

A Nation of Narrations: Religion, Hegemony, & Self-identification in
Arab American Literature

by

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B.A., The Islamic University of Gaza, 1999

M.A., University of Idaho, 2007

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

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University of Victoria

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This research project investigates the intersection of religion, self-identification, and imperialism in a number of Arab American literary works. It engages a wide array of, and contributes to, scholarship from American Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Islamic Studies, Global Studies, and Transnational Literary Theory. The project examines two groups of writers: the first group consists of American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Bridgette Gabrielle, and Wafa Sultan, while the second includes Arab American literary writers Mohja Kahf, Leila Ahmed, Ibrahim Fawal, and Alia Yunis. The former employ the traditional autobiography genre to produce master narratives, while the latter utilize the memoir, novel, and short-story cycle genres to challenge hegemonies and master narratives.

The cultural conservatives, I contend, belong to a growing transnational body of writers whose phenomenon constitutes an extension of what Matthew F. Jacobs calls an “informal network” of transnational self-identified specialists (4). In their autobiographies, Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan concentrate on the Middle East, Muslims, and Arabs, but they are unique in the sense that their policy-oriented personal narratives explicitly seek to influence not only American attitudes and practices aimed at Arabs and Muslims, but also those directed at American citizens of Arab or Muslim descent. Furthermore, their culturally-conservative traditional autobiographies *Infidel* (2007), *Nomad* (2010), *Heretic* (2015), *Now They Call Me Infidel* (2006), *Because They Hate* (2006), *They Must Be Stopped* (2008), and *A God Who Hates*

(2009) deem American multiculturalism a serious danger to the United States and the West, a thesis not unlike Samuel P. Huntington's in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

In this research project, I claim that Arab American literary writers have had to face, and write against, the predominance of this old-new clash of civilizations idea which has evolved into a discourse promulgated by the self-identified experts of the "informal network" and the cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent. The Arab American literary novels, memoirs, and short-story cycles my study closely examines trouble the clash of civilizations discourse. Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Ahmed's *A Border Passage* (1999), Fawal's *On the Hills of God* (1998), and Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009) are arguably representative of trends in, though not limited to, the contemporary Arab American memoir, novel, and short-story cycle genres and are best understood as literary writing within the context of this broader American tradition of interpreting the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims and the specific cultural conservative fixation on Arab and Muslim Americans.

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Introduction

Through the Lens of Arab American Literature: Representations and Counter Representations

--They all appear by the mudbank at the bridge, and are startled and demystified at the sight of their friend and his sister, covered in mud and wailing. . . . And Khadra wails and wails in the midst of *The Clash of Civilizations*.

(Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, 429-30)

--So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.

(Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 212)

--It [*Nomad*] is about how Islamic ideals clash with Western ideals. It is about the clash of civilizations that I and millions of others have lived and continue to live.

(Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad*, xiv)

Near the end of Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Khadra Shamy, the Arab American main character, returns to the mudbank at the bridge, the location where her Black Muslim American friend Zuhura was murdered several years previously. In Martinsville, Indiana, the town notoriously known for white racism and Ku Klux Klan's activities, Khadra sits in the mud wailing as she remembers this violent and traumatizing past. Seconds later, still in the above mudbank scene, Khadra is comforted by her brother and both are shortly surrounded by compassionate Mormon friends, members of his musical band "The Clash of Civilizations." Standing together in camaraderie, the religiously-diverse youth transcend the racially and geographically constructed boundaries of contemporary American identity. Their unity in commemorating the loss of Zuhura challenges the racist transnational Ku Klux Klan,¹ its white

¹ The earliest iteration of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was in the 1860s. What later became known as the KKK started in Tennessee as the Klan of Reconstruction shortly after the end of the American Civil War. It quickly came under heavy pressure from the federal government in the 1870s, but it revived its ranks a couple decades later. In 1915, William J. Simmons restructured and revived the notorious Ku Klux Klan. The KKK established presence throughout Canada in the 1920s and attempted to revive its ranks in the 1970s. Saskatchewan was the central base

supremacy, and later imagined civilizational clash. Members of the Klan, or “Christian terrorists on the loose” as one of Kahf’s characters dubs them, are suspected of raping and murdering Zuhura (89). This Ku Klux Klan of the second half of the twentieth century was supremacist on racial and religious grounds. It saw in colored peoples a civilizational threat.

In exploring this racist white phobia of a so-called non-white civilizational takeover, Kahf participates in a well-established American literary tradition.² The opening chapter of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), for example, captures a semi-clannish white supremacist worldview. Talking to Nick Carraway, the character Tom Buchanan aggressively warns that “Civilization’s going to pieces. . . . I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read ‘The Rise of the Coloured Empires’ . . . ?” This “fine book” which “everybody ought to read,” Tom proceeds, contends that “if we don’t look out the white race will be . . . utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved. . . . It is up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things.” Tom shortly asserts: “we’ve produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art and all that. Do

for the Klan’s activities. For further information, see James M. Pitsula’s *Keeping Canada British: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan* (2013) and Julian Sher’s *White Hood: Canada’s Ku Klux Klan* (1983). Currently, the Klan in the U.S. has been reinventing itself and recruiting. Many realms of the Klan have re-appeared in Germany in 2011 (Obermaier and Schultz, n. p.) and KKK is said to have established presence in England around the same time (Parry and Armstrong). “The European White Knights,” Parry and Armstrong write, “claim to be represented in Britain, Germany, France, Greece, Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden” (4).

² The KKK has been romanticized and criticized in many American literary and cultural productions. It was romanticized in Thomas Dixon’s novels *The Leopard’s Spot* (1902), *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), and *The Traitor* (1907). Dixon also adapted the second novel as a play under the title *The Clansman* (1905). Portraying the KKK in a positive light, D. W. Griffith adapted Dixon’s *The Clansman* for his 1915 silent film *The Birth of a Nation*. In the film, Griffith turns the KKK into a heroic Southern organization that liberates the post-Civil War South from the abuses Blacks and Northerners inflict upon it. As the KKK gained more momentum during World War One and in the 1920s, it added Jews, Catholics, and immigrants of color to its list of targets. The KKK lumped Catholics, Jews, Asians, Mexicans, and others together as one hostile group because it saw them as alien and un-American. Catholics, the Klan members thought, take orders from Rome and the Pope and they therefore were deemed un-American. Other works of American literature that touches on the phenomenon of the KKK include Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936), Karen Hesse’s *Witness* (2001) and Joe Martin’s *Fire in the Rock* (2001).

you see?” (17-18). The racist hysteria Tom exhibits here was symptomatic of the 1920s. Similarly, “The Rise of the Colored Empires” is not entirely a fictional title. Fitzgerald more likely alludes to Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, the author of the bestseller *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (1920). In *The Rising Tide*, Pankaj Mishra writes, Stoddard “proposed a straightforward division of the world into white and coloured races. He also invested early in Islamophobia, arguing in *The New World of Islam* (1921) that Muslims posed a sinister threat to a hopelessly fractious and confused West” (10). This idea of a predominantly white Protestant West clashing against the colored rest, including Muslims, continued throughout the second half of the twentieth century and arguably culminated in the publication of Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).³ The idea has gained further momentum in the twenty-first century with the publication of numerous works that reinforce the clash of civilizations logic and warn of a global Muslim takeover. Personal narratives by American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent, like Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s *Infidel* (2007), *Nomad* (2010), and *Heretic* (2015), belong to this still growing phenomenon.

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf is not merely a critique of the American Ku Klux Klan’s religio-racial supremacy. It primarily references Huntington’s hypothesis and engages, albeit indirectly, autobiographical works by American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent who adopt his thesis to argue that Islam is the ultimate enemy of the Judeo-Christian

³ In the body of my study, I demonstrate how the idea of a clash of civilizations preceded Huntington’s hypothesis by decades. In the 1970s, it was popular among mainline Evangelical Christian Zionists who, after Huntington circulated his thesis, took its premise especially the existential clash with Muslims to be unquestionably true. In the early 1990s, the clash idea was articulated by Bernard Lewis also before Huntington published and later developed his article into the book version. This popularity of the idea in the second half of the twentieth century, as I have suggested earlier, is traceable to publications from the 1920s and 1930s like Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (1920) and Basil Mathews’ *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations* (1926).

white United States. Naming the Muslim-Mormon American musical band “The Clash of Civilizations” and using the phrase at least three times in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is Kahf’s subtle way of ridiculing, by mimicry, not only Huntington’s thesis, but also the adoption of his thesis in numerous contemporary transnational works authored by cultural conservatives. The latter have revived and reproduced his thesis to achieve three goals: first, they interpret the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims for their Western audiences and re-imagine future submissive Arabs, Muslims, and a different Middle East—one more in line with official American and European interests. Second, they advise the U.S. and Europe on how to preserve the Judeo-Christian tradition and white culture. Third, from their perspective, the Judeo-Christian tradition and White culture are and ought to always be the basis of what the West is. Culturally conservative works like Ali’s are policy-oriented, not unlike Huntington’s.

Indeed, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington cautions his Western readers against mistaking *The Clash of Civilizations* for “a work of social science”: “It instead meant to be an interpretation of the evolution of global politics after the Cold War . . . [and it] aspires to present a framework, a paradigm, for viewing global politics that will be meaningful to scholars and useful to [Western] policymakers” (13). In it, Huntington contends that the contemporary “Islamic Resurgence and the economic dynamism of Asia demonstrate that other civilizations are alive and well and at least potentially threatening to the West” (302). “To preserve Western civilization in the face of declining Western power,” Huntington recommends, the U.S. and Europe must act on two levels: internally and externally (*The Clash* 311).

Internally, the U.S. and Europe must show that they are “capable of stopping and reversing the internal process of decay” (303); they must address “economics,” “demography,” and other “problems of moral decline, cultural suicide, and political disunity in the West” (304).

In Western nations, Huntington asserts, “Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies.” Some of these groups are “immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and to propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies.” Opposition to assimilation, Huntington adds, “is most notable among Muslims in Europe, who are, however, a small minority. It is also manifest, in lesser degree, among Hispanics in the United States, who are a large minority.” Failing to assimilate these minorities will result in “internal strife and disunion” in the U.S. while in Europe, “Western civilization could also be undermined by the weakening of its central component, Christianity” (304-05). Multiculturalists are partly responsible for this failure. “Multiculturalism,” Huntington insists, “threatens the United States and the West” because a “multicultural United States will not be the United States; it will be the United Nations” (306), and “[i]f the United States is de-Westernized, the West is reduced to Europe and a few lightly populated overseas European settler countries. Without the United States the West becomes a minuscule and declining part of the world’s population” (307). To survive,⁴ the West therefore must re-root itself in Western culture, identity, and Christianity because “Islam is exploding demographically with destabilizing consequences for Muslim countries and their neighbors; and non-Western civilizations generally are reaffirming the value of their cultures” (Huntington, *The Clash* 20).

Externally, Huntington advises, the U.S. and Europe must solidify the ties between all Western nations to prevent non-Western civilizations from weakening the West. They must include Western nations from Central Europe in their military, economic, and political bodies like NATO and actively westernize Latin America. They must “restrain the development of the

⁴ Huntington argues, the “survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew it against challenges from non-Western societies” (*The Clash* 20-21).

conventional and unconventional military power of Islamic and Sinic countries” and they must “maintain Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations” (311-12). In addition to others, these foreign policy recommendations should secure the power of the West. Paradoxically, however, Huntington urges the U.S. and Europe “to recognize that Western intervention in the affairs of other civilizations is probably the single most dangerous source of instability and potential global conflict in a multicivilizational world.” In *The Clash of Civilizations*, he fails to recognize that “to restrain” the “power of Islamic and Sinic countries” while “maintain[ing] “Western technological and military superiority over” them qualifies as meddling or intervening in other nations’ national affairs (*The Clash* 312). He seems to be immune to this truth although the message in his recommendations makes it clear that the West must maintain and expand its hegemony globally without having to establish traditional imperial presence or spread a Universalist culture.

In advising the West on how to restrain the rest, Huntington interprets Muslim and Arab countries to his target Western audiences. “Islamic culture,” he claims, “explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world;” he insists that the “prospects in the Muslim republics are bleak” (29). Yet, he asserts that “Islamic societies attempt to expand their own economic and military power to resist and to ‘balance’ against the West” (29). Huntington associates Middle Eastern Arabs and Muslims with terrorism (58) and cautions of a dramatic Muslim increase in population by 2025 (66). “Islamic fundamentalist movements,” he also warns, “have been strong in the more advanced and seemingly more secular Muslim societies, such as Algeria, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia” (101). This contemporary Islamic revival is “an urban phenomenon and appeals to people who are modern-oriented, well-educated, and pursue careers in the professions, government, and commerce” (101). The growth in

population “in Muslim countries, and particularly the expansion of the fifteen-to-twenty-four-year-old age cohort,” Huntington elaborates, “provides recruits for fundamentalism, terrorism, insurgency, and migration” and this “demographic growth threatens Muslim governments and non-Muslim societies” (103) because the Muslim “Resurgence is mainstream not extremist, pervasive not isolated” (110). It “has touched almost every Muslim society” (111). The population growth and rise in Muslim religiosity “tend to push outward.” Consequently, Muslim immigration to the West quickly becomes “an issue” because Muslim immigrants cannot be assimilated in the host societies (119). For one, the “structure of political loyalty among Arabs and among Muslims generally has been the opposite of that in the modern West. For the latter the nation state has been the apex of political loyalty,” but in the Islamic and Arab nations, the “tribe,” “religion,” and the “*ummah* . . . have been the principal foci of loyalty and commitment” (174-75).

This inability to fit in the West is further triggered by the increasing power Islam has garnered over the lives of Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East: “pro-Western governments gave way to governments less identified with the West or explicitly anti-Western in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. Less dramatic changes in the same direction occurred in the orientation and alignment of other states including Tunisia, Indonesia, and Malaysia.” Even Turkey and Pakistan, Huntington adds, “are under Islamist political pressure internally and their ties with the West subject to increased strain” (214-15). This hostility towards the West is “likely to continue” (238) not because the West is hegemonic but rather because “Muslims have problems living peacefully” with the rest of the world (256).

Huntington, and, as I will shortly demonstrate, the cultural conservative writers of Arab or Muslim descent invest in warning the West of an Arab and Muslim threat. They are joined by

many American and European writers who share their worldview. They form a contemporary transnational phenomenon. This phenomenon is an extension of another that Matthew F. Jacobs calls an “informal network” of transnational self-identified specialists who interpreted and re-conceptualized their object of study from 1918-1967 (4). Without the contributions of these interpreters to official American and European knowledge of the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims, American and European hegemony over the region would have been unimaginable. The “exercise of U.S. power—cultural, economic, military, and political—in the Middle East,” Jacobs argues in *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967*, “has been enabled, justified, and sustained, through the ways Americans have thought about and interpreted the region, the people who inhabit it, and the forces at play there” (1).

Like Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Leila Ahmed’s *A Border Passage* (1999), Ibrahim Fawal’s *On the Hills of God* (1998), and Alia Yunis’s *The Night Counter* (2009) represent trends in, though not limited to, contemporary Arab American novel, memoir, and short-story cycle genres that are best understood as literary writing within the context of this American tradition of interpreting the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims and the growing popularity of cultural conservatives like Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The literary re-presentations Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis produce complicate the Middle East as official America knows it. They imagine Arab, Muslim, and Arab and Muslim American realities unlike any of those promulgated in the clash of civilizations discourse or the traditional autobiographies of the American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent. In their post-9/11 highly popular conventional autobiographies, the latter—especially Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Bridgett Gabrielle, Nonie

Darwish, and Wafa Sultan⁵—imagine Arabs, Muslims, and Arab Americans to be a homogenous, religiously and culturally conservative whole, hostile to the democratic foundations of the West. These writers who have mounted controversial claims during times of national anxiety at home and military enterprises abroad adopt Huntington's thesis and take up the role of cultural insiders. They have indeed quickly become the darlings of many within the American Right as well as the Left. They have grown in popularity within white feminist circles to the point where some feminists consider Ali the ultimate revolutionary Muslim feminist voice, a model to emulate in the fight for Muslim women's human and civil rights. Similarly, New Atheists bestow upon Ali a prophetess status.

Debating Islam in the Age of Cultural and Religious Identities

In today's world, signs of strong religious revivalism exist across cultures and nations. This often radical religiosity attracts negative criticism from conservatives and liberals regardless of their politics. It also invites counterclaims. The nucleus of the debates and ensuing criticisms involves the location of Islam in the West and abroad, but generally leaves out Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, and Christian fundamentalisms, among others.⁶ Debating the condition of Islam in the United States has been the case especially, though not exclusively,⁷ since the Oil Crisis of 1973

⁵ The four writers are naturalized American citizens. Ali is originally from Somalia. She grew up Muslim, but now identifies as an atheist. Darwish is Egyptian. She descends from an Arab Muslim family, but like Ali, she left Islam. Instead of atheism, however, Darwish has become a conservative Evangelical Christian. Gabrielle is a Lebanese Maronite Christian. Her zealous religiosity draws her to Evangelical Christian Zionism. Sultan is originally from Syria. She was born and raised into Alawite Islam, but since immigrating to the U.S., she has been identifying as an agnostic.

⁶ Similar debates are currently taking place across Europe, especially in France, England, Italy, and Holland about tackling the Muslim problem.

⁷ As early as late eighteenth century, Muslims and Arabs were generally portrayed in the U.S., by American statesmen, artists, travelers, the media, businessmen, and some missionaries, as backward, barbaric, non-democratic,

and the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis. Islam heavily registers in orientalist scholarship and Cold War narratives. In fact, Islam's contemporary popular image in the U.S. is never flattering. In the American imagination, Islam suggests autocracy, polygamy, social injustice, gender inequality, resistance to democracy, and terrorism. Most recently, Islam is further imagined in a way that links it to antagonism towards the West and anachronism on accounts of so-called pure inassimilable religious identity, hyper-sensitivity to critique, intolerance of difference, and rejection of modernity. Islam, as the late Edward Said gracefully puts it, "is peculiarly traumatic news today in the West" (*Covering Islam* x). Articulated in 1981, his statement still rings true.

Aside from the negative, yet regular, representations in American mass media, political debates, national and foreign policies, and particular academic discourses,⁸ a significant portion of the imagined collective Muslim antagonism towards the West is traceable to Huntington. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, he writes:

American leaders allege that the Muslims involved in the quasi war are a small minority whose use of violence is rejected by the great majority of moderate Muslims. This may be true, but evidence to support it is lacking. Protests against anti-Western violence have been totally absent in Muslim countries. Muslim governments, even the bunker governments friendly to and dependent on the

heathen, fanatic, bigoted, politically unfit, and incapable of ruling themselves. Frequently, such statements were made on the ground of the religious difference. For example, in *American Orientalism*, Douglas Little writes, "Because it wedded the religious teachings of the Koran with the secular power of sultans and sheiks from Turkey to Morocco, the specter of Islam loomed larger in late-eighteenth-century U.S. popular culture than did Judaism. . . . The revolutionary statesmen who invented America in the quarter-century after 1776 regarded the Muslim world . . . as the antithesis of the republicanism to which they had pledged their sacred honor" (12).

⁸ In chapter five of this dissertation, I thoroughly engage dominant modes of representing Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in American politics, mass media, image production, and other areas. I, however, do not argue that all Americans and all American representations of Muslims are negative. Instead, the dominant current of representing Islam and Muslims is negative.

West, have been strikingly reticent when it comes to condemning terrorist acts against the West.

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is . . . the West. (217)

The fantasized collective Muslim rivalry Huntington hypothesizes is, however, by no means original or new. The clash idea is traceable to an unholy contemporary matrimony between ideological projects of imperial expansionism and messianic visions of end times. In particular, among the growing constituencies of contemporary Evangelical Christian Zionists in the U.S., and elsewhere, the unwavering belief in an apocalyptic clash between Muslims and Judeo-Christians was alive and well in the 1970s, about two decades before Huntington published his 1993 well-known article, “The Clash of Civilizations?”.⁹

Nonetheless, Huntington’s hypothesis has attracted a plethora of American and European cultural conservatives since the attacks of 9/11 and the consequent proliferation of U.S. military enterprises in Arab and Muslim majority countries. A few of these cultural conservatives, including Ali, Darwish, Sultan, and Gabrielle, are of Muslim or Arab descent. Arguably, the so-called War on Terror, growing nativist nationalism, and the general anxiety over economic

⁹ In chapters one and four of this dissertation, I unpack my statement here about the ties between colonial expansionist projects and end times prophecies. Believers in the imagined existential clash between Islam and the West exist in the three Abrahamic religions. Captive to their radical dogma and messianic ideology, mainline Evangelical Christian Zionists (ECJ) imagine an Islamic civilization clashing with a Christian Civilization. Contemporary ECJ’s radical beliefs date back to the 1970s (Mezvinsky 46). The mainline Evangelical Christian Zionists, for example, understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in theological terms. The ECJ John Hagee believes, “[t]he conflict between Arabs and Jews goes deeper than disputes over land. It is theological. It is Judaism versus Islam” (24). Islam itself is in a civilizational clash with the Judeo-Christian West. Because I am focusing on Arab American literature, however, I limit my analysis to currents within the Judeo-Christian tradition. In so doing, however, I do not dismiss that similar theological and ideological hegemonic tendencies and master narratives are present in particular locales in Muslim-majority countries.

recession as well as the visible Muslim presence in North America and Europe have increased the appeal of the clash hypothesis in the eyes of culturally conservative writers in the U.S. and elsewhere. The following cultural conservative writers are some of those who operate in North America and Europe: Geert Wilders, Thilo Sarrazin,¹⁰ Gis le Littman (also known as Bat Ye'or),¹¹ Oriana Fallaci,¹² Niall Ferguson, Bernard Lewis, Pamela Gellar,¹³ Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Patrick Buchanan, Christopher Caldwell,¹⁴ Mark Steyn,¹⁵ the late Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Bruce Bawer,¹⁶ to mention just a few (all also qualify as members of

¹⁰ According to Doug Saunders, Sarrazin published *Germany Abolishes Itself: How We Are Putting Our Country at Risk*. The book sold “1.2 million copies in little more than three months in 2010” (27).

¹¹ Bat Ye'or is a Hebrew phrase which means “daughter of the Nile.” Littman, a Swiss-English writer, was born in Egypt. She, also an Egyptian Jew, publishes under the pseudonym Bat Ye'or. She is known for her book, *Eurobia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (2005).

¹² Fallaci is known for *The Rage and the Pride* (2002) which sold 700,000 copies in the first two weeks following its publication in 2002. The book was on the bestseller lists in Italy and Spain. In both Europe and North America, the book sold over a million copies in a couple weeks. Some reviewers labeled the book racist because of its frequent derogatory and disparaging references to Muslim immigrants, phrases such as they are “vile creatures who urinate in baptistries” and “multiply like rats.” Its reception, however, was ironically very positive: “journalists and reviewers . . . saluted Fallaci for daring to speak in truth and ‘to shock awake a noble civilization hypnotized by multiculturalist mumbo-jumbo’” (Dreher, n. p.). Sherene Razack is indeed correct when she states that in the aftermath of 9/11 and the War on Terror, to write about Muslims in the West or even abroad especially by “Western feminists, both Muslim and non-Muslims,” one is guaranteed “royalties and the prestige of being on the bestseller lists” (11).

¹³ Gellar published *Stop the Islamization of America: A Practical Guide to the Resistance* (2011).

¹⁴ Caldwell wrote *Reflection on Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (2009). In his book, Caldwell sees Muslim immigrants as a serious problem in the West because of the former's alleged high birth rates, unwillingness to assimilate, and being loyal first and foremost to Islam, but not the secular Western states where they live. Caldwell attributes the so-called growing Muslim power in the West to the rapid weakening of Western moral/spiritual Judeo-Christian values and overall decline of Western power.

¹⁵ Steyn wrote his best seller *America Alone: The End of the World as We know It* (2008). Steyn's radical views on the presence of Muslim citizens of the West influenced the extremist Andres Behring Breivik, who on July 22, 2011 attacked fellow Norwegians. He slaughtered 77 when he bombed a neighborhood in Oslo and went on a shooting rampage on Utoya Island. Most of his victims were youth attending a summer camp for young political activists.

¹⁶ Bawer's anti-Muslim immigrant writing and attacks on multiculturalism have also been inspirational to Andres Behring Breivik in his assault on multiculturalism. Breivik accuses multiculturalism of allowing Muslim immigrants to allegedly take over Europe. Bawer wrote two books to warn Westerners of the soon-to-be-realized threat Islam in its collectivity poses to the West, Western democracies, and liberty. Bawer suggests that multiculturalism is partly to blame for Islamic fundamentalism, which he sees fermenting in both America and Europe, completely oblivious of American and European traditionalism which has, in direct correlation, triggered Christian nativist sentiments. Bawer implies that the presence of inassimilable Muslims in the West endangers the spirit of tolerance and the

the “informal network” Jacobs identifies).¹⁷ They passionately assert that the West is facing a reverse Muslim crusade. Muslims will take over the West through demographics, immigration, violence, and conspiracies.¹⁸

As they repackage particular components of Huntington’s thesis, I argue, these cultural conservatives produce hegemonic representations. Their overarching hybrid thesis generates grand narratives. These narratives—oppressive, radical, and politically polemical—conceal the complex conditions of their object of critique under a multi-layered veil of sweeping generalizations, logical fallacies, unreliable data, and fear mongering language.¹⁹ Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan, among many of the above transnational advocates of the clash of civilizations discourse, I further contend, are the latest newcomers to a tradition, an “informal network,” if I may build on the scholarship of Jacobs’ *Imagining the Middle East*. This “informal network” includes missionaries, travel writers, novelists, tourists, Western academics, businessmen, policy and strategy intellectuals, political commentators, and lobbyists who “shared the common goal of contributing to policy and public discussion about the Middle East and its relationship to the United States” (4). This dynamic, heterogeneous, and constantly expanding informal network was well established in the nineteenth century, according to Jacobs who concludes, after studying its composition from 1918 to 1967, that its members produced

acceptance of difference that multiculturalism is supposed to protect. Bawer raises these issues in *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (2010) and in *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within* (2007), the latter disturbingly a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

¹⁷ The list of these writers indicates the political range of the clash advocates. For example, Huntington and Harris identify as atheists, while Buchanan is a Christian conservative.

¹⁸ For detailed information about the claims many of these writers make in their clash of civilizations works, see Doug Saunders’ *The Myth of the Muslim Tide*.

¹⁹ For further information about the cultural conservative inaccuracies and faulty logics, see Saunders’ *The Myth of the Muslim Tide*.

policy-oriented knowledge. The members of this “informal network” were in communication, read, and referenced one another.

Although the network consisted primarily of Americans, it included members from England as well as the Middle East who interpreted, and reported on, the region. More than Westerners, Middle Eastern self-identified experts were sought after “either as educators of future experts or as interlocutors who might lend credibility to various assertions about the region and its peoples” (Jacobs 5). Jacobs’ “informal network” is eclectic; its members cannot be easily collectively labeled or classified. Some were Orientalists, others not; some were religious, others secular; some were specialist, others non-specialist, but “all members of this network shared a professional and policy-oriented interest in the Middle East and sought to convey a sense of the region’s role in a broader conception of international politics” (Jacobs 4).²⁰ The diversity of this network makes it difficult to impose a single classification on all of its members and therefore labeling these self-identified experts as either Orientalists or Islamophobes does not account for the complex nature of the network, the eclectic composition of its members, the lenses they use to interpret their object of critique, the nature of their critique or their proposed

²⁰American missionaries and travel writers were among the first members of this network to imagine the Middle East. In the nineteenth century, “glossing over religious and sectarian differences” Jacobs writes, “missionaries, travel writers, and others established the precedent of placing virtually all inhabitants of the Middle East within a narrative of backwardness that would last well into the twentieth century” (20). Also, their early conceptualizations “suggested that the Orient was incapable of changing on its own, and that the United States was therefore the only legitimate sources of change for the region. This way of imagining the United States in the Orient became deeply embedded in U.S.-Middle East relations over the coming decades, and its influence continues to the present” (Jacobs 23). Over particular periods in the twentieth century, Jacobs writes, “the older sacred and secular narrative of the United States and its missionaries—religious, business, and political—redeeming a debased Middle East remained powerful, but the older narrative was now supplemented by new layers of authority, expertise, and knowledge filtered through the lens of contemporary politics” (35). Orientalist knowledge and scholarship did not cease and interpretations of Islam as a source of conflict in the region persisted until the mid-to late 1950 when Arab secular nationalism appeared on the political scene. “In this new environment,” the informal network’s members differed on the how to approach and perceive of Islam. “[S]ome specialists and policymakers,” Jacobs writes, “hoped the traditional religious movements they had previously feared might serve as a counterweight to the new forces animating the region” (58). In basic words, although Islam was one central focus of their work, they rarely agreed on one interpretation.

strategies. Indeed, although Islam looms large in the knowledge the informal network produced from 1918 to 1967 (and of course afterwards as I demonstrate later), Jacobs argues that the members of the network disagreed on the status of Islam in relation to American interests. To some, Islam was a threat; to others, it was a religion in crisis; and still to others, it was a malleable force that if wisely utilized could prove useful to bolstering American interests (Jacobs 58-94). Largely, however, the interpreted object was approached, assessed, and represented through the logic of furthering and protecting American interests.

Understood in the context of this “informal network,” Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan align themselves, collaborate, engage, and draw on the works of a large body of transnational peers who interpret and translate the Middle East to their Western audiences. As they translate Islam and the Arab world, they produce policy-oriented works.²¹ These cultural conservative conventional autobiographers share other core principles with the members of the network Jacobs identifies. They obsess over Islam and share the belief in American secular and sacred obligations.²² “Envisioning a unique transforming mission for the United States in the Middle East,” Jacobs explains, “relied on closely connected and equally powerful sacred and secular imaginings of the region” (8). The hopes to remold the Middle East “in both sacred and secular terms,” he adds, “remained powerful motivating forces for Americans involved in the region from the middle of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twenty-first” (15). As part

²¹ For example, some of the self-identified experts on Islam Ayaan Hirsi Ali references, in her 2015 book *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*, include Irshad Manji, Maajid Nawaz, Zuhdi Jasser, Bernard Lewis, Philip Salzman, Ed Husain, Tawfik Hakim, Raymond Ibrahim, Asra Noomani, and David Cook.

²² According to Jacobs, the members of the examined “informal network” sought to educate “the broader [American and European] public about” the Middle East and believed “that the United States was an experiment in republican values, virtue, liberty, and orderly progress that served as an ‘exhibition of a new world order’ that might benefit ‘humankind as a whole.’” In addition to this sense of the secular mission, the members of Jacobs’ informal network invoked the sense of the “sacred”—in other words, the belief that the U. S. has been “providentially selected for divine purposes.” This invocation emphasizes that “Americans have a unique role to play in the Middle East” (7).

of my effort to extend Jacobs' scholarship here, I argue that the cultural conservatives who have been writing in the post-9/11 attacks era share these foundational traits and principles. They represent the most recent development in an old-new tradition of interpreting the Middle East and Arab and Muslim Middle Easterners in past and present times so as to imagine how the Middle East can be restructured, its inhabitants reeducated, in ways that would better serve the interests of American and European powers.²³ Like some members of the network in the first half of the twentieth century and like radical Evangelical Christians in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, the cultural conservative autobiographers see Islam as the threat the U.S. must face. To the cultural conservatives, Islam is a totalitarian force that controls every aspect of Muslim life and is determined to conquer the world. These cultural conservatives, however, are unique in the sense that their policy-oriented personal narratives explicitly seek to influence not only formal American attitudes and practices aimed at Arabs and Muslims, but also those directed at American citizens of Arab or Muslim descent.²⁴ In spite of this important difference, both the "informal network" Jacobs unveils and the cultural conservatives I examine in this study would not have had gained their status as informal self-identified experts on the Middle East had the United States not been economically, militarily, culturally, ideologically, strategically, and politically invested and involved in the region.

²³ In *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*, for example, Ali argues that the book is "not a work of theology. It is more in the nature of a public intervention in the debate about the future of Islam" during these critical times as the "Muslim world is currently engaged in a massive struggle to come to terms with the challenge of modernity." Speaking directly to her Western readers, Ali shortly writes: "I am now one of you: a Westerner. I share with you the pleasures of the seminar rooms and the campus cafés. I know we Western intellectuals cannot lead a Muslim Reformation. But we do have an important role to play" (Introduction). Western intellectuals must support so-called reformists like Ali.

²⁴ The same objectives are shared with contemporary European cultural conservatives who focus on the European context.

Official American investment in the Middle East predates the twentieth century,²⁵ but the U.S. has officially, though aggressively, claimed the Middle East as an economic, strategic, ideological, and cultural site of high national interest since World War II. In *Epic Encounters: Culture Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Melani McAlister points out that “U.S. political and economic involvements expanded rapidly in the postwar era” due to “overarching concerns” (32). These interests are “strategic position, religious rites, support for Israel, and access to oil.” These four factors are fundamental to understanding how the Middle East and its people have been interpreted and imagined. “The multifaceted history of U.S. cultural and political interests in the Middle East,” McAlister emphasizes, “is the history of these

²⁵ The informal network’s “physical interaction” with the Middle East is traceable to the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the conceptual idea goes back to the 1600s. In the early 1900s, many Americans, both secular and religious, according to Michael B. Oren in *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, “were prepared to save the world spiritually, by teaching the Gospel, as well as politically, by promulgating freedom.” This U.S. “commitment to its vision of global betterment, secular and religious, crystallized in 1808, at Williams College in Massachusetts.” In 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was established. The board included clergymen, physicians, businessmen, lawyers, and industrialists (Oren 87). Although the board was interested in evangelicizing the entire world, no area “aroused the board’s excitement more than the Middle East.” “While conversions might be made elsewhere in the world,” Oren writes, “only in Palestine, the missionaries believed, would they have an immediate and millennial impact. Only there would the Protestant’s [sic] longing to reunite with their spiritual forebears, the Jews, converge with their yearning for the Messiah’s reappearance” (88). Accordingly, in 1918, the restorationist missionaries Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk travelled to the Middle East, with their eyes fixed on Palestine as their prized destination (90).

As I hinted earlier, the formal network’s direct engagement with the Middle East started in the nineteenth century, but American restorationists, arguably one of the most influential segments of the network, conceptually, theoretically, and theologically initiated the tradition of imagining the region—its past, present, and future—in the seventeenth century. Restorationism, according to Oren, “was neither new nor unique to American Protestantism [in the nineteenth century]. Evocations of the idea can be found in Sir Henry Finch’s 1621 treatise, *The World’s Great Restauration, or, The Calling of the Jews*, as well as the poems of John Milton and the philosophy of John Locke.” Similar, if not more radical, dogmas were present among the Puritans. Oren elaborates: “En route to the New World, the Puritans took the concept [i.e. restoring the Jews to Zion] with them to Holland, where they petitioned the Dutch government to ‘transport Izraell’s sons and daughters . . . to the Land promised their forefathers . . . for an everlasting Inheritance.’” The drive for restorationism did not end there: “Colonial American theologians such as John Cotton . . . and Increase Mather . . . called for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire to make way for the Jews’ return. By the Second Awakening, the dream of reinstating Jewish rule in the Holy Land was fast becoming doctrine” (Oren 89). According to Nur Masalha, the earliest calls, by a Christian, to restore the Jews to Zion appear in *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* by the English millennialist Anglican priest Thomas Brightman in 1585. The document “is the first Christian publication in English that calls for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in order to fulfill biblical prophecy” (89).

contending forces” and “the confluence and the contradictions of those forces defined the contest over the nature and extent of postwar U.S. power in the region” (35).²⁶

From the perspectives of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan, these four factors are irrelevant to understanding the American presence and hegemony in the Middle East. In fact, in their personal narratives, the U.S. does not factor at all as an active imperial player, not even as a superpower, in the region.²⁷ Instead, the region is a threat the U.S. has to neutralize in order to protect global stability and peace. Indeed, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan use their life narratives to warn Americans. Although these writers are by no means homogenous, they share convictions, propose strategies, and devise programs to aid the U.S. in fighting this imagined existential threat. Ali identifies as an atheist, Sultan an agnostic, and the rest are conservative Christians, but they all conflate “Arab” with “Muslim” and call upon the U.S. to take tougher measures against the Middle East, Muslims, and of course American citizens of Arab and Muslim descent. Although they rightly sometimes identify issues that “particular” Arab, Muslim, (and Christian) majority countries have to seriously address, such as the abhorrent cultural practice of female genital mutilation or honor killing, they fail to objectively and constructively engage with the issues they raise. Instead, they manipulate contemporary problems, like political Muslim violence, postmodern radical religiosity, and gender inequality, so as to advance the following set of polemics, many of which are directed at Arab and Muslim Americans.

²⁶ McAlister is not alone in articulating these points. The following studies make similar claims: Jacobs’ *Imagining the Middle East*, Hahn’s *Crisis and Crossfire*, and Ambrose’s *Rise to Globalism*.

²⁷ Their views on the status of the U.S. are relatively similar to Huntington’s. Huntington speaks of an official contemporary America that seeks to spread a universalist culture of democracy, human rights, individualism and freedom of speech (183-84). The U.S. is a “global power” (186) whose goal is to promote democracy (*The Clash* 193).

The U.S., they claim, is under attack and must defeat the threat. The aggressive infiltrators are predominantly anti-modern Arab Muslims.²⁸ Because of Islam, Muslims cannot reconcile their mores with American values, and instead of helping Muslims integrate, multiculturalism enables them to plot against the United States. To solve the problem, the cultural conservatives propose, assimilation must be compulsory to nonwhites especially those who are neither Jewish nor Christian. Because self-critique does not exist among Arabs and Muslims, the West must help Muslim reformists who live in the West, like Ali and Irshad Manji, trigger and lead a Muslim reformation. Finally, the cultural conservatives insist that Israel and the U.S. rightly intervene in the Middle East only to weed out Islamic terrorism. Arguably, these reductionist representations increase the invisibility of Arab and Muslim America, expand the psychological barriers already in place between the concerned minority and the American public, and deny existence to a diversity of ethnicities, cultures, religions, and worldviews at home and abroad, heterogeneous bodies they lump under a blanket term—Islam. In the U.S., for instance, Christian and Jewish Americans of Middle Eastern and North African descent, among other communities, are erased, or at best marginalized, under such a term.²⁹ In focusing their critique on the Middle East, Islam, Arab and Muslim immigration, and multiculturalism, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan are indebted to Huntington.

²⁸ Muslim Arabs, Stephen Sheehi rightly points out, are the primary focus of Ali and I would add Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan, among other cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent. Likewise, American and European cultural conservatives in general consider Arab Muslims the problem. In Ali's work, the "vignettes and examples are meant to serve as analogues to the misfits of Muslim Arabs in modern, global society. In other words," Sheehi contends, "the ignorance of Muslims in the Islamic world is due to the backwardness of Arab culture and every social and political Muslim failure finds its origins in the 'stifling morality' of the Arab constitution" (ch. 3).

²⁹ Ali's homogenizing term "Islam," conceals how indigenous Christianity is also suppressed in her work as it was in nineteenth-century travel and religious writings. Middle East Christians, among other populations, continue to suffer in silence. Indeed, in "the minds of missionaries," Jacobs reminds his readers, "Oriental Christianity and Islam were coupled as the two pillars of temporal and spiritual corruption that had to be struck down" (16).

After all, they build their polemics on many claims from his thesis in order to forefront the “Muslims are coming” theme and launch an attack on multiculturalism. Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan lead the way in a number of popular culture autobiographies. These works are *Infidel* (2007), *Nomad* (2010), *Heretic* (2015), *Now They Call Me Infidel* (2006), *Because They Hate* (2006), *They Must Be Stopped* (2008), and *A God Who Hates* (2009). In these autobiographies, as I later demonstrate in chapter one of the dissertation, the four authors deem contemporary manifestations of Muslim religiosity, whether conservative or radical, mainstream or extremist, premodern. This premodernity, from their perspective, explains Muslim hostility towards the Judeo-Christian West, the oppression of Muslim women, the dysfunctionality of the Muslim family, intra-Muslim violence, and Muslim terrorism, among other maladies they take the contemporary Muslim collective to suffer from. As I further elaborate in chapter one, only Islam earns their critique because of its premodernity.³⁰ Ironically, however, the cultural conservatives systematically use modern and postmodern political revivalist movements, precisely Saudi Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Iranian Revolution, Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria to build their master narratives.³¹

³⁰ Similarly, although Huntington argues that religious identity has become a unifying factor across civilizations and criticizes Islam for being Islam, he does not criticize Western Christianity. In fact, he calls upon the West to revive its religious tradition because Christianity represents a core characteristic of Western civilization.

³¹ They, however, refuse to attribute any cases of Muslim religiosity, conservatism, or radicalism to the sharp contemporary transformations many societies have undergone. In *Heretic*, Ali considers such attempts laughable. To her, the violence of radicals like Mohammed Bouyeri who murdered Theo van Gogh is not caused by “socioeconomic deprivation or postmodern alienation” but “the call to violence and the justification for it are explicitly stated in the sacred texts of Islam.” Although she argues that Western converts to Islam gravitate towards Medina Islam (think Salafi Islam), she fails to recognize why such Westerners, who come from largely secular, democratic, “civilized,” and postmodern societies would choose radical Islam in the first place. If the problem is internal to Islam, why would Westerners convert? Insisting on the premodernity of Islam and taking contemporary manifestations of Muslim religiosity or even conversion to Islam to be premodern is problematic to say the least. The emphasis on premodernity gets more problematic when Ali argues that the majority of Muslims have not yet endorsed Muslim violence, but their Islam is anyway troubling because “their religious beliefs exist in an uneasy tension with modernity—the complex of economic, cultural, and political innovations that not only reshaped the Western world but also dramatically transformed the developing world as the West exported it” (Introduction).

Unquestionably, many of the contemporary manifestations of radical or even conservative Muslim religiosity are unlike any others from within contemporary Christianity, Buddhism, or Judaism. After all, manifestations of religiosity are the product of particular stimuli at a particular moment in time and place. In spite of numerous similarities, they are different. Should one look further, however, the contemporary rise of radical or even conservative religiosity is in fact “a *global* phenomenon occurring in many different countries and in virtually all established religious traditions” (Taylor 258). Contrary to popular American and European belief, Mark C. Taylor rightly argues in his 2007 book *After God*, Christianity, and not Islam, is the “fastest growing religion in the world today” (258). Currently, Christianity is enjoying remarkable growth outside the borders of the United States and the rest of the West. Places like Africa, South America, and Asia are hot spots. However, the fast-growing Christianity in question here within and outside the West, according to Taylor, registers more in conservative and fundamental manifestations: “The [Christian] sects that are increasing most quickly throughout the world are those that are thriving in the United States—Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.” Within the United States, Taylor adds, “the most recent religious revival has occurred in groups that previously have been marginalized—Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals—rather than mainline churches” (258).³² In that sense, contemporary religious

³² Most recent Pew Research data (released May 2015) shows that Catholicism and mainline Protestantism are still losing members in the United States and although the growth of evangelical Christians is slightly slowing down, their growth has not been affected as much as the other groups. The drop in their numbers is less than 0.9 %, while Catholics dropped by 3.1% and mainline Protestants by 3.4%. Even in spite of the fact that the study argues that the overall number of American Christians “has dropped by nearly eight percentage points in just seven years, from 78.4% in an equally massive Pew Research survey in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014,” the United States “remains home to more Christians than any other country in the world, and a large majority of Americans—roughly seven-in-ten—continue to identify with some branch of the Christian faith” (3). Nonetheless, I would argue, Evangelical Christians have more political power and leverage than any other religious groups, especially within the Republican Party (GOP) and the American government. Evangelical Christian Zionists have enormous influence on the GOP’s

fundamentalisms and conservatisms manifest themselves in Islam as they do in Christianity and just like Muslim fundamentalists, Christian fundamentalists have political programs, albeit different ones. On the one hand, Saudi Wahhabism competes with Khomeini Islam for regional and even global influence. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria aspires to enforce its version of political Islam on the entire world, especially Sunni Muslim majority countries, if it could. On the other hand, from within American Christianity, conservative Evangelical Christians are well represented in the Republican Party and many of them have a very active messianic expansionist project.³³ Indeed, Kevin Phillips estimates that “Christian evangelicals, fundamentalists, and Pentecostals . . . muster some 40 per cent of the party.” Phillips observes that

strong theocratic pressures are already visible in the Republican national coalition and its leadership, while the substantial portion of Christian America committed to theories of Armageddon and the inerrancy of the Bible has already made the GOP into America’s first religious party. (xiii-xiv)

politics. Therefore, in any case, the Evangelicals or more specifically the groups Taylor identifies are the most stable so far.

³³ Iain Buchanan investigates what has become an intricate, yet less-recognized, web of an Evangelical Christian influence on American foreign politics since the end of World War Two and maps out what he calls a powerful contemporary American evangelicizing imperialist enterprise, in his 2010 *The Armies of God: A Study in Militant Christianity*. Buchanan urges his readers to “see the United States as being governed according to the interests of a coalition of corporate business, professional political and military elites, and a compliant church establishment. Politics are largely a matter of ensuring the continued dominance of this coalition, and as far as possible the expansion of its power—politically, economically, and militarily.” But where does religion, especially dogmatic Evangelical Christianity, fit in the larger picture? “The church establishment, by and large,” Buchanan writes, “is geared to the same objectives, but has the distinctive role of promoting the religious ideology which both cements the nation and ensures its compliance with the ruling interests.” “This arrangement,” Buchannan argues, “is reflected in both national and foreign policy—the United States is an imperialist nation, and its foreign policy reflects this” (18-19), and the alliance between the four forces is “translated into the evangelization process now being pursued by Western (and largely American) mission agencies throughout the non-Western world” (20). Evangelical Christianity sends out its missionaries to every region in the world, but it assigns a special importance to the Middle East and particularly to Palestine. Chapter four of my study highlights these connections.

Yet, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan ignore this manifestation of radical political American Christianity. An honest critique should not be limited to the critique of Islam in its entirety on the ground of contemporary local political manifestations of Muslim religiosity, while leaving radical Christian American religiosity and Evangelical global expansionism out of the picture.

More problematic, however, is their take on manifestations of Muslim religiosity to mean innate primitiveness, a Muslim failure to transition to modernity in the first place, and a failure only active Western involvement in educating, evangelicizing, and disciplining the Muslim other can remedy. This, what I would call “imperial,” argument Taylor would disagree with. Taylor proposes locating contemporary religious revivalisms within the domain of the postmodern, contrary to the cultural conservatives who consider contemporary Muslim revivalisms, as well as non Judeo-Christian cultural reawakenings, existentially premodern and therefore primitive and static. The latter conceptualization (i.e. considering religious revivalism among non Judeo-Christians a premodern phenomenon) reinforces dichotomies while the former approach (i.e. treating religiosity as a postmodern phenomenon) exposes them and thus offers richer analyses. Moreover, the latter approach examines the concerned worlds, those who populate them, and the issue of religiosity, or lack of it for that matter, without properly historicizing and contextualizing them; consequently it leads to reinforcing stereotypical generalizations which obscure reality and further marginalize those who dwell on the margins. To argue that *only* Islam and Muslims breed radicalism is unscientific.³⁴ The cultural conservatives seem equally blind to

³⁴ In contemporary Burma, for example, Buddhist monks have been at the forefront of an ethnic cleansing program against the Rohingya Muslims. As early as mid nineteenth century, a transnational movement of radical Evangelical Christians has been indirectly involved in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians to fulfill a messianic vision of end times. In chapter four, I address this issue more in depth.

the fact that radicalism is often a danger to Muslims as it is to non-Muslims.³⁵ Furthermore, contemporary migration to religious radicalism is not indicative of premodern religiosity. Indeed, Taylor insists that when one studies Christian fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals, one must “realize that these contemporary forms of belief and practice do not represent a reversion to premodern forms of life but are distinctly *postmodern* phenomena” (258). They are largely symptomatic of, and responses to, postmodern anxieties, socio-cultural and technological transformations. They represent attempts at setting in motion multi-faceted regeneration to remedy what the religious elite consider decadent societies.³⁶ In spite of the different

³⁵ According to a Pew study released on July 16, 2015, “roughly half or more of people across all the [21] countries surveyed say they are at least somewhat concerned about Islamic extremism in their countries.” According to the data, “a median of 52 % across nine Western nations are very concerned about Islamic extremism,” and “[a]cross the 10 countries with Muslim populations of around half or more (including Middle Eastern, Asian and African nations), the median who are very concerned is 42%” (“Extremism Concerns” 2).

³⁶ The rise of the New Religious Right, according to Taylor, was in many ways in response to the relativism, pluralism, nuclear threat, sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and the antiwar movement of the 1960s (242-44). The American youth was resentful of and resistant towards authority, felt alienated, and “passionately sought experiences they believed were authentic” and real (244). Conservative Evangelicals and others sought to “reverse” what they perceived as a decline in morality and cultural values by “reasserting religious and moral absolutes in a world that seems to drifting toward chaos” (Taylor 297). Not unlike the counterculture of the 1960s, however, Evangelicals and Pentecostals “were persuaded that what the world needed most was transformative personal experience. Furthermore, both conservative Evangelicals and countercultural hippies share[d] a commitment to the privatization, deregulation, and decentralization of all systems and networks” (281). Evangelicals and others have recognized “the growing importance of media” and the information revolution and put them to good use (Taylor 281, 82). Another indicator of the postmodernity of conservative Evangelicalism is its hostility towards communism, Islam, and religious plurality, which explains conservative Evangelicals’ quick adoption of Samuel Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations. Another indicator of postmodernity is evident in the transformation of “born-again Christianity” from “the religion of the disinherited,” as theologian H. Richard Niebuhr calls it, to the religion of the economically affluent. “[O]ver the last 40 years,” Niebuhr writes, “evangelicals have pulled steadily closer in income and education to mainline Protestants in the historically affluent establishment of denominations. In the process they have overturned the old social pecking order in which ‘Episcopalian,’ for example, was a code word for upper class, and ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘evangelical’ shorthand for lower. Evangelicals are now increasingly likely to be college graduates and in the top income brackets” (cited in Taylor 286).

Furthermore, Taylor observes that the New Religious Right “is a largely rural and exurban phenomenon—its center of gravity tilts away from the coast to the South and Southwest and from cities to the country and suburbs.” Not only that, Taylor proceeds, but also “the most media savvy Protestants are conservatives rather than liberals. Committed to spreading the Word, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals have always used every technological means at their disposal” (286). They rely on multimedia in their performance. This postmodern system of Christian religiosity is however dynamic, flexible, and adaptive, “struggling to secure the ground at the precise moment it slips away” in “a world of the frenzied flux and flow of signs” (Taylor 304). At least in the 1960s and 1970s, it sought to “disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure,” although it has ended creating its own absolutist and hegemonic

particularities, the same line of reasoning can be applied to many Islamic fundamentalist or conservative revivalisms. The rise of particular forms of religiosity and religio-cultural practices are deliberately devised and circulated among practitioners through “absolutizing, reifying, and fetishizing culturally specific forms of belief and practice” to “avoid [contemporary] uncertainty and insecurity” (Taylor 258). Putting into rigid application “the exclusionary principle of either/or,” anxious religious conservative or radical sects “establish their identity as much by what they oppose as what they embrace” (258-59). For example, in “promoting their counter-counterculture,” Taylor proceeds, “neofoundationalists” perceive themselves and their faith in direct opposition, if not hostility, to modernists, secularists, communists, socialists, humanists, liberals, science, relativists, feminists, gays, and elitists (259). The fact that the development of fundamentalisms and fundamentalist group identity is often in reaction to internal or external stimuli does not mean that one should agree with, or applaud, them. Rather, scholars should try to understand them as movements in motion, ones that do not exist in a vacuum, and are not premodern.

Taylor is very helpful here. His treatment of contemporary manifestations of religious revivalism in general as postmodern phenomena allows scholars to guard against approaching religion and religiosity through de-contextualized and de-historicized lenses. While I am inclined to reiterate that postmodern patterns of religiosity similar to the ones Taylor identifies in American Evangelical Christianity do exist in different manifestations of contemporary Muslim religiosity, adopting Taylor’s take on contemporary manifestations of religiosity further guards

structure (Taylor 251). “In a world where everyone is increasingly interconnected,” Taylor concludes, “religious foundationalism and moral absolutism threaten to bring about the very disaster their adherents claim to be trying to avoid” (255). They, however, are “designed to avoid uncertainty and insecurity” of the postmodern world (Taylor 258).

against homogenizing the examined communities. Indeed, in chapter one, I show how, as they insist on labeling manifestations of Muslim religiosity and cultural identity “premodern,” the cultural conservatives reduce the U.S. to an angelic Judeo-Christian white nation and call for the erasure of all forms of cultural and religious ethnic diversity. Their insistence on homogeneity, I further argue, dismisses as irrelevant complex webs of intra and inter cultural and religious dynamics. Such dynamics often contribute to the formation of in-group identity, shape patterns of exclusion, point to an unholy marriage between religious dogma and domination, and undermine or perpetuate discriminatory practices. By insisting on homogeneity, they erase difference and diversity; they deny subjectivity to individuals and agency to communities and distract from how the formation of national American identity and the growth of racist attitudes or systematic discriminatory practices towards particular religious and cultural ethnic Americans are informed by the nation’s hegemonic enterprises outside its borders. Finally, the imposed homogeneity leads to stereotyping which quickly descends into dehumanization of Arabs, Muslims, Arab and Muslim Americans, and other religious and cultural ethnic groups, therefore allowing the continuation of interconnected cycles of discriminations, many of which are rooted in imperial history and present realities.

In this study, I claim that Arab American literary writers have had to face, and write against, the predominance of this clash of civilizations idea and discourse promulgated by the self-identified experts of the “informal network” and the cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent. Though they do not always invoke this discourse as explicitly as Kahf does with her Clash of Civilizations rock band, I show in the following chapters that the Arab American literary novels, memoirs, and short-story cycles my study closely examines trouble the clash of civilizations idea. They undermine the insistence on premodern homogeneity and destabilize the

logic behind it. They attempt to frustrate the clash of civilizations discourse by showing the heterogeneity of Arab and Muslim Americans, offering interventionist representations that complicate the simplistic dichotomy of the national American self versus the foreign Arab and Muslim other, engaging in multiple critiques, introducing different Arab American literary takes on citizenship and belonging, and rejecting the cultural conservative claims to a homogenously Judeo-Christian and Eurocentric American identity and culture as the defining marker of contemporary America. As I contend that particular trends in Arab American literature take on a political role to emphasize the heterogeneity of Arab and Muslim America and challenge hegemonic narratives, I am in agreement with Carol Fadda-Conrey when she argues in “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11” (2011) that some Arab American literary works “respond to the post-9/11 political and social terrain in the US by capturing and challenging homogenized depictions of Arab Americans, forging in the process revisionary spaces that stand against and redefine exclusionary conceptualizations of US citizenship.” Such literary works, Fadda-Conrey adds, criticize “racial stereotyping, blanket labeling, and discriminatory profiling by insisting on complex representations of Arab Americans” (533). My study advances this claim, but with two distinctions: first, it puts that goal of heterogeneity into the context of the clash discourse, and second, it shows that this literary drive was already in progress long before 9/11, as Kahf and Fawal show, even if 9/11 intensified the need by Arab American literary writers to try to counter the clash discourse.

The first novel I examine to question the chimera of homogeneity, as I show in chapter two, is Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). In direct dialogue with the revived clash of civilizations discourse as I have shown earlier in the introduction, *The Girl* offers

complex contemporary representations of the self and the other. In the context of immigrant Muslim communities, Kahf's representations effectively respond to the reductionist cultural conservative accounts and disrupt allegations of a civilizational clash between a so-called innocent secular West and a homogenous, albeit violent radical, Islam. The fictional representations are successful because Kahf relies on localized narratives instead of the comparative meta-narratives the cultural conservatives use as their core strategy. Furthermore, Kahf neither idealizes the local settings nor shields any of the represented groups from critique; she offers representations that deconstruct, though without regenerating, the binary oppositions Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan build claims on in their personal narratives. Her imagined Midwestern Islam is dynamic, pluralistic, and constantly evolving not unlike other religious traditions, though similarly not without limitations. In contrast with core claims in the clash discourse, Kahf ultimately demonstrates the adaptability of Midwestern American manifestations of Islam, creatively reinterprets socially-constructed definitions of the American secular self and the ethnic religious Muslim other, delineates social boundaries, challenges cultural dominance, and exposes hegemony and cultural essentialism. In addition to my interpretation of them to be part of Kahf's attempt to correct her readers' distorted perceptions of the self and the other without fully alienating any of her target audiences, these moves, I argue, upset the clash discourse's ideologically-and-politically motivated misrepresentations.

Not unlike Kahf, Leila Ahmed, in her memoir *A Border Passage—from Cairo to America* (1999), rejects claims to homogeneity and problematizes the notion of a Muslim collective. Ahmed, I further argue in chapter three, critiques colonial and postcolonial regimes that did not allow for difference and failed to cherish diversity in particular locales, especially Egypt. Her representations trouble the typical stand the cultural conservatives and numerous New Atheists

take: the latter have systematically considered figures like Ayaan Hirsi Ali to be the only living embodiment of (secular) Muslim critique. Muslim and Arab intellectuals, they argue in agreement with Ali and other cultural conservatives, neither care nor dare to criticize Islamic radicalism or conservatism, come out in defense of minorities, speak out against the oppression of Muslim women, or admit the need for serious reforms. Therefore, true reforms will not happen unless the West comes to the rescue because religious fundamentalism is mainstream among world's Muslims. Such is the case because Islam itself is premodern. The case of Ahmed challenges these unfounded notions. Like in Kahf's novel, her memoir strategically opts for specificity, engages in multiple critiques and presses for reform. She unveils the negative impact formal Muslim rigidity and Arab exclusionist politics have inflicted on diversity, indigeneity, difference, and plurality, precisely in the example of Egypt and Jamal Abd El Nasser's Arab Republic. She further critiques Western colonialism. In fact, Ahmed critiques all overarching political structures and strips naked radical ideologies, regardless of their orientation, origin, and geographical location, before she defends indigeneity, calls for the protection of women's lived religious traditions, and exercises historical revisionism. Clearly, Ahmed pursues an intellectual political project in the memoir, but she does not engage in polarizing identity-reimagining. In favor of interconnectedness and cross-cultural understanding, Ahmed rejects dichotomies and fixed identities—many of which are advanced by the cultural conservatives in question.

Ibrahim Fawal's novel *On the Hills of God* (2006) is another literary work that problematizes core cultural conservative claims. Similar to the previous two literary works, Fawal's novel, the focus of chapter four, engages the theme of diversity. More specifically, it laments the collapse of a fairly harmonious mix of indigenous Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Palestinians who shared a culture and spoke one language in their local geography up until the

British Mandate and European Zionist settlers erected the physical foundations of an ethnocentric European Jewish state in historical Palestine. Although Palestine is thematically present in countless Arab American literary works,³⁷ *On the Hills of God*, I first argue, is unique in terms of its emphasis on Zionism,³⁸ Palestinian displacement in 1948, and the devastation of a diverse people. I extend my argument to show how Jewish Zionist settler colonialism intersects with Evangelical Christian messianic religious dogma, and that this alliance shatters local structures, thus displacing indigenous Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Palestinians. In that sense, what I take to be Fawal's implicit thesis drastically differs from the core thesis the cultural conservative Darwish advances in her personal narratives. In *Now they Call Me Infidel*, assuming that all Palestinians are Arab Muslims, Darwish totally erases Christian and Jewish

³⁷ Some of these works include Edward Said's *Out of Place*, Susan Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile*, Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*, Aziz Shihab's *Does the Land Remember Me*, Ibtisam Barakat's *Tasting the Sky*, Suheir Hammad's *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black: The Gaza Suite*, Shaw J. Dallal's *Scattered Like Seeds*, Sami Shalom Shetrit's *Doll's Eye*, Leila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* and *Once in a Promised Land*, Fawaz Turkey's *The Inheritance of Exile*, Jacob J. Nammur's *Born in Jerusalem*, *Born Palestinian*, Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage*, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, and Najla Said's *Looking for Palestine*, to mention a few. In *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, Fadda-Conrey is correct when she points out that the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" and the "US support of the state of Israel is central to transnational formations of Arab-American identities, specifically in relation to the most contentious and therefore unresolved question of the Palestinian right of return" (ch. 2). This is a Kindle book.

³⁸ Zionism, Edward Said writes, is "essentially [a] Western ideology" that has been marketing "itself to the world as legitimate," although what "the Zionists did in Palestine they did of course as settler-Colonialists; yet everything they did in Palestine was enacted on the world-stage so to speak in a rhetoric and costume fundamentally of the same sort as the cultural currency of the period" ("Zionism from the Standpoint" 12). Zionism quickly adopts the dominant Western discourse at any particular time to advance its own agenda, be that discourse bringing progress to an arid land, aiding in the American democratization effort in the Middle East (Said 12), or combating terrorism. In "Zionism and Colonialism," historian Ilan Pappé reminds us that "[a]ccording to the Israeli interpretation, Zionism was a national liberation movement with a strong socialist past and more recent liberal tendencies that entered its ancient homeland, derelict and empty since the exile of Jews in Roman times, waiting to be resettled" (612). But to Pappé, "Zionism . . . [,] historically and thematically [,]" is "an unconventional colonialism, diluted by strong nationalist characteristics." "Zionist settlers—indeed Zionist thought and praxis—," Pappé adds, "were motivated by a national impulse but acted as pure colonialists. . . . Zionism was not, after all, the only case in history in which a colonialist project was pursued in the name of national or otherwise noncolonialist ideals" (612). The French colonialism of Algeria and the British imperialism in Asia and Africa are two vivid cases, according to Pappé (612-13). In this dissertation, I draw from Said's, Pappé's, and other scholars' research to define Zionism as follows: Zionism is a colonial Jewish project whose goal has been the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. The modern restore-Jews-to-Zion political project initially started as a holy Christian vision of ethnic cleansing and exploitation, evolved into a covert colonial program of ethnic cleansing when Jewish Zionists arrived in Palestine, and has become a system of displacement, exploitation, racial discrimination, and dehumanization under the Israeli rule since 1948.

Palestinians and renders the Palestinian-Israeli conflict into a civilizational clash where Muslims are bent on destroying Jews and Christians. Here is where Fawal's novel becomes interventionist: Fawal, who seems committed to addressing old-new absences and misrepresentations, chose indigenous Christian and Jewish Palestinian characters to populate the fictional Palestinian town of Ardallah. They and their Muslim neighbors live side by side. By rooting this diverse community in the land, Fawal, I argue, draws attention to the presence of a relatively harmonious demographic, religious, and cultural diversity in historical Palestine. This diversity, never acknowledged in official Western Zionist narratives and culturally conservative autobiographies, has been written out of existence in 1948, as explained in chapter four, thus marking another modern development in the history of appropriating Palestine and the Palestinians.³⁹

The Arab American literary preoccupation with diversity, rewriting one's history, and challenging particular hegemonic myths recurs in Alia Yunis' short-story cycle *The Night Counter* (2009), the focus of chapter five. In comparison with the previously-discussed Arab American literary memoirs and novels, however, *The Night Counter* takes these themes to another level. *The Night Counter*, I argue, is interested in unearthing forms of injustice and economic disparities afflicting American minorities. In making this observation, I am reminded of Barbara Nimri Aziz who argues that Arab Americans have been the subject of countless

³⁹ The Palestinians are absent present in the clash discourse and in many cultural conservative narratives. In Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, they constitute a Muslim demographic ticking bomb that threatens the existence of the State of Israel. "Israelis," Huntington writes, "are concerned about the high growth rates of Palestinians" (119). Huntington gives his readers the impression that Palestinians represent an immigrant problem to the Israelis. He strips them of their indigeneity. In Gabrielle's *Because They Hate*, Palestinians voluntarily left their homes in 1948 and 1967 to give the Arab armies enough room to crush the Jews. The same Palestinians are responsible for destroying her Lebanon. In Darwish's *Now They Call Me Infidel*, Palestinians prevent the Holy Land from becoming fully holy because they stand in the way of the complete restoration of the land to world's Jews. In different ways, Palestine is appropriated and the Palestinians are misrepresented in the clash discourse and the cultural conservative narratives. On their bodies, erasures are inscribed.

stereotypes which they themselves “have imbibed and perhaps believed” (xii). To break free from these “half truths,” she emphasizes, Arab Americans, artists and writers included, must draw on and identify with other ethnic American struggles (xi).⁴⁰ Writing almost in that vein, Yunis depicts forms of disempowerment. The shared constraints among different multiethnic American communities are caused by white American cycles of discrimination. These cycles of discrimination, I propose, point to nationalist procedures deployed to constantly redefine the American nation in ways that maintain the dominant power structures. Throughout American history, discriminatory policies and practices have been directed at different ethnic and religious American communities, but in their narratives as I show in chapter one, Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan systematically leave out or deny the dark sides of the American national story. Instead, they depict a perfect America. In that America, the ethnic other, especially the Arab or Muslim American, is always the problem and he or she can be redeemed only through compulsory religious and cultural assimilation. Set in post-9/11 and structured on de-centered, localized accounts, *The Night Counter*, I argue, draws out manifestations of shared multiethnic American marginalization, creates less familiar Arab American and Arab realities—some of which are entangled in national and global histories and politics—and frustrates misconceptions

⁴⁰ Broadly speaking, I personally define an “ethnic American” as anyone who is a member of a cultural group identity. I do not consider ethnic identity inherent and static, but I see it rather as constructed, shifting, and subject to defining and redefining processes in response to particular social and political contexts and power dynamics. Accordingly “Italian Americans,” “Irish Americans,” “English Americans,” “Chinese Americans,” and “Arab Americans” constitute ethnic American cultural groups. On a national level, “ethnic” usually means an individual or a group that is different from mainstream culture. “Difference” can mean many things: difference in terms of skin color, country of origin, linguistic heritage, religious affiliation, and/or degree of social acceptance and inclusion, among others. In this dissertation, I use the term “ethnic American” to primarily suggest a person or a group that suffers a degree of prejudice and discrimination, or is not fully included in dominant national discourses that define what full Americanness is and redefine who qualifies for it. My use of the term often suggests a power imbalance in the interactions between the dominant white culture and ethnic cultures. It also suggests a plural ethnic American attempt at challenging discourses, narratives, and policies of exclusion, othering, and domination.

about Arab and Muslim Americans. More than Kahf, Ahmed, or Fawal, I further contend, Yunis sustains a systematic critique of American hegemony in the Middle East.

Research Questions and Literature Review

Before I transition to chapter one, it is useful to recapture, in a more direct way, my research questions and situate my study in relation to the available literature. In the previous pages, I have pointed out that the four examined Arab American literary works in my study offer nuanced representations and complex worldviews, ones rarely seen in popular American culture, official narratives, and public discourses. They especially complicate many of the simplistic claims the American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent make. Because my study engages a number of ongoing debates in the United States (and elsewhere), it poses two interconnected sets of questions. The first cluster of questions concentrates on the cultural conservative popular autobiographies: what are the major claims the cultural conservative personal accounts advance? What contributes to the popularity of these accounts among mainstream white readers, in spite of their polemics and hostility towards not only Arabs and Muslims but also the multicultural and multiethnic American social fabric? What do they reveal, or conceal, about the intersection of religion, imperialism, and contemporary dynamics of self-identification? What is their take on identity, heritage, and belonging? How does the Palestinian-Israeli conflict register in these narratives? Why should literary scholars take the cultural conservative seriously and engage with their personal narratives more critically?

The second set of questions focuses on the selected Arab American novels, memoirs, and short-story cycles by Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis. Throughout my dissertation, however, I engage other Arab American, multiethnic, and contemporary American literary works to answer the following prompts: what patterns of socialization among Arab Americans do the studied

Arab American literary texts describe? As representative of trends in Arab American literature, do they register a weak or rather a strong intersection of religion, imperialism, and the contemporary dynamics of self-identification? What popular American representations of Arabs and Muslims do the selected works confirm or frustrate? Cognizant of the discrimination Arab Americans encounter, do the authors produce literary signs of solidarity and affiliation with other minoritized ethnicities? Do their works also signal acts of resistance to discrimination and otherness? How does the Palestinian-Israeli conflict register in the selected Arab American literary works? What is their take on identity, heritage, and belonging?

My analysis of the American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent acknowledges the scholarship of Stephen Sheehi, Stephen Salaita, and Wail S. Hassan, among others. In one of the chapters in his book, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* (2011), Sheehi calls Ali, Sultan, Gabrielle, and Darwish Islamophobic native informants who facilitate U.S. imperialist enterprises in the Middle East. They have been used by the “American media, political organizations, and religious groups” as “native informants to provide evidence that will convert their Islamophobia into a social and cultural analysis” (ch. 3).⁴¹ As he explores the case of Ali, Sheehi accuses her of employing a “method that sets the paradigm for the native informant genre itself.” This method materializes in her determination to “locate” her “authority to speak in the ‘authenticity’ of simply being” a Muslim woman. She, Sheehi adds, is therefore quickly picked up as “typical of all tokens”—meaning that she is “selected, adopted, and promoted by the dominant group on the basis of” her “willingness to perform in accordance with” its expectations (ch. 3). Therefore, in spite of her lack of scholarly credentials and

⁴¹ This is a Kindle book. The MLA manual requires citing the title of the section or the chapter number to compensate for the absence of page numbers. Whenever I use a Kindle book for the first time in the dissertation, I signal that in a footnote.

academic qualifications “to speak authoritatively about Islam and the Arab world,” she has been accepted in the West as a scholar, feminist activist, and reformer primarily on the grounds of her “insider claims about Islam” (Sheehi ch. 3). An insider, Ali reinforces a desirable narrative.

Steven Salaita examines a relatively similar case, namely the case of the fraudulent *Honor Lost* (2003) by Norma Khouri, who fabricated the core story of honor killing, among other events, in her autobiography. *Honor Lost*, Salaita argues, became instantly popular because of its “appeasement of a long-standing cultural mythos in the United States and its ability to retroactively justify decades of aggressive foreign policy in the Arab world” (*Arab American Literary Fictions* 88). Similarly, in *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*, Wail S. Hassan calls Khouri “an unscrupulous opportunist” who “knew how to exploit both her national background and Orientalist stereotypes in posing as an authoritative cultural translator.” Hassan observes that “Khouri’s initial success vastly contrasts with the general neglect of Arab and Anglophone Arab writers, suggesting that many readers in English-speaking countries are only prepared to accept texts that confirm what they already ‘know.’”⁴² As a result, Hassan adds, such works are quickly accepted “because they confirm stereotypes that function to justify U.S. foreign policy toward Arab countries” (36). I agree with Sheehi, Salaita, and Hassan on the issues of the cultural interpreters’ claims to authenticity, their appeal as they confirm to their audiences what they already know about the others, and how their works are used to pressure the othered population into assimilation or submission. Sheehi uses the term “Islamophobia” while Hassan employs the term “Orientalism”

⁴² Interestingly, the points Sheehi, Salaita, and Hassan are making here remind one of similar claims the Chinese American critic Frank Chin makes about a number of Asian American writers whom he labels “writers of the fake” in the Asian American literary tradition. These views, which some critics agree on, appear in Chin’s “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake” and Chin et al.’s “Introduction to Chinese-and Japanese-American Literature.” I discuss them in chapter one.

to describe the writing of Ali and others. I, however, disagree on the efficacy and adequacy of the terms “Islamophobia” and “Orientalism.” I consider Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, Sultan, and even Khouri to be the latest newcomers to a tradition of interpreters. I extend Jacobs’s thesis to argue that these cultural conservatives belong to a transnational “informal network” of self-identified experts on Arabs, Muslims, the Middle East and diasporic Arab and Muslim populations in the West. The cultural conservatives, however, do not concentrate only on Muslims, Arabs, or even Arab and Muslim Americans. Obsessed with the diverse demographic and religious structures in the West, the cultural conservatives consider cultures of color and non-Judeo-Christian religions a threat to white culture. Their worldview is heavily informed by Huntington’s civilizational paradigm, the hypothesis of the “West” clashing with the “rest.” According to Huntington, the “rest” includes all non-Westerners: Latin Americans, Asians, Africans, Eastern Europeans, Muslims, and Hindus (*The Clash* 45-48). Orientalism and Islamophobia, though undeniably powerful as Hassan and Sheehi effectively demonstrate, alone cannot explain Huntington’s call on the West to unify against the rest so as to maintain its hegemony. They also do not explain the practices, affiliations, and the beliefs of the diverse members of this informal network or the eclectic discourses they produce, let alone their attack on multiculturalism and ethno-religious diversity.

My study examines trends in Arab American literature which formally, methodologically, conceptually, and/or thematically complicate the personal narratives of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan while also unveiling the forces that stand between Arab and Muslim Americans and their inclusion in the larger body of American multiculturalism. Indeed, Arab Americans are in a “precarious position,” Fadda-Conrey points out in *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. Since 9/11, Arab Americans

“have found themselves relegated to an increasingly precarious position within the US nation-state” and this position “firmly brands” them “as the racial, religious, political, and national Other of a hegemonic US national identity that has increasingly become more uniform and insular in nature.” Since the first wave of Arab immigrants arrived in the U.S. in the nineteenth century, Fadda-Conrey adds, Arab American “legal and cultural forms of citizenship have been repeatedly denied or questioned;” although since 1944, Arab Americans have been legally considered white, their whiteness status is at best honorary. “This type of ‘honorary whiteness,’” Fadda-Conrey argues, “serves to isolate Arab-Americans from the white category (since they are never actually included in discussions of racial whiteness) and from a racial minority status, situating them in an unstable racial space within the US.” This “stigmatizing racialization of Arab-and Muslim-American bodies by the US mainstream,” therefore, “accentuates the ambiguity of Arab American belonging in the US” and “such stigmatizing racializations are instrumental in affirming the foreignness or Otherness of these bodies in the US” (Fadda-Conrey, Introduction). My treatment of the selected Arab American literary texts draws attention to this “precarious” state and explores these questions of citizenship and belonging. My study treats the examined Arab American literary works as “responses” that unveil how religion and the critique of imperial hegemony factor into the clash narratives and register in the counter Arab American literary representations.

My study was initially prompted, as a research project, by the scarcity of book-length monographs investigating how alternative modes of discourse in the Arab American literary tradition engage the cultural conservative personal narratives. To a large extent, the available studies document the sociology of Arab immigrants, offer a trans-diasporic examination of Arabic literatures, present a survey-type treatment of Arab American literature, or focus on a

single author. Scholars of Arab American literature have examined the history of Arab immigration, the development of the Arab American literary tradition, and themes pertaining to cultural translation, identity negotiation, hybridity, diaspora, the Lebanese Civil War, exile, fighting stereotypes, Arab sexism, racializing Islam, the notion of home, the theme of belonging, and American racism. A closer look at (some of) the available critical publications reveals the following scopes and concentrations.

Anthologies provide general introductions, construct a coherent Arab American literary tradition, and canonize certain literary works and their authors.⁴³ Reader's guides add to the growing corpus of critical introductions carving a place for Arab American literature in the broader multicultural landscape of American letters. Designed to familiarize a general readership with Arab American literature, reader's guides offer quick introductions to selected Arab and Muslim American authors,⁴⁴ introducing these writers, naming their contributions, and providing accessible general analyses of key literary works. Sociological studies map Arab America as a distinctive ethnic community by documenting the history of both early immigrants and the experiences of their offspring.⁴⁵ This focus constitutes a common area of research among Arab

⁴³ See Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa's *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* (1988); Kadi's *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994); Akash and Khaled Mattawa's *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999); Handal's *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2001); Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa's *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (2004), and Sharara's *Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry* (2008).

⁴⁴ See Layton's *Multicultural Voices: Arab American and Muslim Writers* (2010), and Salaita's *Modern Arab American Fiction: a Reader's Guide* (2011).

⁴⁵ For a small sampling of sociological studies, see Shakir's *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997); Suleiman's *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (1999); Benson et al.'s *Community of Many Worlds: Arab-Americans in New York City* (2002); Boosahda's *Arab-American Faces and Voices: the Origins of an Immigrant Community* (2003); Malek's *A Country Called Amreeka: Arab Roots, American Stories* (2009); Howell's *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (2013); Abraham and Abraham's *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities* (1983); Naff's *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (1985); and Orfalea's *Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab Americans* (1988).

American academics. They contextualize Arab America and weave its history into the fabric of American history while alluding to the socio-political, legal, religious, and economic conditions under which this ethnic community has existed. Sociological and historical studies offer valuable information necessary for any researcher to comprehend Arab America and Arab American literature in context. Edited critical collections constitute a major venue where Arab American culture and literature are frequently discussed. In them, Arab America is examined as part of diasporic, multicultural, Arab, or a mixed Arab and Arab American body of cultures and literatures.⁴⁶ Arab American literature has been increasingly discussed in academic journals and is occasionally assigned a special issue.⁴⁷

I also build on the growing number of book-length critical studies and monographs on Arab American literary works. Some either investigate Western literary influences on the cultural production of early Arab American intellectuals who founded the Mahjar (émigré) School of Arab American writing,⁴⁸ explore Ameen Rihani's secular humanism and his role as a bridge between the West and the East,⁴⁹ combine what the previous two 2010 studies look into,⁵⁰

⁴⁶ For edited collections see Gana's *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture* (2013); Majaj's *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab American Writer and Artist* (2002); Geissler and Horst Pöttker's *Media, Migration, and Integration: European and North American Perspectives* (2009); Darraj's *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* (2004); Al Maleh's *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (2009), and Abdulhadi et al.'s *Arab and Arab American Feminist Perspectives: Gender, Nation and Belonging* (2011).

⁴⁷ In terms of special academic journal issues, for example, *The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)* devoted its 4th issue in the winter of 2006 to Arab American literature. *The American Studies Journal* similarly designated its 52nd edition, November 2008, to Arab American culture and literature. The 2008 issue on race of the journal of the Modern Language Association of America, *PMLA*, has a special section on Muslim and Arab literary writing of American and Canadian background.

⁴⁸ See Imangulleva's *Gibran, Rihani & Naimy: East-West Interactions in Early Twentieth Century Arab Literature* (2010).

⁴⁹ See Hajjar's *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani: The Humanist Ideology of an Arab-American Intellectual and Activist* (2010).

or provide a useful general source to the Arab American literary tradition and scholarship, an attempt to map out and conceptualize the prospective field of Arab American Studies.⁵¹ Other works examine how Arab American writers embrace their hyphenated identities which allow them and their hybrid characters to negotiate their unique location on the fringes between Arab and American cultures,⁵² study orientalist representations of Arabs in Western popular literary and cultural productions,⁵³ research Arab and African American identities and the “issues of body and representation” in contemporary literary and cultural works,⁵⁴ or look at cultural translation, identity politics, and diasporic identity negotiation.⁵⁵ Other scholars investigate how

⁵⁰ See Rihany's *Multiculturalism & Arab-American Literature* (2007).

⁵¹ See Salaita's *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007). It is amalgamation of personal recollections and observations, literary criticism, social and political reflections, literary analysis, and philosophizing about the future emergence of Arab American Studies. *Arab American Literary Fictions* intermittently and sporadically engages Islam and religion especially in its general discussion of ethnic Arab America, its public image, and its ambiguous states of being, but it primarily investigates the status of Arab America and Arab American fiction from a secular prism.

⁵² See Abdelrazek's *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings* (2007). Abdelrazek studies Ahmed's *A Border Passage*, Kahf's *E-mails from Scheherazade*, Halaby's *West of the Jordan*, and Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*. In *Contemporary Arab*, religion, empire, and American anti-Arab biases inhabit a scattered discussion necessary to her analysis of Arab American hyphenated identities, cultural in-betweenness, and Western stereotyping. Religion and foreign policy by no means resemble the core of her study. Nor does her study, like Salaita's, probe into the discourse of the cultural conservatives or advocates of the clash of civilizations.

⁵³ See Jarmakani's *An Imperialist Love Story: Desert Romances and the War on Terror* (July 31, 2015). According to the book's description on amazon.com, *An Imperialist Love Story* “contributes to the broader conversation about the legacy of orientalist representations of Arabs in Western popular culture. Combining close readings of novels, discursive analysis of blogs and forums, and interviews with authors, Jarmakani explores popular investments in the war on terror by examining the collisions between fantasy and reality in desert romances. Focusing on issues of security, freedom, and liberal multiculturalism, she foregrounds the role that desire plays in contemporary formations of U.S. imperialism.”

⁵⁴ See Pickens' *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (2014). According to the book's blurb, Pickens “discusses a range of literary, cultural, and archival material where narratives emphasize embodied experience to examine how these experiences constitute Arab Americans and African Americans as social and political subjects. Pickens argues that Arab American and African American narratives rely on the body's fragility, rather than its exceptional strength or emotion to create urgent social and political critiques.” In the examined works, Pickens adds, “[t]he creators of these narratives find potential in mundane experiences such as breathing, touch, illness, pain, and death” (n. p.).

⁵⁵ See Sabry's *Arab-American Women's Writing and Performance: Orientalism, Race, and the Idea of the Arabian Nights* (2011). The work explores two issues: first, Orientalist and stereotypical representations of *The Arabian*

different generations of Arab American and Arab British literary writers have had to contend with the heavy burden of Orientalism as they translated Arab and Muslim cultures for English-speaking readers and categorize the roles they are forced to assume as cultural interpreters,⁵⁶ or investigate how contemporary Arab American literary, visual, and artistic evocations of Arab homelands offer a corrective and interventionist understanding to exclusionist American notions of citizenship and belonging.⁵⁷ My study engages some of these works and the scholars' treatments of various issues and is in conversation with them.

The "significance of literary genre choice" is a final research question that has come out of my analysis of the cultural conservative and Arab American literary works, yet it does not

Nights and second, the reconstructive representations of Scheherazade and her tales in Arab American writing by women authors. Resisting the simplistic identities Orientalists and Western stereotypers fabricate for Scheherazade as the epitome of oppressed Arab women, Sabry argues, diasporic Arab American women writers continuously embark on recasting the character of Scheherazade and her narratives anew to negotiate their own affiliations and challenge simplistic representations of Arabs and Arab-Americans. As Sabry puts it, "this book defines itself as an interventionist attempt at reconsidering simplistic identity politics through an exploration of diasporic identities. It seeks to position itself in relation to the budding field of Arab-American Studies, through the captivating narrative and orality of the narrator of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade, in Arab-American women's writing and performance" (xii).

⁵⁶ See Hassan's *Immigrant Narrative: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2011. *Immigrant Narratives*, Hassan points out, "is about how Orientalism has . . . profoundly influenced immigrant Arab writers, how they have reacted to it, and how their position as cultural translators has shaped their discourses." More specifically, Hassan 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).

⁵⁷ See Fadda-Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014). In the book, Fadda-Conrey concentrates on Arab American literary, artistic, and visual productions "dating from the 1990s onward." Her chosen Arab American productions, Fadda-Conrey argues, "contest blanket and erroneous representations of Arab Americans" while simultaneously "endorse, develop, and portray antiassimilationist and transnational modes of Arab-American belonging that ultimately transform dominant and exclusionary US understandings of national membership and citizenship." More specifically, Fadda-Conrey argues that "the discursive negotiation of transnational connections to Arab homelands from a variegated and multilayered US perspective has an integral role in creating a space for reformulating hegemonic and unilocal understandings of US citizenship and belonging" (Introduction). This newly published scholarship raises immediate questions relevant to my dissertation project including the themes of stereotypical U.S. misrepresentations of Arab Americans, literary Arab American counter self-representations, self-conscious literary Arab American attempts to break free from the binary "us versus them," the ability of the alternative Arab American narratives to challenge reductionist and exclusionary manifestations of national identity, and reimagining the past as a mode of Arab American resistance.

receive full treatment in the body of my dissertation: why do the cultural conservatives Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan utilize the conventional autobiography genre while the Arab American literary writers Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis resort instead to the memoir, novel, and short story cycle genres? I, indeed, partially treat this question in chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, and chapter five, but I return to it in the conclusion to offer a comprehensive treatment. More specifically, I argue that the traditional autobiography genre is very suitable for the policy-oriented ethnographic projects of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. It allows them to claim authenticity, narrative authority, and win the trust of their target audience by meeting their expectations before they call for a Western civilizing mission that ought to focus on the inferior Arab Muslim others inside and outside the West. In addition, the conventional autobiography makes it easier for Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan to contribute to a fringe, albeit fast growing, conservative American identity. This identity is hyper-nationalist, exclusionist, and assimilationist. In the process of narrating their personal stories, the four cultural conservatives render contemporary ethno-religious American plurality marginal as they insist on imagining a future America—one that is predominantly white in culture, religion, and politics. They would have had serious difficulties conveying their policy-oriented messages to their target audience had they written in a different genre. Conversely, the other literary genres—i.e. the memoir, novel, and short story cycle—Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis utilize not only allow their literary works to exhibit a progressive and anti-hegemonic set of thematic and conceptual constellations, but they aid Kahf, Fawal, Ahmed, and Yunis in their effort to celebrate multicultural diversity and appreciate religious difference. Furthermore, they make it possible for some of these writers to draw attention to how the continued projection of American power in the Middle East, as evident in the cultural conservative autobiographies, negatively influences

the public image of Arab and Muslim Americans and contributes to a growing body of clichés that misrepresent Arabs and Muslims abroad. Simultaneously, the novel, memoir, and short-story cycle enable Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis to establish new connections and endorse democratic notions of identity. The genre choice is important to both the cultural conservatives and the Arab American literary writers as I demonstrate later in the conclusion.

Chapter One

The American Cultural Conservatives on Islam: Narrating the Self, Translating the Dysfunctional Other

In choosing to critique Islam, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan are indebted to Huntington who argues in *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order* that the end of the Cold War marked the end of the clash of ideologies and registered the birth of cultural and religious conflicts, one of which is an upcoming civilizational clash between Islam and the West. While Western civilization holds the reins to world power now, Huntington contends, the Islamic civilization will pursue power and will consider reshaping the world according to Islamic ways of seeing and being, of course, not unlike other non-Western civilizations. The West therefore must unite, believe in its civilizational identity, maintain and secure hegemony over other civilizations, and tackle internal and external challenges more seriously. In the introduction of my study, I discuss the core claims and policy recommendations Huntington makes in *The Clash of Civilizations*. In this chapter, I therefore engage the core themes and claims Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Bridgette Gabrielle, and Wafa Sultan make in their personal narratives. The chapter consists of two sections. In the first section, I deliberately offer a mainly objective collage of the main claims the above writers make in their popular autobiographies. In the second section, I analytically and critically concentrate primarily on Ali as a case study. I am hoping the first section will familiarize my readers with the cultural conservative works I deconstruct in the second part and frequently allude to throughout the study. Before I venture in this direction, however, a brief biographical account of each writer is necessary.

Ali grew up Muslim in Somalia and lived in Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Kenya because of the political instability in Somalia. Early in the 1990s, she applied for political asylum in the Netherlands. After gaining Dutch citizenship, she was elected for the Dutch House of

Representatives in 2003. Three years later, she was forced to step down because she concealed her real name (Hirsi Megan), claimed that she travelled to Holland from Somalia (while in fact she arrived from Kenya via Germany), and lied about her age on her citizenship application. Her Dutch passport was revoked in 2006, the year she immigrated to the U.S. While in the Netherlands, Ali completed a Master in political science and identified as an atheist, a belief she still maintains in the U.S. Born and raised in Egypt to a Muslim family, Darwish is the daughter of an Egyptian lieutenant general who was assassinated in the Gaza Strip in the 1950s by an Israeli special unit. Darwish has a BA in sociology and anthropology from the American University in Cairo. She immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s, left Islam, and has become a conservative Evangelical Christian. Gabrielle is a Lebanese Maronite Christian. While in Lebanon, she worked as an Arabic language news anchor for *World News*, a station owned by the South Lebanese Army and funded by Israel. During the alliance between the Maronites of South Lebanese Army and Israel, Gabrielle, who has a high school diploma, lived in Israel before she immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s. Her zealous religiosity and Maronite nationalism draw her closer to Evangelical Christian Zionism. Sultan was born and raised in an Alawite Muslim Syrian family and finished a degree in psychiatry while in Syria. In the 1980s, she immigrated to the U.S. Since then, she has identified as an agnostic. Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan are naturalized American citizens.

Their popularity in the U.S. exceeds that enjoyed by other American women and men of Arab or Muslim descent who make similar claims. Male writers include Walid Shoebat, Zuhdi Jasser, and Mosab Hassan Yousef. Although the men—especially Jasser who wrote *A Battle for the Soul of Islam: A Muslim American Patriot's Fight to Save His Faith* and Yousef, who published the conventional autobiography *Son of Hamas* and is the star of the documentary *The*

Green Prince—have garnered enough attention, the reception of their work is not as strong as that of the four women. This fact explains my attention to only works by Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. After this succinct introduction, I will now begin the chapter which consists of two parts.

Part One: Introducing the Cultural Conservative Autobiographers

One identity: Totalitarian Muslims

In *They Must Be Stopped*, Gabrielle takes radical Islam to be the mainstream version of Islam in the today's world. This Islam is innately antagonistic, terroristic, and exclusionist ideology—one determined to eliminate Judeo-Christians. Unlike anyone else, Arabs and Muslims are loyal to their religion and cannot be faithful to the state or accept the notion of national identity (21). They represent a unified dysfunctional ummah,¹ congruous and homogenous (38-39), whose problems originate from Islam itself (54-55; 63; 72). Not unlike Gabrielle, Sultan locks Islam in an imaginary past, treats the Islamic world as a backward homogeneity, and claims Muslims to be fear-ridden subjects who avoid the unfamiliar and prefer to embrace a regressive radical worldview from the medieval era (58). "All social institutions in contemporary Muslim society," Sultan similarly argues, "are founded on oppressive proprietary relationships. Muslim society has been a slave society since it came into being and has remained so ever since" (156). All Muslims are radicals; the mainstream is extreme. To that end, Darwish states, the "truth is that all Muslims are a part of 'political Islam' rather than a religion and a

¹ "Ummah" or "umma" means a global Muslim community. According to Talal Asad in *Genealogies of Religion*, the "*umma* is the concept of a religious-political space—divinely sanctioned and eternally valid—within which rational discussion, debate, and criticism can be conducted. It is also a space of power and of punishment" (221).

personal relationship with God. Furthermore, the nonpracticing Muslims are often as biased, extreme, and supportive of Jihad as the religious extremists” are (136). Likewise, Arab and Muslim Americans are just the same: they “do not need some Americanized Muslim religion . . . [but] need to bring true Islam to this nation [America] that needs it” (Darwish 140). Arab and Muslim immigrants, Darwish repeats, “have come to Islamize America” (149). Regardless of their generational, religious, cultural, economic, educational, or sexual traits, all are the same. All are the face of the hidden enemy. Entrenched in this belief, Darwish had to choose. She, therefore, “turned from a culture of hatred to one of love” and converted to Christianity (161).

Binaries: America versus the Muslim World

Unlike these dark representations, the U.S. occupies a favorable location in the cultural conservative personal narratives. It is the oasis of freedom, perfection, enlightenment and justice. Sultan, Darwish, and Ali recreate the U.S. without its tumultuous race relations, history of colonialism, brutal slavery, hegemonic enterprises, and the ongoing various manifestations of social and racial inequalities. For Sultan, the U.S. is a transformer of corrupt consciousness, a savior of oppressed women, and a beacon of enlightenment and justice. The U.S. Sultan discovers shortly after leaving Syria is a savior and a model to follow (161-64), because it is “governed by law and morality,” unlike her Syrian village which “was ruled by the laws of the jungle” (8-9). Similarly, Darwish lauds the U.S., the adopted angelic country which has offered her “a new beginning” (126-27). The States becomes the chosen land, a transcendental and heavenly kingdom of Western justice. Like Sultan, Darwish leaves out the dark chapters in American history. Her imagined U.S.—Judeo-Christian and Euro-American in body and spirit—fascinates her to the extent where she dismisses as trivial the documented history of American colonialism, racism, and imperialism. Recalling Berkeley in the 1990s, Darwish remembers

meeting Americans who “were not happy with” and “blamed America for most of the ills around the world.” She reports on hearing “things like: White men committed the worst atrocities to humanity. They criticized American foreign policy and the military and often used words such as colonialism and imperialism” (167-68). Darwish brushes off their critique and instead takes the U.S. to be “a world superpower that was trying to inspire democracy,” a benevolent state that “instead of using its power to rule the world, chose to “juggle the many conflicting demands of Third World countries as best it could” (168).² Similarly, for Ali, “Britain and America were the countries . . . where there was decency and individual choice” (109); the Dutch society has no contradictions (215). The Christian values of these countries promote kindness, love, and decency (*Infidel* 215-16). In contrast, the Islamic world lags behind because of Islamic teachings, according to Ali who asserts, at the end of *Infidel*, that “[f]rom my grandmother to me is a journey of just two generations, but the reality of that voyage is millennial. Even today you can take a truck across the border into Somalia and find you have gone back thousands of years in time” (350). If *Infidel* is Ali’s declaration of independence, that is to say freedom from Islam and its barbarity, *Nomad* is her homage to the U.S. (*Nomad* xiii).

² This denial of contemporary American empire, permeating the culturally-conservative narratives of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan as it does the orientalist historiography of Bernard Lewis, to a degree follows in the footsteps of an old tradition in American historiography. In this tradition of American historiography, wrote William Appleman Williams in 1955,

One of the central themes . . . is that there is no American Empire. Most historians will admit, if pressed, that the United States once had an empire. They then promptly insist that it was given away. But they also speak persistently of America as a World Power. (379)

In their accounts, Ali, Darwish, Sultan, and Gabrielle go beyond the limited realm of life narratives so as to craft a history of the Arab and Muslim world. In their representations, any discussions of the contemporary United States as a Western imperium, one that is involved in the Middle East and North Africa, is irrelevant and naïve. To them, the U.S. is just a superpower involved in the Middle East in order to combat Muslim radicalization and Muslim terror. The U.S., a benevolent world leader, works hard to democratize the Arab and Muslim world.

De-contextualizing Violence, Absolving Colonialism

Like the U.S. which has no interest in imperial endeavors, Israel is not engaged in settler colonialism. Accordingly, the Palestinian becomes the face of the contemporary Muslim terror in Gabrielle's lost Lebanon. In *Because They Hate*, she accuses the Palestinian refugees, whom the Zionist project displaced, of destroying her Christian-majority country and claims that these "Arab" refugees left their homes after they were ordered to do so by the five Arab armies invading the newly-born state of Israel in 1948 (17). The same, she argues, happened during the 1967 war: Palestinians voluntarily fled their towns to give the invading Arab armies room to crush the peaceful state of Israel. In her account, Israel is a David who fights back against a Goliath and always in self-defense. The same narrative leaves out the story of Zionism as a European colonial project (17; 33; 88), and insists that Israel and the U.S. intervene in Arab and Muslim countries to protect themselves from Islamo-fascism and radical terror (108). In her account, the clash of civilizations materializes in the binary conditions of Lebanon and Israel: "The difference between the two cultures," Gabrielle writes, citing Huntington's famous phrase, "has nothing to do with money, and everything to do with values. It is truly the clash of civilizations in its rawest form" (103). "I began to realize that the Arab Muslim world, because of its religion and culture," Gabrielle shortly announces, "is a natural threat to civilized people of the world, particularly Western civilization." The issue here is not that religions are all bad, but that Islam in particular is bad. "While Christians and Jews learn to repair the world, love their enemy, forgive those who trespass against them, and turn the other cheek," Gabrielle asserts, "Muslims are taught to fight the infidels, to consider them the enemies of Allah" (105). Accordingly, Gabrielle blames the contemporary dislocation of Middle Eastern and North African Jews squarely on this alleged religio-cultural hostility (*Because They Hate* 105). They

fled to Israel in pursuit of safety, equality, and justice. Similarly, in *Infidel*, Ali labels Muslims Jew-haters and rejects Arab and Muslim critiques of Western colonial hegemony and its devastating impact on their lives. Such claims, she insists, are “clearly” mere “nonsense” (224). Likewise, European racism towards immigrants of color is fictional (Ali, *Infidel* 224-33).³

Outward looking: Absence of Muslim and Arab Self-critique

Instead of looking inwards, Arabs and Muslims find it more convenient to look outwards. Sultan and Ali believe that Muslims and Arabs do not exercise self-critique,⁴ especially when

³ These claims contradict the overwhelming scholarship on the devastating effects of colonialism on the subjugated or recently independent peoples. Indeed, in *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, for example, scholar Elizabeth Kassab argues that the “many commonalities found in the cultural debates carried out in linguistically, religiously, culturally, and racially different [postcolonial] regions clearly indicate that their issues and problems cannot be due—at least not solely and not deterministically—to the specific language, religion, or race of a given region. Rather the economic, political, and historical conditions of colonialism and neocolonialism have had and continue to have a most crucial role in producing them and shaping them.” Invested in the post-1967 era while also surveying mid-nineteenth-century to mid-twentieth-century, Kassab’s book offers a comparative analysis of a number of postcolonial cultural debates and critiques focused on cultural decolonization. “In all these debates,” Kassab contends, “the quest for a liberated, empowered, and distinct sense of self dominates, checked by a whole array of intellectual, cultural, economic, political, and often military challenges” (Introduction). [This is a Kindle book.]

⁴ Talal Asad, however, challenges the assumption that “the practice of public criticism is seen as alien” to Muslims, by delineating an “extended account of public criticism that takes place in a contemporary religious state: Saudi Arabia” (200). “[R]easoned criticism” is not exceptionally the property of, nor is it practiced only in, Enlightenment societies. Indeed, “institutionalized forms of criticism, made accessible to anonymous readers and listeners, are integral to many non-Enlightenment states. Among them,” Asad argues, “is contemporary Saudi Arabia” (207). Reasoned criticism takes on different form in the Saudi Kingdom, according to Asad: “The most important form in which this tradition finds expression is the Friday sermon (*Khutba*) delivered in the larger mosques, but it is also practiced in the form of theological lectures in the Islamic universities” (212). Another form of reasoned criticism is “*nasīha*,” which “signifies advice that is given for someone’s good, honestly and faithfully. It also has the meaning of sincerity, integrity, and doing justice to a situation.” *Nasīha* “carries the sense of offering moral advice to an erring fellow Muslim” and “it is at once an obligation to be fulfilled and a virtue to be cultivated by all Muslims” (214). “As a practice that is everyone’s responsibility,” Asad emphasizes, “*nasīha* is thus independent of the ruler’s authority. Furthermore, the critical role of ordinary Muslims . . . requires a direct engagement with the transgressor. More important, neither the ruler nor his officials are exempt from criticism by the upright Muslim” (216), who possesses “knowledge of the rules and models of virtuous living” and abides by the “appropriate mode[s] of engagement” (217).

Asad offers a concrete case where in May 1991, “several hundreds of Saudi” religious scholars signed “an open letter, addressed to King Fahd” and which they “distributed throughout the kingdom.” The letter “puts forward several demands that bring together longstanding criticisms made of the regime by various groups within the country. The demands include the ‘establishment of a consultative assembly to adjudicate on domestic and foreign affairs . . . with complete independence . . .,’ ‘a just distribution of public wealth . . .,’ ‘guarantee of the rights of the individual and

they are faced with central issues pertaining to radicalization, violence, mistreatment of women, and terrorism. Sultan writes, “[w]e [Muslims] no longer condemn the language of killing and terrorism, which has become a way of life for us. It has become a skill that we practice with the same delight that the surgeon takes in his work” (213). Even educated liberal men eventually succumb to the teaching of Islam and the acceptable cultural norms. For Ali, Muslim intellectuals and Arab public figures, including her father, stay silent on violations of women’s right to their bodies, civil rights, and human rights. In *Infidel*, she explains how she has chosen to speak out against Islam’s atrocities so as “to spark a debate among Muslims about reforming aspects of Islam so that people could begin to question, and criticize, their own beliefs. This could happen only in the West, where Muslims may speak out; in no Muslim country can there be free discussion on such” thorny issues (295).⁵ Claiming to be speaking for Muslim women, Ali invites them to “become more aware of just how bad, and how unacceptable, their suffering” is. By breaking her silence, Ali hopes “to help them develop the vocabulary of resistance” (*Infidel* 295). But she cannot accomplish the job on her own. She needs the support of Western feminists. In *Nomad*, Ali, therefore, calls upon “Western feminists . . . to take on the plight of the Muslim woman and make it their case. Their aim should be to help the Muslim woman find her voice.” Western feminists must aid in the education of Muslim women, help them reclaim their bodies, and show them the way to financial independence (Ali, *Nomad* xix).

society . . . ,’ ‘and the removal of all infringements on the wishes and rights of people, including human dignity . . . , in accordance with legitimate . . . and recognized moral rules . . . —as well as a complete and thorough review of all political, administrative, and economic organizations in the kingdom to ensure that they are run in accordance with the Islamic *sharīa*” (Asad 223). Critique exists even in countries that apply Islamic law like the case of the Saudi kingdom. As I demonstrate in chapter three of my study, likewise secular intellectuals have been exercising self-critique.

⁵ Ali recycles the same views in her most recent book *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*.

Muslim Women in a State of Subordination: Dysfunctional Families

Still on the issue of Muslim women, Sultan claims that Muslim women are enslaved by Islam, a religious ideology that breeds a unitary misogynistic Muslim culture. This culture empowers men by reducing women to a subordinate class—a master-slave relationship. She uses her Aleppo experience to claim that all Muslim and Arab women are oppressed. In her narrative, Sultan insists that the women in her family were associated with shame and had to endure humiliation. Her grandmother lost three sons during a smallpox epidemic, but her two daughters survived. The crisis “enveloped [the grandfather] not in sadness, but in shame because he has become the ‘father of daughters’” (12). In the narrative, the suffering of the grandfather compels the grandmother, she who is responsible for his shame, to ask the hand of a beautiful woman in marriage for him (13). During the marriage ceremony, the grandmother even dances in his marriage and eventually serves the new bride. Therefore, to Sultan, Muslim women are variations of one female type: one who is submissive, enslaved, oppressed, and religious. If they continue to follow the teachings of Islam and Arab culture, Sultan asserts, Muslim women will pass onto their female offspring their passivity, submissiveness, helplessness, restrained sense of imagination, and self-loathing. In summation, Muslim men, like their God, are inhumane, authoritative, and tyrannical. Their religion encourages ignorance, hinders free thinking, and locks them in a medieval past unable to evolve or move forward (57). As a result, Muslim societies are sick and Muslim culture is dysfunctional. Unable to stay silent about these harsh realities, Sultan, now a liberated feminist in the West, has a mission: to “defend those [Muslim and Arab women whom] Allah had cut down in size until they were smaller than flies” (109).

Ali shares many of the above convictions. According to her, patriarchy fully controls Arab and Muslim women’s sexuality and undermines their agency and subjectivity. Ali offers

her case as one vivid example: “I absolutely had to be a virgin at marriage, because to do otherwise would damage the honor of my father and whole clan—uncles, brothers, male cousins—forever and irretrievably” (72). Muslim men see women and girls as either a burden or sexual objects and in order for one to become a good wife, sister, or daughter, she must accept subordination, sexual repression, genital mutilation, silence, and obedience (*Infidel* 29-32; 76-77; 93-94; 218; 244). She describes her brother beating up his wife and children. Her father remarries and abandons his own family, thus adding additional pressures on her mother who quickly becomes erratic. These men exercise violence over the female body, torment her psyche, and cause women to become dysfunctional (*Infidel* 259-60). In this context, God is violent; the fathers are so, and the sons repeat the cycle as they project onto women and girls their inherited violence. This “oppression of women,” Ali believes, “causes Muslim women and Muslim men, too, to lag behind the West. It creates a culture that generates more backwardness with every generation” (*Infidel* 349). In short, fear is the language of the Muslim condition and violence is its defining feature (*Nomad* 46, 47, 58). Accordingly, the Arab and Muslim presence in the West is an existential problem. In depicting such a dark reality, Ali echoes Sultan who claims that an “oppressed and subjugated woman cannot give birth to an emotionally and mentally well-balanced man” and the “invisible Muslim woman has been and continues to be the hen who incubates the eggs of terrorism and provides them with the necessary warmth to hatch the terrorists” (135). Since all Muslim women are oppressed, Muslim terrorism prevails. Freeing Muslim women will save the West and end terrorism, Sultan reiterates (147-48; 149).

Exposing a Muslim Take Over, Denouncing American Multiculturalism

According to Sultan, Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. are not only incapable of adopting American values (226; 227; 228), but are also on a crash course with them (223; 232). The U.S.,

Sultan insists, should take the threat seriously because she offers inside knowledge of the Arab and Muslim world. The U.S. “has to defend itself and try to subject every Muslim to microscopic scrutiny” because “[n]o one can be true Muslim and a true American simultaneously” (Sultan 242-43).⁶ Any efforts to combat the so-called Muslim threat, Sultan urges, must consider helping

⁶ This cultural conservative illogic corresponds with historical patterns of anxiety over the integration of, and consequent discrimination against, Jews and Catholics in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century. Anxiety over the Catholic presence and Catholic immigration was volatile. Similar to the phenomenon of cultural conservative narratives and the clash discourse publications I mentioned earlier in the dissertation, books “sounding the alarm over the flood of Roman Catholic immigrants to the United States” were highly popular. According to Doug Saunders, Paul Blanshard’s *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949), for example, “warned [that Catholic immigration] was a profound threat to democracy, equality, and secular values. They [Catholic immigrants] came from countries that were almost all authoritarian, religiously fundamentalist and opposed the rights of women and the practice of birth control.” Blanshard, Saunders adds, believed that “Catholics adhered to a changeless, unalterable, clerically preordained dogma that was not so much a faith as a political ideology” (115). Blanshard termed this immigrant adherence to Catholicism “a survival of medieval authoritarianism that has no rightful place in the democratic American environment” because at its heart Catholicism is an “undemocratic system of alien control” (cited in Saunders 115). Catholic immigrants, Blanshard added, “[are] outbreeding the non-Catholic elements in our population” in order to turn the U.S. into a “Catholic republic” (cited in Saunders 115). In the eyes of many Americans, Catholics were seen as “establishing parallel societies” and “plotting to impose their beliefs even more widely” (Saunders 115). Blanshard saw in Catholic black headscarves the mark of women’s subjugation and accused the Catholic population in the U.S. of bringing “violence, fascism, crime, and terrorism and called upon Americans to initiate a “resistance movement” to defeat the Catholic menace in America (cited in Saunders 116). Saunders reminds his readers that Blanshard was not just a random figure who decided to write about Catholic immigration in such a degrading way, but he was “a respected figure of American secular thought. . . . Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell praised his book, and John Dewey spoke of its ‘exemplary scholarship, good judgment, and tact’” (Saunders 116). In expressing these views, Blanshard was not alone. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and historian Lewis Mumford lent their voices to the same cause (Saunders 117). The paranoia and anxiety also took off in American academia. Saunders cites historian John T. McGreevy who writes that “a broad group of faculty members in the humanities and the social sciences, and many influential figures in Reform Judaism and mainline Protestantism” believed and warned that “Catholic authoritarianism might quash the scientific spirit, produce adults incapable of psychological autonomy, and have a disastrous effect on national unity because of the growing numbers of children enrolled in Catholic schools” (cited in Saunders 116).

These signs of American anxiety and prejudice towards Catholic immigrants were transnational. They were shared in the Canadian context. “Repeatedly,” Saunders writes, “internal [Canadian] government memos warned that European Catholics could not be assimilated into democratic countries.” In one “memo from Laval Fortier, commissioner for overseas immigration,” Fortier argues that “[the Italian] is not the type we are looking for in Canada. His standard of living, his way of life, even his civilization seems so different that I doubt if he could even become an asset to our country” (cited in Saunders 117). The post-war anxiety and prejudice towards Catholic immigrants, Saunders emphasizes, are not unique to the twentieth century. Similar attitudes registered in North America in late nineteenth century when large numbers of Catholics arrived at the shores of the continent (118). In early twentieth century, books like Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) warned of the threat Catholic, Jewish, Syrian, and Slovak immigrants constitute to the fabric of the U.S. Even feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton warned that Catholic immigrants threaten “American liberties” (Saunders 121-22). In their political campaigns, U.S. Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and James Garfield picked up on these racist vibes and believed that Catholicism and Catholic immigrants are a threat. Literary figures including Ralph Waldo Emerson followed in the same path (Saunders 122). The contemporary cultural conservative narratives and the clash discourse therefore

Muslims give up Islam and embrace Christianity instead. In her own words, Sultan emphatically professes, “we first have to help them see their ogre clearly and show them how to exchange their God who hates for one who loves” (10). Arguing in a similar vein, Darwish mounts a comparable claim: “Because I possess knowledge both of Middle Eastern and American culture,” she writes, “I felt it was my duty to inform Americans and openly speak the truth” (201). Convinced that Arabs and Muslims are the enemy,⁷ Darwish calls upon the West to “get tougher” (244), impose stricter immigration laws especially on Muslim and Arab immigrants, endorse assimilation, stop the nonsense called “multiculturalism and cultural relativism” (246), and be wary of interfaith marriages—particularly in situations when Muslim men marry Jewish

constitute another wave of hostile responses to immigrant difference, but the scope of their webs—especially what they term as the threat to the West—is bigger. The so-called “threat” includes Arabs and Muslims wherever they are.

⁷ Similar to Catholic immigrants in late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and similar to Arab and Muslim immigrants especially since the Iranian Revolution, Jewish immigrants faced, in the U.S., hostile narratives and discriminatory policies from 1870 to 1945. “The mass migration of millions of Jews from Eastern Europe,” Saunders writes, “set off loathing and fear on a scale that had never been seen before. . . . [They] . . . were denounced as total outsiders” and “potential threats.” In North America, Jewish immigrants were met with “intolerance and exclusion” (127). The situation in Europe was not better. Saunders goes on to point out that in “London and New York, the Jewish-immigrant neighborhood quickly came to be seen as a parallel society, one whose appearance, customs and treatment of women seemed to have emerged from the Dark Ages. . . . The new immigrants’ dark clothes and head coverings soon became emblems of civilizational conflict” (128-29). “The new Jews,” Saunders elaborates, “came to be associated with criminality and violence (even though there was no indication that Jewish crime rates were higher than those of any poor neighborhoods)” (129). Saunders highlights how Jewish immigrants in New York in the first and second decades of the twentieth century were considered a menace by state officials like Theodor A. Bingham, the New York City’s police commissioner. Anti-Jewish prejudice was circulated by psychologists like Henry H. Goddard. According to Saunders, Goddard “declared, after screening immigrants to the United States in the years before the First World War, that 60% of Jews, and 76% of new Jewish immigrants, were ‘morons.’” Similarly, “academics and government officials frequently claimed that Jewish immigrants were lowering the average intelligence of the [American] people” (131). Jewish immigrants were further considered a demographic threat. Similar to his xenophobic statements about Catholic immigrants in *The Passing of the Great Race*, Madison Grant cautioned Americans in 1916 that the “native American [meaning the Anglo American] is vanishing from much of the country” as “swarms of Polish Jews” take over the cities. Grant also argued that white Christian Americans “will become as extinct as Athenians of the age of Pericles and the Vikings of the age of Rollo” (cited in Saunders 131). European books like Edouard Drumont’s *La France Juive* and Wilhelm Marr’s *Der Siege de Judentums über das Germanentum* warned of a Jewish take over (Saunders 132-33). American academics like Lawrence Lowell, the President of Harvard University, were “instrumental in sparking the legislative programmes that led to the immigration restrictions of the 1920s, and the widespread refusal to accept Jewish refugees before and during the Holocaust” (Saunders 133). The same xenophobic rhetoric and similar policies were also present in England, Germany, and other European states.

or Christian women (251). After all, Darwish, citing Huntington's famous phrase, believes that the threat Arab Muslims constitute is not just "a clash of civilization" but rather "an attack on civilization itself by haters of civilization" (197). The positions Darwish and Sultan advance echo those of Ali and Gabrielle. Ali sees in multiculturalism a nightmare, a recipe for disaster. According to her, multiculturalists are ignorant of the harsh reality of most Muslim immigrants who endanger mainstream America and Western societies by failing to embrace the Western ways or leave outside the port of entrance their primitive cultural, religious, and tribal norms and values (*Nomad* 80, 81, 133). "When I speak of assimilation," Ali clarifies, "I mean assimilation into civilization. Aborigines, Afghans, Somalis, Arabs, Native Americans—all these non-Western groups have to make that transition to modernity" (*Nomad* 259-60). Ali makes another analogous statement, though this time in *Infidel*: "Having made that journey [from barbarity to civilization], I know that one of those worlds is simply better than the other . . . because of its values." Accordingly, "we in the West would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred toward women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life" (348). Similarly, in *Heretic*, Ali insists that "we [men and women of the West] need to stand up for our own principles as liberals. Specifically, we need to say to offended Western Muslims (and their liberal supporters) that it is not we who must accommodate their beliefs and sensitivities. Rather, it is they who must learn to live with our commitment to free speech." Muslims in the West are incompatible with Western modernity and democratic values. Unable to reconcile their beliefs to their experiences in the West, the not-yet-radicalized Muslims tend to retreat into small enclaves, slowly turning into either atheists/dissidents or radicals. Their children repeat the cycle. Atheists, like her, can help in

reforming Islam and re-imagining Muslim identity in the twenty-first century, if Islam were to join modernity (Introduction).⁸

In terms of her views on Islam and Muslims, Gabrielle agrees with Ali. In the U.S., Gabrielle writes in *They Must Be Stopped*, radical Muslims “cloak themselves in the garb of moderation and take advantage of America’s freedom of religion” but in reality, they “aspire to transform the United States into a Muslim nation” (5). Gabrielle reaches this conclusion on the ground of her Lebanese experience. Indeed, in *Because They Hate*, Gabrielle contends that Muslims hate Christians (and Jews) on religious grounds. The former are commanded to crush the latter. Accordingly, Gabrielle warns, “Americans need to listen: their country is at stake. I lost my country of birth to Islamic fundamentalism and don’t want to lose my country of adoption to the same fate” (23). Her westernized Lebanon, Gabrielle argues, was as sovereign, multiculturally diverse, religiously tolerant, politically democratic, and economically rich as the U.S. is now, but the Muslim newcomers, encouraged by Lebanon’s tolerance and multiculturalism, brought her country to its knees. Because of these shared traits between Lebanon and the U.S., Gabrielle warns, America must act (*Because They Hate* 14). In her personal narrative, Gabrielle uses her personal story to convince American readers that the multicultural U.S. is similarly infiltrated by Arabs and Muslims who conspire to destroy its tolerant mainstream Christian culture in preparation of establishing Muslim dominance. To fellow Americans, Gabrielle says: Arab and Muslim radicals, especially in the U.S. and the West, “hate our democracy, they hate our freedoms, they hate who we are as people, and they are working toward one Islamic Caliphate throughout the world with Sharia rule as law” (111). The

⁸ This is a kindle book.

clash is no longer between communists and capitalists. It is rather a clash between Muslims and Judeo-Christians worldwide; it is a religious war (Gabrielle, *Because They Hate* 33). Heading in the same direction, though this time in *They Must Be Stopped*, Gabrielle proclaims Islam is violent and its violence is traceable back to the Prophet Mohammed. “According to the original Islam of Mohammed,” she argues, “there are no innocent civilians. Radical Islamists consider all people . . . who do not believe in the original Islam of Mohammed, to be the enemy until they convert or are subject to Islamic law.” Therefore, Americans should not be fooled by thinking that these radicals do not represent the entire Muslim world, because “[e]ven the so-called ‘moderate’ Muslims, who don’t agree with these jihadists’ devotion to the purest form of Islam or their terror tactics, respect their passion and commitment” (3). All are dangerous.

Part Two: Weaving the Fabric—Reflections on Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Case

In spite of the highly problematic claims Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan advance in their testimonial narratives, their conventional autobiographies have garnered remarkable popularity. In them, they play on their target audience’s expectations by performing as authoritative ethnic Americans, yet they manipulate their readership into believing that diversity is dangerous by pretending to be white American nationalists. Their testimonial narratives call for the restoration of the U.S. to a white Judeo-Christian nation by erasing all pluralities, ethnic diversity, and multicultural bodies that form the rich fabric of the U.S. Although in the narratives Arab and Muslim Americans are the enemy, the primary target, I would argue, is American multiculturalism. Indeed, to the cultural conservatives, American multiculturalism is the Trojan horse Muslims will use to execute their master plan of world domination. Multiculturalism is further the weak link through which ethnic American minorities corrupt the white Judeo-Christian American values. Positioning Arab and Muslim Americans as the national problem

allows Ali, Darwish, Sultan, and Gabrielle to launch their less obvious attack on multiculturalism. Indeed, this tactic allows Ali to loudly argue that “the West needs to criticize the cultures of men of color too. We need to drop the ethos of relativist respect for non-Western religions and cultures if respect is simply a euphemism for appeasement” (*Nomad* 242). To remedy what Ali calls “social failures of Muslim immigrants,” assimilation must be applied.⁹ These problematic claims have not upset the reception of Ali or of her work among large numbers of white feminists, New Atheists, mainstream media, American policy makers, the general public, and even academic institutions.

Indeed, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the author of *Infidel*, *Nomad*, *The Caged Virgin*,¹⁰ and *Heretic* has recently been the focus of media outlets across the globe. She was invited to speak at the spring 2014 commencement of Brandeis University and receive an Honorary Doctorate. Urged to rethink its decision,¹¹ the Brandeis administration eventually withdrew its invitation and rescinded Ali’s Honorary Doctorate, angering those who believe they support Ali’s right to free speech. Simultaneously, the decision was favorably received by those who decry Ali’s hate speech and Islamophobic rhetoric. This controversy is significant: it demonstrates how divided

⁹ Eventually, all Americans of nonwhite cultures must be assimilated. The cultural conservatives follow in the footsteps of Huntington who, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, believes that “[m]ulticulturalism at home threatens the United States and the West” (Huntington, *The Clash* 318).

¹⁰ These works are popular globally. For example, according to Saba Mahmood, “*The Caged Virgin* (2006) has sold translation rights in 15 countries” (83).

¹¹ Taking note of these plans, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) urged Brandeis University to seriously reconsider. In an April 8, 2014 letter addressed to the University President, CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad highlights that “While Ali is free to spew anti-Muslim hate—including her call for violence against the entire Muslim world—in any venue she chooses, she does not have a similar right to be honored for that hate by a prestigious university” (1). In addition to CAIR, civil rights groups, students, and faculty members protested the decision. Eighty seven Brandeis faculty members wrote President Fred Lawrence asking him to rescind Ali’s Honorary Doctorate because from their point of view she is a “divisive individual” whose radical political views do not “express Brandeis’ values” (Hansen et al. 2).

Americans are, not unlike Europeans, over Ali's public persona, ostensibly secular narrative, and her clash of civilizations stance. Yet, Brandeis' preliminary initiative underscores the growing appeal controversial celebrity figures like Ali have garnered in contemporary American society and increasingly in academia.¹² In spite of the troubling inaccuracies, exaggerated descriptions, blunt misinformed portrayals, and sweeping generalizations, Ali's works reveal that "not only do left critics like Christopher Hitchens (2006) hail her publication," according to Saba Mahmood, "but Hirsi Ali received the Simone de Beauvoir Freedom Prize in February 2008" (83). Ali's popularity "is true" and "not only among right-wing conservatives," writes Kiran Grewal, "but also among many who are drawn less to the ideological position she takes and more to her assertion that she should be allowed to speak" (571). Ali's popularity, undeterred determination "to speak," and the absence of an engaged thorough analysis of her work have led some scholars to misinterpret her stance on Islam and Muslims in the West. For instance, Sabiha Sorgun proposes that *Infidel* is not interested in confirming Western stereotypical representations of Muslims—especially Muslim women—but it "actually criticizes the patriarchal interpretation of the religion rather than the religion itself" (6). In *The Myth of the Muslim Tide*, Doug Sanders successfully demonstrates how groundless the fear of the so-called Islamization of the West is, yet he writes, "I am in agreement with secular Muslims such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali . . . when they argue that the instructions of the Koran and the cultural practices of many Muslim countries are enormously harmful to those who are subject to them, especially women" (6). Without a doubt,

¹² In *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*, Ali uses the opposition to Brandeis University's decision to honor her as a starting discussion point. In the book, Ali deems Muslims to be pre-modern. Their failure to enter modernity, Ali asserts, is inherent in their submission to Islamic values, Islamic teachings, Islamic culture, and an Islamic tribal and fatalistic worldview. She accuses those who opposed the Brandeis University's initial decision to honor her of silencing and "denouncing" her "as heretical," she whose sole intention is to launch a "Muslim Reformation." What her accusers call "hate speech," Ali terms "heresy" or the desire and determination to reform a stagnant violent religion (Ali, *Heretic*, Introduction).

particular cultural and religious practices within specific Arab and Muslim locales need reform, but had Sorgun and Sanders read Ali closely and without seeming to cater to her popularity, especially within particular white feminist and leftist academic circles, they should have arrived at the truth: to Ali, Islam in its entirety is the problem and Muslim citizens of the West are a threat. Besides, Ali's so-called secularism is questionable. After all, she has called upon the Church to offer Muslims an alternative spirituality. Indeed, Ali encourages Western Churches to convert "as many Muslims as possible to Christianity, introducing them to a God who rejects Holy War and who has sent his son to die for all sinners out of love for mankind" (247).¹³ Ali seems confident that Christian religion, or at least spirituality, is the tool to combat Islam. "Some readers," she writes, invoking Huntington's famous phrase, "may still be skeptical that the clash of civilizations can be won through religious competition. But I know it can work" (*Nomad* 253). Her quarrel is not with organized religion, but it is more specifically with Islam. These convictions, as I have demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, Ali shares with Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan.

¹³ In *Heretic*, Ali continues the project she started in *Infidel* and *Nomad*: to distinguish violent, primitive, tribal, and intolerant Islam from the peaceful, modern, liberal, and tolerant Judeo-Christian traditions. Fundamentalism in Christianity, she asserts, is a question of the medieval era. It no longer exists in today's world. Not only that, but also contemporary Muslim fundamentalism is not even comparable to medieval Christian fundamentalism. In short, Christianity has been blemish-less since the Reformation (Introduction). In *Heretic*, she later insists on how important it is "to recognize the long traditions in Judaism and Christianity of passionate debate and agonizing doubt" which "are largely absent in Islam." In Islam, there is no "great schisms within the Sunni or Shia branches," but there is "conformity" (ch. 2). Ali continues her unfounded assertions by claiming that the so-called Arab Spring "is not solely due to despotic political systems. It is not solely due to failing economics and the poverty they breed. Rather, it is due to Islam itself and the incompatibility of certain key facets of the Muslim faith with modernity" (ch. 2). These "key facets" include the imaginary infallibility of Mohammed and the Quran; a theologically-promoted obsession with death and the afterlife; the unchallenged grip of Sharia; the inability to think critically and challenge conformity; the unwavering power of jihad. The rest of her book looks at how reform can be obtained if the West supports primarily Western-based "heretics" or "Muslim reformers" to initiate and guide the Muslim Reformation. In order for this reformation to materialize, these reformers and the West must help what Ali terms "Mecca Muslims" to break free from these five core Muslim beliefs and values. Mecca Muslims are those faithful Muslims who have not yet experienced radicalization or practiced violence. They are redeemable, unlike Medina Muslims—read traditionalist, radical, violent, and political Muslims.

If such recurrent misinterpretations of “secular Muslims such as Ali,” to quote Sanders (6), demonstrate anything, they point to how necessary scholarly analytical engagement with their works is. Without a doubt, like all religious texts, the Quran includes problematic verses especially towards women by today’s standards; however, Sorgun and Sanders recognize neither the cultural essentialism of Ali’s stance nor her troubling cultural conservative politics that make of Islam an existential problem while simultaneously seeing Christianity and Judaism as part of the solution. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile their views in the context of the strong statements Ali repeats, like when she says Islam “is a destructive, nihilistic cult of death” (cited in Pérez-peña and Vega, n. p.), and Islam in its entirety is the “new fascism” (quoted in Emerson, n. p.), and thus it “should be defeated” (Ali, “Interview with Rogier Van Bakel” n. p.). It is equally perplexing to know that Ali is yet “considered the contemporary doyen of ‘conservative left criticism’ ” (Mahmood 83). Although I do not intend here to interrogate whether Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan are fake or authentic, I am interested in unraveling the secrets behind their popularity, which leads me to the tradition of the autobiography.

Translating the Cultural Other: The Tradition of the Autobiography

Self writing has gained prominence in the contemporary era as a result of numerous factors including the traumatic experiences of World War Two, attempts to define the ethnic self within a dominant white culture, the empowerment of the feminist movement,¹⁴ and the rise of individualism and cultural consciousness among immigrant and marginalized ethnicities. In the U.S., numerous ethnic writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Maxine Hong Kingston, utilize life

¹⁴ According to Wail S. Hassan, “feminist and minority criticism questioned the traditional literary canon and brought to the attention of scholars women’s and minority writing, especially previously unknown or uncanonical text, many of which were autobiographical, such as women’s letters, fiction, and diaries, and African American slave narratives” (*Immigrant Narratives* 78).

narratives to unveil past traumatic events so that future ones can be prevented, challenge imposed codes of silence, and give voice to victimized communities. Instead of the conventional autobiography, ethnic American writers often utilize the memoir and other hybrid genres. Arguably, the conventional autobiography still appeals to particular ethnic American writers, but more so to their readership, on the ground of the assumed “authenticity” of the narrator who acts as a witness. This authentic ethnic confessor often “portrays his or her own *experience* as *representative* of a *collective memory* and *identity*. *Truth* is summoned in the cause of *denouncing* a present situation of exploitation and oppression or *exorcizing* and *setting aright* official history” (Gugelberger and Kearney 4). Conventional autobiographies, therefore, do not operate in a vacuum when reception is in question. The notion of “revealing the truth” appeals to the target audience not because all autobiographical works innately possess an air of credibility, but rather when a certain autobiography makes claims that engage with, and preferably verify, what the audience already believes. “[Whether] and when autobiography emerges as an authoritative discourse of reality and identity, and any particular text appears to tell the truth,” writes Leigh Gilmore, “have less to do with that text’s presumed accuracy about what really happened than with its apprehended fit into culturally prevalent discourses of truth and identity” (ix). In conventional autobiographical genres, this “fit,” therefore, “depends on meeting those ideological requirements—that is to say, on effectively *translating* personal experience into familiar patterns of autobiographical narration” (Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives* 81).

Indeed, writing about the Muslim and Arab worlds in times when Islam has been racialized in North America and Europe has made Ali’s books very appealing to her target Western audience, especially because she, an ethnic woman, verifies typical clichés about Muslims and Arabs, just as her background and positionality made her a Dutch Member of

Parliament.¹⁵ Read in the context of the original function of self writing as defined above by Gugelberger and Kearney, Ali's autobiographic writing, Kiran Grewal rightly observes, "would seem to suggest the very opposite: a reinforcement of the dominant order through the 'authentic' voice of the victim" (582). Claiming authenticity in *Nomad*, Ali reminds her readers that her "experience was typical of the way most people from all over the non-Western world [read Muslim and Arab] grow up with violence as a social norm" (187). Postcolonial feminists have come to understand the testimonial genre,¹⁶ Grewal points out, as suffering from inherent problems, especially with regard to the issue of authenticity and representation. Writing for a dominant white readership, Ali capitalizes on these weaknesses when she repeatedly identifies as a woman who has been freed from her tyrannical Muslim religion and now feels obliged to speak

¹⁵ In *Nomad*, Ali acknowledges that her critical views of Islam and Muslim immigrants in the West were her ticket to the Dutch Parliament. She writes, "I had not yet made the public statements about Islam that would bring me notoriety, fame, a seat in the Dutch Parliament, a mission to improve the lives of millions of women I have never met. . ." (96). Although one cannot fully take Ali at her word because after all not all Dutch voters are gullible, her discriminatory views did resonate with a particular sector of Dutch voters who were under the spell of a wave of racism that was influencing the Dutch society.

¹⁶ Postcolonial feminism came into being in the 1980s. Among the different core tasks postcolonial feminism performs, writes Karma R. Chavez, it critiques "Western nation-centered perspectives on gender, race, class, and sexuality" and questions "the colonial legacies that still impact relationships between first-and third-world peoples." According Chavez, postcolonial feminism challenges "hegemonic Western feminism" and advances "culturally, geographically, and historically grounded feminist theories and politics in relation to broader transnational processes." Western feminism, Chavez adds, merits critique from postcolonial feminists because it "often adopts and reproduces many of the same troubling [Orientalist] representations of the East and the other." Western feminism's "depictions and treatment of third-world, subaltern, or marginalized women," Chavez argues, "often reproduce colonization by featuring third-world woman as a monolithic object who is a victim of the universal conditions of patriarchy or male domination." In these representations, third-world women are seen as helpless, powerless, voiceless, and oppressed sex without any agency and in need of saving. These representations do not look at the local and do not consider the particularities under which specific women communities exist. Focusing on "concepts such as reproduction, family, and patriarchy" (767), Western feminist representations de-contextualize and de-historicize the realities of third-world women communities. As they impose "ethnocentric universalism," these hegemonic representations impose white Western norms upon third-world women and their realities. They disarm them by taking away their own agency and subjectivity. To fight back, postcolonial feminism ensures "centering the perspectives of third-world women, offering alternative theories about gender and gendered practices, and investigating the way that global flows of capital and culture impact people's gendered experiences" (768). Postcolonial feminists, furthermore, "uncover the ways in which particular experiences of race, gender, and class are always positioned in transnational power relations. Critiquing the state and its role in sanctioning women's oppression in various ways around the world and adopting an anti-capitalist framework for rethinking democracy are central to this task," according to Chavez (768).

out against the subjugation of Muslim women whom she has come out to represent. If her target readers accept that, they should also accept the authenticity of her testimonial narrative. This proclaimed authenticity withstands the criticism Ali and her testimonial writings face from postcolonial feminists, many of whom label Ali an inauthentic ethnic voice, a fake subaltern at the service of imperialist feminism (Grewal 580-87). According to Grewal, Ali's is "a classic enactment of the colonial 'civilizing mission' discourse" (585). Unlike ethnic women writers who, though often caught between identities, refuse choosing between either ethnic or American, not only has Ali given up, but she also has denounced, her ethnic (cultural and religious) self and embraced an essentialized assimilationist identity which partly explains why *Infidel* stayed on the *New York Times* bestseller list for almost thirty seven weeks.

The astounding popularity of her assimilationist testimonial autobiography—a troubling phenomenon from the perspective of several postcolonial critics—"lies to a great extent in the ability of the Muslim [or Arab] woman author to embody the double figure of insider and victim, a key subject within Orientalist understandings of women in Muslim societies" (Mahmood 79). Testimonial works like those written by Ali, an American woman writer of Muslim descent, observes Mahmood, have an "ideological force" behind them, a force too appealing to diverse readers from both the right and the left. Many feminist academics use such ex-Muslim testimonial accounts in their university syllabi "or widely read [them] within women's study circles" (79). Further, the publishing industry, writes Nouri Gana, contributes largely to the increasing popularity of, and demand for, "authentic" testimonial accounts. Gana identifies "a residual neo-orientalist political economy of publishing and reception that conceives of Muslim [and Arab] women's or men's writings almost exclusively along the lines of what Mohja Kahf suggestively calls victim or escapee narrative." Prototypical popular escapee writers include

“Irshad Manji, Wafa Sultan, Nonie Darwish, and Hirsi Ali,” all “self-professed secular Muslims” (Gana, “Introduction” 1577-578). Whether all these women consider themselves Muslims is beyond the interest of this chapter, but all of them directly claim authenticity in their autobiographies.¹⁷ Such claims are necessary as a marketing scheme. Generally speaking, Anglo American editors and publishers, as Amal Amireh points out, would often encourage, “manipulate,” and “market” works by Arab or Muslim American female writers as such “to meet the expectations and assumptions of Western readers” (n. p.).

To get published, a growing number of cultural conservatives or American escapee writers of Arab or Muslim descent indeed seize upon this opportunity and deliberately produce personal testimonials whose subject matters vary from the oppressiveness of Islam as a premodern faith and an aggressive culture especially towards women, the fossilized nature of Muslim societies, the absence of freedom of choice or freedom of speech, to Arab and Muslim hostility towards modernity and secularity. Works like *The Trouble with Islam: a Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*, *Inside the Kingdom: My life in Saudi Arabia*, *Honor Lost*, *Nadia's Song*, *Infidel*, and *Nomad* do not just entertain their target audiences. Their writers claim authenticity, they claim to be experts on the distant Muslim and Arab others, and they also claim to represent the oppressed Muslim women collective on whose behalf they speak out through the genre of the conventional autobiography. Repeatedly, they remind their readers of their goal: to expose their native oppressive religious culture, save their gender, bring civilization to Muslims, and protect their host American and European communities. Their accounts confirm dangerous

¹⁷ In *Heretic*, for example, Ali repeatedly states “my views on Islam are based on my knowledge and experience of being a Muslim, of living in Muslim societies,—including Mecca itself, the very centre of Islamic belief—and on my years of study of Islam as a practitioner, student, and teacher [at the Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government]” (Introduction).

stereotypes and as they do so, they reinforce the old-new dichotomy of the “civilized us” versus the “barbaric them.” In addition, they increase the pressure on Muslim and Arabs in the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere.¹⁸ They speak of “core values” that all the others must live by and in that sense these accounts are not unlike similar narratives throughout the West. The “notion . . . that the population of a modern nation-state must be committed to ‘core values,’ an essential culture that must be shared by all if society is to hold together,” Talal Asad argues in *Genealogies of Religion*, “belongs to a discourse about the limits of political society. It is easier to deploy in discourses that exclude particular differences than in those that describe what the core values . . . are. The core values of nonwhite immigrants are *not*—so the hegemonic discourse goes” (ch. 8). Therefore, nonwhite populations have to struggle against the forces of assimilation since if they wish to stay in the West, the hegemonic narratives insist, they must assimilate in the dominant culture and adopt its core values. Indeed, in *Infidel*, Ali brings to the attention of her readers that “Dutch society was churning with discussion over how best to integrate Muslims, and Muslims in Holland also seemed largely aware now that they needed to choose between Western values and the old ways. Above all, Muslim women were now prominently on the agenda of the country” (340). Not only that, but, according to Nori Gana, the representations and claims

¹⁸ For scholarly works that primarily examine what has become widely known as Islamophobia, Sheehi does the topic justice in *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims*. Although I disagree on the efficacy of the term “Islamophobia” as a descriptor of the scope and volume of the enterprise cultural conservatives like Ali, Darwish, Sultan, and Gabrielle are executing, I think Sheehi fairly identifies many of the injustices Muslim and Arab Americans have suffered since the early 1990s. They have intensified after the 9/11 attacks. Sheehi refers to “new levels of domestic control and surveillance. . . .” He identifies national “policies that previously would have been considered unconstitutional, even un-American.” In the name of stopping the imaginary Muslim threat, American agencies have exercised unrestrained policies of torture, racial profiling, “kidnapping and extraordinary renditions, extrajudicial assassinations, freezing habeas corpus, and total war against and occupation of sovereign countries” (Introduction). Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim representations and discourse have contributed immensely to shaping the American public opinion in ways that made it possible for the regime and extremist elements to exercise lawless actions. Other relevant works that look into the impact of representing Arabs and Muslims in cultural, artistic, social, and political productions include Edward Said’s *Covering Islam* and Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters*.

circulated in such popular autobiographical works “have undermined the credibility of the decolonized Muslim and Arab [intellectual] voice[s] in the West” (1578). Besides their claims to authenticity, such testimonial works garner additional popularity, according to Mahmood, on the ground of “the emancipatory model of politics underwriting these accounts that provokes such pathos and admiration” (79). In that sense, the cases of Ali and the other cultural conservatives are far from unique. In fact, there is an important resemblance between their phenomenon and another in the Asian American literary tradition.

An Old-new Phenomenon: Writing a New Self, Erasing the Other

Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan are indeed not an unusual phenomenon. Many of the themes which have become highly attractive to them since the attacks of 9/11—including their conscious utilization of traditional autobiography, their adopted American patriotism, stereotyping their ethnic world and worldviews, romanticizing the host society and its dominant culture, and idealizing Christianity—were put to practice in the twentieth century by Asian American writers who stereotyped their parents’ countries of origin. One primary difference, however, is that the Asian American tradition in question here is primarily literary and its members have not produced overtly policy-oriented works. Their literary productions, however, inform Americans about the Orient in stereotypical ways. The literary critic Frank Chin calls them “writers of the fake” in Asian American writing. What does Chin mean by this label? In “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake,” he argues that certain Asian American writers of autobiographies and autobiographical fiction are popular among their Euro-American readership because they purposefully manipulate the existing Western stereotypes of the Asian other. Seeking the status of American popular writers, Chin adds, Amy Tan (1952-), Yung Wing (1828-1912), Jade Snow Wong (1922-2006), Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Pardee Lowe

(1904-1996), Maxine Kingston (1940-), David Hwang (1957-), and C.Y. Lee (1917-) among others have blocked out “all experiences that didn’t gibe with the stereotype” (140). They offer Judeo-Christian Euro-America a “fake” representation of the ethnic other, his culture, and art. This representation reduces China to a misogynistic patriarchal culture—one that is backward, anti-individualistic, unreliable, inassimilable and utterly foreign to Western values and worldviews. Chin furthers his claim: those whom he labels literary writers of the “fake” rely on the form of traditional or testimonial autobiography, which is a conventional device of Christian conversion, to reproduce representations of China and Chinese culture typical to those one can find in the writing of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Houston Stewart. Both men believed Chinese culture to be “stagnant” and “morally inferior” (Chin 142).

Some of Chin’s arguments were published earlier in *Aiiieeeee: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*. In “Introduction to Chinese-and Japanese-American Literature,” Chin et al. emphasize that for Asian American writers who have catered to white fantasies, “[b]ecoming white supremacist was part of their consciously and voluntarily becoming American” (x). According to Chin et al., such writers engage the negative stereotypes of Chinese and Chinese Americans in a manner that basically reinforces and revalidates the clichés. Hence, Chinese culture is portrayed as oppressive of women who endure an imposed code of silence; Chinese men and women in diaspora are sojourners who reject America and are fully detached from American culture. In such de-historicized and de-contextualized representations, Chinese and Chinese American men are effeminate and uncultured. Writers like Tan or Wong, Chin et al. highlight, quickly garnered the attention of their target readership because “they mostly had patriotic virtues rather than literary ones. They were more manipulable. [Their works] . . . were

treated . . . as anthropological discoveries” (xxii).¹⁹ Although scholars have rightly debated Chin’s weak case against Maxine Hong Kingston and David Henry Hwang (Sau-Ling Wong 194-95),²⁰ and have questioned his gender-biased tone and patriarchal cultural nationalism (Cheung 10), Chin and fellow critics’ position on Tan and earlier writers is justifiable to a large extent. An analysis of one of these Asian American works is necessary here to offer concrete illustration.

One typical work that clearly caters to certain Anglo-American fantasies is Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). The book sold over two million copies, was produced into a movie, has been translated into seventeen languages, and is widely taught to high school and university students.²¹ In the book, China stands in stark opposition to the U.S. *The Joy Luck Club* portrays

¹⁹ Notice that the same applies to the writing of Ali and her fellows: their accounts demonstrate more “patriotic virtues rather than literary ones” and this particular feature very much contributes to their popularity among their readership especially since their themes, portrayals of the Arab Muslim other, and more all correspond to the racialization of Islam, declared War on Terror and U.S. military mission in the Middle East.

²⁰ For example, Sau-Ling Wong absolves Kingston of acting as a cultural insider bent on exoticizing Chinese culture and Chinese people. Wong references Elliot Butler-Evans who points to a major difference between Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*: the former is characterized by “interrogative modality” (cited in Wong 195). In other words, it does not claim narrative authority but rather frustrates it constantly “through the intervention of a narrating consciousness” (Wong 195). The dilemma of the “ethnographic reception of” Tan’s work according to Christopher Douglas is “one that haunts Chinese American fiction, and Asian American literature more generally” (102). This problem Douglas attributes to the influence of sociology. In *A Genealogy of Literary Multiculturalism*, Douglas points to a prevalent “social science expectations of truthful, accurate, and representative insider knowledge of the communities” and “implicit claims to social science documentation with which” ethnic American literary works “have sometimes been received” (101). Accordingly, Douglas emphasizes, the “reception and the production of Chinese American fiction are still laboring under certain regulations formed at the interstices of citizenship and the social sciences half a century ago” (102). Tan complies with these expectations in *The Joy Luck Club*. Her “ostensible dismay at readers’ expectations of her cultural expertise,” which she expressed in the 1996 Fall issue of the *Threepenny Review*, “is,” according to Douglas, “directly traceable to [Jade Snow] Wong’s and other earlier Chinese American writers’ social science willingness to represent and explain the totality of culture” (109). Unlike Wong, Douglas argues, Kingston resists claims to ethnographic authority as evident in her “revisions to specific episodes in Wong’s autobiography” in *The Woman Warrior* (309). *The Woman Warrior* “again and again undercuts her [Kingston’s] status as cultural authority” (311).

²¹ It is not a secret that Tan received \$ 1.23 million for the paperback rights. This high figure is rarely earned by well-established ethnic writers who engage the subject matters of self-identification, cultural heritage, national belonging, and /or gender relations in their writing but refrain from structuring their works around stereotyping their ethnic cultures and origin countries. Moreover, such high figure is seldom earned for the first book they write. No doubt that part of Tan’s fame has to do with the spirit of American multiculturalism which was strong when *The Joy*

Chinese culture as oppressive and backward, one that is frozen in time unlike the progressive American cultural model. Furthermore, the text presents—regularly through the lens of the Americanized daughters—Chinese immigrant society as clownish, rigid, and non-progressive, unlike mainstream America (Tan 198-99). Chinese mothers are almost systematically inarticulate unlike their American daughters with their flawless English and standard American mannerisms. Indeed, Chinese immigrants are portrayed as malleable, impressionable, and without intellectual sophistication. The character of Jing-Mei Woo narrates that her parents joined the First Baptist Church just because they felt indebted to the congregation for the help it offered them, especially the gifts—“two hand-me-down dresses.” Woo says, “[a]nd because of their gifts, my parents could not refuse their invitation to join the church. Nor could they ignore the old ladies’ practical advice to improve their English through Bible study class on Saturday mornings” (Tan 6). Although the book is about ethnic daughter-mother relationships, readers further witness an unbridgeable generational and cultural gap between most daughters and their mothers. For example, Waverly Jong sees her mother as causing constant embarrassment because she is always dissatisfied, traditional, and very critical. Waverly says, “She [mother] and I make a bad combination” (Tan 183).

The Joy Luck Club, nonetheless, mentions that the Chinese American daughters have experienced loss in America as much as their mothers endured in China, but the text often refrains from examining how or what exactly the Americanized daughters have lost. It rather focuses on the mothers, exposing the horrors and injustices they encountered in China. For

Luck Club was published in 1989, but many of the writers Chin critiques were writing in the first half of the twentieth century and decades before multiculturalism took hold of the American literary scene. Jade Snow Wong published *Fifth Chinese Daughter* in 1950. Yung Wing, another example, published *My Life in China and America* in 1909. Pardee Lowe published *Father and Glorious Descendant* in 1943.

example, Ying-Ying St. Clair, looking at her Americanized daughter who “sits by her fancy swimming pool and hears only her Sony Walkman, her cordless phone,” wishes to “tell her this: We are lost, she and I, unseen and not seeing, unheard and not hearing, unknown by others” (Tan 64). It is not entirely clear how the daughter is lost. Maybe the text refers to the loss of her ethnic culture as she has become a consumer, living the mainstream American way of life. But, the text does not elaborate. Further, *The Joy Luck Club* frequently glorifies the United States while it simultaneously debases China. The daughter Jing-Mei Woo clearly states that her mother left China to the United States, the land of freedom and opportunity: “America was where all my mother’s hopes lay. She had come here in 1949 after losing everything in China: her mother and father, her family home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls. But she never looked back with regret” (Tan 141). I do not intend to imply that the book never touches on issues such as racism or prejudice in America. It does so sporadically, but such brief passages are filled with ambiguity and the narrative quickly shifts to reemphasize how miserable China and Chinese culture are.

Indeed, in *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan translates Chinese cultural and linguistic specificities to her white American audience. She presents herself to them as a cultural authority on China, Chinese, and Chinese Americans. According to Sau-Ling Wong, “the leveling of descriptive details in the ‘Chinese’ segments is an important source of pleasure for white readers, who accept and appreciate it as a ‘mythic’ treatment of a remote but fascinating China” (187). Regardless of how accurate or inaccurate the cultural details—such as the occasional mistranslation of Chinese axioms— Wong argues that these cultural details or “markers of authenticity” gesture to mainstream American readers that the author of the ethnic work is very familiar with the culture she examines and portrays. The cultural details seek “to create an

‘Oriental effect’ by signaling a reassuring affinity between the given work and American preconceptions of what the Orient is/ should be” (187). *The Joy Luck Club* achieves this effect through the English it assigns to the immigrant Chinese matriarchs. The matriarchs utter unnatural wordy prose marked by “short, choppy sentences and the frequent omission of sentence subjects” among other signifiers of foreign, exotic, and unsophisticated otherness (188). The English of the mothers and the aunties suffers from occasional missing possessive “s,” problems with propositional verbs, and dull wordiness (Tan 27).

The Joy Luck Club makes America look like the Promised Land. One can see this revered status in the actions/ reactions of the immigrant Chinese matriarchs and patriarchs towards America (Muller 187). In the opening scene of *The Joy Luck Club*, readers are introduced to an immigrant Chinese mother figure who recalls a promise she shared with a swan on the ship sailing to the States. The woman remembers saying,

In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband’s belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan—a creature that became more than what was hoped for. (Tan 3)

Readers learn that the swan used to be a duck “that stretched its neck in hopes of becoming a goose” (3). The parallel between the bird and the woman is oddly noticeable. Both of them aspire to improve their conditions as they reject who they are. And although the older woman’s aspiration clearly invokes the mythical view of America as the dream land where she and her daughter could achieve presumably unconditioned socio-cultural and gender mobility, the same

longing registers an Orientalist bias as China is juxtaposed with America. The woman's statement verifies the biased Orientalist views of China and Chinese culture: China is backward and unprogressive, its culture patriarchal, sexist, abusive, inferior, and limiting. In contrast, America stands for hope, progress, advancement, equality, abundance, and fulfillment of aspirations. The passage also shows self-contempt and self-debasement when the woman determines to make her daughter speak only "perfect" unaccented English. The debased ethnic other is sacrificed without hesitation.

There are profound similarities between the above Asian American literary phenomenon and first-generation American cultural conservatives of Muslim or Arab descent. Like *The Joy Luck Club*, I propose, *Nomad*, *Infidel*, *Because They Hate*, *They Must Be Stopped*, *They Call Me Infidel*, and *A God Who Hates* are quasi-ethnographic works because the narratives are primarily about the primitive others. In them, the anti-modern Muslim and violent Arab others who fail to become like the progressive and peace-loving Westerners are the object of the cultural translation project Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan are pursuing. In their narratives, they closely follow four nineteenth-century ethnographic rules: write primarily about the others and their culture to the benefit of a Western audience; depict the others as the antithesis of the civilized West; argue that the others—frozen in time—are incapable of changing their decadent status on their own; and perceive progress and modernity as exceptionally Western. Consequently, and unlike many nineteenth-century ethnographers who limited their role to only observing, documenting, and reporting on the studied cultures and peoples before they go extinct, the cultural conservatives not only perceive the ethnic and cultural others as a chronic

problem, but they also call for their complete erasure through religious conversion if possible.²²

Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan frame their popular culture autobiographies using the following five moves in their personal accounts to shape their narrative arc.

The Others: Writing about Them, But Not for Them

First, enlightened by their encounter with non-Muslim America and the West in general, Ali and her fellow cultural conservatives write about the Muslim and Arab others for two reasons: allegedly to educate the West and to help Muslims transition into civilization. They use their personal accounts to advance their political agenda. *Nomad* and *Infidel* are partially about Ali's self-discovery journey. In them, she presents herself to the readers as an insider from that distant, yet intimately familiar, geographical, cultural, religious, and (im)-moral space she has disassociated from. Ali constantly positions herself as "an 'authentic insider' to legitimate her arguments," writes Iveta Jusová (150). She serves the role of an informant whose mission is to

²² I locate these four ethnographic rules in the nineteenth century, although some of them were still in use in the twentieth century among practitioners of ethnography. I have modeled these four rules after Laura Nader, who, in *Culture and Dignity: Dialogues between the Middle East and the West*, points out that her graduate experience at Harvard University in the 1950s left her with a strong realization: "I understood that an unstated consensus had already been long established concerning what ethnographic work should be." Nader adds that certain unstated expectations were enforced and they included the following: "we were to work in non-Western societies, write about them as if they were bounded entities, ignore power politics which included colonial and imperial presence, ignore similarities between 'us and them,' [and] deplore nineteenth-century unilineal evolutionism and exceptionalism but still practice it" (53).

Those who violated any of these rules were either "dismissed as amateur by academics like Franz Boas" (Nader 56) or had their works devalued because they were seen as lacking on the ground of insufficient "scientific rigor" (57). Other rationales existed, but for the purpose of brevity, I will not list all of them. Of the former, Nader mentions James Mooney and his study *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. From the perspective of his critics, Mooney committed an unforgivable violation: "ethnography is about the other, *not* the other intertwined with their conquerors, not about us and them" (56). Nader explains that in the eyes of many, Mooney digressed because his work "provok[ed] a sympathetic understanding of Indian deprivations in land and livelihood, and cited the tragic implications of wrongs done to them as reasons to protect them further from the demands of white society," a society that "sought to turn the people" it "called savages toward so-called progress and civilization, in some cases using humanitarian rationales, such as being the only way to save Native Americans" (56). Like Mooney, the ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski faced strong opposition from his contemporaries for arguing, in his book *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935), that the use of magic is a basic component of culture. In making this claim, Nader argues, Malinowski inscribes and represents native "culture as reasonable," thus challenging "notions of primitiveness." He violates an unstated ethnographic rule (57).

enlighten Westerners about the crisis of Islam and expose the Muslim threat in the West. Hence, “relating the stories of” her “formative years, which include stories of” her “siblings and other relatives” become essential (Ali, *Nomad* xv). Indeed, the accounts of her family and inter-familial relations serve as a first-hand example of a dysfunctional Muslim extended family that misshapes the lives of its young members. In agreement with Huntington (*The Clash* 217), Ali insists that Islam lies at the heart of the problem. In spite of the political mission the text serves, Ali insists on *Nomad* being “a very personal book, a kind of reckoning with” her “own roots.” Ali addresses the readers:

You might say the book is addressed to Sahra, the little sister I left behind in the world that I escaped. But it is also the conversation I would like to have had with my family, especially my father, who once understood and even propagated the modern life I now lead, before he fell back into a trance of submission to Allah. It is the conversation I would like to have with my grandmother, who taught me to honor my bloodline, come what may.

While writing this book I constantly had in mind my brother’s son, Jacob, growing up in Nairobi, and Sahra’s baby daughter, Sagal, who was born in a bubble of Somalia in England. I hope that they will grow straight and strong and healthy—but also, above all, free. (*Nomad* xxi)

This passage foreshadows many themes. It presents the other world as a repressive space from which Ali has to escape in order to claim her autonomy, voice, freedom, and modernity. The world she left behind is traditional, tribal, and controlled by religion. Also not unlike Huntington

(*The Clash* 204) and other cultural conservatives,²³ Ali offers a hint of how alien Muslim immigrants are in the West. Unless they completely give up their religion and culture, Ali later argues, Arab and Muslim immigrants by default cannot and will not integrate into secular Western societies, nor will they become true citizens of the West because Islam fundamentally opposes modernity. In that sense, Muslim contemporary manifestations of religiosity are premodern. Through the personal, Ali promulgates these politically-charged polemical themes.

In the “Introduction” to *Nomad*, Ali broadens what the book is really about. *Nomad*, Ali insists, citing Huntington’s famous phrase, “is about how Islamic ideals clash with Western ideals. It is about the clash of civilizations that I and millions of others have *lived* and continue to live” (xiv). She positions her life story, prior to achieving enlightenment in the West, as typical of the unchanging Muslim condition, in spite of the fact that she no longer identifies with her Islamic cultural heritage or Islam. Furthermore, she presents herself as an advocate of Muslim women’s rights and more so in *The Caged Virgin* (5). Others also present her as such. Bruce Bawer describes her as a “Somali-born beauty” who, though having “forsworn her native Islam,” is devoted to saving “her country’s Muslims—especially women—from the tyranny of their subculture” (2). However, Muslim women, or Muslim men for that matter, are not her target audience. Her works are indeed *about* the Muslim others, but are not *for* them; in that sense, they are not unlike those by Gabrielle who writes in *Because They Hate*, this “book is in part my personal story and my observations.” *Because They Hate*, Gabrielle adds, “is written in the hope that Americans and the West will recognize this imminent threat [Arab and Muslim immigrants pose] to their way of life and make the correct philosophical, legal, governmental policy, and

²³ In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington refers to Muslim immigrants in United States and Europe as the “problem of Muslim demographic invasion” (204).

military decisions to protect themselves from suffering the same fate as the Lebanese infidels [read Maronite Christians like herself]" (xii). Not only does Gabrielle interpret the Middle East, Arabs, Muslims, and Arab and Muslim Americans, she also offers policy-oriented recommendations. Similarly, *Infidel* was written with white North American and European audiences in mind. Ali and a "number of brave ex-Muslims" are the vanguards who "have been warning" of the threat Islam constitutes to the West, writes the late Christopher Hitchens in the "Forward" to *Infidel* (xvi).²⁴

²⁴ Christopher Hitchens also writes, "A number of brave ex-Muslims have been warning us for many years that Islamist demands are *not* to be interpreted as some kind of 'civil rights' claim. . . . Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasrin, Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam, Monica Ali, and many others have tried to tell us what is under way, and what lies in our future. *Infidel* is one of the latest, and surely one of most luminous, of these manifestos" (Ali, *Infidel* xvi). Some might be surprised to see Salman Rushdie among this group of cultural conservatives. By including him, Hitchens leaves his readers with two possible interpretations: either Rushdie endorses such cultural conservative views or that by lumping Ali with Rushdie, Hitchens intends to bestow literary solemnity and respect upon Ali's public persona as the inclusion indirectly suggests that she, just like Rushdie, fights religionists regardless of what religion or nationality they belong to and stands for freedom of speech and other democratic principles. It is possible that Hitchens included Rushdie in Ali's boat because Rushdie was a victim of a religious fatwa, a death sentence put on his life; that he received harsh criticism not only from Muslim intellectuals and religious figures, but also from literary writers and critics who accused him of deliberate sensationalism, opportunism, and cultural insensitivities. Shortly after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, Author Roald Dahl denounced the sensationalism of the book. "This kind of sensationalism," Dahl writes, "does indeed get an indifferent book [i.e. indifferent to Muslim feelings and any possible angry responses] on the top of the best-seller list . . . but to my mind it is a cheap way of doing this" (cited in Cliteur, 160). Talal Asad reminds us that "any piece of literary writing can become politicized." Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, he adds, "is a political book" because "it intervenes in political confrontations already in place, and is consequently bound to be fought over in an asymmetrically structured political terrain" (272-73). These confrontations are between the British liberal state and its minority Muslim citizens. In "Britain," Asad explains, "the politics of the rule requires its immigrant subjects to struggle with 'the baffling idioms and codes of the white chameleon, which is cunningly Christian yet secular, Conservative yet liberal, repressive yet permissive'" (282).

The Satanic Verses, Asad contends, "is without a doubt a deliberately provocative rhetorical performance in an already charged political field; *that* context has inevitably become integral to the text" (283). As pastiche, *The Satanic Verses*, Asad observes, evokes in its readers "recognition of characters, actions, events, atmosphere" and "produces a sense of delighted confirmation." Therefore, the "self-recognition" in the novel "works to confirm the self-satisfied reader in her/his established predispositions and prejudices instead of inviting her to think herself into a new world. . . . The book deploys categories that are available and sanctioned in the liberal (especially literary) world, and even in its playfulness, its satire, and its ambiguities, it evokes responses (whether of anger or delight) that work on recognition" (Asad 284). Asad clarifies that "European readers applaud" the novel "because it brings into play metanarratives of Western modernity that conflict with Islamic textualities by which Muslim immigrants in Britain try to define themselves" (285). Since Rushdie blends the line between fact and fiction and employs "characters from novel and autobiography," the technique signals to "the politically engaged reader" that this "deliberate merging invites the recognition of authorial intention within the novel, even when it disavows itself" (286). In the novel, when Rushdie represents Islam as "psychosis," "superstition," or "chicanery," it is not out of

Binary Oppositions: The Antithetical Others

Second, Ali and the cultural conservatives comfortably interpret multifaceted realities, diverse worldviews, and complex human relations through the lens of binary oppositions,

“mere prejudice,” but it is rather driven by “the familiar post-Enlightenment conception of literature as the legitimate source of spirituality” (287). Unlike “English believers and nonbelievers,” Asad adds, “Muslim immigrants in Britain find it difficult to assimilate their practical religious traditions to” the category of literature (289). This “bourgeois doctrine,” more precisely “that literature is, more than merely life itself, the very truth of life, has had a close connection with imperial culture” and not unlike the intimate relationship of British literature to the “British mission of in India—the mission to modernize an ‘unprogressive’ population” (289). In the novel, Asad concludes, Rushdie seems to have a mission. His novel “assumes the categories of an imperialized world: it presents the possibility of salvation through literature, it urges upon (Muslim/immigrant) Indians a more progressive morality, it seeks to subvert their traditions in the hope that they will translate themselves into identities appropriate to the modern (i.e., *civilized*) world. . . . [Rushdie] wrote as a privileged author to improve ideologies” (290). In simple words, Rushdie “is situated in a Western liberal tradition and is perceived to be addressing an audience that shares it” and although this tradition “prides itself” on “the use of reasoned argument and the avoidance of cruelty,” it ironically “applaud[s] a novel that is so given to intimidating rhetoric” (Asad 295-96).

Although Rushdie’s case seems more complex than Ali’s, since the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, he has adopted an ideological position on Islam that seems to jump back and forth between liberal leftism and mainstream right wing conservatism. It, however, echoes the clash discourse. In his liberal leftism, his critique of Islam is part of his general critique of contemporary religiosity and the intrusion of religion on politics and public life worldwide. In the essay “Coming After Us,” Rushdie writes “now, sixteen years later [meaning after the attacks on *The Satanic Verses* and the threats to his life], religion is coming after us all, and even though most of us probably feel, as I once felt, that we have other, more important concerns, we are all going to have to confront the challenge. If we fail, this particular fish may end up frying us” (21-22). In the essay, the wedding between politics and conservative American Evangelical Christianity, the religiosity of the British political establishment, and Islamism are all subjected to his criticism. But, from time to time, Rushdie shows a specifically-radical position towards Islam and Muslims. During the 2006 Danish Cartoon controversy, for example, Rushdie “was a signatory of an open letter entitled ‘Manifesto: Together Facing the New Totalitarianism’, which expressed strong support for the publication, in the Danish satirical paper *Iylands-Posten*, of a series of extremely controversial cartoons depicting the Islamic Prophet Mohammed” (O’Gorman 107). In various public statements, Rushdie insists that the West is facing a “paranoid Islam, which blames outsiders, ‘infidels’, for all the ills of Muslim societies and whose proposed remedy is the closing of those societies to the rival project of modernity.” This form of religion, Rushdie adds, “is presently the fastest growing version of Islam in the world” and it must be challenged and defeated “[i]f Islam is to be reconciled with modernity” (quoted in “Rushdie Attacks ‘Paranoid Islam,’” n. p.; emphasis added). In “The Attacks on Islam,” Rushdie takes the United States to be not responsible, even partially, for the chaos the Middle East has been facing, nor is there a link between its hegemonic actions there and the 9/11 attacks, a position that has “led some formerly sympathetic leftist commentators to turn on him in disgust,” writes O’Gorman (107). One of these ex-sympathizers, Tariq Ali refers to Rushdie by “a member of an Islamophobic ‘belligerati’” while from the perspective of the columnist Ziauddin Sardar, he is a “British literary neoconservative” (cited in O’Gorman 107).

Earlier in this dissertation, I have argued that books like *Nomad* and *Infidel* disempower Muslim and Arab Americans and contribute to their marginalization. The case of *The Satanic Verses* attests to the truth of my claim. *The Satanic Verses*, Asad wrote in 1993, “is now being used as a stick with which to beat the [Muslim] immigrants in [Britain in] a variety of political arenas—in education, local government, and parliamentary constituencies” (302). The American cultural conservatives have contributed to the general atmosphere of suspicion of Arab and Muslim Americans. A detailed discussion of their negative impact of the Arab and Muslim American communities is however beyond the scope of this study.

irresolvable polarities, and impenetrable dichotomies. *Infidel* heavily utilizes binaries: a radical, oppressive Arab and Muslim world versus a liberal, progressive West. The latter attracts millions of immigrants to its shores, seeking refuge from Islamic abuse, oppression, and degradation of soul, body, and mind. Western societies have no vices and their Christian values are spotless. Christianity liberates while Islam enslaves. In Islam, the relationship between the faithful and the deity is a slave-master relation. The binaries are also employed on a structural and thematic level in *Infidel*. *Infidel* consists of two parts: “My Childhood,” and “My Freedom.” The sections stand in stark opposition to one another. In the former, Ali recollects memories of her formative years as a child, a teenager, and a young woman living in four countries: Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. As a result of the ravaging war in her mother country Somalia, her family sought refuge in each of the three other states. Although each country offered them relative stability, Ali’s life experiences in each place are tainted, according to her, because of the Islamic teachings that ruled over some of these locations or those her maternal figures lived by and insisted must dictate the nuts and bolts of her conduct as a Muslim female. In “My Childhood,” female relatives not only embody primitive culture and repressive religion according to Ali, but also fiercely instill them in their offspring, especially young women and girls. Readers learn the first custodian is Ayaan’s grandmother. She insists that Ayaan remembers by heart her family’s genealogy and tribal bloodline. Loyalty to the family and to the tribe, the grandmother inculcates, must be indisputable and flawless. Obedience, honor, and pride are expected. She repeats into Ayaan’s ears, “[i]f you dishonor them [family and clan] you will be forsaken. You will be nothing. You will lead a wretched life and die alone” (*Infidel* 3).

In these sessions, the nomadic culture is transmitted to the younger generation, males and females, through various ways: coercion, physical disciplining, fairytales, and tribal accounts.

However, more attention is given to young women. Ali writes, “The moral of every one of my grandmother’s stories rested on our honor. Ali later states, “I was a Somali woman, and therefore my sexuality belonged to the owner of my family: my father or my uncles. . . . The place between my legs was sewn up to prevent *it*. It would be broken only by my husband” [My italics] (*Infidel* 72). By “it,” Ali means sex outside marriage which dishonors the tribe. The same theme of repressed female sexuality and genital mutilation recurs in almost every culturally conservative work. But these works rely on cultural insiders like Ali to add an air of authenticity to their narratives about the barbarity of tribal Muslim cultures that exercise female genital mutilation.²⁵ While Islam, indeed, prohibits sexual relations outside of marriage, the link between female sexual purity, female genital mutilation, and the honor of the tribe points to a set of cultural attitudes and practices unique to certain localities, where ensuring female sexual purity can be explained on the account of tribal culture. The Ali family “were nomads who moved constantly through the northern and northern eastern deserts to find pasture for their herds” (*Infidel* 7). Tribes would regularly come in contact with, and fight, one another. Hence, one’s clan was the socio-political entity that protected her and others and all must declare allegiance to it. Further, Ali’s grandmother’s generation was illiterate, underprivileged, and during the Civil War also had to claim the role of men, who were not present to participate in educating the children. To guard against sexual impurity and dishonoring the tribe, female genital mutilation was applied. Nonetheless, it was not universally applied, not even within Ali’s own tribe. Ali herself mentions how her mother and father strongly oppose this violent cultural practice. In fact, the grandmother, with the help of other tribal women, genitally mutilates Ayaan in the absence of her mother who becomes furious as soon as she finds out. Although female

²⁵ One example is Bawer’s *While Europe Slept* (18).

genital mutilation, an abominable cross-cultural and cross-religious practice, is often attributed to tribalism, Ali uses her story and others' to attribute it to religion. To justify her claims, Ali concentrates on the rise of conservative and radical religiosity *and* tribalism as markers of personal and collective identity among Muslims—Somalis included, thus confirming Huntington's point about the rise of culture and religion as markers of group identity. Yet unlike Huntington who acknowledges that religious revivalism is a contemporary "global" phenomenon (*The Clash* 95-100),²⁶ Ali limits it to Islam. Islam therefore merits her criticism.

According to *Infidel*, Ali lived in Mogadishu, the Somali tribal region, and Saudi Arabia. In all three, Islam is the dominant religion. Quickly, Saudi Arabia becomes synonymous with brutality—mutilation of limbs, beheading, stoning, veiling. One scene after another is filled with images of extreme religiosity, discrimination against foreigners, especially from African countries on the account of their skin color, separation of genders in public transportation, a biased legal system in favor of Saudi interests, conformity, and a superstitious population. And although many of these oppressive actions indeed happen in the particular locale of Saudi Arabia, Ali takes these negative actions she witnessed in these particular countries to be representative of everything and everyone Muslim. She sees only a monolithic Islam, one that transcends geographic and national boundaries. In the closing chapter of *Infidel*, Ali reiterates this assertion to ensure her readers accept that Islam in its entirety is bad. Ali reminds her readers

²⁶ Roughly starting in the 1970s, Huntington writes in *The Clash of Civilizations*, "a global revival of religion occurred . . . [and] it has pervaded every continent, every civilization, and virtually every country" (95-6). In many cases, the revival has been accompanied by "expansion by some religions, which gained new recruits in societies where they had previously not had them. . . . Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Orthodoxy, all experienced new surges in commitment, relevance, and practice by erstwhile casual believers. In all of them," Huntington adds, "fundamentalist movements arose committed to the militant purification of religious doctrines and institutions and the reshaping of personal, social, and public behavior in accordance with religious tenets" (96). "In society after society," this revival "manifests itself in the daily lives and work of people" (96) and "is a reaction against secularism, moral relativism, and self-indulgence, and a reaffirmation of the values of order, discipline, work, mutual help, and human solidarity" (98). The revival has been triggered by "the psychological, emotional, and social traumas of modernization" (100). Yet, Huntington believes Islam is a major threat to the West.

that she “first encountered the full strength of Islam as a young child in Saudi Arabia.” This Islam, she admits, “was very different from the diluted religion of my grandmother. . . . In Saudi Arabia, every breath, every step we took, was infused with concepts of purity or sinning, and with fear.” Ali immediately jumps to make an overarching claim about Islam. “Wishful thinking about the peaceful tolerance of Islam cannot interpret away this reality: hands are cut off, women still stoned and enslaved, just as the Prophet Mohammad decided centuries ago.” In other words, the problem with Islam is “Islam” itself. Its genetic base is malignant. Whether one is talking about Saudi, Somali, or Kenyan Muslims, their shared “mind-set makes the transition to modernity very painful *for all who practice Islam*” (347; emphasis added). Variations do not exist among them and therefore one should not expect to find any among other Muslims.

Ali persistently attempts to manufacture this monolithic Islam, willfully ignoring her own distinctions between different interpretations of Islam, versions she personally encountered before leaving to the West. Choosing extreme cases, like Somalia or Saudi Arabia, as typical sites of women’s subjugation and introducing them as representative of the entire Muslim world, *Infidel* joins a long-standing Western tradition where sweeping generalizations are arbitrarily made on the basis of “widely consumed examples of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ genre.” In this genre, the oppression of Muslim women often “take[s] place in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan” (Ahmad 107).²⁷ Using the testimonial genre also allows Ali to position herself as a Third World feminist whose ostensible mission is to fight for equal rights for her fellow Muslim

²⁷ Yet, as Sheehi rightly observes, Ali does “not delve into US foreign policy in the Middle East in any substance or direct way.” She does not “discuss local legislation, civil society, jurisprudence or the political culture of any particularly Muslim country.” Ali does “not engage either the secular progressive or faith-based tradition of Muslim women’s activism,” although “Arab, Iranian, African, and South Asian Muslim feminists are readily available in English translations.” This omission, Sheehi adds, signals that Ali has “no room for either intellectual or advocacy integrity or rigor.” Ali and similar writers, Sheehi argues, seem to “nurture a reactionary aversion to progressive movements, activists and thinkers who engage in what Abdelkebir al-Khatibi called a ‘double critique,’ where Arabs question simultaneously their own societies’ patriarchy and the imperialism and capitalism of the West” (ch. 3).

women. In *The Caged Virgin*, Ali writes, “Muslim women are scarcely listened to, and they need a woman to speak out on their behalf” (5). Yet, in her works, she belittles Muslim women and paints them as either perpetrators of oppression or naïve submissive clowns, voiceless and hopeless. These women, Ali insists, will be saved only when they divorce themselves from their native religion and culture and embrace a Western consciousness as she did.

Through essentialism, *Infidel* indeed becomes an entertainment project, but also an educational product, for her target audiences and women readership. It becomes par excellence the story of Muslim polygamy, repressed female sexuality, patriarchal tribalism, religious fanaticism, primitivism, submission, ignorance and hostility towards modernity. Consequently, her religious, ethnic, and cultural self must disappear. After she had divorced herself from her ethnic and religious inherited selves, only through her newly-adopted nativist and culturally conservative consciousness does Ali explain the Muslim/Arab world to her Western audience. Writing within the tradition of the clash of civilizations discourse, Ali indeed idealizes the West while simultaneously reducing Muslim and Arab others to everything and anything that the West is not. Both in *Infidel* and *Nomad*, Ali exercises a politics of radical essentialism and cultural conservatism. Equally important, as I demonstrate next, historicization and contextualization are often absent in her writing.

Producing De-contextualized and De-historicized Essentialist Representations

Third, the cultural conservatives build their essentialist claims on de-contextualized and de-historicized hegemonic anecdotes. According to Darwish, the Arab and Muslim world is stagnant or has rather devolved, especially after the colonial powers withdrew from it (110-11). Darwish, a contemporary of Ali, refrains from acknowledging the destructive impact Western colonialism has had on the previously colonized world and blames everything on those whom

colonization subjugated (110). Tracing her life back to the 1950s Egypt, Darwish mislabels the anti-imperialist resistance to the joint Israeli, French, and British assault on Egypt in the 1950s as “jihad” to create a decadent culture of war. The often misunderstood term “jihad” alone should trigger in the minds of her Western readers the image of a contemporary culture of war that lives by the rules of medieval Islam. But, Darwish defines jihad for her readers to achieve the optimum effect: “In the Arab world, the meaning of jihad is clear: It is a religious holy war against infidels, an armed struggle against anyone who is not a Muslim. It is a fight for Allah’s cause to promote Islamic dominion in the world” (33).²⁸

In this so-called religious war, Muslims are always the aggressors. Darwish completely and deliberately leaves out the offensive tripartite coalition against 1950s Egypt after Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal. The 1950s was the era of decolonization for Egypt and the socialist Nasser was by no means a jihadist nor did he perceive the confrontation with Israel or Western imperialism as a religious war. Exercising cultural essentialism and translating everything Arab or Muslim through the lens of the War on Terror, Darwish insists that “[n]o

²⁸ On their official website, The Islamic Supreme Council of America points out that the term “Jihad” is often taken to mean Muslim “holy war.” Linguistically, however, the term means “struggling or striving,” has little to do with the term “war” which in Arabic translates as “harb,” and also means many things including “military action.” The term “jihad” can be used to mean “internal as well as external effort to be a good Muslim or believer as well as working to inform people about the faith of Islam.” Military jihad or action is permissible when all peaceful alternatives are exhausted to defend Muslims and when they engage in a military confrontation, there are strict codes of conduct and rules that must be followed to avoid harming innocents or spoil their properties. Moreover, from an Islamic legal point of view, to declare a military jihad, a proper political and religious authority must exist. The Islamic Supreme Council of America, however, points out that the term “jihad” has been “hijacked by many religious and political groups over the ages in a bid to justify various forms of violence” (The Islamic Council of America, n. p).

The Quran and the Sunnah lay out strict Islamic ethics of war: Muslims are not to begin the hostilities (2:190), but they are permitted to defend themselves if they come under attack (22:39); if the aggressors decide to halt their aggression for peace, Muslims must not continue fighting (4:90); if their opponents seek peace, Muslims too must seek it and trust in God (*The Meaning* 8:61). However, just like in Christian and Jewish holy texts, there are verses in the Quran that show different attitudes and positions with regard to war. In general, if taken out of context and if interpreted without reference to the historical circumstances surrounding this or that verse, misunderstanding and misinterpretation will be the natural outcome.

Arab could avoid the culture of jihad” (33). Like her fellow cultural conservatives, Darwish deliberately conflates Arab with Muslim. By using “Arab” to mean “Muslim,” she cancels out the presence of Christian and Jewish Arabs, among other non-Muslim Arabs. (Repeatedly, the cultural conservatives show aggressive hostility towards cultural plurality and diversity.)

Likewise, Ali labors to make identical claims and similarly the conclusions she puts forward are de-contextualized and de-historicized. In *Infidel*, Ali accuses her relatives of hating Ethiopians on the account of religious difference, completely leaving out the influence of colonial heritage and imperial presence on modern and contemporary Somali realities. Like Darwish, Ali believes Muslims hate non-Muslims on principle. She uses her mother and grandmother to make her point. Both matriarchs come across as purely racist in the way they speak of and treat Ethiopians and Kenyans. To them, Ethiopia and Kenya are infidel states; their citizens are “filthy” unbelievers, “barely human.” They call Kenyans “slaves” and “infidels.” Ali adds, “[t]hroughout the ten years they lived in Kenya, the two of them treated Kenyans almost exactly as the Saudis had behaved towards us” (61). Ali’s statement points to two important issues: first, an intra-Muslim racism, which indeed exists. As we will see in chapter two, intra-Muslim racism is also explored in depth in Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Like Ali, Kahf does not shy away from unearthing this racism nor does she attempt to defend it. Second, Ali underscores inter-faith discrimination. Although this othering, when it happens, must be exposed, one should look into the history of colonialism in which both Kenya and Ethiopia played, and continue to play, a major part. On the one hand, if taken literally and out of context, religious texts most likely will inform such sentiments or attitudes, but Ali’s mother and grandmother are not religious fanatics. On the other hand, the British, the Italian, and the French colonized parts of Somalia from the 1880s to 1960. In 1948, the British gave two large Somali regions to Ethiopia and Kenya, who

continue to occupy them in the present time. Yet, Ali does not, even partially, attribute the hostility the two matriarchs feel towards Ethiopians and Kenyans to the ongoing colonialism, a heavy burden which possibly informs the consciousness of the two matriarchs. Ignoring this history becomes necessary for Ali to manufacture a monolithic Islam. Pearl Abraham arrives at the same observation: “in her writings, lectures, and interviews,” Ali “reaches for the simple solution and quick answer. Always and everywhere, she insists on depicting Islam and Muslims as the enemy, her tribal culture as backward” (300). More troubling, Abraham finds, is “the way her writing moves rather regularly from anecdote to didacticism, so that every experience is made to serve a simplistic conclusive purpose—Islam bad, Muslims very bad” (301).

Willfully ignoring the history of colonialism in *Infidel*, Ali, later, attributes Islamic radicalism in contemporary post-Independence Somalia to the influence of Wahhabi Islam and the madrassah system. Although Wahhabism has undeniably contributed to this change among many Somalis, one can also trace a strong revivalism and an early call for jihad against Christians during the era of colonization. When Britain invaded Somalia, the leader of the Darod clan, Sayyid Muhammad Abdulla Hassan, organized and led the anti-British resistance. He recruited fighters from across the Horn of Africa to face what he referred to as the “Christian invaders” and he also issued a call for military action against both the Christian British who according to him “have destroyed our religion and made our children their children” and against the Christian Ethiopians who occupied Somali land, exploited Somali resources, and disrupted Somali religious, political, and social peace (Touval 51). Hassan was regarded as “a champion of his country’s political and religious freedom, defending it against all Christian invaders” (quoted in Shultz and Dew 67). This religion-infused anti-imperialist rhetoric, which Hassan utilized to fuel the resistance against the Christian colonizers, was also employed by other resistance

movements in Africa during the period of the Scramble for Africa (1876-1914). In 1913, the Libyan leader, Sayyid Ahmed “declared the formation of a Sanusi state and called on his followers to fight for the *jihad* against the invading Italians” (Ahmida 118). Another Libyan resistance leader who interpreted the struggle against the colonizers in religious terms is Omar al-Mukhtar. A Sanusi Sheikh who taught the Quran as a profession, al-Mukhtar led the Libyan Mujahedeen against the colonizing Italians.

It is not my intention here to present the African resistance movements to European colonization in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a homogenous current driven by religious ideologies. Doubtlessly, some of the anti-colonialist Africans were secular nationalists, others used religious jihad as the rallying cry, while still others sought a limited level of self-rule. However, the radicalization or even the call to jihad against Christian infidels Ali refers to is not an utterly new phenomenon triggered by the postmodern influence of Wahhabism and the Muslim Brotherhood, though this problematic influence does exist. Resistance to colonialism has been a recurrent factor in most modern and contemporary cases of religious radicalization. Arguably, it is similarly impossible to imagine the rise of Al-Qaeda outside the context of Soviet colonization and American hegemonic counter force. With this in mind, Ali and the other cultural conservatives equally see Arab and Muslim Americans a serious threat to the democratic foundations of America. They insist Islam and only Islam is the problem and to counter this threat, they propose assimilation and conversion.

Changing the Nature of the Beast: Thou Shalt Assimilate and Convert Them

Fascinated with the Enlightenment,²⁹ the cultural conservatives see the so-called dysfunctional religious others in need of saving, a role they encourage Christian and secular Western institutions to take responsibility for. The cultural conservatives assert that Islam is the problem, but Christianity is part of the solution. Like other fellow cultural conservatives, Sultan, another contemporary of Ali, claims America at the expense of her ethno-cultural self: “America, to put it very briefly indeed, is my freedom,” she concludes (237), a freedom she does not want to lose. Because “No one can be true Muslim and a true American simultaneously,” she argues, America must take action against its Muslims (242-43). Physical violence is always an option, but initially America must help them give up Islam and embrace Christianity instead: “we first have to help them see their ogre clearly and show them how to exchange their God who hates for one who loves” (Sultan 10). Similarly, Ali calls upon atheist and Christian Euro-Americans to unite against the Muslims in the West. She urges the former to educate Muslims and the latter, especially western Churches, to convert “as many Muslims as possible to Christianity, introducing them to a God who rejects Holy War and who has sent his son to die for all sinners out of love for mankind” (*Nomad* 247). Sultan and Ali’s triumphalist narratives consider Judeo-Christian America a savior of the Muslim and Arab others in the West. If they continue to cling

²⁹ In *Nomad*, Ali believes Western public education will help Muslim immigrants in the U.S. and elsewhere in the West enter modernity and evolve into loyal citizens. Western public education systems in their current form, Ali is convinced, were born out of the “European Enlightenment of the eighteen century.” “This public education,” Ali states, “was geared toward grooming citizens, not preserving the separateness of the tribe, the sanctity of the faith, or whatever happened to be the prejudice of the day” (xviii-xix). In making this argument and using the Enlightenment as the measure by which Muslim immigrants are ought to be judged, Ali acts like a typical elitist (if not imperialist) Westerner. “The European Enlightenment,” Asad writes, “constitutes the historical site from which Westerners typically approach non-Western traditions. That approach has tended to evaluate and measure traditions according to their distance from the Enlightenment and liberal models. Thus, Islamic states are typically regarded as absolutist, and the practice of public criticism is seen as alien to them” (200).

to their ethnic, cultural, and religious heritage, these Muslim and Arab others are not fit to join civilization or transition into modernity.

Interestingly enough, although Ali claims atheism as the compass guiding her worldview, she and Sultan whole-heartedly believe Christianity will redeem their unenlightened fellow Muslims. Unsurprisingly, the dogmas of these ostensibly atheist cultural conservatives echo the radical beliefs of mainline Evangelical Christian Zionists, the latter who, according to Norton Mezvinsky, imagine Islamic civilization clashing with Christian civilization. In fact, the latter's radical belief dates back to the 1970s (46)—almost two decades before Huntington published his essay “The Clash of Civilizations?”. The 1973 Oil Crisis and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran gradually directed their attention to what they saw as an existential Muslim threat. Later, also according to Mezvinsky, “Evangelical Christian Zionists have concluded and reiterated that Huntington's prediction [of a clash between Islam and the West] was a truism” (46). But it was not until after 9/11 that their “antagonism towards Islam exploded For Evangelical Christians generally, the clash of civilizations threat had become a hot war. The role of Israel thus became more important in this developing war, and the Christian Zionist support for Israel increased and became more intense” (Mezvinsky 46). In this “hot war,” the so-called War on Terror has become a magnet-like topic and a driving force for their Evangelical Christian Zionist worldview. It has helped them advance their end times prophecies and openly express hostility towards immigrant communities, especially though not exclusively Muslims. More importantly, it has offered them a comfort zone to dehumanize their objects of critique. They have been effectively utilizing fear as a scare tactic in their narrative, not unlike the case of the cultural conservatives, to paint an almost apocalyptic confrontation with Muslim citizens of the West. This contemporary messianic bind is ironic on many levels. For a long time, Jews had been the

target of organized Christian hatred. More troubling, however, is the outcome Evangelical Christian Zionists anticipate after their messiah arrives. According to their messianic ideology, a small percentage of world's Jews will be converted to Christianity, the rest slaughtered.

Originally coined during the era of the Bush Administration, the term “War on Terror” allowed the Bush Administration to put on hold “political realism in favor of a new holy war where American terror represents the divine wrath against evil,” writes Shadia Drury (33).³⁰ Similar to the ideological stand of the Bush Administration,³¹ I propose, Evangelical Christian

³⁰ Some historians might disagree with Drury's statement about a Bush administration's “holy war” against particular Muslim countries on the assumption that Bush never publicly used religious language in conjunction with the war on terror. But Michael Lind reminds us that the born-again President Bush, “who was converted in his late 30s by none other than Reverend Billy Graham,” brought “to the office of Command-in-Chief the certitudes of an evangelical Protestant. His rhetoric portrays a rather simple world in which good battles evil.” Lind goes on to argue that “President Bush's frequent references to ‘evil’ function in practice as a code—meaning one thing to ordinary audiences and another to the Republican Party's politically Southern Protestant base.” One should be reminded, Lind adds, that Bush “believes that Satan and his fallen angels routinely intervene in the history of nations as well as individuals” and that “the purposes of God and the interests of the United States are presumed to be identical” (n. p.). Indeed, this religiously-infused foreign policy and rhetoric take a more concrete form at Sharm el-Sheikh when Bush met with the Palestinian delegation team just a few months after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Ewen MacAskill from *The Guardian* cites Nabil Shaath who went on record saying that Bush stated the following in front of everyone: “I am driven with a mission from God” who “told me, ‘George go on and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan’. And I did. And then God would tell me ‘George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq’. And I did.” Bush does not stop there. He adds, “And now, again, I feel God's words coming to me, ‘Go get the Palestinians their state and get the Israelis their security, and get peace in the Middle East’. And, by God, I'm gonna do it” (n. p.).

This marriage between religious ideology and foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 is probably what General Wesley Clark describes as the official American loss of “purpose,” “strategy,” and “organizing principles” which he considers symptomatic of the American foreign policy following the end of the Cold War. During a 2007 taped lecture at the Commonwealth Club of California where he discussed his book *A Time to Lead: For Duty, Honor, and Country*, General Wesley Clark drew attention to an official U.S. plot to launch war in seven Muslim countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran. He knew of this plot, or what he calls an American “policy coup,” a few days after 9/11. The goal is to “attack and destroy the governments in seven” Arab-majority countries. Clark argues that the U.S., at least since Desert Storm and not since 9/11, “was taken over by a group of people with a policy coup. Wolfowitz, Cheney and Rumsfeld and you could name a half dozen other collaborators from the project for a New American Century.” Transparency and accountability, two core components of democracy, were put on hold in the Bush administration's tenure in the White House, Clark emphasizes.

³¹ The war on terror narrative has too much in common with the cultural conservative narratives. As a political narrative, the “War on Terror” has formulated and pushed forward a set of assumptions and justifications about the American effort to combat “Terror” and identify and define those associated with it. This narrative which has evolved into a global discourse and policy has become a master narrative whose repercussions on individual and collective rights, democratic foundations, and peace and war are visible internationally. According to Adam Hodges, the “Bush ‘War on Terror’ Narrative has provided ‘the official story, the dominant frame’ . . . for understanding 9/11

Zionists and the cultural conservatives take the War on Terror to be “a just war against the malevolence of the enemy” (Drury 33).³² The poor logic of Christian Zionists and the cultural conservatives, with regard to the Muslim others, heavily depends on Manichean language of essentialism: Judeo-Christian Anglo-Americans and their culture of modernity are the antithesis

and America’s response to terrorism. It has allowed for the discursive justification not just of a metaphorical ‘war on terror’ but of the very real wars on Afghanistan and Iraq” (5). “The Narrative,” Hodges adds, “has provided . . . [a regime of truth] from within which supporters and critics of the Bush administration have operated” (5). “In the Bush ‘War on Terror’ Narrative,” Hodges points out, “the particulars of 9/11 and America’s response to terrorism are mapped onto the familiar human plight of a nation at war.” Instead of “framing” the attacks as “a criminal act” done by a terrorist group, the Bush administration framed them as “an act of war” (20). This way of articulating and representing the tragic events of 9/11 allowed the Bush administration to interpret the terrorist attacks, which in reality belong to the domain of the “novel, unfamiliar, and incomprehensible,” as a straightforward act of war which is “familiar, understandable, and easily identified” (20). This act of war, the Bush administration argued, necessitates a responsive action, a “real war waged on many fronts” (Hodges 23). In basic language, after the Bush administration interpreted the attacks as terrorism, it argued that “TERRORISM IS WAR” instead of “TERRORISM IS A CRIME” although the earliest of Bush’s addresses to the nation following the attacks include references to the attacks as a crime perpetrated by rogue criminals who must be brought to justice. But, references to “state actors who hold a monopoly on force” were also used to “suggest a war frame where the armies of nation- states” (Hodges 24) are attacking to force the U.S., as Bush puts it, into “retreat.” The attacks, Bush argued, target “our way of life, our very freedom” and “democracy” (cited in Hodges 24; 25). Like the clash narratives, the War on Terror narrative empowered a particular ideological position “in the debate over how to deal with terrorism” (Hodges 23). Addressing the nation on September 12, 2001, Bush vowed that America and its allies “will not allow this *enemy* to win the war by changing our way of life, or restricting our freedoms.” On September 14, Bush emphatically stated that “*War has been waged against us* by stealth and deceit and murder” (cited in Hodges 26). Gradually, Hodges argues, the language of “crime” and “criminals” disappears from Bush’s narrative. Terminology and metaphors that point to a war frame begin to dominate his addresses and speeches, building up towards “a highly militarized foreign policy” and an unlimited “military campaign in response” to this so-called “act of war” (Hodges 28). “The war on terror,” Bush insisted on March 19, 2004, “is not a figure of speech. It is an inescapable calling of our generation” (cited in Hodges 30). It ought to unite Americans and bring closer their allies. It therefore became logical for him to imagine the war as happening between good and evil, us and them, lovers of freedom and supporters of chaos. Bush encapsulated the logic of the war on terror in the following motto: “you are either with us or against us.” His master narrative became more hegemonic and harder to challenge as he drew on official American history and collective memories of wars that took place in the “past 136 years” (cited in Hodges 31). He compares 9/11 with the attacks on Pearl Harbor (31, 32), and apposes the 9/11 attackers and their leadership “with enemies” America “faced in past conflicts: Hitler from World War II and Lenin as a representative of the Communist ideology of the Cold War” (32). The point Bush has wished to drive home from these comparisons is that the world intervened too late in the case of Hitler and therefore the price was very high in terms of the atrocities and destruction Hitler brought upon humanity. Likewise Lenin murdered millions of his people. Learning from past histories, the U.S. must not stand by until similar atrocities happen; the U.S. must act to destroy those who are responsible for 9/11 (Hodges 33). Bush argues the attackers “follow in the path of” “fascism,” “Nazism,” and “totalitarianism,” and therefore, they are “the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century” and the war against them is thus “the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century” (cited in Hodges 34).

³² This essentialism has also been used in reverse. Drury proceeds: “The same biblical rhetoric is used by America’s Islamic enemies. In this way the dualistic and Manichean aspects of biblical religion are reintroduced into politics.” Drury adds, “We are confronted with a clash between two enemies who believe they are custodians of the one and only truth—divine, singular, unassailable, eternal, and unchanging” (33). The clash of civilizations dominates the rhetoric of these essentialist radicalisms.

of the decadent Muslim others. These demagogues willfully ignore the presence of a myriad of similarities between “us” and “them,” entities they manufacture as absolute polar opposites. Instead of building bridges, complete transformation of Muslim consciousness and religious conversion becomes one of the answers to the so-called Muslim problem or what Huntington calls the “problem of Muslim demographic invasion” (*The Clash* 204). In privileging mono-culturalism, they call for a return to a cultural, linguistic, and religious purity that does not exist and never existed. Their opposition to the mere existence of Muslim Americans manifests a broader rejection of multiculturalism and cultural mixing—a position Huntington himself takes. Hence, as I illustrate in my next point, interfaith-marriage has become one of their targets.

The War on Multiculturalism: Opposition to Interfaith-marriage

The ideology and racist practices of the cultural conservatives towards Muslim Americans and Muslim Europeans are part of a larger, yet an indirect, assault on multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, in the eyes of the cultural conservatives in question, is more dangerous than the imagined threat of American Islam. Depicting Islam as the enemy in America is their strategy to undermine American ethnic and cultural plurality in favor of an imaginary return to mono-culturalism. For example, Darwish calls upon America to “get tougher” (244), impose stricter immigration laws especially on Muslim and Arab immigrants, endorse assimilation, and stop the nonsense called “multiculturalism and cultural relativism” (246). More alarming is Darwish’s call upon fellow non-Muslim Americans to be wary of interfaith marriages—particularly those where Muslims marry Jewish or Christian women (251). Her last statement is indeed a paradox: According to the clash discourse, Muslims in the U.S. refuse to integrate and cannot become citizens of the U.S. by the merit of their attachment to their ethnic cultures, traditions, and Islamic faith. It seems odd, if not impossible, to be both—a cultural/

ethnic Muslim American, one who is bent on destroying America, yet still accepts to enter in an interfaith marriage with Christian or Jewish Americans. The case even gets odder if one were to consider what marriage means to Muslims based on the clash discourse. In *Infidel*, Ali makes the following claims: first, Muslim men desire virgin women because Muslim cultures are cultures of shame (*Infidel* 72). Second, the norm for Muslims is arranged marriages. In the European context, according to Bruce Bawer, himself a cultural conservative, arranged marriages among Muslims are overwhelmingly the norm. In fact, European Muslims, he adds, have rejected intermarriage. “Many immigrant communities, through a pragmatic twist on the tradition of arranged marriage,” Bawer asserts, “have exploited this provision [i.e. family reunification] brilliantly—and in doing so have changed the face of both Western Europe and Muslim marriage” (20). Earlier, Bawer claims that “many European officials saw intermarriage as the key to integration. They assumed that when the children of immigrants grew up, they’d marry ethnic Europeans and raise European Children. Ghettos would fade away; segregation would be a thing of the past.” “But that didn’t happen,” Bawer emphasizes (20).

Although his statement problematically de-contextualizes and de-historicizes the complex and diverse situations of Muslims in Europe, Bawer offers half the truth: Muslim integration rates are very low in Europe. They are, however, low not because Muslim Europeans entirely and uniformly insist on staying in parallel societies by preserving culture and religion through their children, who must enter into arranged marriages. Although Bawer blames the failure to integrate on Muslims rather than the unavailable “necessary means of acculturation and inclusion” or the unavailable “pathway to full citizenship and ownership of property” due to

“restrictive laws in too many European countries” (Sanders 76-77),³³ if one were to accept his so-called power of arranged marriages, one should question the earlier wake-up call by Darwish: Muslims are taking over the West through the door of interfaith marriage.

Unlike the situation of Muslims in Europe, Muslims visibly practice interfaith marriages in the U.S. Also unlike in most European states, interfaith marriages are perceived positively in the States. Arguably, the spread of interfaith marriages is a sign of successful American multiculturalism.³⁴ In response to questions about interfaith marriages among Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and non-Jews, one study’s results show major approval rates for interfaith marriage from 60 percent in favor in 1968 to close to 80 percent in 1982 (Putnam and Campbell 151). A Pew survey, conducted in 2007 and published in 2008, shows that 27 percent of Americans are in interfaith marriages (37). The percentage would rise to 37 percent if “marriages between people of different Protestant denominational families are included” (37). With regard to Muslim Americans and interfaith marriage, Naomi Riley observes that the “interfaith marriage rate among Muslims is roughly the same as for other Americans.” “According to data taken from the Pew Religious Landscape Survey of 2007, in round numbers,” Riley reports, “about one in five American Muslims have married outside their religion” (150). Although like any marriage, an interfaith marriage in the U.S. comes with complications, a confirmed outcome of marrying

³³ Huntington himself seems to agree with such claims, although instead of integration, he speaks of assimilation. His choice of terminology can be explained by his advocacy for civilizational (cultural and religious) identities and a multi-civilizational world order. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, he points out that “European societies generally either do not want to assimilate immigrants or have great difficulty doing so, and the degree to which Muslim immigrants and their children want to be assimilated is unclear” (204).

³⁴ By his own testimony, Huntington laments the success of multiculturalism in America and considers multiculturalism an “immediate and dangerous challenge” to the U.S. because multiculturalists “have attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other substantial cultural identities and groupings.” American laws and official support for multiculturalism since the 1960s, Huntington adds, divorce the nation from the vision of its Founding Fathers who “saw diversity as a reality and as a problem” (305).

outside one's faith is to grow more relaxed about religiosity. Indeed, according to Riley, "those who marry outside their faith tend to take religion less seriously or lose their faith entirely" (14). If Muslims who enter in interfaith marriages normally become either less religious or rather lose interest in the faith, then what exactly alarms Darwish and her fellow cultural conservatives regarding Muslims intermarrying with Christians, Jews, members of other faiths, or seculars? Radicalization and religiosity are doubtfully the cause. Rather, the multicultural direction the nation has been leading possibly triggers the anxiety of such figures like Darwish or Ali. Riley speculates that one factor behind the increasing appeal of interfaith marriages among Americans "are the cultural pressures of pluralism." These pressures are "pushing people toward interfaith marriage. Or, to be more precise, letting them fall into it" (13). In a panic mode, Huntington writes, the prospective of Western civilization hinges on America's response to multiculturalism (*The Clash* 307).

Conclusion: the Distraction of Islamophobia

In light of my analysis of the works of Ali, other cultural conservatives, and Huntington, I propose that when scholars take Islam to be the only enemy in the clash of civilizations discourse and cultural conservative narratives, their interpretation is incomplete. "In this clash of civilizations," Ali writes in *Nomad*, "the West needs to criticize the cultures of men of color too. We need to drop the ethos of relativist respect for non-Western religions and cultures if respect is simply a euphemism for appeasement" (242). Equally problematic is labeling Ali *only* an Islamophobe, her narrative *exclusively* Islamophobic. Surely, Ali targets Islam and Muslims, but such a narrowly-focused interpretation overlooks her Eurocentrism and veiled supremacist attitude towards ethnic and cultural plurality. She denounces ethnicity as anti-modern. Her faulty logic prevents her from seeing "ethnicity and modernity are not opposites. This is true in

life, in cultural media, as well as in literature” (Sollors 244). Ali also fails to see “ethnic identification itself as a modern phenomenon” (Sollors 245). The term “Islamophobia” scholars often use does not fully capture the scope or magnitude of the wholesale ultraconservative language of the clash of civilizations Ali and her fellow cultural conservatives use.³⁵ After all, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan write in the tradition of the clash of civilizations. The exclusive use of the term “Islamophobia” understates their terror and distracts from the damage they cause not only to Muslims and other ethno-religious minorities, but to the entire social fabric of the U.S. Applying the term Islamophobia exclusively, I speculate, risks producing misinformed or at least sidelined interpretations because Muslims and Arab Americans are not the only target in the autobiographical narratives of these culturally conservative writers: all nonwhites and non-Judeo-Christians are. This culturally conservative attitude towards non-Westerners and the attack on American multiculturalism heavily rely on Huntington’s work.

³⁵ Islamophobia, according to Sheehi, pervades every corner of American political and cultural life. Americans, “from all walks of American cultural and political life [...] share misinformed and Islamophobic narratives.” Islamophobia, Sheehi elaborates, “is an ideological formation,” one created by “a culture that deploys particular tropes, analyses and beliefs and social practices.” A multiplicity of actors—including journalists, media outlets, think tanks, etc.—are “collectively responsible for the virulent dissemination of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab stereotypes and beliefs, circulated in order to naturalize and justify US global, economic, and political hegemony.” Islamophobia, Sheehi clarifies, “is an ideological phenomenon which exists to promote political and economic goals, both domestically and abroad. The effects of Islamophobia can be a series of acts institutionalized by the United States government ranging from war to programmatic torture to extrajudicial kidnappings, incarcerations, and executions to surveillance and entrapment.” “For these effects to work in unison with a rhetoric that justifies them,” Sheehi adds, “Islamophobia must act concurrently on two levels . . . : the level of thought, speech, and perception; then the material level of policies, violence and action” (Introduction).

Islamophobia is a “political and cultural construct.” North American Islamophobia, Sheehi argues, is different from European Islamophobia. Islamophobia is not a “universal condition or a monolithic ideological construct.” One should speak of Islamophobias that are “deployed with particular ideological intent and effects that differ depending on the specific and varying social, political, historical, and economic conditions.” Islamophobia, Sheehi proceeds to argue, “is the heir to Orientalism.” Racial anxiety is a sign of Islamophobic policies and practices and the “issue of race,” Sheehi insists, “cannot be separated from Orientalism, Arab-hating or Islamophobia. What distinguishes the racist violence and paradigms are the political conditions and contexts in which Islamophobia has been mobilized.” Sheehi rightly concludes his introduction by pointing to the intersection of forms and manifestations of discrimination and paranoia. Islamophobia “is a part of larger ideological formations within US culture and politics. Islamophobia came together as an ideological amalgam within the politics and culture of the 1990s, accompanying globalization and the rise of US Empire. . . . Islamophobia is the latest ideological construct deployed to facilitate American power; in its particular case, American power in its ‘unipolar moment’” (Sheehi, Introduction).

Indeed, according to Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations*, Muslims and Arabs are some of the others the West must face, restrain, and control. After all, the clash is between the “West” and the “rest.” Africans, Asians, Hindus, Muslims, Orthodox Eastern Europeans and other non-Westerners must be restrained and their power must be kept in check if the West desires to sustain its global dominance and face the threats these civilizations pose to its power. To perpetuate Western hegemony over the rest globally without having to spread a Universalist Western culture or physically colonize other civilizations, the U.S. must abandon multiculturalism nationally. “Multiculturalism at home,” Huntington warns, “threatens the United States and the West. . . . A multiculturalist America is impossible because a non-Western America is not American.” Huntington concludes: the “preservation of the United States and the West requires the renewal of Western identity” (318). He advocates for mono-culturalism and essentialist identity. He, therefore, ends *The Clash of Civilization* on a troubling, yet significant, note which encapsulates the clash advocates and the cultural conservatives’ vision of a new world order where the West reins supreme. In order for this envisioned nontraditional imperial hegemony to take place, the U.S. must be restored to its colonial Euro-Christian roots. Its multiculturalism must end. Here is how Huntington puts it: “In the clash of civilizations, Europe and America will hang together or hang separately” (321), and Western nations must “preserve, protect, and renew the unique qualities of Western civilization” (311). “Whether the West comes together politically and economically,” Huntington insists, “depends overwhelmingly on whether the United States reaffirms its identity as a Western nation and defines its global role as the leader of Western civilization” (308). The U.S. must reform on national and global levels:

Domestically this means rejecting the divisive siren calls of multiculturalism.

Internationally it means rejecting the elusive and illusory calls to identify the

United States with Asia. Whatever economic connections may exist between them, the fundamental cultural gap between Asia and American societies precludes their joining together in a common home. Americans are culturally part of the Western family; multiculturalists may damage and even destroy that relationship but they cannot replace it. When Americans look for their cultural roots, they find them in Europe. (307)

At the core of his argument, Huntington rejects ethnic equality, refuses to celebrate difference, detests cultural diversity, and sees a danger in plural identity. The cultural conservatives follow in the same path.

Arabs and Muslims are just *part* of what Huntington and the cultural conservatives see as the larger problem the U.S. must tackle at home and abroad to maintain its hegemony and strengthen Western power. For the global model to succeed, Western power must be implemented on the national American level first. Therefore, all the rest, or in other words non-Westerners must be assimilated or vanquished. The Arab American literary novels, memoirs, and short-story cycles examined in this dissertation challenge this hegemonic logic and complicate many of the core claims its advocates make. They investigate, frustrate, and problematize many of the issues dwelled upon in the clash discourse or promulgated in the culturally conservative accounts of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. The first of these works is *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf.

Chapter Two

Islam in the American Midwest: *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* on Combating Cultural Essentialism

--“They all appear by the mudbank at the bridge and are startled and demystified at the sight of their friend and his sister, covered in mud and wailing. . . . And Khadra wails and wails in the midst of The Clash of Civilizations.”

(Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* 429-30)

Steven Salaita observes, “most Arab American novelists treated the culture and practice of Islam [in the United States] either tangentially or intermittently. In Kahf’s novel, however, Islam is a primary theme, one that she explores as a highly diverse set of beliefs and customs” (*Modern* 32). A poet, literary critic, and novelist, Kahf invests in writing about Islamic subject matters, depicting major challenges Muslims encounter in the U.S., through imaginatively recounting Muslim stories of integration and stories of troubled self-identification. Kahf also probes into inter-and intra-Muslim relations: She places under the microscope thorny issues such as racism, gender relations, dynamics of exclusion, cultural essentialism, and religious radicalism. Her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) explores these issues and more.

Kahf’s serious thematic examination of intra-Muslim relations and critique of exclusionary American practices and hegemonic ideologies subtly registers in the novel’s playful criticism of Samuel P. Huntington’s thesis “the Clash of Civilizations,” as in the mudbank scene quoted in the epigraph above. Mikhail Bakhtin writes in *Speech Genres*, “[e]very utterance must be regarded as primarily responsive to preceding utterances of the given sphere. . . . Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others.” It “presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account.” In that sense, each utterance links back to, is in dialogue with, and possibly anticipates other communications because no utterance, and no text for that matter, operates in a vacuum. “[E]ach kind of utterance,” Bakhtin emphasizes, “is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech

communication” (91). Texts are always in dialogue with one another. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the clichéd phrase “The Clash of Civilizations” appears at least three times in *The Girl*. Kahf wittingly employs intertextuality when she names a musical band—composed of young Muslim and Mormon American performers—“The Clash of Civilizations.” The same group appears in the mudbank scene where Khadra’s brother hugs her while his Mormon friends, deeply touched by her delayed grief years after the murder of her friend Zuhura, stand close in what looks like a moment of genuine human compassion. United in camaraderie, these youth transcend the often strict boundaries of contemporary ethno-religious identity. Their unity during calamities such as the loss of a dear human life is Kahf’s subtle way of engaging with Huntington’s thesis. The novel, I however propose, is more in dialogue with the revived Clash of Civilizations discourse endorsed by American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent, like Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The phrase “tangerine scarf” in the novel’s title and having Khadra cover her head with the fashionable scarf point to an authorial familiarity with a dominant perception and a popular genre of confessional writing. Had Khadra unveiled at the end of the novel, Kahf writes, American readers “would have read” this choice in one and only way: “We won! She is an escaped Muslim woman!” (Macfarquhar, n. p.).¹ Had this been the case, the story of Khadra would have become another emancipation narrative just like Ali’s. In addition to the escape theme, Ali and fellow cultural conservatives have been *selectively* reinventing components of

¹ In “She Carries Weapons; They Are Called Words,” Neil Macfarquhar highlights Kahf’s deliberate choice for Khadra to cover her head at the end of the novel. “The knowledge that her work might be one window that outsiders use to view Muslim Americans,” Macfarquhar speaks of Kahf, “sometimes shapes her choices as a writer In an early draft of her novel, for example, its heroine, Khadra Shamy, changed from being a devout teenager wearing black head scarves to taking the veil off entirely as an adult. In later drafts Ms. Kahf changed her mind She ultimately decided that Khadra would remain veiled” (n. p.). This veiling style she uses, however, is more relaxed, flexible, and fashionable.

Huntington's thesis in their autobiographies, roughly since the 9/11 attacks, to foreground the "Muslims are coming" theme.

Core Claims

In this chapter, I primarily argue that Kahf engages the clash discourse in *The Girl* by indirectly countering the polemical claims Ali and fellow cultural conservative Americans articulate in their popular personal narratives. Ali's representations are built on irreconcilable binaries: true Americans versus othered Muslim immigrants, open versus insular societies, free versus submissive women, heterogeneous versus homogenous cultures, good versus evil, progressive versus primitive, and God who loves versus Allah who hates. Evidently, these dichotomies "are sometimes spatial (West/Islam), sometimes temporal (modern/archaic), and sometimes moral (good/evil), and they have become hegemonic since the Enlightenment" (Moallem 54). *The Girl* engages many of these problematic representations. Kahf, I first contend, targets the assumption of inescapable culturalism upon which many of the clash discourse's claims rest, by focusing on locality—yet simultaneously understanding the local in a global context. Second, while the novel rejects nativist claims to a conformist Muslim homogeneity as the definitive religio-cultural marker of everything Arab and Muslim American, it does not shy away from criticizing the socio-cultural ills Muslim and Arab America must confront. Kahf presents her readers with complex Muslim realities in the American Midwest: on the one hand, they are marked by contradictions and hierarchical power relations, but on the other hand, they demonstrate the active presence of subjectivity, agency, and heterogeneity. Third, Kahf cautions against cultural essentialism and in-group/ out-group dynamics of exclusion. Never reluctant to expose all extremisms while attending to the neglected in the clash

discourse in *The Girl*, Kahf seeks a diverse readership hoping to build bridges between the self and those it perceives as the others.

My analysis of *The Girl* proceeds in the following order. The first section looks at Kahf's strategic employment of a local setting—the small and fictional Midwestern town of Simmonsville. The second section investigates the relationship between the practice of othering and American foreign policies. The third section demonstrates Kahf's engagement in self-critique. It also probes into how her fictional representations disrupt nativist claims to a universal Muslim homogeneity. The fourth section unveils young currents of social evolution among the fictional Midwestern Muslims. Agency, subjectivity, and heterogeneity mark this social evolution. By way of concluding, I revisit Kahf's treatment of “identity” to demonstrate the troubling nature of essentialist cultural and religious identities.

Cultures in Contact: Through the Lens of the Local in Small Town America

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf imagines the Muslim presence in the American Midwest from the 1970s to the 1990s largely through the eyes of Khadra Shamy, a Muslim Arab American woman whose religio-cultural identity undergoes constant evolution. *The Girl* concentrates on the American Midwest which has been an attraction to Muslim immigrants. Contemporary Muslim immigrants have been selecting the Midwest because “groups of Muslims from Arab countries and their descendents are already living there” (Haddad and Lummis 69). Further, enough social and cultural support networks are in place to assist new Muslim immigrants. However, a third, yet more important factor, is at play here: arguably, the Midwest is the Mecca of America's small towns. New immigrants have historically sought out these sites for a number of reasons. In the collective immigrant imagination, small towns offer open spaces and consist of safe neighborhoods suitable for bringing up children. They allow the newcomers

to develop communities. They are sites of desired religious freedom and permit immigrant (especially religious) communities to preserve elements of their imported cultures and mores. They further operate as transitional spaces—in the sense that from them, younger generations move out to larger cities in pursuit of their dreams. This list of motives is by no means exhaustive. In terms of their contributions to the development of American character, identity, and literature, Dalia Kandiyoti rightly argues, America's small towns rival in importance the significance of the frontier. Kandiyoti elaborates: "The concept of the 'American Dream' is frequently localized in the site of the small town, fixed in the literary and social imagination as a place where individual freedom and collective harmony can be achieved in a pleasant environment" (124). American small towns, according to Richard Adicks, traditionally stand for "simplicity, honesty, neighborliness, and clean living" (50), while from Park Goist's perspective, "for an important segment of the American imagination 'the town' is synonymous with 'community.' Conversely, 'the city' has frequently been the antithesis of community" (3). This notion of community, argues George Hillery, draws its strength from imagined group "self-sufficiency," collective values and "norms," "group uniqueness," communal "homogeneity," shared public "institutions" such as a church, and finally an emphasis on "localism" (qtd. in Goist 4).

The imagined small town, however, can have a different, yet darker, side to it. It represents a closed off social structure populated by an ostensibly homogenous majority. From within this visible majority, nativist, racist, and xenophobic currents can go unchecked, particularly during times of economic instability. It is not uncommon to witness inhospitality towards foreigners because the host environment is too sheltered. The self-enclosure can create a fertile ground for bigotry, hostilities, and misrepresentations; when the circumstances are ripe,

religious and/or cultural encounters with immigrants may give rise to such sharp anxieties. Such is the case in *The Girl* where the action takes place in the southern limits of Indianapolis “where the sprawling city almost met up with the small adjoining town of Simmonsville.” Living in a townhouse with such proximity to Simmonsville, the Shamys are in direct contact with the town’s residents. Tense encounters recur.

The proximity of the Shamys’ house and the Dawah community centre to the small town of Simmonsville allows Kahf to draw attention to the local rather than the universal while understanding the local in a global context. Imagining religious and cultural encounters in the vicinity of this local space is an effective strategy Kahf utilizes to expose prejudices, reject cultural essentialism, and emphasize the complexity of individual and group cultural self-identification. The small town further dispels the romanticized image of America as a Promised Land with its arms wide open to all. Indeed, white racism becomes clear very early in the novel.² In the opening scene of *The Girl*, readers meet the adult Khadra driving west to central Indiana from the East Coast. Her newspaper expects from her a comprehensive report featuring her Muslim American community in Indianapolis. The narrator describes what looks like a homecoming scene, albeit a troubled one.³ Arguably, in the novel, Kahf introduces the homecoming theme because it registers serious ongoing collective struggles, familiar stressors, scarring traumas, and unresolved tensions. The homecoming scene in *The Girl* features Khadra,

² To think that discriminatory practices are exclusively enacted by whites is a mistake. The novel depicts similar currents among the immigrant Muslim community and thus it rejects labeling America an “Infidel” or “Kuffar” land.

³ Troubled homecomings constitute a recurrent theme in contemporary ethnic American literature. Often central characters return to a physical place they associate with their formative years, cultural heritage, traumatic experiences, or nothing more than a community. The journey normally has a restorative effect, allowing them or their communities to find a centre upon which they could restructure their lives and feel grounded. In other contexts, a sense of urgency lies behind the return—an urgency to speak out, to remember, or a desperate need to preserve cultural difference. Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, Louise Eldrich’s *Love Medicine*, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/ La Frontera* and N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* are some examples.

whose eyes bitterly scan the expansive landscape she is driving through—almost an alien landscape endlessly stretching before her eyes. All signs, landmarks, and sites remind her of her foreignness. The narrator reports that Khadra sees “silver silos and pole barns, tufts of goldthread on the meridian, and the blue day beginning to pour into the dark sky.” The narrator captures her thoughts:

But it is not mine, she thinks, this blue and gold Indiana morning. None of it is for me. Between the flat land and the broad sky, she feels ground down to the grain, erased. She feels as if, were she to scream in this place, some Indiana mute button would be on, and no one would hear. (Kahf 2)

Pressure builds up inside her and bitterness gradually gains holds of her when, on the road to her hometown, the Muslim-Arab American Khadra comes across a “highway sign that claims ‘the People of Indiana Welcome You.’” She, reacting out of a traumatic personal experience, answers the sign: “Liar.” After all, Khadra “spent most of her growing up years in Indiana. She knows better than the sign” (1). Khadra does not see a land opening its arms to receive her; Indiana has not been kind to her or her community. The unpleasant memories she associates with the place and the local eyes that gaze at her along the road stir fear. The gazing eyes are almost telling her how foreign she is, that she does not and will never belong. The natural response to substantial fear is flight: Khadra drives on, “rolls the windows up, tamps her scarf down on her crinkly dark hair, and tries to calm the panic that coming back to Indiana brings to her gut” (3). Distant memories flood her head.

The adult Khadra comes back to a land of serious challenges; the America she experienced in Simmonsville and Indianapolis is not the Promised Land recurrent in American literature, American popular imagination, or even the collective consciousness of her early

Muslim community. It is also an America different from the idealized one cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent like Ali, Gabrielle, Sultan, or Darwish claim to have found. Racism, cultural conservatism, religious prejudice, and xenophobic sentiments were major challenges Khadra and her fictional Dawah Muslim community faced in the 1970s and 1980s American Midwest. During Khadra's formative years, white racism and later hate crimes on the basis of religious difference were symptomatic of the time. She and her family were regularly called "raghead" (5). The hostility commenced the moment the family arrived in Indianapolis. Upon arriving, the Shamys saw the locals gazing at them. To the latter, the Shamys were "a bunch of foreigners. Dark and wrong. Dressed funny. Their talk was gross sounds, like someone throwing up." In addition to the funny looks and verbal insults, the Shamy family was unwelcomed with vandalism. The children of one of their neighbors broke "[b]eer bottles, a pile of brown and gold shards at their doorsteps" and when the Shamys complained to the aggressors' parents, they were vulgarly yelled at and told to go "BACK WHERE YOU PEOPLE CAME FROM!" (7).

The immediate anxiety between the locals and the newcomers, triggered by pre-existing notions of selfhood and otherness, can be demystified through the lens of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and more precisely the term "imaginative geography." Relatively homogenous groups, according to Said, rigidly map out the world geographically into "their land" and "the land of the barbarians." Delineating these fiercely-guarded boundaries on the basis of imaginative "familiar" and "unfamiliar" geographical spaces is a "universal practice." This method of "making geographical distinction," Said highlights, "*can be arbitrary*" in the sense that "imaginative geography of the 'our land-barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction." Said adds an important point: "The geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways" (54). Indeed,

imaginative geography explains the first encounter between the Shamys and their neighbors. The former's dark skin, unfamiliar native tongue, exotic attire, social interaction, and primarily the distant place the locals associate them with, visibly and indisputably mark the Shamys as foreign others from a barbaric land, others whose presence in Indianapolis and on the border of Simmonsville constitutes an insult, if not a threat, to the locals. Not only do the latter see the newcomers through the prism of the already preconceived geographical distinction, but they also extend the juxtaposition to engender oppositional notions of identity applicable to the situation of the newcomers.

The undesirable ethnic, racial, religious, and geographical identity markers the Shamys exhibit earn them the same status as their fellow country men and women back in the Middle East: inferior others. The fact that they reside in the States and soon will become U.S. citizens does not make them insiders. At specific times, they are both insiders and outsiders, but never full insiders. The xenophobia and racism they endured at the beginning of their settlement were not unique to them. The larger Muslim community in the area equally suffered othering and harassment. Its members felt unwelcomed, unwanted. The narrator reports that several of the town's residents "were not so happy about the Muslims doing God's work there." In one incident, many locals were gathered a few meters away from the Dawah Centre to shut it down (38).⁴ Having a conservative understanding of Islam, the Dawah community believe they have a noble mission: to enlighten fellow Muslims and to revive Islam in the American Midwest. Their mission, nonetheless, is fraught with difficulties, one of which is an encounter with a hostile white local community. The following friction reveals the dynamics of exclusion nativist

⁴ The Dawah Centre is a Muslim community centre.

xenophobic members of the host culture apply in response to the Dawah folks whom they see as intrusive alien elements in the vicinity of their small town. This immigrant presence initially triggers systematic harassment from a radical group that goes by the name of the American Protector of the Environs of Simmonsville. Orvil Hubbard, a veteran awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor, leads the group. It is probable that Kahf modeled the character of Orvil after the Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard (1903-82), an “ex-Marine, nonpracticing attorney, self-acknowledged expert on matters from the milking of cows to the history of the American Revolution, and personal symbol of suburban America’s resistance to racial integration” (Good 28). Historically, the latter, a notorious white segregationist, was determined to keep African Americans and other nonwhites outside the suburb of Dearborn, Detroit. Hubbard guarded Dearborn’s white purity even during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. “And while the racism of Orville Hubbard was not the racism of the Ku Klux Klan, of the cross burners and the lynch mobs,” writes David L. Good in his 1989 biography *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn*, “it was just as insidious in its way, representing as it did the stranglehold of the white power structure on the political machinery of the suburbs of northern America” (27). The late Hubbard strongly rejected integrating not only blacks in Dearborn, but also Mexicans and Arabs. Of Arabs in the east end of Dearborn, he once said: “some people, the Syrians, are even worse than the niggers” (34). Racial integration, the historical Hubbard thought, will corrupt white racial purity and will eventually lead to a black takeover. To him, and in the eyes and minds of substantial numbers of white Americans, African Americans were a problem.

By modeling the character of Orvil, who considers blacks and Asians a problem, after the late Orville Hubbard, Kahf points to a historical pattern of social exclusion and seems to communicate the following message to her *contemporary* readers: like African Americans in the

1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Arabs and Muslims are considered the most recent “problem,” but also like their fellow ethnic Americans, they will challenge the label and the negative representations attached to it. Kahf, herself a member of the Arab and Muslim American population, participates in frustrating the clichés and exposing their danger. With the late Orville Hubbard in mind, Kahf shows how the bluntly racist character of Orvil engages in acts of Orientalism: he claims familiarity with the invasive alien others, their ways of life, and the way they think. Peeking through the exclusionist worldview of Orvil shows xenophobic actions his group advances based on his alleged expertise about the others. Claiming first-hand knowledge lends additional credibility to his argument when he urges his group members to stop these foreigners from disfiguring the identity of their town, possibly through demographics, miscegenation, and religio-cultural difference. Through employing the character of Orvil who makes sweeping generalizations and expresses a supremacist ideology not unlike the cultural conservative Ali, the novel, I argue, is attentive to the reemerging Clash of Civilizations discourse: the novel suggests that Orvil’s remarks, hegemonic and reductionist, are neither based on a *specific* othered religious identity nor are they directed at a *particular* ethnicity. In other words, like the narrative of Ali, his narrative not only does not acknowledge diversity, but in fact erases it as it recognizes in it a problem. Orvil’s remarks do, however, demonstrate how inhospitable the small town is towards the newcomers. To his audience, Orvil says, “I’m not speaking from ignorance.” He elaborates, “I’ve lived in their countries, and I know. They *will* destroy the character of our town” (42). Contrary to what he claims, however, Orvil is in fact ignorant about his Muslim/dark-skinned foreign neighbors. He served in Korea, and possibly Vietnam, and lost a leg there. But it is unlikely that he had been to the Middle East, Africa, or to any Muslim majority country for that matter. He is rather thinking along the lines of the Orient versus the Occident. He is

mostly speaking about “Oriental” immigrants regardless of their origins or religions, especially since he seems to act out of indiscriminate racism or pure xenophobia.

Not unlike the cultural conservatives’ hostility towards unassimilated nonwhite Americans, Orvil’s racist language is directed at an amalgamation of nonwhites, whether they are U.S. born or recent immigrants, Asians or Africans, religious or secular. Orvil, however, seems to have issues more with darker-skinned immigrants. After all, his group’s systematic discrimination against the Dawah people happens in the early 1970s America: then, race relations were troubled. Indeed, Curtis points out that the “incredible influx of Muslim immigrants after 1965 coincided with increasing patterns of racial segregation in the United States” (xi-xii).⁵ This historical context explains why Orvil would use Manichaean language: white versus colored, us versus them, the U.S. versus their old countries, superior culture versus inferior cultures, and the West versus the East or even the rest. As in the case of Ali, his relation to the other is one of power. Indeed, implied in Orvil’s statement is a sense of nativist superiority, possibly driven by anxiety over the presence of other cultures in his local environment. (Similarly, Ali adopts a nativist white supremacist attitude in her autobiographies.) The dynamics of exclusion operating locally in this case cannot be fully understood in isolation. They make more sense in the context of the global.

⁵ After 1965, the arrival of large numbers of migrants from Arab and Muslim majority countries, like Iran, Palestine, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Turkey, is largely attributable to the “new immigration law called the Hart-Celler Act,” which President Lyndon B. Johnson signed on 3 October, 1965. The new law “expunged the racist immigration quotas that had been established under the National Origins Act of 1924 and the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952” which “favored white people: the annual quotas allowed 149,667 Europeans, 2,990 Asians, and only 1,400 Africans to come to the United States.” The October 1965 law “changed that, banning discriminatory quotas based on national origins” (72). Approximately, “1.1 million immigrants [to the United States from 1966-1997] were Muslim” (Curtis 73). These Muslim immigrants arrived in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s during times of racial tension, visible American intolerance towards Arabs and Muslims during the 1967 War, the 1973 Oil Embargo, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the 1990 Gulf War, among other geopolitical events.

Orvil claims that he “knows.” But his is a “political knowledge,” to borrow the phrase from Said, because his statement and actions signify a complex set of immediate power relations. To Said, “anything” that has “direct political effect upon reality in the everyday sense” is political (*Orientalism* 9). Orvil’s claimed familiarity with the East, its inhabitants, and its cultures is also false knowledge. He has either invented the imaginary “Other” or rather resorted to the culturally and politically constructed knowledge already stored in his consciousness when he misidentifies Muslims with East Asians. U.S. immigration policies coined new categories for post-1965 immigrants who arrived from Africa, Asia, and other non-Western regions. “Immigrants, primarily Europeans coming to the United States before 1965,” writes Jamillah Karim, “were classified by nationality.” But “with post-1965 waves of immigration, ethnic categories [were] broadened to include groups marked by increasingly greater differences, groups that did not even share national borders.” One example is the “panethnic label” Asian American, an umbrella classification term that “includes Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Pakistani, Korean, Vietnamese, and Cambodian immigrants” (27).

These broader, yet reductionist, categories, I propose, might have made it even easier for nativist characters like Orvil to mis-identify and consequently express racism against the Muslim newcomers.⁶ Karim rightly argues that “Like race, ethnicity is an artificial, not a fixed, marker of human difference” (27). In reality, the ethnic others cannot be reduced and are more complex than the way Orvil describes them. The invented ethnically-homogenous others, however, give Orvil the convenience of defining himself and his cultural group against the so-called colored

⁶ I consider the original broad terms of classification problematic and reductionist, although particular terms, such as “Asian American,” have been embraced by different ethnic alliances to help them unify their struggles and gain more power. For example, “Asian American” became an identification marker for a powerful ethnic alliance and multiculturalism in the 1970s.

“Others.” At this point in time, the fictional Muslim community in Indiana is a colored “Other” regardless of how relatively diverse that community is. In terms of diversity, it includes South Asian and Middle Eastern majorities. African American and white American Muslims represent two minorities in the Dawah Muslim community. The skin color of the South Asian, Middle Eastern, and African American Muslims is darker than the locals, and their cultures are different. Ethnocentrism and mono-culturalism deeply inform Orvil’s worldview. Almost echoing the case of Ali, Orvil exhibits a collective sense of white superiority, a sense of mission, and contempt. These manifestations of racist superiority are closely attached to his view that white culture, core values, and collective self represent the norm against which all others must be measured and rated to determine whether they should be included or excluded. Although Orvil does not directly claim America as a white American Christian nation because he operates in a local environment, Kahf develops his character in a way that makes him a spokesperson for the clash discourse and through characterization she mounts her critique of it.⁷ No doubt, the presumed unified Christianity and dominant culture are imaginary power constructs. Yet, Ali and Orvil seem to closely convey a shared message: ethnic cultural difference is a problem and out-groups are a threat that must be dealt with. Orvil’s contempt is for the dark-skinned out-groups, even though within the in-group itself, unity and the imagined homogeneity is unreal.

The Local in the Context of American Foreign Policies: Othering Arabs and Muslims

The in-group and out-group dichotomy becomes more prominent in times of crisis.

Indeed, the novel depicts how during the U.S. Embassy Hostage Crisis, Arabs and Muslims in

⁷ For Ali, the others must be assimilated. Assimilation, to her, means complete erasure of who the ethnic-cultural others are before they convert to Christianity and adopt the dominant American culture. Orvil, on the other hand, flatly rejects the others—whether they assimilate or not. In either case, the others are trapped in impossible situations. In that sense, Orvil is more like Gabrielle.

the Midwest became the hated out-group. From the nativist white locals' perspective, Muslims in oil-producing Arab countries were responsible for the energy shortages that crippled the American economy and made Americans feel vulnerable as never before. Discrimination on the basis of religious identity comes into play more forcefully later in the context of the Iranian Revolution. Until then, racism was the most common, though not the only, form of discrimination the Midwestern Dawah Muslim community had to contend with. With regards to the dynamics that influence these particular in-group and out-group relations, U.S. hegemonic practices outside its national borders play a major role in either igniting or subduing acts of othering, racial discrimination, religious prejudice, or xenophobic tendencies at home. The novel imaginatively describes some of the hostility towards Muslims and Arabs in the United States in response to the 1973 Energy Crisis: Muslims and Arabs were stereotyped in the American media, discriminated against in the political and public spheres, and became the face of the enemy.

In disagreement with mainstream Americans who interpreted the embargo as mere blunt Arab hatred of Americans and saw in it a malignant determination to economically bring America down,⁸ the Dawah folks read the event and the consequent American reaction to it in

⁸ After oil-producing Arab countries like Saudi Arabia imposed the oil embargo on the United States, Japan and some European countries in response to the American support for Israel in the October War of 1973, the image of the Arab was not flattering in the United States. Gottschalk and Greenberg state, "[p]olitical cartoons" of the period in American newspapers depicted American "resentment" towards Arabs "through pernicious stereotypes of Arab physical features, aggressive countenance, and moral character" (118). The authors add: "cartoons represented Arabs as undifferentiated in their stereotyped qualities as scheming and money mongering, qualities already portrayed in caricatures of Nasser two decades earlier. Now, however, Arabs were not acting passively. Instead, the united effort of some to institute an embargo had apparently put them in control of the economic fate of the United States." "Underlying the majority of the cartoons during this period," the authors argue, "we see that the deep-rooted Euro-American association of Islam with violence, providing a background for understanding of this modern, economically driven situation" (118). In one cartoon by Bill Mauldin, Gottschalk and Greenberg write, the readers see an "image of a contentedly smiling Arab playing with the globe at the end of a string" and as such, the cartoon "makes no effort to convince its audience of a fact that it assumes" they "will already know: The Arab embargo

the context of Western imperialism. Nationally, Americans responded with stereotypes, racism, and violence. Readers of *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* learn that “[t]he only Muslims on television were Arab oil-sheiks, who were supposedly bad because they made America have an energy crisis. . . . Nasty Arab sheiks appeared on *Charlie’s Angels*, forcing the shy angel Kelly, to bellydance” (Kahf 83). Arabs and Muslims became more visibly unwelcomed in America and among Americans who acted as if they were entitled to have full access to Arab oil, as Khadra’s father disapprovingly puts it (83). His statement, if read in the context of the U.S.’s postwar status as a modern superpower, points to particular attitudes modern Muslim American immigrants in general have gradually developed towards the U.S. In fact, Curtis argues that from the fourth wave of immigrants and onwards (1947-present), Muslim American immigrants have found it “more difficult . . . to express unreserved support for the U.S. government, especially its foreign policy” (61). The Dawah Muslim immigrants, like Khadra’s father, who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, in fact belong to generations of Muslim American immigrants who “brought critical attitudes towards U.S. foreign policy” (Curtis 63).⁹

Their nonconformity and criticism are generally triggered by their visibility, albeit negative visibility, in the U.S., a country which they consider exploitative of their homelands.

derives from Arab avarice. The cartoonist suggests that the Arab-Israeli conflict, the oil embargo, and global manipulation are all of a piece” (120).

⁹ Unlike earlier waves, these newest comers were religiously awakened. The history of modern Muslim immigration in the U.S. includes five waves of immigrants: 1875-1912, 1918-1922, 1930-1938, 1947-1960, and 1967-the present (Haddad and Lummis 14). From the 1880s through the First World War, immigrants arrived from Greater Syria. They also arrived from British India—which included present day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The majority of them were Christians. Yet, approximately “less than 10 percent of the total population was Muslim” (Curtis 49). The history of Islam in America dates back to the sixteenth century. Historians estimate that among the enslaved Africans in North America, Muslims ranged between “the thousands to more than a million,” writes Curtis, who also adds that by “the late 1500s, common Muslim-sounding names such as Hassan, Osman, Amar, Ali, and Ramadan appeared in Spanish language colonial documents.” Historical documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prove “that Muslims from almost all Islamic regions of West Africa were present throughout the Americas during the colonial period” (Curtis 4-5).

Arab and Muslim Americans, “the most Invisible of the Invisibles” to borrow a phrase from Joanna Kadi (xix), are remembered “once there is another ‘crisis’ in the Middle East. Crisis: A by-product of past and current colonialism” (xvi). These invisibles are seen, and spoken of, as hostile outsiders inside the U.S. The narrator sporadically discusses U.S. hegemony over the Middle East. Exploring American hegemonic interests allows Kahf to demonstrate how global contexts invite specific reactions towards Arabs and Muslims in America. In addition to illustrating how American foreign policy towards the Middle East influences the formation of ethnic (Arab or Muslim) and national American cultural identities, the novel offers an insight into why it would be difficult for some Arab and Muslim Americans to develop “a strong” sense of belonging to the U.S. when the latter exploits their home countries and frequently sees them through the same prism—foreign hostiles. Commenting on the November 1979 U.S. embassy Hostage Crisis in Iran, the narrator blames the U.S. for what the Iranians had to go through under the Shah, “who imprisoned protestors, tortured prisoners, encouraged booze and corruption, and tried to eliminate Islamic identity in his country. All with America’s blessings and weapons” (119).¹⁰ The novel makes it clear that the fall of the Shah displeased the American

¹⁰ The administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported the 1953 coup codenamed Operation Ajax in Iran which brought the Shah to power. “Shortly after Eisenhower took office in January 1953,” Roham Alvandi writes, “the CIA was given the green light to begin work with the SIS on a plan to topple [Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad] Mosaddeq” (17). The British and the Americans mounted the coup to end the term of Mosaddeq and surrender power in the hands of the Shah. “The Eisenhower administration’s support for the overthrow of Mosaddeq,” Alvandi points out, “marked the beginning of the US-Iran patron-client relationship. US economic and military support not only stabilized Iran after the 1953 [British-American orchestrated] coup, but also freed the shah from any significant social constraints on his power, thereby transforming the Pahlavi monarchy into a dictatorship. In exchange, the shah ruthlessly suppressed any communist or nationalist threat to American interests in Iran” (18). His secret police did the ugly business. The CIA and the Israeli Mossad trained the brutal Shah’s secret police, SAVAK. After the coup, British and American oil companies enjoyed monopoly over Iranian oil. While Iranian citizens were subjected to different forms of oppression, Americans received very special treatment. In the early 1960s, the Shah extended “diplomatic immunity to the civilian and military staff of the US military missions in Iran, as well as their dependents.” The Shah basically “sold Iran’s sovereignty to the United States,” Alvandi argues (24). The SAVAK were the brutal right hand of the Shah’s oppressive monarchy. Eye-witness accounts describe the torture and indictment methods SAVAK applied as follows: SAVAK

administration, but taking Americans hostage directly hurt America's egoism, and its image of itself as a superpower.¹¹ The Hostage Crisis, McAlister argues, stimulated artistic, literary, and film productions that rendered Americans into "a nation imperiled by terrorism" and made Americans imagine themselves as "victims of—and eventually fighters against—terrorism." The new revolutionary Iran "structured a national [American] narrative of victimization and longed-for revenge" (199). *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* captures this sense of victimhood, but it also challenges it.

The novel captures how some Muslim Americans reacted to the immediate crisis. Their views are better understood as instantaneous reactions to U.S. hegemony. On the other hand, Kahf mounts her criticism of American exploitative foreign policies through their views which contextualize and historicize the Hostage Crisis. The added historical and contextual information is symbolic: it rejects typical American claims to complete innocence, exceptionalism, and monopoly over victimhood, hoping to shake off the general American insensitivity towards the plights of other nations. Wajdy, Khadra's religiously-conservative father, the narrator for

would kidnap a man as he walked along the street, blindfold him, and lead him straight into the torture chamber without asking a single question. There they would start in with the whole macabre routine--breaking bones, pulling out fingernails, forcing hands into hot ovens, drilling into the living skull, and scores of other brutalities--in the end, when the victim had gone mad with pain and become a smashed, bloody mass, they would proceed to establish his identity. (cited in Kapuściński 49)

If they decide to proceed to trial, SAVAK and the Shah's men would use "only military courts: closed sessions, no counsel, no witness, and an instantaneous sentence" (cited in Kapuściński 50). Those who were subjected to the violence of the regime included adult men, children, women, and entire families (51). According to Kapuściński, SAVAK "were so threatening, and the definition of an enemy of the state was so loose and arbitrary, that everyone could imagine ending up in such a torture chamber" (52).

¹¹ Obsessed with faulting the U.S. for protecting the Shah who oppressed Iranians, the Dawah folks do not seem to recognize that kidnapping the American diplomats and embassy staff violates international law. After all, to the Dawah folks as it was possibly the case for many Iranians, the U.S. brought the Shah back to power, aided in creating and training his secret police, established a British-American monopoly over Iranian resources, and treated Iran like a colony. Americans in Iran were given full immunity, regardless of the nature of their violations. Iranians were oppressed in their own country by the Shah, his secret police, and by Americans. The U.S. presence in Iran was imperial.

example reports, felt a strong sense of satisfaction. He believed the hostage situation and the ensuing American humiliation were “a taste of their own medicine” because the Americans “make everyone else in the world suffer while they live like lords. They create terror in other people’s countries while they live in safety and luxury. Let them see how it is to have to worry,” Wajdy adds (Kahf 118). Many readers might describe this sentiment as “un-American” if endorsed by U.S. citizens, or “anti-American” if expressed by alien residents. Regardless of their mixed immigration status, the emotion was largely shared among many from within the fictional Dawah community then. However, it is never translated into violent actions.¹²

By offering her readers the uncensored truth regarding how the imaginary Dawah community responded to the Hostage Crisis, Kahf risks validating the clash discourse. It is not unusual that some ethnic American writers are accused of practicing self-exoticization or the “pastoralization of the in-group” (Sollors 31). But Kahf does not engage in self-exoticization in spite of the fact her novel does not attempt, even slightly, to conceal or leave out such strong critical sentiments towards U.S. foreign policy practices. First, Kahf presents the readers with a plurality of Muslim Americans—integrationists, assimilationists, cultural, spiritual but not religious, and evangelical Muslims, among others. The Dawah folks do not represent all Muslims

¹² Kahf, whom I suspect is aware of how “Islam” and “terrorism” became synonymous after the Islamic Revolution gained political power and after American diplomats were taken hostages in Iran, is careful not to introduce any politically or religiously violent Muslim characters. After all, the novel in these scenes primarily embarks on exposing American imperialist hegemony in the region and its strategy to demonize revolutionary regimes, regardless of their religious or secular nationalism. At that time, in American cultural and political discourses “‘Islam’ became highlighted as the dominant signifier of the region [the Middle East], rather than oil wealth, Arabs, or Christian Holy Lands. None of these other constructs disappeared,” McAlister rightly points out, “but they were augmented and transformed by a reframing of the entire region in terms of proximity to or distance from ‘Islam,’ which itself became conflated with ‘terrorism’” (200). Islamic revivalism, McAlister also rightly states, “*did* become a more prominent political force in places like Egypt and Lebanon, and eventually Iran, in the wake of the failure of secular nationalism to produce the promised political and moral victories against the vestiges of Western imperialism (including Israel, which was seen as an outpost of European power)”. “The representation of this reality in U.S. public culture, however, often transformed an emergent political-religious phenomenon into the essential character of an entire region,” consequently, “what had been understood, albeit incorrectly, as ‘the Arab world’ in the 1960s and 1970s became, again, incorrectly, ‘the Islamic world’ in the 1980s” (McAlister 200).

in the Midwest, let alone the U.S. Second, when the narrator reports how “everyone at the Centre agreed that under normal circumstances, hostage taking was bad” although “they [the Dawah folks] could understand why the Iranian students did it” (Kahf, *The Girl* 119),¹³ Kahf does not endorse the religious conservatism of the Dawah folks whose anti-hegemonic rhetoric gets clouded by their contemporary religiosity. Muslim religiosity in the U.S. gradually rose as a marker of identity during the Cold War and the Vietnam War and gained more momentum in the 1970s.¹⁴

The Girl suggests that when an ethnic American criticizes U.S. foreign policies during times of military interventions, the stance, and by extension the person expressing it, is marked as un-American. In the novel, the Hostage Crisis unveils how prejudice flourishes more in environments plagued by conformity, high levels of political ignorance, and unexamined belief in in-group exceptionalism. The explosive and often conflated anti-Arab and anti-Muslim

¹³ The pre-revolutionary Iranian regime oppressed Iranians, while it offered Americans uncontested access to Iranian wealth and control over Iranian national and foreign policies. According to Peter L. Hahn, “in the 1950s, Iran emerged as an important U.S. ally. In 1955, it . . . garnered extensive U.S. economic and military aid (some \$1 billion by 1960). Hundreds of U.S. military personnel trained Iran’s national police and army. In 1964,” Hahn adds, “the Shah granted these U.S. soldiers the legal right of extraterritoriality (essentially, diplomatic immunity from Iranian law), thereby eroding Iranian sovereignty” (69-70). “In 1972-77, Iran increased its defense budget by nearly 700 percent and purchased U.S. weapons valued at \$16.2 billion. The CIA formed a close partnership with SAVAK, the Shah’s secret police force. By 1978, there were 50,000 Americans in Iran, many of them holding executive positions in government and the oil industry.” Supported by the U.S. who successfully orchestrated a coup which brought down the Mohammed Mossadegh’s administration and brought back the Shah (38), the Shah erected a dictatorship, spent the country’s wealth on his lavish lifestyle, and gave SAVAK the green light to “repress dissent with censorship and torture” (71). Against this harsh reality, revolutionary Iranians, “who viewed the Shah as a discredited lackey of Western imperialism,” had to act (Hahn 71).

¹⁴ In the 1960s and 1970s, many Muslims in the U.S. experienced anxieties about the sexual revolution and other stressors related to U.S. involvement in the politics of their home countries. Curtis reflects on the drivers behind this rising religiosity. “When combined in the 1970s with concerns about the sexual revolution, the Watergate scandal, the economy, and other issues,” Curtis writes, “this distress over U.S. foreign policy led some Muslim Americans, like Christian Americans, to conclude that the world could be saved only through a massive religious revival, or at least a return to religious values” (69). This reawakening struck roots with the newer wave of Muslim immigrants and graduate students who arrived in the 1950s and the 1960s. In reviving their faith, these immigrants thought, they could become a successful exemplar for their fellow Muslims overseas, “modeling what Islam could be if lived with verve and commitment” (Curtis 69). The anxieties about the sexual revolution were similarly experienced by Christian conservatives in the U.S.

prejudice on local and national levels in America then (as it is the case since 9/11 attacks) indeed sheds light on recurrent patterns of exclusion the ethnic others are subjected to in the actual context of U.S. foreign policies and global geopolitical relations. During this time of crisis, Kahf suggests in her novel, conformist white America acted like an in-group. Anyone who dares to challenge the group consciousness, fails to conform, or comes across as less patriotic than expected is othered. “[D]issent in matters of governance and foreign affairs is unpatriotic and therefore unsavory. It is drawn from a longstanding sensibility that nonconformity to whatever at the time is considered to be ‘the national interest’ is unpatriotic,” Salaita argues (“Ethnic” 154). This is exactly the case in *The Girl*. Arab and Muslim Americans, especially those who are visibly non-conformist, are singled out as an out-group. Arabs were conflated with Iranians during the hostage crisis. After all both are Muslims. This conflation is evident in the harassment Khadra receives at school. “Khadra,” readers are told, “counted out her days in George Rogers Clark High School where, for four hundred and forty-four days [the period the American hostages spent in captivity], she was a hostage to the rage the hostage crisis produced in Americans.” Khadra, I suggest, spent each day at school “dodging verbal blows—and sometimes physical ones” because of her ethnic background and religious attire (123). It is possible that her fellow students made a connection between the “one scarf-wearing [revolutionary Iranian] woman” who aided in taking the American embassy workers hostage and the scarf-wearing Khadra (119). After all, these students were exposed to daily images of the hostages on TV where some news anchors also “counted out the days of their captivity at the end of each news broadcast” (Kahf 123).

In response to these reminders and representations, the early Muslim American community near Simmonsville grows more attached to its Muslim identity. Religiocentrism

gains more momentum. Trying to counteract the soul-crushing stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims her daughter experiences daily or the harassment she faces in school on the account of her Muslim identity, Ebtehaj, Khadra's mother, shares with her daughter the following group-based truth: "Islam is scientific" and unlike "Christianity, Islam . . . encourages us to learn science. In history, Christianity killed the scientists" (120). Although Muslims in Simmonsville live under fear during the hostage crisis (123), all this considered, I argue that the group-based truth activates a sense of solidarity, belonging, resilience to outside stressors, and helps form a collective consciousness on the basis of an ascribed group identity. This collective identity maintains its allure during tumultuous times. When the group comes under pressure from the broader white American culture, its members, generally speaking, huddle together. However, when such stressors are over, members of the Dawah community, especially the young, do not shy away from criticizing their own group and its culturally-transmitted worldview. The omniscient narrator partakes in the criticism. As I discuss later in this chapter, when the pressure from the wider American society decreases, young members of the Dawah community claim agency and demonstrate subjectivity. They search for a middle ground, a borderland to reposition themselves.

Adjusting the Lens: Self-criticism and Rejection of Nativist Claims to a Conformist Muslim Homogeneity

Unlike Orvil and Ali, the narrator in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* offers a more balanced account of America: I have demonstrated how the narrator criticizes white American racism, and later exposes American cultural conservative and nativist tendencies. The criticism does not end there. The novel moves to fault the Dawah conservative Muslim community in the fictional Midwest, who at times border on being too conservative. The Dawah Muslims, according to the narrator, did not choose wisely when they were searching for a location to

establish their religious community, nor did they research their designated neighborhood in Indianapolis or its proximity to the small town Simmonsville, its local inhabitants, their cultural norms, or the status of the economy. The educated Muslims, according to the narrator, had “put their heads together over a map and said, ‘There! That’s the middle of the country, so Muslims in all parts of the land can find us’” (44). They did not even pay the slightest attention to the existing race relations or the racial distribution of the population, assuming they had a decent understanding of such relations provided they were educated and had lived in the States for some time. “About the lives of the small-town residents of Simmonsville and southern Indianapolis . . . much less the outlying landscape of central Indiana with its farmers in crisis, many facing foreclosure in the 1970s,” the narrator emphasizes, “the Dawah folk knew next to nothing, and didn’t care to know. They bent their heads to their task” (45). The newcomers acted as if the place were a wilderness, a chosen land for God’s chosen people. In this portrayal, I take Kahf to suggest that their arrival story in the American Midwest to a degree echoes that of the Puritans. The latter believed they had a sacred mission. They sought to establish in America “a tabula rasa on which they could inscribe their dream: the outline of a . . . city on a hill exemplifying the Word of God to all the world” (Slotkin, *RV* 38). And just like the Puritans, the early conservative Muslims in Indiana relied on religious language to draw a dividing line between themselves and the locals. This line acted as a border. “Borders,” writes Gloria Anzaldúa “are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge” (25). And although Anzaldúa is thinking of borders in the context of national and cultural identities and land claims, her definition is still relevant to the case of the Dawah folks. In making this implicit connection to the Puritans, Kahf draws attention to a typical pattern of immigration in the U.S., critiques the newcomers’

blindness and ignorance, but also reminds her readers of the instability of such closed-off structures. The newer generations end up resisting them and dismantling the religious and ideological borderlands their ancestors imposed.

Indeed, the Dawah patriarchal authority's notion of group identity necessitated that they draw a strict borderline to define and regulate the Muslim self from the alien Others. They expected the demarcated line to not be crossed. According to the narrator, the Dawah elites considered the locals to be "Kuffar," i.e. infidels; they failed to see them as stressed humans operating under harsh socio-economic realities. They failed to connect, did not care, and engaged in stereotyping them. The stereotyping increases the more stressed these early Muslims are about the continuity of their faith and cultures through their offspring, the latter of whom come under the spell of American culture and non-Muslim lifestyle. Experiencing serious anxieties over the obvious influence the American lifestyle has on her daughter Khadra, Ebtehaj emphatically repeats to Khadra, "we are not Americans" (67). The statement is a reminder from the mother to her daughter that Muslims are superior. Americans are ignorant, impure, individualistic, and cultureless infidels who are neither generous nor hospitable. They are corrupt and uncivilized. The narrator reports that the Shamys "had it on good authority that a fair number of them [Americans] used drugs. Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and lots of divorces" (68). Although such was indeed the case in the 1970s, the Dawah folks frequently present these context-specific facts as timeless truth. They become stereotypes. In addition to their flexibility in terms of applicability to the entire othered out-group, stereotypes resist erasure: "One hallmark of a stereotype is its persistence," writes Marsha J. Hamilton (173). For the Dawah elites, stereotypes are necessary to secure the religious and ideological borderlands. "Articulating immigrant cultural identity through rigid binaries is not an

unfamiliar resolution to immigrant and people of color's struggles in a society structured by a pressure for assimilation and racism," Nadine Naber highlights (6). "This dynamic," Naber adds, "while a reaction to political and historical conditions, is an attempt to depoliticize the immigrant experience where culture is articulated not as living, changing social relations but a set of timeless traits" (6). In basic language, early Dawah immigrants produced essentialist understandings of both cultures and those who belonged to them in order to shield their offspring from, what they thought, becoming culturally lost.

In the very early stages of their settlement at the edge of Simmonsville, Khadra's parents effortlessly translate their distorted knowledge of the others, rendering it universal truth, possibly because they are overtaken by their fears, especially the fear of cultural and religious failure. Historically, similar anxieties were experienced by second and third generation Puritans. By acknowledging the Dawah anxieties, Kahf should not be mistaken for endorsing the cultural essentialism that follows. The parents indeed become almost hysterical about transmitting their cultural norms and religious worldview to their children. Also blinded by their sense of religious mission, they constantly fail to see the others as normal people just like themselves. The parents genuinely believe that they know everything about America and Americans. The narrator explains, "Khadra's dad said Americans threw out their sons and daughters when they turned eighteen unless they could pay rent—to their own parents! And, at the other end, they threw their parents into nursing homes when they got old." Americans did this while "they took slavish care of mere dogs. All in all, Americans led shallow, wasteful, materialistic lives" (68). The same Americans the parents refer to, "were the white people who surrounded them, a crashing sea of unbelief in which the Dawah Centre bobbed, a brave boat. (There were black people who were Americans, but that was different)" (67). The narrator reports what the first generation Muslim

immigrants thought of Americans at this early stage of settlement in the Midwest. The readers meet a few good white Americans who are kind to their Muslim neighbors such as Mrs. Moore (40), and the couple Lindsay and Leslie (7). On the other hand, there are bullies and racist folks like Orvil Hubbard (42-43), the Lotts (6-7), and Curtis Stephenson (124). The rest, except a scattered few here and there, fall under the ignorant American category, ignorant in the sense that they are isolationist and know very little about the world. But also ignorant in terms of what the narrator refers to as “a crashing sea of unbelief.” In the midst of their new, unfamiliar, and non-Muslim environment, the early conservative Muslim community thought of themselves as “a brave boat.”

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf seems to evoke the famous Puritan John Winthrop’s “Arabella Covenant” and Samuel Danforth’s “Errand into the Wilderness” in its attempt to criticize irresponsible religiosity, but also to remind its readers of similar immigrant currents in American history. Considering the novel’s intertextuality, the image of the Dawah immigrants as a “brave boat” brings to mind Winthrop’s Puritan community of settlers whose goal was to improve their lives by serving God; to achieve that goal, conformity was expected from all. Warning his congregation not to break their covenant with the Lord, Winthrop made his message loud and clear: “Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man” (104). Winthrop called upon his fellow Puritans to “be as a city upon a hill” and to brace together so their ship or the utopian city of God would stay afloat (104). The metaphor of the boat and the pious community in the midst of a “waste and howling Wilderness” in Danforth’s “Errand of the Wilderness” (11) is also evoked in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Neither Danforth’s New England nor the Dawah community’s

Midwest were in reality a literal wilderness. Rather, the newcomers imagined them to be so. Danforth's "wilderness" is a metaphor for the imagined perils facing the Puritans in 1670 New England. Local Native Americans, seen as absent-present and visibly invisible, were the dark-faced heathens to sweep away from the land so as to make room for the newcomers. They were a hindrance to be overcome so Puritan small towns could expand into cities of God. To some Puritans, Native American souls were in need of salvation, but saving them was not the primary Puritan mission. Puritan settlers, who left England to the New World in search of religious freedom, purification of faith, and establishment of a civil and religious government, imagined erecting a holy city, a Jerusalem, in the New World to spread their pure faith and remove the darkness from the world. But their dream gradually turned into a nightmare. Their communities grew radically intolerant of difference, nonconformity, and dissent. Over the span of a couple generations, Puritan religiosity lost its momentum and its appeal diminished.

In the case of the Dawah Muslims, they came from different lands. War forced some to seek refuge in the U.S.; others fled from political persecution; while others arrived to study in American universities and preach the word of God among fellow Muslims whom they perceived lost and in need of saving. Like the Puritans, the Dawah folks sought religious purification: they wanted to revive the local Midwestern Islam, re-guide fellow local Muslims. Unlike the Puritans, they never thought, nor intended, to take over the land or eradicate the local residents. However, not only did they disapprove of, but were also condescending towards, white local Americans, American values, and American lifestyle (4). As Kahf's novel shows, they would call non-Muslim Americans "impure kuffar" and would repeatedly label America "a kuffar land" (Kahf, *Girl* 13, 14). Their notion of selfhood and otherness was structured around religious affiliation. The Shamys, indeed, believed that "Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they [meaning

non-Muslim Americans] but knew” (68). Many of the Dawah folks shared that same view because they belong to particular waves of immigrants. Curtis points out that the wave of immigrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s included “Islamists, formal members of the Muslim Brothers or individuals who supported the idea that Islam could be a solution to the political, social, and cultural problems of the world” (63).¹⁵ These early first-generation Dawah Muslim immigrants, to a large extent, believed they were devout pioneers whose mission of teaching Islam to fellow Muslims in America resembled a “noble jihad” (Kahf, *The Girl* 14). They were there for God (18); they believed they were responsible for delivering his message to fellow Muslims in the kuffar land. The novel criticizes their dogmas and narrow-mindedness.

The novel, I propose, does not endorse these radical views about America and Americans. Nor should the act of revealing this religiosity be interpreted as a validation of the clash discourse and its polemical claims. The novel indirectly advances this message through using humor. By unveiling Muslim Midwestern conservatism, Kahf rebukes the politics of cultural essentialism, regardless of which side exercises it. A central difference between the pious Muslims and the impure Americans, readers are told repeatedly, is that “Americans did not wash their buttoholes with water when they pooped. This was a very big difference between them and the Muslims” (Kahf, *The Girl* 68, 69). In this case, humor pokes fun at the absurdity of lingering at such a trivial cultural difference to advance the illusion of some meaningful essential distinction between the Dawah folks and Americans. Repeating the humorous statement about clean Muslim versus dirty American buttoholes possibly aims to caution readers against cultural essentialism, which aids in establishing us-versus-them dichotomy. The issue here is not only about hygienic practices. It is also about the implied binary states: Muslims are associated with

¹⁵ Their dogmas were not unlike those of the rising Evangelical Christianity around the same time period.

cleanliness, godliness, purity, and moral worth, unlike the unclean, impure, Godless, and morally corrupt Americans. The novel employs the tool of humor to question the validity and pokes holes in the reliability of narrow-minded ways of thinking and self-identifying.

The novel does not “ignore or dismiss” the early conservative Muslims’ narrow-mindedness or their continuous condescending references to Americans as “Kuffar” and to America as the Godless “Kuffar land.” Neither does *The Girl* hide nor conceal the sense of superiority this early conservative Muslim community felt in relation to the broader American society. Khadra’s mother reminds her of one major difference between the Dawah Muslim community and the American society. This reminder becomes a protective measure. She repeats to her daughter,

Pee, poop, vomit, dog spit, and beer were impurities. Americans didn’t care about impurities. They let their dogs rub their balls on the couches they sit on and drool on the beds they sleep in and lick the mouths of their children. How Americans tolerate living in such filth is beyond me. . . . (4)

From the point of view of the observers, in this case the fictional early Dawah Muslims, these impurities mark one of the borderlines between them and the broader American society. The pure must not mix with the impure, the mother reminds Khadra. Her instructions are crystal clear: “You come straight home” (4). In reporting these conversations which reveal the Dawah folks’ profound culturalism and reverse Orientalism, the narrator consciously avoids idealizing or romanticizing the Muslim Americans in the Midwest, especially the Shamys. It becomes obvious how their culturalism is deeply woven into their group consciousness to help them define, validate, and believe in their self-worth and group identity. Their culturalism further

allows them to distinguish themselves from non-Muslim white America, the out-group whom they exclude.

Their culturist perspective insists on the homogeneity and the essentialism of white American culture. Simultaneously, this insistence creates an in-group consciousness. It imposes simplistic interpretations on complex realities while also deliberately seeking to mold even individual consciousness through socialization or cultural transmission to protect and ensure the continuity of an essentialist group identity, regardless of how imaginary that identity is. Indeed, sociologists Raymond Boudon and Francois Bourricaud state, “it is only at the price of oversimplification that we can admit the idea of common values and imagine that these values are more or less administered to all by way of socialization.” Boudon and Bourricaud add, “individuals are never exposed to the culture of a society as such. That culture is already no more than a simplification and a rationalization produced by certain actors, such as priests, intellectuals, or . . . some fraction of the elite” (95). Undoubtedly, this notion of a unified, homogenous culture in reality does not exist among the Dawah Muslim community in the American Midwest. Yet, their nonstop othering of white America suggests their urgent need to protect the imagined cohesiveness of their community against the outside white culture. They also use reverse Orientalism to the same end.

The term “reverse Orientalism,” was originally coined by Sadik Jalal al-Azm. According to Mehrzad Boroujerdi, the term refers to “a discourse used by oriental intellectuals and political elites to lay claim to, recapture, and finally appropriate [i.e. to make one’s own] their ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ identity. This self-appropriation is almost invariably presented as a counter knowledge to Europe’s oriental narrative” (12). “First and foremost, orientalism in reverse uncritically embraces orientalism’s assumption of a fundamental ontological difference

separating the natures, peoples, and cultures of the Orient and the Occident,” Boroujerdi adds (12). Orientalism, which according to Said is a Western system of thought and scholarship, enforces a set of beliefs of and about a Western construct called the Orient and sees an essentializing difference between the Occident and the Orient (*Orientalism* 4-6). The former is perceived as masculine, rational, civilized, cultured, secular, and scientific, while the latter is irrational, feminine, uncivilized, crude, religious, and superstitious. Europeans and, later, Americans have defined themselves by making sweeping generalizations and crafting stereotypes of the oriental Others, their cultures, and their lands. Orientals have been perceived as incapable of thinking for themselves or ruling themselves (Said, *Orientalism* 34-48). In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, reverse Orientalism is a reaction to Orientalism. However, one would be mistaken to think that Kahf sympathizes with the Dawah folks’ reverse Orientalism. Her novel critiques both Orientalism and reverse Orientalism for polarizing the world into us and them, a civilized self and a barbaric other.

Reverse Orientalism is strongly present in several of Khadra’s father Wajdy’s comments about the Muslim world, its knowledge of itself, and its attempt—however unsuccessfully—to reverse Orientalism. In one scene, Wajdy advances the following supposedly self-defining and self-validating statement:

“And they think they are more civilized than us, and tell us how to run our countries.” Wajdy shook his head. The Western imperialism and high-handedness endured by the far-flung Muslim peoples of the world were that much more outrageous in light of the fact that its perpetrators did not even know how to properly clean their bottoms. (Kahf 69)

The narrator deconstructs this Muslim community's perceptions of themselves, their theological beliefs, their cultural values, and of those whom they see as the others, and repeatedly undercuts them with humor.

More problematic than this Muslim community's relations with Americans is, however, its elite's attitudes towards fellow Muslims. Indeed, their so-called love for God does not curb recurrent discriminatory actions against brothers and sisters in the faith on the basis of skin color, social class, and theological or sectarian difference. The Dawah Centre, "a non-profit outreach office, a dream begun by devout but impoverished Arab and Indo-Pakistani graduate students in the mid 1960s" (39), sought to teach diaspora Muslims and American-born Muslims how to become "better Muslims," a notion the novel diligently interrogates as a manifestation of cultural and religious essentialism. The Dawah Muslims established their centre to "help" fellow Muslims, especially Muslim Americans, re-correct their path and revive their faith. They called on earlier waves of Muslim immigrants to adhere more strictly to Islamic teachings and prohibitions. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* reveals the perceptions of these religiously-awakened Dawah folks and unveils their influence, or lack thereof, on generations of Muslim Americans. One group includes those Muslims who arrived in Indiana at the turn of the century. One would be mistaken to think that the novel endorses or calls for evangelicizing the latter. It rather occupies itself with imaginatively describing the specificities of each group's conditions and unveiling the complexities with which each group has had to wrestle.

Eyad, Khadra's brother, recounts the story of the earlier Muslims: "The Muslims who lived in that Northern Indiana town were the assimilated kind, second-and-third-generation Americans descended from turn-of-the-century Arab immigrants." The Dawah community thought that these assimilated Muslim Americans were lost Muslims who "had failed to preserve

their identity—they'd caved" (184). But, the character Joy, one of the descendants of those early immigrants, offers a more accurate and insightful explanation: these early Muslim immigrants, who were less educated and less privileged than the subsequent waves of Muslim immigrants, arrived during difficult times. They were pressured into assimilation (184). They acted pragmatically by telling themselves, "it's okay for Islam to adapt to new locales" (Kahf, *Girl* 185). Adapting also meant marrying outside one's ethno-religious group.

Sociological and historical records verify these novelistic portrayals. Curtis offers the Syrian Muslims of North Dakota and the South Asian Muslims of California as two examples of mostly assimilated immigrant Muslims who gave up their Muslim identity. Curtis also provides explanations. The former's "Islamic identity melted away as they became more and more integrated into their predominately Christian towns and villages" (Curtis 50). Most of the latter group refrained from passing Islam and ethnic culture onto their offspring to spare them from being marked as colored. "Their children," explains Curtis, "who were given names such as Bahadour, Rostom, and Roheamon, were often classified as 'colored' or 'Negro' on various government documents" (51). These immigrants understood that to be marked as colored would subject their children to racial segregation and would put them at a large disadvantage. They therefore refused to identify, or to be racialized, as black because African Americans were at the bottom of the social and racial hierarchy.

These immigrants believed they could achieve the American Dream as long as they disassociated themselves from African Americans, who were "systematically vilified and demonized in American culture" (Karim 29). In one way or another, the same immigrants accepted the racism prevalent against African Americans as if, to quote Toni Morrison, "racial contempt" towards African Americans is the "rite of passage into American culture." Morrison

adds, “Only when the lesson of racial estrangement is learned is assimilation complete” (“Back” 57). In several parts of the U.S., other Muslim immigrants—for example from Albania, Arabic-speaking countries, and Bosnia—“held on to their religious identity. But they also crafted an Islam that celebrated American patriotism and cultural integration” (Curtis 57). Interfaith marriages were not uncommon among these Muslim Americans (59), who were relaxed about their Islam. For example, many did not think, or possibly did not realize, that trading in or drinking alcohol, owning casinos, or taking out a mortgage to build a mosque would violate conservative Islamic principles. I also speculate that some possibly did not observe these religious prohibitions because they felt themselves to be successfully integrated into the larger American society.

In the novel, Muslim graduate students who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s indeed think their Islam is the “norm.” Hence the novel does not spare them from its criticism. According to the teaching of Khadra’s father Wajdy, “Elijah Mohammed business was nonsense. He said it was a good thing black Muslims like Aunt Khadija and Uncle Jamal converted to the real Islam or they would be wandering astray” (24). The Nation of Islam is not *the true* Islam from Wajdy’s perspective. Similarly, the Dawah Sunni members excluded fellow Muslims of the Shiite sect from the category “true Muslims” because they consider the Shiite theological beliefs wrong (35). The Dawah community also had discriminated against white American Muslims such as the Thoreau family. They distrusted the latter on the account of their skin color which they associated with mainstream America. They were suspicious of the family whom they thought were linked to the CIA (27). In order to fit in just like Uncle Jamal’s black Muslim family did, the Thoreau family eventually had to conform to the Dawah people’s version of Islam and expectations. Conformity to the so-called dominant Muslim worldview grants the ethno-religious

minorities within the Dawah Muslim American body ostensible acceptance. These power relations underscore cultural essentialism as a powerful social construct used to regulate relationships between members of the in-group on the one hand, and to configure the in-group's relation to out-groups.

Natural Social Evolution: Subjectivity and Muslim Heterogeneity in the Midwest

These power relations, nonetheless, reflect the heterogeneity of Islam in America. The natural evolution of human societies shapes the Muslim presence in the American Midwest, contrary to what the cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent argue. According to them, Muslims inherit dysfunctionality, impart submission, train in conformity, and grow up with violence. Above all, Muslims fail to become citizens in America. But, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* presents a different reality: First, Muslims in the American Midwest break away from the tradition. Second, Muslim identity in the Midwest is far from monolithic. Third, Muslim agency and subjectivity are not alien to Midwestern Muslims. In *Muslim American Youth*, Selcuk R. Sirin and Michelle Fine propose that “*cultural* identities are extremely fluid and not fixed, particularly when understood through a diaspora and particularly when embodied in youth” (12). Factors such as age, life experiences, education, gender, social and historical pressures, or inclusion and exclusion dynamics make this cultural identification fluidity a reality among diasporic young generations. After all, “[c]ulture does not sit still” (Sen 43). In many ways, this is the case of the youth in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Its fictional Muslim youth are not statically culturally-conservative in their mindset, unwaveringly faithful to tradition, or without agency and subjectivity. Indeed, most Muslim American youth in *The Girl* successfully integrate in American society. The several cases Kahf presents dispel the so-called dysfunctional homogeneity of Muslims in America the clash cultural conservatives insist on. The cultural

conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent argue that Islam, as a religion and a culture, is central to Muslims. Because Islam guides every aspect of Muslim life, the claim goes, the Muslim family suffers from irreparable and irreversible dysfunctionality. Muslim parents pass this dysfunctionality to their children: Each generation repeats the exact patterns, fails to adopt the ways of American society, and consequently becomes a threat to the inner fabric of this society. *The Girl* acknowledges that Islamic teachings, social traditions, or imported cultural practices inform Muslim practices and values in the American Midwest. But neither do they define them, nor generate carbon-copied societies and individuals: Muslim Midwesterners are not uniform.

Indeed, the different representations of youth in the novel defy the culturalist notion of socialization or the essentialist understanding of cultural heritage transmission. Socialization of young Muslim Americans, the novel reveals, is neither rigid nor deterministic in nature. So-called normative cultural values are rarely passed intact onto the offspring; agency and subjectivity are not non-existent in the case of young Muslim Americans in the novel. Cultural identities and worldviews evolve on individual and collective levels in response to a multitude of internal and external stimuli. The following conversation between Khadra and her grandmother illustrates this dynamic. The young Khadra wants to braid her hair, but her grandmother objects to this idea because she associates braiding with “tribes of Zunuj.” “Zunuj” is the Arabic equivalent of the derogatory term “niggers.” Braiding will make her grand-daughter’s hair “like that repulsive hair of *Abeed*, all kinky and unnatural” (75). “Abeed” means “slaves.” Although it is possible the context of American racial politics at the time influenced the grandmother’s language, the grandmother most likely imported this discriminatory language from the old country where blacks are looked down upon, possibly because sacred Muslim texts do not explicitly prohibit or outlaw slavery (just like the Hebrew Bible and New Testament).

Historically, substantial numbers of slaves in Islam were of African origin. Now, if Muslims, especially those settling in America are stuck in their old ways permanently or if each generation follows in the exact footsteps of its predecessor, the logic dictates that Khadra should have no problems with such derogatory language. But, it is not the case. At the moment the grandmother was brushing Khadra's hair, Khadra "pushed her hand away angrily," and addressed her sternly: "You can't say that" (75). By "that," Khadra means "Abeed" because from her point of view, it is "haram" to say so. It is forbidden. Khadra adds, "It's haram to be racist" (76). Her sibling, Eyad, also concurs and to express his disappointment, he gives the grandmother "a look that reminded her rather of his father in his teenaged years, when he started getting religion" (Kahf 76).

In Arabic, the word "haram" can mean either "unkind and inappropriate" or "religiously prohibited." In either case, each of these generations follows specific ethos. Even if these teenagers most likely meant to say "using racist language is prohibited in Islam," the kind of Islam or culture they recognize is clearly different from that the grandmother subscribes to. Homogeneity does not explain what is happening here. Their debate suggests that certain Islamic interpretations can exhibit streaks of racism. Their disagreement also proves that Islam is also being used to articulate a sour criticism of the matriarch's racist convictions. Contrary to the cultural conservative Ali and her fellows, Islam does have an edge of progressive critique of tradition. Furthermore, it is also possible that the strong reaction Khadra and Eyad have just exhibited with regard to the grandmother's racist language is the outcome of their successful socialization into American culture. It can indeed be the case considering they themselves are seen by the larger American society as colored others. Their strong responses represent a

rejection of the politics of othering. The formation of individual and group immigrant selves is a dynamic complex process.

In *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Muslim American Midwesterners—both individuals and groups—always contend with who and what they are, revisit the past to understand the present, and have high hopes for their future in America. Conformity, as one dynamic within Muslim American societies in the Midwest, is hardly the norm. To the contrary, *The Girl* does not privilege a single Islamic worldview; it moreover offers nonconformist models. In these models, individuals and groups alike question, challenge, reform, or abandon what is often described as mainstream Islam. Khadra and her generation spearhead the change. Kahf spends a large portion of the novel on second-generation Muslim American youth. They are central because they are the future generation and because second-generation Muslim Americans “constitute more than two-thirds of Muslims in the United States” (Sirin and Fine 4). One case in point is the complex development of Khadra’s religious experience. For instance, Khadra grows up a moderate to a moderate-conservative Muslim, but she later shifts to neo-classical Islam. While they differ in the degree of devotion and commitment to practicing the teachings of the faith, the latter follows traditionalist Islamic scholarship, is revolutionist/ confrontational in its dogmatic politics, and is understood to be literalist in terms of its interpretation of the Quran and the Prophet’s sayings. The followers of the latter seek a purer form of Islam, one as close as possible to the Prophet’s ways of seeing and being. In her neo-classical phase, Khadra “went on a regime of dates and water to emulate the diet of the Prophet” (153). Then, challenged by the contradictions inherent in the teachings of each of these schools or the practices of their followers, Khadra temporarily abandons the faith.

Khadra's and her brother's generations eventually abandon the idealistic idea of Islam as a civilization, reject discrimination on the ground of skin color, oppose conformity, and each seeks his or her own dream. Khadra ultimately resents the Dawah Centre for the false promises, crippling expectations it fed her, and for the "Twenty-one years of useless head-clutter." Her inherited knowledge of Islam "had to go." According to the narrator, it is possible that "she believed some of it, maybe she didn't—but it needed to be cleared out so she could find out for herself this time. Not as a given. Not ladled on her plate and she had to eat it just because it was there" (262). Eventually, Khadra embraces a more inclusive, humanistic Islamic perspective—one founded on accepting difference and multiplicity to allow inter-and-intra Muslim dialogue which should lead to healthier, more balanced relations. During her spiritual journey, Khadra gets married, seeks a divorce, gets an abortion, pursues a university degree in photography, lives away from home, and develops a career. Her tumultuous multi-faceted identity quest testifies to her success as a Muslim Midwestern woman. Her religious experience or identity, always in evolution, neither contradicts nor negates her Americanness.

In fact, Khadra's religious experiences bring her closer to America: with each experience, the real replaces the romantic; the compassionate pushes aside the prejudiced. Her pilgrimage experience to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is a perfect example. Before arriving in Mecca, Khadra viewed Islam romantically. Still in the airport in Indianapolis and about to board the plane to Mecca, Khadra "felt funny. The phrase 'leaving home' came into her head. But Indianapolis is not my home, she thought indignantly." In her head, "Catchphrases from Islamic revival nasheeds [i.e. Islamic chants or hymns] flashed . . .—how a true Muslim feels at home wherever the call to prayer is sung, how a true Muslim feels no attachment to one nation or tribe over another." Preoccupied with an ideal Islam, a romantic Islamic world, and a fictional

contemporary Muslim identity, Khadra ends her inner thought on the following note: “I don’t even care if I never see the Fallen Timbers Complex again” (157).¹⁶ These initial thoughts, however, begin to dissolve immediately after Khadra experiences a different Muslim world in Mecca, one unlike what she naively imagined. The Islam she briefly witnesses in the Saudi Kingdom is built on pretense. On the plane to Jeddah, she sees Arab women dressed like American women, but when the plane enters the Saudi airspace, the women “suddenly covered up in black *abayas* and turned into picture-postcard Saudis dotting the airspace rows” (158). In the Kingdom, she learns the hard way that women are not allowed to pray in mosques. One morning, she purified her body and walked to the nearby mosque to pray the fajr, but half an hour later, she “was back, escorted by two burly *matawwa* [i.e. religious] policemen with big round black beards and billy clubs belted over their white caftans” (166). Women pray at home, she is told. During her stay in the Saudi kingdom, she is taken to a mixed-gender party organized in secrecy by the daughter of the Shamys’ Saudi host. Now in the company of religiously and sexually liberal Saudi youth from both genders, Khadra witnesses these youth snort cocaine, make out, and feel up one another. One man forces himself on her. But when she forces him off of her, he is bewildered. In his mind, sexual liberalism is the norm in America, and since Khadra is an American, he has assumed she should be okay with sexual liberalism. In his mind, he imagines Khadra as a loose, free woman (170-79).

Shocked by the hypocrisy, pretense, and sexism of the Saudis she encounters, Khadra is pleased when her trip is finally over. The narrator reports, “Khadra was glad to be going home. ‘Home’—she said without thinking.” This transformation in attitude towards America, which she now considers “home,” would not have been possible without her pilgrim visit to the Saudi

¹⁶ The “Fallen Timbers Complex” is the name of her childhood neighborhood in Indiana.

kingdom. The global, once again, informs her appreciation of the local and the national: “She pressed her nose against the airplane window. The lights of Indianapolis spread out on the dark earth beneath the jet. The sweet relief of her own clean bed awaited her there—and only there of all the earth” (Kahf, *The Girl* 179). She comes back to a newly-found Indianapolis. Khadra’s evolving self-awareness and religiosity are not exceptional.

Khadra’s religiosity peaks at times. Yet, Khadra—like a considerable number of Muslim American women in the novel—does not subscribe to a single, normative religious identity. In fact, the ebbs and flows her identity undergoes complicate the culturally conservative notion of identity. Muslim women in the novel are as diverse as the religion itself. In the novel, Islam itself is just like any other religion: malleable and adaptable. The status of the fictional Muslim women testifies to that. The types of women featured in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* include traditionalists, moderates, dissenters, reformers, secularists, and socio-political activists. Yet, within each category, differences exist. In addition, Muslim women regularly move back and forth between these various types. Muslim American women in the novel, especially those who grew up in America, are highly educated, vocal, and self-assertive. Their conditions reflect the sociological facts about Muslim women in America. In a 2009 study, 42% of Muslim American women reported finishing a university degree, thus placing second after Jewish American women who according to the same study came first nationally with 59% among them holding a university degree. The same study found that one in three Muslim American women had a professional job. In terms of employment, Muslim American women again placed second after Jewish American women. They came ahead of Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, and the general American female population (Gallup’s Center 65).

Through its conscious re-presentations of Muslim American women, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* proves fictitious the stereotype of the silent Muslim female, a standard cliché the clash discourse insists on being the norm. In *Nomad*, Ali alleges that the collective body of Muslim females, regardless of geographical location or national identity, is silenced by the teachings of the faith. She argues,

The will of little girls is stifled by Islam. By the time they menstruate they are rendered voiceless. They are reared to become submissive robots who serve in the house as cleaners and cooks. They are required to comply with their father's choice of a mate, and after the wedding their lives are devoted to the sexual pleasures of their husband and to a life of childbearing. Their education is often cut short when they are still young girls. (xvi-xvii)

Ali's statement denies the multiplicity of Muslim women subjectivity and agency. They are nothing but "submissive robots," which are "wholly unable to prepare their own children to become successful citizens in modern, Western societies. Their daughters repeat the same pattern" (xvii). The literary re-presentations of Muslim American and Muslim women Kahf offers further challenge Ali's submissive Muslim housewife stereotype. Muslim American mothers in the novel are also active in their communities, while their daughters pursue college education, search for employment, and determine their own fates. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* unveils the unacknowledged Muslim American diversity. It underscores Muslim immigrants' adaptability in America and offers a multiplicity whose presence the clash discourse fanatically denies.

Conclusion: The Trouble with Essentialist Cultural and Religious Identities

Through crafting local portraits of Islam, studying Muslims in context, incorporating historical and geo-political events, and bringing subjectivity to the forefront, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* invites readers to rethink the supposed presence of a homogenous, conformist, and essentialist Islam that operates as the definitive cultural marker of Muslim American identity. In addition to criticizing the vision of a monolithic Islam clashing with the West which Ali and her cohorts advance, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* extends this criticism to Muslim religious and cultural conservatives who believe in essentialist notions of identity. All these cultural conservatives fail to see how fragmented contemporary Muslims are, how diverse their Islams are, and how elastic the contemporary notion of self-identification is. Indeed, “neither Islam as a religion nor Muslims as a community are unified and homogenous categories,” writes Minoo Moallem. Both bodies, Moallem adds, “constitute a complex web of relations between social subjects and economies, political structures and cultures, across a range of geopolitical locations, in which religion is only one element” (53). Civilizational identities, let alone clash of civilizations, are naïve and nonexistent. Yet, on both ends of the spectrum, cultural conservatives insist on civilizational identity as the unifying force behind the collective body of the Muslim Ummah. This so-called collective Muslim identity, they imagine, is in direct opposition to a homogenous Western civilization. Among the American cultural conservatives of Muslim or Arab descent, the fictional Dawah community would represent a clear case. Khadra’s early essentialist perception of identity is another case in point. Experiencing religious revivalism as a teenager, Khadra herself naively speaks of a Muslim unity and a long-desired single Muslim polity. Her romantic notion of identity is evident in the following conversation between her and Hakim.

In *The Girl*, Hakim develops a strong commitment to militant Black American ideologies of the time after his sister became pregnant out of wedlock. He “had acquired kind of a hard edge, read militant black authors, and talked tough about ‘self-discipline,’ as if to distance himself from what she’d done, an undisciplined thing” (136). Khadra challenges Hakim’s newly adopted identity when he lectures her, “You all is, immigrant brothers and sisters. ‘We’ is, black people. I mean African people. African people in the North American wilderness” (137). She responds, “You’re not African And ‘we’ are all one thing: Muslim” (Kahf 137). Still naïve at this early stage of her life, Khadra repeats like a parrot what the Dawah patriarchs poured into her ears. Like them, she then essentialized Muslim identity and imagined Islam as a single body. No differences exist, no prejudices are allowed, no racial or class lines control intra-Muslim relations is what she believed the case to be. However, when Hakim—who also seems to treat all Muslim immigrants as a singularity different from his people, i.e. the African American people—raises the thorny issue of racism among Muslims, Khadra resorts also to what she heard the Dawah leaders say: “No racism in Islam. Meaning, none is allowed.”

The narrator jumps in to deconstruct this Dawah Centre’s motto, acknowledging that the statement is “a commendable ideal. But it was also a smokescreen of denial that retarded any real attempt to deal with the prejudices that existed among Muslims” (137). Kahf reiterates this point without reservation in her poem “Little Mosque.” Kahf writes,

My little mosque offers courses on
the Basics of Islamic Cognitive Dissonance.

“There is no racism in Islam” means
we won’t talk about it.

“Islam is unity” means

shuttup. (122)

In the above excerpt, Kahf is more critical of her little mosque than her novel is of the Dawah Muslims. Kahf confirms that racism exists among the Muslims of her imagined mosque community who consider debating racism a taboo. Implicit in Kahf's poem is a subtle form of self-critique.

Precise evidence of racism becomes clearer following these logical points which Hakim makes: if racism is not allowed in Islam, Hakim asks Khadra, "how many Dawah Centre officers are black? How many immigrants do you know who've married African American? Be for real! Immigrant white-pleasers'll marry white Americans, Muslims or not, but they won't marry black people" (137). Hakim here speaks the truth about a serious problem the ideal notion of Islam fails to overcome in intra-Muslim relations. Malcolm X must have subscribed to the "ideal" notion of Islam when he states, "America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem" (371). Islam for Malcolm X was a means to fight back against white racism. Possibly fascinated by the ostensibly Muslim equality during the Hajj season in which he participated, Malcolm X saw a solution in Islam to the race problem in America. "Even today," states Karim, "Islam remains in African American communities as a symbol of resistance to antiblack racism" (4). But the unified, just Ummah or the ideal Muslim nation Malcolm X thought he witnessed in action did not materialize when Muslim immigrants who arrived after 1965 came in contact with fellow African American Muslims. Indeed, Karim references a "study of American mosques conducted in 2000" to point out that "African Americans and South Asians tended to worship separately. Moreover, when South Asians shared a mosque with another ethnic group, that group tended to be Arab." Karim adds, "immigrants of different backgrounds are more likely to worship together than are immigrants and African

Americans” (7). Yet, out of pride, Khadra does not back down when confronted by Hakim. Knowing that her parents would never marry her off to an African American Muslim, she counters Hakim: “Yeah well that cuts both ways . . . I don’t see the proposals rolling in from the African Americans to the immigrants, either” (137). Indeed, her parents shortly object to her brother Eyad’s marriage request. “She’s black as coal” is their only objection to his choice (Kahf, *Girl* 139). At this stage in her life, Khadra fails to hear the absurdity of the illogic or the troubling nature of her way of essentialist notion of group identity.¹⁷

Later, Khadra arrives at a new truth: grand narratives lack credibility; civilizational identity is but an illusion. She realizes that no “religion had claim to an exclusive truth.” While in Damascus, she discovers that the different “religions [were] spokes on the same wheel. All connected to the hub. All taking their turn in the wheeling of the great azure heavens” (297). Instead of avoidance, exclusive religious truth, and the politics of othering, Khadra now begins to think of connectivity, plurality, and humanness as new realities and modes of identification that must shape her awareness and guide her consciousness (307). Her newly-found modes of being echo a central theme in Kahf’s writing. In “Little Mosque,” Kahf writes:

I would like to find a little mosque

¹⁷ At this early stage in the novel, during her romantic idealization of Islam, Khadra indeed understands her group identity in Manichean terms: the Muslim collective self versus the Kuffar collective America. The conservative Dawah teachings she was fed made her understand her world in white-and-black colors. She essentialized who she was and who the others were. After her father decides to apply for U.S. citizenship, Khadra was in shock. In her mind, seeking American citizenship meant betraying everything she was taught. Perplexed, she wonders: “Wasn’t she supposed to be an Islamic warrior woman, a Nusayba, a Sumaya, an Um Salamah in exile, by the waters dark, of Babylon?” (141). In her mind then, she affiliates with Muslim women whose powerful personalities and dedication to Islam during the Prophet’s time turned them into legends in Islamic history. Not only were they role models for Khadra, but they were also figures who internalized an essentialist notion of Muslim identity, on the individual and collective levels. The essentialist notion of identity Khadra grew up with drew a clear line between the “pious us” and “the kuffar them.” Yet, by seeking citizenship, her father confused her. His pragmatism did not register well with her essentialist and literalist understanding of the self and the other as incompatible bodies with irreconcilable differences and identities. Khadra gradually loses the essentialism that defined her in-group and the othered out-group.

where my Christian grandmother
 and my Jewish great-uncle the rebbe
 and my Buddhist cousin
 and my Hindu neighbor
 would be as welcome
 as my staunchly Muslim mom and dad. (122)

The quest for inclusive Muslim places of worship or public spaces points to a strong sense of urgency. The same desire for a hopeful future of unrestricted brotherhood and welcomed religious difference strongly registers in the mud scene, the location where Khadra sat mourning in the ravine. The togetherness the Mormon and Muslim youth of the American Midwest exhibit indicates that Kahf is fully aware of the anxieties over the tension between religious identity and the notion of citizenship in post-9/11 America. Yet, Kahf does not see exclusion and avoidance as the answer to these anxieties. Isolating oneself from the wider (non-Muslim) community will not stop bigotry or prejudice. “Doesn’t my little mosque know,” Kahf rhetorically asks, “the way to protect its windows / is to open its doors?” (“Little Mosque” 121). Kahf’s sought-after inclusivity is eventually fulfilled through Khadra.

Exposed to different experiences and socio-cultural settings while in Syria, Khadra returns to the U.S. with a new perspective. In her childhood and teenage years, she saw America as her tormenter, a foreign land of unkind faces and unfamiliar traces, but now she is delighted to belong to what she calls “homeland America” (313). Her initial essentialist notion of religious and cultural identity seems to fall apart here. The implied message in her transformed worldview and evolving consciousness encapsulates the following: understanding inter-cultural relations on the basis of irreconcilable binaries, as the cultural conservatives of the clash discourse or their

Muslim counterparts do, generates essentialist notions of identity. The applied essentialism leads to marginalization, inter-and intra-cultural conflicts, and will reduce human relations to a low level of existence. The dichotomy of “us” versus “them” serves only an elite few. It further marginalizes those who dwell on the periphery of the so-called normative culture, and above all extends the life of the imaginary clash of civilizations. *In the Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Kahf disrupts these dichotomies: instead of clashing parties, Christian Mormons and Arab Muslims unite in humanness and empathy. The wailing of Khadra “in the midst of the Clash of Civilizations” is a sign of hope in tomorrow, hope in human agency, and hope in future generations.

Chapter Three

Indigeneity and Pluralism in Leila Ahmed's *A Border Passage*: The Problem with "Identity"

In their life narratives, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Bridgette Gabrielle, and Wafa Sultan see in the United States a site of unfettered intellectual freedom and self-critique, a trait all Muslim-majority communities allegedly do not possess. Intellectual freedom and self-critique are also granted rights these women writers are denied in their countries of birth. In *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (2015), Ali reminds her white American readers that she, among a few others in the West,¹ is a reformer the Middle East and Islam needs. "For years," Ali points out, "I have been told, condescendingly, that my critique of Islam is a consequence of my own unique troubled upbringing. This is rubbish" (ch. 1). Ali believes she has to speak out because self-critique does not exist among Muslims. "Until Islam," Ali argues, "can do what Judaism and Christianity have done—meaning question, critique, interpret, and ultimately modernize holy scripture—it cannot free Muslims from a host of anachronistic and at times deadly beliefs and practices" (ch. 3). Similarly, New Atheists who contribute to the clash of civilizations discourse dispute the presence of self-critique among Muslims.² Other than Western

¹ Ali's list of reformers of Muslim background in the West includes "Tawfiq Hamid, Irshad Manji, Asra Nomani, Maajid Nawaz, Zuhdi Jasser, Saleem Ahmed, Yunis Qandil, Seyran Ateş, [and] Bassam Tibi" among other cultural conservatives. These reformers, Ali argues, "must be supported and protected. They should be as well known as Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov, and Havel were in the 1980s—and as well known as Locke and Voltaire were in their days, when the West needed freethinkers of its own" (Ali, *Heretic*, ch. 8). This is a Kindle Book.

² In *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal* (2010), Amarnath Amarasingam defines New Atheism by pointing out that "New Atheism" is directly associated with a number of publications by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett. These authors take an anti-religion position and produce statements that are "characteristically petulant and provocative, challenging yet cranky, urgent but uninformed" (1). They have become celebrity thinkers through attracting attention by their frequent presence in the media, the high sales of their provocative books, and the aggressiveness of their ideological advocacy. "The academic community, with few exceptions," Amarasingam writes, "has largely dismissed their writings as unsophisticated, crude, and lacking nuance" (2). Although New Atheism is not entirely "new" since one can link it back to atheism, New Atheism is characterized by "the newfound urgency in the message of atheism, as well as a kind of atheist social revival that their [i.e. Dawkins' and company'] writings, lectures, and conferences have produced. In other words,

liberal voices and courageous secular figures like Ali, New Atheists systematically argue, Muslim intellectuals neither care nor dare to criticize Islamic radicalism, speak out against the oppression of Muslim women, come out in defense of minorities, or admit the need for sincere reform. Among others, New Atheist comedian Bill Maher and neuroscientist Sam Harris believe the West must support, enable, and empower the few “true reformers in the Muslim world,” to quote Harris, because religious fundamentalism is mainstream among world’s Muslims. During a 2014 episode of “Real Time with Bill Maher” on *HBO*, the two called Islamic conservatism, Islamism, and Islamic fundamentalism innate deficiencies with Islam, neglecting that these problems are in fact influenced by geopolitical and socio-cultural currents, particular to certain locales and times. Muslim reformers, according to Maher who follows in the footsteps of Bernard Lewis and Fareed Zakaria,³ do not speak out because “Islam is the only religion that acts like the mafia, that will fucking kill you if you say the wrong thing, draw the wrong picture, or

the ‘new’ atheism is not entirely about new ideas, but a kind of evangelical revival and repackaging of old ideas” (2). In his “Preface” to *Religion and the New Atheism: A Critical Appraisal*, Reza Aslan explains that the evangelistic nature of New Atheism manifests itself in New Atheistic “special interest groups,” “ad campaigns,” and a “holiday (International Blasphemy Day).” The New Atheism, Aslan argues, amounts to “a new and particularly zealous form of fundamentalism—an *atheist* fundamentalism” on the ground that the New Atheists are convinced that “they are in sole possession of truth (scientific and otherwise), the[ir] troubling lack of tolerance for the views of their critics . . . , the[ir] insistence on a literalist reading of scripture (more literalist, in fact, than one finds among most religious fundamentalists), the[ir] simplistic reductionism of the religious phenomenon, and, perhaps most bizarrely, their overwhelming sense of siege: the belief that they have been oppressed and marginalized by Western societies and are just not going to take it anymore.” Aslan does not stop there. “This,” he adds, “is not the philosophical atheism of Feuerbach or Marx, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche. . . . Neither is it the scientific agnosticism of Thomas Huxley or Herbert Spencer. This is, rather, a caricature of atheism: shallow scholarship mixed with evangelical fervor” (xiii-xiv). Aslan elaborates: “the most prominent characteristic of the new atheism—and what most differentiates it from traditional atheism—is its utter lack of literacy in the subject (religion) it is so desperate to refute” (xiv). In *After the New Atheist Debate* (2014), Phil Ryan points out that New Atheists make the following core claims: “*Religion promotes violence*” (23), “*Religion divides humanity*,” “*Religion is meddling and power hungry*,” “*Religion supports tyranny*,” “*Religion promotes stupidity*” (24), and “*Religion causes psychic deformation*” (25).

³ Sheehi discusses the positions Bernard Lewis and Fareed Zakaria take on the question of the Arab world, modernity, and self-critique in his book *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign Against Muslims*. I take Harris, Lewis, Maher, and Zakaria to be part of Jacobs’ transnational informal network of self-identified experts on the Middle East, Islam, Muslims and Arabs.

write the wrong book That is the reason why Ayaan Hirsi Ali needs bodyguards 24/7.”⁴ As such, true reform will not happen from within Islam, “the mother lode of bad ideas,” Harris concurs, unless the West comes to the aid of liberal Muslim voices, precisely those who are nominally Muslim. Maher and Harris consider Ali a living testament to the censored freedom of

⁴ Maher believes Islam is unlike any other religion in terms of its violence and the fatwas issued to assassinate artists on religious grounds. Although indeed fatwas, like the one issued on the head of Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini, are troubling and should be strongly condemned, Maher’s statement is disturbing on many levels, especially considering his high public profile and access to millions of viewers. Maher conflates an entire faith with the actions of political-religious leaders who had or have assumed absolute religious powers. In the case of Rushdie, Khomeini represents neither the entire Muslim world nor Islam. As condemnable his fatwa as it is, it is indicative of a dominant political atmosphere and political agenda at the time. Of course religious dogma played a part in its making, but I do not think it was the core motive. After all, years before the fatwa on Rushdie’s life, the Iranian leadership “praised” Rushdie for *Midnight’s Children*. His Farsi-translated novel was “named the book of the year” in Iran (Dehghan, n. p.).

Furthermore, the issue of fatwas is a complex and thorny one. Fatwas have indeed been used by radical Muslims, but they have also been used by political powers affiliated with the United States. Fatwas were issued to advance American-like values, American interests, and aid in the creation of new local and regional political realities favorable to U.S. foreign policies. For example, the Egyptian leadership communicated to al-Azhar religious leadership to support, in a fatwa, the signing the 1978 Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel. The religious leadership complied. Also, after the Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990, the Saudi monarchy relied on a fatwa from Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Bin Baz, chairman of the Supreme Council of Ulama (i.e. supreme council of religious scholars), to justify inviting American forces to be stationed in the Kingdom, just in case Saddam Hussein invades Saudi Arabia. The American troops, the fatwa explained, were there to defend the Kingdom.

But the moment the American troops engaged in combat on the ground with Iraqi soldiers and needed a military Arab and Saudi active participation in the fighting, a fatwa became urgent. Bin Baz issued another fatwa inviting Muslims to wage jihad against Hussein and his Iraqi forces. Here is the second fatwa: “The jihad that is taking place today against the enemy of God, Saddam, the ruler of Iraq, is a legitimate jihad on the part of Muslims and those assisting them.” Bin Baz argued that the Iraqi forces must be forced out of Kuwait because Saddam “has wrongly transgressed and committed aggression against and invaded a peaceful country. Therefore it is obligatory to wage jihad against him to expel him unconditionally from Kuwait, to assist the oppressed, to restore justice and to deter the oppressor” (cited in Kurzman, n. p.). Charles Kurzman observes that the pro-U.S. position Bin Baz endorsed in his fatwa was a drastic departure from his long-standing opposition to permitting Christian forces into the Arab Peninsula, let alone inside Saudi Arabia. It is a position the Saudi political establishment requested and Bin Baz complied.

In another famous case on September 27, 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi who is based in Qatar, and other prominent Muslim religious scholars issued a fatwa making it permissible for Muslim American soldiers to fight al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. In the fatwa, the religious scholars state, “it is acceptable God willing for the Muslim American military personnel to partake in the fighting in the upcoming battles, against whoever their country decides has perpetrated terrorism against them” (cited in Kurzman, n. p.).

Of course, Bin Laden and other radical Muslims issued their own fatwas, but the idea here is that fatwas are conditioned and often determined more by politics and the political environment than by religious interests. Further, issuing religious decrees to assassinate artists and scholars was not an unusual practice in Catholicism. The Church targeted them in a manner similar to the Khomeini style of fatwa against Rushdie, but once again, one cannot ignore the political forces fuelling and often determining such repugnant actions.

speech, the silence of Muslim intellectuals, and the urgent need for Muslim reform—as if all Muslims were silent sheep in need of Ali to speak on their behalf or Harris to remind them to speak up.

To the contrary, however, Arab and Muslim intellectuals have been exercising self-critique and have pressed for reform since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. They have been publicly involved, politically engaged, and protested injustice and tyranny. Scholar Elizabeth Kassab observes that Arab intellectuals have been preoccupied with “[q]uestions of civilizational decline, renewal, and identity,” since the 1940s (27).⁵ In one of their de-historicized polemics, the cultural conservatives claim that Islam has always been the desired political program in Muslim societies; political Islam is second nature to Muslims. In reality, however, Islamism was not a viable option in Arab-majority countries until after the 1967 war.⁶ Following the “Naksa,”

⁵ According to Kassab, from the 1940s to the 1950s, Arab intellectuals envisioned the solution to Arab societal problems “in terms of political justice,” but in the post-independence era, they shifted their attention to “cultural heritage” and “issues of authenticity and modernization” (27). They asked the question, “what was wrong with Arab culture,” but not what ails Arab politics (28). This new direction continued until the end of the 1970s. Since then, Arab intellectuals have “refocused attention on the workings and failures of the post-independent state,” Kassab argues (28). According to Sheehi, the “idea that Arab regimes have trumpeted the tenets of modernity while in fact working against its spirit” was articulated by a “generation of progressive Arab intellectuals from Sadiq Jalal al-Azm to Hisham Sharabi to Muhammad al-Jabri.” These and other Arab intellectuals, Sheehi adds, “rethought and actively engaged the ways their own 19th century predecessors defined the meaning of modernity in the Arab world.” This “very intellectual canon, quite accessible in translation,” Sheehi argues, “contradicts Zakaria’s (and Lewis’) [and I would add Maher’s, Harris’, among other] assertions that Arabs [and Muslims] lack a tradition of self-criticism.” “Modernity for Arab thinkers,” Sheehi elaborates, “is an era of political and social conditions that involve the eradication of feudal, traditional and putative social, political and economic practices and mind-sets without necessarily eviscerating Arab identity.” To them, modernity “is a state of socio-economic, political and gender liberation” (Sheehi, ch. 2).

Scholar Elizabeth Kassab researches Arab intellectual participation in Arab political struggles for socio-economic justice and democratic governance. She is the author of the seminal book *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (2010) where she “discuss[es] the main thinkers, publications, conferences, and themes of contemporary Arab cultural critique” before she “place[s] them in a comparative perspective by looking at European, U.S. American, Latin American, and African debates on cultural critique” (Preface).

⁶ According to Kassab, in *Contemporary Arab Thought*, the 1967 Arab defeat “was a turning point in Arab popular and intellectual consciousness. It was a political and intellectual crisis that called for a reassessment and revisiting of the modes of thinking that had prevailed as well as the political and intellectual struggles that has hitherto been adopted.” The defeat “necessitated an urgent reflection on the liberation and decolonization movements that had failed to achieve their goals. It led to the radicalization and polarization of two major trends: on the one hand, the

or the 1967 military defeat of the Arab armies which stripped naked the façade of Arab nationalism, Arabs began “the search for a salvational native ideology that could embody a culturally and morally more genuine and faithful promise for a better future, namely Islamism.” The defeat also “made the need for a radicalization of critique even more pressing, occurring in the midst of desperate salvational yearnings, culturalist circular reasoning, and ideological fervor. From these critical quarters came a renewed emphasis on politics” (Kassab 28). The multitude of Arab intellectuals provided “political reading[s]” of the pressing issue of Arab malaise, its repercussions, and possible solutions.⁷ While they underscored “the fundamental human values of freedom and dignity,” intellectuals “warned against totalizing ideologies—whether religious or secular—[,] resisted intellectual terrorism practiced in the name of ‘Truths,’ and criticized the un-reflected cult of authenticity” (Kassab 29). Intellectuals, Kassab proceeds, “did engage in cultural critique, yet without giving in to the culturalism centered around issues of authenticity and identity that prevailed in the post 1967 era. Indeed the 1980s and ‘90s were dominated by a concern with tradition and authenticity” (29). But, in the following decades, intellectuals became intensely self-reflective and used their crafts to critique “domestic problems” (29). Intellectuals shifted their gaze from the colonizer to the national self. The

search for totalizing doctrines, especially religious doctrines after the demise of the Left and of secular nationalism, and, on the other hand, the radicalization of critique.” The first trend was triggered by “a deep yearning for a holistic vision that could offer an indigenous nonalienating worldview and mobilize the necessary forces toward a way out of the humiliation and the oppression.” The second trend, Kassab adds, “was the outcome of a painful confrontation with the limitations and dangers of holistic views as well as of the growing realization of the vital need for critique in the face of multiple forms of oppression” (Introduction).

⁷ Kassab studies Saadallah Wannous, Sadiq Jalal al-‘Azmi, Hisham Sharabi, Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Naji Al-Ali, Nizar Qabbani, Nawal el-Saadawi, Adonis, Mohammad Arkoun, Leila Ahmed, Nazira Zain al-Din, Fatima Mernissi, Hassan Hanafi, Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, Farag Fouda, Fouad Zakariyya, Aziz al-Azmeh, Bassam Tibi, Talal Asad, Abdullah Laroui, Qustantin Zurayq, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, among others. These writers come from different disciplines and areas of study. They have contributed to debates about cultural decolonization, social justice, gender and sexuality, democratic governance, modernization, cultural malaise, theology of liberation, secularism, political Islam, reformation, assessing the Arab Nahda, cultural critique, among others. For detailed information on the contribution of each of these intellectuals, see Kassab’s *Contemporary Arab Thought*.

process of self-critique required that they reassess “internal liberation policies” and re-conceptualize “emancipation concepts” (30). This “critical turn,” according to Kassab, marked “a shift of emphasis from essence to agency, from identity to democracy, and from ideology to critique” (30). Similarly, Talal Asad, in *Genealogies of Religion*, identifies extended “religious discourses and practices” of critique in Saudi Arabia and argues that they are “a *part* of modernity and not a *reaction* to it, as is often said: unless, of course, it is insisted that modernity is articulated by a fixed teleology” (225-26). Asad considers this religious criticism “a vigorous expression of political opposition to the Saudi ruling elite” and is “not merely a one-sided assault.” Rather, “it invites argumentative exchange” (231). This “critical reasoning” stems from the Islamic principle of *nasīha*. The “Islamic tradition,” Asad argues, “is the ground on which that reasoning takes place” (236).⁸ In that way, self-critique is not alien to Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners as the cultural conservatives Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan assert.

The fact that non-assimilationist Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern American intellectuals do not have visible presence in U.S. media outlets, as Ali and Harris do, does not negate their active roles in Muslim and Arab public affairs and demands for change. Besides Reza Aslan, one could add Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Steven Salaita, Sami Shalom Chetrit, Shaw J. Dallal, Mohja Kahf, Fawaz Turkey, and Leila Ahmed. These Americans of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian backgrounds engage with political questions, speak against oppression, and practice responsible self-critique. Many of them openly criticize particular issues pertaining to Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern affairs. They also criticize the clash discourse and those who

⁸ In chapter one of my study, I engage Asad’s take on *nasīha* as the basis for self-critique in the Islamic tradition. The “critical reasoning involved in *nasīha*,” Asad insists, is not futile in comparison with or inferior to “political and moral reasoning within the modern liberal tradition.” The major difference is that “modern liberalism deploys powers that are immeasurably greater, including the flexible power to construct a ‘universal, progressive history,’ which the other tradition does not possess. That today is the main condition that limits religious criticism in the contemporary Middle East” (236).

carry its banners. In my previous chapter, I have demonstrated how Kahf criticizes Huntington's thesis and many of the claims the cultural conservatives advance. In this chapter, I examine the sophisticated case of Arab American intellectual Leila Ahmed. Ahmed was born and raised in Egypt to a Turkish mother and an Egyptian father, educated in Egypt and England, and is now a professor of women's studies in religion at Harvard Divinity School. She witnessed the revolution of Jamal Abd El-Nasser, saw the collapse of Egyptian diversity, and worked in the Middle East before she moved permanently to the U.S. Judging by her worldview and position in *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey* (1999), Ahmed belongs to the generations of Arab intellectuals who experienced the "critical turn" Kassab identifies. Therefore, as an Arab American writer, her memoir *A Border Passage*, I contend, is best understood in the context of cultural conservative claims about an essential clash and monolithic Arab and Muslim identity. Her memoir shows systematic attention to agency, democracy, and critique, themes the cultural conservatives discussed earlier argue are nonexistent among Arabs, Muslims, and Arab or Muslim Americans.

In *A Border Passage*, the primary objective goes beyond just the traditional act of representing the self or reimagining one's personal or familial history. Accordingly, I question some of the literature on Ahmed's memoir before I present my core claims. Some scholars of ethnic American literature continue to "heavily" look at the split identity of hyphenated subjects, whom they purport are caught between different cultures, nationalities, imaginative geographies, and collective memories. This so-called in-between state, the general argument goes, prompts the ethnic subject to embark on a deliberate self re-identification mission. To redefine who she is, the hyphenated subject must decipher the present, and to do so, she has to reinterpret the past. For some ethnic Americans, the memoir offers a suitable vessel. Ahmed is such a figure in *A*

Border Passage, according to Abdullah Shehabat.⁹ Ahmed and others, Shehabat delineates, “have chosen the memoir as a form through which to represent themselves and their responses to being caught in two different cultures, not knowing whether they belong ‘here’ or ‘there,’ and

⁹ The terms “split identity,” “hyphenated subjects,” and “in-between state of being” represent old terminology that is no longer reflective of the current state of contemporary criticism, but this old language has been recently used by some practitioners of multiethnic American literature. In his 2012 dissertation, for example, Shehabat argues that “[Leila] Ahmed, [Zainab] Salbi, and [Marjane] Satrapi do not differ from many other Western women memoirists in their choice of the literary genres used to represent the themes of *identity bifurcation*” [my italics] (6-7).

I consciously use the concepts “split identity,” “hyphenated subjects,” and “in-betweenness” in the first couple pages of my chapter to point out such language’s inability to capture the complex notion of “self-identification” and “self-actualization,” processes evidently active in literary works like *A Border Passage*. These terms either suggest a static, fixed, and already determined state of being or represent ambiguous analytical categories. I agree with Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper when they argue that “[i]dentity” is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics, and social analysis [and literary criticism] must take account of this fact. But this does not require us to use ‘identity’ as a category of analysis or to conceptualize ‘identities’ as something that all people have, seek, construct, and negotiate” (2). “Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of ‘identity,’” Brubaker and Cooper add, “saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary” (2).

Shehabat’s use of these terms to analyze *A Border Passage* and other memoirs demonstrates how problematic such use can be. Like other contemporary Arab American memoirists, Shehabat suggests, Ahmed chose to write in English so as to address a Western audience, bridge the gap between East and West, and “re/shape” her “*original identit[ies]* . . .” [my italics] (17-18). Just like other Arab American women writers, Shehabat also suggests, Ahmed uses the memoir to speak out against Muslim “religious oppression, and patriarchal domination” in her country of origin after she managed to “escape” (18) to the West, the place where she found professional and intellectual freedom. Shehabat argues that her empowerment happens after she and other women took “advantage of the international community’s wish to improve their [i.e. Arab and Muslim women’s] social and cultural status, especially when they witnessed what happened in Afghanistan” (17). Shehabat refers to the U.S.-led war on Afghanistan and later on Iraq. The American war on Afghanistan gave voice to “hundreds of [Afghani] women [who] reported being suppressed by the Taliban regime,” and as Ahmed and other ethnic writers observed the free voice these oppressed Afghani women enjoyed afterwards, Ahmed and fellow women memoirists “felt safer. . . to express themselves and to begin writing themselves in the hope of being heard” (Shehabat 17). Shehabat’s analysis of Ahmed and other writers is problematic on many levels. Aside from its reductionist nature, Shehabat’s use of language is essentialist when he assumes the presence of an “original identity.” He seems to misunderstand that self-identification is in fact an always in-progress process that is not limited to a particular geographic space (in this case the West) nor is it determined by one event (in this case the War on Terror). Although Shehabat acknowledges that Ahmed and fellow memoirists suffer from alienation in the West, he offers a simplistic explanation of this alienation, one that implies the relatively static nature of the cultural makeup of the memoirists: alienation happens because “these women normally come from homes where they live with their extended families and where people socialize together all the time, but when they move to live in the West, they miss that familial milieu and accordingly begin to feel alienated” (23). By downplaying the relation between racial and religious discrimination and alienation, Shehabat imagines Ahmed and fellow memoirists as having fixed, at best hyphenated, identities. Shehabat seems to overlook the danger of overemphasizing the in-between or hyphenated state of these writers. “In the multicultural context of contemporary US,” Salah Hassan and Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman argue, “the hyphen in a term such as ‘Arab-American’ ostensibly serves to bridge racial otherness or to naturalize the alien, but its net effect is political accommodation within the nation.” Hassan and Knopf-Newman proceed: “The dilemma of the hyphen is familiar to scholars who work in the fields of race and ethnic literatures and question the politics of a multiculturalism which often conceals all manners of exclusions behind the pretense of cultural inclusion” (4).

making it difficult for them to find a true home to which they belong” (1). It is possible that Shehabat advances his observation on the account of frequent statements Ahmed makes. In one of them, she states, “I am not here to betray. I just do not want to live any longer with a lie about who I am. I don’t want any longer to live with lies and manipulations” (255). When Ahmed brings up the issue of “non-betrayal,” she reminds us of the numerous ethnic American women writers who tread carefully to avoid alienating their ethnic communities or the larger white target audience. In that sense, Ahmed is not unlike Diana Abu-Jaber in *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* or Maxine Hong Kingston in *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*. On a deeper level, however, Ahmed is more like the late Gloria Anzaldúa, who in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, embarks on imagining a novel cultural consciousness, “a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*” (44). In spite of the strong resemblance—evident in their shared historical revisionism,¹⁰ critique of colonized consciousness,¹¹ speaking out in defense of indigeneity and favoring women’s lived religious traditions¹²--Ahmed is neither a cultural nationalist as Anzaldúa was,¹³ nor does she imagine a

¹⁰*Borderlands* delineates a genealogy of Mestizos/ Mestizas to “recover the history of the land and the [Chicano] people that has been overwritten by the history of the United States and its cultural and political dominance,” says Peterson (180). *Borderlands* emphasizes the rootedness and the continuity of Mestizos/ Mestizas in the U.S. Southwest thousands of years before Anglo-Americans took over the place; insists that “the Chicanos’ ancient Indian ancestors—were found in Texas and have been dated to 3500 B. C.” (Anzaldúa 26). Then, *Borderlands* moves to make the link between the Indian ancestors and modern-day inhabitants of the Chicano/a borderlands: “Our Spanish, Indian, and *mestizo* ancestors explored and settled parts of the U.S. Southwest as early as the sixteenth century. . . . For the Indian, this constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest” (27). *Borderlands* recovers and re-inscribes vital memory of Chicano/a indigeneity, rootedness in place and continuity with native ancestors, that has been erased from the American official record.

¹¹ Anzaldúa invokes the historical past to reclaim the Mestizas who occupy the Southwest United States as “both native to the Americas and with a non-Western, multiple identity” (*Borderlands* 2). Her *Borderlands* celebrates indigeneity and establishes indigenous, though Chicana/Mestiza, cultural roots.

¹² *Borderlands* also resurrects, in order to re-claim, historical, native, female goddess figures—*Coatlalopeuh* or *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *la Chingada* or *Malinche*, and *la Llorona*, mediators who possess divine powers. In particular, the text develops a special interest in *la Chingada* or *Malinche*, also known in historical records, such as *The True History of the Conquest of Spain* by Bernal Diaz del Castillo, as Doña Marina. Anzaldúa writes, “In part, the true identity of all three [native female figures] has been subverted.” Anzaldúa elaborates, “*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-

new hybrid lesbian consciousness. I would further propose that Ahmed has no interest in pursuing a similar polarizing identity-reimagining project.

Ahmed's memoir primarily occupies itself with issues that are more central and more urgent than re-imagining her personal identity in a state of in-betweenness (Shehabat 1), establishing a feminist "space for a new construction of Arabic subjectivity" (Stephens 90), negotiating "Arab American identity in the U.S." (Hassan, "Arab-American" 8), or "assert[ing]" her "identity" and "inscrib[ing]" her "particular experiences within the larger textual record of Arab history" (Vinson 79). In one way or another, the memoir arguably touches upon all the above, but it neither favors nor advances any as "the theme." Rather, I want to argue, Ahmed subjects to serious critical investigation personal, familial, national, transnational, and global histories in her memoir. Not unlike Kahf in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Ahmed relies on historicization and demonstrates a seldom acknowledged plurality and heterogeneity within Islam and Arab countries. *A Border Passage* is the life-story of Ahmed, a story which intersects with her account of the British colonization of Egypt, pre-revolutionary Egyptian engagement with Zionism, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist Arab nationalism of Jamal Abdel Nasser, political Islam, and Western feminist racism—forces that have influenced her understanding of a

suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgin/puta* (whore) dichotomy" (53). *Borderlands* rejects this negative image traditionally assigned to *la Chingada* whom Anzaldúa accredits with creating the Mestiza culture (44). In redefining *la Chingada*, Anzaldúa reaffirms her own indigenous identity to decolonize her culture. In reclaiming the three female figures, Anzaldúa roots herself in place and in a Mestiza culture as a person of mixed-blood. *Borderlands*, though a multilingual text, assigns special significance to Chicano Spanish, Anzaldúa's native tongue (Anzaldúa 81). *Borderlands* is also a multi-genre work that mixes historical, autobiographical, theoretical, fictional, and poetic narratives. It is a hybrid text that parallels Anzaldúa's Mestiza consciousness or philosophy of mestizaje and allows her to reclaim Aztlán and embrace the indigenous ancestors. In it, Anzaldúa develops her Mestiza identity.

¹³ Similar to Native Americans, Chicanos became politically and socio-culturally active in the 1960s. They embraced "Aztlán"—the homeland of the Aztecs, the pre-Columbian tribes in Mexico — and invoked its myth of origin as a form of cultural and political resistance to the Anglo-American stereotype of them as interlopers (Patell 544). This invocation of an indigenous place and native ancestors by political activists strongly reverberated with Gloria Anzaldúa.

multiplicity of histories including her own, an understanding that is always in the making. In that sense, *A Border Passage* challenges many core cultural conservative claims, especially the binaries “East” versus “West” and “Islamic” versus “Western” civilization. *A Border Passage*, Wail S. Hassan points out, “belongs to the new direction in Arab immigrant writing, which undermines Orientalist assumptions and fosters new knowledge. . . . [Ahmed] seems deliberately to conjure up Orientalist themes such as the East/West opposition and Islam’s oppression of women in order to refute the assumptions on which they are based.” The memoir, Hassan adds, “presents itself as a narrative of connectedness rather than polarity” (*Immigrant Narratives* 146-47).

Core Claims

Ahmed, I contend, shows serious interest in lived religious and cultural traditions and her memoir exhibits strong commitment to indigeneity and plurality. Her interest in reclaiming lived traditions as well as critiquing the attack on hybridity, indigeneity, and pluralism proceeds by three tactics. First, she deconstructs hegemonic colonial notions of modern self-identification before she moves on to reinterpret the project of Arab nationalism. Second, she explicitly criticizes neo-liberal feminism, textual Islam, and Zionist colonialism. Third, I take Ahmed to be suggesting a central truth: like lived traditions, self-actualization, whether on an individual, national, or trans-national level, is a complex and unfixed process, and always an incomplete project. My analysis of *A Border Passage* follows the same order. In the process of critiquing political Islam and the other hegemonies, Ahmed claims marginalized lived religious and cultural traditions. To variable degrees, these overarching structures suppress indigeneity, contest hybridity, weaken diversity, and rarely offer space conducive to pluralism.

Removing the Veil: Exposing the Ugly Face of Western Colonialism

Unlike the cultural conservatives Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan, Ahmed unveils the cruelty of European colonialism, identifies its dynamics of domination, and exposes colonialist ethical and moral bankruptcies. Ahmed holds Western colonialism accountable for some of the damage it caused Egyptians.¹⁴ In *A Border Passage*, Ahmed's "experience of political persecution in her native country, along with her subsequent experiences of exile and racism towards Arabs and Muslims in the West," writes Pauline Homsy Vinson, "have contributed to a complicated sense of personal identity" (82). Without a doubt, these challenges and others have shaped her attitude towards her self-identification as a hybrid woman because each one rejects the indigenous components of her hybridity by imposing reductionist identity definitions. Ahmed eventually protests all imposed, narrowly-conceived identities; simultaneously, her final acceptance of hybridity embodies her preference for cultural plurality. In fact, hybridity itself in *A Border Passage* registers as a form of desirable plurality, especially after Ahmed retrospectively unpacks colonialist British cultural hegemony—the first force that reduces her into a westernized subject. Her critique of Western imperialism is rational and not the product of irrational Islamism and baseless hatred as the cultural conservatives take all critiques of Western imperialism to be. Born in 1940 British-colonized Egypt to a middle-class Egyptian father and an upper-class Turkish mother, Ahmed came under the influence of British settler culture, more so than lower-class children did. Her entire elite social circle, the "intellectual, professional, and governing classes of Egypt," did not reject the imperial British culture or language, nor did they question the colonial structures of knowledge production even when Egyptians were "locked in

¹⁴ According to Wail S. Hassan, Ahmed "resented the racism and chauvinism of British colonial schoolteachers and curricula;" she "felt enormously betrayed by the British during the Suez Crisis of 1956" (*Immigrant Narratives* 142).

struggle with the British for Egypt's political independence" (Ahmed, *Border* 5-6). Not only elite Egyptians, but also bourgeois Middle Easterners residing in Egypt would gravitate toward everything British. This trend, among Middle Eastern elite and upper-middle class colonials, was not unusual in most colonized places.

The colonialists systematically indoctrinated these influential classes to perpetuate colonialism. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon explains this system of westernizing the colonial intelligentsia:

The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal.

(46)

Westernization manifests itself in inferiorization—dismissive attitudes directed towards native language, native culture, and local cultural productions. Native bourgeoisie often communicate in the colonialist tongue while looking down upon the native language. In the context of the Algerian struggle against the French, for example, Fanon observes how “to speak French” was the norm among the “Antilles Negro” (*Black Skin* 27), a “problem of language” also relevant to other colonized populations. Fanon “broaden[s] the field of this description and through the Negro of the Antilles include[s] every colonized” person (*Black Skin* 9). *A Border Passage* registers almost identical currents, though this time English is the preferred tongue.

Although Ahmed's parents were fond of Europe and all things English, her British-educated father represents a more extreme case than her mother does.¹⁵ Ahmed reports that he was not keen on teaching the children written classical Arabic and in the absence of equal or at least enough attention to classical Arabic, the adult Ahmed realizes, "English was valued above Arabic in ways that would have marked it, in a child's mind at least, as being somehow innately a 'superior' language" (23). Existing power structures prevalent then granted English this higher status: English was the language of the colonizers, teachers, and mentors; it was the idiom of the popular culture elite Egyptians engaged with and emulated. In addition, English was formally used to disseminate scientific and academic knowledge and was valuable for anyone seeking upward class mobility. Unlike Ali's allegations of familial and collective hatred of the British in Somalia, the westernized Egyptian environment as well as the prevailing socialization patterns deeply impact Ahmed's generation whose members grow up fond of English at the expense of everything native or local.¹⁶ A case in point, the young Ahmed develops a colonized consciousness. For the indigenous subject to possess a colonized consciousness, he or she must internalize the values of the colonialist culture. This "epidermalization of inferiority", or the desire to be included in the colonialist culture as a civilized white at the expense of separating

¹⁵ The father received a scholarship from the British to study in England. The British authorities conditioned that he studies Geography instead of Engineering, for him to be awarded the scholarship. In spite of all the injustice Egypt and Egyptians suffered from, Ahmed's father continued to admire the British and incorporate their culture into his and his children's lives (Ahmed, *A Border* 43).

¹⁶ Ahmed's parents' generation, like most of those belonging to their social and economic circle, were fascinated with what the British stood for, their scientific and cultural advancement, their language, and their manners. Thinking back to her formative years, Ahmed offers the late Edward Said's family as a testament to how deep westernization ran within her social class. The Said's "were Christians of Palestine and we were Muslims of Egypt, but their attitudes were not discernibly different from ours." Ahmed elaborates on what these attitudes were: "Our very names—Edward, Jean, and my own school name, Lily, an anglicized version of my given name—plainly suggest our parents' admiration of things Europeans" (*A Border Passage* 6).

one's self from his indigenous soul, culture, and locale indicates an inferiority complex (Fanon, *Black Skin* 43).

From Fanon's point of view, when a native "adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born," this choice "is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (*Black Skin* 14). To associate with the colonialist tongue, the native must disconnect from what she perceives as an inferior native heritage. Growing up under British colonialism, Ahmed labeled everything local or native inferior, including Arabic music, Arabic language, and even her mother (25). The attached inferiority to local color creates a barrier between Ahmed and the acquisition of written classical Arabic. Her inability to use the language disconnects her further from the Egyptian local culture. Her classroom environment contributes to this inferiorization. Ahmed and her classmates saw in their British teachers role models. Hence their dismissal of Arabic as unworthy of their attention. Ahmed explains: "It was common, this show of looking down on Arabic music, among English Schoolteachers. Arabic music was the music of the streets, the music one heard blaring from radios in the *baladi*, the unsophisticated folk regions of town" (24). One could take Ahmed's statement to suggest the active presence of hierarchical structures of social stratum, but the involvement of her English teachers and their devaluation of the Arabic idiom and Egyptian music (23-24), orally and aurally produced especially in "folk regions of town," unveil a systematic colonialist inferiorization of everything native. The same negative attitudes towards everything indigenous are passed onto students, like Ahmed, who internalize and project them in more radical ways onto everything and everyone they associate with indigeneity. The adult Ahmed's critique of British colonialism is a rational act of intellectual reasoning. It is not triggered by a religious hatred of the West and Westerners as Ali,

Gabrielle, Darwish and Sultan assert. The damage of this colonialism becomes more serious when Ahmed explores its disastrous effect on her relation to her mother.

Inferiorization of the indigenous, triggered by a colonized consciousness, scars the individual's relations to her native people regardless of their level of cultural modernity, education, or economic class. The colonized consciousness shapes Ahmed's early perception of her upper-class mother, the latter who becomes an inferior other because she celebrates the local color. Her mother, Ahmed writes, "was not, in our eyes, *baladi* [meaning an unsophisticated member of the Egyptian folks]. She quite distinctly and also quite self-consciously belonged to a culture and background quite different from the folk culture around us." Ahmed remembers her mother, a cultured woman and disciplined literate (73), "[l]ighting cigarette after cigarette and reading" in the evenings (73). Yet, speaking in Arabic and enjoying Arabic classics marks her as an othered native (24-25). This negative attitude towards the indigenous elements of her hybrid heritage registers a desire to separate herself from her mother on one hand and also from the Arabic idiom on the other. "I was fifteen," Ahmed writes, and "[l]ike many other girls that age, I was sure of one thing: I did not want to be like my mother. I was sure I wasn't like her and would never grow up to be like her." Ahmed adds, "I didn't want to think we were alike in anything, let alone in our deepest hearts' desires, and I didn't at all want to think that I might indeed be her daughter" (74). The desire to figuratively disown or at least disconnect from her mother has more to do with equating the indigenous with inferiority than with generational difference, a practice Ahmed in retrospect realizes was "there, too, in my own childhood and in the very roots of my consciousness" (25).

Ahmed therefore holds European colonialism responsible for the sense of cultural inferiority she and her father suffered from. Because at the core of European colonialism lies

inequality, of course, not unlike colonialism across time and space, its logic dictates that the colonizers belong to a white race, superior to those of the colored colonized. In that sense, racism and racial discrimination define inter-and intra-relations. Colonialism does not concentrate only on the physical conquest of lands, natural resources, and subjugated bodies, but it also targets the minds of the conquered. Utterly uninformed, or at least oblivious, to the racist nature of European colonialism, Ahmed's father, though an Egyptian intellectual and political activist, believed in Egypt's ability to become a European nation. From the academic Ahmed's point of view, the Egyptian elite and intelligentsia her father belonged to "had not yet understood that this was what defined them in the European gaze and that nothing would make them 'civilized' and 'modern' in European eyes. They did not know that nothing else counted, not 'progress' or 'development' or 'modernity,' just race" (36). In the European colonial imagination, "there was one thing that defined them [i.e. Egyptians] as unalterably and ineluctably different, unalterably and ineluctably *unlike* Europeans and unalterably and ineluctably inferior—their race" (*A Border Passage* 36).

This inferiorization and discrimination on the basis of racial difference heavily informed British colonial policies in Egypt and disempowered Egyptians. Under the British colonial rule, "the laws were skewed in favor of Europeans. They were exempt from paying taxes and could not be prosecuted by any local court—even for murder. Not surprisingly, Italians, Greeks, and Maltese, as well as French and British, flocked to Egypt" (38). More than the elite Egyptian classes, who relatively benefited under the colonial rule (39), the peasantry and working classes were the most oppressed and abused among the indigenous. They were overtaxed, overworked,

dispossessed, and seen as expendable. In 1906 Dinshawi,¹⁷ one example of colonial oppression, the British criminally charged 50 Egyptian peasants, whom they falsely accused of causing the death of a British officer, with “premeditated murder” (44). This collective punishment the British justified as a necessary response to “Islamic fanaticism” which the British foreign secretary falsely alleged “was flaring up all over North Africa” (45). According to Ahmed, Egyptians did not accept this allegation of Islamic radicalization because it is a mere “fabrication of a nonexistent Islamic enemy to justify [the] savagery, injustice, and inhumanity” the British colonialists inflicted upon the indigenous Egyptians (*A Border* 45). Unlike Ali and Darwish, Ahmed does not celebrate the colonizers. In her narrative, they are not liberators who benevolently developed a primitive land. They rather oppressed and disempowered the colonized.

Ahmed steps up her critique of British colonialism, through evoking the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis. To stop Nasser from nationalizing the Suez Canal and “appropriating its revenues for Egypt —revenues that have been going, unjustly, to Britain and France” (32), Ahmed writes, Britain, France, and Israel began a large-scale offensive on Egypt. At this point in the narrative, Ahmed does not restrict herself to objective retelling. She rather takes a stance and condemns the brutality of Western colonialism when she describes the attack on Egypt as immoral: “The spectacle of two of the world’s mightiest powers combining to attack the small nation of Egypt, in collusion with Egypt’s new neighbor [Israel], had the effect of demonstrating to the entire world how unjust and bullying, and how immoral, the European imperial powers actually were”

¹⁷ Dinshawi is an Egyptian village.

(32). Ahmed associates Israel with Western colonialism—in this case England and France;¹⁸ she creates an image of a just small Egypt standing up to the three giant colonial bullies, who shamelessly flex their muscles over it.¹⁹ The image of the “small nation of Egypt” eventually winning the fight against all odds could also be read as a subtle critique of the tirelessly overused analogy of the Biblical young underdog David defeating the tyrant Goliath, a myth that has been used, by Westerners, Zionists, and cultural conservatives, to describe the innocent state of Israel fighting for existence against hostile modern Arab giants.²⁰ The warring parties exchange places in Ahmed’s description. The newly-independent Egypt becomes an inspirational David to

¹⁸ Ahmed acknowledges that the United States forced Israel, France, and England to stop the attack. “American action,” Ahmed writes, “brought the attack to a halt and compelled the withdrawal of the aggressors” (*A Border* 33). This American course of action, I speculate, was triggered by a number of factors, one of which is an American assertiveness that the U.S. is the alpha imperial force that looks after the region and any military actions by European powers in the region must go first through the American channel. European powers cannot act without consulting the U.S. was the message.

¹⁹ In *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, author Max Blumenthal alludes to the origin of the State of Israel as a colonial construct. Zionist founding ideologues imagined it necessary to erect a Jewish homeland, a European colonial outpost at the heart of Asia. Blumenthal writes:

The men and women who set out to build a Jewish state in historical Palestine began with a dream of escaping from the crippling confines of European anti-Semitism into an imagined utopia in which Jews would be a normal people like the English or Germans and whose normality, even socialism, included a version of nineteenth-century Western colonialism, and uplifting “*mission civilisatrice*,” as the French put it. Those who invented modern Zionism had little knowledge of, and no regard for, the actual people living in Palestine, then a province of the Ottoman Empire. And if they had any regard for them, it was expressed in typically colonialist terms. Zionism’s intellectual author, Theodore Herzl, a Viennese playwright and journalist, described the country “as a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.”

This imagined colonial identity has persisted in the contemporary times. Blumenthal adds that the “Labor Zionist movement’s chief ideologue, Berl Katznelson, blunter than the dreamy Herzl, declared in 1929, ‘the Zionist enterprise is an enterprise of conquest.’ More recently, and perhaps more crudely, former prime minister and Defense minister Ehud Barak described the goal of Zionism as maintaining ‘a villa in the jungle’” (351).

²⁰ The irony, however, is that Egypt was still rescued by other Western, yet colonial, superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union. In response to the aggression and acting to prevent the direct involvement of the Soviet Union, the United States pressured the aggressors to end their offensive.

colonized or recently-liberated nations.²¹ These nations saw in Egypt an emerging leadership, one that stood up to tyrannical colonial powers.

Transitioning to a Postcolonial Egypt: Nasserism and the Trouble with Arab Nationalist Identity

However, it would be a mistake to think that Ahmed romanticizes the Egyptian leadership or avoids criticizing both colonial and postcolonial political structures that battled on Egyptian soil. Here, Ahmed serves as a model intellectual who conducts self-critique. Her case challenges the cultural conservative allegation to nonexistent Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern self-critique. She opposes the imposed conformity and uniformity of Arab nationalism because homogeneity endangers the multitude of oral cultures and local minorities—rendering them invisible (Abdelrazek 32); unlike the cultural conservatives, Ahmed endorses plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity by responsibly urging Arab governments to protect local cultures and oral linguistic forms (*A Border* 284). Indeed, according to Ahmed, Nasser “ruled openly as dictator and his government became more and more overtly repressive” (*A Border* 33). This view of Nasser does not deny his misguided politics, nor does it dismiss how the Suez Canal incident and Nasser’s nationalization decision inspired many nations in their struggles for independence during the 1950s and the 1960s. But Nasser was not faultless. Not unlike the English colonial

²¹ In *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Melani McAlister mentions how the winning position of Egypt following the Suez invasion became inspirational for many countries and populations who were subjected to, or recently freed from, colonialism. The new reality Egypt created, by defying colonial powers, invited prominent figures like Martin Luther King to feel hopeful that the era of oppression is fading and the oppressors are losing the fight. After the failure of Israel, France, and England at bending the will of Egypt, King believed a “new order of freedom and justice” is forming and anticipated it will contribute to the struggle of African Americans (cited in McAlister 84). The tripartite invasion of Egypt even moved W. E. B. Du Bois, McAlister points out, to support Nasser and Egypt although Du Bois always supported Israel. Months after the Suez invasion ended, Du Bois celebrated Nasser’s victory in a poem. In Du Bois’ poem “Suez,” McAlister explains, “Nasser’s authority lay in his role as racial spokesperson; the ‘great black hand’ of his power came from the fact that both ‘blackness’ and ‘slavery’ united colonized peoples. Invading Egypt thus puts Israel, which Du Bois had earlier described as ‘bringing a new civilization into an old land,’ on the wrong side of the ‘concentrated hate’ of the colonized” (85).

hegemony, the 1952 Egyptian revolution, Ahmed who here engages in multiple critiques claims, ended the plurality the country enjoyed the moment citizens ceased to identify as Egyptians.

Nasser carved a new identity for Egypt when he endorsed Arab nationalism.

Nasser united Egypt with Syria and renamed the newly-unified political and economic body the United Arab Republic.²² The arrival of the Egyptian Revolution, Ahmed argues, brought to an end the democratic status of Egypt, then “a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected government” and established instead a socialist despotism (6).²³ Leaving “Egypt” out of the country’s new name confused many non-Arabs who lived in Egypt and for centuries never felt as outsiders as they felt then. The blow to cultural and ethnic plurality was fatal when Nasser, following the 1956 Suez War, mandated that all those who wish to stay citizens of the new United Arab Republic must give up any other citizenship(s) they carry, forcing many non-Arabs to leave the country. In summary, besides erecting a dictatorship, Nasser imposed the reductionist identity of Arabism on the nation. Hence, it became equally difficult for Ahmed to identify with her English upbringing or Turkish heritage or African roots. Like the nation, her identity became reduced to only an Arab.

²² In *A History of the Arab People*, Albert Hourani states that Egypt and Syria became one country in 1958. Hourani writes that “a struggle for power between political groups in Syria led one of them to take the initiative in calling for union with Egypt; the union took place, and in February, the two countries were merged in the United Arab Republic” (368). In the same year after Jordan and Iraq created a “rival union,” a group of army officers violently took control of Iraq, murdering the “king and most of his family.” They transformed Iraq into a republic. Nasser hoped Iraq will join his union, but “the division between Baghdad and Cairo soon showed itself. Within the Arab Republic itself, the differing interests of Damascus and Cairo led, in 1961, to a military *coup* in Syria and the dissolution of the union” (Hourani 368-69).

²³ The Egyptian Revolution of 1952 was a response to colonial actions in the region, especially actions that implicated Egypt and left it scarred. Of course, there were other stimuli. Ahmed concedes that the establishment of the state of Israel was the “final blow that would trigger the revolution in Egypt” (9). The military defeat of Egypt in 1948 War invited the Revolution which succeeded in capturing power without bloodshed. As a result, Nasser adopted a strong anti-imperialist, socialist, and pro-Arab nationalist rhetoric and policies (Ahmed, *A Border Passage* 10).

In articulating the disruption during Nasser's era, Ahmed directly criticizes his reductionist reimagining of Egypt as only Arab. Her criticism of Nasser is however best understood as part and parcel of her revolt against all "fixed," "narrow," and "reductionist" notions of identification on national, communal, and personal levels (11). The imposed Arabism is an alien, reductionist identity. It is not native to Egypt or Egyptians. Nasserism narrowly and reductively restructured and redefined a world previously subjected to British and Western colonialism. It "silently excluded people who had been included in the old definition of Egyptian" (Ahmed 244).²⁴ Some of the excluded include Copts (one of the indigenous populations in Egypt prior to the establishment and later prominence of Islam in Egypt). Copts "were the only truly indigenous inhabitants of Egypt" (Ahmed 244). Jews and Zionists, Ahmed continues, were the definition of those Nasser's Arabism excluded.²⁵ Arabism came into being as a counter response to Zionism and the formation of the state of Israel. According to Ahmed, Egypt's new identity under Nasser

. . . proclaimed openly our opposition to Israel and Zionism—and proclaimed implicitly our opposition to the "Zionists" in our midst, Egyptian Jews. For although explicitly Zionism was distinguished from Jewishness, an undercurrent meaning "Jewish" was also contained in the word. The word "Arab," emerging at

²⁴ The route Nasser took is typical of most postcolonial nations' struggle to achieve independence from colonial Europe and develop a national, especially cultural, identity. Rarely did the attempts manage to avoid the "us versus them" dichotomy or essentialized identity formations. "In the struggle for cultural decolonization," Kassab writes, "the former colonial power or the present neocolonial power, meaning the West in general, has been that main addressee and reference, even when it is being attacked. The exchange has often taken the form of the polemical, apologetic, and rhetorical debate 'us versus them'" (Introduction). In Nasser's case, the Zionists, the Jews, the British, and the French became the demonized "them."

²⁵ Similar to Ahmed who laments this Arab nationalist conflation of "Jewish" and "Zionist," Kahf critiques Islamist conflation of both identities. When her protagonist Khadra visits Syria, she realizes how Damascene Jews belong to Syria, unlike what she was taught. "Of course, of course; she knew there were Arab Jews," the narrator reveals her inner thoughts, but "she'd thought of them as *Them*, these people over *There*, not all the same of course, she knew that, but, still not part of *Us*. Never" (*The Girl* 305-6).

this moment to define our identity, silently carried within it its polar opposite—Zionist/Jew—without which hidden, silent connotation it actually had no meaning. For the whole purpose of its emergence now was precisely to tell us of our alignments and realignments in relation to both terms, Arab and Jew.

(*A Border* 245)

Arabness, the new identity, was imposed through the media, political propaganda, public education, and other venues. Ahmed's argument—of how shortsighted nationalist, de-colonialist Nasser and the oppositional nature of his notion of Arab identity as a counter-identity to Zionism, Jewishness included—is well taken.

Indeed, the Egyptian Revolution imposed a new national (and transnational) order. Ahmed shows that it constructed Arabism as the new identity of Egypt and Egyptians. In reference to this newly-found identity, Ahmed writes, "I began to see the constructed nature of our Arab identity as it was formed and reformed to serve the political interests of the day" (10). Ahmed seems to adopt a partially postmodern worldview, perceiving the writing and rewriting of history (and identity) to be an inherently human drive for deliberate erasure and incessant inscription. The various political projects—whether colonial or postcolonial—stem from ideological positioning. Each ideology inscribes and controls imaginative spaces and identities. These imaginative signifiers are often arbitrary and oppressive. "Inscription," Rick Wallach reminds us, ". . . is a doubled-edged process, the other aspect of which is effacement, whether effacement of the blank space it covers or of prior markings" (12). This "effacement" is evident in Nasser's Egypt. Following the 1952 Revolution, Egyptian identity underwent violent transformations on the national, social, cultural, historical, educational, environmental and even personal levels. Nasser's politically-instigated national identification left scars on the bodies,

minds, and souls of many who experienced it. It also transformed everything the nation came to be composed of. For example, the newly-adopted Arab identity changed the lives of the Christian Palestinian Said family and the Jewish Egyptian Alteras family. In the process, Ahmed's relation to them suffered. Ahmed testifies to the injuries she personally endured: This remade "[i]dentity was . . . something that directly touched my own life in personal if unarticulated ways" (10). In drawing attention to the newly-imagined Egyptian identity, Ahmed highlights how problematic contemporary notions of identity and identity formation are. In addition, she seems to advance the following argument: identity is never static nor is it ever fully realized. It is always in constant formation and reformation, and it is, especially in the case of Egypt during Nasser and Sadat, "inescapably and deeply political" (10).

Obviously, part of Ahmed's displeasure with Nasser's Arabism has to do with the reductionist nature of Arab nationalism and its failure to escape us-versus-them polar opposite relations, but this is not the full story. Nasser's Arab nationalism embodies fundamental contradictions. A cultural and political movement, Arab nationalism dates back to the late nineteenth century. More specifically, it originated "among the Christians of Syria, and in particular among a group of Syrian men who had attended French missionary schools" (Ahmed, *A Border* 247). The region then was under the Ottoman rule. However, Western powers—in this case the French—who had their eyes fixed on the region encouraged and supported an Arab nationalist cultural and political identity in order to challenge Ottoman hegemony. Missionary schools, then run by Westerners, were also involved in circulating this idea. These claims are historical truths. "Historical records," after all, "suggest that British officials were indeed already encouraging and supporting the idea of Arabism even before World War I (that they did so during the war is well known)," Ahmed writes (*A Border* 247). During World War One, the

British stimulated, triggered, and supported the Arab Revolt which was orchestrated and led by T. E. Lawrence. It is unfortunate that Nasser was unable to see the contradiction in Arabism, an idea the British used to “mobilize the ‘Arabs’ against the Ottomans” (Ahmed, *A Border* 249).

To combat the imposed Arab identity on Egypt, Ahmed proposes a multiplicity of alternative markers of identification: “African, Nilotic, Mediterranean, Islamic, or Coptic. Or as all, or any combination of the above. Or, of course, as Egyptian: pertaining to the land of Egypt” (11). By emphasizing the phrase “pertaining to the land of Egypt,” Ahmed seems to favor a return to local, indigenous names and identities—ones that are more inclusive and representative of the diversity that Egypt and Egyptians represent. Like Kahf in *The Girl*, Ahmed relies on historicization to reject monolithic structures and demonstrate heterogeneity. Ahmed delineates a rich history that stands behind the name “Egypt” (11). A multiplicity of civilizations, empires, cultures, religions, conquests, religious and cultural encounters are inscribed in the ancient name Egypt, a name also indicative of a hybridity Nasser erases. His reductionist and constructed Arabism robs Egypt of a rich history, and a multiplicity of identities. In complete contrast with the cultural conservatives who see in non-Western cultural heritages a failure and threat to modernity, in reflectively rethinking colonialism and decolonization, Ahmed particularly illustrates how indigeneity and a re-embrace of indigenous cultural and environmental worldview(s) grounds individuals and communities. In that sense, her position and argument are useful tools to frustrate the monocultural worldview of the cultural conservatives and neoliberal white feminists.

I take the return to indigeneity to be a method of resistance, one Ahmed envisions capable of restoring balance and justice. In this regard, currents in the Islamic tradition contribute to her vision. Ahmed offers the cases of the architect Hasan Fathy and her own father

as examples of her envisioned successful return to indigeneity. The former, who was “versed in Western architectural ideas,” returned to and drew from Egyptian indigenous materials and designs (34). According to Ahmed, Fathy “pioneered the return to the use of traditional materials and to ecologically sound as well as aesthetically satisfying indigenous forms in architecture” (34). Of her own father, Ahmed attributes his environmentally-conscious ecology to “his rootedness in his own tradition and perhaps even to his thorough immersion in the language and the thought of the Quran, with its sense of the profound connectedness of all life and all the processes of which we are subject” (35). Ahmed adds, “[t]hinking about a dam,” her father “considered earth, river, sea, fish, organisms, and people and thus came up with an ‘ecological’ understanding long before ‘ecology’ was a common concept” (35). In praising this positive sensitivity toward ecological diversity and pluralism, Ahmed unveils his indigenous awareness. Ahmed also seems to highlight a version of Islam which she later describes as women’s Islam—pluralistic, pacifist, indigenous, and unfixed. This point is implied in her immediate reference to Rachel Carson, Barbara McClintock and others whose “originality . . . sprang in part from their rootedness in a different cultural ethos—a women’s ethos of connectedness—different from the ethos of competitiveness and individualism of the men of their culture” (35).

The Trouble with Western Feminism: Muslim Feminists and Westernized Consciousness

In *A Border Passage*, Ahmed offers a history of Egyptian women in the first half of the twentieth century. In her account, Egyptian women do not seem much different from women in the West during the same period. “By the time my mother was a child,” Ahmed writes, “change for women was well under way in Egypt. Women’s magazines were flourishing, feminists were writing newspaper columns, and French, British, and American schools for girls had opened and were attended by the daughters of the well-to-do.” Women pioneers from the middle class were

“leading the way in education.” In the 1920s, “European dress and no veil would increasingly become the norm among the middle and upper classes, and soon it would be the ordinary dress of the women of modern Cairo” (94-5). Rethinking her familial past while fully cognizant of the assumptions prevalent of the Muslim world in her adult years in the West, Ahmed writes, “I would well conclude that the ethos of the world whose attitudes survived into my own childhood must have been an ethos in which women were regarded as inferior creatures, essentially sex objects and breeders, to be bought and disposed of for the a man’s pleasure. But my memories do not fit with such a picture.” In simple words, Ahmed “do[es] not think that the message I got from the women of Zatoun was that we, the girls, and they, the women, were inferior” (100).

Like Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Leila Ahmed’s *A Border Passage* occupies itself with interrogating major polemical claims that particular Western feminist circles and cultural conservatives make, on the status of Muslim women, gender relations, Islamic diversity, and cultural heritage. But Ahmed offers a different take on these issues. In chapter one of my dissertation, I have argued that the culturally-conservative politics of Ali adopts a hegemonic version of Western feminism. Oppressive towards Muslim and Arab women, this feminism heavily relies on “culture vs. women binary,” a dichotomy Ahmed traces back to nineteenth century European colonial efforts in so-called Third World countries. In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Ahmed writes, “[a]s the history of Western women makes clear, there is no validity to the notion that progress for women can be achieved only by abandoning the ways of a native androcentric culture in favor of those of another culture.” Ahmed adds, “[t]he idea seems absurd, and yet this is routinely how the matter of improving the status of women is posed with respect to women in Arab and other non-Western societies.” Yet the same requirement is not expected from Western women because they “may pursue feminist goals by engaging critically

with challenging and redefining their cultural heritage,” a right Muslim women are denied. Indeed, the general argument goes like this: “Muslim women can pursue such goals only by setting aside the ways of their culture for the nonandrocentric, nonmisogynist ways (such is the implication) of the West” (Ahmed, *Women* 244-45). Like the dynamics of colonialism, this inferiorizing feminist logic is built on inequality. If indigenous, i.e. non-Western and nonwhite, women wish to break free from the so-called bondage of their religious and cultural heritages, they must abandon them. Ahmed comes face to face with this harsh biased reality while studying in England and later teaching in the U.S. In both geographical locations, Ahmed encounters racist Orientalist attitudes from Western white feminists who imagine Muslim and Arab women as submissive, sexually exploited, veiled, oppressed, voiceless “harem” and thus insist that Muslim and Arab women forsake their local traditions, renounce their native cultures, and adopt a Western worldview and Western values if they wish to end their oppression (*A Border* 292-93). “For the feminist orientalist, a political stance embedded in Western liberal feminism from its inception,” Bernadette Andrea argues, “women in the harem must be rescued from Islam in order to be liberated as women” (4).²⁶

In similar ways, Ali and fellow cultural conservatives take all Muslim women to be silent harem-like population. In *Infidel*, Ali argues, Muslim women’s communities are lagging behind because of Islamic faith and culture. Only after giving up Islam will they become free. *Infidel* generates stereotypical harem-like scenes where Muslim women and girls are either sexual objects or religious fanatics. When she was eight years old in Saudi Arabia, Ali mentions visiting

²⁶ “Middle to late twentieth-century European literature,” writes Michelle Sharif, “represented harem women as occupied only with men’s pleasure. The West came to define the harem as a prison for women and their captors as violent Muslim males. Islam thus became closely associated with violence against and subjugation of women” (154). This association has not abated yet.

a neighboring family. Inside the house, she witnesses a harem-like space: five to six teenage girls “tied clothes around their hips and swayed at each other, rotating their hips and shoulders and wrists with meaningful glances.” In retrospect, the adult Ali comments that “these girls . . . exuded a torrid, and completely unfamiliar, eroticism” (*Infidel* 46). This image of a sexual harem in the making is contrasted with a religio-culturalist harem composed of her grandmother and other matriarchs who perform female genital mutilation on young girls so as to protect them from sinning, save their virginity for their husbands, and guard against dishonoring the tribe should these girls lose their honor (*Infidel* 31, 34). Like the feminist Orientalists Ahmed encounters, Ali advocates rescuing Muslim women from the tyranny of their faith. Freedom will be the destiny of Muslim women only after they discard their cultural and religious heritages. The eye-opening encounter with Western feminists’ reductionist representations of Arab and Muslim women stimulates Ahmed, on the other hand, “to reformulate her judgments of her mother and female forbears through reconstructing Arab/ Muslim women’s histories,” argues Geoffrey Nash (366). Indeed, Ahmed defends the harem society by defiantly re-interpreting “harem” as “a system whereby the female relatives of a man—wives, sisters, mothers, aunts, daughters—share much of their time and their living space” (Ahmed, “Western” 524).²⁷ The harem system is more about everyday life.²⁸

²⁷ Ahmed’s understanding of the “harem” corresponds with that of Huda Shaarawi captured in her autobiography *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*. Indeed, in the introduction to the autobiography, Margot Badran articulates that “the word *harem*, which to Western eyes usually conjures up a host of exotic images, was simply the portion of the house where women and children conducted their daily lives” (Shaarawi 7). To Ahmed, this women’s space was not one of oppression, nor was it one of exploitive sexual activities.

²⁸ In their artistic representations, painters like Ingres, Delacroix, Picasso, or Matisse created a harem different from the one writers like Laila Ahmed or Fatima Mernissi have later associated with Islamic realities. In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi emphasizes that the Islamic and Arabic notion of the harem she is familiar with differs from the “artistic images” Matisse and the others produced. These artists “reduced women to odalisque (a Turkish word for a female slave).” Her harem is likewise different from the one has been manufactured “by talented Hollywood moviemakers, who portrayed harem women as scantily clad belly-dancers happy to serve their captors.” Like such

This harem private space, offers Muslim and Arab women—Ahmed included—privacy, freedom, agency, power, and above all a learning environment to pass onto the younger generations an oral-aural version of Islam. In reclaiming the “harem,” the hybrid Ahmed basically challenges Western cultural domination. Her defiant reinterpretation is not unlike several ethnic American literary works which stand “the dominant ethics on its head,” refusing “to accept its universal goodness by challenging the boundaries on which it is constructed” (Sollors 193). Rethinking her earlier condescending behavior towards her mother, Ahmed regretfully wishes she could reset time to her childhood years so she could acquire traditional women’s wisdom from her mother and the harem society. She laments the decline of their indigenous culture and the traditional knowledge she failed to inherit from her mother. “What wouldn’t I give now for the gift of my mother’s passing on to me, in her own voice, her own and her people’s story,” Ahmed writes to express this sense of cultural loss (*A Border* 75).

This sense of woeful loss moves Ahmed to probe into the everyday Muslim life of her women relatives. She uncovers a local Muslim women’s oral-aural tradition of practices. She reveals a lived religion, possibly to encourage revitalizing contemporary Muslim life in the United States and elsewhere. Lived religion, Danièle Hervieu-Léger reminds us, is “fluid, mobile, and incompletely structured” (22). As she reclaims what she sees as “diminished” indigenous Muslim practices, Ahmed goes beyond just Islam to identify and disrupt hegemonic forces both religious and secular. Ahmed, I propose, unearths a Muslim women’s tradition of practice to inform academic and public debates about the irreducible nature of contemporary Islam in the age of globalization. But first, what do we mean by “practices”? In *Practicing Our*

artists and image producers, Mernissi adds, there are journalists who depict “the harem as a voluptuous wonderland drenched with heavy sex provided by vulnerable nude women who were happy to be locked up” (14).

Faith, Dorothy Bass defines practices as “those shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life.” Practices allow members of the religious group to lead “a faithful way of life, one that is both attuned to present-day needs and taught by ancient wisdom” (Bass xi). On the other hand, to David Hall, practice “always bears the marks of both regulation and what, for want of a better word, we may term resistance. It is not wholly one or the other” (xi). Hall’s definition is closer to what Ahmed imagines “practice” to mean. By emphasizing the local, as evident in the case of the Zatoun harem society as I will demonstrate shortly,²⁹ Ahmed consciously and cautiously neither seeks nor wishes to reclaim a “universal Islam.” And although Ahmed is interested in local, indigenous, popular, and oral-aural manifestations of Islam, she does not position them as the singular alternative of official, textual Islam. “[I]t would be unfortunate [indeed] if the turn to lived religion meant simply changing the valence of the familiar dualities while preserving them,” writes Robert Orsi, “just substituting religious practices in the streets and workplaces for what goes on” in formal places of worship (9).

Ahmed, whose interest materializes in recovering indigenous Muslim traditions of practice, takes a middle position between theologians and social theorists of practice. More of a social theorist of religious practice than a theologian, Ahmed shares some of the aspirations of practical Christian theologians Dorothy Bass, Craig Dykstra, and Stephanie Paulsell who, according to Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp et al., “have evinced a keen interest in revitalizing the Christian life through a sustained recovery of practices.” These three theologians “have drawn on wider philosophical and ethical reconstructions of the virtuous life and its practices.” Yet, also like the social theorists of practice Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Catherine Bell, and Talal

²⁹ Zatoun is a district of Cairo.

Asad, Ahmed critiques the “hegemonic, regulatory, and structuring character of practice” (Introduction).³⁰ Nonetheless, the recovery of a popular Islam is a quest *A Border Passage* consciously seems to pursue, at least through historical recovery. I take Ahmed to be suggesting that in order for Islam to be a constructive force in contemporary life and politics, it must reach back to its historical oral-aural practices, philosophy of inter-connectedness, and ethics of justice. These qualities such as orality predate Islam and were behind early Islam’s vitality and democratic nature. Some of them were lost as authoritarian textual Islam gained unchallenged power especially in the modern era. Gradually, as Ahmed suggests, popular manifestations of Islam are diminishing. “Popular religion,” Hall reminds us, points to a “space that emerged between official or learned” religion “and profane (or ‘pagan’) culture. In this space lay became actors in their own right, fashioning (or refashioning) religious practices in accordance with local circumstances” (viii). “Where lived religion goes,” Hall elaborates, “its own way is in breaking with the distinction between high and low that seems inevitably to recur in studies of popular religion” (ix), for “religion,” according to Orsi, “is not *in* or *of* the world, nor simply *against* but *through* the world” (8). Academic and theological insistence on distinguishing the sacred from the profane, high from popular religion, and the officially religious from everyday experience is artificial at best. Orsi is right to argue that

Men and women do not merely inherit religious idioms, nor is religion a fixed dimension of one’s being, the permanent attainment of a stable self. People appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented,

³⁰ This is a Kindle book.

taken, borrowed, and improvised at the intersections of life. . . . It is through such dynamic processes of engagement that religion takes life. (8)

Indeed, this lively interaction between religion and everyday life gives religion its form and content. This is exactly what Ahmed, the religious studies scholar, does in *A Border Passage*: she rejects oppositional relations—between masculine and feminine Islams, for example; and she does not position popular Islam as a replacement for official Islam. She rather seeks to open more space for popular Islam to exist and thus challenge the hegemony of official Islam as still the normative version of the faith taught in academic programs and university courses.

Indeed, *A Border Passage* critiques formal textual Islam that dictates, imposes, and normalizes hegemonic practices. Its fixed practices are regulated over a lengthy period of time and transmitted, through textual rules and observable behaviors, from one generation to another with little consideration for the socio-cultural, economic, geographic, or political conditions under which individuals and communities live. Like Bourdieu et al., Ahmed’s “exploration of practice is, at bottom, an examination of the intricate exercises of power, the procedures of enforcements, the spaces of negotiation, as well as the subtle tactics of resistance” (Maffly-Kipp et al., Introduction).³¹ Engaging the “category of practice” allows Ahmed, like it does other religious studies scholars, “to move into the murky arena of daily social encounter and everyday experience” (Maffly-Kipp et al., Introduction). Ahmed looks at hegemonic power structures that try to contain religious plurality, cultural diversity, and multiethnic difference. In exploring the issue of everyday oral-aural and indigenous practices of women’s societies, Ahmed both describes and interprets everyday experiences and socio-political actions prevalent in the different societies she belonged to at some point in her past life.

³¹ This is a Kindle book.

During the process of rethinking her past, Ahmed yearns for her lost heritage which she attempts to revive by remembering what was passed on to her. Partly homage to her mother, partly an attempt to liberate Islam from “other people’s inventions, imputations, false constructions” (225), Ahmed shares with her readers her mother’s understanding, a woman’s view, of what Islam in practice and everyday life is and should be: one must refrain from inflicting harm on any creature and “even if your choice is between harming yourself and harming someone else, choose to harm yourself.” Her mother explains that the former route is better “because if you harm someone else you will have to live all your life with the knowledge that you have done that, and nothing that happens to oneself is worse than that” (75-76). This philosophical and ethical objection to harming any being becomes a practice in the life of Ahmed’s mother and the lives of her sons and daughter. Ahmed’s mother raised her sons to guard against violating the same principle. She made them swear not to ever hurt any man or woman or for that matter operate “in any field that contributed in any way to weaponry.” She also objected to them “participating in any war as combatants” (76). Ahmed adds the following prophetic statement to enforce this proper conduct: “She could not live, she said, with the thought that she had been responsible, through giving birth to them, for the death of another mother’s son. It would make her, she said, as well as them, a murderer” (Ahmed, *A Border* 76).

In the eyes of Ahmed as it was the case of her mother, this philosophical principle of preserving human life is a foundational ethical code shared by most, if not all religions. As such, one expects that living and dying by this code should interconnect followers of world faiths rather than divide them. More than formal religious textual practices, oral-aural religio-ethical practices generate this sought-after interconnectedness. Ahmed speaks of her mother as someone who “did not as a rule pray or fast or observe what in our household were thought of as the outer

trappings of religion—its formalities and rituals. But she talked of herself as a religious person” (75). If this claimed religious identity is neither determined nor defined by religious formalities and rituals, the backbones of formal textual Islam, what is it then? Refraining from inflicting harm, from the mother’s perspective, is the core of Muslim self-identification, and is “all one needs of religion.” The essence of what it means to be a religious Muslim hinges on a single Quranic verse (5:32), according to Ahmed’s mother. Ahmed translates the verse her mother quotes:³² “‘He who kills one being kills all of humanity, and he who revives, or gives life to, one being revives all of humanity.’ That, she said, is all one needs of religion” (Ahmed, *A Border* 75). This profound wisdom is passed on orally from grandmothers, to mothers, to sons and daughters. Contrary to what the Western feminists Ahmed encountered believe, neither the Zatoun harem space nor this women’s Islam was oppressive of women. This women’s Islam is matriarchal, pacifist, and relies on oral-aural transmission of religio-ethical practices unlike patriarchal Islam, which is susceptible to violence and relies heavily on textuality. The Zatoun harem Islam “was an essential part of how” the women “made sense of and understood their own lives,” and “[i]t was through religion that one pondered the things that happened, why they had happened, and what one should make of them, how one should take them” (121). These women’s Islam, “gentle, generous, pacifist, inclusive, somewhat mystical—just as they themselves were” (121), concentrates on the inner side of one’s self, purifying the heart, clearing the mind, and living by what one would be preaching. In it, private signs of religiosity receive more attention than the public ones.

This humane and enabling Islam of the Zatoun harem society is not unlike the Islam the father and grandmother of Ali associate with: a pacifist, humanist, and nonviolent Islam. Ali

³² For all referenced Quranic verses, see *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*.

does not acknowledge this pacifist Islam as a viable alternative from the coercive Islam she learns from official religious figures trained in Wahhabi Islam. From her point of view, only a monolithic Islam of submission, whose hegemonic Islamic practices degrade women, exists. In *Infidel*, Ali attributes to her father the following statements: “[t]here is no coercion in Islam’ . . . ‘No human being has the right to punish another for not observing his religious duties. Only Allah can do that’ . . . Today there could not be a Holy War . . . because only the Prophet Muhammad could call for a Holy War” (179). In response, Ali does not accept her father’s Islam or his “interpretation” as authentic or valid. Ali argues, “[t]his was my father’s Islam: a mostly nonviolent religion that was his own interpretation of the Prophet’s words. It relied on one’s own sense of right and wrong, at least to some degree.” She proceeds, “[i]t was more intelligent than the Islam I had learned from the *ma’alim* [meaning teacher of religion], and it was also far more humane.” Based on this description, one would expect Ali to accept her father’s Islam, but because her “father’s Islam was also clearly an *interpretation* of what the Prophet said,” she concludes, “it was not legitimate” (179). Ali implies that either Hadith or Quranic verses do not need any interpretation because they speak for themselves or rather they are absolute fact and all interpretations of them, including her father’s, are fiction. Ali insists that one “may not interpret the will of Allah and the words of the Quran . . . It is forbidden to pick and choose: you may only obey,” and in support of her point, Ali references this frequently quoted hadith (i.e. a prophet’s famous saying or traditional account): “*I have left you with clear guidance; no one deviates from it after me, except that he shall be destroyed*” (*Infidel* 179).

Ali’s objection to her father’s “interpretation” is not unusual. In general, advocates of the clash dismiss as invalid all interpretations and lived traditions that do not capture the literal meaning of Quranic verses and textual traditional teachings of the prophet. They especially

dismiss those interpretations that methodically contextualize and historicize the examined verses or sayings.³³ Like the larger body of cultural conservatives, Ali's statement seems to also misinterpret the nature and role of Sharia—the laws derived from the Quran, Hadith, and other Islamic sources. Scholar Aryn B. Sajoo draws attention to this common essentialist attitude when she writes,

A commonly-heard narrative about the sharia is that it stands for the 'divine law,' and hence binds Muslims everywhere for all time. In support of this universalist view is invoked the Quranic verse, "Now we have set you on a clear religious path, so follow it" (45:18). Yet the "path" here, or the "way" of the sharia, is clearly an ethical compass—which came to give birth over time to the Muslim legal tradition of *fiqh*. Precisely because the Quran is *not* a book of laws; human endeavour has been required to construct the *fiqh*. (5-6)

In refusing her father's early interpretation against harm and aggression in Islam, Ali implicitly argues that Islam is a fixed, authoritarian religious ideology. God and his prophet demand absolute submission. Islam, Ali suggests, is an absolute tyrannical regime. In *Infidel*, Ali presumably attempts to challenge and disrupt this authoritarian regime by offering her Western readership what she sees as "the truth." Yet, her alternative narrative, overwhelmed by her cultural conservatism and radical political advocacy, itself becomes an authoritarian conservative meta-narrative not unlike the rhetoric of Al-Qaeda or radical militant Salafism.³⁴ Ali's narrative

³³ Ali and the rest of the cultural conservatives do not subject the Bible and the Torah to criticism at all. In fact, they do not discuss them at all.

³⁴ Absolute and essentialist, a meta-narrative is "the implicit and usually invisible ideologies, systems, and assumptions which operate globally in a society to order knowledge and experience" (Stephens and McCallum 3). "The major narrative domains, which involve retold stories all, in the main," argues Stephens and McCallum, "have the function of maintaining conformity to socially determined and approved patterns of behavior, which they do by

dismisses the presence of texts, interpretations, traditions, and practices that would facilitate, negotiate, change, resist, or even contest certain authoritarian Islamic rules or teachings. Her statements deem Islam static, premodern, authoritarian, and undemocratic, completely disregarding how her narrative underlines the presence of at least two Islams: the grandmother's or father's popular oral-aural Islam, and the more literate, Evangelical Islam Ali was introduced to in schools and mosques.³⁵ Unlike orientalist and cultural conservative discourses whose claims Ali volunteers to authenticate, Ahmed argues that the harem society offers Muslim women a private space free from the domineering male gaze and the harem space enables generations of women to study and pass onto one another a pacifist Islam. According to Bernadette Andrea, "Ahmed establishes this woman's space as the font of ethical Islam, which she contrasts with the official legalistic Islam perpetuated by a male-authored tradition—one embraced by the West in its own official discourse" (4).

Of equal importance to the presence of this women's Islam is how the harem society foregrounds non-textual ways of imparting religious and cultural knowledge, emphasizes the importance of inter-generational relations, and instills in its members the interconnectedness of all forms of being. The harem space of Zatoun positively contributes to the growth and nourishment of a pacifist, matriarchal Islam. The same space allows different generations of Muslim women to pass this tradition onto their offspring. The latter are taught Islam as a "way of being in the world" (121). Their teachers and mentors act as role models who are out there "in the world, conveying their beliefs, ways, thoughts, and how" Muslims "should be in the world by

offering positive role models, proscribing undesirable behavior, and affirming the culture ideologies, systems, and institutions" (4).

³⁵ In *Infidel*, Ali also writes, "[a] new kind of Islam was on the march. It was much deeper, much clearer and stronger—much closer to the source of the religion—than the old kind of Islam my grandmother believed in, along with her spirit ancestors and djinns" (87). Yet, Ali fails to hear or see the difference she herself observes.

a touch, a glance, a word—prohibiting, for instance, or approving.” Instead of relying on written sources to educate their offspring, the matriarchs use “mere responses in this or that situation—a word, a shrug, even just their postures” (121). These matriarchs pass on knowledge through orality and practice, like all indigenous forms of knowledge production, preservation, and transmission. As Ahmed rethinks her maternal heritage, she thinks of broader communities of Muslim women, currently present and active in and outside of Egypt, whose methods of socialization de-center knowledge production and circulation, and create democratic socio-cultural cells, inclusive and nonviolent. The Muslim matriarchs she observes “profoundly shape the next generation, but they do not leave a record in the way that someone writing a text about how to live or what to believe leaves a record. Nevertheless they leave a far more important and, literally, more vital, living record” (122). Ahmed elaborates: “Beliefs, morals, attitudes, passed on to and impressed on us through those fleeting words and gestures are written into our very lives, our bodies, our selves, even into our physical cells and into how we live out the script of our lives” (122). Whatever teachings, practices, or values are passed on almost become a memory in the flesh, minds, hearts, and souls of the receivers. In addition, the absence of a written tradition guards against the malignant growth of dogmas and prevents the imposition of a fixed single worldview as the normative way of seeing and being. Such methods of teaching religion and socialization also ensure the proliferation of a diversity of teachings, narratives, and styles of passing knowledge from one generation to the next. These women, who were not systematically exposed to “orthodox interpretations of religion that men (or some men) got every Friday” (123), Ahmed argues, understood what Islam meant through dialogue, discussions, and application among themselves, with their men, and among the larger body of women, including their offspring (124).

In Defense of Indigeneity: Democratic Strategies of Critique

Ahmed does not imagine all Muslim Egyptian women to be pacifist. More specifically, Egyptian women who are formally instructed about Islam by male figures embrace values different from those the Zatoun harem women cherish. Nonviolence is central to the belief of her grandmother and mother who both mentored her, unlike the case of Zeibab al-Ghazali, a male-instructed Muslim woman who “openly espoused a belief in the legitimacy of using violence in the cause of Islam” (122). Al-Ghazali received formal instructions from her father. The father drew from “ancient classical texts of Islam, texts that only men who had studied the classical Islamic literary heritage could understand and decipher” (123). At this point of rethinking and reassembling the past, Ahmed identifies “two quite different Islams, an Islam that is in some sense a women’s Islam and an official textual Islam, a ‘men’s’ Islam” (123). When Ahmed distinguishes between an oral women’s Islam and a written men’s Islam, she does not intend to polarize the Arab and Muslim worlds which she examines in *A Border Passage*. Wael Hassan, however, contends that “the greater problematic here [in *A Border Passage*] lies in Ahmed’s polarization of literacy and orality, and further the conflation of this polarity with another, that of male/female, which in turn is conflated with yet a third, fundamentalist/moderate Islam.” Disapproving of Ahmed’s so-called acts of polarization, Hassan points out that “[h]ardly does one encounter such slippage in the work of the Arab scholars, critics, philosophers, and theologians who have in recent decades been actively challenging patriarchy, traditional interpretations of Islam, and fundamentalism” (29).

But in *A Border Passage*, Ahmed reminds her readers, especially Western readers, of how wrong one would be to reduce Islam to only the two types she mentions earlier. Ahmed considers the Zatoun harem women’s Islam “part of” the women’s “subculture;” consequently,

she arrives at a profound, though often neglected, truth: “there are not just two or three different kinds of Islam but many, more different ways of understanding and of being Muslim” (125).

Ahmed also realizes that the Islam shared and circulated among the harem circle of women is

nothing only of women but of ordinary folk generally, as opposed to the Islam of sheikhs, ayatollahs, mullahs, and clerics. . . . [I]t is an Islam that stresses moral conduct and emphasizes Islam as a broad ethos and ethical code and as a way of understanding and reflecting on the meaning of one’s life and of human life more generally. (125)

The Islam of sheikhs is the product of a minority of men who canonize this or that version of Islam and regularly attempt to impose their canonized medieval Islam on everyone and every space with little to no regard for the existing diversities, contextual particularities, dynamic modern populations, and unfixed realities.

Ahmed’s pronouncement and the delineation of Islams is not an arbitrary move. Her reflection on different Islams while criticizing orthodox Islam could be taken as an acknowledgement of the fears many Westerners might have about Islam. If my assumption proves true, Ahmed also redirects their attention to the existing plurality of Islams, a plurality hijacked by official Islam, colonial feminism, the clash discourse, cultural conservatives, and other socio-political hegemonies. Through distinguishing between one organic and another imposed type of Islam, while simultaneously acknowledging the presence of other Islams, Ahmed seeks to liberate through reclaiming indigenous, organic, oral-aural manifestations of Islam. Ahmed argues that the oral-aural traditions she speaks of are neither exclusively modern nor contemporary phenomena. They rather have their roots in the very beginning of Islam, an indigenous Islam. She writes,

Leaving no written legacy, written only on the body and into the scripts of our lives, this oral and aural tradition of Islam [, embodied in her matriarchs and their practices,] no doubt stretches back through generations and is as ancient as any written tradition. (*A Border* 127)

Ahmed adds, “One could even argue that an emphasis on an oral and aural Islam is intrinsic to Islam and to the Quran itself, and intrinsic even to the Arabic language” (127). Ahmed, one could further argue, implicitly suggests that stopping fundamentalism must begin with ending the “erasure of oral and ethical traditions of lived Islam,” an erasure that goes hand in hand with overwhelming “dissemination of written Islam, textual, ‘men’s Islam (an Islam essentially not of the book but of the Texts, the medieval texts)” (*A Border* 128). This erasure enables fundamentalism to position written medieval texts as “*the* authoritative Islam.” The problem then is not with Islam as a whole from Ahmed’s perspective, but it is rather “today’s fundamentalists, literate but often having read just a single text, [who] take it to be definitive and the one and only ‘truth’” (128). Not only have orthodox Muslims been privileged and their textual version of Islam imposed and studied as the norm even in academia, but also to make room for their Islam, all alternative oral and indigenous variations are unremorsefully sacrificed. The official textual “variant of Islam has wielded absolute power and has not hesitated to eradicate—often with the same brutality as fundamentalism today—all dissent, all differing views, all opposition” (130-31). Equally troubling for Ahmed is the “literal destruction and annihilation of the Muslims who are the bearers of those traditions” in Muslim lands (*A Border* 130).³⁶

³⁶ Indeed, Ahmed’s views here are very relevant to understanding thorny contemporary issues such as the troubling Islamic radicalism festering currently in the example of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has been violently erasing all presences of religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity—primarily minority communities, the bearers of non-hegemonic values preserved from one generation to the next through oral-aural traditions. In pursuit of a Salafi caliphate, ISIS targets all manifestations of ethnic difference and religious plurality,

In distinguishing between indigenous oral traditions and formal textual Islam, Ahmed does not propose the presence of an entirely good women's Islam opposed by a completely bad men's Islam. She does not wish to reinstate the dialectic or oppositional relation. Rather, she complicates what Islam is from the perceptions of orthodox Muslims and neoliberal Western academics, to dispel the power such dichotomies have. Each Islam is of a complex nature and cannot, nor should it, be reduced to either utterly good or irredeemably evil (133). Instead, Ahmed calls for embracing diversity, nursing to health indigenous forms of Islamic traditions, and studying them in equal depth without neglecting the role of historical, political, socio-cultural, and economic contexts. Ahmed calls for a refocusing of attention to non-hegemonic Islamic traditions. She calls for an end to the systematic privileging of the textual over the oral. Tracing Ahmed's personal history indeed demonstrates how Western academics seem to indirectly participate in the erasure of indigenous variations of Islam by either elevating the written above the oral or entirely dismissing indigenous Islamic religious variations, cultures, and worldviews. Western academic scholarship, according to Ahmed, contributes to "the gradual silencing and erasure of alternative oral forms of lived Islam" (*A Border* 129). But Ahmed does

including Christian, Kurdish, Shiite, and Yazidi populations. More than anyone else, women, presumably the transmitters of values and ethics similar to those Ahmed identifies among her Zatoun harem women society, bear the deep scars of ISIS's terror. According to a recent report authored by the United Nation's human rights office in Iraq, ISIS does not spare any indigenous ethnic and religious minorities (i). In its fourth installment of *Dabiq Magazine*, ISIS leadership shamelessly admits enslaving Yazidi women as a matter of common practice (ISIS 14).

Although such stark terrors are just the tip of the iceberg, ISIS is not unique in its disregard for human life and human rights. From afar, ISIS looks like an unprecedented extreme, one the United States and its allies hope to eradicate militarily over the span of several years. The uniqueness of ISIS is, however, debatable because not unlike other political experiments in the Middle East, ISIS targets all manifestations of ethnic and religious difference and therefore has much in common with every political experiment that has been put to the test in the region since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. From colonialist to nationalist, from theocratic and monarchic, from Islamist to coup d'état, and from failing-state model to the current ISIS model, hostility towards difference, erasure of diversity, and rejection of plurality have been the norm, as I have also suggested elsewhere (Yaghi 1). Again, Ahmed can be very helpful: she critiques Western colonialism, Arab nationalism, Arab/Muslim monarchies, formal textual Islam, Zionism, neoliberal Western feminism, and socialism, among other overarching power structures for failing to acknowledge, celebrate, and include all manifestations of religious, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, and environmental difference. Plurality and diversity are slain on the altars of all the above hegemonies.

not come to the rescue of only oral Islamic cultural and religious bodies. She relates her experiences in the 1960s England to also outline the dilemma of indigenous women of color in the British academy then. “Veena and I (and thousands of other nonwhite women immigrants into the academic societies of the Western world),” Ahmed writes, “were living in a society that insidiously and pervasively undermined our own experience, our own perspective and our own sense of reality.” The erasure of these women of color, Ahmed adds, came “in ways that we too did not know how to speak of, and that undermined and denied too, in our case, our own histories and cultures and the foundational beliefs of our societies” (*A Border* 226).

Ahmed pursues her critique of Western academe, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, to expose how Western academia systematically silenced nonwhites and women of color including herself. In the 1960s and 1970s, European academic spaces failed to overcome racialized politics or surpass racial discrimination, let alone fight it. According to Ahmed, “the steadfast, insidious, built-in denigration of blacks, Muslims, Arabs, and people of other cultures and the colonized generally, was just the ordinary academic fare.” Ahmed interprets the discrimination Arabs and Muslims faced in Britain as part of larger racially-biased structures. These structures of power preyed on a collective body of peoples and cultures, “blacks, women, Muslims, and so on,” who in Western scholarship “could be the *objects* of study. . . . But they could not be its subjects.” The studied peoples and cultures were not permitted to speak for themselves or have agency. “The perspective through which they were understood, measured, analyzed, judged,” Ahmed elaborates, “had to be that of white men. Otherwise, the conclusions arrived at could not be considered ‘objective’” (237). This alleged objectivity eventually comes under scrutiny from Black Studies and Women’s Studies (and eventually Ethnic Studies) in the United States. These academic programs have rejected the inherited so-called objective knowledge and “grand

transcendent truths.” Instead, the practitioners reinterpret the claimed “truth” and “objectivity” to be nothing more than the “traditions, beliefs, and perspectives of white middle-class men” (*A Border* 236) and subject them to thorough analysis and critique.³⁷

As one considers the multiple critiques Ahmed exercises, it becomes obvious that she does not absolve any essentialist, reductionist, or hegemonic structures from responsibility and accountability. In addition to Western academe and orientalist white feminists, Ahmed directs a soft criticism at Said’s *Orientalism* for its Arab nationalist-like tone, exclusionist stand, and binary language,³⁸ although she acknowledges her indebtedness to Said’s *Orientalism* for offering her and other women of color the terminology necessary to understand the dynamics of

³⁷ Ahmed becomes an othered woman of color and a marginalized Muslim Ottoman-Arab academic while studying in England and later working in the United States. As a result, her consciousness undergoes constant turmoil, trying to figure out how to respond to such impositions. Ahmed finds her experience “deeply and perhaps irretrievably fraught with angst and confusion” (238) possibly due to the clash between her admiration for the West and desire to be included on the one hand, and the former’s inability to give up its power over the colonized or rethink the world anew outside the binary of colonized-colonizer power structures, on the other hand. Besides, the imposed notion of Arabness has been emotionally draining and politically troubling for her, even when she is in the Arab world. But while in England and in the States, Ahmed has never expected the levels of “racism,” “ignorance,” “bigotry,” “imperialist perspective with which both Nasser and the Arabs were often presented,” and “biased and outright racist views of Arabs” especially during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War (238-39). Ahmed rightly observes that then, and even still now, “being an Arab was profoundly implicated, of course, in what has proven to be one of the most painful and intractable political problems of our day, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict” (239). The next chapter of this study will explore the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

³⁸ In terms of her attempts to frustrate binaries and dichotomies, Ahmed sounds like Elizabeth Bishop who was more interested in dissolving and obliterating the established dichotomies and binaries—especially the patriarchal association of women with nature and men with mind, or the notion of universal fixed truth—than in reinstating new ones. She does so in “The Map.” Bishop continues her project of destabilizing the dichotomies in the poem “Brazil, January 1, 1502” when she engages the politics of representation by emulating the Portuguese invaders’ positioning of nature, native inhabitants and women as material for conquest. By imitating the rhetoric of the Portuguese colonizers when she writes, “January, Nature greets our eyes/ exactly as she must have greeted theirs,” Bishop invites the reader to question which narrative is more reliable. Is it the traditional male-centered or the woman-coined narrative that similarly objectifies nature and Natives? Offering two problematic narratives could possibly lead the readers to question both representations. The poems “The Moose” and “Crusoe in England” continue the dichotomies-frustration project. Similar to Ahmed, Charles Johnson and E. L. Doctorow examine the historical past, question historical knowledge. Although Ahmed’s memoir is not historiographic metafiction, *Middle Passage* and *The Book of Daniel* interrogate the alleged objectivity of history and question the official past and its grand narratives. Like *A Border Passage*, *The Book of Daniel* calls attention to the endless process of re-interpreting the past. Relatively similar to Ahmed, Johnson’s *Middle Passage* emphasizes that identity is fluid: each one can be a victim and a victor at the same time; the line in between is not that definitive; the true freedom happens when all markers of socially-constructed racial and ethnic identity collapse.

orientalist, colonialist, and racist practices (240). Years after reading *Orientalism*, Ahmed still finds it difficult to reconcile her “own history” with many of the core claims of *Orientalism* and Said’s own position on Nasser and Arab nationalism. She outlines what she finds problematic in *Orientalism*:

Nasser, for instance, figures in its pages [i.e. *Orientalism*] only fleetingly, but he is there as hero and only as hero. Even Said’s general thesis echoed for me Arab nationalist rhetoric, for of course the notion that European attitudes and policies towards Arabs were rooted in a European hatred that went back to the Crusades was a commonplace of that rhetoric. (240)

Orientalism idealizes Nasser and puts forward an argument similar to nationalist narratives with regard to the hostility of the West towards Arabs and Muslims. Ahmed further adds, *Orientalism* “even echoed, too closely, to me, the overtly simple binary view of Arab nationalism, which represented imperialism as uniformly and comprehensively negative” (240). Not interested in putting forward simplistic claims, Ahmed acknowledges that all “grand, overarching theories” has serious blind spots in their fabrics. As such, Geoffrey Nash rightly argues, “Ahmed’s intuition, while not discounting the divisive realities of colonial education or the flawed ‘project of Western civilization’, is to reject the binary, confrontational, monolithic entities encoded in the signs of ‘colonialism’, ‘imperialism’, ‘anti-imperialism’, and ‘liberation.’” “Ahmed’s position,” Nash elaborates, “is also revisionist with respect to postcolonial strictures, not in contradicting criticism of the actions of the colonizer (which she partially endorses) but as a riposte to both pan-Arab nationalism and Islamism” (358-59). In part, *A Border Passage* intervenes to offer more balanced interpretations of complex realities, realities several

essentialist theoretical and political frameworks, especially the cultural conservatives Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan, come up short in faithfully representing.

Conclusion: Moving Forward, Embracing Pluralism

In conclusion, *A Border Passage* is Ahmed's interventionist critique of Western colonialism, Arab nationalism, Orientalist feminism, textual Islam and other overarching structures. These grand structures fail to "recognize the complexity" of the "world and experiences—with which we all struggle in our ongoing endeavor to speak and write of the realities that make up our lives and our world" (241-42). At best, they might succeed at offering reductionist understandings. Her memoir offers balanced interpretations of complex realities: it reclaims lived traditions and invokes indigeneity, orality, and matrilineal ancestral history. Reclaiming indigeneity as one of multiple selves challenges Walter Benn Michaels' argument in *The Shape of the Signifier*: Michaels proposes that the contemporary concern with identity and difference, in literary production and political debate, is basically a concern with identarianism—"who you are" rather than "what you believe" (66). Through reclaiming the indigenous, Ahmed embraces a plurality that defies narrowly-defined notions of identity and identarian difference. It reconciles her native heritage with her colonial and Western education, and inscribes her life story in an expansive fabric of histories (Ahmed, *A Border* 296).

One of Ahmed's insightful realizations forms a central thesis in the memoir: the truth about past events is too complex to be compartmentalized in one universal, authoritative interpretation. One example is the story of Western colonialism in the minds of Arab nationalists who consider this colonialism all evil. Ahmed disagrees: if one shifts focus from what is being disclosed, in this case the past itself, to the process of deciphering and composing it, s/he will arrive at a multiplicity of sequential interpretations which will most likely bring her or him closer

to comprehending what actually happened. Ahmed's personal history testifies to the truth of her point. Through revisiting her love-hate relation to written classical Arabic, Ahmed demonstrates the impossibility of fully understanding the past or the historical knowledge passed down onto her from the past. Early in the memoir, she attributes her lack of exposure to, and eventually her negative attitude towards, written classical Arabic to the colonized consciousness she and her father had. But, she later discovers new information which complicates what she already knows. Colonized consciousness offers partial explanation. Indeed, the adult Ahmed reveals that she was unable to learn classical Arabic because of complex traumatic experiences she and her father had. She recalls her Arabic language private tutor constantly "groping at" her "under the table" (26). Preoccupied more with staying out of his sinful hand's reach, the adolescent Ahmed "learned very little Arabic" (26). While she was in the process of writing the memoir many years later, the adult Ahmed sought a friend to help her decipher her father's letters to her, which were written in cursive handwriting. Ahmed discovers that her father did not send her to the "*Kuttab*, the traditional Quranic school, for a few hours each week, as some of . . . [her] schoolmates had been" because he was still traumatized by his own experience in the *Kuttab* (26). Sent to learn classical Arabic and the Quran, her father, a boy then, was scarred by the harsh physical punishment techniques the teacher used to instill learning in the students (26). Her father "could recite the entire Quran by the time he was eight," the readers are told. However, he "vowed never to subject his own children to such an experience" (*A Border* 26).

By relaying this information, Ahmed seems to imply that there is no simple black or white truth. The truths behind her life circumstances, colonial encounters, or the experiences she had or is having—whether good or bad—are interpretations and reinterpretations, the outcome of a plurality of factors. I am inclined to argue that from Ahmed's point of view, self-identification

on individual and collective levels, just like her shifting consciousnesses and fragmentary understanding, is by default an always incomplete project. What Ahmed identifies and possibly accepts is more of a constantly-evolving and dynamic individual, national, and transnational self-identification that must embrace difference, indigeneity, and pluralism in order for it to break free from hegemonic grand structures.

In the same vein, to better understand how major forces, such as colonialism, inform one's understanding of the notion of selfhood, one must treat the self as a complex, yet constantly evolving, pluralistic entity and must think of self-identification as a process that has a beginning but no virtual end. Ahmed

. . . think[s] that we are always plural. Not either this *or* that, but this *and* that.

And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through us. (*A Border* 25)

Whether one rethinks individual or collective identity, the same applies. "There is no history except as it is composed," as E. L. Doctorow proclaims, and "the act of composition [therefore] can never end" ("False Documents" 24). Every generation interprets the past differently in light of the circumstances available to it. Notions of the self, the other, nation, the past, tradition, religion, history, and consciousness are never fixed. And instead of erasing unpopular past identities in favor of fashionable present formulations of self-identification, Ahmed suggests including or at least looking back with nonjudgmental eye on unpopular formations of past self-identification because one, whether singular or collective, is always in a state of becoming. One must "look back with insight and without judgment" because "there will always be new ways to

understand what we are living through, and that” we “will never come to a point of rest or of finality in” our “understanding” (*A Border* 26-27).

This rejection of fixed identities, I speculate, has prompted Ahmed to end her memoir on a note that not only suggests the liquidation of border lines, boundaries, dichotomies, and fixed identities, but also insists on rejecting them because they are reductionist, arbitrary, and oppressive. Ahmed concludes:

I am now at the end point of the story I set out to tell here. For thereafter my life becomes part of other stories, American stories. It becomes part of the story of feminism in America, the story of women in America, the story of people of color in America, the story of Arabs in America, the story of Muslims in America, and part of the story of America itself and of American lives in a world of dissolving boundaries, and vanishing borders. (296)

At this point in her narrative, Ahmed embodies a new pluralistic consciousness. Her statement emphasizes interconnectedness. “One writes to become someone other than who one is. One tries to modify one’s way of being through the act of writing,” Michel Foucault once said (182). Reflective writing, I take his dictum to suggest, transforms the one conducting the action. The statement rings true in Ahmed’s case. Writing the memoir helped her evolve into an inseparable part of a larger fabric composed of a plurality of life stories, geographies, histories, cultures, struggles, identities, and possibly alliances—all seamed together, defined, redefined, challenged, and some reconciled. The memoir genre allows her to re-examine under a magnifying glass minute aspects of the everyday life which intersect with complex historical events or socio-political milieus. In so doing, she takes her readers on a tour of familiar, yet unfamiliar, places, faces, and socio-political challenges. Neither romantic nor reductionist, her portraits de-

familiarize the familiar and therefore should help us comprehend urgent contemporary phenomena.

Chapter Four

Ibrahim Fawal's *On the Hills of God*: Remaking "Palestine," Reimagining "the Palestinians"

In his introduction to *Blaming the Victims*, Edward Said captures the complex nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He hints at why the Palestinians have not been able to gain their inalienable rights in spite of their endless struggle and countless sacrifices. Said writes:

The conflict over Palestine is unusual in many different ways, principally of course because Palestine is not an ordinary place. An almost mythological territory saturated with religious ideology and endowed with overwhelming cultural significance, Palestine has been weighed down with historical as well as political meanings for many generations, peoples, and traditions. (1)

Palestine is more of a symbolic sacred geography. On its scarred body, the powerful have written and continue to rewrite history in ways that serve their interests, fulfill present needs, and bring to fruition visions of physical and spiritual rejuvenations. To a degree, this bitter truth possibly explains why Ibrahim Fawal ends *On the Hills of God* (1998) with a famous scene that offers his primary character Yousif Safi and the displaced Palestinians neither closure, or relief, nor justice. Forced out of his town Ardallah and out of Palestine, Yousif looks back at the land and makes a solemn promise: "The conscience of the world must be pricked, awakened. And we will do it. This is *not* an idle promise. . . . We *shall* return." Yousif vows to return "for the sake of all of us who have been dispossessed—the . . . babies who journeyed and died from thirst, the dead we left along the trail. . . . [W]e *shall* be delivered. We *shall* return" (Fawal ch. 32).¹ This scene is particularly significant because it invites countless questions that are difficult to answer. It,

¹ This is a Kindle book.

nonetheless, exhibits a commitment to remembering, speaking out, resisting, and holding tight to the inalienable right of return.² Yousif speaks to us.

No doubt, Yousif speaks to Palestinian Americans and they are among his target audience, as Steven Salaita speculates (“Scattered Like” 54). Salaita argues that Fawal seeks to educate primarily Palestinian American young generations who possibly are not fully aware of the significance of the Nakbah in the Palestinian struggle.³ “One of the Arabic Palestinian literature’s goals is to explore memory and ensure that future generations of Palestinians remain attached to the land from which their ancestors were uprooted,” Salaita writes. He adds: “Fawal extends this tradition across the Atlantic, pressing for a similar recognition among those born in the West” (54). Although Fawal undoubtedly seeks out younger generations of Palestinian Americans, especially those unfamiliar with the nature and significance of the Nakbah or those politically uninvolved with the Palestinian Cause, I want to argue here that he has an equal purpose of educating an American audience and contesting misrepresentations of Palestine.

Arguably the generations who experienced the Nakbah first hand do in fact pass onto their Palestinian American offspring this history. If he wrote the novel to educate these generations only, Fawal would be preaching to the choir. In fact, sharing historical harsh realities like the Nakbah is overwhelmingly a staple theme in Palestinian American life as evident in

² The 1948 war resulted in the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians. Since then, the displaced Palestinians have become refugees and they currently constitute between five to seven millions. According to international law, the refugees have the full right to return to their homes if they choose to do so and those who prefer not to return, they are entitled to fair compensation. The resolutions that protect the inalienable Palestinian right of return include the U.N. General Assembly Resolution no. 194 (III) Of December 1948, U.N. Security Council Resolutions no. 242 and 338, and U.N. High Commission for Refugees Executive Conclusion no. 40. The right of return is a recognized customary norm of international law. It is well-established as an inalienable right in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

³ The “Nakbah,” Arabic for “catastrophe,” is the term Palestinians use to refer to their violent displacement from historical Palestine in 1948.

Palestinian American literature. Lisa Majaj, a Palestinian American writes, in *Food for Our Grandmothers*, that “like my parents, I am grounded in both history and alienation” (84). By the compound nature of their identity, as both Palestinian and American, most Palestinian Americans are “forced to take responsibility for both American and Palestinian histories in their contradictory entirety—histories articulated through idealism, but resorting too often to violence” (Majaj 82). Arab American novelists, like Fawal, do not need to primarily worry about young Palestinian Americans forgetting irreversible tectonic events, especially the Nakbah. By choice or by force, their notions of self-identification are informed by the tragic history of Palestine and their Palestinian ancestors. They remember the Nakbah because in this remembrance, they preserve their Palestinian identity. “If we don’t keep in touch with the ancestor,” Toni Morrison rightly reminds us, “we are, in fact, lost. When you kill the ancestor [or his/her history], you kill yourself” (344). Indeed, refusing to fully breaking free or away from the ancestors and their histories is a staple theme in most Palestinian American literary works.⁴

I want to argue in this chapter that Fawal seeks out a broader American readership to change the lens through which the American public has been viewing the Palestinian struggle. Like Said who throughout his life was committed to presenting Palestinians as “people” rather than “a pretext for a call to arms” (*After the Last Sky*, 4), Fawal seeks to humanize the Palestinians by portraying them as the victims of ex-victims who chose to become oppressors. Palestinians are people like us with relatable dreams and aspirations, Fawal suggests. Choosing to leave his readers with the final tragic scene where the Christian Palestinian Yousif swears to awaken and shake their conscience about the plight of the dispossessed in 1948 and the atrocities

⁴ Two examples are Randa Jarrar’s *A Map of Home* and Leila Halaby’s *West of the Jordan*.

committed, the readers are invited to end the injustice should there be just peace. The Palestinian stolen humanity requires our attention. Bonnie Johnston is right then to draw attention to how *On the Hills of God* “appeals to our common humanity” and “Fawal begs us to find within ourselves the capability to treat one another with a compassion transcending religious dogma and political cant.” It is doubtful, however, that Fawal, who writes “with such immediacy and fervor,” as Johnston argues, looks forward to “a reader [who] will easily entertain, with Yousif, the hope that peace between Zionists and Palestinians is possible” (1501). Whether or not this peace is attainable, the novel provides no answers as it ends on the collective displacement of Palestinians. “We will return,” the dispossessed Yousif declares more than once to emphasize his and other Palestinians’ inalienable right to return to their homes in 1948 Palestine.

Core Claims

On the Hills of God, I argue, represents Palestine and humanizes its indigenous population. Its representations counter cultural conservative, clash of civilizations, and Zionist misrepresentations which contribute to an on-going American tradition of appropriating and mistranslating Palestine.⁵ These distortions are traceable to manifestations of nineteenth-century imaginative remaking of Palestine and contesting Palestinian indigeneity (by that I mean their rootedness in the land). In *Now They Call Me Infidel*, Nonie Darwish systematically performs

⁵ Fawal’s literary rendering of Palestine and the Palestinians challenges Zionist Jewish American representations. Leon Uris’ highly popular 1958 novel *Exodus* is the first American novel about the State of Israel. Published in 1958, it was directed at American and European readers to garner further support for Israel especially from Jewish Americans (Knopf-Newman 50). “By the eve of the June War in 1967,” writes Gregory Orfalea, the novel “had sold twenty million copies worldwide. No other book has so influenced Americans on foreign policy” (“Literary Revolution” 112). The movie version, Edward Said points out, “fostered the astonishing idea more or less prevalent nearly everywhere [more then than now] in the West, that the real victims of the Middle East were Israeli Jews, whose good-humored ingenious pluck gained them respite from continued Arab threats to ‘throw the Jews into the sea’” (“Introduction” 6).

deliberate erasures, produces hegemonic portrayals, and enacts violent inscriptions on the body of Palestine and the Palestinians. I show how her narrative draws from Zionist misrepresentations which have become, to borrow Said's words, "narratives and images that acquired the solidity and the legitimacy of 'truth'" more so in the U.S. than in Europe ("Introduction" 4). Arguably cognizant of the power of these narratives, Fawal reaches out to a broader American audience through the historical novel genre. A testimony to the unspeakable, *On the Hills of God* stands witness to the 1948 Zionist settler colonial destruction of Palestinian personal and collective histories, livelihood, cultural harmony, and religious diversity. Its representations of personal and collective losses and its vivid descriptions of a locally-based indigenous Palestinian identity inclusive of Christians, Jews, and Muslims are best understood in the context of cultural conservative misrepresentations of the Palestinians and the appropriation of Palestine. They frustrate the myth of a peaceful Jewish Zionist settler colonialism Darwish and other cultural conservatives shoulder as they speak for but not to power.

Engaged in historicization to show the heterogeneity of the represented world, just like Mohja Kahf and Leila Ahmed, Fawal evokes interdependence among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Palestinians. He recreates a lost local identity and develops a local site of shared existence, one rarely acknowledged in official histories and cultural conservative and clash of civilizations narratives. Likewise, the Palestine he recreates, as I show later in the chapter, is unlike the one captured in nineteenth-century American travel writing, and its Palestinians carry no resemblance to the figures readers encounter in the Palestine of Robert Laird Stewart, Nonie Darwish, or Mark Twain. This continuum of acts of appropriation invites me later in the chapter to expand Matthew F. Jacobs' "informal network" of experts to include not only American

cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent like Darwish, but also these earlier American manifestations of appropriating Palestine.⁶

The Novel: a Humanizing Agent, Testimony to the Unspoken, & Act of Survival

Following its publication in 1998, *On the Hills of God* attracted mixed reviews, possibly due to the political nature of its subject matter and thematic constellation. Sybil S. Steinberg calls the novel “stodgy,” “polemical,” “highly politicized and, worse, unimaginative rendering of history and character. Fawal’s Palestinians speak the language of pamphleteers, and the Jewish characters, except for one anti-Zionist physician and his son, are arrogant, sneaky, and vengeful marauders.” In short, Steinberg concludes, Fawal is incapable of writing a “good literary novel about the conflicting claims—both to the land and to the truth—of Israelis and Palestinians” (48). In all fairness to Fawal, this dismissive appraisal of the novel points more to the personal anxiety of the reviewer, than it speaks to the absence of literary merits. The reviewer could have, at least, acknowledged Fawal’s courage in digging up the Nakbah. After all, Said reminds us, “the crucial issue for any discussion of Palestine has to be 1948, or rather what happened in 1948” (“Introduction” 14). Debating Palestine in the U.S. is difficult and can quickly become an emotionally-charged endeavor. However, of all discussions, 1948 is the most difficult.

At its core, *On the Hills of God* is a revisionist account of this early history. It depicts what happened and explains why it happened from a Palestinian perspective. Like other Palestinian American narratives, Fawal’s novel generates, to borrow a phrase from Said’s *The Question of Palestine*, an “‘inventory’ of what Zionism’s victims (*not its beneficiaries*) endured” (73). *On the Hills of God*, Sana Abed-Kotob writes, courageously “serves as a sobering reminder

⁶ For more information on this network, please refer to the introduction.

that one nation's celebration has been made possible only at the cost of another nation's devastation" (135). Possibly on this ground, Bonnie Johnston praises Fawal for giving voice to the Palestinians through remembering their ongoing Nakbah (1501). But the harsh truth about this early Palestinian history, Said would agree, is that it "must be told and re-told innumerable times" ("Introduction" 11). Not unlike other Palestinian and Arab American writers, Fawal covers that history, but unlike many of them, he fully concentrates on the Jewish Zionist settler colonial project in 1948 and seems to have a remembering mission, a mission he entrusts to Yousif Safi, the character who vows to awaken the conscience of the rest of the world. A Christian Palestinian youth, Yousif is the focalizer for most of the novel. In choosing the Christian Yousif over the Jewish Isaac or the Muslim Amin (Yousif's two key friends in the novel), Fawal, I propose, draws attention to the often denied religious heterogeneity and plurality of Palestinians. Among the displaced in 1948 were Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Palestinians. This formal choice of narrator contradicts cultural conservative and the clash of civilizations renderings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of the Palestinian resistance to Israeli settler colonialism into a jihad against Christians and Jews. In that sense, Fawal's emphasis on historicization and diversity is not unlike the authorial intentions and thematic constellations Kahf and Ahmed foreground in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *A Border Passage* respectively.

Misrepresented Palestinians & A Disfigured Palestine in the Clash Discourse

In chapter one of this dissertation, I have shown that American proponents of the clash label anti-colonial Arab nationalisms of the 1940s and 1950s jihadi movements. Arabs, the cultural conservative autobiographers argue, are nursed on hating Zionists because they are Jews or "the dreaded enemies of God" according to Darwish (10). Cultural conservative narratives

contribute to the clash discourse through enforcing versions of the following definition of jihad. “In the Arab world,” Darwish, for example, writes, jihad “is a religious holy war against infidels, an armed struggle against anyone who is not a Muslim. It is a fight for Allah’s cause to promote Islamic dominion in the world.” Darwish, who further insists that “[n]o Arab could avoid the culture of jihad” (33), uses the term “jihad” not only in reference to Jamal Abdel Nasser’s transnational anti-colonialism, but more importantly to the Palestinian struggle against Zionist settler colonialism in the 1950s Gaza Strip and by extension in the twenty-first century. Darwish misrepresents the question of Palestine and the Palestinian struggle by turning it into an evident manifestation of a clash of civilizations. In *Now They Call Me Infidel*, she argues:

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict represents the focal point of the larger confrontation of the Muslim world against the non-Muslim world. Israel may be the frontline enemy, but beyond the Mediterranean and the ocean is the non-Muslim world that Muslims believe they need to conquer for Islam. In the process, Palestinians have been sacrificed and kept hostage for the human frontline of Arab jihad. (220)

Instead of a struggle against Zionist settler colonialism, the Palestinian resistance becomes symptomatic of radical Arab and Muslim jihad against Jews, Christians, and the West. Palestine itself becomes the frontline of Western defense against Arab and Muslim jihad. Darwish claims to know, from first-hand experience, the truth about the entire Middle East, especially Egypt and the Gaza Strip. After all, her narrative is about her life experiences. The story arc of her autobiography traces the author’s transformation from a submissive Muslim Egyptian woman raised (in Egypt and the Gaza Strip) in a static culture of violence, hatred, and shame to a

patriotic Evangelical Christian American who warns of the imminent threat Arabs and Muslims pose to the Judeo-Christian America.

After she establishes herself as an authentic cultural authority, Darwish ventures in a vein of polemics similar to that of Bernard Lewis and Thomas Friedman, two proponents of the clash of civilizations discourse.⁷ She asserts that Egyptians and Palestinians—by virtue of their Arabness and Muslim identity—fail to “take responsibility for their mistakes and ineptitude” and they instead hold “Zionists and Western imperialists” responsible for their “society’s ills” (41). In harmony with a well-represented discourse, also in liberal American media,⁸ Darwish

⁷ Bernard Lewis, while defending Orientalist ethnography and scholarship, downplays the devastating repercussions of Euro-American imperialism and hegemonic practices on the current decadent state of Arab and Islamic countries. In essentialized language, he instead blames the stagnation on internal Muslim weaknesses, rejection of modernity, and resistance to Western progressive values. Indeed, in *The Crisis of Islam*, Lewis accuses the Islamic world of blaming its shortcomings and failure to modernize on America’s alleged hegemonic presence in the region (112). Lewis, refers to the U.S. hegemonic occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan as an “American military intervention” mobilized by two objectives: “to deter and defeat terrorism” and “to bring freedom, sometimes called democracy, to the people of these countries and beyond” (*The Crisis of Islam* 165). In *The End of Modern History in the Middle East*, Lewis emphasizes that if the peoples of Islam wish to move forward, they must admit their mistakes and take responsibility for the Dark Ages-like conditions under which they continue to live, especially as the era of Western imperialism ended years ago (4-5). The argument Lewis advances is popular in mainstream American media. In this media, Islam is the problem because the Arab and Muslim worlds refuse to acknowledge or take responsibility for their deeds.

The case of Thomas Friedman is another example. In a Sunday column, Friedman argues that due to the power of their fictitious narrative, the Arab and Muslim worlds fail to see the United States as a benevolent country whose primary goal is to liberate the region from tyranny, spread democracy, and promote modernity. Instead of taking responsibility for the self-inflicted stagnation taking hold of their societies, the Arab and Muslim worlds blame the U.S. (n. p.). According to Friedman, American foreign policy towards the Arab and Muslim worlds is well-intentioned. The problem lies with Arabs and Muslims but not, not even partially, with the United States. Acting on a similar principle, the George W. Bush administration appointed, in 2001, three public relations experts to counter the propagandist Islamic “narrative,” Friedman points to, by explaining to Muslims what the 2001 U.S. declared War on Terror is about. The public relations experts, Margaret Tutwiler, Karen Hughes, and Charlotte Beers, depicted the U.S. as a benevolent power genuinely working to help Muslims weed out a radical few amongst them so as to protect American-Muslim relations.

⁸ Three recent journalistic articles that articulate views similar to Darwish’s *Now They Call Me Infidel* are Roger Cohen’s “Islam and the West at War,” Mustafa Akyol’s “A Letter Concerning Muslim Toleration,” and Michael Walzer’s “Islamism and the Left.” Cohen argues that contrary to what liberals like President Barak Obama think, the West is actually at war with Islam in its entirety and it is not Western imperialism’s fault. Until Muslims genuinely practice self-critique, the civilizational war will continue (n. p.). In a similar vein, Akyol proposes that the current violence sweeping across the Arab and Muslim worlds is indicative of an intra-Muslim religious conflict rooted in intolerance. “Punishing people in the name of God” lies at the heart of the problem both on state and group levels. Yet, Muslims, Akyol argues, should be capable to reform their faith not by identifying “A Muslim Martin Luther,”

completely absolves European and American imperialists of any wrongdoings and instead blames everything on the ex-colonized and the colonized from whose murderous arms and poisonous culture she claims to have escaped. Accordingly, after she relocates to the U.S. in 1978, she who lived in only Egypt and briefly the Gaza Strip substitutes the Middle East for both national and local geographies so as to create a homogenous Arab collective, one that is Muslim, radical, and obsolete.

Read in the context of this cultural conservative narrative, *On the Hills of God* presents a Palestine and Palestinians different from the ones described in Darwish's autobiographical account. In the town of Ardallah, Palestinians have a local identity: they are interconnected by one culture, one language, and a shared local place. They are Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Palestinians who live in relative harmony. Right from the outset, Fawal introduces this re-imagined socio-cultural harmony as well as the fear of rupture Zionism and the British Mandate are about to cause. Set in June 1947 in the modern Palestinian town of Ardallah, the opening scene in *On the Hills of God* shows the entire local community getting together to celebrate the building of the Safi villa. The town's women—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Palestinians—contribute to the joyous event by cooking and serving local cuisines to the guests, workers, and

but rather by “tak[ing] a Lockean leap.” To calm potential readers who might jump to the conclusion that he is asking Muslims to import and adopt a “Western cultural notion” of reformation, Akyol argues that “a Lockean tradition [in reference to John Locke] has long existed in Islam, buried in the late seventh century, in a largely forgotten school of theologians called Murjites.” In short, the Islam of postmodernity is the problem because it is intolerant of religious difference, but a seventh-century version of Islam has the solution (n. p.).

In both articles, examining the radicalization of Islam in isolation and out of context is a shared endeavor. Like Cohen and Akyol, Walzer blames Islamism and calls upon the left to distance itself from Islamists like Hamas members and to launch an ideological and intellectual campaign against Islamists wherever and whoever they are. He proposes “a policy focused on the containment of Islamism,” launching an ideological war on the philosophy of modern Muslim thinkers including Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Maulana Maududi while resurrecting “rationalist philosophers of the Muslim past and the liberal reformers of more recent times.” Walzer further suggests “engage[ing] cooperatively with Muslim, and also lapsed Muslim, opponents of zealotry” including Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The ultimate objective for leftists, Walzer writes, should be “to defend the secular state in this ‘post-secular’ age and . . . to defend equality and democracy against religious arguments for hierarchy and theocracy.” In the three articles, the responsibility of Western imperialism is deliberately dismissed.

everyone present. Here, Fawal concentrates on the various local dishes piling up inside the Safi family's kitchen, to emphasize this harmonious cultural and societal local community. "Aunt Hilaneh . . . and other women," the omniscient narrator reports, "were already stuffing three large lambs with rice, chunks of meat, pine nuts, and spices. Two or three of these women took great pride in their cooking, and Yousif wondered which one would appoint herself as supervisor." In previous social gatherings, Yousif witnessed these particular women "make faces behind each other's back and bicker about too much cinnamon or not enough nutmeg. But not today. Today," the narrator emphasizes, "everyone was working in harmony" (Fawal, ch. 1). The narrator adds that the various local dishes "were brought by Christian families and Muslim families; by rich and poor." The same town has three Palestinian Jewish families; of these families, "the family of Moshe and Sarah Sha'lan, Isaac's parents, was the closest" to the Safis "and they too chose to participate in the celebration." They "had ordered two large trays of *kinafeh* [a famous Palestinian dessert] from Nablus—a town twenty miles to the northwest and famous for its pastries—and paid a taxi driver an outrageous fare to drive all the way and pick them up" (Fawal, ch. 1).

Another early sign of the local communal socio-cultural harmony materializes in the intimate relationship of Yousif, Isaac, and Amin. Inside the Safi kitchen, the three friends aid the women during the event. They work together. According to the narrator, Yousif "was in charge of drinks: whiskey, beer, arak, kazoze, lemonade, and water. By ten o'clock, his best friends, Amin and Isaac, were with him." Amin and Isaac "helped him crush the large ice block . . . , and they helped pass around drinks as the guests began to arrive. Among the prominent figures the three friends served were many clergymen: a Greek Orthodox, a Melkite Catholic, an Arab Anglican minister and two Muslim *Shaykhs*" (ch. 1). They came to congratulate the Safis and

bless their new house. Later in the novel, the three friends are frequently seen at one another's homes, studying together, sharing their food, hiking, catching wild birds, participating in political debates in public and private, and even spying on Zionist surveyors whom the three friends thought are in their town to identify its strengths and weaknesses in order to attack it when the time is ripe. Their religious difference does not come in the way of their friendship and unity until Zionists plot to take over the land.

In terms of the strength and nature of their friendship, the narrator describes it as follows:

Yousif, Amin, and Isaac

were born within a few blocks of each other. They had gone through elementary and secondary school together. Together they had switched from short to long pants, learned to appreciate girls, enjoyed catching birds, suffered over acne, and, because they were all Semites, wondered who among them would have the biggest nose.

The narrator does not stop here. They “were so often seen together that the whole town began to accept them as inseparable” (ch. 1). Their inseparability was evident in them “enjoying a favorite Ardallah pastime: tourist watching” (ch. 2). They have too much in common. It would be a mistake to think that Fawal romanticizes their friendship or offers his readers an unsophisticated portrayal of them or of Ardallah in general. Fawal is attentive to social class. He is conscious of economic hierarchy: the families are friends, but the Christian and Jewish families are well-off, while the Muslim family of Amin is poorer. Amin's father is an artisanal laborer. In spite of this difference, the friendship the three youth have is real. The narrator reports that “[n]one of the three boys wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Yousif wanted to be a lawyer; Amin a doctor; Isaac a musician. Such were the dreams that fluttered in their hearts as they walked

together, like birds awaiting the full development of their wings to fly” (ch. 2). The three best friends continue to have this inseparability up until the Zionist project disrupts it. This harmonious relation the friends have is paralleled by another. Readers learn that in their effort to modernize their town and boost the strong sense of communal solidarity, the town’s people have initiated “a community fund to build a hospital” and contribute “to all happy occasions: weddings, childbirths, baptisms, the building of a new house, [and] returning from abroad” (ch. 1). The town itself is thriving economically from attracting tourists who frequent the “many little shops—and the few big ones.” On one Sunday, “[s]hoppers coming out of the Muslim and Jewish stores,” readers are told, “had their arms laden with packages. But to the Christian shopkeepers of this predominantly Christian town, Sunday was truly a day of rest” (ch. 2). Up until this point, Ardallah is a safe, peaceful, and prosperous town.

Like the strong relation among Yousif, Isaac, and Amin, the harmony and prosperity Ardallah community enjoys is neither a romantic rendering of the past nor is it an outlandish wishful thinking on the part of Fawal. In offering these representations, Fawal, I would argue, evokes the documented accounts on Jewish-Muslim-Christian historical relations throughout the Middle East. Literary, historical, and sociological accounts of pre-1948 Palestine speak of a world similar to that of Ardallah. During his travel in Palestine, Mark Twain mentions camping “within the city walls of Tiberias,” whose population, he disparagingly reports, consists of “particularly uncomely Jews, Arabs, and negroes” (263). In late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Palestine, Christians, Muslims, and Jews— including some European Jews— lived side by side in mixed communities as well as separate neighborhoods without major conflicts. The childhood of Moshe Sharett, reported in his *Personal Diary*, is a profound example. His Russian family, including his “fervent[ly] Zionist activist” father, immigrated to

Ottoman Palestine in 1906. Sharett was twelve years old. “The family settled in the Arab village of Ein Sinya, near Nablus. Later,” Livia Rokach reports, “Moshe, his brother and three sisters would describe that two-year period, during which they studied Arabic, played with the children of the village and learned fascinating stories from the village’s elders as the happiest time of their lives” (8).⁹ Like earlier legal and historical records of Muslim-Jewish relations in Palestine (see Ben Naeh 205-10 and Al-Jubeh 211-17),¹⁰ the actual world Moshe and siblings experienced

⁹ Sharett became a member of the Zionist political movement and occupied several important political positions: he was the head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department (1933-1948), the head of the Israeli Foreign Ministry (1948-1956), and later the Israeli Prime Minister (1954-1955).

¹⁰ Comprised of Arab, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and Iberian Jews, the Jewish population, during the Mamluk era (1250-1516), settled in several towns including Safed, Hebron, Jerusalem, Acre, Gaza, Nablus, and Tiberias (Ben Naeh 203-04). Under the Mamluk reign, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in mixed neighborhoods. During that period, scholar Yaron Ben Naeh writes, “there was no ghettoization or areas specifically set apart for Jews or for Christians. The areas of Jewish residences, which sprang up spontaneously, did not have hermetic borders.” They lived adjacent to one another to the point where “faithful Muslims complained about the proximity of the Jewish quarter during prayers at the mosque” (Ben Naeh 205). Some devout Muslims occasionally protested the “Depraved” lifestyle of Jews, an action that might have fostered aggression, in the form of “throwing stones or insult,” towards Jewish children (Ben Naeh 206). These actions, however, were neither endorsed nor tolerated by the legal system: “all residents of the land of Islam had a basic sense of security, and the certainty of their permanence, without any threat of expulsion, forced conversion, or physical violence.” Even more, during the Ottoman era (1516-1914), the law gave “the same civil rights to Muslims and non-Muslims” (Ben Naeh 206).

Ben Naeh stresses the harmonious co-existence between Muslims and Jews during the Ottoman era and offers Jerusalem as a case in point: “the two communities coexisted harmoniously . . . [,] lived in close proximity, and no particular ostracism was observed. They rubbed shoulders in the urban centers where they worked side by side . . . [,] frequented the same cafés and hammams” (209). Ben Naeh offers a more sophisticated picture of inter and intra Muslim Jewish relations between the different social classes. “The way of life for needy Jews,” Ben Naeh claims, “was apparently closer to that of their Muslim or Christian neighbors than to that of their more fortunate coreligionists. Perhaps the Jews recognized in themselves a Judeo-Arab (or even Ottoman, in the enlightened milieus) identity, in opposition to the new identity that colonialism and forced modernization wished to thrust upon them, as indicated by numerous texts from the beginning of the twentieth century” (Ben Naeh 210).

Other scholars offer a similarly complex reading of the Jewish permanent presence in Jerusalem, among other places. Scholar Nazmi Al-Jubeh, for example, points out that “the real situation among the Jewish population varies with the times, from citizenship, to near-total equality, to proven persecution on occasion.” Al-Jubeh, however, reaches a common conclusion shared by many scholars: “But the same observation can be made with respect to Muslims and Christians. During the difficult periods—those, for example, during which a corrupt governor was installed in Jerusalem—all the residents of the city suffered the same degree of arbitrariness and persecution” (211). Disharmony, Al-Jubeh asserts, was more visible between Arab Jews and Ashkenazi Jews than between Jews and Muslims. Ashkenazi Jews began to arrive in the eighteenth century and unlike the Arab Jews of Palestine, they sought the official protection of foreign countries including Russia, America, and England, among others. Unlike Ashkenazi Jews, Arab Jews were well-integrated in their local surroundings and many preferred to live in “the proximity of Muslims than to their coreligionists of a different group” especially Ashkenazi Jews (212). Venturing in a similar vein, Yitzhak Laor points out that although “there were Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews in the country

while in Ein Sinya is similar, in terms of the fairly harmonious coexistence, to the fictional world Fawal depicts in his novel.

In terms of Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations, Palestine was not an exceptional case. In *A Border Passage*, Ahmed speaks of Christians, Jews, and Muslims living together and developing close friendships in Egypt before Zionism and Arab nationalism became bitter realities. She speaks of the Christian Palestinian Said and Jewish Egyptian Alteras families being close friends with her own family up until Arabism and Zionism clashed. Similarly, in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Kahf tell us about Khadra visiting Syria and realizing that Jewish Syrians still live with Christian and Muslim Syrians. Khadra refers to them by “Arab Jews,” and prior to her visit, she knew that they live in Syria, but she never thought of them as part of the Syrian cultural or national milieu because of the conflict with the Zionists over Palestine (305-06).

In Ardallah, the fortunes of the town begin to shift with the arrival of nine Yiddish-speaking Jewish Zionists who, “dressed in identical khaki clothes” and carrying “duffle bags,” go to the farthest corners of the town to survey its topography and assess its strategic location (ch. 2). Ardallah, according to the narrator, “was not only strategic—it was essential to whoever wanted to dominate the region.” These and other Zionists are “bad news for all” Palestinians, Yousif warns. In agreement, Isaac reveals that his “parents are afraid of them” because “they’d bring nothing but trouble to all of us who live here” (Fawal, ch. 4). In expressing this fear of rupturing the societal peace the town enjoys through Yousif, but more importantly the Jewish

before Zionism—in Jerusalem, in Tiberias, and in Hebron—there was no nationalist or cultural dimension to the relations between them, no links of ‘a shared past,’ or of ‘a common language.’” “At most,” Laor adds, “there were religious connections between them. And this aspect was also problematic from the outset” (149-50). Jews, nonetheless, were a central component of broader Palestinian community (Al-Jubeh 212-15). To drive his point home, Al-Jubeh concludes that “the Jewish presence in Jerusalem was the longest and most durable during the periods of Muslim rule.” Historical accounts arguably demonstrate “an uninterrupted [Jewish] presence of seven centuries under successive Muslim powers. Nowhere else in the world—not even in pre-Islamic Palestine—has Judaism known such continuity” (217).

Palestinian Isaac, Fawal evokes the documented Middle Eastern and North African Jewish questioning of the Zionist project in Palestine and Zionism itself as it sought to impose on them an ethnocentric identity and to separate them from the geographic and cultural milieus where they have already established roots.

Isaac's and his family's expressed fears of Zionism are not unusual statements. Historically, it was almost the norm among most Middle Eastern and North African Jewish communities to publicly oppose Zionism and its Jewish state enterprise. Iraqi Jews, for example, made their position crystal clear. Ariel Sabar cites Iraq's chief rabbi, Hakham Sassoon Kadoori; the Baghdadi Jewish leader Menahem Salim Daniel; Iraqi Jewish scholar Ezra Haddad; and the Baghdadi Jewish leader Yosef El Kabir who all declared a similar position on Zionism and the Jewish state. Like many Jewish leaders and intellectuals in Iraq, Kadoori "took pains to distance" himself "from Zionist movements in Europe and Palestine." "Even if some Iraqi Jews felt intellectual sympathy with the messianic notion of a Jewish homeland," Sabar adds, "they were not particularly eager to leave comfortable lives for an uncertain future. Nor did they have any inclination to stir resentment among Muslim friends, neighbors, and business associates." Sabar reports that Daniel "pleaded with the secretary of the Zionist Organization in London to slow down." Daniel stated in a letter, "I cannot help considering the establishment of a recognized Zionist Bureau in Baghdad as deleteriously affecting the good relations of the Mesopotamian Jew with his fellow citizens." Arab-Jewish relation in Iraq, Haddad wrote, is harmonious: "When [the Arab Jew] speaks of the Arab land, he speaks of homelands which from time immemorial surrounded him with generosity and affluence—homelands which he considered and continues to consider as oases in the midst of a veritable desert of injustices and oppressions." In particular for Haddad, his Jewish identity cannot be isolated from its Arab roots. "An earlier article by

Haddad,” Sabar adds, “carried the pithy title ‘We Were Arabs Before We Became Jews’ (qtd. in Sabar 63). The injustices and oppressions which Haddad speaks of are in Europe. In 1938, El Kabir, Sabar mentions, strongly opposed the Balfour Declaration on the ground that the “problem which the Balfour Declaration purported to solve is and remains a European problem” (64).¹¹

On many levels, the fictional local community of Ardallah is as closely connected as many actual locations the historical records speak of. The three local faith groups share cultural practices, social norms, and respect one another, but as the colonial forces intrude, they gradually, but steadily, disrupt this coexistence and change the composition of the community. In the earlier festivity scene from Ardallah, one does not sense any abnormal anxieties about the local religious difference in town. Shortly, however, the physical presence of high-ranking British officers who visit with the community to congratulate the Safi family on their new villa brings to the fore the topic of the British-Zionist alliance and the brewing conflict in British-Mandate Palestine. The omniscient narrator reveals Yousif’s troubled thoughts and emotions:

These men [i.e. British officials] had been to Yousif’s house before on religious holidays. Still, he felt conflicting emotions at seeing the Britishmen again. He knew the troubles brewing between the Arabs and the Jews would not be there had Britain not acquiesced to the Zionist demands. (ch. 1)

¹¹ In the dissertation, whenever I use the term “Arab Jew,” I do so consciously to object to structuralist interpretations and in favor of a poststructuralist position. I follow the lead of a number of Arab-Jewish Israeli intellectuals who self-consciously utilize the term to challenge years of official Israeli policies of cultural cleansing: the systematic erasure of the “Arab” component—be it cultural, political, or nationalist—of the identity of Middle Eastern and North African Jews who constitute a Jewish majority in Israel. For a sample of these intellectuals, please see the documentaries *Forgetting Baghdad* and *They Were Promised the Sea*. For more information on the different usages of the term “Arab Jew” in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, please consult the publications of Yehouda Shenhav, particularly *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (2006).

Here, Yousif is referring to British politicians' interest in creating an environment conducive to the establishment of a Zionist state. Arthur Balfour issued the infamous Balfour Declaration in November 1917. According to this official document, the Crown promised to aid in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

As soon as colonialist British Mandate rulers put this promise to practice, they began to gradually harm a well-established local cultural identity Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Palestinians have developed, drastically changing the face of historical Palestine.¹² According to Said et al., the forced transformation of Palestine from a predominantly majority-Palestinian land to a Jewish state with a small Arab minority is indebted to the British Mandate and its national home policy, "officially inaugurated by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which espoused the twin Zionist objectives of building up Jewish presence while administering Arab presence in Palestine" (242). A few British officials serving under the Mandate administration mounted sharp critique of these British schemes. In 1923, for example, Lt.-Col. W. F. Stirling criticized the unethical schemes of the British-Zionist alliance. Stirling believed that it "was clearly not right to inject a foreign sovereign state into the heart of a group of Arab countries; nor was it right to displace an existing population against its will in order to make room for migrants from

¹² Tension, especially in major cities, between Jews, Christians, and Muslims became visible after the intrusion of European ideas and forces. Particularly, the introduction of European nationalism triggered tension among the different religious groups. Here, I do not intend to imply that tension, and even violence, was unknown before these intrusions took place. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that a reasonable harmony was identifiable in many rural and urban centers prior to the advancement of European political ideas and physical colonial encroachment. In the case of Palestine, the cities of Jerusalem and Jaffa are two examples of increased friction, unlike Haifa or Nazareth. In *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Hebron*, Menachem Klein contends that "[o]nly at a few points in time did the conflict [between Arab and Jews] become total." The day-to-day interactions between Jews and Arabs prior to the national struggle are indicative of a common local identity and reasonable coexistence. Approximately "toward the end of the nineteenth century," Klein argues, "a local Palestinian identity began to form, an identity in which Jews and Arabs were partners. It did not arrive from the outside, like Arab nationalism and Zionism, but grow out of the daily lives of the country's inhabitants." But, Klein continues, the contemporary struggle for nation building has disrupted this coexistence: "The national struggle broke out . . . , impairing the previous web of relations and reorganizing daily life" ("About this Book"). [This is a Kindle Book.]

abroad; but there was no objection to doing what we [the British] set out to do.” By establishing “a cultural and religious base or home for the Jews scattered throughout the world,” Stirling emphasizes, “it was they [Arabs], it should be remembered, who during the past thousand years protected the Jews, while the Christians in Europe were oppressing them” (235). Stirling made his statement in 1923 and just a short time after he was relieved of his duties as the Governor of Jaffa. He was dismissed because he officially protested the vague language of the Balfour Declaration which worked in favor of the Jewish Zionists and their colonial project.

In *On the Hills of God*, Zionism steadily becomes almost a major character, precisely the antagonist, who changes the lives, fortunes, and hopes of the Palestinians forever. Disguised as European tourists or Arab Palestinian farmers, Zionists are seen surveying the mostly-Christian town of Ardallah in preparation of the takeover, spying on the local resistance, recruiting Jewish Arab Palestinians, and eventually ethnically cleansing Palestinian villages, towns, and cities. As Zionist violence breaks out in the novel, like in the massacre of Deir Yasin,¹³ the question of Zionist ideo-theology surfaces. It is through Yousif’s eyes that the readers see the approaching threat of Zionism. In one scene, Yousif reads breaking news aloud: “the population of about five hundred, no one was spared to tell the tale. So far the British police have been barred from entering. It is generally believed,” Yousif goes on, “that the Zionist invaders were, in the words of a high official, ‘still mopping up.’ They needed time to remove the litter and wreckage they have wrought for this peaceful, defenseless Arab village” of Deir Yasin (ch. 17). As the horrors of the massacre begin to unfold, news outlets reveal that Palestinian women were raped “before

¹³ Deir Yasin massacre happened on April 9, 1948 when members of Irgun, Palmach, and Lehi military organizations ethnically cleansed the Palestinian village of Deir Yasin. The massacre is one of many.

they were disfigured and ultimately murdered.” More violence was directed at the most vulnerable. Pregnant Palestinian women

. . . were slit open and embryos were scattered on the floor. One woman was cut by a bayonet from her womb to her mouth. Babies’ heads were crushed like chestnuts. Eyes were knocked out and left hanging like large marbles. One man was burned to ashes in his sleep. His bones and right foot were the only parts which had escaped the blaze. Children were dissected and their young flesh mercilessly scraped off their tender bones. (ch. 17)

The chilling descriptions send a surge of shock and anger throughout Ardallah. Many of the residents listen in utter disbelief, hearing that the Red Cross observers “. . . recalled the holocaust. According to eye witnesses, the ghost of Nazism could be found in every street of Deir Yasin, nay, in every home. Shocking evidence is there for the whole world to see.” In short, the narrator comments, “Hitler’s victims have turned into victimizers. At their hand Deir Yasin has become a crematory, a cemetery, and a blot on the Jewish conscience forever.” Yousif is in utter shock and in loss of words. In his town, as the news of the massacre spreads, he “could see women in the crowd shutting their ears with their palms. Others were leaning against their husbands, crying. Men were chewing their lips. All stared. All seemed visited by a nightmare.” Shortly, the “atmosphere was electrified. Live wires hummed. Wild angry voices rose from the crowd. Shrieks punctured the air.” How could they, ill-prepared and too trusting, “meet the Zionist ferocity that threatened their very existence” becomes an urgent question the town’s residents repeatedly fail to answer (ch. 17). Engulfed in unidentifiable emotional mix and overtaken by anger, fear, helplessness, and despair, a Christian and Muslim mob begins to form. Jewish Palestinian houses and businesses quickly become its target.

Fawal, I argue, depicts actual acts of ethnic cleansing. Some conscientious Israeli soldiers historically testified to having eye-witnessed similar horrors in 1948. One Israeli veteran who was present during the destruction of the Palestinian village of Dueima testifies to the horrors its Palestinian inhabitants faced at the hands of Zionist troops. The veteran offers the following graphic account:

To kill the [Palestinian] children they fractured their heads with sticks. There was not one house without corpses. The [Palestinian Arab] men and women of the village were pushed into houses without food or water. Then the saboteurs [i.e. Zionist soldiers] came to dynamite the houses. One commander ordered a soldier to bring two women into a house he was about to blow up. . . . Another soldier prided himself upon having raped an Arab woman before shooting her to death. Another Arab woman with her newborn baby was made to clean the place for a couple of days, and then, they shot her and her baby. Educated and well-mannered commanders who were considered “good guys” . . . became base murderers, and this not in the storm of battle, but as a method of expulsion and extermination. The fewer the Arabs who remain, the better. (Cited in Rokach, 5)

These Zionist acts of terror were not as random or isolated incidents. They were part of a systematic program to empty the land of Palestinians. Fawal’s depiction of the horrors Deir Yasin met matches the description of the Zionist massacre in Dueima. It also stays faithful to the documented massacre of Deir Yasin on 9 April, 1948 when 254 Palestinian men, women, and children were butchered by Zionist forces. Fahimi Zidan, a Deir Yasin child survivor who hid under the bodies of his parents recalls the massacre: the Zionists “line[d] up” the villagers “against the wall,” then opened fire at his “father,” “mother,” “grandfather and grandmother,”

“uncles and aunts and some of their children.” Zidan mentions Halim Eid, another survivor who testifies to seeing a soldier “shoot a bullet into the neck of” Zidan’s pregnant sister before “he cut her stomach open with a butcher knife” (cited in Hirst 249-50). According to Richard Catling, a British officer, “many sexual atrocities were committed by the attacking Jews. Many young school girls were raped and later slaughtered. . . . Many infants were also butchered” (cited in Hirst 250). The attackers, according to Jacques de Reynier of the International committee of the Red Cross, “were young . . . men and women, armed to the teeth.” Their “cutlasses . . . still dripping with blood,” de Reynier adds, these attackers “[were] obviously performing” their “task very conscientiously.” After examining the mutilated bodies of the Palestinian villagers, de Reynier observes that “everywhere it was the same horrible sight” and the “gang was admirably disciplined and only acted under orders” (cited in Hirst 252). Deir Yasin and Dueima massacres are two out of 31 massacres that took place between December 1947 and January 1949. Commenting on many of these atrocities, Aharon Cizling, Israeli Minister of Agriculture, expressed his shock on 17 November 1948 in a Cabinet meeting. Cizling stated, “I often disagree when the term Nazi was applied to the British . . . even though the British committed Nazi crimes. But now Jews too have behaved like Nazis and my entire being is shaken” (cited in Segev 26). In recreating the massacre of Deir Yasin, Fawal evokes these testimonies.

In *On the Hills of God*, the more Zionist violence the Ardallah town’s people hear about or witness, the faster the religious/ethnic difference becomes the primary marker of identity. In the case of Ardallah, distrust and anger towards the Jewish Palestinian families arises after Zionists massacre the residents of Deir Yasin. Local Jewish Palestinian families run for their lives after some of the town’s people conflate “Zionist” with “Jewish” and therefore hold the local Jewish families—indigenous families they have lived beside perhaps for generations—

responsible for the Zionist atrocities. In *A Border Passage*, Leila Ahmed speaks of a similar conflation taking place in Egypt in the early 1950s. This reactionary assumption shatters the Ardallah community: treated unjustly, local Jewish Palestinian families, especially the Sha'lans, are forced out of town, even though the Sha'lans sincerely oppose Zionism and its ethnocentric state enterprise. According to Yousif, "the Sha'lans ate like Arabs and sang like Arabs. Moshe Sha'lan was "so tall and strong of build that he could pass for a brother or a cousin of the Arab near him" and his wife "looked like all the middle-aged Arab women who abandoned all pretense at youth and became plump from rice, bread, and potatoes." The Sha'lans were so different from the blond, blue-eyed Zionists" and according to Isaac, his family were scared of Zionists because of the instability and "trouble" they bring to "all of us who live here" (ch. 4). In drawing attention to this mistreatment of Jewish Palestinians, Fawal clearly does not absolve the doers of guilt or responsibility. Historically, Arab mobs and Arab politicians compulsively and ignorantly conflated Zionism with Jewishness, thus victimizing Middle Eastern and North African Jewish populations across the Middle East and some North African countries. As a result of this reactionary conflation, hundreds of thousands of Middle Eastern and North African Jews were historically uprooted and forced to settle in Israel.¹⁴

¹⁴ Zionist circles also played a major role in their displacement. Iraqi Jews, according to Arab-Jewish Israeli intellectuals Shimon Ballas, Moussa Houry, Samir Naqqash, and Sami Michael, were well-integrated in the Iraqi Arab culture, were too involved in the revered Iraqi anticolonial and anti-Zionist Communist Party, and lived comfortably in Iraq until the underground Zionist Organization in Iraq bombed Jewish neighborhoods. The director of *Forget Baghdad*, Samir, who interviewed the four intellectuals concludes that all the Jewish Israeli of Iraqi descent with whom he spoke believe that Zionist agents were behind the use of terror, forcing them out of Iraq. The interviews are the focus of the documentary *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection* (2002). Another, yet more recent, documentary that criticizes Zionism for disturbing the organic existence many Arab Jewish communities had across the Middle East is *They Were Promised the Sea* (2013). In *Ben-Gurion's Scandals: How the Hagannah and the Mossad Eliminated Jews* (1992), Naeim Giladi argues that Iraq was not the enemy of Iraqi Jews, but Zionism was.

On the level of individual relations, even the three friends get tangled in the conflict. In the midst of the reactionary rioting in Ardallah, Yousif sees Amin destroying Jewish Palestinian property. As he attempts to stop him, Yousif senses a drastic change in their relationship. Amin was “calm but drained.” He was “formal” and dry in his tone (ch. 17). At this moment, their relationship experiences its first rupture. Yousif “walks away in stupor” and begins to process the Deir Yasin massacre in the context of all that is happening around him. The narrator reports on his tumultuous, yet prophetic, thoughts:

The words of the announcer rang in his ears. The images flashed before his eyes.

What madness! What heinous crimes! Was this the Wandering Jew’s way of returning to the Promised Land? Was this the fulfillment of biblical prophecy?

How inhumane! How immoral! (Fawal, ch. 17)

Through this direct reference to restoring world’s Jews to Zion and the implicit allusion to messianic dispensationalism,¹⁵ the novel draws our attention to a fundamentalist Evangelical

¹⁵ My understanding of “dispensationalism” is drawn from the Clifford A. Kiracofe’s *Dark Crusade: Christian Zionism and US Foreign Policy*, James Barr’s *The Bible in the Modern World*, Nur Masalha’s *The Bible and Zionism*, and Grace Halsell’s *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*. Elsewhere in the dissertation, I also occasionally allude to other scholars. “Dispensationalism, or dispensational premillennialism,” according to Kiracofe, is “an eschatological belief system and ideology, based upon distinctive interpretations of biblical prophecy. This ideology arose in the UK in early nineteenth century and migrated to the USA in the mid-nineteenth century.” The doctrinal theology of dispensationalism “holds that human history is divided into seven periods and that ‘signs of the times’ today indicate that mankind has entered the final period, the Last Days, or End of Times. The dispensationalist world view interprets current events and the world situation in light of biblical prophecy. Contemporary Christian Zionists believe that the End Times are marked by the birth of the modern state of Israel in 1948.” Dispensationalism “doctrinally . . . specifically requires the physical and political restoration of the entire Holy Land, geographic Palestine, to the Jewish people as an exclusive possession, in order to advance” its “eschatological scenario.” Kiracofe emphasizes that “[t]hose holding dispensationalist beliefs form a militant doctrinal theopolitical pro-Israel faction within American Protestantism” (xiv). This faction is substantial and is constantly growing. It, in fact, penetrates deep into the heart of American religious, economic, and political life. Par excellence, writes Kevin Phillips, the strong presence and influence of Christian Zionists among other religiously conservative members of the Republican Party (GOP) “has already made the GOP into America’s first religious party” (xiv). This growing “political marriage” between “Christian leaders” and “the more conservative wing of the Republican Party,” warns former President Jimmy Carter, “is in political conflict with . . . the separation of church and state” (39).

Christian-Jewish Zionist alliance whose goal is to “gather the ten million Jews in the world and settle them” in Palestine. Many of the characters understand that Zionists and Zionist settlers are not necessarily Jewish (ch. 4). As one of Fawal’s characters puts it, Zionists “want to build an empire stretching from the Euphrates in Iraq to the Nile in Egypt. Their strategy is this: take what you can get and then ask for more” (ch. 7). These suggested boundaries are Biblical in their roots. These and other statements evoke Zionist sources.¹⁶ But they also hint at messianic

Dispensationalists, Masalha writes, “hold that there are several ages of God’s history. Each age is a *dispensation* from God. The ages are named after Old Testament figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. These ages are followed by the Christian or ‘church age’, which culminates in the messianic and ‘New Heaven and New Earth’ ages” (124). As such, dispensationalism, according to Barr, “is a totally fundamentalist scheme. . . . Dispensationalism . . . though it may say with general fundamentalism that the Bible is in principle a human book as well as divinely-inspired holy scripture, in fact goes a good deal farther in treating it as a direct transcript of the divine will.” It asserts that “the surface markings of the biblical texts are a direct transcript of God’s will and future plans” (197-98). Therefore, “Christian Zionists—like Jewish Zionists,” writes Masalha, “equate 1948 as another ‘Exodus’, a return to the ‘promised land’ in fulfillment of biblical prophecies and Divine blessing” (114). Dispensationalists mark two future cataclysmic events: the battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming. Obsessed with the Armageddon and the Second Coming, dispensationalists do not hesitate to plot and execute plans bent on the annihilation of the unsaved others. “Convinced that a nuclear Armageddon is an inevitable event within the divine scheme of things, many evangelical dispensationalists,” Halsell writes, “have committed themselves to a course for Israel that, by their own admission, will lead directly to a holocaust indescribably more savage and widespread than any vision of carnage that could have generated in Adolf Hitler’s criminal mind” (195). The Middle East, especially Palestine, occupies a special place in dispensationalist doctrinal theology. As they wholeheartedly believe in the “*inerrancy* of the Bible,” dispensationalists believe it “provide[s] a ‘road map’, not for peace in the Middle East, but for future turbulence” (Masalha 125). They claim to love and support Israel because Jews and Evangelical Christian Zionists are one in the fight against Muslims. Together, they will aid in the slaughter the Muslims and other nonbelievers on “Israel’s soil” and the ensuing violence, to quote Gershom Gorenberg, will be “so terrible that the dry river beds will, they predict, fill with rivers of blood” (6). Eventually, even Jews will be slaughtered and the State of Israel will be erased. Indeed, dispensationalism is fundamentally militant, genocidal, and hegemonic. According to its doctrinal theology, Jesus will come back to “‘rapture’ true Christians into the upper air, while the rest of humankind” will be “slaughtered below.” Only “144,000 Jews would bow down before Jesus and be saved, but the rest of Jewry would perish in the mother of all holocausts” (cited in Masalha 128).

Heavily invested in the violence of the State of Israel, dispensationalism is a serious threat to regional and world peace. Masalha critiques dispensationalism on the following accounts: it theologically justifies “racism and the denial of basic human rights,” “supports the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians,” “endorses the building of Jewish settlements,” “incites religious fanaticism by supporting the building of a Jewish Temple on Mount Moriah,” “dismisses moderate Jewish opinion willing to negotiate land for peace,” “and advocates an apocalyptic eschatology likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy” (130).

¹⁶ After securing international confirmation of the Jewish right to conquer Palestine, Zionists, Herzl projected, would take over the land, allowing only Jews to settle it. Herzl’s Zionism dreamt of an ethnic Jewish state extending geographically from the Nile to the Euphrates (Rodinson 29). It “desire[d] to make the largest possible number of Jews come to” the Jewish state and it planned to forcefully extend the borders of this state “within all the territory of the Israel of the time of David and Solomon” (Rodinson 30). For Herzl’s project—i.e. establishing a Zionist state in historical Palestine—to see the light, ethnic cleansing, apartheid, and displacement of indigenous Palestinians were

Evangelical Christian complicity, which was a distinct but significant religious idea that became important in the events of the period.

A Messianic Evangelical Christian American Tradition of Appropriating Palestine

The earliest modern waves of Evangelical Christian travelers to Palestine came from England and many of these pilgrims were driven to it primarily because of their messianic beliefs and partly because of the growing tension, and competition, between Darwinist evolution and creationism. Here, I do not intend to give my readers the impression that, at the turn of the century, all religious travelers to the Holy Land, let alone religious believers in England, were creationists, but, I rather suggest that traditionalists who were actively working to counter new discoveries in geology and evolutionary biology took special interest in the Holy Land, its geography, geology, archeological sites, and the indigenous lifestyles they expected to come across because they thought the findings would reinforce the Bible's historical accuracy, and by implication, should prove the factuality of Genesis.¹⁷ Proving the truth of Genesis would have the potential of challenging the emergent evolutionary science's dependence on the eons being

applied. Herzl, who was in favor of occupying Palestine over Argentina or Uganda, fervently argues, in *The Jewish State*, that when Zionists take over Palestine, they "should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism. We should as a neutral State remain in contact with all Europe, which would have to guarantee our existence" (96). The paradox of maintaining a European identity, considering the discrimination Jews received there in the first place, was necessary to eventually physically appropriate then expropriate Palestine with the blessing of the international (read Western) community (101). "Our first objective," Herzl writes, "is . . . supremacy, assured to us by international law, over a portion of the globe sufficiently large to satisfy our just requirements" (141). In David Ben-Gurion's vision, the soon-to-be-established exclusively Jewish state ought to not be contained in spatial geography or be equally inclusive of the indigenous Palestinians (4).

¹⁷ Similarly, the Israeli Occupation of the rest of Palestine, especially Jerusalem, in 1967 triggered a wave of jubilation among Evangelical Christian Zionists who saw in the Zionist conquest of Jerusalem a validation of the authenticity of the Bible. Scholar Nur Masalha reports on L. Nelson Bell, Billy Graham's father-in-law and the editor of *Christianity Today*—an important American Evangelical Christian Zionist publishing outlet—celebrating the 1967 Occupation. In an editorial, Bell joyously argues, the fact that "for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible" (cited in Masalha 109). In the contemporary debate over, and the re-imagining of Palestine by American Evangelical Christian Zionists, the competition between creationists and Darwinists still plays an undeniable role.

proposed by the new geology. Indeed, in his essay “The Invention of the Holy Land,” Elias Sanbar contends that the European exploration in Palestine had as its “starting point” the “controversy between the partisans of the theory of Darwinian evolution and the Anglican Church, whose dogma maintained that the Bible was not only a source of faith but also a historical narrative, with the Genesis story its founding episode.” “The confrontation between Science and Faith,” Sanbar adds, “shifted naturally to the physical locations in which the Church, through archeological excavations and observation of the ways and customs of the Palestinian population, could prove that Darwin had erred” (292). This competition between the Darwinist and Creationist enterprises had implications for the Palestinians. In the largely creationist travel writing tradition, and, I would also add, later the cultural conservative narratives of the clash, “anteriority, redemption of the land, [and/or] illegitimate presence of Palestinians in Palestine” quickly became core values (Sanbar 296). The same objectives, dynamics, and values, I propose, were also active in the American context around the same times in secular and religious travel writing phenomena. It is also useful to note that Evangelical Christian Zionists—who have become a mighty force on national and global levels, especially in the twenty-first century U.S.,¹⁸ and who unequivocally support Zionist settler colonialism—are in fact creationists. Darwish herself is an Evangelical Christian Zionist. Nineteenth-century creationist vs. Darwinist

¹⁸ American Evangelical Christian Zionists and dispensationalists had two of their golden periods once during the Ronald Reagan administration in the 1980s and another during George W. Bush’s terms in 2000 and 2004. “In the 1980 presidential elections,” Masalha writes, “80 per cent of the US evangelicals supported the conservative wing of the Republican Party, and Ronald Regan in particular. . . . In 2000 George W. Bush received roughly 50 million votes—30 million of them from evangelical Christians, of whom approximately 15 million were dispensationalists. The percentage of Christian Zionists voting for Bush in 2004 was similar” (116). In each of these successful bids for presidency, according to Scott W. Hibbard, “the Party’s electoral strategy relied on a mix of patriotism, Evangelical Christianity, and divisive social issues to appeal to the populist sentiments of the white Christian majority” (208). The Republicans, who successfully nurtured and reaped “a conservative majority through appeals to race, religion, and culture” during the administrations of Reagan and Bush attacked liberal values (208). “Liberal conceptions of religion and society,” Hibbard points out, “were characterized as culturally inauthentic, as were such key features of the open society as dissent and tolerance of diversity” (209).

confrontation on Palestinian geography should, therefore, be relevant to any contemporary understanding of the clash discourse and of cultural conservative works like Darwish's as well. In this discourse, the imagined clash is ironically between a largely secular, rational, Darwinist West and a radically religious, emotional, and creationist Islam.

The clash between Science and the Church among Nineteenth-century English circles indeed echoes another among nineteenth-century Americans who travelled to Palestine. Both secular and religious American travelers examined the Palestinians and their land through the prism of either science or religion. Besides their prism of preference, each applied the lens of Orientalism and colonial dominance. In this section of the chapter, however, I limit my discussion to Evangelical Christians who supported what I will call a scripture-motivated ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Americans, including Levi Parson, Pliny Fisk, George Adams, Edward Robinson, Robert Laird Stewart, and William McClure Thomson travelled to Palestine to establish Protestant missionary centers or erect millennialist colonies or chart the land for Jewish settlements in anticipation of the Second Coming.¹⁹ Among the ranks of these travelers were laymen, theologians, politicians, journalists, novelists, and academics. The moment they came in contact with the physical Palestine and its inhabitants, they forced upon Palestinian geography their preconceived ideological interpretations and hegemonic colonial representations. Unsurprisingly, the Puritan heritage, especially Cotton Mather's notion of "Christianography," informed Christian American travel reconstructions of Palestine. This inherited sense of religious mission and nationalist pride, Hilton Obenzinger rightly argues, "provides a dialectical tension

¹⁹ There were also Western agencies active in nineteenth-century Palestine. These include The Palestine Exploration Fund, The American Society for Palestine Exploration, and The German Palestine Society. They participated in imagining and restructuring Palestine.

that makes Palestine, the New Holy Land's Other, a key site for constructing settler-colonial identities" (25).

Indeed, the majority of Evangelical Christian American travelers to the Holy Land arrived with preconceived notions of what the land and its inhabitants should look like. They imagined Palestine through the lens of Biblical and colonialist narratives. For example, in his 1899 study entitled *The Land of Israel: A Text Book on the Physical and Historical Geography of the Holy Land Embodying the Results of Recent Research*, Professor Robert Laird Stewart explicates his methodology of studying the history, geography, and archeology of Palestine. Stewart writes: "It seems reasonable . . . that if we are to study a Sacred Geography, confessedly based upon a Sacred Book, we should give to the statements of that book the *first* place in authority and importance." In that sense, as the land is studied and rediscovered, the findings are used to validate, and revive, the historical Biblical narrative concerning "the promise given to Abraham and his descendants" (6). Unlike the Puritans who became the metaphorical Jews of the American holy land—the chosen people in a new promised land—the Evangelical American travelers to Palestine were focused on restoring Jews to Zion. Applying colonialist Evangelical Christian historiography in order to appropriate a Palestinian geography, Stewart's study demarcates Palestine based on imaginary Biblically-defined boundaries and consequently offers the land to the world's Jews to possess exclusively (10-12). Therefore, Stewart's delineation of the geography and topography of Ottoman Palestine Judaizes the land. His research method follows a quasi-scientific Biblical genealogy: it imposes Hebrew Bible narratives, renames modern geography and urban locations, erases the modern Palestinians and their presence, and finally inscribes Jews as the tenured tenants. Full of violence and erasures, Stewart's narrative neither allows nor permits Palestinians to speak; Palestine itself becomes the Judeo-Christian

“land of the Patriarchs,” “the Prophets,” “the Sacred Poets” and “the Apostles,” “David and Solomon,” and “a host of saintly men and women whose names are familiar to us as household words. But more than all it is the land where the Son of God was made flesh and dwelt among men” (57). Palestine is *not* the land of the “Moslem hordes from the desert . . . [Nor is it the property of] the Arabs or their successors, and co-religionists, the Turks” (56). These Muslims are heathens, their faith false. The message is simple: under nomadic Palestinian and Muslim Ottoman rule, the land fell to ruins, but it will prosper once it fully falls into the rightful and righteous hands of European Christian colonists who will restore it to the Jews. With this restoration, the land will regain fertility and re-earn its lost holiness.

This core belief in restoring the land in order to accelerate the Second Coming has not faded away. It very prominently shapes the personal narrative of Nonie Darwish. Just like Stewart, Darwish at some point travels to the Holy Land. While there, she basks in the greatness of the almost-realized Jewish dominion over historical Palestine because in her heart, she believes God promised his chosen people a permanent tenure in the chosen land. Not unlike the Evangelical Christian dispensationalist Stewart, Darwish, now an Evangelical Christian Zionist and an American traveler in the Holy Land herself, wholeheartedly aspires for the day when world’s Jews will dominate over every inch of Biblical Palestine. Darwish captures this ideological belief in her autobiography:

Now as I was entering this holy city [Jerusalem], I could not help but think and long for the day when the holy land can be made truly holy by giving the Jews the respect and security they deserve in their homeland. (237)

The statement registers two polemics: the land is currently only partially holy because of the Palestinian presence, but will regain full holiness the moment Jews takeover all of it. The

indigenous Palestinians stand in the way of achieving this goal. Displacing them to make way for more Western settlers is the promise Darwish yearns for. By expressing this statement of ideological belief while physically present in the Holy Land, Darwish continues the American tradition of appropriating Palestine. She joins the coterie of nineteenth-century American travelers to Palestine who, in their writing, misrepresented the land and its indigenous people, exercised erasures on its and their bodies, and imposed alien inscriptions.

Messianic Evangelical Christianity and Zionism

Stewart's understanding of Palestine and the Palestinians corresponded with a general belief among a transnational body of European Evangelical Christian Zionists who mythicized Palestine into "a country without a people" waiting to be restored to "a people without a country." This myth, which since the late nineteenth century has become a fundamental component of Zionist ideology, was in fact first coined by the British Christian Restorationist Alexander Keith in 1844. Keith writes:

The Israelites . . . are . . . wanderers throughout the world, who have nowhere found a place on which the sole of their foot could rest—a people without a country; even as their own land, as subsequently to be shown, is in a great measure a country without a people. The one and the other have been smitten with a curse. But let that curse be taken away—let the Lord remember His people and remember the land, and there shall be no more scattering nor wandering, no more desolation, no more separation between Zion and her children. (52)

Preceding Stewart by more than half a century, Keith perceived of Palestine as a cursed empty land and only through restoring it to world's Jews, God's wandering children, will the land come

to life again. Stewart follows in the footsteps of Keith, repeating the same myth of an empty Palestine. Later in the twentieth century, Jewish Zionists embraced the Evangelical Christian myth as it proved to be the perfect material to validate physical conquest and colonization.²⁰ In that sense, modern Zionism is hugely indebted to this nineteenth-century restorationism or doctrinal dispensationalism. The same “group of evangelical English Protestants that flourished in England in the 1840s,” Israeli historian Anita Shapira writes, “passed this notion [of a country without a people to a people without a country] on to Jewish circles” (15). In that sense, two traditions converge. Indeed, according to the Jewish scholar Abram S. Isaacs, “Zionism was not unrelated to restorationism, a Christian doctrine that aspired to convert all the Jews” (cited in Oren 275). “In the interests of gaining international support, political Zionism,” scholar Nur Masalha argues, “appealed to the biblical narrative to legitimize the Zionist enterprise,” in spite of the fact that “it was basically a secular, settler colonial movement, with nonreligious and frequently anti-religious dispositions” (1-2). Masalha adds: “political Zionism looked for ‘historical roots’ and sought to reinterpret distant pasts in the light of newly invented nationalist ideologies” (2).²¹ It is worth noting that the foundational political Zionism of late nineteenth and

²⁰ In *Palestine: A Personal History*, Karl Sabbagh mistakenly attributes the invention of the myth “[a] land without people to a people without land” to the Zionist Israel Zangwill (6). Zangwill rather adopted Keith’s coinage in 1901, a Christian-coined myth which Sabbagh is correct to highlight “serves the useful purpose of implanting the false impression that Palestine was uninhabited when Jews decided to agitate for it to become their state” (6). Zangwill was born in 1864 and began circulating the myth of an empty Palestine in 1901.

²¹ Zionist and pro-Zionist lobbyists harnessed the Biblical associations Americans used to understand the Middle East in the early 1920s, so as to gather more momentum for their proposed state in Palestine. “Historian Irvine Anderson,” Jacobs writes, “has argued that two influential interpretations of the Bible emerged in the early twentieth century, both of which assisted Zionist objectives in Palestine.” The first interpretation “relied on ‘liberal historical/critical viewpoint’ that ‘did not read the Bible ‘as factual history,’” while the second one was a “‘fundamentalist literal/prophetic view’ in which the Bible was read as ‘the inerrant word of God.’” The liberal interpretation “suggest[ed] that Jews had a historical place in the Holy Land and thus made their return to Palestine seem a reasonable proposition,” while the fundamentalist interpretation “predicted a ‘Second Coming of Christ and the End Times’ following the return of Jews to the area of ancient Israel, and thus required support for the Zionist cause” (193). The liberal one did not require support for Zionism while the second one did; however, both became instrumental in advancing the Zionist cause. What I wish to highlight here is that although many Zionists and Jews

early twentieth centuries was secular. But, according to Masalha, since the establishment of Israel in 1948, a sacred Jewish Zionism has been on the rise (8). Secular Zionists have utilized the Bible as “‘history’ rather than theology or a source of belief,” Masalha highlights; “[p]aradoxically, however, the secular Zionist claim to Palestine is based on the biblical paradigm and the notion that God had given the land to the Jews” (16).²²

Messianic Evangelicalism, Politics, and Empire

In *The Hills of God*, Ardallah characters criticize Zionism and the European powers that stand behind it, especially the British. Historically, the European support for Zionism in the first half of the twentieth century was the outcome of a number of factors. One of them is an alliance

consider Zionism a liberationist political movement, the foundations of Zionism are rooted in ideo-theological and colonial claims. Although I develop this point throughout the chapter, it is useful to reference Yitzhak Laor. The tragedy of Zionism, Laor observes, is many fold: “Zionism thought it would politically resolve the exile within Europe—Jews as ‘Orientals inside the Occident’—not just by an Exodus, by going elsewhere, but by going to the heart of the colonial hinterland of Europe, the East.” Its plan was “not to become part of the East” but rather “to become representatives of the West ‘over there,’ inside Europe” (6)

²² Whether secular or religious, all strands of Zionism rely on the Bible. For example, in spite of his secular Zionism, David Ben-Gurion, the Father of the Nation and the first Israeli Prime Minister, told the members of the British Royal Commission visiting Palestine in 1937 that the “Bible is our Mandate” (qtd. in Masalha 16). Ben-Gurion, Masalha adds, “made extensive use of ‘elect people-promised land’ ideas and kept stressing the ‘uniqueness’ of the Jewish people” (27). Contemporary Israeli statesmen and generals, including Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Yitzhak Shamir, and Benjamin Netanyahu have made similar claims. In his 1969 book *A New Map, Other Relationships*, Dayan writes in reference to the 1967 Israeli Occupation of the rest of Palestine:

Our Brothers who fell in the War of Independence—we have not abandoned your dream and we have not forgotten your lesson. We have returned to the Temple Mount, to the cradle of our people’s history, to the inheritance of the Patriarchs, the land of the Judges and the fortress of the Kingdom of the House of David. We have returned to Hebron and Shechem, to Bethlehem and Anatot, to Jericho and the crossings of the Jordan at Adam Ha’ir. (cited in Masalha 74)

All of the above Zionist doctrinal ideas are rooted in post-Reformation Protestant doctrines. “From its earliest days in the late nineteenth century,” Masalha points out, “secular Jewish Zionism embraced the Protestant Zionist biblicist doctrine of exclusive land ownership. The fundamentalist doctrine was premised on the notion that the Hebrew Bible provides for the Jews’ sacrosanct ‘title deed’ to colonize Palestine, and gives moral legitimacy to the establishment of the State of Israel and its current policies towards the indigenous Palestinians” (16). Masalha elaborates by stating that “political Zionism developed a theory of ethnic and racial superiority on the basis of the land and conquest traditions of the Hebrew Bible, especially on the Book of Joshua and those dealing with Israelite origins that demanded the subjugation and destruction of other peoples” (21).

between conservative Evangelical Christianity and colonial expansionism. Arthur Balfour's crucial role in giving life to the Zionist project reflects this alliance. In the following encounter, Balfour speaks of "traditions." Tom Segev recounts an interesting conversation that took place between Chaim Weizmann and Arthur Balfour. In the end of the conversation, Balfour identifies as a Christian Zionist and declares that Zionism is an essential component of his religious tradition. Segev writes:

One night in 1916 Weizmann dined as a guest of Balfour's, who was now foreign secretary. It was already after midnight when Weizmann left. Balfour walked with him for a few minutes They walked back and forth . . . for two hours, Weizmann doing most of the talking. He laid out his much-repeated argument—that Zionist and British interests were identical. The Zionist movement spoke, Weizmann said, with the vocabulary of modern statesmanship, but was fueled by a deep religious consciousness. Balfour, himself a modern statesman, also considered Zionism an inherent part of his Christian faith. It was a beautiful night; the moon was out. Soon after, Balfour declared in a cabinet meeting, "I am a Zionist." (41)

Arguably, besides the incentive to establish a colonial presence in Palestine, Balfour aided the Jewish Zionists because he was an Evangelical Christian Zionist. He was driven by religious doctrine. A couple years later, and with utter disregard for the Palestinians, Balfour explained why Zionism matters: it is because of shared colonialist and messianic values. In August 1919, almost two years after the Balfour Declaration, Balfour declared in a memorandum that the "four great powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the

desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land” [²³] (cited in Khalidi 225).

On the Hills of God seems to point to this colonial ideo-theological justification behind the Zionist project in Palestine and critiques it. In the previous scene from *On the Hills of God* following Deir Yasin and the attacks on Jewish Palestinian property, Yousif’s critique is delivered in a set of rhetorical questions. The novel provides answers, through its depiction of the multi-layered devastation individual Palestinians, communities, and eventually the Palestinian collective undergo as Zionists (Christian and Jewish) execute a comprehensive displacement of Palestinians. Fawal takes a moment to remind his readers of the orchards, villages, and towns Zionist forces will shortly physically erase or empty and have their Muslim and Christian names removed, thus evoking what revisionist historian Ilan Pappé calls the massive ethnic cleansing military campaign codenamed “Plan Dalet.”²⁴ Fawal re-inscribes the

²³ The Big Four were the United States, France, England, and Italy. The U.S. President then was Woodrow Wilson. David Lloyd George was the British Prime Minister. Lloyd George was a Zionist and two of President Wilson’s closest advisors, Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, were faithful Zionists. In addition to Lloyd George, two British Prime Ministers—Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) and Sir Winston Churchill—“were closely associated with ‘Gentile Zionism.’” “[N]early half a century in and out of office,” Nur Masalha writes, Churchill “was devoted to political Zionism and the British Empire” (93).

²⁴ In addition to Pappé, Maxine Rodinson, Moshe Dayan, Israel Shahak, Edward Said, and Nur Masalha, to mention just a few, have revealed the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. In *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Pappé writes, on March 10, 1948, Zionist political leaders provided the military units

with a detailed description of the methods to be employed to forcibly evict the people: large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centers; setting fire to homes, property and goods; expulsion; demolition; and, finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning. (11)

Palestinians were a demographic and an ideological problem for the Zionists in 1948. If Palestinians were to stay on their land in 1948, a Jewish state would have been impossible. Indeed, according to Rodinson, “a plan for a Jewish state in Palestine, drawn up in 1880-1909, could only be realized in one or two ways. Palestine being incontestably an Arab country at that time, there were only two ways of turning it into a Jewish country: either expelling or subjugating the natives” (31). Both methods were applied, Rodinson says, and the political Zionist elites “were quite ready to colonize” (32). Pappé and others base these conclusions on Plan Dalet, an Israeli document which, according to Nur Masalha, is a “Haganah plan of early March 1948 . . . a blueprint for the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible . . . and the destruction of Arab localities” (58).

past from the shards of memory and remembers those who dwelled in it. He revives Palestinian geography and remembers Palestinian urban and rural centers the Zionist project erased in 1948. The local town Ardallah, Fawal therefore writes, is “a natural landmark. Between Ardallah and the Mediterranean Sea lay Jaffa, Lydda, and Ramleh.” These Palestinian cities and towns are “surrounded by hundreds of orange groves; between Ardallah and the highlands lay hundreds of Arab villages surrounded by fig and olive groves and pasture lands” (ch. 2). In this descriptive scene, Fawal remembers Palestinian cities, towns, and villages. Historically, Zionist military units violently displaced the population of hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns and erased the markers of their physical presence. Some of these Palestinian rural and urban centers had Palestinian Christian-majority populations. This fact probably explains why Fawal chose the Christian-majority town Ardallah to be the center of the fictional action. This attention to indigenous Palestinian Christians undermines the cultural conservative rendering of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into a Muslim attack on Christians and Jews. As a model of Jewish-Christian, and-Muslim coexistence, Ardallah defies this fundamentalist claim.

Equally important, in featuring a Palestinian Christian-majority population, *On the Hills of God* draws attention to indigenous Christian Palestinians whose presence European and American Evangelical Christian fundamentalists at best ignore. “In addition to problems with mainline churches,” Said K. Aburish writes in *The Forgotten Faithful*, “Christian evangelist groups from the United States, Holland and other countries support the State of Israel at the expense of local Christians. The evangelists accept the recreation of Israel as the prelude to the second coming to the extent of ignoring local Christian rights and feelings” (3). Speaking of ongoing challenges Palestinian Christians face, Aburish adds: “when it comes to the Israeli occupation, the Christians have suffered more than their Muslim countrymen because they have

more of what the Israelis want”—i.e. land and resources (2). Historically speaking, in the 1930s and 1940s, Jewish Zionists saw in Palestinian Christians a serious problem because they owned most of the land in Palestinian towns and they were cultured and educated. They understood and resisted Zionism. In “Shtetl Colonialism,” Pappe argues that second-Aliya Zionists viewed Christian Palestinians as a serious threat to the Zionist project.²⁵ Pappe sums up the issue as follows:

Towns [in Palestine] had a large number of Christians, reported Ben-Gurion. His colleague Nathan Shifris lamented that they were educated, nationalists, and more or less grasped what Zionism was all about. They were ‘impertinent and too assertive’. Israel Kadishman believed that ‘our wits’ and not only our power will be needed to combat these ‘Arabs’. Jaffa in particular symbolized everything the Second *Aliya* dreaded and detested. (52)

To successfully expropriate urban Palestine in 1948, Zionist leaders believed they would have to come up with effective methods to eliminate the threat educated urban Christian Palestinians posed for their Zionist settler colonial enterprise.

Fawal, I speculate, is likely cognizant of these issues when he chose to present the political prowess of Christian Palestinians and unveil the extra pressures they faced in Palestine before the war of 1948. Indeed, their political intelligence is evident in the numerous sophisticated conversations the three friends and the rest of the community have. Their struggles, on the other hand, materialize in the multifaceted loss they endure whether it is in human life,

²⁵ The term “Second Aliya” refers to the thousands of Jewish Zionists who immigrated mainly from Eastern Europe to Ottoman Palestine roughly from 1904-1914. Settlers who belonged to this second Aliya were zealous Zionists who built agricultural communal Jewish settlements, revived Hebrew as a national language, built Jewish schools and later became hardcore advocates of segregating Jews from Palestinians.

material wealth, local identity, or eventually their sense of belonging to a place they can call home. In the 2006 “Forward” to *On the Hills of God*, Robin Ostle mentions that Fawal “has never ceased to be haunted by his childhood and adolescence in Ramallah and by the unending cycle of injustice which has been the lot of the Palestinian people throughout the second half of the past century” (n. p.). These personal and collective injustices, Fawal seems to indirectly remind his readers, have their roots in the Nakbah.

On the Hills of God, therefore, offers its readers a miniature duplicate of the historical Palestine the Palestinians were forced to leave. The novel illustrates the multi-layered loss Palestinians endured. Very early in the novel, as the three friends are spending time in the urban heart of town, they see a group of Zionists. The observed were men and women, carrying surveying equipment. They head to the countryside. Yousif, Isaac, and Amin follow them. In the process, Amin suffers a fall and breaks his arm, which later has to be amputated due to improper treatment (ch. 3). After Isaac’s family, the Sha’lans, exit the town, Zionist forces pressure them into contributing to the war effort. Hence, Isaac is forced to dress like an Arab and raid the town Ardallah. In one of the saddest scenes, the disguised raiders are captured and paraded through the town. “All the invaders,” the narrator reports, “were teen-agers, shaking with fear” the more the “demonstrators became motionless. They thought they had seized a band of fearless fighters. What they had captured were mere boys. The victory was now hollow.” The ultimate shock happens when Isaac is discovered among the attackers: “The crowd gasped again. It was Isaac without his glasses. . . . People stared at Isaac with hate in their eyes.” The damage done to this previously harmonious local community can be seen in the reactions of the town’s people who knew Isaac:

“Isaac? My God—”said midwife Hanneh, who had delivered him. . . .

. . . . “Isaac, you came to kill us?” seamstress Zahiyyeh said, her hand going up to her lips.

“Shame, shame on you,” a rose-cheeked woman blasted.

Yousif felt a lump in his throat. This same woman had given the three boys a loaf of bread on the last day of bird hunting—the day Yousif wanted the three of them to make a pledge of friendship.

“You dirty dog.”

They cursed him. They spat on him. They chewed him with their eyes.

“Isaac, this cannot be true,” rang Yousif’s voice.

Hammered with this wide range of responses and standing there terrified and worried for his own life, Isaac explains why he is in town among the Zionist raiders and carrying a gun: “I was *forced* to come and you’ll be *forced* to kill me. Alive or dead, we’re all victims—we’re caught in a war from which we can’t escape” (ch. 16). Isaac is shortly executed. Yousif, who is seen earnestly pleading for the life of his friend, ends up helplessly watching him die.²⁶

²⁶ This coercion Isaac speaks of was not unusual in the actual physical world. Non-Zionist historical records systematically allude to harmonious Christian-Jewish-Muslim Palestinian relations prior to, and even during, the Zionist project’s encroachment. Writing in the 1920s, W. F. Stirling, a British Lt.-Col. and the Governor of Jaffa under the Mandate Administration of Herbert Samuel, testifies to the indisputable power the Jewish Agency had over Jews in British-Mandate Palestine and its effective methods of segregation. Officially beginning in the 1920s, the Zionist movement systematically denied Palestinians employment and sought to segregate European Jews and Palestinians. Stirling recounts an incident where a second-generation European Jewish landowner was commanded by the Jewish Agency to fire the Palestinian workers on his farm. Because many of these farmers are his childhood friends, the Jewish landowner sought help from Stirling. The landowner met with Stirling at the latter’s house after dark, fearful the Jewish Agency might retaliate against him. “When he arrived,” Stirling writes, “he told me he had come to ask for my advice on a personal problem. He explained how, as a small boy, he had been brought to Palestine by his father, one of the biggest landowners of his village. Growing up there, he had made numerous friends among the little Arab boys of his own age.” The landowner elaborates that after the death of his father, he became the owner and “continued to employ his boyhood friends,” but “[t]hat morning . . . , the Jewish Agency had ordered him to dismiss all his Arab employees and to engage some newly arrived Jewish immigrants,” Stirling recounts (233-34). The order to dismiss the Palestinian workers, who also happened to be his boyhood friends, severs the relationship. But the order to deny Palestinians employment corresponds with core Zionist tactics and philosophy which are traceable to Theodore Herzl in his personal diaries.

Eventually, like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948, Amin and Yousif lose their town and are forced outside the entire homeland. “Like the tributaries of a mighty river,” the narrator reports, displaced Palestinians “first trickled, then poured into Ardallah’s main street to form a gigantic procession, the biggest Yousif had ever seen.” Shortly, “[o]ld residents and new arrivals were joined together in an exodus” (ch. 30). The narrator captures their misery in one expressive sentence: “The marchers moved like scarecrows. Death was their loyal companion” (ch. 31). “In an astonishing matter-of-fact tone,” Clare Brandabur writes, “Fawal records . . . the advance of the Jewish forces with the rape, murder and pillage that ensued.” Subjected to series of massacres, one of which is Deir Yasin, the Palestinians “are driven from their homes, robbed at gun point, forced to leave their dead and dying along the desert path, and finally to take refuge across the Jordan” (81). The unfolding horrors Yousif witnesses deliver an unfamiliar reality to the readers. Indeed, in terms of his treatment of the Nakbah, Michael S. Lee credits Fawal with informing Western readers whose knowledge of the Palestinian loss is shallow at best. *On the Hills of God*, Lee proposes, “provides that understanding” to those

Stirling describes the Zionist power and its methods of coercion in Mandate Palestine as follows: “In the early days there were many Jews in Palestine who were not Zionists, but the pressure applied by the Jewish Agency became so great, and its Gestapo methods so severe, that few Jews dared openly express any other faith” (233). To emphasize the problematic nature of the increasing Zionist segregation of European Jews from indigenous Palestinians, Stirling relates his observations of a visit Lord Northcliffe, the founder of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* and also the Director of War Propaganda in the British Government in 1918, gave to the Zionist colonies in Palestine. Stirling, who accompanied Lord Northcliffe, relates the following:

At [the colony of] Richon-le-Zion we were entertained to a grand Kosher luncheon, and speeches of welcome were delivered in Hebrew. Northcliffe, in reply, made a speech which left most of us gasping. He told the Jews of Palestine some home truth which no one hitherto had dared voice. He said that they should realise that they could not always be guarded by British bayonets, and that their future status in the country depended on how well they co-operated with the Arabs, whose guests, after all, they were.

Stirling observes that “[j]udging from the faces of those who understood English, his speech was not very welcome, and Norman Bentwich, who had to translate it into Hebrew, had a hard time toning it down to render it less unpalatable to the audience” (234-35). The Zionist determination to kill all communications and interactions with the Palestinians was too powerful to be affected by such an honest advice.

“readers [who are] too far removed in time or space to have comprehended at first-hand the *nakba*, or ‘catastrophe,’ that deprived the Palestinians of their homes, their lands, their rights and even human compassion” (123-24).

The way Fawal revisits 1948 challenges a Zionist foundational myth. According to this myth, the Palestinians became refugees because of the war of 1948, a war they and the Arab world initiated.²⁷ The novel tells a different story. Throughout the narrative, readers are repeatedly reminded of Zionism as a settler colonial enterprise. The novel even features David Ben-Gurion formally announcing the establishment of the State of Israel. In the novel, the European Ben-Gurion proclaims that the “Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people,” and the “recent holocaust . . . which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the need to solve the problem of the homeless” (ch. 27). His claim to a Jewish Zionist indigeneity or more precisely an “imaginary autochthony,” to borrow the phrase from Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (718),²⁸ invites a mocking response from one of Fawal’s characters: ““Oh

²⁷ In “Shtetl Colonialism,” Ilan Pappé writes, “Some Zionist and anti-Zionist historians assumed that the war of 1948 caused the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. On the contrary . . . the war was the means, not the cause, for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine” (54). Similarly, Yitzhak Laor points out that the “extent to which the 1948 war really was a war of the besieged few against the many is a question still debated by historians, but its myth as such remains predominant to this day” (xviii). Pappé convincingly delineates that the same Zionist gaze that saw in British Mandate Palestinians nothing but “aliens who usurped a home country and, as long as they are there, they are inevitably involved in an attempt to prevent a Jewish presence in Palestine,” “remains steadfast and dominant at any given historical and current moment since the early 20th century.” The Zionist and Israeli “engagement with the question of indigeneity,” Pappé emphasizes, “was born in a certain historical reality and is still unchanged in a very different one more than a century later” (41). This same “historical reality” is the one Fawal unearths again and again in *On the Hills of God*.

²⁸ In “Diaspora and Jewish Identity,” Boyarin and Boyarin point out that “One modernist story of Israel, the Israeli Declaration of Independence, begins with an imaginary autochthony—‘In the Land of Israel this people came into existence---and ends with the triumphant return of the People to their natural land, making them ‘re-autochthonized,’ ‘like all of the nations.’” “Israeli state power, deprived of the option of self-legitimation through appeal to a divine king,” Boyarin and Boyarin write, “discovered autochthony as a powerful replacement.” To the contrary and historically speaking, Boyarin and Boyarin contend, the Jewish people had been always strangers to the Promised Land. The Jewish people had been “forever unconnected with a particular land, a people that calls into question the idea that a people must have a land in order to be a people.” Zionism dismisses not only this fact, but also “a prophetic discourse of preference for ‘exile’ over rootedness in the Land (together with a persistent hope of eschatological restoration), a prophetic discourse that has been totally occluded in modern Zionist ideological

sure,’ Dr. Afifi said, rolling his eyes, ‘you solve one problem by creating another one just like it. What are we going to do about our homeless?’” (ch. 27). The victims of Europe are given its blessing to victimize another, the novel suggests. Delighted, its victims complied. The European Jewish problem is solved at the expense of the Palestinians. The novel does not shy away from making its critique as clear as possible. Zionists, Yousif articulates earlier in the novel, plan to “take over Palestine. . . . They think it’s theirs. They think God promised it to them” (ch. 2). This information unsettles Amin and invites the following conversation:

“And what about us? We’re Abraham’s children too. Just like them.”

“They want us out,” Yousif told him.

“Out where?” Amin inquired.

“I don’t know. Just out.” (ch. 2)

And unlike the Palestinians who “offered to live in one country” (Fawal, ch. 18) inclusive of all citizens regardless of their religious or ethnic background, the Zionists, the novel repeats, were not invested in inclusivity and coexistence. They “want[ed] a separate *Jewish* state.” (ch.18).²⁹

representations of the Bible and of Jewish history.” This discourse, the authors explain, “was pivotal in the rabbinic ideology” (Boyarin and Boyarin 718).

²⁹ Zionist historiography insists that Palestinians always rejected living with the Jewish immigrants in one state. The latter, the argument goes, were interested in cohabitation, but the former responded with violence to empty the land of the Jews. The available historical records however contradict these assumptions. Before 1948, the Zionist project of state building did not envision establishing a democratic state of and for all of its citizens in Palestine, but as early as 1882, Zionist elites insisted on transferring Palestinians to other regions in the Middle East. In a March 1919 “informal meeting of Zionists and British officials in London,” the question of transferring Palestinian peasantry to Arab countries like Egypt and Syria so as to allow a Jewish state to emerge was the core topic. The recorded minutes show that Major Rothschild “suggested that it would be well if his Majesty’s government would also consider whether some comprehensive emigration scheme [read transfer] to the south (Egypt) as well as to the north (Damascus) could not be arranged for the Arab Palestinian peasantry in conjunction with schemes for the immigration of the Jews.” Other participants, “Miss [Gertrude] Bell and Colonel [T. E.] Lawrence agreed and Miss Bell added that there was scope in Mesopotamia for such immigrants. It was pointed out that it was not impossible to move Arab [Palestinian] peasantry from their lands as had shown when the original Zionist colonies were established” (cited in Sabbagh 140). Sabbagh argues that “this is not the earliest mention of the ‘transfer’ of large numbers of Palestinian inhabitants. The idea was raised by Zionists as early as 1882. It gathered momentum in the 1930s, in parallel with Nazi plans to ‘transfer’ Jews out of Germany” (140). Palestinians were “virtually unanimous

But “[w]here will that be if not on your land and my land and his land?” one of the characters rhetorically asks (ch. 18). His question points to the heart of the matter. Zionists are not of the land, Fawal suggests. They arrived from somewhere else to only colonize. Therefore, not only did they separate themselves from the indigenous Palestinians, but they also persecuted them. Whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish Palestinians, it did not matter because those subjected to it were not Westerners.³⁰

in their resistance to an eventual Jewish state” (Sabbagh 154) and were strongly opposed the overwhelming numbers of Jewish settlers who, according to the Jewish Arthur Koestler, “made no effort to adapt themselves to those aspects of oriental life. . . . There was no cultural symbiosis between the two races. The Jews came as conquerors” (cited in Sabbagh 154-55). Until the rise of Zionism, the Palin Commission’s report (completed on July 1, 1920) suggests, “the three sects, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, lived together in a state of complete amity” (cited in Sabbagh 160). Even during the riots of 1920s and 1930s, when Jewish neighborhoods were attacked by Palestinian nationalists, many Palestinian families protected their Jewish neighbors (Sabbagh 177-178). Even during the riots, Sabbagh adds, “Jews and Arabs lived side by side in Tiberias. While violence erupted further south, senior figures did their utmost to prevent it spreading to their town. The Jews and the Arabs signed proclamations of peace and friendship in Arabic and Hebrew” (179). Zionists who in the 1930s called for transferring Palestinians include Chaim Weizmann, Menahem Ussishkin, and Felix Frankfurter (Sabbagh 186-87).

Palestinian violence was a response to the transfer threat. David Ben-Gurion reminded his fellow Zionists in 1938 that “politically we are the aggressors and they [Palestinians] defend themselves. . . . The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down, and in their view we want to take away from their country” (cited in Sabbagh 210). In a conversation with a friend, Ben-Gurion adds, “Were I an Arab. . . I would rise up against an immigration liable in the future to hand the country and all of its Arab inhabitants over to Jewish rule. What Arab cannot do his math and understand that [Jewish] immigration at the rate of 60,000 a year means a Jewish state in all of Palestine?” (cited in Sabbagh 210-11). Establishing a Jewish state, the Zionist Joseph Weitz argued, requires one and “only solution. . . . Israel without Arabs. . . . [T]here is no way besides transferring the Arabs from here to the neighboring countries, to transfer them all. . . . There is no other way out” (cited in Sabbagh 215). By demanding a separate country, Zionists wanted a Jewish-only state, but in order for the state to become a reality, Palestinian-owned lands must be taken by force and Arab Palestinians must be transferred. Before the war of 1948, Palestinians objected to the designation of Palestine as the homeland of world’s Jews, but accepted establishing one state in Palestine—one that includes Jewish citizens of Palestine but not all world’s Jews. Ben-Gurion insisted that Jews “are entitled to Palestine as a whole” (cited in Sabbagh 255) and on this logic, Zionists rejected a proposal from the American Council for Judaism (ACJ). Lessing J. Rosenwald, the director of ACJ, proposed accepting that Palestine is “the homeland of its own citizens only, and not of all Jews” and called upon Zionists to stop the flood of Jewish immigrants to Palestine and “call a halt to this dangerous course.” Immigration quotas and procedures, Rosenwald highlighted, must be made through democratic decision making processes where all represented religious and ethnic groups who reside in Palestine participate. Zionists rejected the proposal (cited in Sabbagh 241-42). According to Sabbagh, “Zionists sought an entirely Jewish state,” but the Palestinians “did not ask for an entirely Arab state. They had lived for centuries with Palestinian Jews among them. They could even have lived peacefully with a reasonable number of immigrant Jews in the 1920s and 1930s if those Jews had merely wanted to live in a democratic Palestine” (259-60).

³⁰ Indeed, in *The Myths of Liberal Zionism*, Yitzhak Laor writes: “Zionism thought it would politically resolve the exile within Europe—Jews as “Orientals inside the Occident”—not just by an Exodus, by going elsewhere, but by

In 1948, this ethnocentricity did not appear problematic at all to Britain, or to the administration of U.S. President Harry S. Truman, who is featured in *On the Hills of God*. “Washington dealt us a dirty hand,” one character opines before another counter-argues that “[n]ot Washington, only Truman.” To Yousif, Truman and the U.S. are one (ch. 7). Truman, the novel highlights, shifted from opposing the partition plan to supporting it. Not only that, but he also “was honest. He said he didn’t give a damn where they put Israel so long as they didn’t put it in Missouri” (ch. 7). His statement further points to the latent anti-Jewish attitude of the West, including the United States and Canada. Neither country could imagine large-scale Jewish immigration, even after the Holocaust. His eventual support for Zionism, characters speculate, is attributed to the power of the Jewish American vote, an American desire to resolve the Jewish problem by relocating the Jews somewhere else other than the U.S.,³¹ and/or an American sense of guilt and responsibility for what European Jews had gone through. Therefore, on the ground of supporting the Zionist project at the expense of Palestinians, many of the town’s people believed that Truman “won’t allow the Zionists to be defeated, because his election is much more important to him than a tiny distant country called Palestine could ever be. Personal tragedies don’t concern him” (ch. 22). They, therefore, are not surprised hearing Truman recognize the Zionist state minutes after Ben-Gurion finished declaring its establishment. This American political support for the Zionist state-building project indeed does not come as a surprise to the people of Ardallah who attribute the official American support and immediate

going to the heart of the colonial hinterland of Europe, the East, not to become part of that East but in order to become representatives of the West “over there” This is how Herzl put it, in very crude words, in his programmatic book *The Jewish State*” (6).

³¹ “Perhaps,” Peter L. Hahn writes, “Truman was also motivated, ironically, by a subtle form of anti-Semitism, common among white Missourians of the early twentieth century, that favored settlement of Jews in Palestine over their admission to the United States” (23).

recognition of the newly established state to the political weight of the Jewish vote and the Holocaust. But this support might have also been facilitated by the significance of Palestine as a sacred geography, a geography religious and secular Americans have constantly appropriated.

Conclusion: Inform to Reorient, Represent to Humanize

We need to understand Fawal's novelistic project as talking back to a longstanding American mythologizing of Palestine. Indeed, Palestine has always preoccupied the American imagination. The fascination, arguably traceable to seventeenth-century Puritanism, is fraught with appropriations, violence, and countless misrepresentations. Inspired by their interpretation of what Biblical Palestine stood for, Puritan elites reinvented the myth of the Promised Land on the geography and body of the New World. They considered themselves the chosen people and their New England settlement "the New Israel in New English Canaan," as Hilton Obenzinger puts it in *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (24). This remaking demanded that they erase Native Americans and deny their "tenure in the land," as Native American writer N. Scott Momaday famously puts it in his novel *House Made of Dawn* (57), a model copied in 1948 Palestine. Even in the nineteenth century, the Puritan heritage was too resilient to fade away. The continued fascination, Obenzinger and other scholars rightly observe, is evident in nineteenth-century secular and religious travel writing focused on Palestine. Previously in the chapter, I discussed Stewart and Darwish as two creationists who engage in acts of appropriation and misrepresentation from within a messianic Evangelical Christian tradition.

Representations of Palestine and the Palestinians in secular nineteenth-century American literary travel writing similarly mark acts of appropriation and misrepresentation. In *The Innocents Abroad, or, The New Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, Mark Twain (from the

Missouri that Truman later suggested did not want a large Jewish population) depicts Palestine as a land infested with marauding Bedouins. It is overtaken by disease, superstition, poverty, and drought. Jerusalem becomes the “mournful, and dreary, and lifeless” city (329). To his secular eyes and racist irreverent sense of humor, the inhabitants of Palestine are an ignorant, unsophisticated, manipulable, superstitious, “thankless and impassive race” (224). In the following quote, the secular Twain most likely imagines these Bedouins to be inferior creationists. Of Muslim Palestinians, he writes, “[a]ll Mohammedans shave their heads, but they are careful to leave a lock of hair for the Prophet to take hold of.” Twain claims that his guide “observed that a good Mohammedan would consider himself doomed to stay with the damned forever if he were to lose his scalp-lock and die before it grew again.” “The most of them that I have seen,” Twain sarcastically remarks, “ought to stay with the damned, anyway, without reference to how they were barbered” (355). It is not a religious rite for Muslims to shave their heads nor do they leave a scalp-lock so as to transition to paradise or the spirit world. Twain, however, purposefully borrows this stereotypical image from the American context to draw a caricature for his white readerships. One familiar stereotypical image is that of the scalp-lock Native American.³² Shortly, Twain reports that one man of his group “was going to scalp such Bedouins as fell to his share, and take his bold-headed sons of the desert home with him alive for trophies” (Twain 370). This irreverent secularist satire, which is partly directed at the American Protestant pilgrims in his company, but mainly targets Palestinian Catholicism and Islam,³³ is the

³² The familiar stereotypical image is also similar to the Chinese queue in the nineteenth century, but Twain was more likely thinking of Native Americans.

³³ In secular and religious travel writing, not only Palestinian Muslims, but also Palestinian Christians were under attack. American travelers to the Holy Land, and the rest of the Ottoman Empire, looked down at indigenous Christians. To American Protestant missionaries for example, historian Ussama Makdisi argues, Ottoman “Christianity and Islam were coupled as the two pillars of temporal and spiritual corruption that had to be struck

product of Twain's skepticism and secularism evidenced in his statement, "I must studiously and faithfully unlearn a great many [Biblical Christian] things I have somehow absorbed concerning Palestine. I must begin a system of reduction" (Twain 238-39). The secular-religious divide is evident in Twain's descriptions; however, his language shows an imperialist flare.³⁴

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain misrepresents Palestinians and appropriates Palestinian geography and archeology by imposing Anglo-American names and specificities upon them, some of which are directly drawn from nineteenth-century American expansionist contexts (Twain 234). Repeatedly, Twain models Palestinians after Native Americans. Accordingly, his Palestinian Arabs are systematically the nomadic "Indians" of the Holy Land. In one incident, Twain alleges coming across "half a dozen Digger Indians (Bedouins) with very long spears in their hands, cavorting around on old crowbait horses, and spearing imaginary enemies; whooping, and fluttering their rags in the wind, and carrying on in every respect like a pack of hopeless lunatics" (312).³⁵ Just like the stereotypical menacing Native Americans in nineteenth-

down" (691). "The central missionary narrative," writes Matthew F. Jacobs, "was one of decline and redemption, of the new Jerusalem [meaning the United States] cleansing the Holy Land of all its corrupting influences—be they Islamic, Oriental Christian, or otherwise—and reviving it for the present and future" (16).

³⁴ Twain espoused colonialist convictions in this stage of his life. His perception and support for American colonialism, however, began losing momentum in the 1890s. "Though he once considered himself a 'red-hot imperialist' who 'wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific,'" Michael B. Oren writes, "Twain had been disillusioned by the ruthless suppression of Filipino insurgents by U.S. troops in 1899. The United States, he felt, had lost track of its fundamental purpose in the world, to furnish, rather than to deny, freedom." This disillusionment eventually ends his support for American imperialism: "'And so I am an anti-imperialist,'" Twain concluded. 'I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land'" (Oren 271). This opposition to American imperialism Twain embraces in the 1890s was not popular among Americans. In fact, a majority of Americans "endorsed the imperialist enterprise." "In no sector of American society was support for imperialism more exuberant than among those who would today be called faith guided," Oren argues before he adds, "Enlightened European control of the Middle East, for them, meant more schools and clinics, more missions and the chance to emancipate its peoples from Muslim rule. Such hopes were entertained not only by great numbers of Christians, but also, for the first time, by a growing cadre of American Jews. The Statue of Liberty, they noticed, did, in fact, face toward the East and, in their imaginations at least, looked foremost to Palestine" (271-72).

³⁵ This particular scene brings to mind others from the dime novel genre, the tradition of the American Western movie, and even anti-Western genres. Stereotypical representations of Native Americans have yet to disappear.

century frontier literature, this stock image of hostile nomadic Bedouins recurs in Twain's narrative. In fact, it is the defining image of Palestinians. And just like in Stewart, the nineteenth-century Ottoman Palestine, which Twain mercilessly imagines ruled by marauding savage nomads, suffers from neglect.³⁶ Under such circumstances, colonial logic dictates that only European settlers can transform this unsettled land into a paradise. Not unlike Stewart, Twain portrays Palestinians as aliens in a land desperately in need of attention. His persistent depiction of savage Palestinian nomads passing through the largely unsettled Palestine as well as his account of fellow Anglo American colonialists contemplating scalping Palestinians drive home one message: only Westerners can bring Palestine back to life.

Twain, Stewart, and Darwish have contributed to particular American understandings of Palestine and the Palestinians. Messianic evangelical ideo-theology of figures like Stewart has informed Jewish Zionism. Darwish on the other hand, draws from Zionist mythologies and messianic Evangelical ideo-theology. In all of them, the image of Palestine and the Palestinians is distorted. Their narratives—hegemonic, oppressive, and reductionist—interpret Palestine and imagine a futuristic version, one without Palestinians. Arguably cognizant of these forces and the

³⁶ The image and racist perception are not unlike those found in numerous Western and anti-Western novels and films. In Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, for example, Captain White articulates a similar view on Mexico and Mexicans. In addition to the secular narrative of American republicanism, Captain White employs a religious narrative to demonize Mexicans and justify murdering them and colonizing their land (McCarthy 33-34). To him, Mexicans and Native Americans neither share the same God with him, nor have a republican government. They are, therefore, incapable of governing themselves: "there is no government in Mexico. Hell, there's no God in Mexico. Never will be," asserts the Captain. Then he proceeds with undermining both groups' ability and right to self-rule: "We are dealing with a people manifestly incapable of governing themselves. And do we know what happens with people who cannot govern themselves? That's right. Others come to govern for them," he adds (McCarthy 34). Repeatedly, the Captain uses dehumanizing terms to describe the others: "what we are dealing with, he said, is a race of degenerates. A mongrel race, little better than niggers. And maybe no better." The Captain epitomizes the imperial project of the United States as he sees himself and his men as "the instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land" (*BM* 34). His colonial language degrades the Mexican others and robs them of every positive trait of character that constitutes or affirms their humanity.

power of their produced images and depictions, Fawal has to write against this American tradition of mythologizing and distortion.

On the Hills of God, I therefore conclude, offers an alternative version of history to disrupt hegemonic narratives and destabilize their normative images of Palestine and the Palestinians. Its alternative version is capable of countering the erasures, silences, and violence different discourses—including nineteenth-century American religious and secular travel writing, the clash discourse, and the growing body of cultural conservative autobiographies—impose on the body of Palestine and the Palestinians. Not only were Stewart's and Twain's hegemonic representations of Palestine and the Palestinians stereotypical of nineteenth-century travel narratives, but they also contributed to a dogmatic discourse which eventually paved the way for European and American settler colonialists to aid in the modern Zionist conquest of Palestine. In reimagining this early Palestinian history of the Nakbah, Fawal speaks truth to power. He fulfills what conscientious readers expect of him as an intellectual: give voice to the voiceless, the oppressed, and the persecuted, those who are silenced by the might of the sword and the belligerence of the word. After all, as Said reminds us in *Representations of the Intellectual*, intellectuals are “individuals with a vocation for the art of representing” (13). They are “of their time, herded along by the mass politics...” (21). However, they are “capable of resisting those [representations] only by disputing the images, official narratives, justifications of power” and “trends of thought that maintain the status quo” (22). The intellectual ought “not to consolidate authority, but to understand, interpret, and question it.” The “intellectual vocation,” Said elaborates, “essentially is somehow to alleviate human suffering and not to celebrate . . . the state or the patria or any of these basically triumphalist agents in our society” (*Reflections on Exile* 502-03).

Chapter Five

Scheherazade in a Post-9/11 America: Alia Yunis on Marginalization, Representation, and Critique of U.S.

Hegemony

Ethnic American identification, writes Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity*, often stems from a dialogic relation between one's anxiety to honor and preserve her familial or ethnic heritage, and the same individual's desire to free the self from these blood ties to the ancestors in order to make her own destiny. This dynamic is identifiable in many contemporary ethnic American literary traditions including the emerging Arab American tradition. In many cases, however, political triggers—in the form of rising discrimination, negative stereotyping, racist consciousness, and indiscriminate racial labeling against local communities and against Arabs or Muslims in the Middle East—invite increasing numbers of Arab American literary writers to emphasize the first half of this dialogic relationship by embracing their ethnic selves, challenging stereotypes, and forming new bodies of resistance. In the anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers*, Arab American and Arab Canadian writers insist that they personally have chosen to reclaim their Arabness in direct response to major violent events, including the 1967 War and the first Gulf War, which have influenced the American public opinion of Arabs and Arab Americans. Joanna Kadi, for instance, writes, "I desperately needed a map during the massacre known as the Gulf War. All Arab-Canadian and Arab American activists—and even those who tried to stay hidden—did." It is the responsibility of Arab American women writers featured in the anthology, Kadi adds, to "talk about what we know," "work for radical change," and "create maps that chart new grounds" (xvi-xvii). Seeking new beginnings, some writers were forced to revolt against what Martha Ani Boudakian calls "cultural bleach . . . wherein light-skinned people of color are urged to consider" themselves "physically, historically, and ideologically white" (35). In

response to assimilation (a recurrent theme ethnic American writers like Nella Larsen, Charles Chesnutt, Philip Roth, Toni Morrison, and Diana Abu-Jaber invoke in their writing), L. J. Mahoul, who until the outbreak of the first Gulf War refrained from identifying with her Arab roots, mentions the War as the catalyst behind her “anti-racist consciousness” (28). Mahoul, however, was reacting primarily to her own family and not “to anti-Arab sentiment directed at” her or “even other family members, who were proud of their Lebanese heritage and lamented only the embarrassment of being labeled a member of a ‘lesser race’—Chicano, Filipino, or Black” (28). In the face of such harsh realities, the imaginative remaking of the Arab American through literature has arguably required many Arab American writers and intellectuals to search for connections between their communities and other ethnic American groups. The cases of Leila Ahmed’s *A Border Passage* and Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, the focus of chapter two and three respectively, are vivid examples. Links are frequently established on the grounds of shared marginalization and means of resistance.

In the process, the evolution of the American self across ethnic American lines, as evident in numerous literary productions, has required exposing racism and frustrating negative stereotypes. John Okada and Maxine Hong Kingston are two examples. Okada’s novel *No-No Boy* exposes American racist policies during World War Two which were exclusively directed at Americans of Japanese descent and Japanese nationals. Okada, Jinqi Ling rightly states, “has created a protagonist who fails to regain his selfhood and whose ongoing predicament epitomizes the consequences of the racism that fueled the wartime internment of Japanese Americans and continued to condition their lives and identities in the postwar years” (32). Indeed, the character Emi explains to the protagonist Ichiro why they had to suffer during the war years: “It’s because we’re American,” Emi says, and “because we’re Japanese It’s all right to be German and

American or Italian and American or Russian and American but . . . it wasn't all right to be Japanese and American. You had to be one or the other" (Okada 91). In the same vein of critique, the novel challenges, through its sympathetic representations of the Nisei generation, the stereotypical racist perception of Japanese Americans as un-American, sojourners, and clannish.

Similar to Okada, Kingston reexamines, in *China Men*, the traumatic experiences of Chinese Americans, including her ancestors. Her narrative unveils white racism and negative clichés directed at Chinese laborers and immigrants. After Chinese laborers had completed the Central Pacific Railroad, Kingston reports, white men "killed for fun and hate. They tied pigtailed to horses and dragged Chinamen." In the following decades, Chinese workers were massacred in several U.S. states. Some endured mutilation, others imprisonment, others were shot in the open like buffalo, while still others were stripped of their property and life savings (146-51). Kingston further offers an inventory of several racist Chinese Exclusion Acts which denied Chinese and other ethnicities the right to work visas, inclusion, and naturalization. Unveiling these racist laws allows Kingston to condemn white racism and give voice to her ancestors, but it further enables her to challenge major negative American stereotypes. Chinese immigrants were thought of as clannish (155). Chinese men were considered abusive and cruel towards women and girls (Kingston 18-19). Through literary writing, Kingston reclaims these men whom the official narrative leaves out or demonizes. In defiance of white racism which uses the term "Chinamen" in a derogatory manner, Kingston re-appropriates the term to celebrate generations of Chinese American laborers.¹ *China Men*, Richard Gray rightly states, is Kingston's humble attempt at

¹ Similar to Chinese, Chicano/a, Native, and Black Americans who re-appropriated ethnic, racial, and cultural markers of self-identification, contemporary Arab Americans reclaimed the identity marker "Arab" roughly during

“‘claiming America’ for Chinese Americans by showing how deeply in debt America is to the labor of Chinese men, her forebears among them, who cleared the land, built railroads and created fertile farmland out of desert and swamp” (791). Likewise, Nancy Peterson argues, by “[f]acing history as a wound that has not recorded the accomplishments of her people, Kingston turns to literature to shape a narrative that can correct the historical record” (2). Like Gloria Anzaldúa, Louise Erdrich, N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, Helena Maria Viramontes, and Toni Morrison, Okada and Kingston challenge misrepresentations of their othered fellow ethnic Americans, critique white racism, and work towards new beginnings. Similar currents are visible in the Arab American literary tradition.

Indeed, in addition to Mohja Kahf and Leila Ahmed, the focus of previous chapters, a growing number of contemporary Arab American writers have concentrated on their often misrepresented Arab American realities. They, conscious of their communities’ marginalization as I will argue shortly, align their fight against white racism with other struggles of minoritized ethnic Americans and draw connections between their communities and other oppressed groups.²

the 1960s. As a result of the rise of Arab nationalism especially during the term of Jammal Abd El-Nasir, the 1967 War, and the continuous plight of the Palestinians whom the American media repeatedly dehumanized, Arab Americans began to refer to themselves as Arab and American. This political statement, says Evelyn Shakir, came out of “solidarity with a people [Palestinians and Arabs] who were being savaged in the American Media. It was analogous to the decision made in the 1960s by the descendants of African slaves to call themselves ‘black,’ taking on with pride what had been a term of derision” (Shakir 9).

² In my chapter on *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, I demonstrate how particular generations of Arab Americans rejected any affiliation with Blacks in the U.S., especially during the segregation era, but contemporary Arab Americans, especially intellectuals and writers, do seek such connections. Diana Abu-Jaber and Suheir Hammad are two of these Arab American writers. In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber invokes the racialized history of Black America through employing Black American symbols and alluding to the disenfranchisement of Blacks in America. The novel also draws links, however weak, between the plight of Native Americans and Arab Americans as seen in the character of the mechanic Ricky Ellis whom Jemorah dates. Black, Native, and Arab Americans have enough in common to invite acts of solidarity from Black and Native American communities and draw the attention of white Americans to the current discrimination Arab Americans face.

In her experimental memoir *Drops of this Story*, Suheir Hammad recalls her childhood and being “raised around the delicious stinks of the ghetto. Fried plantains and smoked reefers, my mother’s stuffed eggplant and the neighbor’s

As such, their cases and representations defy the label of an insular, dysfunctional, and disloyal community the cultural conservative Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Bridgette Gabrielle, and Wafa Sultan make of Arab and Muslim Americans. Indeed, countless Arab American literary representations pose a serious challenge to cultural conservative narratives as well as the clash discourse. “Given the heap of misrepresentations and the patronizing tales of Arabs penned by generations of Orientalists, politicians, and reporters,” Barbara Nimri Aziz writes, “we [Arab Americans] face a barrier of half truths that we ourselves have imbibed and perhaps believed” (xii). To demolish, or at least weaken, these barriers, Arab Americans, Aziz argues, would benefit from drawing on the experiences of other ethnic minorities and their struggles. “There are many similarities between Arab and African American experiences in the United States,” Aziz points out, “and Arabs in general would gain much in our struggle for empowerment and recognition by studying our positions vis-à-vis the mainstream white society more closely. This applies to artists . . .” (xi).

pork ribs. Our apartment building was always swaying with smells of the East, the Caribbean, and the South” (6). The ghetto was the place where this cultural, ethnic, religious, and culinary diversity existed. She further remembers white American teachers discriminating against her. She recalls one teacher who “refused to call” her “Palestinian” because “it didn’t exist as an ethnicity.” She recalls other teachers who “wouldn’t admit that [she] a Black, Asian, Latino, or Arab kid could read the Western masters and understand them” (50). Within her hybrid self, variations of the struggles of these minorities materialize. Resistance, however, constitutes another major theme in her memoir. She reclaims her ethnic name, Suheir (49); she claims the Palestinian heritage her teacher denies her (60), by recounting her familial history, strengthening her attachment to Palestine, remembering Sabra and Shatilla; she critiques white racism. Of white racism, Hammad writes: “My memory conspires with this story to force me to write words that I’d rather not remember. Words that marked childhoods; nigga, spick, camel, bitch. Words used when people don’t know your name” (55). Hammad recalls crying in school after the news of the massacred Palestinians in Sabra and Shatilla was circulating in media. She remembers Ms. West, the “only teacher to let me know it was alright to cry.” Ms. West was “my only Black teacher. She held me as I cried over these people I didn’t know, and she cried with me. My other teachers asked me, What did I expect? My people were terrorists. They got what they deserved. My tears turned to stones to hurl at them” (59). Like many other Arab American writers, Hammad draws on ethnic American experiences. *Drops of this Story* alludes to a network of writers including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and Malcolm X. Likewise, in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, Hammad makes similar connections and identifies with Blacks in the U.S. especially artists and writers.

Core Claims

Writing almost in the same vein in *The Night Counter* (2009), Alia Yunis, I argue, points to signs of affiliation, on the ground of shared marginalization, among Arab or Muslim Americans and characters from other ethnic American groups. The connections could possibly be interpreted as modest literary gestures to redefine the discrimination Arab and Muslim Americans face within the larger context of white-nonwhite imbalanced power relations.³ The forms of disempowerment contemporary Arab and Muslim Americans encounter are similar to others minoritized ethnic Americans face, in the sense that they are generated by a white nationalist American cycle of discrimination. This American cycle might be best understood as a systematic method of defining and redefining the nation in ways that preserve the dominant power structures. Ethnic American communities had and have been the target of discriminatory policies, but the cultural conservative personal narratives, which I have covered earlier, entirely leave out these troubled relations and resort instead to idealizing America. In their narratives, nonwhite America is always the problem; Arab and Muslim Americans are the most problematic. This cultural conservative whitewashing disempowers nonwhite communities who clearly do not belong in the imaginary Judeo-Christian homogenous white culture Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan fancy exists.

The Night Counter imaginatively depicts one of these communities. *The Night Counter*, a fictional tale of four generations of the Arab American Abdullahs, revolves around the arrival of Scheherazade, the legendary heroine of *The Arabian Nights*, in the U.S. after she follows an

³ Unquestionably, solidarity between white Americans and Arab Americans does manifest itself frequently, especially in the context of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli settler colonialism or American grassroots political activism surrounding U.S. hegemonic projects in the Middle East. I do not intend here to depict white America as an indistinguishable homogeneity.

American soldier from a tour in the 2003 American-occupied Iraq. Besides drawing subtle connections between Arab Americans and other minoritized ethnic American groups, *The Night Counter*, I further argue, offers American readers the chance to become privy to less familiar Arab American and Arab realities, which are entangled in national histories and global politics. Here, Yunis follows a narrative strategy, namely joining the local to the global and concentrating on local geographies, Ahmed and Kahf employ in *A Border Passage* and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* respectively. Yunis brings these connections and unfamiliar realities to the fore by employing Scheherazade as a structural device. Her presence in different local environments within the U.S. and regions outside it allows Yunis to criticize the contemporary American hegemonic enterprise in the Middle East. Modeled after the narrative structure of *The Arabian Nights*, the de-centered, localized accounts of the Abdullah family introduce a diverse community of Arab Americans to frustrate particular American clichés of Arabs, Muslims, including misconceptions about Arab and Muslim Americans. Before I commence my analysis, I will proceed to examine how *The Night Counter* utilizes the narrative structure and particular thematic features of the short-story cycle *The Arabian Nights*. This examination should later shed light on what central messages *The Night Counter* is able to communicate and how it does so.

In the Tradition of *The Arabian Nights*

Clearly, Yunis engages *The Arabian Nights*, a medieval work that belongs to the short-story cycle genre. According to James Nagel, short-story cycles have their “roots in the most of ancient narrative traditions. The historical meaning of ‘cycle’ is a collection of verse or narratives centering around some outstanding event or character.” Nagel quotes Arnold Williams who states that it is customary in the cycles to find “a constant calling attention to the vices of the great” (1-2). The cycle genre appeared in the U.S. as early as the early 1820s and the works

generally depicted “localized characters in regionalized settings” (3), but in the aftermath of the Civil War, the genre attracted the attention of “abroad spectrum of ethnic” writers (4). The genre in modern American fiction, Nagel writes, “is patently multicultural, deriving perhaps, both from ethnic cross-fertilization within the literary community and from a shared legacy reaching back to ancient oral traditions in virtually every society throughout the world, uniting disparate peoples in a heritage of narrative tradition” (4-5). Nagel attributes the “evolution of the genre in this rudimentary form,” to the “desire of speakers to relate their tales in some meaningful way to those told before” (5). Some of the American writers who utilized or continue to use the genre include Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, Chesnutt, Chopin, Crane, Steinbeck, Hurston, Barnes, Wright, Welty, Faulkner, Hemingway, Cather, Toomer, Baldwin, O’Connor, Erdrich, and Kincaid, to mention some prominent writers.⁴

Adopting this form for similar reason, Yunis borrows particular thematic and formalistic features of the short-story cycle not only to frustrate how Arab and Muslim Americans are stereotypically seen through the prism of *The Arabian Nights*, but to further perhaps depict an unacknowledged diverse Arab and Muslim America, while launching a kind of cultural-political protest against, or rather critique of, hegemonic knowledge production regimes. This diverse America the cultural conservatives are determined to erase because, they believe, diversity will undermine core American values. Through reappropriating Scheherazade, using repetition, and

⁴ Irving was one of the first American writers to contribute to the development of the cycle in *The Sketch Book* (1820). He was followed by Hawthorne in *Twice-Told Tale* (1851), Melville in *The Pizza Tales* (1856), Chesnutt in *The Conjure Woman* (1899), Chopin in *Bayou Folk* (1894), Crane in *Whilomville Stories* (1900), Cather in *O Pioneers* (1913), Toomer in *Cane* (1923), Hemingway in *In Our Time* (1925), Hurston in *Mules and Men* (1935), Barnes in *Nightwood* (1936), Steinbeck in *The Red Pony* (1937), Wright in *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938), Faulkner in *The Unvanquished* (1938), and Welty in *The Golden Apples* (1947). Baldwin produced *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), O’Connor wrote *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965), and Erdrich published *Love Medicine*. As of Kincaid, she released *Annie John* in 1985. For more information, see Nagel’s *The Contemporary American Short Story Cycle* (1-17).

employing humor, as I will shortly demonstrate in the discussion section, *The Night Counter* becomes subversive of a tireless tradition of misrepresenting Muslims and Arabs in the U.S. and the Middle East. Although the origin of *The Arabian Nights* is “impenetrably obscure,” according to Daniel Heller-Roazen, authors “from Coleridge to George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson, Hofmannsthal, Proust, and Borges found in this book the privileged archive of the culture, mores, beliefs, and literature of ‘the Orient’” (viii-ix). However, “Arabic writers, for their part, have rarely shared that view. A traditional judgment in the Arabic tradition,” Heller-Roazen elaborates, “represented also by such a modern scholar as Francesco Gabrieli, maintains to the contrary that the *Nights* is neither especially ‘Arabian’ in content nor in particularly literary form” (ix). Yet, in Western popular cultures and at least within Orientalist circles,⁵ *The Arabian Nights* has been considered representative of Arab and Muslim realities.⁶

⁵ Some of the following adaptations of *Arabian Nights* are produced by Hollywood and other international production companies, especially French companies. They include the movie *Arabian Nights* (2000), *Scheherazade One Thousand and One Erotic Nights* (1981), *Les 1001 Nuits* (1990), and *Scheherazade* (1963).

⁶ Western interpretations and adaptations of *The Arabian Nights* often highlight what they imagine is wrong with Arab and Muslim cultures as if the fictional accounts found in *The Arabian Nights* were real. According to Lynne Thornton, *Scheherazade* and *The Arabian Nights* preoccupied the artistic imagination of the West for many centuries. In *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting*, Thornton writes,

From the 1700s to the 1920s, the racy, high-colored stories recounted by Scheherazade in *Alf Laylah wa Laylah* . . . enjoyed considerable, enduring success in the West. Although the tales have a strong spirituality, it was the theme of sexuality, love, violence, humor, and guile that left an indelible impression of the Eastern World as being poetical, erotic and violent. In addition, the caliphs, vizirs, odalisques, and eunuchs who parade through the pages became clichés in the Orientalist repertoire. (4)

In close relation to these stereotypes, the European, and by extension the American, notion of the harem quickly became, and still is, a prominent site of representing Scheherazade, Muslim and Arab women in general. “Eastern women in their quarters” Thornton explains, “were the most popular of all themes in Orientalist painting. Since harems were precisely areas that male strangers could never enter, artists could give full rein to their imagination.” Accordingly, “[t]heir manner of treating the subject falls more or less into two categories: voluptuous fantasies, on the one hand, and on the other, domesticity in the European manner transposed and applied to the Eastern World” (20). These misrepresentations were not passé when Leila Ahmed wrote *A Border Passage* in 1999. In the memoir, Ahmed directly challenges that stereotypical understanding of the harem. Likewise, Yunis challenges not only what Scheherazade represents in the Western imagination, but through Scheherazade, she also destabilizes misrepresentations that have yet to disappear.

Structurally, the tale of witty Scheherazade who marries and outsmarts the tyrant King Shahriar controls the entire medieval collection, which relies on a frame narrative, namely her repeated production of stories to escape death. After witnessing the infidelity of his first wife, King Shahriar slays her and decides to marry a woman every night and take her life at dawn. The cycle of marrying and shortly murdering continues until he marries Scheherazade, the daughter of his vizier. She produces an orally-delivered short-story cycle to preserve her life and the lives of other women. Her act of storytelling, as Heller-Roazen rightly puts it, “works to ward off death. As such, the act of narration here has a double role to play; simultaneously, it defers and anticipates an imminent execution” (x). Most of the tales, David Pinault similarly writes, “feature very prominently the threat of violence and the use of stories to postpone or avert this violence” (10). The *Nights* “sets in motion at least two narratives, which are both simultaneous and noncoincident”: there is the tale of Scheherazade and the stories she must tell to postpone her own death (Heller-Roazen x). According to Pinault, some of the storytelling techniques used in the tales include repetition,⁷ *Leitwortstil* or leading-word style,⁸ thematic and formal patterning,⁹ and dramatic visualization.¹⁰

⁷ Pinault highlights that the tales repeatedly reference objects or characters who look minor, but near the end of the designated tale, they show up later to “intrude suddenly on the narrative” (16). This repetition or “repetitive designation” “creates thereby an effect of apparently casual foreshadowing” (17).

⁸ The term refers to the “‘purposeful repetition of words’ in a given literary piece. . . . [It] usually expresses a motif or theme important to the given story; the repetition of this *Leitwort* ensures that the theme will gradually force itself on the reader’s attention” (Pinault 18).

⁹ Thematic patterning refers to the “distribution of recurrent concepts and moralistic motifs among the various incidents and frames of story” and it “may be arranged so as to emphasize the unifying argument or salient idea which disparate events and disparate narrative frames have in common” (22). Formal patterning refers to the “organization of events, actions, and gestures which constitute a narrative and give shape to a story” (23).

¹⁰ Dramatic visualizations refers to author’s effective “representing of an object or character with an abundance of descriptive detail, or the mimetic rendering of gestures and dialogue in such a way as to make the given scene ‘visual’ or imaginatively present to an audience” (25).

In many ways, the major plotline, numerous subplots, the various settings, diverse themes, characterizations, formalistic devices, and motifs in Yunis' *The Night Counter* echo some of those found in *The Arabian Nights*. Sampling some of these features reveals how the former work borrows from the latter. The major plotline revolves around the arrival of Scheherazade, the legendary heroine of *The Arabian Nights*, in the U.S, and traces her many encounters with the Lebanese American Abdullah family. *The Night Counter*, however, departs from *The Arabian Nights* by commencing the action on the 992nd night. In addition, on her magic carpet, Scheherazade initially follows an American soldier returning to Los Angeles from a tour in the post-9/11 American-occupied Iraq. By beginning the action with this encounter, Yunis frames the whole narrative in the context of the American hegemony in the Middle East and delineates how this hegemony affects representations of Arab and Muslim Americans. This opening encounter is very important because "the first and last stories are most often the ones of key significance, with the final story of the cycle being the most powerful, because there the patterns of recurrence and development initiated in the opening story come naturally to fullest expression" (Lynch 25). Indeed, like the opening story, the closing one occupies a special location in *The Night Counter*: it emphasizes the necessity for telling Arab American stories, especially during times of racial profiling and surveillance, but it also demonstrates how the Abdullahs have established permanent roots in the U.S. Contrary to what the cultural conservatives claim, Arab Americans are there to stay. Indeed, *The Night Counter* is more about the Arab American community than it is about particular individuals, even though Scheherazade meets, communicates, and shares stories only with the 85 year-old Fatima Abdullah, who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1930s and now lives in West Hollywood with her gay grandson Amir. As she travels to various American and Middle Eastern locales to check on the four

Abdullah generations in a post-9/11 attacks world, Scheherazade becomes the vehicle through whom Fatima—the primary relater (not to be confused with the narrator who is also different from fictional Scheherazade)—delivers some of the stories which relate to the themes of “immigrant family,” “citizenship and belonging,” and “critique of American hegemony.”¹¹ The interaction between Scheherazade and Fatima, who obsesses over her ancestral house in Lebanon and thinks she will die on the 1001st night, and other conversations among, and between, opportunistic reporters, FBI agents, anti-war activists, assimilationist Arab Americans, observant Muslim Americans, Palestinian refugees, and the main characters—unveil some of the challenges Arab and Arab Americans wrestles with in the U.S. and abroad. Throughout my discussion, the importance of the short-story cycle to revealing these challenges and more will become clearer.

¹¹ *The Night Counter* has received positive, diverse reviews ranging from calling the novel a work of immigrant literature, a family drama, an assimilation story, to a creative portrayal of immigrant disillusionment, and unfulfilled dreams in a mythic promised land. Undoubtedly important, the available reviews leave out a few issues untouched: the issue of representation, the use of the structure of *The Arabian Nights*, the question of citizenship and belonging, and the critique of American hegemony. A June 2009 *Kirkus* review calls the novel “an immigrant-assimilation story” (n. p.), a story, which, according to *The Publisher Weekly*, offers a creative account of Fatima’s “huge dysfunctional family.” Their imperfection is a sign of their normalcy (33). Writing in the same vein, Leslie Patterson describes the novel as one about “complicated family ties, long-buried secrets, and last minute surprises. It gives insight into the lives of Lebanese immigrants in America” (94). Likewise, from the perspective of Kristine Huntley, the novel is a work “celebrating the rich diversity of a multigenerational family” (32). According to *Daily News Egypt*, *The Night Counter* “shed[s] light on matters of love, family, life’s disappointments, the status of immigrants in the US and Arabs in a post 9/11 America, all wrapped in a package of light comedy” (n. p.).

The novel, says Carolyn See, resembles its author’s efforts to humanize Arab Muslim America. It concentrates on the national space. The book is “an immigrant-ethnic cocktail laced with political oppression. . . . Scheherazade . . . must have listened to thousands of tales of young women who came to America from their beloved old country only to find poverty, struggle, homesickness and disappointment” (C03). Emily Holman refers to *The Night Counter* as “a novel about . . . real life, not myths” (n. p.). Finally, in her review, Kathryn Kysar contends that *The Night Counter*,

is far more than a fantastic family story. Yunis masterfully . . . delivers a searing yet humorous commentary about the difficulties confronting Arab-Americans living in the post-9/11 United States. She presents the reader with a catalog of clichés . . . and challenges her readers to rethink these stereotypes as the characters’ personal crises mirror larger geo-political events. (11E)

Although these book reviews, especially Kysar’s, are helpful, they neither offer in-depth analyses nor do they investigate the issue of representation, the use of the structure of *The Arabian Nights*, citizenship and belonging, and the critique of American hegemony. This chapter attempts to fill the gap.

Arab and Muslim American Realities: Integration, Assimilation, Alienation, Resistance, or . . .

Not unlike a large number of ethnic American writers, including Hurston, Kingston, and Erdrich, Yunis utilizes components of the short-story cycle to explore themes ethnic American writers who write in that tradition dwell upon. Some of these themes include “immigration, acculturation, language acquisition, assimilation, identity formation, and the complexities of formulating a sense of self that incorporates the old world and the new, the central traditions of the country of origin integrated into, or in conflict with, the values of the country of choice” (Nagel 15). Not unlike in Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Ahmed’s *A Border Passage*, and Fawal’s *On the Hills of God*, the themes of diversity and belonging are also persistent currents in *The Night Counter*. Writing during times of hyper-anxiety about Arab and Muslim presence in America, right from the onset, Yunis grounds her diverse Arab American characters in the U.S. Fatima, readers are told, immigrated from Lebanon to Detroit in the 1930s but has never stepped foot in Lebanon since then. She gave birth to ten sons and daughters who live with their own families in Detroit, Washington D.C., New York, Los Angeles, and New Castle (10). The geographic distribution of Fatima’s ten children and fourteen (great) grandchildren suggests that they are well integrated, are neither sojourners nor a ghettoized minority, and constitute neither a national security, nor a demographic threat. They form a heterogeneous plurality, one composed of homosexual men, promiscuous teenagers, sexually-liberal mothers, religiously-mixed marriages, nostalgic first generation, assimilated U.S.-born generations, educated secular and religious males and females, among others. In the introduction to this dissertation, I have outlined the major claims the cultural conservative autobiographers mount. *The Night Counter* creates literary realities unlike the fictional claims Ali et al. make. Ali, Darwish, Sultan, and Gabrielle argue that the U.S. is currently under a covert offensive launched by Arab and Muslim

infiltrators whose values are utterly incompatible with American core values. Slaves to Islam and its stranglehold on every aspect of their lives, Arab and Muslim Americans will destroy the Judeo-Christian American culture and will therefore always be enemies of Israel and the U.S., the two nations who rightly intervene in the Middle East only to uproot Islamic terrorism. Arab and Muslim Americans, the argument goes, cannot be loyal to any nation state and therefore cannot establish roots in the U.S. *The Night Counter*, I contend, offers representations of Arab and Muslim Americans unlike any catalogued in the cultural conservative narratives. These representations are enhanced by the narrative structure. Indeed, in adopting the structure of the short-story cycle, Yunis successfully invites the readers to accompany Scheherazade who in each tale travels to a particular localized setting to check on one or more of Fatima's children and grandchildren. In *The Night Counter*, as it is the norm in the cycle form as I further elaborate in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, the theme of diversity and community is given advantage. In *The Night Counter*, the independent tales showcase an unfamiliar Arab American diversity without the risk of homogenizing it since the tale(s) covering the span of a single night can stand alone. The universe it describes and those who dwell in it are unique.

Indeed, the Arab and Muslim Americans in *The Night Counter* are far from homogenous. The Abdullah family consists of several generations, including the first-generation Fatima and Ibrahim. Fatima and her ex-husband Ibrahim long for an irretrievable past. Fatima obsesses over an ancestral house back in Lebanon although the last time she saw the house was before she left for the U.S. in the 1930s. Yet, she never stops thinking about who among her ten children should get the house her great-grandfather built in Deir Zeitoon. Further, she, used to the idea of arranged marriage, attempts to introduce her gay grandson Amir to young Arab American women, hoping he will take a wife. Amir is not a closeted gay Arab American man, but Fatima

is a traditionalist matriarch. “Fatima Abdul Aziz Abdullah, the granddaughter of one of Lebanon’s greatest matchmakers,” the narrator reveals what Fatima thinks, “could marry off Amir in nine days. Once married, he would not be able to use that terrible word [i.e. ‘gay’], and therefore he would be respectable enough to inherit the house in Lebanon.” Early in the novel, Amir informs Fatima about his sexuality and sexual identity, but she ignores whatever he says. In a conversation with Fatima who thinks that Shakespeare was a “British man who stole all the great Arab plays,” Amir replies by drawing attention to his own sexual identity as a gay man: “Many say the reason Shakespeare liked men in tights so much was that he liked men period. . . . Just like me, Arab and--.” Fatima urges him to “[l]isten to God,” but Amir replies by reminding her that “there’s nothing in the Koran about it being a sin to be gay,” thus “getting the word out before she could prevent it” (8). No matter what Amir says, Fatima is adamant he must “[s]top this nonsense” (Yunis 9).

Fatima speaks Arabic on the bus, treasures other items from Lebanon, socializes with Arab matriarchs, is occasionally seen attending funerals of deceased community fellows, and keeps safe a Quran she cannot read. Fatima is illiterate. “Although Fatima was sure that awful word [gay] was a sin,” the narrator explains, “she could not ask anyone, not even Ibrahim, to find a Koranic passage banning it because she rarely acknowledged in any language that she couldn’t read for herself—nor would she want anyone questioning why someone as virtuous as herself was asking about such a topic.” By promising Amir her house in Lebanon provided that he marries one of the young Arab American women she recommends, Fatima hopes to help him “forget that dreadful word” (Yunis 9). Clearly, Fatima resists disconnecting from the culture of her country of origin. The narrator tells the readers,

Fatima had created her garden in Detroit with the seeds of her mother's garden in Lebanon, seeds that her mother had tucked into the cedar chest for her on the day of her first wedding. Somehow Fatima had made the garden flourish, but she had a harder time re-creating Lebanon in Detroit than Amir had had re-creating her Detroit garden in Los Angeles. Both he and the vegetables were in their natural environment in West Hollywood, but Fatima didn't permit that thought to take hold of her mind. (Yunis 79-80)

In spite of the fact that both Fatima and Amir, and not unlike the rest of the family, have established roots in America—as suggested by the blooming hybrid gardens—Fatima's attachment to the Lebanon she remembers leaving in the 1930s is fairly strong. Although she had never returned to Lebanon, even to visit, her nostalgic yearning for what used to be home never stops. Arguably, her failure to notice how well integrated Amir is in his American locale points to this nostalgic desire to recover the past through restoring at least one of her progeny to Lebanon.

Ibrahim's situation is not substantially different. Like the first-generation Arab American Fatima, Ibrahim speaks broken English. Almost every week, he takes the bus to the nearby airport to satisfy a similar nostalgic yearning for what he remembers of the Arabic-speaking Lebanon. Twice a week, he has to get his fill by watching, smelling, listening, and talking to Arab travelers arriving from the Middle East on KLM Flight 6470. After arriving at the airport, Ibrahim would

wait for the passengers to come out of customs. Most of them would be Arabs, coming from Lebanon and Jordan and connecting through Amsterdam. They weren't his relatives, but as they wept and embraced their waiting entourages, he

would hear the sound of his childhood dinners in their hyperbolic greetings. He would smell his mother's evening gatherings in the heavy perfume of the overly made up grandmothers and in the sweat of the young men who somehow didn't believe in deodorant but eagerly indulged in Western things such as Marlboro and druggie music with no meaning. In the travelers' bulging suitcases, tied together with ropes so that they wouldn't burst open, Ibrahim would picture the gifts of baklava carefully inserted between the sweaters and coats they would make much use of here.

. . . . If he was lucky, he would inhale jasmine with the arrivals, it being in bloom in Lebanon now. (Yunis 19-20)

Ibrahim's and Fatima's memories of their distant past and attachment to what they remember of the old country make them gravitate towards opportunities to connect the now with the then. Whether a funeral, a women's social circle, an Arabic newspaper, the sight of a fig tree, the arrival terminal in airports, a hoped-for Lebanese jasmine scent or the wish to restore a grandson or a daughter to the house in Deir Zeitoon, the eighty-year-plus ex-couple seeks and finds temporary, yet necessary, gratification. Contrary to what the cultural conservative autobiographers claim, however, such cultural attachments are not threatening, nor should America be suspicious of them.

Unlike Fatima and Ibrahim, their children and grandchildren are not attached to memories of the old country. In fact, some of them are completely assimilated, others integrated without fully disconnecting from Arab life and culture. All except Nadia do not speak Arabic, their parents' native tongue. Even Nadia had to learn Arabic as an adult in college (Yunis 38). They do not adhere to the Arab Lebanese cultural traditions their parents grew up with. Nadia, a

professor of Arabic, is in an inter-faith marriage with Elias, also a professor of Arabic. In the novel, traditionalist Arab American matriarchs frown upon this marriage. Responding to what she considers a reprimanding gesture from Scheherazade when the latter states that “Elias is a Christian name,” Fatima replies, “[s]o you wish to reprimand me on how I let my daughter marry a Christian, just like the women in the Arab Ladies Society did in Detroit. Both the Christian and Muslim ladies accused me of being a lenient mother” (39). Clearly, the first generation Arab American ladies seem to consider that a taboo has been broken, unlike Nadia and the subsequent generations. In fact, the U.S.-born generations break major taboos. For example, Suraya, the mother of Amir, used anonymous donated sperm. The result is Amir who grows up not knowing the identity of his father. Also in the novel, Fatima’s teenage great grandchild Decimal is pregnant. Decimal’s own mother Brenda is promiscuous. From this mosaic of Arab Americans, one deduces a particular theme: there is no one representative type among Arab Americans. On generational, intergenerational, familial, and personal levels, major differences exist. Generations of Arab Americans in *The Night Counter* enter in intercultural, interracial, and interreligious relations—including marriage relations. The values of all these heterogeneous Arab Americans are deeply influenced and shaped by their American surroundings and upbringing.¹² In that sense, these Arab Americans are not unlike other immigrant families one encounters in other multiethnic American literary traditions.

Indeed, in spite of their differences, the Abdullahs consider America their home. In that sense, and not unlike Kingston in *China Men*, Yunis claims America for Arab Americans.

¹² In showing that there is no one representative type among Arab Americans, *The Night Counter* echoes other Arab American novels including Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Halaby’s *West of the Jordan*, and Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz*, to mention a few. Similarly, the same theme recurs in different literary works from within the multiethnic American literary cannon. Kingston’s *China Men* and Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* are two examples.

Additional evidence of this rootedness in the U.S. is provided through employing what Pinault calls “Leitwortstil” or “leading-word style.” In other words, the “purposeful repetition” of the Leitwort “house” in *The Night Counter* guarantees that the theme of Arab American rootedness in the U.S. “will gradually force itself on the reader’s attention” (Pinault 18). Throughout the novel, readers see Fatima obsessing over the house back in Lebanon although she has not seen it since the 1930s. Later in the novel, however, readers learn that the house in fact no longer exists. The neighborhood where it was located in the village of Dier Zeitoun, let alone Lebanon as a whole, has been rezoned and developed in ways that would make it almost impossible for Fatima to identify the location of the absent house. If the house serves as a metaphor for returning to Lebanon, its physical absence then signals the impossibility of return. The Abdullahs, even Fatima included, are in the U.S. to stay. The U.S. is their home. This effect is brought about through the deliberate constant repetition of how obsessed Fatima is with the “house” until finally the secret is revealed: the house does not exist and the return to the country of origin is therefore impossible. The same U.S. the Abdullahs call home, however, has problems.

Emplotting Arab America: Racial Profiling, Suspicion, and Disempowerment

Although it charts the normal socio-cultural and immigrant families’ socializing patterns before it delineates a strong sense of Arab American belonging, *The Night Counter* does not romanticize the U.S. Similar to *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *A Border Passage*, it, I argue, engages the political: in particular, *The Night Counter* exposes the racial profiling of Arab and Muslim Americans, makes connections between them and other minoritized communities, and criticizes U.S. military enterprises in the Middle East after the 9/11 attacks.¹³ So far, none of

¹³ My analysis of *The Night Counter* corresponds with the findings of Fadda-Conrey who, in *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, argues that “the discursive negotiation of transnational connections to Arab homelands from a

the novels or memoirs discussed earlier in this study delves as deeply as *The Night Counter* in these subject matters. Indeed, in *The Night Counter*, racial profiling is featured in a post-9/11 U.S. On a structural level, the plotline reveals what I would term a mock detective story when opportunist reporters closely watch the house of Amir before they tip off the FBI whose agents accordingly frequent the premises on the ground of suspecting Amir of plotting to execute a terror attack. As in other short-story cycles, these agents are minor characters early in the novel, but they eventually become immersed in the action. In short-story cycles, such characters “intrude suddenly on the narrative” (Pinault 16). American film directors often assign to Amir, the Arab American junior gay actor, the role of an Arab or Muslim terrorist to play—Yunis’s metaphor for national American expectations. Hence, when the two reporters stationed outside the house see bearded Amir making weird gestures and aggressive-looking faces, or speaking loudly on the phone, they theorize that he is a terrorist. In reality, however, he is just rehearsing for the assigned roles he has, or expects, to play. Nonetheless, this journalistic dedication to uncover what they think is a terror plot in the making, as the narrative suggests, is based on racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims, a common practice in mainstream American media, image production industry,¹⁴ and within security agencies especially in the post 9/11 era.¹⁵ Yunis, I

variegated and multilayered US perspective has an integral role in creating a space for reformulating hegemonic and unilocal understandings of US citizenship and belonging. In other words, the ways in which original Arab homelands, and their concomitant cultural and political byproducts, are imagined, replicated, portrayed, and lived by multiple generations of Arab-Americans” in particular Arab American literary, visual, and artistic productions, “invite new engagements with US citizenship and belonging that are repositioned outside the frameworks of Orientalism and neoimperialism” (Introduction). In “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11,” Fadda-Conrey rightly mentions Yunis’ *The Night Counter* as an Arab American novel that highlights Arab and Muslim American diversity in a deliberate authorial attempt to challenge the stereotyping of Arab Americans as a homogenous community, one disloyal to America and in contradiction with American values (551).

¹⁴ In his article “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” Jack Shaheen argues that “[s]een through Hollywood’s distorted lenses, Arabs look different [from Americans] and threatening. Projected along racial and religious lenses, the stereotypes are deeply ingrained in American cinema.” “From 1896 until today,” Shaheen

states, “filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemies #1—brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural ‘others’ bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews.” To reemphasize his point, Shaheen advances the following statement: “Much has happened since 1896—women’s suffrage, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, two world wars, the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf wars, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Throughout it all, Hollywood’s caricature of the Arab has prowled the silver screen. He is there to this day—repulsive and unrepresentative as ever” (172). Yunis’ novel draws attention to the prevalence of such misrepresentations of the Arab and Muslim others even into the twenty-first century.

¹⁵ Reports emerging since 2011 have shown strong evidence pointing to programs designed by police departments to spy on Muslim Americans. New York Police Department (NYPD) is one of them. According to Adam Goldman and Matt Apuzzo from *Associated Press*, the NYPD instructed its officers to spy on law-abiding Muslim Americans in mosques, coffee shops, restaurants, political events, universities, and other public spaces. The NYPD even went as far as planting informants, in a move similar to spying on anti-war activists in the 1960s. The Handschu guidelines “named after Barbara Handschu, the plaintiff in a lawsuit over similar widespread harassment of anti-war protesters by the police’s so-called Red Squad in the 1960s,” Karen McVeigh writes, “were imposed as part of a landmark settlement in 1985. The case was settled with the imposition of the Handschu guidelines, which prohibited investigations of political and religious organizations unless there was ‘specific information’ that the group was linked to past or present crime” (n. p.). The current NYPD’s surveillance of Muslims, Barbara Handschu warns, is “not that different than what happened back in the ‘60s, except that somebody’s being targeted because of ethnicity and before we were targeted because of political belief . . . I mean, this is worse. This is racial profiling” (Hawley n. p.). Indeed, in a 2013 report, Goldman and Apuzzo, who won a 2012 Pulitzer Prize for uncovering this unconstitutional surveillance, argue that the NYPD “has secretly labeled entire mosques as terrorist organizations, a designation that allows police to use informants to record sermons and spy on imams, often without specific evidence of criminal wrongdoing.” Goldman and Apuzzo add that numerous “terrorism enterprise investigations” “stretch for years, allowing surveillance to continue even though the NYPD has never criminally charged a mosque or Islamic organization with operating as a terrorism enterprise” (n. p.). The spying program reached beyond mosques: Muslim organizations, public institutions, private business, universities, and public gathering have become a target. The NYPD’s racial-profiling-based spying activities on Muslim American date back to 2003.

The FBI is another security agency that has racially profiled Muslim Americans since 9/11. In an initiative called “Mapping the FBI: Uncovering Abusive Surveillance and Racial Profiling,” the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argues that the FBI “is collecting racial and ethnic information and ‘mapping’ American communities around the country based on crude stereotypes about which groups commit different types of crimes. Nationwide, the FBI is gathering reports on innocent Americans’ so-called ‘suspicious activity’ and sharing it with unknown numbers of federal, state and local government agencies” (n. p.). Muslim Americans are at the heart of the FBI’s unconstitutional activities. According to ACLU, the FBI spies on Muslim Americans. In one case in San Francisco, Kari Huus reports, the FBI used a community outreach program to conduct spying (n. p.). The racial profiling, spying, and violation of constitutional rights are, to some degree, informed by the FBI training material which according to Dana Priest and William Arkin portrayed mainstream Muslim Americans as violent radicals (n. p.). In a December 2010 investigative report, Priest and Arkin argue that “law enforcement agencies have hired as trainers self-described experts whose extremist views on Islam and terrorism are considered inaccurate and counterproductive by the FBI and U.S. intelligence agencies” (n. p.). In a September 2011 article, however, Azmat Khan reports on Spencer Akerman who “published a lengthy look at teaching material used by the FBI, including documents that describe mainstream American Muslims as likely terrorist sympathizers, Islamic charities as a ‘funding mechanism for combat’ and the Prophet Mohammed as a ‘cult leader’” (n. p.). The instructors include many of the clash of civilizations advocates like Walid Shobab. It should be noted that the NYPD’s spying activities in the 1960s were not unique. In the State of Mississippi, state agencies spied on Civil Rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s. The documentary *Spies of Mississippi* reveals how a state agency called the Mississippi Sovereign Commission (MSC) hired spies “to infiltrate the civil rights movement and squash attempts to desegregate the state and register African Americans to vote. Some of the spies were themselves African-American.” The MSC produced thousands of reports “many of which were shared with local police departments

propose, responds to this post-9/11 rapid securitization and institutional racial profiling by humor. In comparison with *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, *A Border Passage*, and *On the Hills of God*, *The Night Counter* is the funniest. In fact, the other three works are serious in tone. To explain how humor achieves its desired effect in *The Night Counter*, Lynch's concept of the "dynamic patterns of recurrence" is useful (25). Arguably, *The Night Counter* rebukes the stereotypical ways national security agencies, Hollywood, mainstream media outlets, and the dominant national discourse—to which the cultural conservatives contribute immensely—tirelessly attempt to emplot Arab and Muslim Americans into certain roles. Treated as a homogenous dangerous population, Arab and Muslim Americans are judged by a single script and forced into stereotypical roles. Amir's constant effort to try out for stereotypical typecast roles is indicative of this overall national attempt to force Arab and Muslim America into particularly negative roles. Cognizant of this harsh reality, Yunis, I speculate, repeatedly creates humorous encounters to ridicule such impositions. Her representations cleverly suggest that what the reporters or the FBI agents, for example, consider a possible terrorist cell is in fact nothing but a normal Arab American extended family.

The last conversation between the two journalists stationed in front of Amir's house, watching him in the garden watering the fig tree, reveals this unfounded suspicion, which the reporters base on the customary national politics of racializing Arab and Muslim Americans. Debating back and forth the Abdullahs' case, the two reporters eventually tip off the FBI on Amir and the Abdullahs on the following grounds: some of Amir's relatives are "freaky, loud" Arabs; Amir has a religious Muslim relative or more specifically the "religious nutcase husband

whose officers belonged to the Ku Klux Klan." Some of these reports contributed to the death of a number of Civil Rights activists (Goodman, n. p.).

of the daughter [of Fatima] in Detroit” (137); the evidence is not yet criminalizing possibly because the family is good at concealing its terror activity (Yunis 136-37). The basis of the suspicion, as Yunis renders it, is irrational, ridiculous, and even clownish. Ultimately, the racial and religious identity of Arab and Muslim American characters makes them suspects, in the eyes of law agencies, especially the FBI.

Having already assumed that all Arab and Muslim Americans are guilty until proven otherwise, law enforcement agents fail to distinguish real threats from imagined one. Their performance and their suspicions, therefore, become excellent material for laughter. Consider the following reaction by the fictional FBI agent:

“HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH,” AMIR shouted as he turned off the engine, keeping time to the gospel music coming out of his Honda.

He looked at the SUV parked in front of the fig tree and gave it the finger. “I’m the man,” Amir sang out. “Screw you and your SUV, buddy [Amir now mixes up the FBI SUV with the SUV owned by the more famous gay actor neighbor and his previous lover]; the soap’s going to kill you off tomorrow.

Slowly and painfully. Hallelujah. Halle—.” (Yunis 330)

From inside the SUV, the FBI agents think that Amir knows he is being watched and has chosen to let them know that, by announcing he will kill them. His murder weapon is poisoned toilet soap. “He knows we’re here,” the agent Sherri Hazad says to her partner. She adds: “Talking about poisoning us with soap . . . the grandmother showed me some ‘expensive soap’ in the kitchen. I used it. I should get myself checked” (331). The suspicion of poisoning becomes real to her the moment she factors in the fact that one of Amir’s relatives is a U.S. contractor in Iraq while another, a tourist guide, drives “Saudis all around the Nevada desert” where the U.S. has

“weapon-testing sites out there” (331). The more frequent these encounters with the FBI agents are in the novel, the more absurd and ridiculous they become. For the reporters and the FBI agents, the Abdullahs’ Middle Eastern Arab and Muslim roots offer enough cautionary evidence to suspect them of plotting a terror attack, but for the critical reader, the situations are comic, the performance of the agents is surreal, and the grounds upon which suspicion is established should be laughed at.

To obtain this desired effect of deflating the exaggerated threat and therefore inviting her readers to question the racially-based suspicion Arab and Muslim American characters have to endure, Yunis generates more of these comic encounters. The repetition of the theme of baseless suspicion and the ensuing familiarity in the mind of the readers with the different patterns through which it manifests itself should invite them to identify a problem in national attitudes and practices towards the racially-profiled Arab America. But to obtain that effect, Yunis must repeat the ridiculous encounters. Indeed, after the reporters call the FBI on Amir and his family, they are asked to leave the case in the hands of the FBI. At that moment, one of the journalists urges his partner not to despair because there will be more cases for them to investigate. One of these cases includes a “falafel restaurant owner in Orange County” (137).¹⁶ Like the Abdullahs, he believes, the falafel restaurant owner might be a true suspect. The reporter does not seem dissuaded when his female partner counter-argues that “We all got those” weird and obnoxious relatives. Instead, he reminds her that the Abdullahs’ case is “missing all the little clues that

¹⁶ Like Yunis, Diana Abu-Jaber relates a similar story, though hers takes place in 1991. In her novel *Crescent*, she imagines CIA agents spying on Arab Americans and Arabs in the U.S. after the U.S. attacks Iraq. Two CIA agents frequent a falafel restaurant on the hope of identifying “any terrorist schemes developing in the Arab-American community” (21). Similar acts of security surveillance and keeping a close eye on the Arab American community also register in Laila Halaby’s novel *Once in a Promised Land*.

caused all the big incidents” (Yunis 137). For the male reporter, the family’s ethno-religious roots offer enough ground to investigate them.

From the previous analysis, one observation stands out. The plot of *The Night Counter* develops through the stereotypical interplay of media (mis)presentations of Arabs and Muslims and the routine racial profiling by security agencies, in this case the FBI. The image and information industries (i.e. Hollywood and mass media) inform, and are informed by, the politics of the national security agencies. In the documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack Shaheen argues that in the Hollywood image-making of Arabs, one finds “a dangerously consistent pattern of hateful Arab stereotypes.” The Arab is a villain, terrorist, and vile character. Applying this observation to Amir’s case explains why he rehearses the particular roles he is, or expects to be, assigned. In simple words, he prepares to get the only type of roles available to him as an Arab Muslim American: a blood-thirsty Muslim terrorist. Hollywood is the marketplace and he, an actor given no other options, seeks to meet its expectations. This corporate misrepresentation of the Arab, however, does not operate in isolation. “Politics and Hollywood’s images,” Shaheen contends, “are linked; they reinforce one another. Policy enforces mythical images; mythical images help enforce policy” (n. p.).¹⁷ This close relation between the three bodies—i.e. Hollywood, mass media, and national security agencies—and the racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims as a national security threat manifests itself clearly in *The*

¹⁷ A similar relation was vividly identifiable during the events that led to the internment of Japanese Americans. In *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America’s Concentration Camps*, Michi Weglyn traces how bigotry and racism in American press aided in the political decision to intern Japanese Americans. Both the American media and the official narrative criminalized the Japanese American population by alleging that “all Japanese residents within the United States were disloyal and sure to engage in sabotage should war ever erupt between Japan and the United States. . . . [And while neither German nor Italian Americans or nationals were interned, the American government] decided to intern all Japanese Americans on the West Coast, regardless of their behavior; of those interned some 73 percent were American citizens . . . imprisoned for no reason other than their race” (Weglyn 28-29). Weglyn adds, “the long years of propaganda were bearing fruit” (29). Similar to African Americans during the twentieth century, Japanese Americans were seen as “a problem” during World War Two: the “negro problem” parallels the “Jap problem.”

Night Counter. It is indeed reflective of the suspicion and mistrust Arab and Muslim Americans wrestle with in the U.S. after 9/11.

In the real world, negative images of the suspected Arabs and Muslims, and by extension those of Arab and Muslim Americans, have evolved. In countless media outlets, law enforcement agencies, public and official discourses, and of course Hollywood productions,¹⁸ Arabs and Muslims—Arab and Muslim Americans included—are misrepresented through clichés that trap them in medieval history and define them through the prism of the *Arabian Nights*,¹⁹ Orientalist literature,²⁰ rigid Islamic shari‘ah, and most recently reactionary jihadist narratives.²¹ Arabs, Muslims, and Arab and Muslim Americans are generally the antithesis of democracy, modernity, tolerance, love, justice, progress, and humanness.²² More than often, Arab and Muslim men are given one of the following identities:²³ corrupt wealthy Sheikhs,²⁴ Nazi supporters/Jew haters,²⁵ deceitful abusive villains,²⁶ fanatical terrorists or irrationally violent Muslims,²⁷ silent or violent

¹⁸ It would be inaccurate to say that each and every Hollywood production vilifies Arabs and Muslims. In some movies, Muslims are portrayed in a favorable manner. Examples include *The 13 Warriors* (1999), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), and *Lion of the Desert* (1981).

¹⁹ See the movies *Adventures in Iraq* (1943), *Adventures of Hajji Baba* (1954), *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1925), *The Adventures of Sinbad* (1962), *The Adventures of Sinbad* (1979), *Aladdin* (1992), *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* (1944), *Arabian Knight* (1995), *Arabian Nights* (1942), *The Arabian Nights* (1972), *The Bugs Bunny/ Road Runner* (1979), *Bugs Bunny's Third Movie: 1001 Rabbit Tales* (1982), *Cabaret* (1972), *Captain Sinbad* (1963), and *The Fantastic Voyages of the Sinbad the Sailor* (1993).

²⁰ See the *Indiana Jones* movies, *Best Defense* (1984), and *Dark Streets of Cairo* (1940).

²¹ Some of these examples include the movies *Abdullah the Great* (1956), *Above Suspicion* (1943), *The Mummy* (1999), *Gladiator*, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).

²² See the movies *Aladdin* (1992), *Exodus* (1960), and *Harem* (1985).

²³ TV series that perpetuate many of the negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims include *The Unit* (2006), *24* (2001-10), *Spartacus* (2010), *Weeds* (2005-2012), and *Homeland* (2011-).

²⁴ See the movies *Arabia* (1922), *Basic Training* (1985), *Beyond Justice* (1992), *Cabaret* (1972), *Condorman* (1981), and *The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington* (1977).

²⁵ See the movies *Action in Arabia* (1944), *Adventures in Iraq* (1943), *Adventures of the Flying Cadets* (1943), *Casablanca Express* (1990), and *King Solomon's Mines* (1985).

²⁶ See the movies *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938) and *The Black Stallion* (1979).

²⁷ See the movie *Air Force One* (1997), *Airplane II: The Sequel* (1982), *The Ambassador* (1984), *The American President* (1995), *Beyond Justice* (1992), *Bloodfist VI: Ground Zero* (1995), *Bulletproof* (1988), *Cloak and Dagger* (1984), *Desert Thunder* (1998), *Femme Fontaine: Killer Babe for the CIA* (1994), *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1962), *The Formula* (1980), *Frantic* (1988), *Freedom Strike* (1998), *Jewels of the Nile* (1985), *The Wind and the Lion* (1975), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Rules of Engagement* (2001), and *American Sniper* (2014).

Palestinians,²⁸ slave traders,²⁹ Muslim crusaders,³⁰ and the devil's agents,³¹ among other stock roles. But the terrorist Muslim Arab is one of the dominant negative portrayals at the moment. Arab and Muslim women are imagined to be sexy belly dancers,³² submissive veiled femininity,³³ voiceless slaves in a harem,³⁴ members of the uneducated masses,³⁵ and a jihadi suicide bomber. Their primary roles, as the Hollywood stereotypical tale goes, are confined, by their oppressive men, to biological reproduction, sexual entertainment, domesticity,³⁶ and aiding in attacks on infidel Westerners. The frequency and volume of these stereotypes regular Americans see on a daily basis send them one message: Arabs and Muslims are just this and that. The mission of the Arab American writer is indeed a strenuous one.

One in Marginalization: Sharing the Discrimination

The Night Counter is attentive to the Arab American dilemma brought about partly by particular stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, clichés that affect the image and status of Arab and Muslim Americans. But the racial discrimination Arab Americans face and the stigmatization they have to endure are an extension of what other ethnic minorities had or have experienced in America. In her attempt to subvert the image of Scheherazade,³⁷ and that of Arab and Muslim

²⁸ See the movies *Appointment with Death* (1988), *Black Sunday* (1977), *Deadline* (1986), *Death before Dishonor* (1987), *The Delta Force* (1986), *Delta Force III: The Killing Game* (1991), *Double Edge* (1992), *Exodus* (1960), and *World War Z* (2013).

²⁹ See the movies *Ashanti* (1979), *Gladiator* (2000), and *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1962).

³⁰ See the movies *The Black Night* (1954) and *The Crusades* (1935).

³¹ See the movie *Solomon Kane* (2009).

³² See the movies *Baghdad after Midnight* (1954).

³³ See the movie *Baby Boom* (1987).

³⁴ See the movies *Aladdin from Broadway* (1917) and *Baghdad after Midnight* (1954).

³⁵ See the movies *Against All Flags* (1952).

³⁶ See the movie *Not without My Daughter* (1991).

³⁷ For Arab and Muslim American women writers, like Ahmed and Yunis, re-appropriating Scheherazade of the *Arabian Nights* becomes a necessity because the legendary figure and the medieval text heavily factor into stereotypical Western understandings of Islam, Muslim women, Arabs, and the Middle East. Unlike these

women in general, Yunis assigns to Scheherazade the role of a witness not to primarily Arab and Muslim violence or Middle Eastern backwardness, although those do exist, but more to American racism towards Arab and Muslim American citizens, racism that other ethnic minorities have not been immune to. Scheherazade indeed becomes Yunis' structural device to remind American readers of racist laws that constrained the flow of Arab immigrants in the 1920s when the "new quotas restricted the influx of immigrants, particularly 'yellow people,' as Arabs often were classified then" (Yunis 17). Through the encounter between Scheherazade and Fatima, readers learn how, like Chinese Americans in the 1930s and 1940s, Arab Americans were considered sojourners who did not spend what they earned in America, but they rather sent it to their old countries. White Americans, like Millie's husband, thought Arab Americans would "take off back to 'garlic eating land' as soon as" they "made enough money" (Yunis 85).³⁸ The role Scheherazade plays, furthermore, gives these readers a glimpse of what types of discrimination Arab and Muslim Americans have had to endure following the September 11 attacks, including bigotry, prejudice in mainstream media (26), phone tapping, house surveillance (27), racial profiling, suspicion of terrorist activities (22, 23, 107, 112), and isolation of Arab men and women (Yunis 95).

To this diverse community, the pressures are real and the stakes are high. Indeed, the Arab American character Laila worries that her adult sons will be shunned by American women, because of their Arab and Muslim background. Laila thought "there were fewer women willing to marry a guy with an Arab name nowadays" (95). With the nascent manifestations of

stereotypical representations, the Scheherazade Yunis creates is a subversive character. Her Scheherazade enjoys a remarkable freedom of movement. She travels to different American states and crosses international borders.

³⁸ Such racist, or at least misinformed, Americans forget that Arab Americans actively participated in steel workers' strikes to unionize the business (Yunis 84-85) and contributed to the war efforts to defeat Nazi Germany in World War Two (86).

religiosity her sons are beginning to show after 9/11, Laila fears that their chances of marriage relationships are slimmer, considering that the mosque culture does not allow for men and women to mingle. “What woman,” Laila thought to herself, “was Mo [meaning her son Mohammed] ever going to meet at the mosque? It wasn’t like a church where he could end up sitting next to a nice girl” (105). Laila, readers are told, “did not fear God,” and “she did not fear her religion, but she was terrified of other people’s fear of it” (Yunis 107). Too concerned about the future of her sons, Laila turns to God in a supplication:

God, as my sons turn to you, protect them from the dangers their love for you could bring them. Also God, I don’t want anyone or anything—not the Red Crescent, not the CIA, not you—no one but a marriageable woman to take my sons away from me. I hope you understand. (Yunis 115)

This supplication, coming from a woman who is not religious but clearly under too much stress, points to her anxiety in post-9/11 America, a country where her Arab American sons are not just othered figures, but can be seen as the face of the enemy as a result of their new public religiosity. This anxiety about public manifestations of Muslim religiosity in the U.S. also registers in a conversation between Amir and Fatima. Preparing to go out, Fatima puts on her scarf. Amir cautions Fatima: “People will think you are a Muslim,” to which she replies, “I am a Muslim.” Amir responds as follows: “Even in this community we’ve got punks. You’re old and vulnerable, and it’s better to pass as Mexican in that condition. Without the scarf, you can pass” (Yunis 124).

Other scenes in *The Night Counter* deal with many violations of Arab American constitutional rights. Just like in Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, some of them predate the 9/11 attacks and in them, religion is not a factor. In one of her stories to Scheherazade,

Fatima recalls a situation in the segregated American South. She, Ibrahim, and six of their children were vacating in Georgia. They stopped at a little restaurant to eat. Fatima's daughters needed to go to the bathroom, but as they approached the bathroom area, Fatima got confused: which bathroom should they go to? "There were two doors. One said 'coloreds,' and one said 'whites.' All the people in the restaurant turned around to see which one we would go to," Fatima says. Choosing not to use any, Fatima and Ibrahim returned to their table to find a white male customer chatting with the rest of their girls. The white man "patted Randa on the head and said, 'You're just about the cutest little mulatto I ever seen.'" His remark invited a strong response from Ibrahim, whose face "turned into a frightening purple and red" before he "yanked the man's hand off Randa." Not only that, but Ibrahim yelled "'don't touch my kid.'" According to Fatima, Ibrahim "yelled so loud that the gas attendant looked in" (Yunis 197). Referencing the racism towards Blacks signals to how Arab Americans too were and have become subjected to this injustice. They share a minoritized status and face racial discrimination, not unlike other minorities.

In some cases in the novel, contemporary discrimination takes a complex form, depending on the ancestry of those Arab American experiencing it. The Arab American character Decimal comes from a mixed background: Chinese, African, and Arab. In one communication, she articulates the following statement about her case, but also about the complex nature of discrimination minorities face in the U.S. Decimal writes:

I look at myself in the mirror a lot. I see sickly and pimply, but don't see Arab, or Chinese, or Black. I do see someone who could definitely pass for Latino but not a hot one like Shakira or Jennifer Lopez. *The good thing about not looking Black,*

Chinese, or Arab is that I've never been a victim of a hate crime, at least not for what I really am. . . . [emphasis added] (Yunis 220)

Although the above communication partly points to Arab American integration through inter-ethnic mixing, it still speaks of cycles of racism structured on the ground of racial and ethnic difference. Pointing to these cycles, I argue, registers a commonality among Chinese Americans, African Americans, and Arab Americans—a shared marginalization and racialization. Without the presence of Scheherazade in many of the locales where the Abdullahs dwell, however, such subtle references to racism, discrimination, and methods of responding and coping would not have been possible.

Critiquing American Hegemony: The Middle East in Arab American Imagination

Scheherazade's presence as a structural device borrowed from the short-story cycle, I further argue, offers a nontraditional witness to American hegemonic exploitation of Arab and Muslim majority countries. Through the physical journeys of Scheherazade, Yunis subtly draws attention to American hegemony in the Middle East. Her presence in the different locales allows the readers to become privy to political conversations that frustrate the myth of American innocence. In one of these encounters, the social activist Jamal questions the foundational American myth of altruistic involvement in global affairs. As he puts it during an antiwar demonstration,

we [Americans] don't really care about the human rights in Iraq. . . . A rebel insurgency in Uganda has killed 300,000 people in the last eighteen years and 1.2 million people have lost their homes. Darfur in Sudan has refugees starving to death by the thousands. Do we care? No. We're picking our atrocities based on oil. (Yunis 166)

Jamal argues that American hegemony determines when and where to mobilize American soldiers or wield American diplomatic and economic pressures. For him, it is not benevolence, not the desire to spread democracy, not attention to universal justice, and not the will to protect human rights that draws the U.S. to the Middle East among other regions across the globe.³⁹

Such strong statements of indictment, be it the U.S. invasion of Iraq or the U.S. support for Israeli settler colonialism, are systematically articulated by Arabs, or Arab Americans who were born outside the U.S., but rarely by U.S.-born Arab Americans. The novel, nonetheless, questions the official American narrative, a narrative that justifies such enterprises on the alleged ground of spreading democracy, modernizing the region, and challenging injustice. Such official American beliefs constitute a recurrent theme in American foreign policy. Indeed, in *America, Amerikkka: Elect Nation and Imperial Violence*, Rosemary Ruether argues that U.S. “leaders are often believers in their own ideological rhetoric. They *both* pursue murderous policies motivated by what they see as American self-interest and *also* manage to sincerely believe that they are serving the best interests of these colonized and exploited people” (2). This questionable messianic role comes under fire in the novel, but once again Arab or first-generation Arab Americans mount the critique. Yunis, I hypothesize, seems to do so strategically. She is possibly more interested in improving the image of U.S.-born Arab Americans and more so than that of Arabs, Muslims, and first generation Arab and Muslim Americans. Furthermore, because the house in Lebanon does not exist and none of Fatima’s children or grandchildren is interested in living in Lebanon anyway, it is possible that Yunis is stating a basic fact by choosing Arab and

³⁹ Jamal is right here to argue that oil resources invite American interventions. However, American interventions or meddling in other nations’ affairs are not always driven by oil. Many variables contribute to the magnitude, frequency, scale, and nature of interventions. Furthermore, U.S. international agenda often demonstrate a contradiction between American rhetoric and policies.

first-generation Arab Americans to critique American hegemony: second, third, and fourth generation Arab Americans are more integrated than the first generation. Without a doubt, Arab and Arab American identities inform one another in the eyes of mainstream Americans, but it might be easier for the novelist to work on changing the negative image of integrated Arab America since she could neither equally complicate nor change both simultaneously.

Like Kahf, it is more likely that Yunis seeks to portray a plural and diverse Arab America. In this Arab America, not everyone is politically engaged. Indeed, it is the same Jamal, a Palestinian studying in the U.S., who leads a crowd to protest the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq (Yunis 158-59, 161). He draws the U.S.-born Arab American Dina to his activism, and although she participates in the anti-war effort, she does so primarily because she is physically attracted to him (161). In contrast, readers learn that Jamal's mother "bites her nails when [President] Bush comes on TV in a restaurant or something . . . but at home, look out. We got to hold our plates down" (Yunis 163). This critique of American hegemonic pursuit after energy resources as Jamal puts it goes hand in hand with criticizing mainstream American media. After Jamal and Dina are interviewed by a U.S. TV channel, the aired segment of the interview is dismal. Jamal expresses his dismay to Dina: "Man, ten seconds is all they gave us What the hell, they aired a lost puppy story instead. Dogs, man; they care more about dogs than peace" (167). The same media ignore the sight of poverty, misery, and struggle Palestinian refugees in 2003 Lebanon have experienced since they were forced out of their homes in 1948. The arrival of Jamal and Dina in Lebanon, accompanied by the invisible Scheherazade, brings to the fore the miserable living conditions Palestinian refugees in Lebanon endure:

The sights, smells, and sounds of poverty increased with each meter they went south until they stood before a mass of trash piles, mud puddles, and honking, all enveloped in the stench of summer sewage.

“This is the entrance to Shatila,” Jamal told her. “It’s one of the sixteen refugee camps in Lebanon. . . .” (Yunis 173-74)

Shortly, readers learn that “under all that garbage is the mass grave of many of the women and children who were victims of the 1982 massacres.” Roughly, the massacred are “anywhere between a thousand and two thousand people” all “buried there.” At this moment, Dina remembers reading “in the books Fatima had given her about those massacres during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, an invasion that had left eighteen thousand people dead, in addition to tens of thousands who had died in the civil war raging at the time” (Yunis 174).

Remembering the unspeakable and allowing historical sites of atrocities to be seen in the situation of displaced Palestinians in Lebanon is another critique of American hegemony. Dina sees Palestinians “living in the rubble, mattresses laid out, and food piled up. From where she stood, the people in the building looked like toy tenants in an old dollhouse kicked over and stamped on by an angry big brother” (Yunis 175). In one corner of this miserable human existence, Dina sees “a one-floor concrete building covered with student drawings—kids throwing rocks at tanks; a woman in a head scarf shedding tears made of the red, green, and white [the colors of the Palestinian flag]; and Ariel Sharon in a gorilla suit holding a baby gorilla dressed in a U.S. flag” (176). This scene is the closest Dina, as well as Yunis, gets to critiquing U.S. support for Israel, its violent displacement of Palestinians, rogue military violence, and total opposition to the Palestinian right of return. The graffiti communicates this “Palestinian” indictment of American culpability in supporting Israeli settler colonialism. In another case of

critiquing American and European hegemony, Fatima exhibits a strong position against Western acts of colonialism, unlike her second-generation daughter Randa. Fatima discloses to Scheherazade that Randa

is always telling everyone to come see her house. I tell her my house in Lebanon is much nicer than hers and Dina should go visit, but she doesn't listen. Randa's house is so big that all of Deir Zeitoon could live in it, but it doesn't have any marble and no bidet. *She told me it was colonial-style, like the British and the French colonization hadn't destroyed the Arabs, like colonization was a good thing.* [Emphasis added] (Yunis 193)

This critique of European hegemony becomes more specifically about the American war in Iraq in a conversation between Rock and Dawood. The U.S.-born Arab American Rock explains to Dawood how he is going to Iraq in order to help rebuild civilian infrastructures which the war has destroyed. Rock emphasizes responsibility as his motive: Americans are obliged to rebuild. But Dawood challenges this argument also on the ground of the U.S. responsibility, but this time its responsibility for all the damage and deaths Iraqis have suffered (Yunis 255). Both men continue to disagree on this thorny issue. As with other examples in the novel, it is always Arab or first-generation Arab Americans who directly and unequivocally decry U.S. hegemony in the Middle East. This role division, I hypothesize, points to a novelistic strategy with respect to what stereotypes to tackle first. After all, the Arab American novelist's mission is a difficult one.

Conclusion: Representing as an Act of Resistance

In "The Man Made of Words," N. Scott Momaday writes, "[w]e are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are" (167). Without a doubt, the contemporary

Native American situation variably requires additional urgency as there is too much at stake. If Native American histories, stories, cultures, landscapes, and peoples “go unimagined,” it would be the “greatest tragedy” to befall them (Momaday, “The Man” 167). However, since all histories are made of words, narrating one’s stories becomes a vital exercise at reclaiming the self, an act of active existence and a form of resilient resistance. In *The Night Counter*, this vitality to tell one’s stories gains additional urgency the more Fatima believes she will die on the 1001st night. The resistance, therefore, takes form in language and storytelling. “What if I don’t tell you a story?”, Fatima asks Scheherazade one night. “To know you have a 1001 nights to tell stories is a gift and a curse,” the latter answers before she adds that “when our tales are over, so are our lives” (Yunis 11). Fatima does not die in the novel, but the acts of storytelling she and Scheherazade engage in are vital not only to their own personal survival, but also to the survival of the legendary Scheherazade’s community of women as well as the Arab American community of Fatima. More importantly, storytelling helps the novelist Yunis reinvent and represent Americans of Arab and Muslim descent in the American national consciousness. Arab and Muslim Americans, argues Alia Malek, “would be better served if their lived reality, their voices, their faces, their names were less foreign to their fellow Americans” (267).

Telling Arab American stories is Yunis’ attempt at humanizing Arab Americans. Her stories frustrate the fantastical conflict between Islam and the West promulgated by advocates of the clash of civilizations based on the alleged incompatibility of Arab Americans with American societal and cultural norms. *The Night Counter* poses a serious challenge to their unsound theses. Likewise, it questions dominant clichéd representations American media, Hollywood, and security agencies create of Arab and Muslim Americans, not unlike other Arab American critiques of American media. These critiques constitute acts of resistance in the writing of Arab

Americans. Indeed, Elmaz Abinader writes, “my characters are tiny warriors against the massive media machine that does not see them at all; these stories are the small stones thrown in a battle too large to win” (113).

The Arab American literary mission of liberating Arab America from the media machine and correcting its image in the public eye is rather in its early stages. The Arab American creative acts of telling and retelling must continue. Indeed, *The Night Counter* concludes with its most important tale/night. At that night, Scheherazade requests Fatima’s permission to share her stories “with others,” a request Fatima approves of (365). “What makes one story . . . more poignant than another . . . lies perhaps in the ‘little things’ we are able to identify and recover,” Barbara Nimri Aziz writes before she adds the following insights: “What we build of them may not overturn centuries of injustice, and it will not propel us into a position of dominance. But we can at least write our story” (xiii). The stories to be told do not have to be perfect, but they must keep coming in order for Arab and Muslim Americans to challenge the stigma, resist discrimination, and achieve inclusion in the multiethnic fabric of the contemporary U.S. The writing must continue for their voices to be heard.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In the “Author’s Note” to her experimental memoir *Drops of this Story*, Suheir Hammad writes, “Stories are songs, and singers are prophets. No matter what we think of someone’s politics or personal business, if they do us right with their songs, ‘kill us softly,’ we listen, intent, to find ourselves in their voices.” To her as an Arab American, writing is vital: one morning, “I asked myself: Do I need to write to live? I answered yes with every cell of my being,” and “I’m still writing. So that our stories be told. . . . So that we don’t forget. So we always remember. . . .” (n. p.).

Conclusion

A Nation of Narrations: Competing Representations and Choice of Literary Genre

Each of the previous five chapters that comprise the body of this study has its own themes, but together they offer a cohesive examination of how particular trends in the emerging body of Arab American literature problematize core claims the American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent advance. In this conclusion, I address an important question that has grown out of the preceding chapters. I investigate how significant the choice of literary genre is to both the cultural conservatives and the Arab American literary writers. While acknowledging the diversity and continued growth of Arab American literature, I hypothesize that contemporary Arab American literary writers avoid writing conventional autobiographies. In so doing, they follow in the footsteps of other ethnic literary American traditions.¹ As case studies that are arguably representative of other Arab American literary writers, Kahf, Ahmed, Fawal, and Yunis avoid the conventional autobiography genre, unlike the cultural conservatives Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. Ahmed utilizes the memoir genre; Kahf and Fawal, the novel; and Yunis, the short story cycle. These genres not only allow the literary works to exhibit a progressive and anti-hegemonic set of thematic and conceptual constellations, but they aid Ahmed, Kahf, Fawal, and Yunis in celebrating diversity and appreciating difference. Furthermore, they make it possible for some of these writers to draw attention to how the continued projection of American power in the Middle East negatively influences the public image of Arab and Muslim Americans and contributes to a growing body of clichés that misrepresent Arabs and Muslims abroad. Simultaneously, Ahmed, Kahf, Fawal, and Yunis use their respective genres to establish new

¹ Instead of writing conventional autobiographies, increasing numbers of multicultural American writers are more inclined towards the novel, the memoir, hybrid literary forms, and other genres.

connections and endorse democratic notions of identity. In contrast, the traditional autobiography genre creates a suitable landscape for Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan to produce policy-oriented conservative narratives and call for a Western civilizing mission that focuses on the inferior Arab Muslim others inside and outside the West. The autobiography genre makes it easier for Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan to contribute to a fast growing conservative American identity, one that is hyper nationalist, exclusionist, and assimilationist. In the process of narrating their personal stories, the four cultural conservative writers render contemporary ethno-religious American plurality marginal as they insist on imagining a future America that is predominantly white in culture, religion, and politics.

It is not my intention here to suggest that all traditional autobiographies inherently result in reductionist, polemical, or stereotypically hegemonic narratives. Nor do I intend to argue that other genres always lead to more progressive and just representations. Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* and Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are conventional autobiographies,² but their authors utilized the genre to expose the horrors of slavery and support the Northern abolitionist effort to free slaves and undermine the institution of slavery. At the time of its publication, Douglass' *Narrative* was a powerful eye-witness account of how much damage slavery did to individuals and communities, and how it corrupted faith, social, and societal institutions. Similar autobiographies were powerful narratives that aroused serious anxiety in the hearts and minds of proponents of

² The genre is known as "slave narrative," but this autobiographical variation has too much in common with the conventional autobiography. Therefore, I here take the liberty to treat Douglass' and Jacobs' as conventional autobiographies whose authors however did not subscribe to the normative rhetorical act.

slavery.³ “Defenders of slavery,” Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write, therefore “fiercely invested in debunking the authenticity of narratives about life in the slave system” (29). Native American autobiographer Zitkala-Ša offers another case in point in *Impressions of an Indian Childhood* where the conventional autobiography genre is successfully utilized to critique the Euro-American civilizing mission. According to Smith and Watson, Zitkala-Ša “contrasts her experience of growing up in an indigenous culture on the Sioux reservation and at a missionary school to show the brutal repressions of the latter conducted in the name of its civilizing and Christianizing missions” (105). Likewise, the novel genre can be used to advance social justice politics, but it can be also employed to serve propagandist agenda for the benefit of hegemonic discourses and settler-colonialist projects. Instead of tools invested in fighting for social justice, they could easily be put in the service of hegemonic regimes that disregard justice. Novels like Theodore Herzl’s *The Old New Land*,⁴ Leon Uris’ *Exodus*,⁵ Oriana Fallaci’s *The Rage and the Pride*,⁶ and Soheir Khashoggi’s *Mosaic* are problematic on many levels when it comes to issues of representation, inclusion, and the question of social justice. The same logic arguably applies to the memoir and short-story cycle genres. To large extents, however, the traditional

³ The success of Douglass’ narrative is attributable to a number of factors. His autobiography gained immediate recognition, Couser contends, because “in the *slave* narrative, the role of the innocent protagonist [unlike in Puritan or white captivity narratives] is assumed by the black slave; that of the villain, by the white slave owner. Significantly, this reverses the color code of the captivity narrative, in which whiteness is aligned with Christianity and virtue. It also calls into question the spiritual status of the slave holders, who were often bible-quoting, church-going Christians. In effect, it charged them with hypocrisy or, worse, heresy: the implication was that owning slaves was inherently un-Christian” (121). The narrative also accused the slave holders of being un-American.

⁴ Describing how indigenous Palestinians were looked at by missionaries and Zionists, Pappe writes, “Seen from the perspective of the initial impulse to settle in Palestine, the missionaries and the Zionists regarded the native population as marginal. The locals were hardly there in the early visions of the future, as apparent in the utopian novel [*The Old New Land*] written by the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl” (616). The Zionist vision, as described in Herzl’s novel, is elitist, Eurocentric, exclusionist, condescending towards, and dismissive of Palestinians. The novel speaks of Jerusalem becoming holy again as white European Jews enter, and rule over, it.

⁵ For further information on the novel and its ideological objectives, see chapter four of this dissertation.

⁶ For further information on the novel, see the introduction of this dissertation.

autobiography genre lends itself more easily than the novel, memoir, or short-story cycle to polemics and hegemonic projects. I will elaborate further in the rest of this conclusion. My discussion will proceed in the following order: the traditional autobiography, the memoir, the novel, and finally the short story cycle genre.

The Cultural Conservatives: Writing in the Conventional Autobiography Tradition

In broad terms, “autobiography” means “self-referential writing.” “In Greek,” according to Smith and Watson, “*autos* signifies ‘self,’ *bios* ‘life,’ and *graphe* ‘writing.’ Taken together in this order, the words denote ‘self life writing,’ a brief definition of autobiography,” (1). This general definition does not explain why the conventional autobiography genre appeals to culturally-conservative writers of Arab or Muslim descent like Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. The specific definition however does. “*Autobiography*,” Smith and Watson elaborate, “is a term for a particular practice of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment and has become canonical in the West.” The genre was initially utilized to celebrate the “Enlightenment subject,” or “the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story” (3). The genre grew into a “master narrative of ‘the sovereign self,’” a status that has invited numerous postcolonial and postmodern theorists to criticize the genre that was “celebrated by an earlier generation of scholars such as George Gusdorf and Karl Joachim Weintraub as a master narrative of civilization in the West, [and] has been defined *against* many coexistent forms of life narrative” (Smith and Watson 3-4).⁷ It makes more sense for Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan to utilize the conventional autobiography genre because the four writers celebrate the Enlightenment, write

⁷ Typical American autobiographies that fit this description include Henry Adam’s *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* and Benjamin Franklin’s *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Other American literary writers who wrote in the tradition of the autobiography include David Henry Thoreau and Mark Twain.

solely to a Western audience as native informants, and have divorced themselves from their religious and cultural roots in favor of a complete assimilation into a hegemonic Western identity. They further insist that they are exemplary self-made individuals who discovered their true selves in the West, have claimed Western subjectivity and belonging, have marketed their success stories as universal models to be imitated by Arab and Muslim women, and continuously argue for expanding Western power over the Middle East.

Furthermore, the conventional autobiography genre is perfect for Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan because in the autobiographical tradition, a contract exists between the author and publisher on the one hand and the author and readers on the other. “When we recognize the person who claims authorship of the narrative as the protagonist or central figure in the narrative—that is, we believe them to be the same person,” Smith and Watson highlight, “we read the text written by the author to whom it refers as reflexive or autobiographical.” “With this recognition of the autobiographical pact,” Smith and Watson, who here reference Philippe Lejeune, drive the point home: “we [i.e. audience] read differently and assess the narrative as making truth claims of a sort that are suspended in fictional forms such as the novel” (8-9). The autobiography genre would be further appealing to the target readers of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan because autobiographers “have to anchor their narratives in their own temporal, geographical, and cultural milieux,” are “bound by rules of evidence that link the world of the narrative with a historical world outside the narrative,” and “are expected to remain faithful to their personal memory archives” (9). Conventional autobiographies communicate their truth claims through “multiple ways of accessing memory” and “multiple systems of remembering” (Smith and Watson 20). In the case of Ali’s *Infidel* and *Nomad*, for example, photos, letters, anecdotes, genealogy, and historical events are infused into the narratives, giving them further

credibility. This infusion of supporting materials enables the autobiographer Ali to narrate not only her individual story, but also stories of other individuals as well as familial and collective histories.⁸ Especially because Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan are heavily involved in interpreting the Middle East in past and present times to their target audience and because they envision restructuring it in ways that will make it more subservient to the West, they need to make truth claims. The conventional autobiography genre facilitates their objectives.

Moreover, the conventional autobiography allows Ali and the other cultural conservatives to claim authority and authenticity. Indeed, “a narrator’s investment in the ‘authority’ of experience serves a variety of rhetorical purposes.” “It,” Smith and Watson proceed, “invites or compels the reader’s belief in the story and the veracity of the narrator; it persuades the reader of the narrative’s authenticity; it validates certain claims as truthful; and it justifies writing and publicizing the life story” (27). Most importantly, the traditional autobiography genre becomes vital to the rhetorical act of ethnographic othering narrating the personal stories of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan entails because the narrators/autobiographers are persons from outside the dominant American culture who seek to appeal to its members. Historically, other minority writers used the autobiography genre, albeit toward different rhetorical acts. One recalls Fredrick Douglass, Harriet A. Jacobs, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin.⁹ Arguably, of these four, only the autobiographical experience of Douglass received immediate recognition and attracted sympathy from mainstream Northern American readers during the time of its publication. Smith and Watson remind us that “[a]s the cases of Wright and Baldwin suggest, not all [minority

⁸ According to Jerome Bruner, “autobiography . . . involves not only the construction of self, but also a construction of one’s culture—just as Geertz (1988) assures us that writing anthropology also involves a kind of autobiography” (35).

⁹ Wright wrote *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth* and Baldwin wrote *Notes of a Native Son*.

autobiographical] ‘experience’ is accorded social and cultural recognition or legitimacy” (28).

After all, readers “have expectations about who has the cultural authority to tell a particular kind of life story, and they have expectations about what stories derived from direct, personal knowledge should assert” (30).

Finally, the conventional autobiography genre is suitable for the model of identity—i.e. a fixed assimilationist identity—the cultural conservatives produce and embrace. The chosen model of identity contributes to the recognition Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan have received from many of their target audience. When Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan present themselves as women who were oppressed under Islamic rule and culture, but who have been liberated since the moment they arrived in the West, the conventional autobiography becomes the designated genre for them because “traditional autobiography has been read as a narrative of agency, evidence that subjects live freely” (Smith and Watson 42). Jerome Bruner calls this important “feature of Western autobiography” the “highlighting or ‘marking’ of turning points.” “By ‘turning points,’” Bruner elaborates, “I mean those episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent’s intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction, a thought. This I see as crucial to the effort to *individualize* a life” (31). The turning points in the conventional autobiography normally suggest important stages in the life of the autobiographer, “a way in which . . . [he or she] free themselves in their self-consciousness from their history, their banal destiny, [and] their conventionality” (Bruner 32). In their autobiographies, the cultural conservatives’ freedom materializes the moment they stop reenacting the cultural and religious norms of their countries of origin.

By choosing the conventional autobiography genre, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan have distanced and disassociated themselves from postcolonial writers, anti-racist writers of color, and revisionist minority women writers. They have adopted a fringe stance: they insist that the West must act to preserve its white power at home and abroad. Although they claim to seek progressive reform, they in reality conform to a hegemonic Eurocentric American identity. In their personal narratives, they embrace an essentialist identity and a narrow individualistic notion of agency. In opting for the conventional autobiography genre to report what they see as the ultimate truth about Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa, the United States and elsewhere, Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan fail to recognize the fragility of memory and the fragmentary nature of human consciousness. They refuse to see the interconnections and intersections among identities, communities, and cultures. They seek to empower only their own voices at the expense of the collective Arab and Muslim women's bodies and the bodies of women of color whom they repeatedly claim to speak for. As such is their goal, the conventional autobiography is indeed their ideal genre.

Leila Ahmed and the Memoir Tradition

What the cultural conservatives have achieved with the autobiography cannot be done with the memoir, the genre choice of Leila Ahmed. The term "memoir," G. Thomas Couser writes, "has been generally used by *critics* to characterize a kind of life writing they consider inferior to what they call autobiography." Couser continues: "Until quite recently . . . , 'memoir' was minor and 'autobiography' major; 'memoir' subliterate and 'autobiography' literary; 'memoir' shallow and 'autobiography' deep; 'memoir' marginal and 'autobiography' canonical" (19). Unlike Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan who utilize the conventional autobiography genre which had been used as "a master narrative of Western rationality, progress, and

superiority” (Smith and Watson 113), Leila Ahmed utilized the memoir genre. The memoir inherently does not allow the formation of a master narrative. Linguistically, the term “memoir,” Couser points out, “derives from the French word for memory [I]t is based primarily on memory, a notoriously unreliable and highly selective faculty.” This reality “creates the expectation that the narrative may be impressionistic and subjective rather than authoritatively fact based” (19). According to Thomas Larson, memoir “cannot be *the* record of *the* past as autobiography tries to be. Memoir is *a* record, a chamber-sized scoring of one part of the past. Despite its rightness, it’s a version of, perhaps a variation on, what happened” (19). Memoir, furthermore, draws attention to “relationality” (20) and “can be a repository for witnesses’ accounts of historical events” (Couser 21), but unlike the traditional autobiography, memoir “does [not] attempt to represent a life in its chronological entirety” (23). Its limited and nonlinear scope therefore leaves gaps in the recalled past record, a characteristic that guards against the development of a master narrative. In clear departure from the autobiography, the memoir further does not “tell . . . the story of a radical (and usually sudden) reversal in the narrator’s perspective” (Couser 38),¹⁰ and memoirists do not “just tell the truth,” according to Larson who adds the following point: “We [memoirists] use the possibilities of the form to guide us into a process by which we try to discover what the truth of our life may be” (xii).

Furthermore, the conventional autobiographer is generally taken to be “an autonomous and enlightened ‘individual’ who understood his relationship to others and the world as one of separateness in which he [or she] exercised the agency of free will” (Smith and Watson 121). This understanding is encapsulated in canonical autobiographies such as Franklin’s

¹⁰ The autobiographies of Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan describe such a reversal and in that sense, they are similar to conversion narratives.

Autobiography, Adams' *The Education*, and Thoreau's *Walden*. It is also evident in the cultural conservative autobiographies by Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan. But roughly since the 1970s, the canonization of the autobiography has faced serious challenges from postcolonial, multicultural, and postmodern writers (129), who in anti-hegemonic modes of self-referential writing "propose, constitute, and reframe alternatives to an individual self" (131). Writers have positioned themselves as "the West's former 'Others'" and constantly have been "seek[ing] to be heard in different terms, to be accountable, to count." Postcolonial writers of self-referential narratives have been motivated by "a need to construct subject positions through which to negotiate neocolonial regimes of truth in the name of liberation." They have generated "new concepts of subjectivity, as transcultural, diasporic, hybrid, and nomadic" and in their narratives, they "move the 'I' toward the collective and shift the focus of narration toward an as-yet virtual space of community, across and beyond the old boundaries of identification." Similar to postcolonial theorists and writers of self narratives, postmodernists have "energized the dismantling of metaphysical conceptions of self-presence, authority, authenticity, and truth" (Smith and Watson 132). Traditionally, the autobiographer, Larson points out, has a core purpose: "to set the historical record straight, an idea based on the assumption that there is a single record and the person who lived it can best document it" (11). This is not what memoirists do.

Memoirists, like Ahmed, "contribute to a resistance literature that has begun to reorganize global knowledge" (Smith and Watson 132). Using the memoir genre has enabled Ahmed to challenge master narratives—be it Arabism, Zionism, textual Islam, the civilizing mission of Western colonialism, and/or colonialist feminism. Indeed, in *A Border Passage*, Ahmed embarks on a self-exploration journey and subjects to serious critical investigation a

multiplicity of histories. As she digs deeper into personal, familial, communal, national, and transnational histories, she realizes the limited recoverability of the past. Smith and Watson remind us that the “narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (16). Instead of complete, intact, and preserved records of the past, Ahmed accepts that only fragments exist and understands that identities “are constructed. They are in language. They are discursive. They are not essential—born, inherited, or natural” (Smith and Watson 33). Not only that, but she also realizes that identity is “dialogical. That is, it is always implicated in ‘the process of social interaction’” (Smith and Watson 34). She has come to understand that she has a multiplicity of identities and these identities intersect with one another. Accordingly, she challenges the traditional autobiographical notion of a celebrated individualistic self who inscribes her history as only a written text. In *Infidel* and *Nomad*, for example, Ali describes the oral traditions of her elders, especially the women relatives, as oppressive, primitive, and anti-modernist and she therefore dismisses orality. In contrast, Ahmed embraces the oral tradition of her female relatives which she considers liberal and progressive.

Ahmed’s resistance to the Enlightenment’s autobiographical private self and her avoidance of the traditional autobiography in favor of the memoir genre are indeed evident in her determination to celebrate orality, indigeneity, community, and collective histories of women of color, and in her serious interest in lived religious and cultural traditions. The dynamics of the memoir genre allow her to discover a seldom-acknowledged plurality and heterogeneity within Islam. By using the memoir genre, Ahmed ends up challenging the conventional autobiographical notions of true self,¹¹ stability of memory, the wholeness of individual

¹¹ “To present the self as a consequence of one’s deeds,” Larson argues, “is the work of autobiography, certainly of Franklin’s. To present the self as a person disclosing the mutability of the self is the work of memoir, certainly in

consciousness, and the autobiographical fixed identity. In her memoir, the self is complex, almost indefinable. It is a constantly evolving, pluralistic entity and self-identification itself is a process that has a beginning but no virtual end. As she puts it in *A Border Passage*, Ahmed believes that “we are always plural. Not either this *or* that, but this *and* that. And we always embody in our multiple shifting consciousnesses a convergence of traditions, cultures, histories coming together in this time and this place and moving like rivers through us” (25). This profound realization would not have been easily expressed had Ahmed resorted to the traditional autobiography genre. To conclude this section on Ahmed and the memoir, it is worth noting that, unlike the conventional autobiography, memoir heavily utilizes fictional devices and narrative techniques. This utilization, according to G. Thomas Couser, makes “the boundary between memoir and the novel” too difficult “to determine” (53).¹²

Mohja Kahf & Ibrahim Fawal: The Novel Genre

Indeed, memoirs borrow from novels, but novels have their unique nature, structure, and function. My treatment of the novel generic choice of Mohja Kahf and Ibrahim Fawal will offer further explanation. Mohja Kahf and Ibrahim Fawal wrote *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *On the Hills of God* respectively. Both works are novels. Similar to Ahmed and Yunis, Kahf and Fawal do not employ the conventional autobiography. As I have shown in my analysis of the generic choices of both the cultural conservatives and Ahmed, there is a clear connection between the ideas or themes being promulgated and the designated literary genre. In other words,

recent literary history” (169). Larson also argues that “we [memoirists] write memoir” not because we wish “to dispute the past with others but to discover how the past is disputed within us” (112).

¹² In the memoir, Larson highlights, “writers use a modicum of summary and great swaths of narrative, scenic and historical, to sustain their single theme or emotional arc” (17).

there is often an intimate relation between themes and form, ideas and genre. The cultural conservatives write in the conventional autobiography tradition because the genre provides a storied landscape conducive to the formation of master narratives. In addition, the conventional autobiography genre can easily foster hegemonic voices and advance oppressive claims. The novel genre aids Kahf and Fawal in their effort to disrupt master narratives. Kahf depicts the Muslim presence in the American Midwest up until the 1990s, while Fawal visits the Nakbah from a Palestinian perspective. Kahf intervenes to disrupt hegemonic representations, challenge nativist claims to a conformist Muslim homogeneity, engage in multiple critiques, and insist on the heterogeneity of Muslim America. Fawal re-presents Palestine to humanize its indigenous population. His depiction of a fairly harmonious coexistence of local Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Palestinians poses a challenge to cultural conservative, clash of civilizations, and Zionist misrepresentations which contribute to an on-going American tradition of appropriating and mistranslating Palestine.

In the cases of Kahf and Fawal, the novel genre arguably allows them to overcome the difficult nature of their political subject matters and enables them, if I may borrow a phrase from Henry Gonshak, to “recreate . . . a distanced perspective on” the re-imagined events (55). The politically-charged topic(s) each novelist explores can be best served in an imaginative domain where he or she creates fictional and actual places and populates them with a multiplicity of characters who are interdependent on, and in dialogue, with one another. As novelists recreate historical events and locales, they, unlike memoirists and conventional autobiographers, often conduct research. “It may seem odd,” Couser writes, “that despite their license to create freely, novelists are more likely than memoirists to research their books” (173). In *The Girl* and in *On the Hills*, there is enough evidence pointing to how much research Kahf and Fawal conducted in

writing the novels, as I demonstrate in chapters two and four. But, what might be more important about the novel genre is that dialogism and intertextuality are essential to its thematic, structural, and formal makeup. “A definitional point in dialogism,” according to Per Linell, “is the assumption that human nature and human life are constituted in interrelations with ‘the other’, that is, in *other-orientation*. Humans are always interdependent with others.” This worldview necessitates a rejection of “the *autonomous* subject who thinks, speaks, and acts in and by himself” because “*responsivity* and *anticipation* are part and parcel of all pieces of discourse.” The dialogism of the novel opposes monologism. Linell adds: “From a dialogist point-of-view, the role of others is inescapable. But who is the other? To this question there is no very simple answer. There are many ‘others’ around” (13). Multiplicity sits at the core of the novel and even those whom we tend to call “others” are not homogenous. In that sense, the novel, as a genre, has the ability to destabilize terms like “self,” “other,” “innate,” and “unchangeable.” These terms are repeatedly used by the cultural conservatives, but they are constantly frustrated in *The Girl*. They are also challenged in *On the Hills*, especially in the context of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Palestinian relations. The dialogic nature of both novels further guides the novelists and their readers to approach historical events from the point of view that every reaction is a response to an action. Thus, to understand the Hostage Crisis, one must look at what role the United States played in Iranian politics before and during the Shah rule.

In *The Girl*, intertextuality registers in Kahf’s playful criticism of Huntington’s thesis “the Clash of Civilizations” and the evoking of Puritan literature and theological dogma, to mention just two examples. Intertextuality in *On the Hills* is evident in Fawal’s allusion to UN reports, Balfour Declaration, Ben-Gurion’s Independence statement, official American support of Zionism, and documented eye-witness accounts of Zionist massacres. Both novels are in

conversation with other pieces of discourses. Both novels take to heart Mikhail Bakhtin's statement, in *Speech Genres*, that "[e]very utterance must be regarded as primarily responsive to preceding utterances of the given sphere. . . . Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies upon the others." It "presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account." In that sense, each utterance links back to, is in dialogue with, and possibly anticipates other communications because no utterance, and no text for that matter, operates in a vacuum (91). *The Girl* is in dialogue with the revived Clash of Civilizations discourse which the American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent endorse. Kahf is also cognizant of a public discourse that looks at her, and expects her to write as "an escaped Muslim woman" (Macfarquhar, n. p.). The novel genre allows her to escape conforming to its expectations

Considering Kahf and Fawal's challenging subject matters, the novel genre furthermore provides literary devices and techniques unavailable in the autobiography or memoir genres. Although the memoir utilizes many fictional techniques, it rarely uses interior monologue. "Interior monologue," according to Couser, "has remained exclusively a fictional narrative technique" even though it "is not *inherently* unavailable to, or inconceivable in, life writing" (61). In fiction writing, the novelist is free to employ multiple narrative voices, but in autobiography and memoir, readers generally expect the author, narrator, and protagonist to be the same person. Of course, there are cases where writers employ more than one narrator like in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, but in such situations, we are looking at hybrid genres that cross the lines delineating the territory of the novel from that occupied by the memoir or the short-story cycle. In addition to interior monologues, the omniscient narrator "is not conventional in" memoirs and autobiographies (62). Similarly, the free indirect discourse technique "is almost always a sign that a narrative is

fictional, not memoir” primarily because “memoir narrators do not conventionally have this power to know others’ minds” (62). Furthermore, the novel outdoes the autobiography and the memoir combined in terms of its “temporal scope” which “may be extensive or limited” (63).

According to Couser,

The Sun Also Rises and *The Great Gatsby* . . . focus on short, discrete periods of time: in this way, they resemble, and stimulate, single-experience memoir. In the nineteenth century, novels tended to have longer time spans and larger casts of characters. So for example, Dickens’s *Great Expectations* traces the narrator’s life from childhood to early adulthood. This is the typical span of the bildungsroman, or “growth novel.” This time span is also common in life writing [especially the autobiography]. (63)

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf initially employs a limited scope. It begins with the adult Khadra returning to the Midwest, but as the novel goes back in time to the days when the teenage Khadra and her family move to Indianapolis, or when she visit Saudi Arabia and Syria, or when she get married, the novel moves to employing an extensive scope. *On the Hills of God* develops a limited scope. Indeed, the good days quickly dissipate and the communal harmony collapses over night. The time span of the novel is less than two years. In short, unlike the traditional autobiography, the novel genre does not have to follow a strict chronological sequence of events and although the memoir is flexible in that regard, its flexibility does not match that of the novel.

Characterization is another site where the novel has more advantage over the memoir and the autobiography. The novel can effectively depict plurality and heterogeneity. Unlike life writing in general, the novel has the capacity to employ large numbers of characters. *The Girl* and *On the Hills* are two vivid examples possibly because both novels are concerned with

communities, interconnections, inter and intra religious and cultural relations, and diversity. Individual and collective self-identification develops through characters' interactions with members from within their groups as well as from outside them. In that sense, the novel—not unlike the memoir—confirms how the sense of identity, be it individual or collective, does not form in a vacuum. It is never static, never complete, and is always dialogical. Unlike the traditional autobiography, Kahf's and Fawal's novels do not concern themselves with self-made exemplary men and women like the Enlightenment's independent subject in Ali's autobiographies. Traditional autobiographies further rely on telling rather than showing the action or describing in detail how events unfold, but in novels and memoirs, "it is rare to find narrative that is exclusively scene or summary; the two modes are often used in alteration" (Couser 71). The development of characters in novels requires both scene and summary. Furthermore, novelists are free to give their characters any names they wish. The assigned names are sometimes "symbolic or thematic," a characteristic unavailable to the memoirist and the autobiographer. The same applies to the names novelists may choose for places, locales, or landscape. According to Couser, "even when memoirists invent names to protect real individuals' privacy, they tend not to use symbolic or illusive names" (171).

In novels, characters "exist *solely* within the narrative." They can be "symbolic" and the "responsibility" novelists therefore have "toward their characters . . . is [nothing] more than aesthetic" (Couser 171). Accordingly, novelists do not have to make truth claims and have to defend them as memoirists do. This point is essential, especially when the novelist explores a politically-thorny subject matter. Finally, unlike the traditional autobiographers Ali, Darwish, Gabrielle, and Sultan who constantly explain and remind their readers of their authorial position and the rhetorical purpose behind writing the autobiography, the novelists Kahf and Fawal do not

have to bear the heavy weight of this burden. Readers of autobiographies as well as memoirs must remember that “reading involves identifying the author’s stance” (Couser 177). For all of the above, the novel genre effectively serves the objectives and themes Kahf and Fawal communicate.

Alia Yunis' *Scheherazade* and the Short Story Cycle

Like the novel, the short story is a work of fiction devoted to imagining a world, with opportunities for plurality that the traditional autobiography does not share. The short story cycle genre has been present in American literature since the early 1820s. Writers from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds had or have used it. Following in the footsteps of Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, Crane, Steinbeck, Hurston, Barnes, Wright, Welty, Faulkner, Hemingway, Cather, Baldwin, Erdrich, and Kincaid, to mention just some prominent names, Alia Yunis employed the genre in *The Night Counter*. More than the memoir or the novel, the short story cycle, I propose, allows Yunis to identify signs of affiliation, on the ground of shared marginalization, among Arab or Muslim Americans and characters from other ethnic American groups. The genre enables Yunis to do so without appropriating, eclipsing, or devaluing any group’s experiences. In that sense, her work celebrates multicultural American diversity, while it simultaneously exposes patterns of oppression and discrimination. It challenges the cultural conservatives’ idealization of the United States: the cultural conservatives completely deny the horrors of American imperialism and the injustices brought about by repeated patterns of racial discrimination, xenophobic actions, and undemocratic policies. The short-story cycle genre makes it possible for Yunis to achieve these thematic cores. The structural and thematic characteristic of the “one” and the “many”—or in other words, the fact that the cycle emphasizes the individuality of each story and frequently different characters while simultaneously underlining the “bonds of unity” of the

entire work (Ingram19)—makes the short story cycle the suitable genre for the thematic concentration Yunis forwards in *The Night Counter*. This “particular and different, yet connected” structural pattern and thematic logic makes the genre effective for Yunis’ core objectives. Like Kahf, Ahmed, and Fawal, Yunis emphasizes the heterogeneity of Arab and Muslim American communities that the cultural conservatives identify as monolithic.

Forrest L. Ingram offers an insightful definition of the short-story cycle and explains how the genre achieves its effect on readers. In *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century*, Ingram defines the genre of the short story cycle as a “*a book of short stories so linked to each other by their author that the reader’s successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts*” (19). Ingram unpacks his definition as follows:

The crucial phrase in the [above] revised definition is “the pattern of the whole”, which the reader experiences “successively” and “on various levels”. This pattern structures the “many” into an integral “one”, and in so doing “significantly modifies” the reader’s experience of each story in the pattern. Here we are at the heart of what Helen Mustard has called the “cyclic principle”. Cycles are made by establishing “such relationships among smaller entities as to create a larger whole” without at the same time destroying the identity of the smaller entities.

(20)

What I make of Ingram’s definition and subsequent elaboration is that the cycle genre is more ethical and democratic than the conventional autobiography because the former honors the particularities of imagined individual characters, stories, and represented groups while simultaneously establishing core connections between all of them. An authorial commitment to

ethical acts of representation is also implied in Ingram's take on the nature of the short-story cycle. Indeed, Gerald Lynch, who explores the use of the cycle genre in contemporary Canadian literature, points out how the genre allows writers to depict "a particular region or community, its history, its characters, its communal concerns" and represent diverse regions and communities (16). In clear contrast with the conventional autobiographies of Ali, Darwish, Gabriel, and Sultan, the short-story cycle offers "simultaneous multiple perspectives in a manner paralleling that of cubist painting" (Lynch 24). Unlike the traditional autobiography, the short-story cycle, at least in the case of Yunis, is not suitable for writers who wish to create a master narrative.

This resistance to becoming a master narrative in the short-story cycle is evident on the level of internal structure, humor, and characterization. In terms of internal structure, Ingram argues, the cycle achieves "unity" through the "dynamic patterns of RECURRENCE and DEVELOPMENT" (20). These patterns, he adds, "usually operate concurrently like the motion of a wheel. The rim of the wheel represents elements in a cycle which rotate around a thematic centre. As these elements (motifs, symbols, characters, words) repeat themselves, turn in on themselves, recur, the whole wheel moves forward. The motion of the wheel is a single process" and in such a process, "the thematic core of a cycle expands and deepens as the elements of the cycle repeat themselves in varied contexts" (20-21). This always-expanding world triggers questions in the minds of the readers, but it often leaves them with no clear answers as the action in each short story moves on to new places where new characters are introduced, new locales are described, new subthemes are highlighted, and new communities take up the stage. Readers have to hang on tight and ride along, and as they do so, the repeated patterns will invite them to question what they thought they know.

Humor and characterization are parts of the short story cycle Yunis employs. She heavily relies on humor to gradually invite her readers to see the absurdity of the stereotypical ways national security agencies, Hollywood, mainstream media outlets, and the dominant national discourse—to which the cultural conservatives contribute immensely—tirelessly attempt to emplot Arab and Muslim Americans into certain roles. More than Kahf, Ahmed, and Fawal, Yunis repeatedly creates humorous encounters to ridicule such impositions. The cycle genre arguably offers her more room for humor. In terms of characterization, the short-story cycle employs as many characters as a novel could, but, according to Ingram, in short-story cycles, “‘minor’ characters collectively receive as much, if not more, attention than do the ‘major’ protagonists” (22). Almost similar to how the memoirist Ahmed realizes that her identity is never static, is never complete, and never develops in isolation, central characters in short-story cycles “become ‘realized’ through recurrence, repetition with variation, association, and so on.” Not only that, but also “characters which in a novel would be ‘minor’ figures are often, in a cycle, the center of interest in some particular story. Even then, they are often delineated through comparison with and contrast to other characters in the cycle, some of whom may actively influence their growth or present condition, other of whom merely serve to deepen the reader’s insight by juxtaposition” (22). Such characters populate *The Night Counter*, but the purpose of these characters in Yunis’ work, as it is the norm in short-story cycles, is to foreground diversity and community. In fact, Yunis here stays faithful to the cycle genre where community is typically the core character. Focusing on communities in *The Night Counter* and not on the enlightened self-made individual as it is the case in the cultural conservative autobiographies is significant. In fact, in short-story cycles, the enlightened self-made individual type readers encounter in the cultural conservative autobiographies does not exist. In so doing, Yunis, I

contend, draws attention to an unfamiliar diverse Arab and Muslim America, while launching a kind of cultural-political protest against, or rather critique of, hegemonic knowledge production regimes. Through writing in the cycle genre, Yunis produces *The Night Counter*, a literary work subversive of a tireless tradition of misrepresenting Muslims and Arabs in the United States and the Middle East.

Generic Choices and Political Worldviews: Towards a Conclusion

Up to this point in the dissertation, my analysis of the correlation between generic choices and thematic constellations in both the cultural conservative and Arab American literary works demonstrates that there is a fairly strong link between thematic concentrations and generic choices. Cultural conservative American writers of Arab or Muslim descent systematically utilize the traditional autobiography, while Arab American literary writers write in other literary genres—more precisely, the novel, memoir, and short-story cycle. No doubt, my data sample is not big enough: it consists of seven autobiographies, two novels, one memoir, and a short-story cycle, and throughout the dissertation, I engage many American literary works. Furthermore, the emerging body of Arab American literature includes plays, short stories, poetry collections, and hybrid forms, among others, but my dissertation also does not study these forms due to limited space. I, therefore, cannot effusively claim that the pattern which I have successfully established here, building on the research of genre scholarship, applies to broader bodies of cultural conservative and Arab American literary productions. My conclusion, however, accords with Michael Kimmage who, in “The Plight of Conservative Literature,” observes the absence of a rich tradition of fiction writing among politically and religiously conservative Americans. Conservatives have the tendency to write autobiography. They, Kimmage argues, have not produced “much of a literary culture” (948) because the “conservative emphasis on precedent

and experience, the anti-utopian cast of the conservative mind, leads conservative authors to autobiography, to a nonfiction reckoning with the dilemmas of history, politics, and the self.” In contrast, the “literary imagination thrives on the left, where utopia has long been at home” (949). Conservatives are clearly in a crisis, Kimmage emphasizes, because they “have no trouble championing literature, such as the canonical texts fought over in the 1980s and 1990s, literature as a tributary of Western culture, to be protected from Marxism, the feminism, or the postmodern relativism of the English professors” (949). Conservatives who are obsessed with preserving an America and an American identity that are zealously nationalist, exclusionist, and Western in culture, religion, and politics resort to the autobiography genre because it allows them mastery—control over narrow notions of self, faith, community, nation, and truth. Fiction, on the other hand, tends to resemble a challenge to conservatives. It is often the domain of liberals, a site of revolutionary tendencies and acts of resistance. In fiction, contemporary liberal writers generally celebrate diversity, welcome difference, expose injustice, and challenge hegemony. Autobiography seems to presume the kind of mastery that the fiction writers want to break apart by focusing on the plurality that fiction can instantiate. The battle has yet to be won in the American nation. Until then, we will continue to witness the clash of narrations.

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