

SHIFTING PARADIGMS OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY:
INTERNAL CONCERNS OF POST-2000 ANGLOPHONE ARAB FICTION

by

Majed Shadaid Alenezi

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Laura White, Chair

Dr. Robert Petersen

Dr. Allen Hibbard

In memoriam of Maha Alenezi

To my parents for their unwavering confidence

To Awali for her constant support

To Nasser, Faris, and Laura for enlightening my life

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Abstract

Anglophone Arab fiction flourishes after 9/11. Central to this expansion are the socio-political changes in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks not only on the international scene but also at the local level within the Arab/Muslim world. Paralleling this expansion is a shift from traditional postcolonial discourse toward Arab nation's internal issues. This dissertation, henceforth, studies the new tendencies in the narrative style and thematic structure of four novels written in the aftermath of 9/11 by Arab-Anglo writers: Saleem Haddad's *Guapa*, Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman*, and Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer*. Rather than echoing the outmoded "writing back" paradigm, the Arab-Anglo writers, due to the geopolitical changes as a result of 9/11, have taken up specific social and political concerns through their writings and offer a trenchant commentary on issues of indigenous and international significance. Moving away from postcolonial political awareness, Arab-Anglo writers provide a critical perspective on some important contemporary issues facing the Arab nations like misuse of religious discourse, sectarianism, terrorism, feminism, class struggle, political rights and democracy, and the fragmentation of the Arab society.

By contextualizing the work of Anglo-Arab novelists in their nation's international socio-political ruptures, this study also attempts to dislodge postcolonial theory/discourse from its infinite obligation to colonial legacies through turning to the representation of internal concerns in the Arab world and at the same time exposing the rifts and blind spots in postcolonial theory as we consider issues relevant to the lived reality on the 21st century. In focusing on postcolonial theory, this dissertation – in

addition to highlighting the limitations of the theory– accentuates the need for both postcolonial critics and literary scholars to develop critical and theoretical tools that go beyond outdated Western-centric models to deal with Anglophone Arab texts in the wake of geopolitical circumstances and challenges.

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Introduction

Postcolonial discourses have been viewed as attempting to refute imposed colonial images. Colonial and postcolonial discourses stand in radical contrast. Colonial writers, as a result of their power position, create particular images and representations of the colonized subjects. Colonial discourse primarily addresses western audiences; the intention of this discourse is to shape a perception about non-European people. However, colonialism as a political project has a direct impact on many populations around the world in ways that have been profound and irreversible. Its claimed superiority in cultural, social, economic, and political aspects imposes misconceptions on the individual sense of self and relationship with the wider universe. It establishes a persistent postcolonial ideology within the self of the formerly colonized individual to compel subservience to the West. Although postcolonial literature emerges as a delayed confrontational discourse to refute the inaccurate representation of colonial writings, it fails significantly to root out the inferiority complex established through colonial discourse. And this happens primarily because of the creation of counter narratives which are fully apprehensible in colonial terms. What I mean is the failure of postcolonial literature/discourse to effectively challenge the inferiority complex results from its strategy of responding to colonial discourse; by concentrating on responding to and revising colonial discourse, it accepts the terms set up by colonial discourse.

Thus, one of the early major themes of postcolonial discourse is “writing back,” how postcolonial writers respond to colonial discourses. Bill Ashcroft argues that one of the features of postcolonial writings is to resist notions expressed by colonial writers. The

analysis of colonial discourse reveals that the colonial authors represent the native as primitive, depraved, pagan, criminal, immoral, vulnerable and effeminate. The fact is such a discourse creates a supposed reality where Europeans see the native through colonial perspectives. For Europeans, colonial discourse becomes the mode of perceiving the non-European. More importantly, this discourse constructs a distorted postcolonial reality that acknowledges unconsciously its inferior place. Postcolonial writing, thus, concentrates on a number of issues related directly to colonial history and its legacies and neglects how to root out the imposed ideology. Various postcolonial researchers and scholars study postcolonial writers' responses to the colonial discourse. Wail Hassan in "Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature," argues that "Postcolonial literature is distinguished from the older categories by affiliation with a specialized set of theoretical propositions that not only recognize the limitations of Western knowledge, but make of those limitations an object of analysis" (46). Like Hassan, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, accentuate that "The idea of post-colonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (11). European epistemology and cultural traditions, despite claims otherwise, are limited to the scope of western perspectives in terms of religious and socio-cultural understanding. However, both traditional postcolonial discourse and postcolonial theory are coterminous with colonial discourse, into which even indigenous concerns are subsumed within Europeans' perspective. This in turn gives rise to a set of limitations imbricated with postcolonial writing and theory that gets them caught in the mire of colonialism.

The focus of this dissertation lies beyond responding to colonial discourse. I argue throughout this study that contemporary Anglophone Arab writers shift from the focus of traditional postcolonial literature to provide a critical perspective on some important contemporary issues facing the Arab nations like misuse of religious discourse, sectarianism, terrorism, feminism, class struggle, political rights and democracy, and the fragmentation of Arabic society. All these themes have become essential elements in some of the major Anglophone Arab fiction as a result of social and political instability in the Arab world. This dissertation argues that the Anglophone Arab novels written in the early 21st Century demonstrate a remarkable shift in both theme and style compared to traditional postcolonial Arab writings. The selected authors furnish accounts of the economic crisis and the socio-political upheavals in the Arab world.

At the time of this writing, the Arab world is still grappling with a host of social, economic, and political concerns. The defenders of the political system argue that many of the Arab world's problems lie in its colonial history and its legacies. However, colonial history is not the sole reason for the kind of socio-political anarchy which the Arab world has never been able to overcome. Tattering economies, political corruption, a crumbling social order, military rule and manipulation of religious discourse have been the main problems the Arab world has been struggling with. Therefore, it becomes highly important to analyze these themes and examine writers' views about the issues threatening the solidarity and stability of the current Arab world. In *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*, Muhsin Al-Musawi argues that Arab novelists, besides Arabic language and culture, share "their underlying political and cultural awareness of the need to be [agents] of, and a witness to, change" (28). The fact is, Anglophone Arab novels address

more social concerns and fewer individual issues. And even the individual's concern always represents the wider context. Frederic Jameson in "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," argues that an individual in Third World fiction always represents the collective.

In such moments of geo-political crises, contemporary Arab fiction writers (whether writing in Arabic or English) have taken up the role of social critics and have tried to challenge various cultural and religious facets and the governmental practices in the Arab community. In one interview, Fadia Faqir states, "When political views are repressed and you live under monolithic, monological autocracy, literature becomes an outlet for expressing such views...If you are born in an area of conflict, writing 'art for the art's sake' becomes a luxury" (7). Central to Faqir's view is the lack of freedom of speech and the absence of democracy. Anglophone Arab writers employ different literary devices including allegory, metaphor, symbolism, and figurative language to critique political systems, to point out social deficiencies and to avoid censorship.

In the Arab world, religious values (Islam in particular) and cultural conventions are the main sources for constructing an ideology, yet the distinction between the two realms is not clear. The government's authority also enhances to certain degrees a particular ideology to maintain the total submission and loyalty of its citizens. Religion, culture, and the political system are essential elements in forming social perceptions in the Arab world. These three factors contain many subfields within them such as gender relations, class struggle, marginal sexualities, religious minority groups, sectarianism, social justice, and equality. The presence of these themes in post 9/11 Anglophone Arab fiction and the dearth of available critical study of these themes makes it pertinent to

carry out a research study that highlights the salient characteristics of this distinct body of fiction.

The shift of Arab Anglophone writers' focus can be attributed to several reasons: first, the natural development of the relationship between the West and the East goes beyond the need for counter narrative. Because of colonial and postcolonial narratives as well as globalization, the East is not that dark, unknown, and unexplored part of the world. The second reason relates to the severely unpleasant situation in the Arab world. The priority of the Anglophone Arab writers, then, is to address local issues instead of resisting colonial discourses. The third explanation is associated with the nature of postcolonial theory; "writing back" enhances implicitly the superiority of the West over the East. For postcolonial/Anglophone Arab writers, concentrating on internal issues demonstrates a form of resistance. Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, presumes a Western audience by adopting the language of the colonizer, through his intensive descriptions of certain aspects of African culture which have been already known to Africans, and through demonstrating the impacts of colonization on his nation. Contemporary Anglophone Arab writers go beyond this type of narrative to draw readers' attention to socio-political issues young Arabs are grappling with.

By contextualizing the work of Anglophone Arab novelists in their nation's internal socio-political ruptures, this study explores the themes of postcolonial Arab fiction written after 9/11. The study moves beyond studying the colonial experience as an encounter between European forces and colonized people to address domestic issues. However, the colonial experience can't be totally ignored since the current map of the Arab world is the result of colonial projects. Many parts of the Arab world were subject

to European colonization, and the impact of colonization goes beyond the division of the Arab world into small countries, affecting social life in the Arab world through education, globalization and media, economy, immigration, and above all political systems. The classical European colonial project depends heavily on education where the colonized people intensively received through formal education the colonizers' cultural values, language, literature, and religion. Furthermore, the rise of American imperialism has played a vital role in the Arab world.

This study does not seek or suppose a complete deconstruction between colonial and postcolonial discourses; rather it argues that Anglophone Arab writers draw upon western models/standards to address internal issues. In other words, some of the contemporary Anglophone Arab novelists view social life in the West, in general, and in the United States in, particular, as a utopian model. Intentionally or not, these Anglophone Arab writers' view of civilization remains Eurocentric, especially in relation to concepts such as democracy, liberty, political parties, human rights, and social justice. Highlighting internal issues, contemporary postcolonial Arab writers' discourse still functions within the framework of colonial ideology. That is, the discussion subtly still suggests the West was/is superior to the East especially at socio-political levels. This is attributed to two major factors: first, the process of colonization, although seemingly otherwise, is still alive and active, but it takes different forms due to geopolitical changes and circumstances. By the end of World War II, the United States had surpassed Britain and France as the dominant world power. However, the consequences of these changes have not altered the basis that governs the relationship between the West and the East in terms of political hegemony. The second factor relates to the fragmented dystopian Arab

community, at socio-political levels, compared to the supposedly united Western communities. Absence of freedom and democracy are the main characteristics of political systems in the Arab world.

Influenced by western culture through colonial education and globalization, Anglophone Arab writers can't escape the trap of representing their own communities without drawing from the existing images developed by the colonizer. In his seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said states that "because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action" (3). Similarly, Wail S. Hassan, in his more recent book *Immigrant Narratives* (2011), argues that "Arab authors who use the medium of English, especially if they live in a country with a powerful tradition of Orientalist scholarship that serves imperial interests in the Arab world, could not ignore Orientalism" (3). Prior to Hassan's work, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* underscores that the colonial project has changed its techniques and strategies. It becomes more invisible and dangerous as it creeps in through globalization and cultural invasion. This attitude undergoes considerable diminution and expansion, all at same time. I argue that the American colonial project, especially after 9/11, acts to root out the radical pre-existing ideology in the Muslim world by a number of avenues including: physical invasion, imposing and promoting Western values as the highest model for humanity, and interfering in local affairs in the Arab world. The American colonial project, then, complicates rather than simplifies the East/West relationship, despite being the most obvious corridor of economic exploitation and political extortion. The on-going geopolitical changes demand a new postcolonial discourse that moves a step beyond defining itself only in relation to the traditional colonial powers.

The present study is selective by its nature; it does not claim to analyze all the characteristics of Anglophone Arab writings; rather it highlights the recurrence of themes which enhance the fragmentation of the Arab world. The study argues that one of the essential features of contemporary Anglophone Arab novels is pessimism, at the social, economic, and political levels. The gloominess of Anglophone Arab fiction is the result of the negative impact of colonization, the political situation, cultural constraints, and religious restrictions. With this in mind, contemporary Anglophone Arab fiction establishes a narrative that suggests a shift from the stagnant East/West binary.

The wide and varied world of Arab literature certainly deserves an intensive critical study that exceeds considerably the scope of the present study. Regarding the Arab world, Arabs share some basic characteristics –such as language, religion, and culture – that put them into one category. Although not all Arabs are Muslims, Islam is known to be the dominant religion in the region. In *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Amin Malak writes, “Islam constitutes not only a cardinal component of Muslims’ identity but also becomes a prominent feature in the identity of the non-Muslims who happen to live in Muslim communities” (4). Islam as a theology and some cultural aspects couple together to form people’s perceptions in the Arab world. Also, historically, prior to western colonization, the Arab world was seemingly united as a nation under the powerful Ottoman Empire. In terms of the political system, Arabs do not participate directly in shaping these systems. There are two types of governments in the region: Republics and Monarchies. Both kinds of governments have absolute authority over their citizens, and there are no real democratic practices and opposition political parties are hardly found. The spread of the Arab uprising from one country to another

(Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, and Libya) affirms shared social and political characteristics within the Arab world. The high degree of similarities among Arab nations justifies the generalized attitude this study follows.

In this dissertation, I aim to analyze selected Anglophone Arab texts which deal with internal issues. The authors selected for this study touch upon highly sensitive themes. Saleem Haddad, the author whose work is discussed in the first chapter of my research, for instance, says in an interview, “I wanted to draw on common themes young Arabs across the region could relate to, regardless of their background.” The authors analysed for this project provide a trenchant commentary on matters of local and international significance. Through their fictional writings, they provide a rational perspective on various socio-political and cultural factors. I have selected four Anglophone Arab fiction writers— Saleem Haddad, Fadia Faqir, Rabih Alameddine, and Yasmine El Rashidi— to offer an in-depth study on this shift. The selection of these writers stems from a number of considerations. These Anglophone Arab writers, with the exception of El Rashidi, live in different western countries; all, though, concentrate on the internal crises threatening the Arab world. In their writings, they consider shared themes such as the fragmentation of the Arab world, misuse of religion and manipulation of religious discourse, corruption in political and military institutions, lack of freedom and democracy, and suppression of marginalized minorities. Furthermore, the chosen period testifies to a remarkable increase in Anglophone Arab fiction writing, as Nouri Gana asserts:

The list of contemporary Arab novelists writing in English is expanding steadily given the phenomenal and continuing rise of debut novelists; in fact, more than

half of Arab novelists writing in English today wrote their debut novels after September 11, 2001, and the number of new novelists will continue to proliferate exponentially. (2)

The expansion of Anglophone Arab fiction after 9/11 suggests not only the importance of the event at the political level but also its socio-political repercussions in the Arab/Muslim world.

The Aftermath of 9/11

This study focuses on the period after the historical event of 9/11. Setting the research in a specific period of time serves to trace and contrast the development of Anglophone Arab writings. This particular historical event triggered a recurring question among western media: “Why do they hate us?” This very question manifests a significant failure of the project of Orientalism. The perception of the East established through Oriental discourse fails to offer a comprehensive view of the existing ideology in the Arab world since Oriental discourse blocks other alternative discourses and demonstrates only the colonizer’s viewpoint. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 created a new phase in the world. Prior to the attacks of 9/11, the representation of Islam/Muslims/Arabs through the lens of Western literature and media was not questioned. The aftermath of 9/11 resulted in sparking a direct interest of Western media in the Arabic language and literature, culture, and religion (mainly Islam). In “The Challenges of Orientalism,” Brendan Smyth states, “After the event of 9/11, reading and teaching texts by Muslim authors in North America takes place in an atmosphere of heightened Islamophobia that has long roots in the West” (387). This attitude revolves around the tropes of Orientalist representations and doesn’t provide an alternative view of Islam, and Muslims. Fadia Faqir, in “Lost in

Translation: The Arab Book in The Language of the Other,” writes, “post 9/11 and 7/7 translation and dialogue are no longer optional.” Faqir argues, here, for the need to listen to the voice of the Other. The interest of the West in the Arab world encourages some Arab novelists to express their internal cultural concerns through the use of the English language. And here contemporary Anglophone Arab writers don’t provide counter narratives to the mainstream western discourse. Instead they raise socio-political and cultural issues that lead to chaos in the Arab world. “Gone are the days,” Malak states, “when the representation in English of Muslims and their cultures was dominated by others” (7), hinting at the contribution of Anglophone Arab writers and the alternative narratives they bring with regards to their alien culture and theology which do not fit into Western stereotypical representations. And more importantly, Arab Anglophone fiction allows writers to challenge the discursive authenticity of various social and cultural misconceptions about people in the Arab world.

After 9/11, the Bush doctrine divided the world into two halves, “either with us or against us.” Bush’s statement moves beyond the limits of condemnation to shape the world’s values particularly in the Middle East. Americans’ values and standards have become global and are represented as superior and more beneficial to humanity. In *The Ambiguous Foreign Policy of the United States toward the Muslim World*, David Oualaalou states, “Throughout Bush’s presidency, the mission of American foreign policy toward the Middle East focused on the spread of democracy. Bush felt that he was given a mandate by God to force democracy on the Muslim world based on his standards” (28). However, this pithy statement turned to be hollow as Iraq slipped into chaos and the hope for democracy became a nightmare. In *The Case for Democracy*,

Natan Sharansky adds, “Within days of 9/11, President Bush declared a global War on Terror whose strategy was based on the assumption that freedom is for everyone” (20). The hazard of this colonial attitude lies in imposing Western standards through force, war, and media, regardless of people’s will. The agenda of traditional European colonization was to maintain its superiority over its colonized subjects. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, demonstrates how black people accepted their inferior stance as a result of subscribing to the image imposed on them by colonial France. This established inferior identity does not remain permanently; through self-awareness and self-recognition, colonized people resist colonial hegemony. American imperialism, on the other hand, portrays itself as having the world’s highest moral standards. The American mission is to westernize the Middle East not for moral or political reasons but to ensure loyalty and to prevent any further terrorist attacks.

September 11 serves as a new historical landmark with social and political contexts that go beyond the United States. It gives the United States the political justifications to intervene in the domestic affairs of many Muslim/Arab countries. 9/11 covertly commemorates the role of Islam as an enemy to Western civilization. Immediately after the attack, the United States issued a War against Terror which led to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Despite their claimed aims, neither of these wars has created peaceful results or created newly democratic nations in accordance with the United States’ standards. On the contrary, the two wars led to the establishment of other terrorist groups. The violence of these groups is not only aimed at western targets, but also at local targets in the Arab/Muslim world. However, this study does not seek to highlight the representations of this political event. Instead, it attempts to trace the socio-

political impacts of 9/11 on the Arab world and to examine the radical ideology and the radicalizing process of young Muslims.

The Scope of this Study

As stated earlier, Anglophone Arab fiction has flourished since the September attack. Central to this expansion are the socio-political changes in the aftermath of 9/11, not only on the international scene but also at the local level within the Arab/Muslim world. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Edward Said indicated that literary production by Arabs in English was scant compared to domains formerly colonized by Britain. This is explained by a number of factors. First, Arabic— as the language of Quran— enjoys an important status in the Arab/Muslim world. Unlike local languages in Africa or India which are shared by a small group, Arabic is the official language in twenty- two countries and is spoken/shared and used as a mean of communication by many people. The Arab Nahda (renaissance) in the 1830s contributes significantly to literary production in the Arabic language. And finally, the emergence of Arab nationalism underscores the role of Arabic as a means for creating unity.

In the decades following Said’s statement, Nash argued that the situation had been transformed as a growing number of writers of Arab origin have chosen to use English as the medium for their creative writings. He attributes the shift to a series of factors. First, translated Arabic novels fail to meet the expectations of a western readership. Nash adopts Roger Allen’s notes about the Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mafaouz. Though recognized as an international author, Mafaouz’s translated novels have not gained a broad readership in Western markets, Allen argues. Nash dissects this attitude, stating “a literature taken as too tied to the unfamiliar codes and preoccupation

of Arabic literary culture would be unsuccessful unless it were domesticated to meet the expectations of a Western readership” (15). Nash, though, does not suggest ways to domesticate the Arabic literary culture to fulfill the expectations of a Western audience. Does domestication basically mean adopting the English language or does it mean the use of a similar narrative technique? Or does it relate to the author’s ability to engage in a conversation with a Western reader? Regardless of these questions, Anglophone literature speaks either directly or indirectly to a Western reader.

The second factor for the rise of work by Arabs writing in English, according to Nash, “is embedded in the traumatic politico-cultural history of the Arab world in the twentieth century” (16). Since the end of the Second World War, the Arab world has experienced countless political crises, including the creation of an Israeli state, the Arab-Israeli wars, the Gulf wars, the emergence of military groups such as Al-Qaeda, and the 9/11 attack. These political events lie behind the remarkable increase of interest in the Arab world, simultaneously “making way for a new group of Anglo-Arab writers to present ‘insiders’ narratives apparently starting out from Arab and Islamic source cultures” (Nash 16). Hassan reveals a similar stance to Nash’s, stating, “By writing in English, Arab immigrant writers have found themselves placed in that position, often expected to interpret their culture for their readers” (28). While political events that impact the West may be sparking a growing western audience, reading Anglo–Arab literature only through these political events limits the scope of Anglophone Arab literature. Viewed through this perspective, Anglophone literature fulfills the need of Western audiences and neglects the basic purposes of the Anglo–Arab writers of

expressing themselves and exposing their concerns far beyond functioning as cultural translators.

The third factor related to the rise and success of Arabs writing in English is “the internationalization of literatures” (Nash 28). Nash argues that “the internationalization of literatures offers the Arab writer greater opportunities in reaching a wider readership, not to mention the financially lucrative rewards this may bring” (28). In most Arab countries, writers can’t support themselves financially from their writing; publication in Western countries assures far broader circulation (and profits) than in the Arab world. Three more reasons, I argue, lie behind the rise and success of Anglophone Arab novelists: the astonishing success and international recognition of Anglophone African/Indian authors including Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, and many others, inspires Arab writers to follow their steps; the low level of book-readers in the Arab world; and the dominance of poetry as a literary genre in the Arab world. All these factors together conspire to make the English language a primary option for Anglophone Arab writers.

Paradoxically, Anglophone Arab fiction has received surprisingly little critical attention. Faqir writes, “I find it puzzling that the large body of writing in English by Arabs or authors of Arab origin has not yet been subjected to serious study and analysis.” Faqir goes on to coin the term ‘Arabs writing in English’ (AWE) meaning any body of work written “by Arab writers who write in the English language and whose mother tongue is usually Arabic.” Although the history of Anglophone Arab literature goes back to the first decade of the 20th century, scholarship on it seems to be a relatively new area of investigation. There seem to have been two reasons for this lack, so far, of serious scholarly treatment of Anglophone Arab literature. The first relates to categorizing

Anglophone Arab literature under postcolonial studies. This practice limits the scope of Anglophone literature, excluding some authors/themes that do not fit into the postcolonial field. The second reason is that Anglophone Arab literature is a minor discipline in both western academia and academic institutions in the Arab world, so it does not receive adequate attention in either cultural sphere.

Geoffrey Nash's book *The Arab Writer in English* is considered to be the first serious study on Anglophone Arab literature, yet in this book Nash covers only the period between 1908-1958 and mainly highlights the diasporic experience of the authors. In his more recent book *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, Nash studies selected contemporary Anglophone Arab writers, yet his main concentration is the cross-cultural encounter. Wail Hassan's *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* provides an extensive historical overview of Arab American/British writers. Hassan classifies both Arab American/British and Anglophone Arab writers into the category of minority writers. Moreover, Hassan's study also primarily focuses on issues related directly to expatriate writers such as the themes of exile and representation that reflect the condition of minority groups. Hassan's book does not cover Anglophone Arab writings that deal with the Arab world's internal socio-political concerns. This research, therefore, attempts to fill the gap and provide a study on Anglophone Arab fiction in the early decades of the 21st century that goes beyond the assigned conduit of bringing non-European cultural exempla to Western readers.

This project will cover four Anglophone Arab novels; I am working with texts that are originally written in English. I will focus on Arab writers who incorporate Arab subjects and themes into the English language. Not all critics and scholars place

Anglophone novels in the category of postcolonialism. However, “Arab Anglophone literature,” according to Susan Muaddi Darraj, “becomes especially important because it bypasses the need for translation and poised between East and West, speaks directly to English-speaking audiences about the world on the other side of the divide” (123). Darraj limits the scope of Anglophone Arabic literature to texts “speaking directly to English-speaking audiences.” Heath Hoyt adopts a similar stance to Darraj, stating, “Writing in English is also a means of closing the assumed distance by engaging a language that both writers and readers speak” (405). Even though this is an important facet, especially in terms of colonial and postcolonial discourses and the aftermath of 9/11, there are other elements that affect writers’ choices of language, for instance, an author’s biography, the market place, and the avoidance of censorship. As Geoffrey Nash notes in *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, “Contemporary Anglophone writers use English rather than Arabic as the language for their fiction/autobiography for a variety of reasons including personal preference, avoidance of cultural restriction and censorship, and to optimize exposure” (12). Anyone familiar with the debates on the use of English as a medium in postcolonial literature comes to the realization that there is a profound ambiguity in the purposes of adopting the colonial tongue. Essential to this confusion is the matter of national identity and the role language plays as a unifying tool. However, as mentioned above, different authors have different motives and justifications for their political stance toward the use of English. Fully exploring language debates is beyond the scope of this research, but I wish to add that one of the challenges for Anglophone writers is how to consider the two types of audiences— English readers and Arabic readers— especially with regard to issues related to the socio-political atmosphere in the Arab

world. To overcome this challenge, several Anglophone Arab authors either get their work translated or demonstrate the need for translating them into their native language, not only in the interest of reaching wide audiences but also to highlight the social, religious and cultural fragmentation of their nations. Furthermore, in this study, I attempt to dislodge postcolonial theory/discourse from its infinite obligation to colonial legacies through turning to the representation of internal concerns in the Arab world and at the same time I continue to use certain premises of the theory to analyze the selected texts. The intention is to expose the rifts and blind spots in postcolonial theory as we consider issues relevant to the lived reality of the 21st century.

Since this study focuses on the postcolonial period, the research relies on a wide variety of critical theory, albeit with a primarily postcolonial emphasis. I will use Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1993) in order to analyze issues of identity in the Arab world. Also, I will deploy the ideas of Arab critics including Amin Malak, Anouar Majid, Muhsin al-Musawi, and Wail Hassan to reveal the limitations of traditional postcolonial theory. Therefore, my intention in this work is not to apply one theoretical framework as the main key to uncover the meaning of Anglophone Arab fiction. Instead, I will incorporate different theoretical frameworks to provide an in-depth study of the lived reality in the Arab world in its ontological and historical dimensions.

Postcolonial Theory and Anglophone Arab Literature

The emergence of postcolonial theory offers a new dimension to the interpretation of literature. Anglophone literature benefits from the contributions of the major premises of postcolonial theory. The writings of postcolonial critics are highly critical of

colonialism, racism, oppression, and inequality. Given the ubiquitous presence of postcolonial theory in Anglophone literature, it seems unrealistic to single out the limitations of the theory. However, the fact is that the 21st century witnesses political and socio-cultural changes that lie beyond the East/West encounter and which demands new injections into the body of postcolonial theory for sufficient understanding. In 2010, a symposium was held in Berlin in which many participants argued that postcolonial theory has run its course and no longer is able to explain contemporary phenomena (qtd. in Obendorf). In the same meeting, Vinay Lal talks about a growing sense of “postcolonial fatigue”: “Even among the adherents of postcolonial studies, however, there is a growing recognition that exhaustion has set in, the questions put on offer are predictable, and that one is only likely to encounter regurgitation of familiar arguments.” Lal makes an important observation here as postcolonial theory addresses issues that seem irrelevant to readers in the 21st century. While traditional postcolonial models have been applied to highlight issues including the inaccurate representations of marginalized people, hybridity and mimicry, language choice, and silent voices, socio-political circumstances have leapfrogged all these concerns especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and the rise of radical Islam as a trope associated with terrorist acts.

Moreover, postcolonial theory is a European theory. As Hassan emphasizes, “Postcolonial theory has developed out of four European traditions of thought: Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and feminism” (47), implying the absence of certain aspects that deal directly with religion (Islam in particular) and the complexities of Arab culture. Since postcolonialism is a Eurocentric discourse, Hassan argues that postcolonial theory “seems to inscribe neo-colonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and

consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France” (46). Hassan underscores that the development of postcolonial studies during the 1980s and 1990s has failed to consider Arabic literary and cultural productions. In “Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair,” Anouar Majid concentrates on the limitations of postcolonialism with regard to Islam, a point he elaborates in more detail in his other article, “The Failure of Postcolonial Theory After 9/11”:

Although postcolonial theorists have managed to restore the voices of previously colonized societies by focusing on their cultural and literary production over the last few decades, the field has persistently ignored the real problems and anxieties of Muslims living under the all-encompassing umbrella of globalization.

Majid’s statement is highly significant for the purpose of this study as it points to some of the limitations of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory, because of its association with Western culture, is inherently secular, and inhospitable to Islam. Hassan Majed calls for a new form of postcolonial practice when dealing with Islam and Muslim nations. He goes a step farther and uses the term Islamic postcolonialism as a new way “to counter the colonial discourse levelled against Islam and Muslims” (226). Majed, like many postcolonial critics, defines the field in relation to the West and the intention of his new terminology is to respond to colonial discourse. The theoretical proposition of postcolonialism embodies a monolithic conception and thus has been deemed synonymous with colonial discourse. Another limitation of postcolonial theory/discourse is its hidden tendency to address Western readers. Very often postcolonial critics/writers’ contributions alienate readers outside the West, and at the same time, they may even

thrive at the expense of considering lived realities of their native nations. At its core, therefore, postcolonial theory/discourse serves the interests of Western audiences.

However, the use of certain aspects of postcolonial theory in this dissertation is justified for two reasons: firstly, I argue that the political operators in the Arab world (kings, presidents, or leaders) still adopt aspects of the colonial discourse for economic and political advantages. Arabs were liberated from traditional European colonization and subjected to a new phase of invisible internal colonization. Using colonial discourse leads thereby to social hegemony of the political elite. Secondly, the history of postcolonial theory is inseparable from the rise of English as an international literary language.

Regarding the overlapping terrain between Arabic literature and postcolonial theory, Hassan argues that Arabic literature has been studied chiefly in accordance with Said's framework of Orientalism. Understanding Arabic literature by fitting it into a western academic paradigm limits other discussions, themes, and concerns. In other words, Arabic literature and postcolonial theory are assumed to be automatically coextensive. On this basis, Hassan criticizes postcolonial theory for its limited ability to individuate Arabic literature and culture. In line with Hassan, Nash states, "To adopt a postcolonial analysis of texts produced in the Arab world would imply assigning them to that larger abstract entity the postcolonial world" (23). Indeed, readers of Anglophone Arab fiction tend to see this tradition in terms of postcoloniality and otherness which mainly concentrate on the significance of imperialism and colonialism and neglect socio-political complexities of the Arab world. The repercussions of these limitations have left some areas unattended; this dissertation attempts to fill in such gaps.

Before moving any further, I should emphasize two points: first, my objective in this dissertation is not to lessen the importance of postcolonial theory or undermine its significant contributions to academia, but to single out the unaddressed issues as I discuss them throughout the body of this project. The intention is not to mark a break with the existing theoretical framework of postcolonial theory, rather to propose alternative ways of reading Anglophone Arab fiction. Second, this project simply attempts to expose certain attitudes and concepts that I detect in the selected Anglophone Arab writers.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation has four major chapters. The first chapter discusses and explores the shattered identity of young Arab individuals and the dystopian Arab community as represented in Saleem Haddad's *Guapa*. Beginning with Haddad's text provides necessary religious, cultural, and socio-political background to the whole research as Haddad singles out the influential roles of these elements with regards to political corruption, a culture of uncertainty, gender relations, religion, and sexual minority groups. Because of unstable political situations and unequal distribution of authority and wealth, along with cultural restrictions and religious constraints, Arabs face a dilemma. Focusing on the socio-political ruptures in the Arab world, *Guapa* underscores the shift from traditional postcolonial discourse.

The second chapter revolves around Islam as it appears in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. Central to this chapter is a lengthy discussion on the relationship between Islam and postcolonial theory. The chapter further examines how Islam as a religious ideology functions in society and how political events along with religious discourse are manipulated to serve political agendas. It also attempts to answer the thorny

question regarding the traumatic and dramatic change in ideology among some Muslims who are drawn to radical Islam and become extremists at a certain stage in their lives.

Chapter three examines the representation of Arab women and the issue of postcolonial theory. By looking at Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman*, I trace the roles, representations of, and challenges to women in the Arab world in the first two decades of the 21st century. By considering the representation of Arab women, this chapter attempts to uncover how women are oppressed through the use of religious discourse, patriarchal systems, and cultural constructions of women, and at the same time, it affirms the shift of Arab postcolonial discourse from the 'writing back' to highlighting local issues. It is the marginalization and exclusion of Arab women and their concerns that this chapter seeks to address.

The final chapter of the dissertation concentrates on the Arab Revolution or what has become known as "The Arab Spring." This is a recent historical development which took place in a number of countries in the Arab World. This particular historical event inspires many Arab creative writers to trace the revolution, to point out the causes behind it, to examine its outcome, and to forecast the future of the region. A piece in *The New York Times* on the fifth anniversary of the Arab uprising, explains:

Five years after the popular uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and elsewhere, a bleak, apocalyptic strain of post-revolutionary literature has taken root in the region. Some writers are using science fiction and fantasy tropes to describe grim current political realities.

Since 2011, a number of fictional texts, which deal directly with the Arab uprising have been produced. The theme of revolution occupies a pivotal place in postcolonial Arab

literature. By concentrating on the theme of Arab uprising, writers are able to focus more intently on their internal cultural and political concerns, rather than producing a counter to Western discourse. This chapter establishes a critical conversation on how the Arab Spring as an internal socio-political event underscores the shift from traditional postcolonial discourse. The principle purpose of this chapter is to investigate the emerging modes of the Arab Spring in the aftermath of the collapse of Arab nationalism and Islamic nationalism as it appears in Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer*.

Conclusion

The study of Anglophone Arab fiction as a distinct body of literature with its unique characteristics has remained an under-researched area until now. As indicated earlier, Hassan's *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (2011) is one of the few book-length studies that explores Anglophone Arab fiction in detail. However, Hassan's book, in part, is a historical overview of the rise of Arab American and Arab British literature. This dissertation, on the other hand, attempts to explore the fictional representations of the internal concerns in the Arab world.

My aim throughout this project is to point out how Anglophone Arab fiction writers shift from traditional postcolonial literary concerns in terms of both content and style. Those writers primarily concentrate on various challenges facing Arab people, such as the misuse of religion, manipulation of religious discourse, gender relations, class struggle, and the fragmentation of the Arab world in general. Dissociating themselves from the traditional postcolonial discourse demonstrates that Anglophone Arab authors

have determined to provide a rational perspective on various socio-political and cultural concerns that contribute to the social decay in the Arab world and simultaneously entail the need for a new phase that goes beyond the West and East relationship.

Chapter I: A Dystopian Community and the Fragmented Identity in the Arab World in Saleem Haddad's *Guapa*

Here or there, us Arabs will always carry some kind of pain.(226)

Haddad, *Guapa*

There is fear at the Heart of every desire and desire at the heart of fear. (289)

Haddad, *Guapa*

I am an explorer with a broken compass, with everyone pointing me in opposing directions. If I feel lost now I will feel worse tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that. (333)

Haddad, *Guapa*

Introduction

Since the end of the colonial project, the Arab world has gone through countless political crises that include the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, the 1970s oil wars, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the persistent tension between Palestine and Israel, the First and Second Gulf wars, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, and many other political events such as the Arab revolutions. The unstable environment has resulted in a fragmented and radicalized identity and has given rise to a series of social and cultural crises. At the social and cultural levels, Arabs are struggling with sectarian killings, class conflict,

misuse of religious discourse, lack of democracy and freedom, and oppression of minority groups including women and sexual minorities such as homosexuals.

The Arab people have suffered considerable social, cultural, political, and economic challenges to hinder any current or future prosperity and simultaneously create a ramshackle identity. “The countries of the Middle East,” Natan Sharansky writes in *The Case for Democracy*, “are seen as ill equipped for democracy. They have little in the way of civil societies, small middle classes, widespread poverty, and rampant illiteracy” (35). Despite the fact that Sharansky’s view remains Orientalist, it still carries with it some truth regarding poverty and illiteracy rates. The unpleasant situation creates many obstacles for young Arabs at every social level. By looking at Saleem Haddad’s debut novel *Guapa* (2016), this chapter explores portrayals of the shattered identity of young Arab individuals and the dystopian Arab community. The two elements are interrelated; the occurrence of one leads to the existence of the other. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to show the inter-relation between the two. I concentrate on two pivotal issues: 1) the challenges encountered by young Arabs which lead them to be a non-integral part of the social fabric of the Arab community, with an emphasis on the lack of democracy and freedom, and 2) the ominous portrayal of the Arab world in relation to the corrupt political system and the culture of uncertainty. All these elements coalesce to create a deficient society and a lagging political system which undermine human development and crush hopes for prosperity.

I have selected Haddad’s text for this chapter for two reasons: first, the novel represents a starting point for this dissertation’s inquiry into how Arab Anglophone writers shift from traditional postcolonial discourse, as the themes and paradigms

articulated in the novel form a body of material that reveals the cultural and political concerns of people in the Arab world. Second, the novel reveals Haddad's eagerness to make his readers aware of the constructed nature of all social practices.

Guapa: The Culture of Uncertainty

Guapa is a clearly-written text, with three strands entitled respectively "Casting Donkeys," "Imperial Dreams," and "The Wedding". The text recounts the story of Rasa, a young gay man, who lives in an unnamed Arab city in the aftermath of 2011's Arab Spring. Rasa is the son of mixed parentage who is caught between the Middle East and the West, and who has a shaky sense of identity. He was raised by his grandmother (Teta) since his Arab/American mother found it eminently hard to blend into the Arabic culture and decided to disappear. Moreover, Rasa's father died while Rasa was very young. This unsettling family unit suggests an image of the larger community and signifies the political, cultural, and social crises in the Arab world.

Even though *Guapa* is a fictional literary work, the novel's power rests in part on its realist mode of action and events. The characters in the text are caught in a specific historical and social framework which offers fictional depictions of real events. Moreover, the realist mode allows Haddad to challenge the culture of denial, with its plain refusal to admit the existence of social practices such as homosexuality. The potency of criticism injected into the novel of cultural principles and social practices is only enhanced by the realistic mode of narration. Finally, the realist style enables Haddad to draw upon his personal experiences, revealing his views on politics, culture, and society.

The personal elements in Haddad's novel correspond in important ways to a public/political narrative. Haddad's persistent insistence on demonstrating his personal experience/story as a gay Arab grants his narrative a certain aura of credibility. Also, the autobiographical aspects manifest ways to navigate around social perceptions and solve the puzzle of profoundly constructed beliefs. Lastly, as became clear in postmodernist and poststructuralist work, investigating the individual and his or her affiliative process has been crucial to culture, social, and political studies, to state just a few fields.

Like various postmodernist works, Haddad's narrative blurs the lines between autobiography and fiction. For example, the setting is not fully disclosed; some readers may think it is Cairo, while others might think it is Damascus or Amman. In commenting on the unnamed locale, Haddad, in one of his interviews, says:

Not naming the country allows the story to take on a metaphorical nature: I really did not want to write a book that would be sold as an anthropological or political 'study' of one country. Instead I wanted to draw on common themes young Arabs across the region could relate to, regardless of their background.

Indeed, Haddad, on a fundamental level, singles out a collective set of obstacles at socio-political and cultural levels that young Arabs grapple with. These series of challenges combine to create a bleak view of the Arab world in the wake of political rupture and a culture of uncertainty.

In this unique environment and age, sexual orientations beyond the general accepted norm of heterosexuality are highly problematic. This may seem to be a minor issue in the wider context, but it could reveal enduring implications beyond sexual minority groups' demands to gain their basic rights. Through the course of the novel,

Rasa seeks to construct his sexual identity despite religious, cultural, and social restrictions. However, because of the hegemony of these institutions, Rasa is caught between the need for articulation and the inexpressible. The dialectical conflict within the protagonist himself can be mapped onto the larger paradigm of the culture of uncertainty which constitutes an important layer of the novel's conflictedness.

As the first Arab Anglophone attestation to deal unambiguously with the issue of homosexuality, it is a compelling work because the characters seem real, and the themes discussed are current and important. With an interior perspective, the story moves in and out of the protagonist's mind to construct an image of daily concerns within an inter-war social structure. The text records Rasa's protest against the individual's subjugation through misconstrued and dogmatic interpretation of Islamic laws, cultural principles, and political frameworks in the Arab world. One tendency that emerges is the disconnection between cultural beliefs and their social implications. Reflecting social identity/conduct on the basis of cultural values does not represent the reality of one's identity; instead it is only a way to blend into society. Haddad singles out the issue of an ambivalent identity in which each persona operates in accordance with social circumstances and social expectations. Rasa recalls how his boyfriend acts to meet the social expectations, "the Taymour sitting across the room from me is the Taymour that society wants, the one who is responsible and hardworking, the good citizen who would never disobey his family or the government" (112). The social criteria for evaluating members of society imply submission to established rules. What is noticeable though is the absence of the emotional dimension as an element of these standards. Unconvinced

by this law, Rasa is stifled by family pressures and social requirements and can not form his own social perceptions:

Nightmares of marriage traumatized me. While I felt affection toward women, I could never imagine myself with one. Whatever attraction I felt was due to the social acceptance that courting a woman might bring. I resigned myself to the inevitable prison sentence of marriage. I would marry and have children and live every night in fear, curled up in the far corner of the bed, anxious at the thought of touching my wife. I would be unhappy and alone. (105)

To explain how society operates, Haddad uses the process of ‘marrying’ to show social requirements and the need to conform to accepted norms. Society’s rules create a single path for gender relations and failing to follow or repudiating this pattern would lead to alienation. To use ‘marrying’ as a social criterion for evaluating social identity is misleading. Deploying Rasa’s specific challenges with social norms allows Haddad to highlight large issues of cultural constructions of and constraints on identity, one of which is the absence of clear explanations for these socio-cultural practices.

The novel evokes geographical and temporal dislocation, but it is also embedded with social and political connotations in the Arab world. Although the issue of sexual identity occupies a central position in the text, Haddad, to a certain degree, highlights many of the problems in the Arab world at the social, cultural, and religious levels. The course of the events in the novel take place within a single day, the day after Teta discovers Rasa in bed with his boyfriend, Taymour. Yet, the narration moves back in time and place to shed light on Rasa’s background, his family, his time studying in the USA before, during and after 9/11, the social, political, and economic situation in the

Arab world, and the Arab Spring. The temporal shifts and geographical back and forth movements featured in this novel are emblematic of the unsettling environment. Haddad uses the discontinuous narrative to generate a connection between the unsettled personality and political issues. Rasa's identity struggle signifies a wider image of a society in trouble. Individuals' concerns can't be tackled in alienation from the larger community.

The rhetoric of rupture is one of the prevailing features of the text that reflects the status quo in the Arab world. This nonlinear technique is significant not only because it allows the past to be revisited, but also because of the writer's effort to connect the past with the current line of events. Moreover, the discontinuous narrative relates generally to the dark image of the Arab world. Through this type of narrative technique, Haddad retraces the discursive relationship between the troubled history of the Arab world and the current corrupt condition as he continues oscillating between various periods of time. He represents history in the form of shifting time to foreground the suppressive inherited cultural values at all social levels. And more importantly, this narrative technique allows Haddad to challenge the notion of truth and how it functions in society. It is only through this narrative strategy that the story as a whole develops.

An activist himself, Haddad introduces a range of themes including police abuse and police reform, youth protests, women's rights, and refugee issues. The novel does not single out one theme. Instead, it weaves together social, religious, cultural, and political issues which shape or lead to the formation of social perceptions and identity and at the same time presents a panoramic view of the Arab world. Yet, all these issues are subordinated to Haddad's fictional treatment of sexual identity. Focusing on sexual

identity, the novel attempts to highlight the challenges and obstacles young gay Arabs encounter in their societies. Although Islamic laws interdict this sort of sexual practice, Islam is not delineated in the text as a censor to or enemy of homosexuality. The entire content considers cultural assumptions as the primary motive for constructing social perceptions. What is considered right/wrong and acceptable/unacceptable social behavior is determined in accordance with cultural standards. Though norms fluctuate from nation to nation in the Arab world, there is general agreement upon the essential normative frameworks/ outlines. The influence of Islam over the inherited cultural traditions loses force in the novel. Throughout the text, the role of Islamic symbols such as the mosque and the Imam are not significant in relation to public personal conduct. Rasa says, “The new building overlooks a main road with three mosques that drive me crazy with their wailing” (11). Islam is not represented as a model or a guide: “After years of late-night prayers furiously demanding, negotiating, and then pleading with God to make me fall in love with women, he failed me. They all failed me. So I turned to Marx” (178). In the text, Islam is not depicted as being as important and effective as cultural values. When Rasa declares to his Teta that he does not believe in God, she just says, “you can not eat any more kaak during Eid” (173), but he could not reveal his sexual identity because it violates the cultural norms and there could be severe repercussions. On the other side, the inherited cultural traditions set the binary category of what is culturally and socially right and wrong based on social conventions and agreement. Within the context of these binary categories, Rasa’s sexual identity occupies no space. As he considers his relationship with his boyfriend Taymour, he says, “It is society’s stupid rules that are keeping us apart” (25). Although *Guapa* gives a voice to Rasa’s dissatisfaction with the

discriminatory cultural systems in regards to minorities, including women and gays, he is still unable to alter the social structure of his society. It is a diminutive voice in a monolithic culture. After his homosexual identity is exposed to his Teta (to the public), Rasa responds: "I am an animal, dirty and disgusting madly hunting after my desires with no care for what is right and wrong" (5). Rasa acknowledges his inability to confront social challenges. The total surrender of self, family, and identity to the cultural restrictions represents a scathing condemnation of the individual's values and desires as it forces him/her from his/her real sense of identity into a general accepted norm. In Arabic culture, as these passages show, rules might exert conflicting pressure on individuals, making them uncertain of which rule to follow to meet social expectations, yet these set of cultural principles are given unquestioned power in people's lives, even though they are not civil or religious laws. People follow the rules without understanding the source or authority for them, and this culture of uncertainty is what Haddad attempts to challenge throughout the text.

The Dystopian Community in the Middle East

Haddad represents the gloominess and the darkness of the Arab world in all areas of daily concerns and simultaneously provides intensive cultural and social criticism of the mainstream social behavior and attitudes towards a patriarchal system, sexual identity, religious discourse, corrupt political systems, and the relationship between East and West. Nonetheless, Haddad's social view does not only remain Western-based; he also draws upon colonial narratives in his mission to highlight local concerns with respect to freedom, women, religion, and gender minority groups. Even though Haddad acknowledges the influence of the colonial past and its continuation in the socio-political

milieu of the once colonized region, he dissociates his narrative from this past and concentrates his fiction mainly on the post-independence era. Haddad's narrative attitude in parts resembles that of many postcolonial authors whose plots revolve around the history of the post-independence era. However, Haddad moves a step ahead and considers the current status quo of the Arab world, which can't be isolated completely from its colonial history. For contemporary Anglophone Arab writers, the post-independence period is still hazy, especially with the rise of American imperialism with its hegemonic culture, its constant support of Israel, and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Socio-political variables force Haddad to think far beyond the limited implication of the post-independence era with its primary concentration on the relation with the West. He looks at the vaster socio-political and cultural configurations that produce a catastrophic reality in the Arab world.

This catastrophic reality is not the outcome of a single factor but rather a combination of a number of perceptions and social practices. Cultural, religious, social, economic, and political forces have impinged on every facet of Arabs' life, affecting the individual's sense of self and relationship with others and with the wider community. In the text, characters' frustration is evident, but more important is the fact that the prospects of finding ways of catharsis are remote. Haddad, in his novel, strengthens his view of the need for cultural and political changes in the Arab world by stressing that Arab history is filled with so many inauspicious dark spaces which need re-evaluating and criticizing. At one point, Rasa says, "This old lady and her antique beliefs. Her ideas should have died a long time ago, yet they hang in the air like a fart. It is her and people like her who keep Taymour and me apart" (252). Teta's servitude to the unwritten cultural constitution

demonstrates internalized sanctity of cultural principles and their endurance from one generation to the other without the least bit of resistance. Haddad underscores that although these cultural notions have no legitimate basis apart from social convention, they still play an authoritative and a significant role in society.

The macro-cultural restrictions in the Arab region can only be tackled by situating them in the micro-narratives of individuals. As a collective set, the cultural principles, by the means of dominant social groups, are internalized as a normal and fair way of life and simultaneously their injustice to women and other sexual minority groups, for example, go unmarked. *Guapa* portrays an array of characters; each represents an aspect of cultural concern since an individual is an extension of the cultural and social milieu. “In so called ‘Third World’ fiction, Jameson argued, the individual always represents the collective” (qtd. in Nash. 26). Various political episodes affect the small family as well as the whole society. Nawaf, Rasa’s business partner, says, “The country is falling apart and my love life is in ruins. I really think this is it” (33). Juxtaposing the personal concern with the political issues affirms the deficiency of the political system. Nawaf’s dysfunctional life, at both levels— personal and political— is an exemplar of a dystopian community.

Guapa opens in the early hours of the morning with a sense of loss and feeling of disgrace. The feeling of shame (*eib* in Arabic) is a highly compelling component in Arabic culture. The word *eib* is a multivalent term interlacing both cultural principles and social practices in the Middle East. The public self needs to cope with the affirmatively constructed set of cultural principles and follow the pattern of social expectations; otherwise he or she would be condemned with shame. The feeling of shame frustrates Rasa because he profoundly believes in the impossibility of overcoming cultural

principles which stand against his will in regard to his social identity and his role in society. In the very first lines of the text, Rasa says:

The morning begins with shame. This is not new, but as memories of last night begin to sink in, the feeling takes on a terrifying resonance. I grimace, squirm, dig my fingers in my palms until the pain in my hands reflects how I feel. (1)

Indeed, the first very few lines set the negative rhythm of the upcoming sequence of events. Although ‘shame/disgrace’ is an abstract, invisible feeling rather than a concrete condition, it moves a step beyond the current moment to shape past identity and govern future social behavior. Haddad, in the above lines, conflates the shameful feeling with physical pain in order to transfer the cultural feeling of disgrace from an abstract level into socially practical one. The physical pain demonstrates Rasa’s frustration and inability to assert his sexual identity in the traditional dominant society of the Arab world.

As the text progresses, Rasa vaguely defines and culturally translates the notion of shame/*eib*, how it functions in society, its injunctions, its contradictory nature, and its impact on individuals. The ultimate implicit purpose of the cultural translation of the concept of shame/*eib* possibly is not only to familiarize the English language readers with the notion, but also to draw attention and raise the awareness of an Arab audience to the vagueness of the concept of *eib* and its critical role in society. Rasa explains:

The closest word for *eib* in English is perhaps “shame”. But *eib* is so much more than that. The implication of *eib* is *kalam il-nas*, what will people say, and so the word carries an element of conscientiousness, a politeness brought about by a perceived sense of communal obligation. *Eib* is an old cloak that Teta draped across my

shoulders many years ago... It is *eib* not to go visit the neighbors during Eid. It is *eib* to miss a wedding even if you hate every minute of it. It is *eib* to pick your nose in public. (36)

Haddad, in the above passage, shows that the notion of *eib* effectively functions in a wide range of contexts in the Arab world and simultaneously creates a space for a double identity. The first self meets the minimum expectations of cultural rules, whereas the real identity is revealed in hidden places in which cultural principles are temporarily set aside. Rasa says, “We all tell lies to protect our solitude. We deny the truth and present a false image of ourselves to blend into society. It is the same everywhere, but here the stakes are much higher. So I put on my mask and let out a roaring laugh” (36). Nonetheless, the text does not provide well-established standards for the social function of the notion of *eib*; instead it highlights its contradictions. In response to the taxi driver’s request, to sit next to him whereby the driver can sexually harass him, Rasa says, “I hesitated. It would be *eib* to say no, although it also felt *eib* to say yes. Stuck between two *eibs*” (29). The ironic part, here, is that the whole society relies heavily on cultural standards that are not clearly and accurately stated or defined.

Haddad openly expresses his disgust at certain cultural practices as he observes them applied to society. Social practices are just a reflection of the constructed culture. He points out the fault of society at all levels through Rasa’s inquiry into the causes which lead to the disappearance of his mother:

Why did she have to leave at all? Was it because of the state of the Arab world, where we treated mental health and addiction with the same reckless disdain we had for everything else?...Why was everything done with little planning, just a

bunch of haphazard *inshallah*'s thrown around? Was I angry about the state of the Arab world? Yes, I was furious at the lost potential, at the millions of young people who have no opportunities because of structural impediments that ought to be challenged. I was angry about the lack of law and order. I was angry for myself, about lost childhood navigating this confusing maze of chaos and loss. I was angry about my education with its ancient and rigid teaching methods peppered with false truths and blatant lies, where the only goal was to make us forget how to criticize and ask challenging questions....And that was the fault of our society. (202-203)

With this expression of feeling, Rasa singles out overtly the difficulties young Arabs encounter. He criticizes the lack of law, the weak educational system, and poor planning. All these elements, among many others, interact to make the Arab world an unpleasant place to live. He views himself with his unstable identity as a product of this poor system and vaguely defined cultural standards.

Prevalent cultural norms in the Arab world lead individuals to live ambivalent lives. The novel's title refers to an invented hidden location, Guapa (a coffee shop with a secret basement) where individuals experience their desired identity and live in accordance with their instincts away from political and socio-cultural constraints. In addition, the space of the coffee shop provides individuals with a sense of freedom to discuss major political calamities and events of national and historical significance. Haddad points to the double roles of this place as Rasa narrates, "Just last night we had been at Guapa: Basma, Taymour, Maj, and me. We drank beer and argued. The subject was, as always, American imperialism and the sad state of our revolution" (15).

Metaphorically, the location represents a space to escape the reality of the dystopian community. “I wanted to explain the sad reality” Basma said “we have been kicked out of the kitchen” [the political system] “which is why we were in Guapa drinking ourselves silly” (16). However, the coffee shop can not be a permanent spot; it positively works only at specific times of a day, and then individuals must live up to social expectations and meet with the public nightmare of their community. As a hidden and external space, the coffee shop provides a temporary shelter for Rasa and his friends to escape both political authority and cultural restrictions. Haddad implies that the two institutions are the primary reasons for the condition of a double identity.

Haddad, up through the end of the novel, keeps referring to the double identity, Rasa says, “But in private I created a secret cage in my mind where I stored these dark thoughts...They were free to roam in the cage but unable to escape, lest they be discovered by Teta” (98). Because they contradict the general norm, Rasa describes his feelings as dark secrets. And the use of ‘dark’ significantly enhances not only his enigmatic and unproclaimed sexual identity, but also the labyrinth he negotiates within the dominant culture of the Arab world. Haddad’s view of culture resembles that of some cultural critics who see culture as a process rather than a product. Michel Foucault, for example, argues that individuals internalize normative patterns from the culture around them, absorbing patterns of expectation to the point that they take them for granted. However, the text shows Rasa’s inability to confront or go against the well-established norm. Rasa only reveals his homosexual identity in closed and private places such as “the bathroom,” “the foggy mirror,” and “his bedroom” due to the fear of the public eye; therefore, he is unable to discern any trace of his sexual identity through the dense haze

enveloping his society. He adds, “I do not want to be different. I needed to belong somewhere” (104). With this type of sexual identity, Rasa finds it extremely difficult to blend into society. The important fact here is that Rasa struggles to catch a glimpse of his homosexual identity within the dominant culture. Instead, he needs to follow socially accepted patterns: “[W]hile I felt affection toward many women, I could never imagine myself with one. Whatever attraction I felt was due to the social acceptance that courting a woman might bring” (105). Minority sexual identity is tightly interlinked with the place of religion and culture in the socio-political structures of the Arab world. Rasa emphasizes these points as he says, “I thought seeing Taymour might make me feel better but it only makes me feel worse, because Taymour sitting across the room from me is the Taymour that society wants, the one who is responsible and hardworking, the good citizen” (112). Both Rasa and Taymour are unable to confront the cultural hegemony of their society, and therefore they have a double identity.

Until our current time, homosexuality in the Arab/Muslim world has been taboo, and exotic, and society refuses to admit its existence. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler states, “The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of identities can not exist” (24). When the two lovers (Rasa and Taymour) spent their first night together, Rasa tells Taymour, “This is what our life could be,” Taymour then, responds, “In a less cruel world, perhaps” (54). Both characters see no future for their relationship, and there is no space for open expression of their sexual identity within the dominant culture, “That bedroom, it is not enough space for us, for the potential our love could be” (55). Rasa occupies secretly and privately a position outside binary gender categories. He describes his negative status in society as he wonders, “Is

there anything more pitiful than an Arab who attaches emotions to his homosexuality?” (56). Butler diagnoses this condition, writing that “because certain kinds of ‘gender identities’ fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain” (24). In the text, Haddad attempts to deconstruct and destabilize any stable binary categories for gender and sexuality. However, the narrative demonstrates the impossibility of this mission.

Although Rasa and Taymour do not belong to any unified or stable positions in relation to gender identity, they are unable to transcend binary categories or create publically a space between the defined subject positions. In spite of his love for Rasa, Taymour follows the norm and decides to marry Leila. Submitting to the dominant culture, Taymour does not want to be excluded from the stable and fixed categories. He tells Rasa, “We know how society works. We can play by the rules, one foot in and one foot out. It is the only way to be, because if you get sucked too deeply into society you get stuck in the throes of something that simple does not exist” (260). Nonetheless, when it comes to public concerns, Taymour relinquishes his beloved and follows the mainstream culture; “I was his one foot out” (117), Rasa says. Henceforth, the notion of hybrid position, presented by Homi Bhabha, does not find a place within the strict binary categories of Arabic culture with regards to sexual identity. Rasa attempts to reconcile two paradoxical elements: his sexual identity as a gay and his belonging to the Arab world in a culture that publically refuses to accept homosexuality. He finds both elements in Taymour, yet it is impossible to achieve the two:

I loved Taymour because he was from here, because everything in him reminded me of everything here, because to love him was to love this city and its history.

And yet I could not love because he was from here and so held ideas of how to be and how to love which would never fit in with the love that we share. (131)

Haddad underscores the aloofness of homosexuals in the inherited Arabic culture. He also points out the challenge homosexuality poses to public eyes.

Culturally constructed social practices work to deny the existence of people that do not conform to the established norm. This is not only limited to sexual practices, but it applies to many aspects of daily life. For example, Rasa's family attempts not to address Rasa's mother's transformation from freedom to oppression as she keeps chopping onions:

she chopped enough onions for the entire month... We all knew why she was doing it. Teta knew, Baba knew, Doris knew. And Mama knew we knew. Still she chopped, and nobody said a word, because we also knew the second someone said something the façade would crumble. (185)

Rasa's friend Maj also asserts this point as he tells Rasa when Rasa asked him, "How did you explain the bruises to your parents?" Maj answers, "I told them I got into a fight. Maybe they know, but if they do they did not say anything. We dance the familiar dance of denial" (282). The ceaseless denial of certain social practices makes society schizophrenic because the focus is not only what is socially unaccepted but what members of society would say about it. Individuals' social recognition/fame/status is established through their social identity/conduct. Following the socially accepted paradigm is rewarded by positive social recognition.

Rasa's mother too could not create a space for her social behavior and perceptions within the hegemony of Arabic culture and religious institutions. She tells her husband:

I can not take it here anymore... You can not walk down the street without bumping into a religious nut or an authoritarian one... I took some of the paintings to be exhibited in the art space. A few men came in and pointed to that one I did of two women picking olives in a field. They said it showed the women uncovered. Uncovered! They said it was haram, that I painted their hair with sexually suggestive brushstrokes and I am devaluing their women. (181)

Haddad questions the influence of religious discourse and Arabic culture in defining almost everything in the social and political structure of the Arab world and further highlights how the two facets marginalize women in the Arab world. Rasa's mother, through her paintings, provides an image of women beyond culturally and socially accepted limitations, yet patriarchal ideology attempts to reduce women's roles in society through idealizing and homogenizing traditional gender roles. Teta keeps reminding Rasa's mother of her role as a responsible mother of a boy: "It was fine when you were young and had dreams of saving the world, but you have got the boy now. It is time to stop the painting nonsense" (181). In this patriarchal society, women's identity is reduced to their home-duties as wives and mothers.

The depiction of Rasa's mother is highly significant as it shows a female character move from freedom to oppression. Feminist discourse and postcolonial writers often represent a successful transformation from oppression to freedom. Haddad not only remains skeptical toward this prevalent tendency; he reverses the discourse to criticize the idealism of feminist discourse and to emphasize that changes should take place within the

culture and to affirm that transformation is not a simple and straightforward process. It requires hard effort and developments are gradual, yet the ultimate positive result is not always guaranteed. Rasa's mother ignores her father's advice, "You love him more than you love your own freedom?" (151) for the hope of making some changes: "they returned hand in hand to build a new pan-Arab nation" (151). Initially, the mother refuses to submit to the patriarchal system despite all her sufferings and difficulties. Upon her arrival to the Arab world, she tells her husband that "she will teach the children art," implying a task of liberation. Her mother-in-law (Teta) does not like the idea and says, "Let everyone be responsible for their own liberation" (170). Art as a profession is used metaphorically to signify women's liberty. Rasa's mother displays an intention to change the status of women in society. She continuously resists traditional gender roles. For example, she keeps going to the villages with her western clothes and refuses to wear the dresses Teta buys for her:

This is not America, [Teta says] *habibti*,...you cannot walk around like you are Mother Teresa. People talk here. But if my mother understood this, she was not concerned...And each time she slipped into those paint-stained jeans, my grandmother's resolve only strengthened. The family's standing was on the line, Teta warned my father. Be careful. You only have one life, one reputation. Do not make a mess of it. (171)

However, Rasa's mother's independent behavior is ephemeral, as her social perceptions begin to shake gradually. She helplessly starts to submit to the patriarchal culture. Even though she is a woman, Teta, as a product of the patriarchal culture, not only accepts the inferior position she is assigned, but also empowers the patriarchal ideology and enhances

her traditional gender role by imposing these cultural values on her daughter-in-law: “And if Mama had no intention of becoming a good wife, then Teta would shame her into being one” (171). To understand Teta’s identity, we could draw upon Fanon’s theory of ‘inferiority complex’. Because of a long history of oppression and inequality, women’s submission to the patriarchal system becomes a norm that gains a certain aura of sanctity. And at the same time, Teta plays the role of policing this norm. The patriarchal ideology succeeds at two levels: normalizing the inferiority of women as an internal reality, and hiring indirectly oppressed (women) to naturalize the patriarchal ideology.

Haddad’s depiction of Rasa’s mother may remind us of Butler’s concept of identity: “[G]ender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be... There is no gender identity behind the ‘expression’ that are said to be its results” (33). In accordance with Teta’s view of gender roles, the way her daughter-in-law acts and dresses consolidates a social impression that she is not conforming to the general accepted norm, and therefore she needs to adjust her social behavior to fit into the norm.

Rasa’s mother starts to realize that she can not make her own decisions about how she would like to live her life, and she is not able to make the changes she was hoping for due to culturally established gender roles:

she reached over and grabbed a knife... She turned to her painting of the women in the field and slashed the canvas diagonally, starting from the top right to the bottom left, and then the same thing across the other direction. She dropped the knife back in the sink and returned to the garlic bulbs. (182)

This incident is important as it signifies her loss of the battle against the patriarchal power/culture. Rasa's mother not only destroys her artistic profession but her very existence as a liberal woman with a moral conviction to effect changes.

Furthermore, the intersections of gender, culture, and religion in the Arab world are important in constructing women as inferior subjects. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba states, "many postcolonial regimes have been out rightly repressive of women's rights, using religion as the basis on which to enforce their subordination" (189). Haddad sheds light on how the misuse of Islam and cultural principles conjoin to produce a catachrestic effect on women's identity. As Rasa narrates, "Mama began to spend a lot of time in the kitchen. The religious nuts had found an ally in Teta, and together they succeeded in forcing my mother to drop her paintbrush" (183). She identifies with the kitchen as a concrete testament to her new life in the Middle East and the negative changes it produces. Thus, a particular version of Islam has been implemented to boost the oppression of women through inherited cultural values. The two elements relegate women to a minor role in society. Rasa's mother tells Maj when he plays the role of a bride, "as soon as you take the dress off you will spend your life chopping onions" (122) hinting at assigned gender roles and an imposed identity in which women are confined to domestic work.

Against her will, Rasa's mother accepts patriarchal culture as she is forcefully steered from being an artist to doing domestic jobs including cooking: "[A]t the time Mama was really unhappy, chopping bowls of onions every night...in the morning she had produced no new paintings or sculptures" (193). She fails to make the reforms she was planning. Her failure manifests the power of collective identity over individual acts.

Consequently, she is depressed and acts violently toward herself; Rasa remembers what happened to his mother: “My mother is on the floor....There is a broken bottle and a pool of blood by her hands...Mama is sobbing into the pool of blood. She looks up at me briefly and then buries her face in her chest. Her wailing intensifies” (238). The only avenue for Rasa’s mother to escape the constructed cultural trap is to leave the Arab world. She very deliberately chooses to punish herself physically and emotionally since there is no available spot for her to practice her desired social identity, and all her dreams for change are demolished.

Reading Haddad’s text as a dystopian representation of the Arab world demonstrates how cultural pressures and religious discourse block someone from expressing his/her desired identity. At one point, Rasa narrates, “With the brutish thugs of the regime or the head-banging fundamentalism of the opposition, Taymour and I would always be forced to wear masks, to bend and mold ourselves to their image” (139). The unspoken rules of society operate in an impalpable way in every day life, unless someone decides to resist. Rasa, his mother, and Taymour, with identities different from the general norm, face various social obstacles that make their lives miserable.

The Center Can’t Hold

The political system and the lack of democracy are two essential factors contributing to the instability in the Arab world. Sharansky “divides the world into two categories, free and fear societies, with nothing in between” (41), and continues to classify the people of the fear society into three groups: the first one is comprised of true believers of the prevailing order, the second one includes dissidents to the prevailing order, and the last one inscribes a group of people who do not agree with the prevailing

ideology, “but who are afraid to accept the risks associated with dissent” (44). He calls the last group “doublethinkers” who “live in constant tension from the gap between their thought and words. They always avoid saying what is not permitted but also try to avoid saying what they do not believe” (45). A fear society is controlled not only through an army or a secret police but also through the government’s ability to govern what is read, said, heard, and, above all, thought. “This is how a regime based on fear attempts to maintain a constant pool of true believers” (Sharansky 56). The fact is the majority of Arab countries have the characteristics of a fear society. With this in mind, *Guapa* revolves around the contorted relationship between the political authority and individuals and how the hegemony of the political order in the Arab world, through the institution of religion, law and regulations, and capitalism, produces citizens who struggle with the sense of belonging. The Arab Spring¹ erupted to equalize the relationship between individuals and their political government.

In *Guapa*, in addition to the socio-cultural representations, Haddad concentrates on political issues in the Arab world, including lack of freedom and democracy, dictatorship, and the relationship between the Middle East and the West (the U.S. in particular). The novel proffers a perspective on the corrupt political systems within the Arab world. Through a fictional representation and reconstruction of some of the most important events in the first decade of the twentieth-first century, Haddad points to how the government establishes an unfair political system in which all the three types of authority— legislature, judiciary, and executive— are controlled by the ruling political

¹The Arab Spring is the subject of the fourth chapter of this study.

system. Corraling these authorities under the power of the political regime destroys notions such as social justice, democracy, political participation, and multi-party activity, to mention just a few.

As a socio-political text, *Guapa*'s depictions of the characters' attitudes toward the political system range from naïve acceptance to hypocritical cynicism to harsh criticism. Taymour accepts the government's narrative: "[He] had been so insistent that now, more than ever, the president was the only alternative, it was either that or the Islamists" (15). To this, his friend Maj responds, "That is what the regime wants you to think" (16). The official rhetoric, disseminated by religious and media institutions, presents the political leaders as holding the nation together and maintaining its stability for moral reasons and not personal interest. Haddad attempts to deconstruct this invented holy image of the president through hypocritical cynicism and direct criticism. At one point, Rasa ironically narrates, "You can measure [the president's] popularity in certain neighborhoods by how many posters of him the government has put up. The less popular he is, the more posters his thugs hang in defiance" (121). Employing the cynical rhetoric functions to vilify the sacred portrait of the president. Haddad also, in a direct manner, criticizes the political system as Rasa tells the American journalist (Laura), "the political situation is very bad that we are stuck between terrorism and authoritarianism" (74). Significantly, Rasa expresses his view of the political system to a foreigner and not to a fellow citizen because of the fear of secret police. What is more important though, is the connection between the two groups. Both—terrorism and authoritarianism—rely on power and violence to gain complete loyalty.

While Rasa can't directly voice his criticism, the narrative shows that political authorities violate the basic rights of its citizens: "We stop at a checkpoint. The soldier asks for our papers. An automatic guilt surges within me, as though I may be dragged out of the car for a crime I have unknowingly committed, within the maze of complicated rules and unspoken regulations that descend from every corner" (19). Haddad's portrayal of this incident is strikingly precise and vivid since in the Arab world rules and regulations are not straightforward. Indeed, "suspected terrorist" becomes a label for any individual who calls for demonstration or anyone deemed a threat. Moreover, Arabs are always under serious surveillance. Haddad, through Rasa's narration, asserts this concept: "My life, or everything the regime deems relevant about my life, is in that folder. Twenty-seven years of events" (135). This shows that the relationship between the political regime and individuals is based on suspicion, mistrust, and speculation. Additionally, many of the punitive laws require only random accusations. As Rasa notes, "Anything I have ever done could be taken as a threat to the regime, if that is what they wanted to prove" (135). Hence, the relationship between political power and individuals is a dialectical relation that is not subject to specific criteria. Haddad suggests that without serious and essential reform of the political system, the Middle East would remain repressive.

Thus, the relationship between people and their governments in the Middle East is complex, contradictory, and unfathomable. The Arab revolution/Arab Spring, its aftermath, and the governments' reaction to it reveal the complexity of this relationship.

Mohammed Al-ahmari comments, “Arab people are not citizens but rather inhabitants”² indicating that citizenship refers to political participation at all levels, yet citizens in Arab countries do not have any form of rights regarding political decisions. On the contrary, they must express their loyalty to the government and appreciate all its decisions and actions. Sharansky underscores that in dictatorships, individuals must express their loyalty to the regime that rules them. In the novel, the death of the president’s father shuts down the country for ten days; Rasa adds, “the next week began with a moment of silence to honor the old man, which often descended into collective weeping that was encouraged by the teachers. To question the tears was to be a heartless traitor, so I joined along” (64). Haddad’s parodic portrayal of political leaders in the Arab World reinforces the stereotypical image of the dictatorship in which leaders are presented as God-like. In this representation, Haddad offers a critique of how in early stages (at schools), loyalty to political figures, rather than constitutions, is established.

In dictatorships, social justice and equal opportunities are barely found. The absence of these two important qualities results in a huge chasm between the political regime and its people and possibly leads to violent acts. Haddad highlights this when Maj overtly tells Rasa:

This is a regime that preys on the angry and the weak. On the downtrodden and oppressed, on the poor, on women and refugees and illegal immigrants. Today they released me in a matter of hours. And why is that? Because I speak fluent English and live in the western suburbs. Politically I am too costly to kill. (284)

² Mohammed Al-ahmari delivered his lecture in Arabic and the translations are mine.

This type of government not only empowers the social class divisions, but it also implicitly encourages unequal treatment of individuals. Through these practices, the government adopts an ambivalent discourse to justify its existence in power, ensuring artificially safety for the nation as well as equal treatment to individuals.

Haddad discusses the totalitarian regime's lack of legitimacy by concentrating on the lack of democracy and liberty. Ironically enough, in the novel, the president presents himself as representing the full spectrum of society: "Tribal President, Business President, Islamic President, Secular President- collect them all" (68). Because there is no free election, presidents, in the Arab world, embody the whole nation in themselves, implying a connection between their existence in power and the stability of their nations. This sort of monolithic dictatorship refuses full implementation of democracy and modernity. In the text, Rasa sheds light on the similarity between dictators in the Middle East and his grandmother's rules: "Teta ran our house much like the president ran the country. She had a tight-fisted control over memory, liberally erasing the past to control the present" (169). Metaphorically, Rasa's grandmother represents the tyrannical governments of the Middle East, whereas Rasa's mother represents Western types of government. This reading is supported by Rasa's view of the two characters. He tells readers that he could talk to his mother more than he could to Teta: "With Teta there was little to be discussed apart from whether I was getting good enough grades, what I would study at university, and what I would name my firstborn" (95). There is no space for mutual dialogue; instead conversation is restricted to directions and instructions.

This kind of political system has devastating social, economic and international consequences. Rasa views Teta's house, metaphorically his country, as a different kind of

death: “But to return to Teta’s house with its oppressive silences would be a different sort of death” (95). Sharansky argues that “stability inside a nondemocratic regime is terror outside of it” (14), and he evaluates the situation in the Middle East through a Western perspective and ignores the internal instability caused by the lack of democracy. In the text, the taxi driver tells Rasa, “Nothing works. This is a country, they say. What kind of country is this? Do you think this is a country?” (24). The same concept is repeated when a woman tells Rasa, “I hate it in this city. Nothing works and no one wants to admit it... Everyone is in denial... Keeping up appearances and trying to ignore the fact that everything is falling apart” (279). This discourse promotes the necessity for change in this part of the world at the political level, yet cultural principles and corrupt government conspire to make political change and social advancement impossible. The depiction of the Arab world provided in the novel deconstructs the official government’s claim of maintaining stability at the cost of democracy. Haddad’s insider perspective shows that dictatorial rule hinders social and economic prosperity and naturalizes class division and social injustice.

By the end of the novel, Teta remains alive and maintains her values, and her principles are unchanged, whereas Rasa’s mother could not make the changes she was planning. With this juxtaposition of characters, Haddad implies that change needs to take place within rather than from outside, and at the same time, he acknowledges western advancement compared to the Middle East in regard to gender relations and gender equality. With this attitude, Haddad’s criteria for judgment remain Eurocentric; he thus concedes the superiority of the West over the East. This view is revealed through the cognitive dissonance between the two cultures in terms of social perceptions and

constructions. Rasa's mother overcomes challenges in the West, in spite of all social obstacles she encounters— in particular with identity formation and belonging— but she could not survive in the East because of oppression and gender inequality.

The novel also highlights an important generational divide that affects and alters social perceptions and views. While the older generation simply could not acclimate itself to the Western cultural invasion, the younger generation adapts to these new perspectives at the cost of losing aspects of their cultural principles. Rasa points to the hegemony of American culture: “Having grown up on its television and books, America was a part of who I was before I even set foot there, but the reality of America was grittier and more alien than I had imagined it to be” (152). In addition to revealing the globalization of American culture, Haddad positively emphasizes the inaccurate depiction of America through media coverage at the same time that he exposes the inaccurate representation of the American neo-Orientalist discourse of the Middle East. The hegemony of American culture accompanies the rise of America's new colonial project. Haddad hints at this project implicitly as Rasa tells us about his friend Omar: “He went to the American school, which was the best school in the country. I went to the British school, which had been the best school in the country until the American school was built” (42). American colonialism supplants British colonialism. And the goal is to westernize the East by the means of promoting western values.

At the political level, through Rasa's academic trip to America, Haddad presents a counter narrative to initiate a political dialogue between the Middle East and the West especially after the 9/11 attack. The relationship between America and the Arab world undergoes dramatic shifts, remarkably the shift from ally status to adversary over a

number of the ideological, economic, and political issues. In fact, in the early days of post-9/11, fiction written in response to this catastrophic event largely concentrated on the trauma experienced either by the victims of 9/11 or the U.S. nation and paid no attention to its impact on the Middle East. Haddad criticizes American neo-Orientalist discourses, calling attention to the inaccurate representation of the Orient and the misunderstanding of Arabs. He attempts to reveal that Americans' view of the Middle East, in particular after 9/11, is based mainly on the discourse of American neo-Orientalism which in addition to being selective does not accurately represent the people in the Arab world. In the novel, the American journalist Laura partly represents this neo-Orientalist discourse; she tells Rasa, "I am the news," (65) implying that her job is to cover this part of the world for American audiences. In this sense, she has the authority to choose the type of news she wants to cover and convey, and ignore other news. In addition to her power, she relies on translation which is not always reliable. And above all, media is a commercial enterprise in the first place in which audience's tastes, needs, and beliefs are taken into consideration. Media coverage, considering the hidden agenda of news broadcasting, does not always lead to accurate representation of the Other.

Indeed, having the power to select certain news allows not only a space for representational limitations but may also create or perpetuate inaccurate generalizations concerning the Other. As Rasa is pursuing his degree in America, he encounters this inaccurate discourse especially after 9/11:

Why do you force women wear the hijab? Why is your culture consumed with hate? Why do you produce terrorists?....Was it an Islam thing? Was it because

you did not have freedom or was it because you hated freedom? And why do you hate women so much? Why did you do this to us, they asked. (160)

With the above questions, Haddad sheds light on the power of America neo-Orientalism in constructing social perceptions of the Other. Rasa answers these over-generalized questions: “I was the by-product of an oppressive culture, an ambassador of a people at war with civilization” (161). Haddad accentuates the continuity of the misrepresentation of the Middle East through Orientalist discourse. From a western perspective, the images of the Arabs are stereotypical and colonially-influenced; accordingly, this depiction provides alleged justifications for the U.S. to intervene in the Arab world. Before invading Iraq, George H.W. Bush, then president, used the conditions of the people of Iraq as a justification purporting that he would provide democracy to the oppressed people. If the invasion was based purely on humanitarian purposes and not indirect forms of economic control and exploitation, then why focus on Iraq in particular and not other dictators in the region? And more importantly, why impose western values on people who do not ask for them, regardless of their religious and cultural background?

Yet, *Guapa* provides two contradictory images of America. Prosperity, advancement and civilization have their roots in America: “[W]hen I first came back from America,” Rasa narrates “I arrived with a suitcase full of dreams” (38). Through his academic trip, Rasa starts to recognize different perceptions of life: “The solitude of America and the books it contained helped me uncover the secret to the hegemony of both the president and Teta. I explored my newfound freedom by finally thinking about my mother” (169). The notion was to promote western values including democracy, freedom of expression, and liberty in his own society, “Did America send you to

protest?” (137), an officer asks Rasa. Earlier, Rasa’s mother returns to the Arab world claiming a civilizing mission by introducing art and western values as ways to liberate women from the patriarchal culture. Both Rasa and his mother reveal incredible disappointment with the lack of modernization in their homeland. Where life in America provided them with certain privileges, their return to their country of origin comes with a loss of those comforts and opportunities. However, in both worlds, Rasa and his mother remain positioned between two contradictory places, both of which lack certain essential elements in their constitutions. As an Anglophone Arab author, Haddad attempts to reform and modernize the Middle East based on some western values which implicitly acknowledge the superiority of western epistemes. In this depiction, Haddad’s view of civilization is not different from many other postcolonial writers who privilege western culture and posit its universality.

However, the second image of America displays an opposing view. The text, in part, criticizes U.S. interference and contribution to the distressing situation in the Middle East. The war on terror not only did not achieve its promised goals, but it destroyed countries, culture, and people completely:

The American regime gleefully bombed countries that were similar to mine, countries that shared the same religion and language. One by one the countries fell and then they were no longer countries. I discovered that when America chooses to go to war, the invaded country becomes a situation. History and people and songs and art are swept away, and the country becomes a political event that takes on new dimension that tell a story. An American story. (209)

Through the demonic depiction of the American war on terror, Haddad highlights the negative impacts of the war on the Middle East. The impacts of the war were harsh, severe, and unacceptable: “I watched the footage of bombs dropping on a city that looked like my own, and realized that from now until the day I died that city would not be what it had been...The country that once existed was no more” (224). The American war on terror adds further layers to the already unhealthy socio-economic environment in the Middle East, and at the same time it provides additional fuel to the rise of religious extremism and violent deeds.

Haddad represents the ambivalent attitudes of western governments regarding human values including human rights and freedom of expression. The political leaders, in western countries, advocate for these values, marketing and spreading them as universal and sacrosanct values, and asserting no violation of rights will take place. Nonetheless, they turn blind eyes when these supposedly universal values are violated by their political allies in the Middle East and other African countries. In the text, Maj responds to Rasa’s suggestion of documenting his injuries and reporting them to the human rights group: “The only purpose those reports serve is to make the West feel better about themselves for selling our regime weapons” (141). Maj, here, points out the duplicity of western governments in regard to human values. The hypocritical stance emerges as a result of America’s imperial economic interests throughout the Middle East.

Without considering West/East relations, the complexity of the Arab world can not be fully captured. The two contradictory images of America may trick readers into accepting either of the two as an absolute fact. The two opposing portraits de facto fall into the same category of serving the American imperialist project. Haddad shows that

American cultural hegemony succeeds in promoting its values as the best model. “Before I went to America,” Rasa narrates, “I had thought of it as a place where it didn’t matter who you were or where you were from, all that mattered were the ideas in your mind. I was wrong” (148). He thus unravels the power of American cultural invasion in maintaining its values as superior to the rest of the world. Given the two images of America, Haddad asserts that cultural hegemony becomes implicated in power relations.

Final Settlement: The Pain of Marginalization

This chapter attempts to amalgamate and analyze a set of salient themes in Haddad’s text which demonstrate and contribute to the gloominess of the Arab world. The novel begins with tremendous despair, and maintains the same tone all along to the end, yet with a slight difference as Rasa concludes, “I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know it will not begin with shame” (354). Aware of the difficulties of social and cultural confrontation, Rasa decides to live by his own rules, which initially would isolate him from the norm and give him a mark of difference. The process of initiating socio-cultural change is de facto accompanied by high risk and physical and emotional sacrifice. And this is what happens to Rasa and his mother as they start gradually to alienate themselves and be alienated from their community.

In confronting cultural incongruity, Haddad establishes “the moment of confrontation” when Rasa, by the end of *Guapa*, directly faces his grandmother and her rules. This moment carries with it a long history of doubt and fear. “I am done with shame, [Rasa says]. I am done with your rules about what is eib and what is not. I have my own rules now” (346). Rasa not only expresses his readiness to expose his sexual identity, but also his willingness to confront society’s rules.

On a very basic level, Haddad dramatizes the divide between individual expectations and the reality of social constraints in which cultural standards presented as sacred enact a form of domination over individuals. The aberrant situation therefore shows the extreme depths into which Arabs have fallen in order to achieve the identity they desire and the utopia they dream of. The story transforms the reality of cultural principles into a living nightmare once individuals attempt to resist this hegemony.

A significant contemporary Arab Anglophone writer, Haddad establishes a model for dealing with the internal complexities of the Arab world including sexual minority groups, identity, women, cultural principles, and political corruption. He follows the new trend of shifting away from traditional postcolonial discourse and focuses on issues of local concern and international significance.

Chapter II: Critique of Religious Discourse: Terrorism and Extremism in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*

No one leaves home unless/ home is the mouth of a shark.

Warsan Shire, "Home".

Knowledge might set you free or imprison you forever. (34)

Faqir, *Willow Trees Don't Weep*.

Human beings are like shooting stars. They shine brightly then fall. (271)

Faqir, *Willow Trees Don't Weep*.

Introduction

While the previous chapter presents a dark image of the Arab World with its internal concerns and problems, this chapter deals specifically with religion, Islam in particular, which has played a vital, controversial role in Arab society during colonial, postcolonial, and post 9/11 periods. Islam is an integral part of the social fabric in the Arab world and contributes significantly to the formation of cultural and social perceptions, yet the study of Islam in the West has been mediated by highly uneven colonial discourse. This discourse, as Said argues in *Covering Islam*, "is based on far from objective material" (xi). Postcolonial theory and discourse provide the space for postcolonial writers and critics to represent Islam, yet the images they convey are not fully reliable or accurate largely because of the secular nature of postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial critics deal with Islam within the framework of traditional European oriental/colonial discourse as they draw upon western schools of thought. However, the images imposed upon Islam are targeted themes of Arab/Muslim postcolonial literary productions. The relation between colonial and postcolonial discourse in regards to Islam is a discursive one as the latter responds to the former. Nonetheless, any correlation between Islam and postcolonial theory has always been problematic.

With the emergence of American neo-Orientalist discourse, the attitude toward Islam has not altered since American Orientalism views the Middle East mainly through the framework of European colonial discourse. However, after 9/11 and as a result of it, intensive attention has been paid to Islam, Muslims, and Islamic discourse. The concentration on Islam is demonstrated in a plethora of novels, movies, media and political think tanks. The Hoover Institution³, for example, has established the Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on Islamism and International Order which is dedicated to study the Arab/Muslim World. The Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group has produced numerous books on Islam and Muslims, among them: Bernard Lewis' *The End of Modern History* (2011), Charles Hill's *Trial of a Thousand Years: World Order and Islamism* (2011), and Reuel Gerecht's *The Wave; Man, God and the Ballot Box in the Middle East* (2011). The writings of this group represent American neo-Orientalist discourse toward Islam. In the "Forward" to Gerecht's book, Fouad Ajami states the purposes of this group:

³ The Hoover Institution within Stanford University is a public policy think tank and research institution which was founded in 1919 by Herbert Hoover.

Hoover's newly launched project, the Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on Islamism and the International Order, is our contribution to a deeper understanding of the struggle in the Islamic world between order and its nemesis, between Muslims keen to protect the rule of reason and the gains of modernity, and those determined to deny the Islamic world its place in the modern international order of states. The United States is deeply engaged, and dangerously exposed, in the Islamic world, and we see our working group as part and parcel of the ongoing confrontation with the radical Islamists who have declared war on the states in their midst, on American power and interests, and on the very order of the international system. (xii)

The contributors of this group put themselves in a power position to write about Islam and speak for Muslims. Akbar Ahmed argues, in *Journey into Islam*, that policy forums in the United States mainly concentrating on the Muslim world made no effort to take into account a Muslim perspective. This stance resembles traditional colonial discourse in which the Other is the subject of study and his/her voice is obliterated. Ajami plainly reveals this view when he writes: "Our scholars and experts can report, in a detailed, authoritative way, on Islam within the Arabian Peninsula, on trends within Egyptian Islam, on the struggle between the Kemalist secular tradition in Turkey and the new Islamists" (xiii). The implicit assumption of the writing group is that the Middle East remains a perpetual place of exploration and representation and at the same time the group promotes the very Western notion of democracy. The binary division between civilized and uncivilized nations is based on the level of democratic practices in a society. In other words, the concept of democracy has become the international criterion for

measuring nations' cultural and economic prosperity. In his book, Gerecht affirms that no Islamic country, with the exception of Turkey, has established a fully democratic political system, demonstrating the failure to create a nation-state that meets with western standards of a secular, modern society. But the question then is, how it is possible to impose Western values –based on a claimed assumption that they provide a better way of life to humanity– on other people without intensive consideration of their cultural background, education, religion and history? In one of his lectures, Lewis states, “we in the Western world tend to assume that modernization always means improvement. This is not true....One of the tragedies of the Muslim World is that the process of modernization particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries brought disastrous negative changes.” Lewis argues that classical Islam relies on the notion of “consultation” in which the Sultan had to consult with all kinds of people. “The tragedy of modernization” Lewis adds, “was to put an end to all that.” For Lewis the effect of modernization in the Muslim world was to increase the strength of the central government and at the same time to reduce or eliminate the intermediate powers which traditionally worked as constraints and limitations on the power of the government. Lewis, thus, is critical of how Western democracies have acted in the Middle East and how the concept of democracy is misused to empower authoritarian governments in the Muslim world. Therefore, relying on the Western notion of democracy as a measurement tool does not accurately reflect the political, cultural, and economic realities of the once-colonized nations.

In the aftermath of the catastrophic event of 9/11, a number of American fiction writers tackled the themes of Islam, Muslims, and the Arab/Muslim world. Authoritative tones, misrepresentation, and generalizations with regard to Islam permeate the works of

these Orientalist authors. Before 9/11, the portrayals of Muslims and Arabs in American discourse were consistent with European colonial literary productions. After the September 11 attack, American neo-Orientalist discourse, with regard to the representation of Islam and the Arab/Muslim world, enters a new wave in which Islam supposedly forms a serious threat to Western values and culture. The American journalist Terry McDermott, for example, published *The Perfect Soldiers: The Hijackers: Who They Were, Why They Did It* (2005). McDermott's book is not a fictional account of the September 11 attacks but a full-scale investigation into the men and motives behind 9/11. In the book, McDermott traces the lives of all the hijackers and some of their supporters. The publication of McDermott's book encouraged the Turkish-American author Jarett Kobek to write his fictional version of 9/11. The title of Kobek's novella *Atta* (2011) bears the name of the mastermind behind 9/11, Mohammed Atta. Christopher Buckley's *Florence of Arabia* (2004) is another example of American neo-Orientalist discourse. In his novel, the representation of Islam resembles European Orientalist discourse in which Islam is represented as a threat to the world. Buckley represents the Orient as primitive and uncivilized, yet he justifies dictatorial regimes because the only alternative would be political Islam. The novel tells the story of an American team who travels to the Middle East to civilize its culture and to bring political stability in the region. These are just a few examples of the prolific presence of Arab/Muslims in post 9/11 American journalism and fiction. A comprehensive analysis of the presence of Islam in post 9/11 American novels is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, tracing the general presence of Arab/Muslim characters in neo-American orientalist discourse shows a shift from the traditional European Oriental writings. Prior to 9/11, the people at the margin were

mainly primitive and illiterate and did not form a serious threat. American neo-Orientalist discourse represents Islam as anti-western and a divergence from Judeo-Christian values. In the aftermath of 9/11, Arab and Muslim characters in the American works are not in most cases primitive and illiterate. Instead, they are frequently represented as well educated individuals with academic degrees from Western institutions, but they do have negative views of Western civilization. In Lorraine Adams' *Harbor*, for example, Ghazi –who has a degree in engineering – becomes a radical Muslim after his arrival to the US.

The numerous fictional and nonfictional productions on the topic of Islam are not sporadic, but a trend in American neo-orientalist discourse, to construct a dominant Western view toward Islam. The function of this established version of Islam is to force the Other to abandon his quest for religious authenticity and adopt the taste, habits, and cultural qualities of the West. This attitude is prevalent in traditional Oriental discourse and is heightened later in the American neo-orientalist discourse.

The representation of Islam in a number of ways is influenced by both traditional European Orientalist discourse and American neo-Orientalist discourse. Traditionally, postcolonial authors attempt to refute colonial images. The socio-political changes after 9/11 lead Arab Anglophone writers to take into account Islam and its significant role at the social and cultural levels within their own communities. As such, Arab Anglophone writers shift from a 'writing back' attitude to highlighting and representing their local internal concerns and point out their relation to the international scene. However, since they adopt the English language as a medium of their creative writing, they do not demonstrate a visible departure from traditional postcolonial discourse. The use of English, in part, underscores the connection between the local concerns in the Arab world

and their relations to global politics. After the September attack, Islam, for instance, can't be tackled in isolation from the wider scope of international affairs. Islam is the predominant religion in the Arab world, and for many Muslims it is regarded as an essential component of their identity, yet the spread of Islamic ideology around the globe makes it an international subject. Amin Malak states, "Islam constitutes not only a cardinal component of Muslims' identity but also becomes a prominent feature in the identity of the non-Muslim who happen to live in Muslim communities" (4). The purpose of this chapter is to examine Islam as it appears in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014) and to show how Faqir as an Anglophone Arab author goes beyond the simple formulation of writing back to consider the role of theology and its effects on both local and international scenes. The chapter further discusses how Islam as a religious ideology functions in society and how political events along with religious discourse are manipulated to fit political goals. It also attempts to answer the thorny question regarding the traumatic and dramatic change in ideology among some Muslim individuals who are drawn to radical Islam and become extremists at a certain stage in their lives.

Islam and Postcolonial Theory

Critics do not seem to agree upon the type of the relationship between Islam and postcolonial theory. In *Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels*, Majed Hasan points out that initially Islam benefits from postcolonial theory since the writings of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have themes and notions that are conducive to a thoughtful study of Islam. But, the most significant contribution of the theory to Islam, Malak affirms, emerges with Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. *Orientalism*, claims Malak, "has provided many Muslims and third worldists with the tools to

deconstruct power-backed assumptions of knowledge, transmitted from metropolitan institutions whose dominant discourses went unchallenged for decades and even centuries. Claims about Islam with racist or quasi-racist nuances can no longer pass unchecked” (5). Henceforth, postcolonialism and Islam, to certain degrees, are interlinked, and the two can be beneficially deployed especially with regard to questions of representation, methods of representation, and otherness. Postcolonialism establishes an approach not only to challenge the West’s monopoly on truth and its definition of humanity, but it also provides a new way of thinking about Islam. One of the major premises of postcolonial theory is to deconstruct the presupposed views established through colonial discourses. This generally accepted attitude of postcolonialists creates a limited mold for postcolonial discourses in the sense of supposedly offering cogent critical responses, yet the mission of the discourse fails at three levels: first, postcolonial discourse, despite its prevalence in western academia, still does not occupy or create relatively equal space compared to Oriental discourses due to the power dynamic; secondly, the postcolonial discourse, for some time, has ignored the local concerns of Arab countries in relation to the socio-political ruptures and concentrates basically on the notion of ‘writing back,’ creating little space to challenge problems of domination and hegemony in the global western-based age; and finally, the historical periodization of postcolonial theory in the sense of being established as an immediate and direct response to a historical event limits its applicability. In “The Troubled Encounter Between Postcolonialism and African History,” Paul Zeleza confirms this idea: “Postcolonialists usually discuss the experiences associated with colonialism and its present effects for both the imperial powers and the ex-colonial societies” (98). This quality of the theory

underscores the conceptual eclecticism of postcolonial readings, omitting a long history of changes prior to the arrival of European colonizers, leaving unspecified the precise end of the postcolonial period, let alone the inception of the period. More hazardous though is the West's heavy reliance on a particular historical event in creating its political views and perceptions of others. As such, the interaction between the history of the Arab world, oriental discourses, and postcolonial theory is not straightforward, especially with respect to the cognitive perceptions between the Middle East and the West.

This relationship between Islam and postcolonial theory, according to Hasan, was broken, for various reasons, after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. First, Rushdie's novel, for many Muslims, represents a negative portrayal of Islam. Secondly, postcolonial critics including Said criticized Muslims' reactions to Rushdie's novel. *The Satanic Verses* from an Islamic perspective contradicts the essential constructed assumption of postcolonial theory and discourse; Rushdie does not criticize the colonial legacy, but instead launches his harsh criticism on Islam and ignores its significant role in the process of decolonization. The broken relation between Islam and postcolonial theory displays the essential difference between the two. Islam, for the majority of its disciples, is sacred and claims certainty, whereas postcolonial theory evokes uncertainty and challenges constructed knowledge.

Moreover, the troubled encounter between Islam and postcolonial theory is rooted in epistemic incongruities. Given the secular stance of postcolonial critics, the relationship between these two heterogeneous conglomerates has not always been harmonious. I argue that postcolonial critics deal with Islam as an essential component of culture and social perceptions and behavior, rather than a set of unchanged values and

guidelines. Although they have every single prerogative to combine the two on the basis that religion is not an abstract holy relationship between God and individuals, but rather a system of life which reflects social practices, they do not seem to single out the role of religion in society in a way that underscores the formation of religious ideology. The purpose of this section is to regroup the two seemingly overlapping aspects under the banner of postcolonial discourse.

Despite his acknowledgement of the valuable contributions made by the field of postcolonial studies, Anouar Majid asserts the discourse's significant failure on the basis of its ignoring the real problems and anxieties of Muslims living under the all-encompassing umbrella of globalization. Majid submits that "few scholars took the time to think and write about religion as a sustaining spiritual force, and even fewer bothered to examine the rise and meaning of Islamic extremism" (1). Although postcolonial theory provides the space to challenge colonial discourse, the contributions of postcolonial critics and writers with regard to Islam were/are still scant, especially prior to the September 11 attack. Ignoring Islamic discourses creates a blind spot in the field of postcolonial studies. The secular stance of the postcolonial theory and discourse along with colonial writings create an arcane view of Islam. This arcane view of Islam is associated with three thorny issues. First, the images provided by both traditional European Orientalist and American neo-Orientalist discourse do not accurately represent Islam. Instead, the focus was/is on the negative aspects of Islam especially in relation to violent deeds and women's oppression. Secondly, postcolonial theory fails to thoroughly address Islam. In this regard, Malak criticizes the theory on the basis of "the dearth of useful postcolonial theoretical material germane to the issue of religion" (16). Haifa

Alfaisal, in her dissertation, expresses a similar attitude, writing “postcolonial studies, as an academic field of study, has never given cognitive value to indigenous religious utterances” (4). Thirdly, most Muslim/Arab Anglophone authors, with rare exceptions such as Leila Aboulela, take a secular stance toward religion, especially before the September 11 attacks. Although they are not to be blamed for their political views in relation to religion, the images they convey are complicitous with the enterprise of colonialism and simultaneously perpetuate Oriental discourse by affirming it as a starting point for their writings.

Many postcolonial critics including Wail Hassan and Mohammed Alquwaizani argue that postcolonial writers in their quest for modifying, reforming, and modernizing the Orient use concepts borrowed from the Orientalist discourse. In *Orientalism and Postcolonialism in Modern Arab Thought*, Alquwaziani states, “The application of these Western ideas to situations that are purely “Eastern” privileges the European episteme and posits its universality” (1). Hassan adds that Arab Anglophone writers could not ignore Orientalism’s haunting grip. But the question here is, do postcolonial critics have absolute power over postcolonial discourses? And to go a step back, who are postcolonial critics in the first place? In his essay entitled “The Postcolonial Aura,” Arif Dirlik raises a variation on this question: “Postcolonial intellectuals are clearly the producers of a postcolonial discourse, but who exactly are the postcolonial intellectuals?” (332). Dirlik elaborates on this question, writing “Intellectuals may produce the themes that constitute postcolonial discourse, but it is participation in the discourse that defines them as postcolonial intellectuals” (332). What Dirlik does not address though is the type of participation in relation to religion. The notion is highly complicated since there is no

agreement upon criteria for categorizing postcolonial intellectuals. Having geographical roots to once-colonized locations does not automatically grant intellectuals postcolonial status. The 'postcolonial' mark by itself is an invented historical definition of the relationship between the East and the West. Moreover, in Western institutions, for example, there are a number of postcolonial scholars who contribute significantly to postcolonial studies, yet they do not have direct association with postcolonial cultures. The fact is, it is assumed that geographical association gives an identity mark. For example, in an interview, Fadia Faqir says that Islam was nothing for her before the 9/11 attack, but after the attack, people in Britain started to deal with her as a Muslim, and she said "Yes, I am Muslim." The social categorization, based on geographical roots, directly or indirectly, creates a presupposed perception. That then becomes part of an individual's identity because others apply the label. The aftermath of 9/11 demonstrates how labelling becomes a strategy for categorizing people based on race, geographical background, and religious beliefs.

After September 11, Islam starts to gain intensive attention. This particular event, to use Majid's phrase, "Mark[s] a turning point for postcolonial studies" at two levels. For Majid, 9/11 leads critics "to distinguish between the blending of populations and economies, and the dissolution of cultural and religious identities." The intensive attention Islam received as a consequence of 9/11 forces Arab/Muslim Anglophone authors to create a new way to deal with Islamic discourses and enter a new dialogue with the West. The new wave takes both postcolonial writers and critics to a new dimension of thinking about the rearticulated Orientalist discourse in regard to Islam. Majid suggests that "Islamic alternatives are necessary for the emergence of a new multicultural order

based on dialogue, not exploitation” (9). Majid’s suggestion is the result of his examination of Islam and Islamic identity in postcolonial studies. He shows that Muslims are unable to represent themselves not only because of repressive regimes and inadequate facilities in the Islamic world, but because “it is also actually hindered by the pervasive proliferation of a few theories that have now become the standards against which all postcolonial theories are tested” (9). As such, postcolonial theory has serious limits in its methodological and conceptual capacities to deal with Islam and its global effect in the post 9/11 era. To mend the obfuscation and uncertainty between Islam and postcolonial theory, it is crucial to move away from Homi Bhabha’s celebrated notions “hybridity” and “in-between” to highlight Islamic alienation at the spatial, temporal, and spiritual levels since the essential guidelines and rules of Islam reject any type of assimilation or integration.

Nonetheless, to a certain extent, coupling Islam with postcolonial theory is theoretically and empirically misleading and unproductive, especially with the temporal and spatial scope of postcolonial theory and its lack of attention to Islamic discourse. Traditional postcolonial writings revolve around cultural representations of indigenous inhabitants and cultural confrontation and conflict between colonized and colonizers, but they barely hint at religious discourse. Alfaisal argues that postcolonial studies has dealt with “religious discourse on a very superficial and symbolic level and on certain condition that are delimited by the respective critic/theoretician/writer’s own cognitive field or epistemological grounding” (4). Ironically, postcolonial writings consolidate the Orientalist perception with respect to Islam since “early post-independence writers,” according to Boehmer, “tended to identify with a nationalist narrative and to endorse the

need for communal solidarity” (225). The September 11 attacks catapult Islam into the frontline for American neo-Orientalist discourse, Muslim/Arab Anglophone writers, and postcolonial critics. However, because of the socio-political circumstances, postcolonial theory is ill-equipped to deal with Islam. As Malak explains:

[The] discursive lacuna in postcolonial theory becomes especially pronounced in the case of Islam, a religion that has a distinctive history of resisting and fiercely fighting colonial hegemony. It is odd that ‘postcolonial theory’ can not offer insights about the activism of Islam, despite the fact that one of its seminal texts, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*...is prompted and permeated by a challenge to the colonial representations of Islam as biased constructions whose corrosive corollaries are discernible today in multiple insidious fashions across diverse domains of power. (17)

Another significant difference between postcolonial theory and Islamic belief is that postcolonial theory represents a shift from the center to the margin, whereas, Islam does not take part in this binary view. Postcolonial theory represents the locality of the people with regards to race, nation, and culture; Islam, on the other hand, is not associated with one particular culture, race, or, nation. Instead it is viewed as an international mobile ideology which goes beyond geographical frontiers of modern nations. And this makes the theoretical model poorly equipped to deal with Islam in terms of local/global identities.

Additionally, Islam, like other religions, is based on human interpretation of religious texts which does not necessarily provide an accurate understanding or guideline. In *Contemporary Arab Thought*, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi introduces the notion of ‘cultural

constructions of Islam' to show that different historical periods incorporate different theological components which were essentially heterogeneous. The multiple interpretations of Islamic discourse are not only the main causes of sectarianism and violent deeds committed in the name of religion but also contribute to the inaccurate shaping of Western epistemological grounds of understanding Islam. Postcolonial critics/writers who draw upon colonial discourses treat Islam as a single entity. This stance not only creates a misunderstanding of Islamic discourse, but also overgeneralizes Islam. Muslims are not monolithic. In *Islam and the Arab Awakening*, Tariq Ramadan argues that despite the unanimity of the structure and the categorization of the basic principles of Islam, Muslim scholars "differ widely in their interpretation of the texts and in secondary principles" (68). Reza Aslan in *Beyond Fundamentalism* criticizes the over-generalization process: "It is easy to blame religion for acts of violence carried out in religion's name, easier still to comb through scripture for bits of savagery and assume a simple causality between the text and the deed. But no religion is inherently violent or peaceful; people are violent or peaceful" (4). What characterized Islam though is the Islamist movement which seeks to create an Islamic state, "either through grassroots social and political activism or through violent revolution-built upon a distinctly Islamic moral framework" (Aslan 23). In the Arab World, with the emergence of Arab nationalism, for some, Islam is widely viewed as the foundation for any call for unity. "Religious nationalism," Aslan affirms, "is by no means a uniquely Islamic phenomenon" (23). Unlike other religions, Islam remains politically active in a way it is/was used to create religious nations such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Faqir once stated that "Islam is becoming more than a religion," promoting its active political role.

But the pressing question is, where does Islam stand in civil societies or how can Islam be part of the nation-state in the wake of geopolitical changes and the calls for secular nations? Blending in Islam within modern configuration of nations creates an absurd atmosphere at ideological and identity levels. The ultimate absurdity was reached by some through the call for an Islamic Caliphate. Indeed, the essential premises of postcolonial theory fail to address the different versions of Islamic interpretations with regard to ideology and identity reflection. Postcolonial authors and postcolonial theory tend to ignore Islamic minorities.

Henceforth, postcolonial theory needs to open up its approach to include religion and develop more nuanced models that empower Islamic voices. Furthermore, in light of geopolitical changes and the aftermath of 9/11, Anglophone Arab writers and postcolonial critics need firstly, to be aware of the limitations of postcolonial theory in the sense that many nations in the Arab World still experience different versions of colonization which forms a serious threat to their cultural and social identity and Islamic values. Secondly, they should understand that these geopolitical changes lead to the universalization of Western knowledge in science, politics, religion, and culture.

Fadia Faqir

Fadia Faqir was born and raised in Amman, Jordan where she obtained her BA in English literature; she then gained two postgraduate degrees in creative writing from the universities of Lancaster and East Anglia. She has taught in a number of academic institutions and currently she is a full time writer at Saint Aidan's College, Durham University, UK. Although the topic of women is at the core of Faqir's writings, she writes about Islam, Muslims and Arabs. The major focus of her first novel *Nisanit* (1988) is the

Palestinian intifada. Her second novel *Pillars of Salt* (1996), according to Lindsey Moore, established Faqir as a writer centrally concerned with Anglo-Arab encounters. In *My Name is Salma* (2007), Faqir moves a step ahead and addresses issues of women in the Arab world and cultural contestation. In addition to her career as a creative writer, Faqir significantly contributes to Middle East women's studies. She was the main editor of the *Arab Women Writers series*.

As an Anglophone Arab writer, Faqir plays an ambivalent role. On one hand, she highlights the local issues of her country of origin and on the other hand, she establishes a counter narrative to the neo-Orientalist discourse. Faqir, like many Anglo-Arab writers who reside in the West, carries with her the internal concerns of the Arab world including the issues of Islam and religious discourse, women's status in society, and autocratic governments in the Arab World. Nonetheless, her writing style is distinctive compared with other Anglo-Arab writers in two respects: its conscious connection to Arabic narrative forms, and her concentration on characters who are unprivileged and marginal. In an interview, she states, "my characters are very low on the social scale...down-and-outs...I have not got any characters that are middle class, rich or privileged. That strata or segment of society does not hold my attention."

Despite the fact that women's issues occupy the locus spot in Faqir's writing, she defies categorization, addressing concerns historically and traditionally known to lie within a male-dominated field. Although Faqir highlights internal concerns of her country of origin, she at the same time addresses their wider international relevance. Her exposure to the two cultures provides Faqir with the required knowledge to deal with the internal Arab concerns and their relations to the international affairs. Through active

incorporations of the two linguistics traditions, Diva Abdo argues that “Faqir offers both audiences, English –and Arabic-speaking, a strategy that enables the text to subversively, yet almost invisibly, critique both cultures” (239). Faqir is also known as an active feminist writer who criticizes patriarchal social systems and Islamic discourse which undermine the status of women in the Arab world. I have selected Faqir for this chapter to get beyond the notion that female Arab Anglophone writers address mainly women’s concerns and do not explore issues often considered male subjects, including war, religion, politics, and nation.

Willow Trees Don’t Weep: A Narrative of Two Blending Voices

Faqir’s *Willow Trees Don’t Weep* (2014) touches upon highly complex and local concerns within the Arab world and their relation and effect on the wider universe. In the text, Faqir triangulates the issues of gender, religion, and postcolonialism, yet she does not deal with them in isolation but rather as components that complement each other to create something integral to the seemingly disparate thematic elements. Faqir’s journey of writing this novel started in 1987 when she interviewed a member of Al-Qaeda.⁴ She was inspired by his story, yet she did not want to write a terrorist novel; instead she wanted to demonstrate what happens when a father puts religion over his family. The text was published in the context of the aftermath of the Gulf war, the rise of Islamic terrorist groups, the 9/11 attack, and the 7/7 attack; therefore, Faqir’s novel is clearly meant to be a response to these events. By locating her fictional text in the current moment, Faqir

⁴ Al-Qaeda is a militant Sunni Islamist multi-national organization founded in 1988 by Osama bin Landan and Abdullah Azzam.

gives her Anglophone readers free rein to test for themselves the primary force of Islam in society and urges them to revisit the history of the region.

The story is narrated in two voices and presents two time strands. In the first voice, the story reveals Najwa's voyage to find her father, Omar, who walked out on her and her mother when she was just three years old. The small family must face the consequences of the disappearance of the father who left them for the sake of global jihad. The second voice presents Omar's gradual religious transformation which leads eventually to his being ostracized from society. This narrative technique not only creates a balance between the two storylines; it also calls upon the reader to form a comprehensive overview and places him as an impartial judge.

The story (which is not presented chronologically) starts when Najwa is twenty-seven years old and witnesses the death of her mother due to cancer. The narration then moves back in time to shed light on Najwa's background, family, and the political and religious situation in her nation. The journey to the past, in the text, provides the basic material to understand the status quo. As a consequence of Raneen's death, Najwa can not live on her own in the predominantly Islamic society of Jordan; her grandmother tells her, "Now your mother is dead, you have to go and look for your father...." "Chaste women do not live on their own. Tongues will wag" (6). The suggestion of Najwa's grandmother is the outcome of a patriarchal system which strictly polices women's sexuality, their roles in society, and their mobility. This shows that Najwa is excluded from the political space and entombed in Arab Islamic culture, yet Faqir uses the mobilization of women as an avenue for resisting patriarchal ideology.

Najwa's journey is defined by a series of physical displacements and mental developments. Her physical journey takes her to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and England, tracing every step of her father, searching for her male-guardian in order to meet the social requirement for a decent woman. Nonetheless, the hypocrisy of the situation is that in accord with Islamic laws, women are not eligible to travel by themselves: "The journey had not started yet and three rules were broken already: I'd been into a male-only internet café, got a passport without my male guardian's permission and drunk in public" (52). Throughout the novel, Najwa does not surrender to the gendered logic of her original situation. Her long and difficult quest—which violates Islamic laws and the cultural norms of the Arab world—is socially justified because the ultimate goal (living under a male guardian) is culturally desired. Faqir critiques religious and cultural discourses on the basis of their significant failure to provide and ensure gender equality. The integration between Islamic values and cultural perceptions in the Arab world creates a selective culture in which the dominant male selects what matches with his own social views. Islamic discourse, in this case, is used to empower and give legitimacy to the hegemony of male social standards in relation to women's status in society. The outstanding feature of the novel is clearly the way Omar's voice and his radical transformation quest are incorporated. This technique not only creates balance between the two versions of the story, but also puts power in the hands of readers to form their own perceptions with regards to the issues of nation, religion, and women and above all to question the versions of truth as they hear the story from multiple perspectives. In the narrative, Omar records his spiritual and physical journey and Najwa narrates her journey following her father's steps. Hence, there are logical connections between the two

narrators. The technique is not a haphazard one moving arbitraries from one point to another; rather every move adds another piece of information. The two narratives are linked at the end of the story when Najwa meets with her father at a prison in the UK.

The act of shifting between the two narrators empowers readers with authority and knowledge—through uncertainty and unreliability that the two narrators evoke – implicitly helping readers to draw their own interpretations and conclusions. Bluntly put, none of these multiple storylines is unreliable as Faqir does not give authority to any particular storyline. This narrative technique gives readers the opportunity to piece the two narrations together. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* combines trajectories of transformation, challenge, love, and resistance, all of which are reducible to a scenario that was once Faqir's main focus: the production of Islamic extremists.

Islam in Willow Trees Don't Weep

In her novel, Faqir presents an ambivalent view of Islam. The narrative, on the one hand, is implicated in the neo-American Orientalist discourse in depicting and tracing the voyage of a radicalized male Muslim; on the other hand, the story not only offers a counter narrative to American discourse with respect to Islam but also provides missing narrative elements or scenes absent in the neo-American Orientalist discourse which totally neglects the effects of the violent deed on the community and families of the extremists. Novels written in response to the catastrophic September 11 attacks have largely concentrated on the trauma experienced either by the victims of 9/11 or its negative impacts on the U.S. and have neglected their effects on the Arab/Muslim World. With this in mind, Sarah Ilott states:

A plethora of fictional texts- including Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) and Patrick McGrath's *Ghost Tow* (2005) to mention just a few- have centered on Western narratives of trauma and loss at the hands of a small band of "fundamentalists" who are often figured as threatening the west's very mode of existence. (571)

Although meant to highlight those consequences, Faqir's text ultimately moves the dichotomous gap that lies between the American neo-Orientalist discourse and Arab Anglophone writing into a dialogue first by using a hybrid language and secondly by showing missing scenes in the neo-American Orientalist discourse. As such, Faqir differs from traditional postcolonial writers whose major intention was to respond to colonial discourse; she addresses local concerns of her country of origin and their relation to the international scenes.

Willow Trees Don't Weep bears comparison with John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006).

Both texts trace the radicalization process of Muslim characters in which Islamic discourse as an external force and via the figure of Imams combine with the political environment to significantly determine the process of ideological transformation. The common ground between the two authors harkens back to the discursive relation between American neo-Orientalist discourse and Arab Anglophone writers in the post 9/11 era, yet American neo-Orientalist discourse engages directly with Western readers, underscoring American values, victimizing the U.S. for maintaining its humanistic mission, and singling out "radical Islam" as a potential threat. In an interview, Updike tells Tom Ashbrook that he wrote this piece as a public service, as well as from his personal interest. When he was asked about the type of research he did to write this

novel, he says that he read the Qur'an, especially sections that talk about how to deal with non-Muslims, and he consulted news coverage of the 9/11 attacks. Updike's explanation of his research implicitly poses the question: Is that enough to provide an accurate representation of a Muslim/Arab American character? Updike's novel addresses American society's concern regarding the September 11 attacks. He neglects any other international circumstances (American foreign policy) that led to the tragic event of the September attack. Faqir's narrative fills the void left by Updike's limited approach through her depiction of the protagonists' movement to different locations and by historicizing the Islamic movement in the Arab world. She goes on to provide a penetrating portrait of the internal and external circumstances which contribute to the process of radicalization. Her strength as a writer derives from her ability to rise above all the prejudices concerning Islam and depict the drift of the Arab world toward an a more radical Islamic perspective. However, her purpose is not to respond to American neo-Orientalist discourse but to address thoroughly internal and external concerns of her culture of origin. Faqir goes a step further beyond the binary division between the West and East as she rejects the monochrome pattern of overgeneralizing the East.

Faqir very intentionally sets the temporal boundaries of her novel. The Arab world in the late 1970s experienced an Islamic trend which became known as the "Islamic Awakening." However, the Islamic Awakening has its seeds back to the second half of the 19th century in which reformist thinkers such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) among others attempted to conceptualize an alternative project to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and provide a

counter force to European colonialism. Their notion was to use Islam as a unifying element to re-establish an Islamic nation. About this reformist thinking, Ramadan argues:

Muslims had to rediscover the living force of their religious teachings, to develop a critical outlook, and to free themselves from the alienation produced by colonialism. In this sense, Islam as a religion was called upon to play a key role in the liberation and the political, cultural, and economic future of the Muslim majority countries. It would also act as a unifying factor against the divisions imposed by the colonial powers. (70)

Reformist scholars of that period inspired the Egyptian activist Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) to establish the Muslim Brotherhood Party in 1928. The main objectives of this political party are to return societies to Islam through educating the general population according to Islamic teaching, to reform social and economic conditions, to implement Islamic legislation, and in the long run to establish an Islamic state (Ramadan 70).

Situating her narrative around these events, Faqir traces the roots of the Islamic movements and the cumulative radicalization process.

Within the framework of Faqir's narrative, Islam is presented in discourse and action and has the trait of mobility in time and space as an ideology not confined to a nation with limited and specific geographical boundaries, rather it is represented as a spiritual and abstract perception that could unite individuals of different races and origins. Although employed, used, and misused to serve various political elites, Islam for some of its extremist adherents remains in an ontological and essential conflict with the creation of modern civil societies. The timeframe and dislocation of characters in Faqir's novel underscores that religious identity is not to be found in one particular environment

or time. The Islamic scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi states, “We claim we follow Islam but fail to put Islam into practice We write in our constitution that the state’s religion is Islam, but fail to give it the place it merits in government, legislation and orientation”(qtd. In Al Musawi. 71). With this, al-Qaradawi accentuates that no modern civil society succeeded in creating an Islamic nation. The notion of global Jihad and the 7/7 attack in London, for example, exemplify this particular phenomenon. The 7/7 attack in the U.K. was committed supposedly by British citizens who sabotaged their own country for what they were claimed religious reasons. Modern civil societies marginalize religious identity and create laws and regulations which are incompatible with Islamic teachings. In Faqir’s text, Najwa’s father left civil society to seek the long lost glory of Islam. The political atmosphere and religious practices in Afghanistan contrast sharply with modern civil societies. Paul Rogers describes the political environment in Afghanistan: “During the 1980s, an element of the mujahidian insurgency was motivated more by religious fervor than by nationalism or ethnic identity and this was strengthened by an influx of highly motivated young jihadis from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Libya, and many other countries” (26). Thus, the so called Mujahidian do not belong to one particular nation; instead they come from different geographical roots and they are united under the name of religion. And more importantly they oppose civil societies and reject unities under the limited nature of race and nation.

Faqir, in her portrayal of Islam in the novel, plays around in the mine field of antithetical notions including Islamism, secularism, nations, international relations, terrorism, and gender relations, all reduced into a fictional treatment of a young woman’s struggle for survival through subverting social conventions that have been circumscribed

first by loyalty to and affiliation with Islamic heritage, and secondly through depicting Omar's transformational voyage. Nonetheless, the Islamic discourse recedes into the background despite its centrality to the narrative of ideological changes. For instance, Raneen tells her daughter Najwa, "I lost my husband to religion" (24). Here and elsewhere in the text, Faqir commingles clergymen (sheik in the case of Islam) with religion as though the former have the power to provide meaning and the standard norm of social practices to the latter, neglecting the very notion of the multiple-interpretations of Islamic discourse. Faqir does not provide a distinction between the condemnation of the abuses perpetrated in the name of Islam and condemnation of the faith itself. This stance is overtly expressed in her contribution to *In the House of Silence*⁵; in her autobiographical essay, Faqir states, "A true Islamic Bahdadi house was a house where men provided for women, protected women and policed them" (51). But at the same time, Faqir points out the contradictory role of Islam in the Arab World. First, men because of their Islamic teaching, protect women and are responsible for their daily needs. Secondly, Islam gives men the power to police women. As such, the utopian version of Islam is manipulated to fit the larger views of society in the Arab world. Unfair cultural practices toward women in the Arab world are justified through the implantation and manipulation of Islamic discourses. The hegemony of religious leaders in the social realm created what Marxist thinkers call a false consciousness. Within the Islamic world, subjects of society act not according to the ideal of Islam—if there is one—but rather according to social interpretations and cultural constructions of Islam provided

⁵ In the *House of Silence* is a collection of autobiographical essays by Arab women writers edited and introduced by Fadia Faqir.

by religious leaders. And this case creates the false consciousness whereby individuals do not seek the source of their social behavior; rather they take it for granted as having an Islamic base. The ideological transformation of Omar in Faqir's text, for instance, falls into the category of false consciousness. The manipulation of Islamic discourse along with the cultural construction of Islam contribute to this radicalization process.

In the novel, Faqir's attitude toward Islam is hostile; it is harshly described and represented as the main cause of the family's instability and Najwa's suffering. The text opens when Najwa remembers her mother's last words, "No Islamic funeral"(1), implying a total denial of the religious faith. Her husband's emigration for religious purposes has led to her ideological changes as Najwa recalls, "When he left, twenty-four years ago, my mother changed. She took off her veil, cut her hair, packed my father's clothes, Qur'an, books, prayer beads, aftershave, comb and tweezers in a suitcase, hurled it in the loft and forbade me from mentioning him" (7). As a symbol of Islam and as a mark for oppressed Muslim women –as presented in Orientalist discourses- the veil is used in the text to enhance the Orientalist discourse and to reject the patriarchal system since the absence of the male guardian led to the shedding of the veil. Faqir's narrative with respect to the veil confirms Orientalist discourses. However, although the veil derives legitimacy from Islam, the social practice of wearing it has been promoted by patriarchal culture. In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed argues that the social practice of veiling existed before the emergence of Islam, yet it was used for cultural purposes; Ahmed states, "the veil served not merely to mark the upper classes but, more fundamentally, to differentiate between 'respectable' women and those who were publicly available" (15). Women veil for a variety of reasons. Henceforth, Islamic

discourse is not only used to serve political elites; it also acts vividly to empower the patriarchal system. The patriarchal system uses a selective approach toward religious values. They select facets of religion that comply with their social ideology and maintain their superior status. In religious communities, interpretations of the religious teachings are in the hands of tiny groups who dominate the religious scene in which the masses are supposed to take the interpretations for granted.

Though briefly represented, vaguely mentioned, and lacking a major role in the course of events, Raneen launches a condemnation of Islamic discourse; she asks Najwa to help her “destroy this filth” (8), and burns all her husband’s religious books: “*The Islamic Calophate, The Glorious Ottoman Empire, Overcoming the Fear of Death, Islamic Jihad, A for Allah, The Ideal Muslim Father and Soldier of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan*” (9). What deserves notice though is that the Qur’an is not included in Raneen’s destroyed pile of books. Faqir excludes the holy book to suggest the discrepancies between the Qur’an and its interpretations. However, here and elsewhere, Raneen’s attitude toward Islam remains antagonistic. She adheres to the notion that the mainstream Islamic trends were behind the disappearance of her husband. Once Najwa asked her, “Why did he abandon us, leave us like this, fending for ourselves?” she replies, “It is this ugly thing called religion. Allah is more important to him than us” (11). On a different occasion, she tells her daughter, “I have no intention of offering my daughter on a plate to the nasty Sheikhs” (24). Through the radicalization process of her husband, Raneen has become aware of the manipulation and authority of Islamic discourse. The authority of Islamic discourse is stricken by determinacy that constructs unquestionable social perceptions. Although Najwa’s mother plays a marginal

role in the narrative, her vocal criticisms of Islam are strong and clear and have a direct impact on her daughter's social perceptions and behavior. This is evident when Najwa says to her grandmother, "How do veiled women function under those? Honestly! And the heat is unbearable" (27). Henceforth, Raneen's marginal role in the text is to deconstruct the determinacy of Islamic discourse, yet Faqir gives Raneen a subaltern role to indicate the domination of Islam in the Arab world and to affirm the limited sphere of her authority as a woman whose religious views are different from the mainstream.

The ambivalent function of Islamic discourse in the text is seen in the opposite directions taken by Raneen and her husband. In the wake of the disappearance of her husband and as a way of expressing her fury about Islam, Raneen not only takes a path diametrically opposite to that take by her husband, but also imposes secular values upon her daughter:

I knew I was different." Najwa recalls, "I was not allowed to cover my head, wear a long school uniform or trousers, recite the Qur'an, participate in the Ramadan procession or wear prayer clothes....The house was secular...My mother wanted me to study French at college, because it's the most secular country on earth. (9)

Najwa is the product of social forces; she adopts secularist values because her small community imposes them on her. Raneen aims at achieving full emancipation for her daughter from religious restrictions and opposes any discourse which might establish a false consciousness. Implicitly, Faqir demonstrates how social perceptions are constructed over time and enhanced through a number of strategies. Najwa and her father are two cases in which social perceptions are established over a period of time. However,

social standards vary in accordance with individuals' experiences and human desires. Omar seeks to follow what he thinks is an ideal version of Islam; for Raneen, Omar's action is simply a misguided behavior.

Throughout the narrative, Faqir establishes and maintains a dichotomy between two categories, Islam and secularism, a binary in which Najwa and her mother represent secularism and Najwa's father signifies the product of religious teaching. Yet, consistent with neo-orientalist discourse, Faqir sees the Western type of secularism as the highest standard: "What happened to him between 1981 and 1986? What changed him from a secular student of nursing to someone else, perhaps heartless? In four years, he turned from a normal father and a husband into a vagabond" (36). Faqir favors not a religious state but a secular one where Islamic principles are not to be taken for granted, but rather to think about. She connects the normality of life with the notion of secularism as though religion (Islam) has no role to play in a healthy society. In her autobiographical essay, Faqir describes her country of origin, "What you have left behind in your country of origin becomes clear – dictatorship, fundamentalism, and the mutilation of the mind" (54). With this statement, Faqir recapitulates critical issues of the Arab world. In her novel, she uses the ideological conflict within the small family as an image to represent the larger picture of society. The tussle between religious identity and secular identity, in the text, is manifested via the opposite paths taken by Najwa's parents. However, depicting the two opposite paths of the protagonist's parents shows that Faqir gives only two options for a society, either secular or Islamist. And this is, in my view, an unfeasible conclusion as Faqir fails to consider 'Moderate Islam'. Returning to the family issue, Faqir uses the essential pillars of the family to highlight the wider image of the struggle

between secularists and religious extremists in the Arab world. This struggle is inevitable as modern civil societies allow but an amorphous place for Islam within the formation of modern nations.

Since Islam is unable to protect Raneen's marriage life, it becomes inconsequential for her. Metaphorically, the marriage life in the text suggests a coupling between nation and religion in which Islamic discourse performs an ambivalent function: first, Islamic discourse contributes significantly to the establishment of the nation via the use/misuse of religious discourse to serve political purposes and to impose legislation that benefits the government; on the other hand, it sabotages the nation whereby extremists use particular versions of Islamic interpretations to take revenge against illegal marriage. The illegitimate child of this coupling is an abnormal, confused, and hesitant individual who is unable to reconcile the brokenness of the marriage. Najwa's hesitant personality metaphorically is the product of this iniquitous marriage. Najwa says, "The world was a maze and I didn't know where to enter it, how to navigate it and whether I would find a way out" (23). Najwa's hesitant personality can further be understood as an elegy to the dilemmas of a common individual in the Arab world who becomes caught amidst the socio-political, religious, and economic crises that the nation is going through.

Furthermore, Raneen, as a wife and a mother, metaphorically represents the land. The use of the female to represent land is a strategy analyzed by postcolonial theory. As Loomba states, "From the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond) female bodies symbolize the conquered land" (129). The use of the terms "motherland" and "homeland" are usually interchangeable terms in postcolonial texts. Kim Stone argues that in a narrow sense women are usually cast as mothers and wives, but in a

broader view they signify the nation. Nonetheless, “a woman’s political relation to the nation” according to Anne McClintock, “is submerged in, and subordinated to, her social relation to a man through marriage” (298). Faqir draws upon this concept in her text but for different reasons with different implications. She adjusts this aspect of postcolonial theory to fit Arab contexts. Her unique usage shows a shift from traditional postcolonial theory to a consideration of internal concerns of her country of origin. Najwa’s mother, also, metaphorically signifies the immaculate nation that falls outside the bonds of religious and political authority. The interferences of outside factors sully the purity of the nation. The intensive description of Raneen’s disease, the use of medical terminology, and the chemical treatment show the transformation of the body/nation as a result of the negative influences of fundamentalist religious interpretations and political authority in which the former serves the latter to reach its political purposes. Najwa recalls what happened to her mother:

The cancer began as a tummy ache and the sound of my mother getting up at night several times, swearing in the toilet and pacing around the house. She complained of acidity, kept burping as she chewed the fresh mint my grandmother had prescribed. I could tell that she was having a cramp by the paleness of her skin and tightness of her lips....The doctor arranges something called a “barium meal” and an X-ray immediately. It showed a tumor in the stomach. That would explain the dark stool and the anaemia. And the regular trips to the hospital for chemotherapy began....My mother had changed; you wouldn’t recognize her if you bumped into her in the street. Most of her hair had fallen out and she had cracks by the corners of her mouth, ulcers spreading out of the arrow of her upper

lips all the way to her nose and bruises on her biceps. She sat in bed, a skeleton with ashen skin and vacuous eyes, drifting off then floating back. (12-16)

Faqir uses the stomach cancer in particular to suggest first the growth and development of Islamic movements and the prevailing trend toward radical Islam, and secondly the deep rooted constructed ideology which is hard if not impossible to defeat. The physical pain manipulating Raneen's body parallels the loss of her husband and reveals the role that Islam formerly occupied in her life.

Najwa and her parents are all victims of the nebulous rules of society which fail to create a united national identity where all subjects are treated equally and justly in accordance with clear rules and regulations as civil citizens. Faqir reveals the complexity of society as Najwa tells herself:

I had no option but to find my father. If my grandmother died, I would live alone in that house, something this city would not tolerate. Only women of ill repute live on their own without a male guardian. I would be pursued by predators, ostracized, and my door would be marked. If I'd had any choice, I would have let him [her father] go, for he was nothing to me, not even a memory. (23)

With the primary concentration on the mass culture narrative, Faqir affirms the hegemony of Islamic discourse and Islamic masculinity in the Arab world in which the multilayered operations of religious discourse result in defining the social order. Certain aspects of Islamic practices gain more power as they couple with the cultural paradigm. The status of women in society, for example, is legitimized via Islamic rules to serve cultural perceptions. American neo-Orientalist discourse, I argue, is not aware of the deep

integrations between religious and cultural values; failure to see the differences between the two leads to inaccurate understanding of Islam, Muslims and the Arab world at large.

From Secularism to Islamism

Faqir depicts the ideological transformational journey of Omar Rahman, Najwa's father, from secularism to Islamism in which political struggles, the social environment, and religious discourse combine to change Omar's religious and social perceptions.

Within the realm of a historicized reality, he represents the public trend towards Islamism during the 1980s and 1990s, something that cannot be wholly understood through the body of western media or academic theory per se since both take religion (Islam) as the sole cause for fundamentalism. Faqir is keenly aware of Western perceptions toward the issue of Muslim extremists, and hence she, through Omar's journey, restores temporal depth via a narrative that starts prior to his ideological transformation, affirming that antecedent motives for Omar's actions, social circumstances, and political environment need to be taken into account since he shifts to an identity extremely different from that of his earlier life. Faqir writes, "he studies nursing at college and went on to destroy lives rather than heal them" (36). To furnish a better interpretation of Omar's ideological transformation, Faqir goes back to a specific historical moment in the history of the Arab/Muslim world. As Najwa traces her father's steps, she visits the local mosque to meet with the Imam to ask him about her father's whereabouts. The Imam tells her:

He was a disciple of Sheikh Muhammed, a protégé of Sheikh Azzam. They all left the country....When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Sheikh Azzam...issued a fatwa declaring that both the Afghan and Palestinian struggles

were jihads, holy wars... Your father spent hours debating Azzam's fatwa with Sheikh Muhammad. Many young men decided to join. (39)

Situating the narrative in relation to a particular historical event not only uncovers the hidden story, but also adds a contemplative perspective to the whole Oriental discourse which neglects internal social forces that contribute to the final product of society. In addition to situating the story within a historical context, Faqir uses the names of well-known religious men including Sheikh Azzam and Sheikh Osama to give credibility and reliability to the narrative line and to keep readers active as she narrates recent historical events.

Najwa sees her father primarily as the product of religious discourse. This point of view, consistent with American neo-Orientalist discourse, shows only one dimension of the story and ignores other social factors. The rise of fundamentalism is not solely a matter of religion, but rather the result of an array of social, cultural, and religious forces which contribute to the formation of perceptions which then result in behavior that undermines social unity. In his diary, which works as an internal monologue, Omar singles out the reasons that led him and Hani, his friend, to join the war in Afghanistan;

Our lives had changed that night in Amman, when he knocked on the door, a shadow of his former self. He told me that the study circle in the city center had been raided by the secret police and that they were all handcuffed and driven away. He was taken to the intelligence headquarters, nicknamed 'the Oh! Hotel' because people were able, sometimes, to hear the cries of prisoners late at night. He said that they had taken him for no reason, because he had never broken the law. He did not realize that the study group was run by a banned Islamic party.

The interrogation began in the presence of a foreign officer. So are you going to overthrow the government? Hands and legs tied up to the ceiling, I shook my head. ‘That is a yes, then.’ I shook my head.... At night, two men came in, broke a bottle and stuck it up my anus, tearing the blastopore and intestines. “He was crying like a woman.’ Weeks later, he was released by one of the many amnesties doled out. We decided to leave- fight the injustice in our countries, starting here. How misguided we were! (157)

Omar’s internal monologue provides insight to the real motives which push him and his friend to join the Jihad. Initially, Omar was not inspired by religious teachings, saying, “I panicked because I could not remember the rituals and I realized that I hadn’t prayed since my father took me to the mosque during the Eid celebrations” (95). The absence of freedom, torture, the banning of political parties, and the lack of real democratic participation in the Arab world create a chaotic environment in which citizens feel insecure and unable to make any positive changes, especially with respect to social justice and political participation. “Since that night,” says Omar referring to Hani’s torture story, “he has not been himself. He rarely laughs and he gets tired easily. The carefree young man who sang Olivia Newton-John’s songs has disappeared and now he walks hunch-backed, as if all the worries of the world are upon his shoulders” (97). Faqir not only states the reasons for the process of radicalization but also implicitly assigns blame to oppressive political governments in the Arab world. This notion could be better understood through an allegorical reading of Omar’s wife, who in part seems to represent the oppressive political system in the Arab World. In his diary, Omar calls her “the interior minister” (32) implying her likeness to a secret police. On a different occasion, he

says, “What am I running away from? A controlling wife?” (116). Furthermore, Najwa states plainly that “It was she [her mother] who drove my father away, not religion” (64), hinting at the oppressive role of the government.

Yet, American neo-orientalist discourse demonizes Islam as a driving force in the process of radicalization and pays no attention to the role played by strong political allies of the U.S. in the region. Given the historical context, Faqir not only provides a counter narrative to this discourse, but also implies that the American government has participated in a political conspiracy responsible for the rise of global jihad and fundamentalism. Omar narrates, “The mujahideen forces were united against the Soviets. When the Americans gave them stinger missiles to shoot down helicopter gunships, they overpowered their opponents and triumphed. The Soviets were driven out in 1988” (114). Faqir attempts to deconstruct anti-Arab Western discourse by highlighting the contribution of the American government to the war in Afghanistan and later the establishment of Al-Qaeda. Although resisting the Soviet invasion was morally justified, the international participants involved demoralized the resistance. And as a result of the war, Afghanistan becomes a crumbling country.

However, the contradiction lies in the fact that the most physically unsafe place provides spiritual haven. The global Jihad gives Omar and Hani the sense of unity, justice, and equality which they craved in their country of origin. “There is something special,” Omar muses, “about carrying out the same rituals together with a large number of men. Under the influence of proximity, you think that you are related and you begin to prematurely trust them” (96). Omar’s narrative is complicit with the traditional way of idealizing the war environment whereby soldiers are united regardless of their race,

country of origin, and social class. However, what is dangerous are the stark religious and national divisions in the post 9/11 world where certain individuals prioritize their religious faith over their nations. Omar's quest is the epitome of a citizen who puts his version of Islamic faith at the top of his priorities.

Omar's spiritual and physical journey takes him down a number of paths as he struggles with questions of belief and choices that affect his decision to join the global Jihad. Upon his arrival at the war field, Omar's quest takes a different turn as he starts to question his decision to leave his wife, daughter, and his home country. "And, as I had done almost every day since I arrived here," he states, "I wondered what the hell I was doing in this country. Why did I follow my heart and travel with Hani? What am I fighting for?" (116). Joining the war is figured to be a loss and a shattering of self rather than a glorious victory: "There is a schism between the man I hoped I would become and the man I finally become" (245). When Omar is incarcerated in the U.K., he reflects on his past life in Jordan and Afghanistan, and realizes how he, along with many others, was exploited and used:

I should have stayed and fought against that machinery that crushed everyone in its way. You don't liberate a country standing on the soil of another. How foolish of me. Young and trusting, we were duped, brainwashed and even exploited by the imams. The scheme was larger than us and we, without the eyesight and perspective of an eagle, fitted right into it. (247)

Faqir's narrative in the above passage matches well with American neo-Orientalist discourse which sees Islamic discourse, mediated by the figures of imams, as the main reason for the radicalization process. Unlike the American neo-Orientalist discourse,

however, she interprets Islamic fundamentalism as a backlash against oppressive governments in the Arab world. Her critique of governments in the Arab World constructs a cause and effect relationship in which the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a phenomenon is the repercussion of ineffectual governments. Islamic discourse, therefore, can not effectively function unless imbricated with political, social, and economic circumstances.

The Moment of Realization

After the 9/11 attack and as a result of it, Islam in Western discourse becomes associated with terrorism, “legitimizing” extremists’ killings of non-Muslims and inflicting terror upon the supposedly peaceful world. In many media accounts, Islam is/was represented as a religion of terror and Muslims as terrorists. *Willow Trees Don’t Weep*, in parts, offers an alternative rhetoric to this popular discourse of the post-9/11 era by highlighting the actions of certain individuals rather than Islamic nations. Faqir challenges the process of generalization in Western discourse especially with respect to Islam and Muslims. As an Anglophone Arab writer, she represents the double function of Arab Anglophone literature. Her text not only provides a contemplative and explorative account of the incident and the times after, but it also goes back in time to the roots of the radicalization process. Omar’s narrative deconstructs the stereotypical portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western electronic and print media. The narration shows Omar’s moments of misunderstanding, regret, and realization of his mistakes, as Omar says:

Watching myself from a height, I can see that I was like an earthworm crawling from one dark ditch into another. I lived in the soil and dug myself in and out of trenches, from one reactive move to another, without much consideration or

critical thinking. Earthworms have no eyes. And if you don't refrain, you shall not see. (247)

The moment of realization, for Omar, merges the personal with the political and provides more than one perspective to the text. It re-establishes alternative routes for the East and the West relationship based on direct communication and mutual understanding rather than an abstract binary division 'us' and 'them'. As Omar serves prison sentence in the U.K., he becomes a friend with a young British prisoner, Ed. "I came to this country," narrates Omar, "to punish the English for the death and destruction their army had visited on Afghanistan. A taste of their own bitter medicine. Yet...yet...Ed—white, ex-criminal—was like a son to me. I am fed, clothed, nursed by the English. Some are even kind to me, despite my dark deeds" (248).

By questioning the authenticity of his violent deeds, Omar challenges Islamic discourse as constructed and its various aspects which are politically motivated. Before being radicalized, Omar was an angel of mercy. "How did I turn from an angel to one of wrath?" he asks. "And is there an act big and meaningful enough to make up for what I have done? Is there atonement for a murderer like me?" (248). The realization of his dark deeds leads Omar to change the characterization of the global Jihad to criminal, stating, "My punishment is as big as my crimes" (248). The change of terminology is a symbol of Omar's new identity. The false consciousness—established through the manipulation of religious discourse along with the social forces—comes to an end as a result of direct communication.

The Journey from Uncertainty to Uncertainty

Social circumstances, cultural restrictions, and religious misunderstanding have forced Najwa to pursue a physical and spiritual quest to erase self-doubt and find a shelter for her chameleon personality. Because of the opposite paths her parents took, Najwa finds herself oscillating between the two opposing directions. Najwa, in this situation, represents what Therese de Lauretis calls “speaking from elsewhere.” The stated objective of Najwa’s journey is to find the essential missing pillar (the male guardian) to meet the social requirements of her country of origin. “I’ll not last long,” Najwa’s grandmother tells her, “You can not live in this house on your own after I am gone. What would people say...if you end up on your own in this house, it will be so shameful. Only loose women, ahirat, live alone. You belong with your father” (28). The implied purpose of the journey, however, is to seek the truth about religion, gender relations, East and West relations, and social justice, but neither the stated goal nor the implied one is achieved. The physical quest starts with a fake claim when Najwa applies for visa entry to Pakistan, and she keeps using false claims as she visits other places. The misinformation Najwa uses challenges the notion of truth. Where does truth lie? In what we pretend or hide. The journey creates unsettling gaps and fissures in Najwa’s mental and physical stability. In her youth, she was liberated from a one-dimensional view of the world and no longer has to live in accordance with Islamic principles. “Was I a Muslim?” she asks. “Why did I find bowing to Allah so difficult, even humiliating? Watching believers worship their god was so embarrassing I broke out into a sweat” (111). Najwa continues to struggle with affiliations and identity. The quest which was supposed to be a voyage for truth turns out to be less than successful. No matter how confused the

protagonist Najwa may be, the mere search for mental comfort speaks to the author's social perceptions of her culture of origin, implying a culture of uncertainty and a state of instability. Najwa's dilemma is the outcome of socio-cultural restrictions and religious teachings.

Faqir successfully creates an image of an Arab female character who is beleaguered in every physical or spiritual space she encounters; Najwa fails to have social affiliations in the different environments she visits. Najwa says, "Unlike me, my grandmother knew who she was, where she came from and what she believed in" (138). Many of Najwa's personal dilemmas play out through her inability to establish a solid perception: "I wavered between love and hate" (269). However, this does not mean that Najwa does not challenge the authority of the absolute. To challenge to the Islamic hegemony that her father advocates, Najwa adopts a secularist identity, yet this is just one aspect of her social identity and her social behavior is not a result of an in-depth belief in secularist principles but rather is a way to take revenge on her father. After a quest for truth that spans the novel, Najwa remains equivocal:

When the day I had waited for since I was three arrived, I did not know what to do with myself. My father must be a strict Muslim and would not approve of uncovered hair, make-up, a low-cut top or tight jeans. But my mother's ghost skulking in the room would be offended if I changed my secular appearance and hid my arms. My reflection in the mirror—gaunt, pale, with dry lips—stood between my parents' apparitions. I resented them both. (240)

This passage affirms her hybrid and impermanent sense of self which seeks a feeling of cultural belonging; Najwa finds, though, that she belongs to a culture in which fragmentation, change, and undecidability are the norm.

While the ending of the novel shows a reconciliation between Najwa and her father, physically and emotionally, it is incomplete as the father remains physically behind prison bars. And emotionally, Najwa cannot reconcile with her father completely because of the long-time separation which has led to ideological differences between the two. Faqir reverses the actual political hierarchy within the text where Najwa, the female protagonist, has the ability to move freely and her father is incarcerated. With this depiction, Faqir deconstructs the social order and women's assigned space.

Indeed, the reconciliation does not provide satisfactory answers to Najwa's quest in terms of religion, gender relations, and truth. Her father could not find an answer when Najwa asked him, "What changed you?...What changed you from a Westernized man who loved Jazz, to a...?"(273). Furthermore, the ending does not instill a feeling of hope as Najwa narrates at the end of the novel:

I fingered my face: wet. My tears, bitter and salty, dropped down to my lips. I wept over the father who stood before me, a convicted criminal; my mother, who spent most of her life drugged and then died prematurely: our neighbor's son, who wouldn't get married to a girl brought up in a house without men; Andy's rejection; over my half-sister, who was desperate for my love and never received it, and over my stepmother, whose daughter's death unhinged her. I cried over my grandmother, who had lost her husband in the war, then her homeland, and who

had to wait most of her life to do the haj. Cancer, death, suicide bombs, drones and blown-up buses. I howled. (266)

The passage represents the negative outcomes of socio-political and religious circumstances in the Arab/Muslim world where members increasingly find themselves isolated and uncertain of their status in society. By using such a description, Faqir successfully maintains a continuous atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty which does not allow any of the characters to pursue a peaceful life.

Final Words

This chapter has aimed to address the issues of Islam, postcolonial theory/discourse and the role of Anglophone Arab writers in highlighting internal concerns in the Arab world. Although Islam and postcolonial theory emerge from different starting points and have different core premises, the two make use of similar strategies for resisting hegemony and supremacy of the West. The relationship between the two, though, is not straightforward. Neither of the two can be subsumed by the other because of the solid principles of Islam and the secular, still evolving nature of postcolonial theory which is limited, especially with respect to Islam. The absence of a structuring system leads to ambiguity. Postcolonial theory incorporates multiple issues and uses them for developing a better understanding of postcolonial nations and cultures, and at the same time deconstructs colonial assumptions of postcolonial countries. Therefore, postcolonial theory/discourse engages in a direct dialogue with Western institutions to revise perceptions and provides an alternative route toward the other part of the world. Islam, as understood by its disciples, establishes a system of life given to

people as an avenue for survival in the afterlife. This incompatibility between the two leads to an unfinished and unresolved ending.

As I stated in my introductory chapter, the 9/11 attacks created a new wave of themes and topics of great interest to readers. A number of authors depict the complex issues with which twenty-first century nations are grappling. In the aftermath of 9/11, Islam has been a dominant theme in the works of almost all Anglophone Arab writers and also a major theme in neo-American Orientalist discourse. Anglophone Arab authors' interest in Islam has contributed to their popularity and commercial success yet the space they create still operates within the orbit of a dominant discourse.

Faqir, like many Anglophone Arab writers, addresses Islam, culture, nation, and gender. Her writing clearly approaches these concepts from a sociological perspective highlighting their functions in the formation of social perceptions. *Willow Trees Don't Weep* presents the transformational voyage of a radicalized Muslim. Faqir goes deep into the social and economic circumstances that contribute to ideological changes. Islamic discourse by itself is not the main cause of the radicalization process.

In the world of Fariq's novel, the ideal version of Islam is detached from its interpretations. The ideal of Islam goes through what I call "a justification process" to serve the cultural principles of the Arab world and political agendas. Faqir, through the text, makes a concerted effort to educate her readers about the blurry line between the high moral values of Islam and socially practiced ones. The conflation between the two creates a false consciousness through forming misconceptions about the unyielding principles of Islam and neglecting the fact that humans are the ones who provide interpretations and social meaning to religion. Faqir adds a deep dimension to the

postcolonial discourse as she considers intensively local concerns of the Arab nations from a different angle. And at the same time, Faqir constructs her novel in a way that it requires an active participation on the part of the readers. In this way, Faqir takes the postcolonial discourse a step beyond its traditional function. The discourse Faqir celebrates in this text is not meant to address western readers nor to concentrate mainly on internal concerns within the Arab world, but intermixes the two to shape a better understanding of Islam in the post 9/11 period.

Chapter III: The Representation of Arab Women: Woman and Patriarchy in Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman*

History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchate they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the Other. (300)

De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

All our dreams of glory are but manure in the end. (160)

Alameddine, *An Unnecessary Woman*.

I face a battle that has been over for a long time. I accept defeat with no white flag to wave, with no strength even to unsheathe my sword. (265)

Alameddine, *An Unnecessary Woman*.

Introduction

While the previous chapter examines Islam and its role in the process of radicalization as it appears in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Tree Don't Weep*, this chapter considers the subject of women, specifically Arab women's challenges and representation, in the early decades of the twenty-first century. The representation of Arab women has been mediated by both highly uneven colonial discourse and patriarchal

ideology. In colonialist writings, Arab women have been depicted as victims of both Islamic teaching and cultural traditions, whereas in postcolonial discourse, indigenous women are employed metaphorically to represent the invaded lands. Yet, at their best, colonial and postcolonial discourses on Arab women as independent subjects demonstrate prejudice, misunderstanding, and confusion. The primary purpose of this chapter is to fill a gap in the literature regarding Arab women and to challenge persistent constructed misunderstandings and stereotypes. The basic argument that this chapter tries to substantiate evolves out of the assumption that postcolonial discourse after 9/11 shifted to consider internal concerns of Arab nations and their relation to global politics. By considering the representation of Arab women, this chapter attempts to uncover how women are oppressed in relation to religious discourse, patriarchal systems, and cultural constructions of women, and at the same time, it affirms the shift of Arab postcolonial discourse from the 'writing back' stance to a highlighting of local issues throughout the Arab world. It is the marginalization and exclusion of Arab women and their concerns that this chapter seeks to address.

This chapter, hence, has a particular significance for the Arab world where women's role and responsibilities remain restricted. This particular point highlights the importance of taking representation of women as a focus of investigation. In this chapter, I trace and explore the portrayal of Arab women within the Arab world. The ongoing process of postcolonial studies provides an avenue for retelling a story from a different point of view, highlighting certain themes such as gender inequalities and their relation to religious understanding and cultural perceptions. Through the reading of Rabih Alameddine's *An Unnecessary Woman* (2013), I concentrate on the representation of

Arab women in the 21st century. Alameddine triangulates the issues of gender, religion, and culture in his text and deals with these issues as lived realities through ample examples from the political history of Lebanon, the lives of the masses, and the place of women in society. Promoting the importance of these issues, *An Unnecessary Woman* presents the possibility of reinterpretation and deconstruction of social perceptions and the way they were/are constructed.

Examining the representation and status of Arab women in society demands an in-depth analysis of seemingly dis/connected elements: colonial legacy and orientalist discourse, indigenous resistance and postcolonial discourse, the rise of feminist discourse and feminist scholars, religious values and cultural facets, power dynamics and patriarchal ideology, and nation and national identity. To come to an ultimate and accurate conclusion about the representation of Arab women, these series of elements need to be considered as a group within the context of the historical framework and their impact on the formation of social perceptions and values.

The dominant images of Arab women are surrounded with prejudice, misunderstanding, and confusion. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Saliba, Allen and Howard in *Gender, Politics and Islam* argue that a connection was made between Islamic terrorism and the oppression of Arab/Muslim women. The correlation is not an innovation of neo-American orientalist discourse, but an extension of traditional colonial discourse. This connection is highly significant as it underscores the role of gender politics in the binary division between the West and the East in which the former situates itself as 'culturally superior' to the latter. However, this chapter is not concerned with establishing a counter narrative to the colonial or neo-American orientalist

discourses but concentrates on the complex network of practices through which ‘interior colonization of women’ has been achieved. Too often, the arguments related to the representation of Arab women are overly simplified. Religious discourses and cultural principles along with the hegemony of patriarchal ideology are seen through a limited prism as being the only causes for women’s inferior place in society. To some extent, the above characterizations are genuine, yet the reality is far more complicated. While individuals may come from similar cultural backgrounds and may be exposed to similar educational systems and religious teachings, their perceptions of gender-related matters vary. Cultural principles and religious values are neither a set of facts to be memorized nor monolithic units creating homogenous communities, rather they are changeable in accordance with socio-political and economic circumstances. During World War II, for example, women in Europe because of the lack of manpower started to participate in the public domain. The time of war opens up the possibility for changing expectations connected with women’s status in society. This is also true during anti-colonial struggle as Ania Loomba asserts: “anti-colonial nationalism did open spaces for women, largely by legitimizing their public activity” (188). This reveals that women’s assigned roles are not wholly the result of religious teaching – if it was out of religious belief, then it is supposed to be holy and unchangeable– but they are the result of a male-dominated culture that adjusts and uses religion whenever needed to achieve its agenda. Patriarchal ideology uses the concept of ‘eclecticism’ from religion, culture, language, political events, and history to empower patriarchal ideology.

Hence, in the current interrogation of women’s role in society, privileged cultural/social perceptions are critically interrogated and demystified. Feminist scholars,

in particular, have paid meticulous attention to gender inequality and its social 'constructedness' and have pointed out its relations to language, to power, to economics, to psychology, to religion, and to literature and literary theory; all are reduced to a cultural/social practice whose fundamental definition of society is overtly and covertly patriarchal. The goal for feminists, then, is to establish a single standard of gender equality, one uncorrupted by the multiple interpretations of religious discourse based on traditional alliances between masculine culture and religion. This alliance historically gives birthright priority for men to rule women. The negative overtones of this alliance make any attempt to resist patriarchal culture tantamount to violating religious teachings, internalized by women as a great sin that brings shame in this world and severe torture in the hereafter. "Sexual politics," writes Kate Millett, "obtains consent through the socialization of both sexes to basic patriarchal polities" (26), which in a general sense underscores the superiority of the male gender and assigns domestic roles to women.

The infliction of patriarchal perceptions through religion and culture has resulted in a pervasive assent of the inferiority of women, yet the degree of oppression varies in accordance with the historical moments, the place of religion in society, socio-political and economic circumstances, and educational access. Because of the strong correlation between Islam and culture, Arab women suffer a multi-layer of oppressions: male oppression, Islamic oppression – based on male interpretation of Islamic discourse that put power in the hands of men–, and socio-cultural oppression which exhibits itself through the social system that places constraints upon women and also acknowledges and celebrates masculine values. All these issues are relevant to the topic of this chapter, the representation of Arab women. Alameddine, as we will see in his text, incorporates all

these notions to demonstrate the challenges Arab women face. Yet, before we move any further it is crucial to foreground Arab women within the context of feminist and postcolonial theories as they contribute not only to the status and representation of Arab women, but also the major roles they play in effecting social change with regard to women. And this is the subject of the next section.

Feminist/Postcolonial Theories: Affiliation and Disaffiliation

Many critics draw connections between postcolonial theory/discourse and feminist movements. Both exhibit strong feelings toward the marginalized and both concentrate on the notion of representation and resistance. Most importantly, the two theories create a discursive space that resists domination by shifting marginalized voices from the periphery to the center. However, the two differ at an essential level. Feminists, as the theory shows, demonstrate that adherence to traditional community rules was unnecessary. In fact, feminism's primary goal is to reconstruct socially accepted perceptions with regard to woman. By contrast, one of the strains of postcolonial discourse demonstrates a yearning for the traditions and rules of community prior to the arrival of British and French colonizers. Nostalgia, then, is one of the characteristics of postcolonial discourse, but not for feminist discourse. As Loomba asserts, "Anti-colonial nationalism is a struggle to represent, create or recover a culture and a selfhood that has been systematically repressed and eroded during colonial rule" (182). Lata Mani, in her paper entitled "Contentious Traditions," analyzes the colonial debate on sati. She argues that the history of colonial India demonstrates the importance of traditions and at the same time shows that women's concerns did not carry the same weight. She writes:

Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of woman was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated. What was at stake was not women but tradition. Thus it is no wonder that even reading against the grain of a discourse ostensibly about women, one learns so little about them. (153)

Endorsing Mani's study, Loomba elaborates, "we learn little or nothing about the widows themselves, or their interiority, or even of the fact of their pain" (185). Henceforth, the colonial project with all its civilizing claims does not take internal cultural practices of the colony as a priority; instead it exploits natural resources and imposed selected western cultural values which enhance the superiority of the west.

Loomba takes this issue one step further to criticize colonialists and indigenous patriarchies:

Women are not just a symbolic space but real targets of colonialist and nationalist discourses. Their subjection and the appropriation of their work is crucial to the workings of the colony or the nation. Thus, despite their other differences, and their contest over native women, colonial and indigenous patriarchies often collaborated to keep women in their place. (186)

The question is, what does it mean for the two collaborating parties to keep women in their assigned place? The united stand of the two springs from two closely related factors. First, the patriarchal ideology has tightly bound gender inequality to universal culture; this concept is, for instance, seen through the fact that women in newly liberated countries gain some rights before their European counterparts who are said to be culturally, economically, and politically advanced. Second, during the anti-colonial

struggle, women endured inferiority as a result of mixing politics, patriarchy, and social conduct whereby women's demand for equal rights was delayed for the claimed reason of resisting invaders. This stance reflects the fragile patriarchal ideology which defines itself within the framework of its power over the opposite gender. Whether or not such a stance is plausible, postcolonial theory and feminist theory overlap to the point that oppression becomes the locus of a binary division not only between the two genders or colonizer and colonized people, but also as a mark for social class. What seems problematic here is when feminist critics adopt postcolonial premises which according to Neil Lazarus, in *Postcolonial Unconscious*, fail to address the subject's materialist concerns, which in turn control gender relations. More importantly, some feminist critics see postcolonial theory/discourse as a relational tool through which they get access to the representation of Arab women.

Nonetheless, feminists' close alliance with postcolonialism provides a culture for minority groups' scholarship. The intense drive for liberation supported by colonized communities resulted in the emergence of core individuals who are agents of change. However, injecting an abstract understanding of feminist theory with its western enterprise and principles to the scene of postcolonialism does not necessarily contribute positively to the status of women in the Arab/Muslim world because of cultural and religious differences in relation to feminist theory. The independence period in many newly liberating nations does not take women's concern as a priority. As Elleke Boehmer asserts:

subaltern women were...doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the ground not only of gender but also of race, social class, and,

in some cases, religion, caste, sexuality, and regional status. Far from being eradicated, the grim irony of the independence period was that the pressures of national liberation reinforced many of these forms of exclusion. Gender divisions in particular were often brought into greater prominence. (216)

Select use of relevant aspects of feminism and postcolonial theory would improve the status of women in Third world countries who have been successfully silenced for a long period of time due to socio-political circumstances. In the introduction to *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills state, “The current concern with colonial masculinity and indeed postcolonial masculinities, for example, has been a direct result of feminist interventions in mainstream postcolonial theory” (2). The debate around widow immolation, for instance, has received meticulous attention within postcolonial theory, especially with the publication of Gayatri Spivak’s essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Loomba). Viewed from this perspective, “the honor/shame killing” gains a prominent place within postcolonial Arabic literature. Many postcolonial Arab writers, especially female authors, address this unfair cultural practice. Fadia Faqir’s *My Name is Salma*, as an example, revolves around the notion of “honor killing.” Such a view sharpens the awareness of the reciprocal relations between the two schools (feminism and postcolonial theory) in which oppression and in/equality are the subjects of investigation.

Yet, the tie between feminism and postcolonial theory with regard to oppression and in/equality is that by focusing on responding to dominant representations, they accept systems that assign them to inferior position. This inferiority is created within the subject of the East as endemic because of the absence of critical thinking at the familial

and school curriculum levels along with high poverty rates. Within the mentality of the people in the East, the West remains culturally, educationally, politically, and economically advanced. An educational degree from a western institution and fluency in the English language, for example, are notable signs of a higher class membership and a better IQ. Because of the limited available space here, I can not fully explore the complex relationship between feminism and postcolonialism but wish to emphasize that feminist movements benefit from postcolonial theory especially with regard to notions of representation and resistance. Combining the two schools establishes a new interdisciplinary field for further research and investigation. Or as Mills and Lewis put it, “Feminist postcolonial theory has engaged in a two-fold project: to racialize mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualization of colonialism and postcolonialism” (3). Feminist movements’ relation to postcolonial theory, therefore, marks a political strategy which increases women’s awareness of their rights and status in society and also uncovers male oppression and prejudice which has been ingrained in both genders over a long period of time. And most importantly, it ties together males and females in their confrontation of western hegemony. “In the postcolonial world,” Amrita Basu writes, “nationalist movements often provide opportunities for large-scale women’s activism. With this opportunity comes the recognition of gender-specific grievances and concerns” (9). The socio-political circumstances inject a fresh dimension into feminist studies’ quest compared to the feminist theory produced in western countries. Issues of national liberation and racism, for instance, are primary loci of feminists in third world countries, but they are not of equal importance for white western feminists.

Although it is not the object of this chapter to engage in the various controversies ignited by the two schools of thought (feminist and postcolonial), examining the current status of Arab women demands considerations of these theories and their contribution to the representation of Arab women. Alamddine, whose text will be analyzed in this chapter, acknowledges his affiliation with feminism, and at the same time he is a product of colonial education and very aware of postcolonial discourse. All these traits among others affect the way he represents Arab women.

Arab Women, Postcolonial Discourse and Beyond

Postcolonial discourse has often situated women as inactive individuals and used them metaphorically and allegorically to maintain masculine identity. Of the role of women in nationalist (and colonialist) discourses, Ania Loomba writes, “even though female power, energy and sexuality haunt these discourses, women themselves, in any real sense ‘disappear’ from these discussions about them” (185). This trend has had a silencing effect, penetrating perceptions toward women in such a subtle way as to become natural. “The feminization of colonized men” Boehmer writes, “under empire had produced, as a kind of defensive reflex, an aggressive masculinity in the men who led the opposition to colonialism” (216). Boehmer takes this notion a step further as she argues that nationalist movements, during the resistance period, encouraged men to affirm themselves as agents of their own history, as self-fashioning and in control. “Women,” on the other hand, adds Boehmer, “were not so encouraged. They were marginalized therefore both by nationalist political activity and by the rhetoric of nationalist address” (216). To put it in other words, women are not and should not be part of the political scene. This political attitude contributes to the many forms of injustice

women endure and, in tandem, postpones the calls for empowerment, dignity, and justice for women. The existing power structure constructs the characteristics of postcolonial literature. Aijaz Ahmad, in his book *In Theory*, articulates a similar view: “The essential task of a ‘Third World’ novel is to give appropriate form to the national experience” (124). In this regard, the aesthetic aspects of literary writings are not a priority, at least for western critics. Ahmad elaborates, noting that the novel of the Third World needs to negotiate issues such as representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, and corruptions; otherwise any text would be excluded from the ongoing process of creating a counter-canon. The excruciating irony lies in the fact that western academia and critics, where feminist theory and other humanistic approaches have emerged, are responsible for the Third World literature canon which is significantly limited in scope and content; women’s concerns and women as writers beyond orientalist/colonialist representations and postcolonial studies, for examples, are almost missing from the literary scene. What is disconcerting, however, is that the same standards are not used for canon formation in the West. With the constant domination of western institutions, there is a lack of an openly confrontational attitude in the first place and also many of the authoritative postcolonial critics operate within the margin space available to minorities created by western institutes.

With this general ambience, women are not often portrayed as independent individuals in traditional postcolonial novels. Moreover, even “the writing of women,” underscores Boehmer, “represented an unknown continent in both colonial and postcolonial nationalist discourses” (215). Instead, the female body is cast allegorically and metaphorically to represent the invaded lands, the negative impacts of colonization,

and also served as a way to maintain the patriarchal authority of the colonized people. “It is clear that,” Boehmer writes, “whereas men are invoked as the definitive citizens of the new nation, women are cast as icons of national values, or idealized custodians of tradition” (216). There is an inextricable connection between the female body and the land in postcolonial discourse. Although a number of feminist critics celebrate the allegorical representation of women, viewing them through this perspective as an essential component of the fabric of society, this attitude is insufficient since the bulk of postcolonial narratives do not consider women’s concerns such as their status in society, their struggle against patriarchal authority, and their attempts to obtain rights equal to those of men. In support of such a view, Kirsten Stirling writes, “This use of the female figure elevates and semi-deifies women on the symbolic level but can contribute to disenfranchising them from the position of citizen on a practical level. The symbolic elevation appears to value women’s role in the nation but it masks the political powerlessness” (11). In a stance similar to Stirling, Loomba notes, “Anti-colonial or nationalist movements have used the image of the Nation-as-Mother to create their own lineage, and also to limit and control the activity of women within the imagined community” (180). The justification of this attitude, in my view, is the supposed claim of confronting the hegemony of imperialism. The political stage, from a male perspective, requires not only a suspension of norms but also the improvisation of new rules of conduct. Early post-independence narratives reflected the male-centered vision of national destiny as Boehmer argues. Such a stand, according to Loomba, “implies that gender politics is only a metaphor for the articulation of other issues. This somewhat confuses women’s relationship to any social structure” (185). Tayeb Salih’s *Season of*

Migration to the North (1966) is a typical postcolonial text in which the author highlights the impact of colonization and the nation establishment process. These two concerns are vividly brought onto the stage through a dramatic confrontation between a Sudanese male character and a white woman. His text represents the colonial and postcolonial history of Sudan, but does not simply offer a window on major historical events. Within the domain of the text, although women play major roles throughout the course of the novel, yet their roles are limited to serve traditional postcolonial discourses and themes. This is true with respect to many African postcolonial writers. The major purpose in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), for example, is to inspire those who survive to create the new nation. Mumbi, the female character of the text, is trapped in several ways; she is trapped in patriarchal and the colonial systems along with the emerging male elite in independent Kenya. Ngugi shows that women are not able to contribute significantly to the masculine society. He writes, for instance, that Mumbi "had fed on stories in which Gikuyu women braved the terrors of the forest to save people, of beautiful girls given to the gods as sacrifice before the rains" (89). Moreover, Ngugi uses women allegorically to depict the political situation in Kenya during the decolonization process, in particular when Gikonyo returns from detention and finds that Mumbi suckles another man's child. The earliest postcolonial writers, then, tended to be middle-class, privileged men who, in most cases, received colonial education and adopted the colonizer's tongue. Boehmer underscores this view when she states, "Many writers in English from Africa and the Caribbean took up the call to include literature as a moving spirit in the nationalist struggle. Anti-colonial resistance became for them a rallying cause, an enabling context, and a focal subject" (175). What is problematic here is that the earliest postcolonial

writers have the power to draw attention to certain issues and, in most cases, they chose male themes which celebrate heroism and enhance masculinity.

As I indicated in my previous chapter, defining postcolonialism through the lens of the colonial project imposes limitations on the development of the theory and fictional narratives as it pays little attention to the parochial concerns of indigenous people. I do not intend here to go into detail about what postcolonial theory does not say because I already highlighted these limitations in my previous chapter, but I will add briefly that although the term postcolonialism is wide enough to encompass all manner of studying postcolonial nations, postcolonial studies addresses certain general themes and issues such as representation, identity crisis, resistance, hybridity, and ideology formation; these questions and issues, in fact, not only narrow the scope of postcolonial studies, but also create stereotypes that circulate in modern Western thinking. This can be attributed to the paralyzed stance of critics/scholars of the Third World who still function within modern western thought and could not establish a school of thought distinct and comprehensive enough to deal directly with social and culture life of the Third World as an independent entity. Feminist studies in the Arab world, for instance, is centered around western views of feminism. However, this does not mean that feminist scholars of the Arab world have not attempted to create a school of thought which fits in with Arab society and culture. In *Women Claim Islam*, Miriam Cooke writes, “Throughout the twentieth century, women in the Arab world have tried to find alternative terminology” (ix). The rejection of ‘feminism/feminist’ is mainly because of western associations as Amrita Basu asserts in the introduction of *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, “one reason that many women are uncomfortable with the concept of feminism has to do with the widespread belief that its

inspiration, origins, and relevance are bourgeois or Western” (7). Yet, women in the Arab world still use the term ‘feminist’ with its western definition and implications, despite their awareness that “Western feminist theory has often made generalization about ‘third-world’ women, assuming a homogeneity amongst very diverse groups of women” (Lewis and Mills 9). This view relates directly to the established colonial perception of the incompatibility between Islam and feminism in the first place and secondly the western feminists’ privileged stance to speak for other women.

In colonialist discourse and beyond, Arab women have been represented as victims of religion and traditions. These two general institutions do not carry the same weight in western culture. Feminist theory in the West is a secular enterprise. “Feminism in the West,” Margot Badran writes in *Feminism in Islam*, “has been cast within a secular framework and has neither explicitly invoked religious principles nor looked to religion for support or legitimacy” (2). In the same book, Badran adds that in “Third World countries, feminists have had to juggle their feminist struggle with anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist ones, a dual battle unknown to Western feminists” (117). Such statements sharpen the awareness that the heavy reliance on Western aspects of feminism to understand the status of women in the Arab world does not always result in an accurate picture. To add to the burden of Arab women, most scholarly productions of feminist scholars in the Arab world take a historical overview pointing out actions of certain female individuals, instead of focusing on issues that lead to oppression and gender inequality. Bardran argues that in the Arab world, there are two forms of feminism: secular feminism and Islamic feminism. The former is characterized by affiliations with a western view of feminism. The Egyptian Feminist Union founded in 1925, for example,

uses mainly French language to express their ideas. Islamic feminism, by contrast, attempts to form a feminist ideology and program compatible with Islam. The problem with the two trends is their intentional exclusion of other minority groups.

The representation of Arab women is never precise since women are split between their family role, their role as member of a nation-state and their role as members of religious institutions. The entanglement of these elements creates an enigmatic view of women's roles and status in society. The obscurity emerges as a result of a biased attitude toward one element over the other. The religious establishment, for example, manipulates religious discourses to create a defined role for women in society which matches with the agenda of male domination in the religious institution. This agenda, Badran explains, maintains complete control of women and perpetuates the established hierarchical order. Through internalized oppression, women are forced into accepting patriarchal rules because of their claimed religion, and the consequence is the plundering of women's rights. "Many postcolonial regimes," Loomba writes, "have been outrightly repressive of women's rights, using religion as the basis on which to enforce their subordination" (189). This stance creates one pattern of female identity in the Arab world based on masculine Islamic understandings of women. Such an attitude solidifies western stereotypes where Islam is supposedly responsible for the prevalence of sexual inequality in the Arab world. The veil, which is derived from Islamic traditions, has become central to feminists when discussing feminism in the Arab/Muslim world. "In the last few years" writes Al-Musawi, "the veil has resurfaced in discussions of women's issues, not only in relation to the increasing interest in the area, its politics and resources, but also as a manifestation of political consciousness" (206).

Bucking the western mainstream narrative, Badran argues that “Feminism,” in terms of gender equality, “exists within Islam – that is, within Islamic discourse and among Muslims” (5). The concept is to re-read Islamic texts through a feminist perspective first in order to challenge any intrinsic connection between religion (Islam) and the patriarchal system, secondly to curtail the fear that feminism demands a total transformation of the social structure, and thirdly to deconstruct patriarchal ideology which acquires its legitimacy from sanctioned interpretations of Islamic discourse. More importantly, this stance underscores feminist consciousness of religion as a strong weapon in their fight against patriarchy. Muslim feminists attempt to raise the awareness that their battle is against patriarchy not Islam, intentionally using the same weapon, ‘religion’ which has been manipulated to oppress them. With this stance, Muslim feminists point out that religion and masculine culture are two different institutions, for the former is supposed to be sacred, whereas the latter is contingent, serving patriarchal systems.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Qasim Amin published *The Liberation of Woman*⁷ in which he claims that Egyptian women were backwards because they had been deprived from the rights given to them by Islam. Amin’s work has been regarded as the first book on the subject of feminism in Arab culture. The major argument of the book is the need for social and cultural transformation in a way that encourages prosperity and advancement at all levels. Amin puts all the blame for the low status of Egyptian women on the power of traditions. However, traditions gain their protective

⁷ The book is written in Arabic and later translated into English.

sacred mores and rules via the manipulation of religious discourse, which acts to naturalize the conventional. The masculine hegemony of religion and traditions assist to keep women under “psychological control”; men carefully select aspects of the two that would have a pacifying effect upon women, and at the same time, promote the patriarchal values they wish to instill in women. As Pramod Nayar states, “religious doctrines and theology were deployed to justify unequal gender relations and unfair social structures” (142). Although Amin, in his book, mainly considers the status of women in Egypt, his principle argument can be applied to many parts of the region because they share a post-independence experience characterized by government corruption, political disillusionment, and economic despair.

The exculpation of Islam from oppressing women, in Amin’s book, undermines the colonial agenda of pointing to Islam as the major oppressor of women in the Arab world. Nonetheless, religion plays a significant role in gender identification. “Islamist groups from Morocco to Bahrain” Cooke writes, “are calling for an Islamic state within which they will reestablish what they consider to be Islamically sanctioned gender relations” (54). This step is taken because of the failures in postcolonial Arab countries at the social, economic, military, and political levels. Eroding the role of Islam in gender identification, indeed, delimits the active reciprocity between Islam and the role it plays in establishing social perceptions and values. In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed argues, “The social system had combined the worst features of a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern misogyny with an Islam interpreted in the most negative way possible for women” (128). However, the complex relation between interpretation of Islam and patriarchal ideology is exacerbated by governments. The political division

between pro-feminists and Islamists is promoted by tyrant governments in order to shift the focus away from the need for political reforms. Tyrannical governments in the Arab world act as a destructive force which, in their assumed process of transforming the countries into economically self-sufficient regions, erode the essential and unifying structures of the Arab world by enhancing constant tension between the two groups. This complexity allows individuals little opportunity for effecting, or even expecting change.

Harking back to portrayals of Arab women in postcolonial Arabic literature, it is worthy recalling Muhsin Al-Musawi's *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel* in which offers an academic analysis of a large corpus of contemporary Arabic novels to depict a general perception of Arab life and culture. As he emphasizes principles of Arab culture and tradition, it is no coincidence that Al-Musawi pays considerable attention to the representation of Arab women. He asserts the importance of considering the image of Arab women culturally and politically because of the intensive influence of elements including religion, traditions, colonialism (with its claimed civilizing mission), globalization, stereotypes, and along with feminist theory. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Al-Musawi argues, male intellectuals introduce women's issues in a broad national or Islamic frameworks. Similarly, Ahmed asserts, "The subject of women first surfaced as a topic of consequence in the writings of Muslim male intellectuals in Egypt and Turkey" (128). A number of intellectuals, for example, connect the fight against British colonialism and the liberation of women in which the veil is depicted as a sign of backwardness. Growing out of Islamic and Arabic traditions, the veil remains a core element in colonial and postcolonial discourses. The discrepancy lies in the acceptance of the Western perception that the veil represents backwardness. Al-Musawi

argues that “the use of the veil as a marker of backwardness and resistance to the spirit of the age also indicates subservience to the colonialist discourse” (42). Constructing a negative connotation of the veil within the mainstream demonstrates unconscious submission to Western encroachment. Despite warnings against complicity of the veil and its religious base, colonialist discourse successfully transfers the sacred practice of wearing the veil into a retrograde indication. As Ahmed observes, “Veiling became the symbol now of both the oppression of women and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies” (152). The view with regard to the backwardness of the veil shared by colonists and some Arab male intellectuals is a point which Islamists pick up to develop their strategies to empower the patriarchal system through a counterpart rhetoric including westernization of the East, conspiracy against Islam, undermining the Islamic family, and glorifying the traditional roles of women as mothers and wives. All these concepts are reduced to the rejection of the West and its overall encroachment.

Like other postcolonial critics, Al-Musawi corroborates that Arab intellectuals, despite their fight against the political and cultural hegemony of the West, borrow/adopt certain aspects of Western culture, yet he attributes their attitude for two reasons: the backwardness of the Ottoman’s legacy at that time and the prevalence of patriarchal practice. Borrowing values from Western culture takes place via direct interactions where subjects of the once-colonized nation explore the daily life of Western nations. Gibran Kahlil Gibran’s writings, for example, demonstrate his defense of women’s rights. With this position in mind, Aijaz writes, “Writers-in-exile often write primarily for readerships which are materially absent from the immediate conditions of their production” (131).

Exile, hence, provides Gibran the passageway through which he enters the Western world and transfers Western women's struggle for their rights onto his culture of origin.

Similarly, Salamah Musa, in *The Education of Salamah Musa*, asserts that his perceptions of the veil and women's status in Arab society at large have changed due to his direct interaction with Western culture. Intentional eschewing of explicit interaction with Western culture is a stance used by contemporary patriarchal systems to legitimize/naturalize the inferior status of women through manipulating religious discourse and creating negative connotations of liberty. The interpretation of 'liberty' as a Western notion in the Arab patriarchal systems is always associated with moral decay, while in reality 'liberty' forms a serious threat to their long-time domination. Indeed, this attitude is boosted since in the bulk of Western narratives, the veil mainly signifies the oppression of women. The complex issue is that the veil is understood in a superficial way by Arab patriarchal systems which attempt to show that the West is only concerned with liberating Arab women in terms of their outward physical appearance.

By contrast, in postcolonial Arabic fiction, argues Al-Musawi, the veil represents both confinement and power. In this regard, Al-Musawi, in a passage meriting extensive citation, points out the different perspective:

Narrative reconstructions can be radically different in this context. Some may be subservient to the European interest in the exotic, to the very vexation of the colonialist mind whenever unable to control and survey lands and people, or they may be catering to white feminism in its transposition of problems to the East. Others look at the issue from a cultural perspective, in an attempt to escape the constraints of stereotyping or typology at large. (207)

Instead of demonstrating one single view toward the veil, postcolonial Arab writers display different attitudes in relation to it. This point elucidates two important facts: within the genre of postcolonial Arabic fiction, the veil does not always carry negative associations, and the struggle for independence and freedom for women goes beyond physical appearance.

The investment in the female body as a ground for women's representation in postcolonial discourse has eased the circulation of allegorical and metaphorical readings of women. Al-Musawi, like several postcolonial critics, reiterates the importance of the female body to postcolonial studies: "the female body is a center of attention, a register of symbols, and a terrain for the gaze, containment, and also a frightening presence that recalls and provokes, in certain religions, temptations and sins" (205). As I mentioned earlier, this view sets limits on human understanding of women's role in society. Such a limitation is true in the representation of women as supplementary to the heroic male in the time of anti-colonial struggle. As Al-Musawi points out, "In the nationalist discourse of war and chivalry, land is equated to the female body, and both are held sacred" (212).

Moving a step ahead, Al-Musawi analyzes the images of Arab women as represented in the writings of female Arab authors. Oppression and marginalization of women have been a recurrent theme which still occupies an important place in the literature of post-independence Arab nations. These two themes are taken directly from colonial narratives. This is no coincidence since Western culture and values find their ways into the body of other cultures and literature through the means of colonization and globalization. This is of special importance as it reveals the new form of colonization beyond military occupation and exploitation of natural resources. This point is worthy of

attention because the new form of colonization is less observable as it creeps by degrees into the body of Eastern culture.

Belonging and Un-belonging: Rabih Alameddine

Rabih Alameddine, an American novelist of Arab origin, has become known as a postmodernist writer after the publication of his debut novel *Koolaid*s in 1998. In 1999, his second novel *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters* was published, 2008 witnessed the publication of *The Hakawati*, and in 2013 *An Unnecessary Woman* was published. In 2016, Alameddine published *The Angel of History*. Alameddine has spent most of his adult life in exile; he was born in Amman, Jordan, grew up in Kuwait and later received his education in England and America. Currently, Alameddine divides his time between San Francisco and Beirut, yet he once said that “I live where I do not belong and I belong where I do not live,” implicitly affirming his Arab roots. Like most diasporic writers, Alameddine’s national identity is not purely stated. All his novels to date are either set between the two cultures or set predominantly in Lebanon. Bucking other contemporary Arab Anglophone writers, Alameddine is distinguished by his experimental narrative technique, raising unfamiliar themes, and his rejection of hybrid language. The intermeshing of these motifs underpins the vitality and density of Alameddine’s writing. Michelle Hartman, in her study of *I, the Divine*, asserts that “The novel is written largely in a fast-paced American English” (339). What all these texts have in common, though, is the implantation of postmodern aesthetics which foreground self-referentiality, inconclusive narrative, and convoluted storytelling. Moreover, his texts reveal shared characteristics and narrative techniques through which they tend to favor non-linear style over traditional narrative. His fiction is leitmotiv-based. At the outset, Alameddine’s

novels generally exhibit the complex and critical tension between individuals' desires and social requirements. As an author committed to freedom beyond political independence, Alameddine writes about human conditions and marginalized people. In other words, Alameddine uses his writing skills to support those who are not supported by social structures.

The importance of Alameddine to my project lies in his ability to undermine constructed themes found in typical postcolonial Arabic fiction. He clearly represents the shift in traditional postcolonial discourse, depicting the internal concerns in the Arab world. Although politically committed to the current socio-political orders and human conditions, Alameddine has an aversion to what he calls didactic novels. In his journalistic writings, he clearly sees himself as a writer of human conditions, yet with a postmodernist attitude. I have chosen Alameddine for this chapter for four reasons. First, I wish, to move away from the binary category where male authors write predominantly about matters of concern to men, whereas female writers primarily raise women's concerns. The second reason relates to Alameddine's enigmatic narrative style in which he treats women's issues beyond a surface level. Along the same lines, although emphasizing the importance of themes including inequality, injustice, oppression, and marginalization, Alameddine writes beyond the restrictive division into male and female. Thirdly, Alameddine often declares himself a feminist which it is legitimate when we examine his representation of women in *An Unnecessary Woman*. More importantly, the postmodernist tendencies of style and theme found in Alameddine's texts contribute to the shift from traditional postcolonial discourse to concentrate on socio-political and cultural concerns in the Arab world.

Yet, it is possible to read his texts through the lens of postcoloniality. Whenever Alamddine has spoken in his own voice, he has demonstrated his interest in the people on the margins of society and has always underscored that all art is political. In his novels, Alamddine touches upon themes and issues including the Lebanese civil war, oppression of minorities, and Arabs in the Diaspora; all are embedded in the way he highlights these issues in an artistic style where the treatment of these issues is not straightforward or didactic. However, for Alamddine, as he said in his interview with Conner Habib, the way the story is narrated is more important than the message it attempts to deliver. He has an aversion to what he calls 'didactic art' in which the message becomes more important than the story itself. Alamddine, in my view, goes too far with the narrative style at the expense of the politics of the texts. Individual psychology and aesthetics, rather than polemics, drive the narrative. I shall return to this statement and the broader implications of Alamddine's ideas in the analysis section of this chapter but wish to add here that Alamddine, with this stance, attempts to avoid creating characters that are devoid of distinctiveness. This contradicts the perception of Marx, Althusser and others who argue that individuals can not be understood as an entities separate from context.

To sum up this section, I wish to add that Alameddine 's writings demonstrate keen concern with Arab issues; he sees himself as having more in common with diasporic writers, yet he opposes categorization. Alameddine engages with matters of race, class, gender, and the consequent deformities of neocolonialism which lead to the emergence of local despots. However, Alameddine, at times, falls into the trap of the Orientalist views of the East in terms of judgments of inferiority/superiority. In *An Unnecessary Woman*,

for instance, Alameddine compares unstable societies of the Middle East with advanced and civilized Western societies as his protagonist, Aaliya narrates:

My books show me what it is like to live in a reliable country where you flick on a switch and a bulb is guaranteed to shine and remain on... Dickens's Londoners are more trustworthy than Lebanese. Beirut and its denizens are famously and infamously unpredictable. Every day is an adventure. This unsteadiness makes us feel a shudder of excitement, of danger, as well as a deadweight of frustration.

The spine tingles momentarily and the heart sinks. (52)

The above subtle discourse parallels the traditional Orientalist representation of the East in which the East was/is inferior to the West. Alameddine voices the message that the Arab world, without essential renovation (based on Western standards), will remain uncivilized. This stance includes the status of women and their social emancipation. Therefore, Alameddine's view of feminism remains westernized; he sees that stringent Islamic laws along with patriarchal ideology place women as the 'Other'.

An Unnecessary Woman: Homed in Un-homed Community/ The Establishment of Privacy

An Unnecessary Woman (2013) retells the story of Aaliya, the 'unnecessary woman' of the title who is a seventy-two year old recluse by her choice and a divorcee due to a man's decision. Her life is teeming with literature. Since this novel is fairly recent, it has yet to receive much critical attention. The text negotiates controversial issues in the Arab world including gender equality, religion, politics, and social perceptions and belief. Aaliya, the protagonist and narrator, spends almost all her adult life in the same apartment in Beirut where she follows a ritual of translating a new book

into Arabic each year, yet all her approximately thirty-seven translated books are stored in boxes unpublished and unread by anyone. Within the course of this annual ritual activity, Aaliya creates her own privacy in isolation from the world outside the frontiers of her physical place: “My home, my apartment; in it I live, and move, and have my being” (18). She finds the world outside her physical habitation suffocating and claustrophobic: “I long ago abandoned myself to a blind lust for the written world. Literature is my sandbox. In it I play, build my forts and castles, spend glorious time. It is the world outside that box that gives me trouble” (5). Perceiving the brutality of the world, Aaliya establishes a hostile tone toward the unfair world which, not only because of political difficulties or economic pressures but also because of her gender identity, gives her a succession of losses. Aaliya operates in limbo, unable to belong to her rejected community, yet the establishment of privacy provides her with the space to live according to her own rules. With that personal decision to live in exile within her own physical community, Aaliya’s narrative invites critics to seek satisfactory explanations for Aaliya’s conduct which go a step beyond gender inequalities and investigate the constructed social order with its religious and socio-economic influences. Aaliya narrates:

I have no need for a phone, let alone a smart phone; no one calls me. Please, no pity or insincere compassion. I am not suggesting that I feel sorry for myself because no one calls me or, worse, that you should feel sorry. No one calls me. That is a fact. I am alone. It is a choice I have made, yet it is also a choice made with few other options available. Beirut society was not fond of divorced, childless women in those days. (7)

In the above statement, Aaliya admits her state of isolation, but this state of alienation takes a unique form as it is effected by her own personal decision, yet within the context of limited options. Living in alienation with the attendant social judgment, but copiously free, is a resistant act to the oppressive community. Alameddine uses Aaliya's established privacy metaphorically to affirm humans' desire for freedom despite the severe outcome. This stance opens up avenues for individual action not normally sanctioned by society. The protagonist in the novel tends to favor individualism which strongly deconstructs the collectivism of community. In other words, Aaliya ceases to behave in accordance with communal values. In the novel, Aaliya is shown to be in conflict with society over traditional values. The conflict between an individual woman and the surrounding community is generated by the patriarchal system underpinned by religious discourses and cultural principles. Alameddine's novel suggests he is increasingly interested in promoting a sense of isolation while still acknowledging social connections, "I am my system and my system is me," Aaliya narrates (62).

An Unnecessary Woman yields a rich harvest that ranges from its linguistic innovation and its abundant intertextual connections with English, Arabic, French, and Spanish literatures, to its references to the civil war in Lebanon; all are channeled into a woman's struggle in the face of a dominant culture. The text fuses a number of discursive trajectories involving such complex issues as gender politics, civil war, and women's responses to hegemonic prejudices emanating from patriarchal values. The narrative is controlled transparently by the interior monologue of the narrator. Alameddine guides his readers through Aaliya's conscious flood of thoughts, including a chunk of certain stages of her life for the purpose of highlighting socio-political and economic concerns which

contribute directly to his analysis of the status of women in society. As such, Alameddine creates Aaliya as a female character who performs a complementary role in which she incorporates her private concerns with larger social concerns. At the outset, Aaliya is telling her life story, but that story points to broader social practices regarding women.

Aaliya is the unnecessary woman referred to in the novel's title. However, there is a contradiction between the meaning of the protagonist's name and the title of the text. "My father named me Aaliya, the high one, the above," (11). Thus the title of the text stands in contrast to the meaning of the protagonist's name. Intentionally, Alameddine employs the incompatible meanings to point out the social hypocrisy of the ideal version of women proclaimed by the patriarchy and the real inferior status of women in society; Aaliya keeps reminding her readers of the meaning of her name and at the same time the course of events shed light on gender inequality.

Alameddine rejects a traditional linear and chronological pattern of narration by intermingling apparently disconnected episodes in a way that their placement in the text is overlapping. The temporal movement is non-static, as the narrator oscillates between the present and the past to reflect a comprehensive picture of the status of women in society. This temporal structure allows Alameddine to incorporate various political episodes and local family incidents concerning women in order to synthesize and perceive the direct influence of politics on women's roles in society. In *An Unnecessary Woman*, the catastrophe of the civil war in Lebanon is marked by female concerns. Aaliya, the protagonist, narrates her personal tale along with episodes concerning the civil war in Lebanon. The amalgamation of the civil war experience and the personal

story undermines traditional postcolonial discourse in which resistance to colonization and nation establishment processes were of priority to the point where other internal issues including women's concerns and their status in society were devalued. At the same time, the interweaving of narratives highlights the impacts of the larger political context on the lives of women in Lebanon. Moreover, the narrative is significant not just because it revisits the past but because of the narrator's subjective effort to locate the past in her family's matrilineal line. Cognizant of the difficulty of liberating women, Alameddine places the issue of women alongside the civil war in Lebanon. Situating women's concerns within the context of war provides extra attention to the importance of women becoming active members of society, instead of using them metaphorically and allegorically to represent the invaded land. Indeed, *An Unnecessary Woman* resonates with an engaging sympathy with the aspirations, frustrations, and agonies of the female characters. Alameddine writes a literary work that focuses on the inner thoughts of an Arab woman who feels deprived from acting upon her desires.

Married in Un-marriage: Ambivalent Affiliations

Gender politics occupy so large a portion of all the narratives in the novel, yet, as stated above, Alameddine does not deal with this issue in a traditional dramatic narrative, but rather in a postmodernist aesthetic style which foregrounds self-referentiality and inconclusive narrative. The primary commitment is to the self, not to the community, yet the self's concerns weave around community standards which in most cases privilege men. Aaliya's internal monologue and her limited interaction with the outside world are ways to highlight a number of social practices. The crux of the matter is to reveal the unjust social order based on an indirect view of Aaliya: "Beiruti society was not fond of

divorced, childless women in those days” (7). *An Unnecessary Woman*, in this case, is a feminist text that questions and challenges the values and norms of Lebanese society. The text posits questions that female subjects confront and are unable to reconcile under the patriarchal ideology.

Alameddine in *An Unnecessary Woman* criticizes the institution of marriage, its practices, and its biased and unfair laws. He uses marriage, which is supposedly highly respected socially, to denounce oppression and to condemn commodification of women and to affirm, instead, human values: liberty and equality. As Aaliya recalls the death of her father, “he died before impregnating my mother with another, as he was supposed to, expected to, particularly since I was female and first” (11). With this, Alameddine elucidates two crucial points related to women’s concerns: men are socially privileged and culturally preferable. Alameddine shows men from birth are more highly valued and how this underlies gender relations in the community. Secondly, the ultimate aim of marriage is to produce children. This purpose is delimiting and constraining cognitively and socio-politically. Alameddine reveals a definitive negative view of marriage which holds such a central role in the life of many people, especially women. His point of view of marriage ranges from parodic portrayal of the concept to a complete rejection of the institution. Aaliya’s positive reaction to her divorce represents a rejection of marriage: “I shed not a tear. I did what my nature demanded. I cleaned and scrubbed and mopped and disinfected until no trace of him remained, no scent, not a single hair, not a touch ... I did not wait for the smell of him to dissipate on its own. I expunged it” (15). Aaliya’s tendency to erase her short married life from her memory conveys to Alameddine’s negative view of the institution. Alameddine’s critical attitude toward marriage is perhaps

partly because he sees it as an unfair system to women. Marriage is socially approved to ensure acceptable norms of sexual relations, yet for Alameddine, its social acceptance does not make it a fair system. The interrelation between patriarchy and power largely determines how marriage is perceived; Aaliya recalls her friend's marriage proposal: "Hannah's father paid her knight's father a visit ... the meeting was friendly, each patriarch suggesting that a discussion with his progeny was in order before moving ahead" (152). Candidly, Alameddine points out men's dominant role in the marriage proposal ritual. He later specifies the role with intensive details as Aaliya tells us, "I knew, was told, that this was a marriage proposal and my future husband's family was visiting to measure me, to judge me" (204). The marriage procedure deals with women as objects subscribing to social measurements and standards.

The male dominated culture creates marriage roles to meet men's own advantage. Aaliya's ex-husband, whom she describes as 'the impotent insect along with other names,' takes advantage of the patriarchal system: "Before leaving this world, the listless mosquito with malfunctioning proboscis remarried twice and remained childless. "Woman, you are divorced." Of course, he could have married over me and brought a second wife into our crumbly nest" (13). The distortion of Islam by its practitioners and the imbalance of power between the two genders, along with patriarchal ideology make it possible for men to practice polygamy without any sense of guilt or shame. The unequal perceptions established by male society and simultaneously imposed deliberately upon women as religious facts function as a barrier to any potential resistance since these views gain legitimacy through the supposedly fixed interpretation of religious discourse.

This attitude is demonstrated when Aaliya recalls her mother's reaction to her daughter's divorce:

My mother wanted me to be grateful. He may have rejected me as superfluous waste, he may have treated me as merely the dispensable product of his rib, but still I should be appreciative. "He divorced you. You can remarry a gentle widower or maybe a suitor of women more seemly who has been rejected a few times. Consider yourself fortunate." Fortunate? For my mother, being a pathetic suitee was a cut above being a neglected second wife. She could not conceive of a world in which my husband did not hold all the cards. In her world, husbands were omnipotent, never impotent. (14)

Such statements sharpen the awareness of the misconceptions imposed upon women by patriarchal ideology via the manipulation of religious discourse. These misconceptions are revealed through the mentality of Aaliya's mother. Such a mentality, common among some traditional old women, becomes a fertile ground for not only the emergence but also the continuity of ruthless patriarchal rules. Kate Millett expresses similar views: "It is often assumed that patriarchy is endemic in human social life, explicable or even inevitable on the grounds of human physiology" (27). The family, henceforth, is the first social unit in a community that subscribes to the patriarchal system. After her husband left her, Aaliya recalls how her mother tries to convince her to leave her place: "After my husband left me, my mother did her best to convince me to follow him out the door and leave my home. She suggested that I exchange apartments with my half-brother" (66). The whole system revolves around a single obligation from the side of women. Aaliya's brother, because of his gender, believes that he has the right to take his sister's place.

Alameddine asserts the stereotypical image of the opportunistic patriarchal ideology that uses/abuses every single means to maintain women in an inferior position.

The institution of marriage is the primary social unit, yet Almaddine sees it as an unfair system and practice for women in the Arab world, since even though women are seemingly the essential pillar of the institution, they have no say in the process. The patriarchal family structure naturalizes the inactive/absent role of women. Almaddine projects this attitude through Aaliya's mother:

my mother was a widow at eighteen...What to do with a young widow? The families convened. My mother's family, having thought they had one fewer mouth to feed, now had two more...The families decided that the young widow would be married off to her husband's brother...Three months after my father passed away...my mother knelt obsequiously before a sheikh and watched as her father and second husband signed the contract. (12)

The patriarchal construction of marriage laws gives no rights for women to decide their fate. Rather, women are supposed to obey the patriarchal regulations; otherwise they would be socially condemned and further alienated. Alameddine defines patriarchal politics as the process whereby the male subject seeks to maintain and extend his power over the female. The passage shows also how marriage is socially constructed. Marriage is discussed primarily in the form of economic, social, and religious contexts. The presence of the 'sheikh' signifies that the patriarch usurps power through the manipulation of religious discourse. In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett highlights the deep relationship between religion and patriarchy, writing "Patriarchy has God on its side" (51). Theoretically, Islam gives women the right to accept or reject marriage proposals,

yet in most cases, the male guardian decides the matter. On the night of her wedding, Aaliya recalls that her stepfather, “was visiting my in-laws, finalizing the contracts” (144). Alameddine, here, underscores how this notion is passed on from one generation to another. Aaliya submits to a marriage contract similar to that experienced by her mother. The long-rooted history of male-dominated culture prompts the enforcement of unfair and stringent marriage laws. Marriage, for women, is a layer added to the repressive social and political mechanisms.

Alongside the story of Aaliya, which constitute the main narrative frame, is the tribulation of her married life. Through Aaliya’s narrative, Alameddine condemns the egregious practices of arranged and under-age marriages, “I was married off at sixteen, plucked unripe out of school, the only home I had, and gifted to the first unsuitable suitor to appear at our door, a man small in stature and spirit. Marriage is the most disagreeable institution for an adolescent” (13). From the beginning, the main thrust is to delineate the repressive and constructivist authority of patriarchal domination. Aaliya was not only married against her will, but she is also “gifted,” treated as an object of exchange. Moreover, she is deprived of access to further education which, in many patriarchal societies, is seen as offering a challenge to women’s domestic role as a wife and a mother. The priority for the patriarchal rule is that women be fit for the assigned domestic function. For Alameddine, the institution of marriage places women and female values inside the borders of the domestic realm. Alameddine cynically presents marriage as a mutual agreement between two males, a husband and a male-guardian, in order to decide the fate of a third party. This attitude reveals the traditional stance that views women as subjects unable to think or choose for themselves. In many traditional Arab societies, a

woman has no purely private relationship between the self and the social dimensions of life. Such relationships are mediated by the patriarchal structure and the social order. The powerful discourse of patriarchy demonstrates that adherence to traditional social rules is compulsory.

Social conventions have created a cultural norm in which marriage becomes the inevitable destiny for women. Alameddine criticizes this social perception as Aaliya narrates:

I rarely dreamed of romance or adventure, never of love and husbands. I would be married, I knew that, but I treated that fact as a fact, an impending *fait accompli*, not as something to look forward to. I did not spend time considering whom I would marry or how. I wanted to be allowed to work...How does the old cliché go? When every Arab girl stood in line waiting for God to hand out the desperate-to-get married gene, I must have been somewhere else, probably lost in a book. I do understand that it isn't just Arab girls who have that gene, but it is dominant in our part of the world. A force of nature and nurture, an epigenetic hurricane, herds us into marrying and breeding. Social cues, community rites, religious rituals, family events – all are meant to impress upon children the importance and inevitability of what Bruno Schulz calls the “excursion into matrimony.” No girl of my generation could imagine rebelling, nor would she want to. (125–6)

Alameddine challenges the constructed social perception of marriage as it exploits, marginalizes, and materializes women. The social task of marriage delimits women's mobility physically and intellectually. The ineluctability of marriage creates a path or a trajectory for the journey of women. “I can't force myself” says Aaliya, “to believe I am

in charge of much of my life” (53). Based on the dominant social view, every single task a woman does/doesn't do should serve the ultimate destination. Aaliya remembers her family's reaction to her reading habit: “Reading is bad for your eyes. You'll soon need glasses, which will make you even less attractive...I received various permutations of the ‘Who will want to marry you if you read so much?’” (113). Traditional patriarchal family imposes social expectations on prospective wives; their primary task, hence, is to bring up their daughters to meet social standards. For patriarchal ideology, adherence to traditional community rules maintains cohesion and affirms notions of unity.

Within the institution of marriage, the roles socially assigned to women are those of docility, passivity, and obedience. Society ascribes for women certain social practices which revolve around the margin of the male's world. “Hannah taught me many things,” narrates Aaliya, “When I was married off, I was unprepared for life ... She taught me how to cook,...How to knit...How to sew and how to mend buttons” (207). To her disappointment, married life is a domestic profession in which women are supposed to serve their husbands. And this view sees marriage not as based on mutual love, but as a contracted relation based on patriarchal rules in a capitalist community. Conceptualizing an autonomous role for women is not a facet of the patriarchal system. As Aaliya narrates, “I also know that my marriage was by no means unique, nor uniquely Beirut” (205). In this line, Alamddine asserts that Aaliya's tale is not exceptional; it is seen on a daily basis in the Arab world.

Women are thought to be passive and usually relegated to second class positions, as fulfilling domestic functions rather than as being citizens. In the novel, Aaliya states, “My mother loves her sons only and never cares to be discreet about it. She treats her

youngest daughter as a second-class citizen, a second-gender offspring” (70). Men are also privileged in the workplace; political systems, economic structures, and socio-cultural elements impede gender equality. As Aaliya says, “I wanted to be allowed to work. I hoped for a career as a secretary. In those days, I could not envision any other job. The only workingwomen I came across at the time were in the service business: maids, cooks, store clerks, secretaries, schoolteachers” (125). With this statement, Alameddine reveals three important points: first women need to get permission from men in the family in order to work in the public domain. The second point relates to women’s inability to hold leadership positions, and thirdly, Alameddine asserts the importance of economic factors to keep women in an inferior position. The patriarchal ideology works against the financial stability of women. As Millett states:

One of the most efficient branches of patriarchal government lies in the agency of its economic hold over its female subjects. In traditional patriarchy, women, as non-persons without legal standing, were permitted no actual economic existence as they could neither own nor earn in their own right...In general, the position of women in patriarchy is a continuous function of their economic dependence. (39)

Indeed, Alameddine not only challenges the naturalizing of these points but also sheds light on how patriarchal ideology operates in society. Factors such as religion, financial stability, and history promote patriarchal systems and maintain the inferiority of women. However, feminists attempt to challenge all these elements.

The Translation Profession and Arab Woman

‘Unpublished translation’ becomes a central concept consuming the narrator’s consciousness and the text’s dominant metaphor defining and delimiting women’s

destiny. The metaphor has been employed to capture a vivid image of the status of women in the Arab world. Alameddine, in his narrative, works with the concept of translation in order to foreground the shared status between women as second class citizens and translation as a secondary profession. Metaphorically, he uses translation to represent the challenges and struggles women encounter under the patriarchal system. “I understood from the beginning that what I do isn’t publishable,” Aaliya state. “There’s never been a market for it, and I doubt there ever will be” (107). Women under masculine authority are unable to express themselves directly. Similarly, translation is a subordinate profession that expresses and transfers original versions, “my translation” says Aaliya, “[is] one step further removed from the original” (62). The primary function of a translator is to widen the scope of readership by transferring written work into another language. Translation, in this case, is a limited notion when it comes to seeking the emphatic truth. Women, on the other hand, are not given the same space as men to show their social concerns. They simply contribute to the patriarchal ideology; Aaliya describes translation as, “my esoteric vocation” (267), insinuating the supplementary responsibility of women. Late in the text, when Aaliya was asked if anybody read her translations, she responds: “I am not sure anyone would be interested in reading my translations” (283). Implicitly Aaliya affirms her inferior status as a woman. “My version is a translation of a translation. All is doubly lost. My version is nothing” (284). As a female in a dominant patriarchal culture, Aaliya has no voice. Translation provides an alternative, but it is still considered to occupy a secondary place. In other words, translation metaphorically is an act of re-integrating alienated women into their

community, but in an indirect way. In fact, even in a civilized society, the underlying principle remains that women's desire and needs are still secondary to patriarchal values.

Illusion of Masculinity

Yet, Alameddine, throughout the course of his narrative, attempts to deconstruct the patriarchal ideology through cynical depictions of masculinity. The narrative in parts negotiates how patriarchal ideology is constructed and how masculinity is perceived. Alameddine allows his narrator to engage with issues of masculinity with its purported superiority through critical depictions of masculinity. In the Arab tradition, men's superiority has gone unquestioned for a long period based on an intermixing of Islamic values with patriarchal principles. The amalgamation of the two inculcates in women a specific social perception that glorifies masculinity. As Salwa Bakr in her autobiographical essay entitled "Writing as a Way Out" states:

As for men, I was brought up like millions of girls of my generation, with the idea that I had no existence without a man, the basic desire in life of every girl. Thus she must be beautiful, gentle and elegant for the sake of a man. Even education was placed in the context of giving me added value, so as to draw admiration from and bring pleasure to one sole being— man. Thus thirty years of my life were wasted, until I discovered the falseness of politics and the illusion of man. (36)

Complete adherence to patriarchal rules and the ideal version men create of themselves are what Alameddine challenges as he sees submission to the patriarchal ideology has severe negative impacts on women. "Many women," writes Bakr, "fell victim to this political illusion and ended up with psychological problems – they drifted towards madness, attempted suicide or, in cases of extreme retreat of values, put on the veil and

hid behind the doors of their houses” (37). Aaliya, our protagonist, shows some degree of mental instability and delirium: “I am a conscientious cleaner, you might even say compulsive– but I rarely remember to wipe the mirror clean. I do not think we need to consult Freud or one of his many minions to know that there is an issue here” (1). Because of the hegemonic patriarchal ideology, the Arab community has no sense of itself; the unclean mirror reflects the unjust social system with respect to women, while not wiping it asserts the reality that patriarchy remains a conservative force for any potential change.

The patriarchal ideology creates a social perception that men are the essential pillar of families who have the authority to control familial concerns which women, because of their gender, are not able to deal with. This perception has direct influence on women as it affirms that women are not supposed to take active roles outside domestic domains; Aaliya recalls the response of the owner of her place when her husband left her: “He was generous and neighborly at first, but once my husband walked out, he wanted nothing to do with me. I might as well have worn a scarlet letter. He forbade his children to interact with me...Hajj Wardeh refused to acknowledge my existence in person” (18). Far from being eradicated, the patriarchal ideology receives social acceptance because the dominant figure has the power to establish social perceptions. The grim irony is that these perceptions are constructed based on a supposed claim to protect women.

The cynical depiction of masculinity in the novel offers an alternative avenue to resist the patriarchal ideology. The notion here is to demolish the long standing sacred image of masculinity. This sacred image of masculinity is seen in the text as Aaliya recalls an incident when she walks with her mother:

In one of these side alleys, I can't remember exactly which, I had a humiliating experience that loiters in my memory, almost seventy years later. The recalled event no longer causes me much pain. I must have been a few months past four years old; my mother was second-trimester pregnant with my half brother the eldest. We were hurrying home, she dragging me by the hand. She walked with complete concentration and no little consternation. I couldn't understand then, nor would I for a long time, her terror of being a disappointment to her husband, to his family and hers. Like most of us, she was suckled on the milk of patriarchy (the courage of men, the fidelity of women). She sincerely believed that the world curdled if her husband held his breath, and if his every whim wasn't met, the universe turned to ash... We travelled this path regularly, but that one time was different. Whether she was going to be tardy, wouldn't be on time to cook his dinner, finish cleaning, iron his nightshirt, or something else, I don't know... I remember I was panicking then. I needed to pee. I kept telling her that I couldn't wait until we reached home... Unlike Lot's wife, she wouldn't look back, kept her steady gaze forward, toward her Mecca. (198-199)

The above passage demonstrates how women (wives) proclaim their existence only in relation to superior husbands. Intentionally, patriarchal rhetoric, along with religious discourse, establishes a highly powerful ideal image of masculinity which is irrefutable. Thus, it is this view that Alameddine wishes to deconstruct through sarcastic descriptions of men; as Aaliya narrates:

As a young woman, I was so frustrated never to have seen a man naked that I used to wait until my husband snored before lifting the covers, ... and examining his

body under his buttoned cottons. Ah, the disappointment of discovering a worm in place of the monster. Of this I was supposed to be afraid? This, the forge of fertility? Yet I couldn't rein in my curiosity. (15)

Convinced of the falseness of the purported masculinity, Aaliya, throughout the text, keeps describing her husband with inferior terminologies such as “The impotent insect” and “the listless mosquito with malfunctioning proboscis” (13). Such descriptions not only deconstruct the sanctity men surround themselves with, but also should be seen as uncommon acts of resistance against patriarchal ideology.

Epilogue

I wish to conclude by highlighting volatile issues. Feminist theory and gender studies are still theoretical, abstract fields which have not had a huge practical impact or caused major social changes. These fields, in most cases, survive in academia despite the ironic fact that these approaches fall under the umbrella of the humanities. The slow awareness of traditional communities in regards to gender equality is the result of a chasm between academia with its theory, high standards and professional nature, and the social daily life beyond the university. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed expresses a similar view, writing, “I suspect an academic illusion is that theory is what we do, because we can afford to withdraw from the requirement to act quickly; time for contemplation is assumed as time away from action” (93). In my view, bridging this gap is possible through direct interaction with the intention of changing social perceptions and practices. Fields such as postcolonial studies and feminist theory, for example, emerge with obvious intentions to change people's view and perceptions, yet they are still bound within the walls of academic institutions. And here comes the role of various

literary forms: to join theoretical stances with praxis. If theory has the power to raise consciousness in academia, then fiction has the power to influence social/political changes. A good example of what I mean is Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she, in a very academic way, argues that the way to end the marginalized status of the subaltern is to hear them speak for themselves. This view is put into practice as many authors start to give voice to their female characters to express directly their concerns. Although Spivak remains skeptical that even if subalterns speak no one would listen to them because of the lack of infrastructure, she as a social critic tells the world that there is always a blocked voice. And this itself is an achievement as it raises the question 'What about those who do not have voice?' With this feminist wave or trend, we have seen many fiction writers take stands on this matter and give alternative narratives.

With this in mind, I turn back for the final time to *An Unnecessary Woman* to assess the role of literary texts in changing social perceptions. *An Unnecessary Woman* highlights issues and challenges which Arab women face on a daily basis. To be precise, Alameddine's text offers a particularly incisive fictional representation of Arab women by depicting the action of its protagonist as she moves from her assigned place as a wife living in accordance with social expectations based on patriarchal laws to living by herself and according to her own rules. More than depicting mere direct conflict between the two genders, the novel is a compelling narrative of patriarchal domination countered by female resistance to brutal exploitation of females, and the high status granted men, of female characters stepping out of the ideological cocoon of patriarchy. Moreover, *An Unnecessary Woman* gives Aaliya the space to criticize the social order of her country for denying its women any space or significance. Alameddine reverses this situation in the

text first by providing more space to female characters as compared to the male ones, and secondly by depicting the patriarchal system in the Arab world as pitted against female desire and resolution. He attempts to alter the dynamic between patriarchy and social norms, eroding the network of relationships including religious institutions, historical heritage, and cultural norms on which social perceptions have been based. Through the vivid depiction of the female character, Alameddine shifts from traditional postcolonial discourse which uses women as symbols of nation and pays scant attention to the serious challenges that Arab women encounter on a daily basis. *An Unnecessary Woman* is an example of Arab Anglophone fiction that attempts to deconstruct the dominant discourse.

The above paragraph summarizes Alameddine's social view with regard to Arab women, but the question that remains unanswered is, what is the role of literary critics and readers in relation to social change? If fiction writers finish their role the moment they get their work published, then it is the job of readers and critics to shed more light on these issues through the circulation of these themes and ideas and to uncover how these unfair/unjust social practices and beliefs are naturalized and accepted as solid norms through the use and abuse of cultural principles and religious values. And this role is possible through several ways including; delivering public lectures, writing short pieces in newspapers, and contributing to cultural centers.

Chapter IV: The Arab Spring: Causes, Representation, and Aftermath of the Arab Spring in Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer*

Oppression manipulates facts in people's minds, leading people to believe that whoever seeks truth is sinful, that whoever abandons his rights is obedient, that the one who cries out [against oppression] is mischievous, that the perceptive and intelligent are godless, and that the useless one is upright. It transforms genuine advice into intrusiveness, caring for others into enmity, magnanimity into transgression, enthusiasm/zeal into foolishness, mercy into illness, just as it considers hypocrisy to be a policy, manipulation to be civility, and pettiness/villainy to be kindness.

Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, *On the Nature of Oppression*

Introduction

While in the previous chapter I discuss the portrayal of Arab women and challenges they face, this one revolves around a recent historical event, ongoing, named variously as the Arab Spring/ the Arab Uprising/ the Arab Revolution. I will move between different terms for the purpose of invoking different interpretations of the historical event that the different names imply. The Arab revolution is a series of uprisings against autocratic regimes, starting in Tunisia in 2010 and then finding its way into other Arab countries including Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, Jordan, Syria, and Bahrain. This ongoing political movement marks a change of socio-political realities, not only in the Arab world but around the globe. As the embryonic revolution continues evolving, politicians, anthropologists, religious scholars/clerics, literary critics among many others attempt to demystify the causes, the characteristics, and the future outcomes

of the movement and simultaneously to map out its relation to history, to politics, to economics, to education, to colonial legacy, and to the neo-colonial enterprise. However, while these scholars, along with popular media discussions and official political rhetoric, demonstrate the extensive range this political event has marked, these analyses threaten to dissolve it through the use of over-simplifying/ over-stating abstract general terms such as political oppression, the absence of democracy, repression, injustice, and unwarranted cosmic conspiracy conducted by the West to shatter Arabic/Muslim identity, nations, and wealth. Francis Fukuyama, for example, in his recent book *Identity*, writes, “What was shared among all of these protesters was resentment that they had been humiliated and disregarded by their governments” (43). And here Fukuyama reduces the causes of the Arab Spring to the demand for restoring dignity. Too often, the popular media agree with Fukuyama’s view. Yet, this chapter does not intend to provide intensive details encapsulating all the interdisciplinary views; instead, it takes a literary stance in analyzing the seismic impact of this political movement on the region. The magnitude of considering literary representations of the Arab Spring lies in its capacity to evade certainty, to incorporate multiple views, and to mingle history and politics with fiction. Such amalgamation widens the scope for readers to consider multiple dimensions, which in turn provides a more nuanced understanding of the political event.

The Arab Spring as a political uprising is a benchmark for the forlorn situation in the Arab world at all levels; its influence exceeds the limits of the political landscape, sparking a new trend to reexamine political structures, religious beliefs, the socio-cultural thought, and above all the dialectic relationship between an individual and his or her community at large. A recent and current historical event, the Arab Spring has become

the main focus of interest and investigation for many scholars including fiction writers. Moving away from a postcolonial political awareness, contemporary Arab fiction writers have responded to this event through their narratives and have sought to record, explore, and analyze the socio-cultural and political revolution. This chapter, hence, establishes a critical conversation on how the Arab Spring is an example of the turn from traditional postcolonial discourse to concerns in local Arab societies. The principle purpose of this chapter is to investigate the emerging modes of the Arab Spring in the aftermath of the collapse of Arab nationalism and Islamic nationalism as it appears in Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer*. Beyond all Orientalist and neo-Orientalist depictions, the Arab world bears witness a new trend which in turn requires alternative modes of reading emerging realities. The Arab Spring constitutes a social case that needs to be understood, and its short and long term consequences need to be studied. For this reason, this chapter is designed to fit into the larger scale of the dissertation project which argues that Arab Anglophone fiction written after 9/11 detaches itself from traditional postcolonial discourse. The political event chosen for this chapter, as it is an internal political issue, is indicative of the shift the Arab Anglophone fiction takes after the September 11th attacks.

Politics and Arabic Fiction

Politics and literature are connected for they are both concerned with the human; because of their focus on the human, the two are steeped in conflict and uncertainty. Reading political narratives engages particular historical events that shape the current socio-political situation. The political novel is mapped out against the hegemony of existing political structures. It is a soft arm that shakes gradually the political power and

calls for socio-political reforms. With this in mind, the essential formulation of the political system in the Arab world and the growing importance of issues related to politics and globalization of cultures and economies impact the relationship between literature and politics in which the former reflects/criticizes/ comments on some of the practices of the latter. In other words, socio-political concerns are being mooted by Arab fiction writers in order to inspire reforms and contribute to public awareness. In “Arabic Novels and Social Transformation,” Halim Barakat states, “A writer could not be part of Arab society and yet not concern himself with change. To be oblivious to tyranny, injustice, poverty, deprivation, victimization, repression, is insensitively proper” (126). Literature is a human production shaped by politics, ideology, and personal beliefs. In reality, it can be a revolutionary act against some social perceptions; it not only provides a faithful reflection of the status quo but tends to provide critical explorations into social, political, and cultural structures. Feminist and postcolonial discourses are just examples of these attitudes. Ngugi explains the relationship between politics and literature:

Imaginative literature in so far as it deals with human relationships and attempts to influence a people’s consciousness and politics, in so far as it deals with and is about operation of power and relationship of powers in society, are reflected in one another, and can and do act on one another. (72)

Along the same lines, Barakat points out, “Literature can subordinate politics to creative and reflective thinking, and undertake the task of promoting a new consciousness” (137). The political function of literature varies in degrees, yet it reaches its height as society witnesses major political events. Literary production after the September 11 attacks in the U.S., for example, takes a different direction. I have already stated a number of examples

of this trend in my second chapter. In addition to responding to specific events, Third World literature is political by definition due to the political nature of these societies in terms of despotism, oppression, absence of freedom, fake democratic practices, and a long history of colonialism. This political commitment, for instance, becomes accentuated when postcolonial writers reveal their responses to dominant socio-political trends of colonial times. The writings of postcolonial authors have always been politically engaged, highlighting harmful and continuous economic exploitation, political corruption, and attempting to find solutions to political problems.

Within this political upheaval and social and cultural challenges emerge Arab narratives in response to prevailing social realities with all their deficiencies. The premise for the political novel in the Arab world is three-fold. First, the political novel is an attempt to bring about social reform. Secondly, and most importantly, the political novel brings marginalized voices and concerns to the center. It is a way to respond to the dominant political structure through fictional treatment of political events and certain types of rulers. The lack of freedom necessitates reliance on political novels to form a precise understanding of how individuals view political structures within which they live. Thirdly, this literature provides writers with the space to exceed the moment of “the here and now” to go back in time and establish connections between historical events and current socio-political situations; also it gives authors the chance to incorporate fictional views with real events and to move a step beyond the kind of “objective” representations historians create.

Al-Musawi points out three general characteristics of Arab fiction written between the 1950s and the 1990s: “a nationalist search for identity and independence, a

sharp awareness of social and political change in the Arab world, and an urban susceptibility to foreign influences” (117). Al-Muswai suggests these three features shape traditional Arabic postcolonial narrative, bearing in mind that the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a series of political crises including Palestinian uprootedness, the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the invasion of Egypt in 1956, the 1967 war, and the Algerian revolution. All these political events form the general focus of Arabic fiction and inspire it with new themes and forms of expression. Roger Allen, in *The Arabic Novel*, underscores this view: “The Arab writer is committed, particularly in this period of Arab national revival, to producing works with a conscious and deliberate political meaning” (50). These political issues are well captured, for example, in the writing of Najib Mahuz, Abd al-Rahman Munif, Ghassan Kanafani, to name just some of the major figures.

The religious establishment and domineering political structures in the Arab world not only explain the prevalence of political allegory and the indirect gruff criticism of Islam as key features of the Arabic novel, they also use their power to punish some novelists. As Allen explains:

while the accounts in the novels themselves will often reflect personal experience, we do not need to rely on fictional works in order to document the often risky situations into which Arab novelists have placed themselves in fulfilling their role as commentators on and critics of society. Fact can tell us that ‘Abd al-karim Ghallab, Yusuf Idris, and San’allah Ibrahim (among others) have all spent time in prison and/or exile. (88)

Indeed, governments' stance toward criticism prompts the adoption of an allegorical style. This literary technique provides writers with a hidden space to criticize and comment on political and religious concerns. Barakat argues that Arab novelists are not partisans of the established political order, but they are creative critics of their societies. He elaborates, "Contemporary Arab writers have been pre-occupied with themes of struggle, revolution, liberation, emancipation, rebellion, alienation" (126). The allegorical novella of Kanafani entitled *Men in the Sun* (1963), for instance, touches upon the ramifications of Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Palestinian ordeal, and the hypocrisy and lip service of the Arab governments. San'allah Ibrabim's novel *The Committee* follows this same trend, depicting the political situation in Egypt in the late 1970s. It is a highly enigmatic and allegorical political text in which the allegorical dimension hints at effective touches such as the social transformation of the Egyptian community toward capitalism and the dominance of American capitalism; all is reduced to an allegorical treatment of 'Coca-Cola' culture. In the Afterword of the translated copy of *The Committee*, Allen comments, "Readers will, no doubt, immediately notice the way that the entire narrative of *The Committee* seems almost obsessed with the 'Coca-Cola' culture" (162). Abd al-Rahman Munif is another leading voice who comes up with a strong critique of Arab governments that have been responsible for the educational, ideological, and socio-political messes in the Arab world. Almost all Abd al-Rahman Munif's literary productions raise socio-political concerns within the Arab world. In *Sharq al Mutawasset* (East Mediterranean), for example, Munif sheds light on Arab governments' horrific practice of torturing political prisoners. Munif's major concern is to shed light on human suffering and plead for freedom and democracy.

Not all Arab novelists, however, make use of allegory. The writings of the Egyptian novelist, Alaa Al Aswany, by way of illustration, manifest direct and explicit criticism of the political structure in Egypt. Aswany's *Chicago* (2007), for instance, demonstrates straightforward, heated debates around government policies and political reforms in Egypt, yet the political discussions and the call for political reforms take place in Chicago instead of Cairo. Choosing Chicago as a setting for his narrative, Aswany implicitly hints at the difficulty and risk of holding such discussions in his home country because of the dictatorial regime that always, by means of political and military power, blocks any alternative narrative.

As the political rifts and social divides between various social and religious groups seep into the body of the Arab world, they become other important areas which some writers address in their fictional writings. Political and ethnic divisions, sectarian killings, and manipulation of religion become too visible to be ignored. Arab writers, whether writing in English or Arabic, take up specific social and political issues through their writing and provide trenchant commentary on matters of internal and international significance. Their fiction provides a critical perspective on various socio-political and cultural elements contributing to social decay in the Arab world. And here Arab writers add a layer to their direct conflict with political structures, pointing out the role of government politics in the establishment of social perceptions. For a number of Arab authors, the sectarian conflict in the Arab/Muslim world is invoked to serve the official government's agenda. Tyrannical governments in the Arab world exploit these tensions to present themselves as a protector (safe haven) from potential crisis. This view is explicitly presented in El Rashidi's text as the narrator's uncle insists that the government

was behind the attack on a Coptic village. However, the narrator's mother disagrees: "Her best friend Farida was a Copt and said the government was the only thing protecting them. Mubarak and the Pope were one" (123). El Rashidi provides these paradoxical views not only to maintain uncertainty and challenge the official rhetoric but also to demonstrate the payback of political hegemony in which some individuals unquestionably accept the official government rhetoric.

Given the political nature of Arabic literature along with the hope the revolution may bring, it comes as no surprise that the Arab Spring has become an important theme. Significant Arab fiction writers from different countries have reflected on the Arab Spring and its aftermath. In 2013, the Egyptian author Basma Abdel Aziz displays her fictional representation of the Arab Spring in her novel *The Queue*. The Syrian novelist, Khaled Khalifa, also in 2013, published his novel entitled *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*. Also the Iraqi novelist, Ahmed Saadawi gives his take on the Arab Spring in his work *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013).⁸ These novels are written under the pressure that literature is socially and politically connected and is supposed to provide a literary representation of these new political developments. Along the same line, Elisabeth Jaquette and Nariman Youssef "define post-Arab Spring literature as reflecting the aftermath of a historical moment— whether it is the turmoil of war, chaos of proliferating paramilitary groups, or mass repression of coups and transition governments"(qtd In Al-Mousawi). The political nature of Arabic fiction and the disenchantment with existing

⁸ All the three texts have been translated into English.

political systems in the Arab world justify the concentration on the Arab Spring in this chapter.

The Arab Spring: Causes and Consequences

In the midst of countless political crises that underscore the rockiness of the Arab world, the Arab Spring emerges as a solution to reconfigure the political, cultural and social scene. The Arab Spring is used as a demarcation that defines the deficiency of the Arab world. It offers a verdict that condemns Arab regimes for standing between the Arab people and prosperity, freedom, peace, and democracy. However, where does it all start?

Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year old man from Tunisia, worked as a vendor in the poor state of Sidi Bouzid. On December 17th of 2010, Bouazizi set himself on fire intentionally in protest against the police who had confiscated his cart. As a result, peaceful mass protests broke out on the same day in Bouazizi's hometown and rapidly moved to other cities. After a month of peaceful demonstration and due to public pressure, the Tunisian President Ben Ali who had been in office since 1987, fled the country. The initial success of the Tunisian revolution encouraged millions of Egyptians, Yemenis, Libyans, Bahrainis, Syrians, and people from other Arab nations to go out into the streets to protest against their dictatorial regimes. The single act of Bouazizi initiated waves of uprising around the Arab world, toppling long-standing regimes. Although the single act of Bouazizi inspired the Arab uprising, the seeds for the revolution were planted long ago as a result of the authoritarian rulers who have deprived their citizens of their due rights and failed to establish a civil society.

Following the Tunisian uprising, thousands of Egyptians, on the 25th of January 2011, poured into the streets denouncing the Mubarak regime. Hamid Dabashi, in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*, underscores the direct connection between the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, writing, “Such protests were not unusual in Egypt, but this one was different inasmuch as it was in direct response to events in Tunisia” (18). In the next few days, Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981, dismissed his government and promised that he would not run for office in the next election, but he refused the demand of the protestors to step down. The Egyptian protesters kept demonstrating, demanding that Mubarak leave. Barak Obama, then the president of the U.S., called for a smooth transition of power in Egypt. Mubarak, once again, declined all the demands and announced a 15 percent pay raise for all government employees and promised further reform, yet none of his promises satisfied the protesters who kept demanding his departure. Within a month of the fall of Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia, Mubarak was forced to step down.

On 16 February 2011, protests erupted in Libya against Colonel Muammar Qaddafi who had been the ruler of Libya for forty-two years. The Libyan protesters were inspired to revolt after witnessing the Tunisian revolution of December 2010. As an immediate reaction to the uprising, Qaddafi vowed to fight the critics of his government, calling the rebels drug-addled teenagers and promising to chase them in every single corner (McCaffrey). Unlike the dictators of Tunisia and Egypt, Qaddafi threatened to use power against the Libyans who supported the revolution. In “Qaddafi Gave Us No Choice,” Anjali Kamat writes,

Like its counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan uprising began as a largely peaceful and leaderless popular struggle, with the aim of toppling a dictator and establishing a democratic political order. The decision to take up arms and then to ask for international military support was not easy, but from the perspective of almost everyone in eastern Libya, it was born out of necessity. (93)

In fact, on 21 February, hundreds of protesters were killed in clashes with police. In early March of the same year, President Obama asked Qaddafi to leave power and let Libyans decide their own fate. With the continuous refusal of Qaddafi to step down, civil war erupted between Qaddafi loyalists along with mercenaries on one side and the rebels along with NATO support on the other side. On 20 October, Qaddafi's convoy in Surt was hit by a NATO airstrike which left him wounded and desperate. He was later captured by rebels who killed him on the same day.

Other Arab countries, including Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and Algeria, witnessed different forms of upheaval, yet the ultimate political goal was not achieved for various reasons. The intention of this chapter is not to provide a historical account of the Arab Uprising; instead it will deal with it as a social phenomenon and examine how it has been represented in literature. My intention for this section is not to summarize what the East is missing at the political level compared to the normative West in terms of democracy, public participation, and political parties and oppositions. I do not dismiss the importance of these elements, but for this section, I am inclined to consider the social dimension, though the social dimension is not a single unit which can be reduced to its essential origin; instead it is a combination of different perceptions/misperceptions which are

constructed over a period of time by the means of religious establishments, educational systems, and official government rhetoric.

Before moving any further, it is vital to point out that the Arab world is ruled by autocratic leaders, and that oppression and injustice are main characteristics of these political systems. As Dabashi emphasizes:

Until the rise of the Arab Spring, not a single Arab country was ruled democratically – through a free and fair electoral process, predicated on freedom of the press and peaceful assemblies, and leading to a rule of the citizenship via their elected representatives. To this day, countries ranging from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to Jordan, Syria to Libya and Morocco, are ruled by medieval and modern potentates with not a single enduring institution of democracy to their credit. (90)

And this thereby leads to a very enigmatic and even an antagonistic relationship between citizens on one side and their government on the other side. Because of the dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, patriotic feelings, established during the colonial resistance, have been gradually fading, especially with the failure of the pan-Arabism project – a common nation from the Atlantic across North Africa and into the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea—the creation of a Jewish homeland in the land of Palestinians, the spread of corruption at all levels, and repression and torture. An example of the misuse of power that affects the relationship between citizens and their feelings for the nation is rulers use the state of emergency, giving the president more power, putting more restrictions on the movement of individuals, and allowing the government to monitor and ban publications, search citizens and places without warrants, and intern suspects without

trial. On the practice of the state of emergency in Egypt, Ann M. Lesch writes, “The state often referred civilians to Emergency State Security courts and draconian military courts, where officers served as judges and there was no judicial appeals process” (19). All these irresponsible and unfair practices create an unrepresentative political system in which a chasm is established between reality and utopia. “The gap between the Arab society as it exists in reality” writes Barakat, “and as it ought to be in order to confront trying challenges, has contributed to the urgency for basic changes” (127). The immensity of the gap between the miserable reality and the desired one necessitates the need for political reforms.

The Arab Spring as a revolution and at its essential core diverges from historical colonial resistance movements and wars for independence. In the case of independence wars, the target was to revolt against foreign occupation. Moreover, revolutions are different from military coups in which certain high ranking members of an army take over the nation and have full control of the government as in the case of the ‘free officer movement’ in Egypt and military coups in Iraq, Libya and other Arab countries. “No national hero,” writes Dabashi, “such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Gamal Abdal-Nasser, or Mohammad Mosaddegh will emerge from these revolutions” (63). Dabashi sees this as a positive aspect of the Arab Spring because “it was precisely in the shadow of those heroes that tyrants like Muammar Gaddafi, Hafiz al-Assad, and Ayatollah Khomeini grew” (63). The Arab Spring, thus, is a revolution against the inherited political structure. Moreover, it is a revolution against the colonial legacy responsible for the current geopolitical map in the Arab world. And the Arab Spring is a revolution against the Western stereotype of ‘Arab Exceptionalism’ with regards to the un-readiness of Arab

countries for the very Western notion of democracy. To exemplify this, the narrator of the novel under analysis in this chapter points out the impacts of earlier revolutions: “Baba said we had two revolutions and nothing changed. Baba said we need a real revolution” (58).

During the independence period, national heroes, who came into power after independence, inherited –with minor adjustments through religious, tribal, and cultural establishments – the colonizer’s political structure. As Frantz Fanon notes, “once national independence is achieved, the new nation-state elites replace their colonial masters in administering the same institutions that were used to control them” (qtd. in Massad 1). Indeed, a very similar rhetoric that has been used by colonizers to justify their invasion of the colonies is used by the tyrannical leaders of the Arab world to maintain their full authority. If the colonizer’s mission was supposed to bring civilization, justice, education, and true religion to the people of Third World countries and was not for economic exploitation, the despots of the Arab world have claimed that their purpose was/is to ensure stability and safety to the region and not to use/abuse authority for financial benefit to the newly established political elite. Dabashi goes a step further, rightly pointing out, “Those revolutions were fought and won for doubtful gain. They succeeded in ending European colonial rule over the Arab world, but resulted in tyrants who abused their own populations and robbed them of their civil liberties” (126), through education, press, and religious establishments. With the independence period, the Arab people enter a new phase of oppression. And the perilous part of this stage is that the Arab world witnesses a variety of changes at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels especially with the need to establish a modern nation-state, yet elites ensured that they

would maintain power. Despots, in the Arab world, justify their practices as necessary in order to maintain stability. In the Arab world, politics, in collaboration with religion, conspire to deprive citizens of their rights. The Arab Spring emerges as an alternative to challenge the politics of despair which fail to create an egalitarian system.

With this mind, I recall the uprising in Libya; the moment the uprising broke out in Libya, Qaddafi and his son, Saif al-Islam, warned the Libyans that the nation would slide into an overwhelming chaos and eventually collapse if he and his son lost control of the country. In one of his speeches, President Obama criticizes such a claim: "Sometime you will hear leaders say I am the only person who can hold this nation together. If that is true, then that leader has failed to truly build their nation." Of course, Libya slipped into chaos after toppling Qaddafi, but this is not because of the symbolism of the president, but because of the absence of governmental institutions which Qaddafi himself undermined along with prohibiting organized opposition political parties. This type of rhetoric was challenged as Egyptians marched to Tahrir Square in millions affirming their peaceful protest and asking for a smooth transmission of power.

Harkening back to the causes of the Arab Spring, it is crucial to shed light on two important points. The first is although the revolution was the result of cumulative circumstances, no one seemed to expect it, at least in the early 2000s, for three reasons: the pretended iron grip of rulers in the region along with the direct hegemony of religious and media institutions, a deliberate policy of maintaining ignorance which generates a climate of fear, and lastly the inherited solid culture that defies and resists change. The second point is that there has been a growing public awareness that the existing political systems within the Arab world could not cope with socio-political and economic

concerns. A number of factors contribute significantly to public awareness in the region including the bogus promises of political reforms, socio-economic decline, globalization, and above all a social media revolution which uncovers and facilitates access to data and information that otherwise would be blocked by governmental controlled media coverage. The combination of these elements, along with the social media revolution, foreground the voices of those who exist on the margin and have been silenced by, to use Dabashi's terms, knowledge under duress or disposable knowledge. Added to this, the repertoire of traditional government rhetoric has now been exhausted. Indeed, in the decades following the end of World War II, the Arabs seemed to be in isolation from the rest of the world due to intensive media censorship and control of education. While education is supposed to promote pure knowledge, in the Arab world, it serves political agendas and contributes to the preservation of the established political structure and simultaneously it does not boost social justice, equality, and political participation.

On the whole, the general impulse that sparked the Arab Spring was the desperate search for a new political order that would reconstruct and rearrange society in a way that promotes human values and ensures and maintains social justice. In other words, the Arab Spring embodies an explicit commitment to political transformation. "The protesters believed," writes Babgat Korany, "individual action can bring collective colossal change, and so they poured into the streets to translate this belief into political power" (273). And this is what happened as some authoritarian regimes were forced to step down and have disappeared from the political scene. Nonetheless, this utopian reality has not lasted for long as, for example, a military coup took place in Egypt and the Syrian dictator, Bashar al-Assad remains in power.

Yasmine El Rashidi: A New Voice on the Scene

Yasmine El Rashidi does not belong to the literary canon, information on her and her oeuvre being available exclusively from the internet, the press, or short epilogues annexed to editions of her works. Born in 1977, El Rashidi was raised in Cairo, Egypt by an Egyptian family. She is a frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books* and an editor of the Middle East arts and culture quarterly *Bidoun*. El Rashidi has been influenced by her western education and her mother who teaches English literature. These two factors inspire El Rashidi to explore her creative writing ability. *Chronicle of a Last Summer* is her debut novel, published in 2016, but she also has written a non-fiction book entitled *The Battle for Egypt: Dispatches from the Revolution* and an essay entitled “Cairo, City in Waiting” in a volume called *Writing Revolution: The Voices from Tunis to Damascus*. A product of the Arab culture, El Rashidi draws from first hand experience. As she says in her talk on ‘Politics and Prose,’ she writes to express her discomfort with a place called home. Writing from inside, she depicts a clear image of the contemporary Egyptian community. Although El Rashidi composes in English, her portrayal of Egypt is not a response to western rhetoric. Instead she provides a vivid portrait of the life in Egypt. Her craftsmanship lies in the blending of multiple issues and using them to develop her narratives as she incorporates personal concerns with socio-political and economic ones. Her first novel reflects her familiarity with the recent history of Egypt and the accumulation of political events. El Rashidi’s novel displays a distinctive, fresh voice that foregrounds a society in crisis with spreading social injustice and poor living conditions for the lower working class.

El Rashidi is important for this chapter for a number of reasons. First, she is among the first few Arab Anglophone writers to offer an historical account of the Arab Spring, yet she differs from others Arab writers such as Hisham Matar and Saleem Hadadd who write from places of self-exile. El Rashidi not only lived through the revolution, but she was part of it. Her personal experience is joined with her creativity to form an image of the uprising. Secondly, by writing a fictional account, El Rashidi entices readers into an alternate realm. Refocusing readers' attention away from media coverage of the event into the world of fiction provides an insightful perspective on the relationship between people, government, and revolution in a way different from the official mainstream. And more importantly, El Rashidi, in her novel, attempts to contextualize the Arab Spring within the larger contours of contemporary Egyptian history. Because of the discomfort she feels with a place that is supposed to be home, she is compelled to put politics into fiction. Although El Rashidi acknowledges the impact of colonial history and its continuation in the socio-political milieu of Egypt, she deliberately dissociates her narrative from the colonial past and its aftermath. Her primary focus is on internal issues of concerns to Egyptian society. She explores the dark spaces in the nation's history and highlights the hegemonic social, political and religious discourses in Egypt. The last reason for her importance here relates to El Rashidi's narrative technique in which she encapsulates socio-political concerns of the Egyptian people with her micro, fictional representation of a small Egyptian family that represents the macro image of Egyptian society. With this narrative style, El Rashidi establishes a constructive spirit which facilitates a better understanding of current conditions in Egypt.

Chronicle of a Last Summer: The Art of Silence

First published in 2016, *Chronicle of a Last Summer* oscillates between three different historical periods. The novel narrates the events that lead to the eruption of the Arab Spring in Egypt. The timeframes in the text range between 1984 to 2014, yet the narrative shows glimpses of earlier periods. The novel has a confessional, testimonial quality; it is somewhat personal, even autobiographical, and simultaneously the book takes a critical look at the social, political, and economic atmosphere and examines the impact of those conditions on Egyptians' lives. The book is divided into three parts, with each part recounting one tumultuous summer in the life of its unnamed female narrator. Possibly, El Rashidi felt that not specifying the name of her narrator would make her story have more general nationwide applicability rather than being confined to a single individual. Barakat supports this view as he argues that novelists of revolutionary change "bridg[e] the gap between what is public and what is private" (136). The novel is about this narrator's life as she grows up in Cairo and witnesses socio-political events and changes. However, the narrator is not just a witness but also a victim of the political structure. The dichotomy of the narrator's personality is split between her belonging to the upper class, at one point of her life, and simultaneously being a citizen of a politically and economically troubled nation. *Chronicle of a Last Summer* urges its readers to revisit and reinterpret the past with its fundamental constructed perceptions which lead to the dismal reality and later to the eruption of the Arab Spring.

Simply structured with its first person narration, the story is mostly narrated in the form of a monologue, yet without a clear guiding authorial voice. El Rashidi's narrative technique provides readers not only with the details of the protagonist's voyage

from childhood to adulthood but also adds a contemplative perspective on the socio-political culture. By presenting the young narrator as an analytical individual, the text not only gives voice to the hitherto silenced person, but also challenges the rhetoric of the government. In her review of the novel, Rohan Maitzen argues that the first part of the text challenges “the one-dimensional narratives of the government’s incessant TV broadcasts.” As such, the novel works its way through the first-person narrative mode to recover or redeem what has been intentionally omitted in the official government rhetoric. Nonetheless, the novel does not exhibit a smooth plot with a sustained forward push of events since the real significance lies in the twists that El Rashidi lends to the socio-political atmosphere to show that Egypt is politically weak. Moreover, El Rashidi vividly depicts the complexity of significant issues that twenty-first century Egypt is grappling with. She creates a story that fulfills the need for a new form of interrogative writing that challenges hegemonic rhetoric and prevalent, constructed perceptions.

By choosing to have a young girl narrate the story, El Rashidi shifts the marginalized to the center and empowers her protagonist to tell her story with full control. Exploiting this young narrator, El Rashidi achieves three goals: it gives credibility to her story, touches upon issues that otherwise could not be directly addressed, and finally urges her readers not only to listen to voices coming from the periphery but also to revisit their preconceived knowledge and notions of contemporary Egyptian history. The narrative takes on an impressionist quality whereby the narrator reveals/records historical and political events in a form different from that of controlled mainstream media. And at the same time, the narrator avoids taking sides with either the official rhetoric or the contrasting view. El Rashidi maintains this neutral stance by

making full use of minor characters who reveal contradictory views on various matters. To accommodate this asymmetry, she does not give authenticity to any particular storyline. Perhaps the most confusing feature of *Chronicle of a Last Summer* is its switching among historical accounts of political events, personal views of Egypt, and the minor dialogues between the characters around the corridors of power. Through this strategy, El Rashidi adopts a modernist skepticism towards the multiple versions of truth, challenges the dominant national historical narrative, keeps her readers alert, and maintains uncertainty. All these elements contribute to El Rashidi's goal of revealing how citizens become silent and why silence is broken unexpectedly. The text opens in 1984 when the narrator is a six-year old who is a careful observer of the world around her, yet she is often haunted with confusion, uncertainty, and doubt about the social practices/ phenomena which are left unexplained: she is unable to explain the absence of her father, her relationship with her mother, her western education, and war and revolutions. While being skeptical about the reality of her world, she remains silent: "I want to ask many things but Mama does not like me asking too many questions" (18). El Rashidi singles out how social perceptions are inherited from generation to generation. Although El Rashidi sheds light on familial concerns, she hints at socio-political policies. The narrator's mother, as a product of a despotic regime, supposes that silence is a strategy to eschew the harshness of the government.

And 'silence' is the key notion that El Rashidi wants to understand through the process of writing this book, and how silence eventually and suddenly breaks into a mass demonstration. In her talk on 'Politics and Prose,' El Rashidi says, "What I was most

interested in is how we came to be silent.” In an interview with NPR, El Rashidi elaborates on this idea:

There were certain things that we were not to talk about. There were these certain silences that were immense. And at those moments, they consumed and sort of swallowed everything. And when you are told to be silent and when you are told to swallow certain thoughts or certain parts of who you are, it slowly, I think, eats away at everything.

As silence becomes the only alternative, in spite of looking like consent, apart from escape, ambiguity dominates the social scene which makes it impossible to measure people’s satisfaction with their government.

Hence, the purpose of El Rashidi’s book is not only to break ‘silence’ but also to cast a light on the socio-political culture which views ‘silence’ as a way to have a safe and peaceful environment. In her review of the book, Rajia Hassib argues that silence in the novel not only informs the moral core but also underscores the book’s political theme. Hassib adds that silence is an ongoing theme in the novel. What El Rashidi argues against is that the process of silencing does not solve major daily issues. Instead, it is a way of postponing solutions, which in return adds another layer to the already complicated situation, as the narrator describes:

People get scared when you ask them things on the street. For a writing assignment we are asked to approach passersby with the question of what they would like to see improved in their city. People walked away. They looked at me skeptically. They asked who was asking. They asked who was really asking. They said they could not answer such questions. They put their hands up and shook

their heads. They took steps backwards, sideways. They said they could not speak about the city. They could not speak about the country. Sorry. You know how it is. I do not want to get in trouble. I do not want any problems. So why are you asking exactly? (88)

El Rashidi suggests that ‘silence’ parallels oppression. The autocratic regime threatens its citizens with potential severe torture if they speak against their political government: “Mama said it was best to keep such thoughts to oneself” (58). Driven by trepidation and parental instinct, the narrator’s mother internalizes oppression and the absence of freedom of speech as a normal way of life. Socio-political domination then results in silencing individuals through political practices which take legal shape.

Citizens, on the other hand, encounter political hegemony via what I term ‘pretended ignorance’. This stance is exemplified as the narrator works on her documentary and sets her camera on a downtown corner each morning registering the social scene: “Invariably I was asked to leave. When I asked one cart owner why, he said we all know that tomatoes are politics, he did not want any trouble” (122). This mode, as it seems to me, helps individuals to eschew the harshness of the government, yet it pays its share to the state of gloom and despair. “Nobody has a voice,” the narrator’s cousin says, “nor a real sense of who they are. He insists that the streets are simmering, filled with people’s outrage, but our emotions are misplaced, making us silent” (80). With this in mind, I recall Michel Foucault’s studies of the development of western European state power in the modern period and how corporal punishment was/is legitimized. Foucault builds a bridge between western European state rule and the notion of sovereignty in which any violation of state law becomes an affront to the power of the sovereign which

naturalizes corporal punishment as a way of reforming citizen behavior and perhaps thoughts. Of course, Foucault was not talking about Third World countries which are, at the essential level, politically different from European states, yet a connection can be made through the concept of sovereignty in which sovereign nations in the Arab world are merged with the heads of state themselves to the point of becoming one: “There were posters of the presidents everywhere” the narrator says (61). And therefore, criticizing the political leaders of the Arab world is internalized as an insult to the nation which legitimizes punishment for dissenting views. According to the constitution of Kuwait, for example, criticizing the Amir is a crime that leads to five years in jail. To avoid prison and punishment, silence becomes self-policing as a response to the threat of physical force.

The created sacred image of the president’s sovereignty is bolstered deliberately via a number of means including education, media, religion, and punishment if needed. El Rashidi hints at the role of media in consolidating presidential power: “There was never anything in the paper anymore except the bridges the president was building, the new cities, schools, libraries, hospitals he paid for” (76). Two related points are worthy of attention here: 1) the president treats the nation as if it was one of his properties, and 2) there is no distinction between the government’s budget and the president’s accounts. This state of things not only limits the chances for prosperity and improvement, but also establishes a sense of detachment from society. And in the long term it gradually erodes the sense of patriotism, established during colonial resistance, along the lines suggested by Foucault “that power in the modern period controls not necessarily by repressing individuals but by producing them in the first place as subjects subjected to power” (qtd.

in Massad 3). All practice laws of the nation-states in the Arab world are anchored to benefit rulers and their groups of close supporters. Breaking silence, then, is a direct challenge to and criticism of the existing political structure.

The second part of *Chronicle of a Last Summer* begins in 1998 when the narrator is eighteen years old and a film student. In this part, El Rashidi continues to explore the daily concerns of Egyptian society including unjustified access and distribution of wealth and resources, class disparity, power structures, and umbrage with the decaying and degenerating socio-economic milieu of the country. The sense of confusion and uncertainty established and felt in the first part now leads the female narrator into a state of detachment. The sense of isolation is created in both the narrator and her mother:

We had lost most everyone, family first, then the large and varied staff that Granny had kept and Mama inherited. For all the sprawl of the house it was just me and her now...The house was like an echo chamber, most rooms kept permanently closed. You could hear the wind when it would come brushing even lightly against the old wood-framed windows...Mama never spoke about how things had changed, but it hung heavily on her. I could see it in her gestures, how she sat at her dressing table each morning, ends of her hair in hand, combing, endlessly, as if treading in her own oblivion. (73)

Indeed, the narrator and her mother struggle internally with their feelings toward their nation. Egypt, because of its political policies, estranges its citizens from political participation. Individuals are encouraged to participate in fake democratic elections in which the winner is known prior to the official announcement date, let alone the multiple times the constitution has been altered/adjusted to comply with the president's will. The

nature of the political system in the Arab world relegates citizens to the margins of society and has deprived them of their due rights.

The final part of El Rashidi's text records the summer of 2014, three years after the eruption of the Arab Spring. However, El Rashidi also takes her readers to the period prior to the revolution; she offers a fictional reconstruction of the events and circumstances that lead to the uprising, highlighting issues such as: corruption, economic crisis and poverty, and the absence of freedom and democracy. El Rashidi also underscores that the miserable socio-political and economic situation has reached the edge. As the narrator recalls, "Uncle turned to me and asked what I thought. All through the summer he had been saying we were on the brink" (123).

The text establishes and maintains an atmosphere of instability from the beginning. Geo-political tension in the region, military coups, assassination of a president, and the practice of false democracy are consistent features of all three sections. El Rashidi incorporates fictional characters and mixes storylines with real events and historical figures and investigates the mechanisms of power politics in Egypt. The presence of many contesting political events hints at a narrative of uncertainty and challenges the official government version. El Rashidi is preoccupied with the multiple versions of truth. She not only questions the official political version of history, but also provides an alternate narrative to historical events in Egypt. This attitude progresses as the plot of the text moves forward and furnishes the narrative with a symbolic pattern, helping to perceive political events on a more personal level. And here El Rashidi merges the political with the personal and provides more than one perspective on political events. In El Rashidi's text for example, not all the characters glorify the earlier revolution

against monarchy. The narrator registers the different views toward the Egyptian President, Nasser: “Dido says Nasser was a great man. The men who made the revolution were all great but their children are corrupt. Nasser did great things for Egypt. Mama does not like him. Baba does. Dido hopes there will be another Nasser one day” (54).

Then the narrator states in details her uncle’s point of view of Nasser:

He had no vision. He was delusional. He did not think into the future. He took from the rich and gave to the poor. It was the worst thing he ever did. The poor got things for free and then became lazy. They got land and benefit then thought they could do nothing and Nasser would still give them more. He also made education free, which was very expensive, and so very quickly he did not have the money to pay for it anymore. . . . Students had to start taking private lessons. They started memorizing and stopped thinking. Everyone became lazy and stopped thinking. It was a lethal combination. (55)

After recording the contrasting points of view towards Nasser, the narrator states the supposedly irreproachable government official version: “At school they taught children that all the Egyptian presidents were great. Only the king was bad. Why was the king bad? Because he was a creation of the British” (56). Highlighting the different views, El Rashidi questions the official version of truth and sheds light on how the education system is geared to enhance certain political perceptions.

The Arab Spring: Cheated Generation

The subheading ‘Cheated Generation’ alludes to a recent review of El Rahsidi’s text by Rajia Hassib entitled “A Novel of Egypt’s Cheated Generation.” Too often Arabs are deceived through the manipulation of political rhetoric including: slogans of Arab

nationalism, Pro Palestinian and anti-Israeli propoganda, warnings on the potential threat of terrorism, and intensive emphasis on Islamic discourses that concentrate on blind obedience to the guardian. And the ‘guardian’ in contemporary time, according to the semi-government religious school, is the head of state. Incorporating these types of rhetoric, the Arab governments create a situation whereby whenever citizens call for political reforms, the governments pick one or more of these excuses to justify a delay. To bring an end to this type of constructed knowledge production is no simple feat because of a long history of political domination of religious schools, devastation, and impoverishment. El Rashidi is aware of the government’s strategies to cheat its citizens, and throughout the novel she not only highlights how these unwritten systematic policies operate in society, but also attempts to deconstruct them by singling out their negative impacts.

El Rashidi underscores the significant contribution of media coverage in promoting the government’s political rhetoric and maintaining the ignorance of citizens. The media in the Arab world is doubly bound to the official political rhetoric. The political government’s full control of the public media skews some social perceptions with the aid of censorship laws to ensure that only the government’s point of view is broadcast. In the first part of El Rashidi’s text, the narrator hints at the careful selection of daily episodes:

I turned to the TV. They were replaying pictures of starving children in Ethiopia. Every day we watched them...There are also starving children in Cairo, but they never show them on TV. I see them in the streets on the way to school... After the famine they replay the documentary about Sadat...Next they play the video of the

new president, Mubarak... They show him cutting the ribbon and shaking people's hands. Baba said it was the making of a pharaoh. (6-8)

El Rashidi reveals the atrocious deed hiding under a cloak of entertainment. The political government uses, sometimes indirectly but in most cases directly, the media, what is supposed to be 'the fourth authority', to promote its ideology and agenda. As a result of the government's domination of the media, only one single viewpoint, one that serves the political agenda, is presented and over time it is taken for granted as an absolute truth. The narrator's mother uses a metaphor to explain this attitude: "It was like looking at a painting and someone telling you that you see one thing, but you know that when you look, you see something else. Then every time they show you a painting, they do the same things. You do not believe them anymore. After a while you stop caring" (60-61). If media is no longer a reliable authority, then it only serves to glorify the government's fabrication: "The only people who are allowed to film on the streets are the TV. They work at the Egyptian Radio and Television Union. If you work there, you are also the TV. You are someone tied to the surveillance state" (91). Ostensibly the government controls the media and the divulgence of information which ensures in return that the government's failure at the socio-political and economic levels would not be revealed. To exemplify this, El Rashidi provides real events from recent Egyptian history:

At the bottom of the front page was a picture of Toshka, the president's New Valley Project, intended to turn thousands of acres of desert into agricultural land. Uncle called it the greatest failed promises of any president...Everyday Al-Ahram ran stories about the promise of Toshka. It had been ten years. (132)

Because of the lack of transparency and accountability, the government's failed projects are not revealed and no one is held accountable for such violations of trust which have a direct, negative impact on living conditions for Egyptians.

El Rashidi also points to another unfair practice used by the government to keep its citizens under total control. In the text, the professor of sociology states:

The drug market is largely controlled by the state's security apparatus... It is convenient for the government that *ful* (bean) is the national food since beans make people sleepy...And that is why the government floods the market with cannabis. The street name is hashish. (87)

Overtly, El Rashidi blames the government for using a prohibited means to sustain complete obedience of its people. The more dangerous result of this act is that it disintegrates ties between an individual and his community. Indeed, it puts community cohesiveness into jeopardy.

Burdened with so many crises related to the existing political system, almost all characters in the novel are pre-occupied with political concerns and defiantly reject the prevailing political structure, yet some of them are conditioned not to confront their government. For example, Dido tells the narrator that her "placid exterior is a mask" (114). One of the problems surrounding the governments in the Arab world is that the practice of absolute power has become so normal that its injustice, corruption, and torture go completely unremarked. Moreover, El Rashidi sheds light on the financially and morally corrupt Egyptian military junta: "Army clubs and government cafes take what space they can down to the banks, reserved only for those in upper executive ranks" (75). The intentional environmental transformation conducted by the military power is a

signal of the deteriorated socio-political atmosphere, which in turn adds another dimension to the social and economic crisis, as seen in a conversation the narrator tells us about with her uncle and her mother:

A national monument has been destroyed...the most elegant circular walkway in the world, perhaps even the only one...Uncle groaned about the government's neglect, not even informing people that the square would be closed...The square was a mess, the lawn and fountain covered in rubble...erasing the identity of a city. Everything we ever knew will be gone. Anything with traces of past histories. It was the legacy my generation would inherit, one of destruction and loss. He was sad for what we had been born into. Tadmeer. Tadmeer. It meant devastation. He worried it was who we had become. (76-77)

Indeed, El Rashidi uses the transformation of the environment to stress the government's negative impacts; the color of the Nile and the beautiful natural scenery around the city have deteriorated. “[W]atching the Nile and looking out onto the expanse of green fields...All we could see now beyond the sliver of Nile and the bushes of the garden were miles of a sepia city, and past that, in a horizon marked by a chalk line of rust red, the informal settlements” (124). El Rashidi intentionally ties ecological damage to insufficient governmental action. We read of “Rows and rows of redbrick and concrete buildings, unfinished, not connected in any way to the infrastructure of the built city” (125), and th Dido responses, “It was there...that the fight would erupt” (125). The continuous poor government performance would eventually lead to the uprising.

El Rashidi depicts the pervading atmosphere of the 1990s as one of melancholy or even despair, of perceived decadence and agonizing pointlessness and disillusionment.

Her discourse sets itself against the autocratic regime which falsely presents itself as in alliance with citizens to achieve prosperity, yet citizens failed to take serious steps to curb government abuses. Dido, the narrator's cousin, explains that "We are too passive...and have the capacity neither for revolution or for love" (79). The long history of domination paralyzes people's ability to find a rational solution. El Rashidi moves on to criticize the public for failing to acknowledge the need for political reforms and act upon it:

In the past two years there have been gatherings of people in the square with signs chanting for Palestine. Nobody ever mentions Egypt. People generally do not talk about the status quo even though everyone yearns for change. I do. It seems that politics is at the foreground and background of everything yet not something that can be impacted in any way. Mama wishes things were different, though she never says so in direct ways. But I can tell. Even when she smiles or laughs, I can see her sadness is much greater, a melancholy so steeped in who she is. I am not sure anyone I know is deeply angry, even as they are unfulfilled, restless, somewhat resigned. Uncle complains about things, laments, talks about the incompetency of government, but not with the vehemence of anger that Dido suggests. (84)

Ignoring daily social crises and focusing their attention on utopian fantasies of liberating Palestine demonstrates that the government in Egypt succeeds in diverting people's attention away from their real social concerns.

The miserable social life in Egypt is the result of the political structure. As the narrator's uncle describes it, "corruption and thievery were what made the country. Without those things it would fall apart" (118). Foiled by such contradictions, the

characters are united in their need for political reforms, yet people seem to comply with the status quo rather than to rebel against it. By using various imagery and symbols, El Rashidi maintains a continuous atmosphere of alarm, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Moreover, the life in Egypt, due to economic decline and socio-political corruption, has reached an unbearable stage. The future for the young generation is bleak: “Most young people can not afford to build independent lives. Love is a calculation, of resources and pedigree” (126). Dido bluntly describes the life in Egypt, “The way we live our lives is no better than death” (85). The narrator’s descriptions of her surroundings are replete with ominous signs which insinuate the government’s flagrant collusion in economic corruption:

Baba pointed to one man one morning. He looks at least ninety, does not he? I nodded. But you will never believe that he is actually my age. We did business together. He ran the most successful cement business...They put him in jail. They could not benefit in any way because he was straight. They forged papers. Ten years, look at what they did to him. There was a time when either you stayed and lost your life, or you fled. (148)

Instead of addressing the social concerns of its citizens, the government keeps frustrating them by naturalizing corruption. Because the political system is broken, the desire for individual financial benefit and interest undermines patriotism. In this scene, El Rashidi points out that the purpose of political leaders is not to significantly promote the prosperity of the nation, but to experience and enjoy wealth and authority which in turn creates a fragile political system. All these irresponsible and unfair practices are part of an unrepresentative political system in which a chasm is created between reality and

dreams. The narrator recalls conversation with her uncle in which he depicts the miserable situation in Egypt:

We were breaking down. It was like a building, Uncle said. Filled beyond measurable proportions, badly wired, with extensions, borrowed power, borrowed pipes. He would look at me and shake his head, say nothing, but I knew what he was thinking. He had said it many times before over the years. This was what my generation was inheriting. It was up to us to mitigate the losses, the mistakes.

(124)

The political structure constructs an army of masses who suffer under these dire circumstances and do not question the government political discourse.

Yet, in hindsight, the dupes show their anger based on feelings of despair, resentment, discontent, anxiety, and powerlessness. El Rashidi is very explicit in her portrayal of the duped individuals through a number of characters including, the narrator herself, her uncle, her parents, and her cousins. Almost all the characters are portrayed as being in strife with their society, with others, and even with themselves, and to some extent all of them seek to escape from reality. The narrator's mother intentionally isolates herself and does not contribute significantly to her society: "Mama stared out of the window. She was sad for Egypt" (60). However, after the revolution, she becomes an active member of her society. The narrator also tells us about one of her cousins who fled the country for political reasons. His flight from his home country shows the high price of freedom. Nonetheless, it was not until the next century that the Arab Spring was initiated. The Arab Spring, thus, emerges as an alternative to the political projects in the Arab world which fail significantly to create democratic systems that rise to the standards of

contemporary modern nations. The Arab Spring erupts to resist the pre-established hierarchical structures and reject political authority as a sign of absolute power.

The Arab Spring and the Inherited Intransigent Culture

Since political tyranny, economic crises, and corruption, and social injustice remain prevalent in the Egyptian community, El Rashidi singles out some cultural practices as obstacles to socio- political reforms. For her, the inherited, to some degree solid, Arab culture does its part in postponing socio-political reforms. She dissects in detail this aspect of Arabic culture. As the narrator states:

Ours was not a culture used to change. Permanency was valued. We lived in the same places we were born in. We married and moved around the corner. A job was held for decades. The less change, the less movement, the better. It was a view to stability, rather than the oppression I had internalized it to be. Everyone we knew preserved lives as they were, over generations. Sofas stayed covered in plastic, glass cabinets with proliferating displays were not to be touched, every gift, every token, every ticket, stuffed somewhere, or in a drawer. Most people's homes were like time capsules, offering panoramic views of every year until the present one. (129-130)

This facet of Arabic culture keeps people silent in times of injustice and domination. This cultural condition was/is empowered by the political structure that infiltrates the body of culture through the use of religion. El Rashidi illustrates this point when Dido replies to the narrator's uncle's question about whether he tips the parking attendant or not, "it was culture not corruption" (119). Naturalizing corruption by describing it as a cultural practice is a mean of escape from confronting reality and questioning the roots of such

practices. When corruption takes a cultural form, it is clear that it has not only reached its highest point, but also the great majority of people find it more convenient to comply to it rather than rebel against it which in turn contributes to the intentional ignorance that the government imposes. By the end of the first part, the narrator reveals what her Grandmother told her: “[I]t is better not to know too much anyway” (68). Historical and political knowledge, beyond what the government permits, *de facto* appears as a potential threat to the political structure. And this is why the government, by the means of systematic education which is biased by nature, provides only one version of history.

Traditional upbringing creates a hesitant identity; all the characters occupy the uncertain ground between individual freedom and submission to the political power. The narrator, for example, asks her father why so many people wanted Nasser to stay in power. “He muttered something about heroism, then said he was not sure. He did not have an answer for me” (81). This type of identity is the product of a combination of political structure and traditional upbringing. As the narrator’s uncle puts it, “We act out of fear. We always choose what we know best, even if it means compromise” (82). Thus, people’s unwillingness to rebel has its origins in the combination of their traditional education, which groomed them to conform to the will of the collective and the power of the government which enforces conformity and obedience. Nonetheless, the narrator is uncertain of her own cultural allegiances, and thus she is besieged with doubts.

The slide into globalization is a sign of cultural metamorphosis in which change-oriented movements emerge as an alternative to reform society. El Rashidi elaborates her view through the revolutionary figure, Dido, who reads Russian literature and mixes words of the two languages:

He uses a word, *poranbeyar*, to explain our emptiness. A kind of devastation. Something passed on, by the generation before. A word he invented, hybrid Arabic and Russian. There isn't a language for what we are living. We need our own vocabulary, not just new forms in literature and art. He is teaching himself Russian because he thinks that in their literature he might find answers, a language that speaks to all he feels about the politics of our times. (80)

El Rashidi shows the impulses for political reforms, originated by the younger generation. As the narrator tells us about her cousin's hope: "He wants the next generation to be comrades" (79). The Arab Spring itself sometime is described as 'the young generation revolution.' Instead of being subdued due to their peripheral status, the young people exploit the social media revolution to deconstruct and respond to a more powerful discourse that relegated them to the margins. More importantly, the social media revolution helps young people to distance themselves culturally from the previous generation and create a new language for social and political reforms.

The Arab Spring: Breaking Silence

The growing resentment in the Arab world because of unfair exercise of political authority makes mass eruption inevitable. All the political turmoil and uncertainty depicted in the first two parts of El Rashidi's novel furnish the ground for people to break the feigned silence and to rebel against the fossilized beliefs that the Egyptian government cannot be challenged. "There had been problems with the government" (114), the narrator comments on her final page of the second part. Ending the second section with these words, El Rashidi shows that the seeds for revolution had become

increasingly ready to bloom; the narrator's uncle tells her, in the months before the revolution, "to learn to feel the air change. It was all in the sounds, the way particles moved, echoed. The sound of the city had shifted" (123). When the narrator directly asked him, "Is it possible? Could it happen?" he "said it was inevitable, eventually some change would come" (125). The eruption of the Arab Spring is socially motivated as individuals find it extremely hard to cope with the miserable economic and political situation.

El Rashidi critiques the political structure in Egypt throughout the novel and establishes a cause and effect relationship between the dictatorial regime and the Arab Spring. The Arab uprising emerges as a reaction to the long history of oppression, domination, and corruption: "Things built up: our frustrations, desires. And we all released something, given the chance. Our breaking point was about opportunity, human emotion being offered an outlet, in tandem discovering its source" (150). The protestors are portrayed as strong young people, and they engage in positive struggles at the social level for the overthrow of dictatorial forces. Their rebellion is all the more significant especially when viewed as uncommon acts of resistance against the political structure. Dabashi states precisely what the Arab Spring has achieved:

The revolutionary uprisings targeted domestic tyrannies that had feigned revolutionary resistance to foreigners whilst in effect facilitating it. Their power lay in the fact that corrupt tyrannies ranging from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Libya could no longer pretend they were fighting or resisting imperialism while they were abusing their own people. They were exposed for the frauds that they were. (125)

The incipient outcome of the uprising not only undermines autocratic regimes and their mercenaries, but also reveals that Arab people are gaining strength and becoming more aware of their rights and roles as citizens. The narrator tells us about her mother's reaction to the revolution: "She had been scared when the protests had begun those years ago, but then after a few, she said she felt liberated" (151). But, this political freedom does not last long as the Egyptian army ousts the first elected president.

The Arab Spring marks the public reintegration into the socio-political scene. The narrator's mother, for example, after the revolution becomes socially active, "she has become involved with a community association, writes letters and petitions, joins marches, spends what free time she has walking around the city taking pictures of things that need to change" (174). The patriotic feeling that was fading as a result of the authoritarian regime is ignited again as people start making their own fate: "the revolution has connected us to a past that preceded us...I have gone back into our history books to understand...I can not believe all this I did not know" (157). And here once again, El Rashidi alludes to the deficient educational system which provides only one dimension of history to promote the Egyptian government's agenda.

The Incompleteness of the Arab Spring

Although the Arab Spring, to some extent and for some time, has inspired enthusiasm and self-confidence, its ultimate ends are still incomplete. El Rashidi goes a step further to depict the uprising as a doubtful revolution. The narrator incorporates multiple views towards the revolution which all contribute to her indecisive stance. And by doing so, El Rashidi attempts to point out the gap between the ideal and real, the incomplete mission of the revolution acting as a mediator between the two. The narrator's

father tells her, “he knew a revolution would change nothing” (176). On the other hand, another character has a flyer “denouncing Morsi’s⁹ ouster, calling for solidarity with the democratically elected government and legitimate president” (155). The narrator herself is not very clear of her position either: “I wonder if my position is too often ambiguous” (152). El Rashidi continues to challenge the singular version of truth and reality and goes on to highlight an ongoing discrepancy among individuals with regard to the revolution and its aftermath.

After the ouster of its first fairly elected president in 2013, Egypt politically returns back to the reign of despotism, “A building-size flyer of the new president, Sisi, hangs off the side of one, two, I count five buildings on the street... Things become darker, like paint” (152). Sovereignty de novo is established in the form of the president. And freedom of speech and fair elections are in jeopardy with the new despot in charge. As the narrator relates, “I have become weary about engaging in political conversation” (156). Later the narrator reveals how Sisi was elected in a fake democratic manner: “Most people I know voted for him. Mama, Baba, even H. What other choice did we have? If you had given me another option. Me, I had slept through that day, waking up only after the ballot had closed” (177-8). By opting to depict the unfair election and how Sisi came into power and has total control of the country, El Rashidi asserts the provisional failure of the Arab Spring, “The second defeat, our second Naksa¹⁰”(161). El

⁹ Mohamed Morsi was the first democratically elected president in June 2012; he served as a president until July 2013, when the Egyptian army ousted him and incarcerated him.

¹⁰ Naksa is an Arabic name for the defeat of the Arabs during the 1967 War, yet El Rashidi uses the word here to refer to the failure of the Arab Spring.

Rashidi implies that the abortive revolution would carry the same negative impact as the one Naksa had brought.

Conclusion: The Arab Spring and Beyond

And now Egypt has politically returned back to the days prior to the Arab Spring in which a military general wears the uniform of a civil president, yet this does not make Egypt a democratic state. Furthermore, the fuel that ignited the revolution has not been completely consumed. The suffering Egyptians are still enduring, politically and economically, keeps the flames burning. The question, then is: Has the Arab Spring reached its end and has history repeated itself whereby Egypt experiences a series of revolutions, yet power remains in the hand of the military, or is there another chance for revolution and reformation?

Chronicle of a Last Summer opens up all the possibilities: Will there be a further revolution or a momentary period of stability under the military's authority? "We anticipated, always that something might erupt" (161). Another minor character in the novel tells the narrator that "He is learning that history is repeating itself" (157). Within a consideration of these two views, I wish to add here that a number of Arab intellectuals such as Mohammed El Baradei draw a connection between the revolutions of Europe in 1848 (the Spring of Nations) and the Arab Spring, suggesting that authoritarian regimes may temporarily succeed in suppressing people, but ultimately the will of the people will prevail.

Leaving all the possibilities open conforms with El Rashidi's view and purpose in challenging unitary version of truth. *Chronicle of a Last Summer* attempts to contextualize the revolution within a historical framework. El Rashidi delves deep into

historical and political events, providing multiple versions of narrative related to the political atmosphere in Egypt. The text provides an opportunity to understand the socio-political factors that contribute to the eruption of the Arab Spring. By re-examining the three different periods through the eye of a range of different people, El Rashidi highlights the series of events that lead to the revolution and its aftermath. She chronicles recent history of Egypt, weaving a fictional story into it. Intermixing the two not only challenges the one version of truth but also elevates literature a step above historical narrative.

Conclusion

Our task as Arabs and Palestinians is to pay closer attention to our own national narrative, which is neither an idle aesthetic pursuit nor something that can be continually postponed. Edward Said. “The Politics of Memory,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

I began this project by discussing what I thought to be limitations of the framework of postcolonial theory, and I will conclude here by returning to the theory. What I hope this dissertation project has shown is that postcolonial theory, while it is a vital tool in the defense of formerly colonized nations, has demonstrated a theoretical insufficiency when applied to the culture of indigenous people, in particular with issues related to internal concerns in the Arab world, including: manipulation of religious discourse, terrorism, sectarianism, the fragmentation of Arab nations, cultural construction of women, and gender relations. The theoretical insufficiency of postcolonialism is bound up with secular assumptions embedded in the traditional theoretical framework of the theory with its irrevocable trinity: Said, Spivak, and Bhabha. “The secular background,” writes Hassan Majed, “of key postcolonial writers and critics has caused them to favor freedom of speech above the sensitivities of religious culture” (226). The secular assumptions of postcolonial theory make it insufficient to address the

complexities of indigenous cultures in the Middle East where religious values and cultural traditions play a major role in socio-cultural construction.

Another shortcoming of postcolonial theory is its focus on a particular pattern of the historical past that reinscribes the privilege of colonial powers and at the same time neglects other histories and facets of indigenous culture. In other words, postcolonial theory ties to colonial literary productions and western schools of thought creates excessive reliance on preexisting perceptions, ambiguities, and miscommunications about the theory. Furthermore, the legitimacy of understanding Third World literature as only a practical application of theory indeed manifests cultural myopia in which key questions about indigenous cultures are left unstated and unexplored. What I mean here is that the practitioners of postcolonial theory attempt to fit literature into the general premises of the theory instead of expanding models to consider complexities that literature is already engaging. Ashleigh Harris in "Facing/Defacing Robert Mugabe" takes a similar stance as she argues that "postcolonial theory is in danger of actively refusing to engage knowledge production from Africa [we might add the Arab world] for the purpose of sustaining its own project of advocacy" (106). That is to say although postcolonial theory debunks epistemological and ontological exploitation of others, it cannot account for the current complex life in once colonized nations.

Of course, postcolonial theory has occupied a prominent place in western institutions, yet in its most telling deployments it remained polemic. It is studied/ used for the desire of producing knowledge about the Other. Moreover, the binary division that formerly shaped the relationship between the civilized West and uncivilized East may well seem antiquated after the seemingly political reconstruction of the once colonized

nations. Altering the creed that shaped the earlier perceptions of the world into two parts, the West and the East, requires a different intellectual framework for knowledge production. Postcolonial theory—despite its multiple claims to the contrary—is and continues to be shaped by the colonial legacy. The theory, within its academic context, is trapped by time and geography. Criticism of this academic attitude has been legion. Harris criticizes the theory on the basis of its “circumvent[ing] knowledge production” (106). Although traditional postcolonial discourse seemingly/supposedly is a partial riposte to the pseudo-assumptions of colonial discourse, it indeed reproduces/ rewrites the colonial literature, yet from a different experience. As many critics argue, postcolonial literature is not an entity by itself per se, and its qualities are usually defined in its relation to colonial legacy.

The September 11 attacks have brought the division between the West and the East back into focus, yet within the context of a different reality in which Islam has been summarily identified as antagonistic to the West. With this new reality, Anouar Majid writes that 9/11:

marks a turning point for postcolonial studies. It forced us to distinguish between the blending of populations and economies, and the dissolution of cultural and religious identities. Both phenomena are real: one holds promise for raising living standards; the other represents political perils.

Enthralled by the creed of representation, power operation, and western academic tendencies, postcolonial critics look for signs that match with the academic trend, instead of the ones that could destabilize or challenge the theory. Thus postcolonial studies now

tends to be marked by repetitiousness which in turn raises doubts that theoretical practice may not be sufficiently grounded in current realities.

In this vein, the Indian/American historian Vinay Lal writes, “Even among the adherents of postcolonial studies...there is a growing recognition that exhaustion has set in, the questions put on offer are predictable, and that one is only likely to encounter regurgitation of familiar arguments.” The potential problem lies in the reluctance to address other issues in the wake of the 9/11 attacks with subsequent geopolitical and social changes and the shrinking of the world as a result of globalization. Moreover, Anna Bernard, Ziad Elmarsafy, and Stuart Murray, in their introduction to *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say*, write that “all manner of critical cultural fields or projects arguably appear less theoretical than they did a generation ago” (2). Indeed, there are trendy themes that postcolonial theory revolves around, including: representation, hybridity, mimicry, and subaltern studies which in most cases make little sense to people not affiliated with academia because of the deployment of elitist jargon. To solely dwell on these themes hinders theory’s ability to cope with socio-political changes. And this is why Lal talks about the growing sense of ‘postcolonial fatigue’. Other scholars, as Robert Young in “Postcolonial Remains” mentions, move further and pronounce the end of postcolonial theory on the basis of “relating it to the world from which it comes and for which it claims to speak: that outside Europe and North America” (19). However, Young in his article holds out against this view and underscores the importance of postcolonial theory claiming: “its objectives have always involved a wide-ranging political project— to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below” (20). For Young

the field is still open for progress as we move into the twenty-first century. In fact, Young goes further to argue that for some scholars, the continuous presence of postcolonial studies in western academia provokes anxiety:

The desired dissolution of postcolonial theory does not mean that poverty, inequality, exploitation, and oppression in the world have come to an end, only that some people in the U.S. and French academies have decided they do not want to have to think about such things any longer and do not want to be reminded of those distant invisible contexts which continue to prompt the transformative energies of the postcolonial. (20)

It seems to be an academic fashion to proclaim the death of one school of thought and at the same time celebrate the emergence of another one. As a subfield to humanities studies, literary theories build upon/contribute to each other and do not come to an end, simply because some critics announce their death. The field is infinite and also the literary theories are not in contest with each other; instead they are in a constant state of cross-pollination, leading to further developments in the fields of the humanities. And this is why humanistic studies prioritizes inconclusiveness over completion. With this in mind, I turn back to postcolonial theory; although its politicized rhetoric is muted and mitigated by geopolitical changes, the theory still is capable of being adjusted and reshaped to deal with all these changes since its foundational premises revolve around the dynamics of power, knowledge production, and the construction of identity and ideology. All these basic elements are not a set of facts, but rather they are subject to change in accordance with socio-political circumstances.

Indeed, the absence of a structuring system of postcolonial theory leads to ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion. Such theory lies at the intersection of multiple issues which can be used for developing a better understanding of postcolonial nations and culture, and at the same time deconstructing the colonial assumptions of the postcolonial countries. Thus, traditional postcolonial theory/discourse engages in a direct dialogue with western institutions to revise perceptions and provides an alternative route toward understanding the other part of the world. Yet, postcolonial theory/discourse is bound up in western epistemology that deals with the world in accordance with its biased criteria. One unfilled space is a consideration of domestic concerns in formerly colonized nations.

Thus, my dissertation project attempts to explore the space available between postcolonial theory and traditional postcolonial discourse as we slip into the twenty-first century and witness many major political events which carry subliminal social changes. The study contributes to the flourishing scholarship on postcolonial theory. It engages critically with the current conversation about the theory. However, the project does not have a bridging mission; instead it traces the new direction that Arab Anglophone literature takes in the wake of September 11 and points out the relations between internal concerns (particularly in the Arab world) and the premises of postcolonial theory. By considering postcolonial theory along with contemporary Arab Anglophone literature, I aim to draw attention to the local concerns that the people in the Arab world are grappling with and at the same time to shed light on the limitations of postcolonial theory on reflecting those issues. Highlighting the internal concerns in the Arab world, to a certain degree, provides an accurate depiction of society from within and reveals how

social perceptions and ideology are constructed, how some people are radicalized and become extremists in the name of religion, how religious discourse has been used/misused to serve political agendas, how gender relations and inequality are established and operate in society, what is the nature of the political order, and what are the causes for the Arab Spring.

The introductory chapter of this study surveys the variety of elements that account for the new position taken by Arab Anglophone writers. Departing from traditional postcolonial discourse, contemporary Arab Anglophone fiction writers begin to move into significantly new directions. They deconstruct the government's rhetoric of anti-colonial resistance as a binding force to hold society together. The sense of despair that pervades the Arab world finds its fullest expression in the growing and evolving corpus of contemporary Arab Anglophone fiction which has shifted from the writing back stance to concentrate on issues which shape the despair of daily life in the Arab world. Treating local issues in the Arab world is not a simple task because it entails integration of controversial elements such as: religious discourse and practice, cultural norms and beliefs, social restrictions and expectations, and political power and order, which in turn create a social atmosphere filled with myriad of contradictions. Nonetheless, contemporary Arab Anglophone writers address certain facets of these institutions and single out their roles as social forces in establishing social conventions and perceptions.

In effect, the basic argument has been that subsuming works that are concerned with issues of internal significance in the Arab world under the banner of Arab Anglophone literature is a politicization that is more effective than reliance on certain facets and themes of postcolonialism. Indeed, the peculiar conditions of the Arab world

favor the growth of literary productions that are inclined to move beyond the level of consolation and guiding awareness to the level that seeks answers to social, cultural, and political problems. Arab Anglophone writers' shift in emphasis reveals intensified emphasis on the failure of the political systems to establish nations that meet the standards of modern countries in which social justice, democracy, and freedom of speech are granted.

The sample of contemporary Arab Anglophone literature discussed in this project provides analysis of diverse issues of internal concerns along with their relationship to the global scene. Analyzing contemporary Arab Anglophone fiction shows its profound associations with political, social, and cultural contexts. The analyzed literature reveals that Arab Anglophone writers create their own perceptions toward Arabic culture, society, politics, and religion (Islam). In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to trace the recurrence of certain themes related to the darkness of the Arab world. In contrast to traditional postcolonial novelists who single out colonial history as a major cause for their societies' current social and economic disintegration, contemporary Arab Anglophone writers demonstrate a shift from colonial history and its aftermath to focus on the local institutions. Following the September 11 attacks, Islam and socio-cultural and political forces have powerfully determined trends and directions within the realm of the Arab world.

Contemporary Arab Anglophone fiction, then, has evolved to accommodate and negotiate the changing nature of the Arab world in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Instead of using universal conspiracies and/or colonial history as a scapegoat for the faltering social, economic, and political situation in the Arab world, Anglo-Arab

writers concentrate on recent failures and contextualize them in a criticism of deeply entrenched conventions related to political power, theology, and cultural norms.

Overall, in addition to bringing a relatively new corpus of work to the attention of academic audiences, this dissertation aims to provide a better understanding of the Arab world, Arab culture, the role of religion in society, gender relations, and political structure and of how all these elements operate in society. However, there are limits to what this dissertation does. A study of this nature could be massive because of the significant increase in Arab Anglophone literary productions, yet I narrow my research down to consider only four Arab Anglophone writers as a way of providing a sampling rather than full representation. Moreover, I focus on a specific period of time and trace major common themes. Considering other Arab Anglophone writers, texts, and themes would definitely add new dimensions to Anglo-Arab studies. Arab Anglophone literature is not a monolithic discourse. For that matter, not all writers, for example, have the same view with regards to Islam or the veil. Leila Aboulela's fiction, for instance, challenges not only western stereotypical images of Islam but also other Arab Anglophone writers who call for essential renovation of Islam and Islamic discourse. Aboulela displays a less secular stance toward Islam. Her political position is different from that of many other Anglo-Arab writers. A detailed study of Aboulela's portrayal of Islam, the veil, and religious discourse could help to grasp perceptions of Islam and Muslims which are different from the mainstream images.

Indeed, the last two decades have witnessed a significant growth of Arab Anglophone literary productions. The new novels being published in the English language remain largely unexplored; as Nash notes: "an ignorance of writings by Arabs

in English is almost total” (1). And here I will single out a number of contemporary Arab Anglophone writers who are not well known in academia: Jamal Mahjoub, Tony Hanania, Hisham Matar, and Susan Abulhawa to mention just a few. Those contemporary writers, among many others, take postcolonial discourse to a new dimension to deal with issues of current significance. They go beyond the celebrated postcolonial themes of hybridity and cross-culture encounter, mimicry, representation and speaking for, and national identity and nation construction to investigate on concerns of internal importance that contribute to the despair of the Arab world.

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