“DOUBLE REFRACTION”: IMAGE PROJECTION AND PERCEPTION IN SAUDI-AMERICAN CONTEXTS:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

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For my parents, wife, siblings, and family who helped me in all things great and small

For my son, Ghassan

In loving memory of my late grandfathers

Abdullah M. Alomaish

and

Ghaleb H. Ja'afari

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to create a scholarly space where a seventy-five-year-old "special relationship" (1945-2020) between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States is examined from an interdisciplinary comparativist perspective. I posit that a comparative study of Saudi and American fiction goes beyond the limitedness of global geopolitics and proves to uncover some new literary, sociocultural, and historical dimensions of this long history, while shedding some light on others. Saudi writers creatively challenge the inherently static and monolithic image of Saudi Arabia, its culture and people in the West. They also simultaneously unsettle the notion of homogeneity and enable us to gain new insight into self-perception within the local Saudi context by offering a wide scope of genuine engagements with distinctive themes ranging from spatiality, identity, ethnicity, and gender to slavery, religiosity and (post)modernity. On the other side, American authors still show some signs of ambivalence towards the depiction of the Saudi (Muslim/Arab) Other, but they nonetheless also demonstrate serious effort to emancipate their representations from the confining legacy of (neo)Orientalist discourse and oil politics by tackling the concepts of race, alterity, hegemony, radicalism, nomadism and (un)belonging.

INTRODUCTION

> Texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly. The same is doubtless true of the critic, as reader and as writer.
>
> Edward Said

Introduction of the Problem

"The Saudis are probably the most sexually repressed people in the world," warningly concludes Robert Baer in *Sleeping with the Devil* (2004) (26)[1]. This statement gives a random example of the sweeping, overgeneralized and supercilious representations of Saudis prevalent in most of American fiction and non-fiction depiction of Saudi Arabia, its people, and society, especially in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Undeniably, such generalizations proliferated in the aftermath of this cataclysmic tragedy when most publishers were "eager to make a quick dollar hurriedly produced a few bad books with even worse titles … that set out to denounce the Saudis," as Tariq Ali puts it.[2] Indeed, Baer's superficial claim does not stop here but gradually develops into a mesh of far-fetched hypotheses that intersect gender politics, culture, and oil economics. He alleges, for instance, that it is "easier for a young Saudi man to hitchhike to Afghanistan than to hook up with a young Saudi girl" and "if sexual frustration were gold, the Saudis wouldn't need all that oil."[3] Incongruously, these claims come from an ex-CIA operative

[1] Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 26.
[2] Tariq Ali, "In Princes' Pockets," rev. of America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier, by Robert Vitalis and Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation, by Madawi Al-Rasheed," *London Review of Books* 29.14 (2007): 9-10.
[3] Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil* 26.

who presents himself as an "expert" on the Middle East issues and whose above-mentioned book was considered an "explosive New York Times bestseller" when it came out in 2004.

Likewise, when Vincent Meis, in *Eddie's Desert Rose* (2011), has the character of Dave Bates encounter a Saudi, Khalid, and apologetically state that "I hope you're not offended if I say that you don't seem typical of Saudis in general," Dave has a moment of "floundering in his passive state" when Khalid replies: "What is typical?"[4] Expounding a powerful argument, Khalid rationalizes that "[t]ypical is something the different search for but never find, and what the average try to run away from but are never successful at. Despite what my religion and your constitution say, there is something unequal from the start … Are you a typical American?"[5] I contend that these various moments of cultural and narrative encounters with difference, especially within the Saudi-American context, are extremely intriguing and worth close critical examination which can reveal certain distinctive characteristics of this literature. Actually, these moments spark off a series of questions and tempt us to ask, for instance, what is "typical" Saudi and how is Saudi society represented? Are these representations fair, twisted, or distorted? What is fair, anyhow? How do Americans see Saudi society, women, and culture? How do Saudis perceive and present themselves? Do Saudis interpret their relationship with the U.S. positively? Why? What is the role of this relationship and its historical specificities on the socio-economic forces that have been forging modern Saudi Arabia and changing the cultural and spatiotemporal landscape of society? On the other hand, we can legitimately scrutinize how Saudi writers represent Americans and their culture. But the ultimate inquiry should also look at the big picture

[4] Vincent Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose: A Novel* (San Francisco: Rose Rock, 2011), 159.
[5] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 159.

by analyzing this dynamic of 'mutual othering'[6] and the processes of image projection and image perception within the Saudi-American context. Needless to say, such exhaustive approach raises another complicated and serious set of questions like: On what basis do Saudi and American writers interrogate the intersections between the notion of otherness and gender politics? Can Saudi women Speak?[7] When and how? Does (neo)Orientalism frame these narratives? That being the case, and simply put, my dissertation critically engages with these convoluted questions and interrelated paradigms.

Accordingly, I will employ an interdisciplinary approach in my analysis. The theoretical framework will utilize different paradigms pertaining to such issues as visuality, postcoloniality, critique of (neo)Orientalism and (post)modernism, feminism, and cosmopolitanism. Such a methodology revolves around the concept of "double refraction," to use the term of the Columbia comparative literature professor, David Damrosch, when world literature serves as "windows on two worlds at once: the world beyond us, and our own world as well" (14).[8] The goal behind this strategy is to probe "parochial internationalism" and, therefore, reasonably expand both the depth and the width of this project. This humble and yet ambitious effort comes "in the light of a newly globalized and interdisciplinary study of culture that often blends cultural theory gleaned from anthropology, geography, postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, and media studies with studies in modernist literature and arts."[9] Hence, my comparative examination of Saudi and American literary corpora. With this interdisciplinarity in mind, this dissertation will

[6] For more information on this concept, see Ahmed Idrissi Alami, *Mutual Othering: Islam, Modernity, and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Encounters in Pre-Colonial Moroccan and European Travel Writing* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013).
[7] Asked in the light of Gayatri Spivak's famous question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" See: Rosalind Morris. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[8] David Damrosch, "What Is World Literature?" *World Literature Today*77.1) (2003): 9–14 at 14.
[9] Susan Friedman, "World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity." *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 499-524 at 501.

compare the dynamics of representation in the American texts with their counterparts in some Arabic texts produced by Saudis to explore and compare how the latter depict themselves and interpret the political, social, and economic changes within their culture. This study, in short, tries to create a space in comparative literature and interdisciplinary studies where the representations of Saudis are examined simultaneously from both Saudi and non-Saudi (global) perspectives.

CHAPTER ONE
HISTORY AND THEORY

And the other who had no flavor
The other who had no face
The Other who had no name
The other who had no words
Who now dared
To take another path.

Thurayya al-Urayyid

1.1. Early Encounters with the "Orient" in American Culture (Snapshot)[10]

The early cultural encounters[11] between the United Sates and the Middle East are closely associated with pilgrimage to the Holy Lands in Palestine and they date backs to the 1830s. These associations, with their Biblical context, constructed a powerful and ahistorical image of the region that has shaped the contours of the collective American consciousness over the years. I believe, for instance, and in total agreement with Timothy Marr, that "no one probably did more to shape nineteenth-century U.S. views" of the middle East than Mark Twain,"[12] To illustrate, take Twain's enchanting (orientalist) tone in his description of his first encounters with

[10] The following brief discussion is not meant to be exhaustive in any way; it merely represents select snapshots of complex encounters dating back to the early seventeen and nineteenth century. In spite of the fact that it is somewhat limited, this overview can help deepen our understanding of the powerful visual and textual undercurrents of the Orientalist discourse that run through different periods of American history and illustrate how the Islamic Other and the Orient in general are othered in many different ways to serve varied purposes.
[11] For the sake of brevity and focus, the numerous confrontations between the American Navy and the (North African) Barbary States during the late 1780s is intentionally overlooked here; for a more recent examination of these marine encounters see Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Wars of the Barbary Pirates: To the Shores of Tripoli: The Rise of the US Navy and Marines* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006).
[12] Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13.

Middle Eastern sociocultural landscape during his 1867 trip to the Holy Land in in his best-seller "classic travelogue" *The Innocents Abroad* (1869).[13]

> To see a camel train laden with the spices of Arabia and the rare fabrics of Persia come marching through the narrow alleys of the bazaar […] is a genuine revelation of the Orient. The picture lacks nothing. It casts you back at once into your forgotten boyhood, and again you dream over the wonders of the Arabian Nights; again your companions are princes, your lord is the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid, and your servants are terrific giants and genii that come with smoke and lightning and thunder, and go as a storm goes when they depart![14]

Although Twain's account of the region's ancient history is emotionally charged, it has helped shape the mindset of later American generations. It is worth noting also that such renderings were, in fact, in conversation with other stereotypes already circulating about Muslims in Western culture. For example, the negative, despotic images of the subjects and rulers of the Ottoman Empire that circulated during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries contributed to formulating Americans' early notions of "democracy" and "liberalism" as well as influencing the undercurrents of American foreign policy. Likewise, and throughout his analysis of what he calls "Islamic orientalism" within the American context, Marr skillfully unpacks and analyzes archives of anti-Mormonism publications from the 1840s and '50s to show how the dichotomy between the Oriental East and the Christian West is mediated and appropriated by American

[13] For the full account of his journey see: Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002); for an excellent analysis of Twain's historic excursion see, Tony Johnston, "Mark Twain and The Innocents Abroad: Illuminating the Tourist Gaze on Death," *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7.3 (2013): 199–213.
[14] Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* 312. Quoted in Marr, *Cultural Roots* 9.

culture through a process of "reverse typology" that made use of "the rhetoric of Islamicism" to "infidelize" the Mormon minority within the United States (189). This discussion leads to an intriguing conclusion when Marr argues that the American West, especially Utah, was transfigured (culturally) and othered into being treated as "domestic orient" at some point in American national history.[15]

These recurring and diverse forms of Orientalist projections gave birth to what Melani McAlister classifies as "Commodity Orientalism" where the Oriental other became the epicenter of a new discourse of commodity culture exemplified by the rise of films (mostly silent) that depict, among others, the "exotic pleasures of the Orient."[16] These visual renderings include, but are not limited to films such as : *The Arab* (1915) [lost], *Intolerance* (1916), *Cleopatra* (1917) [lost], *Salome*, (1924), *The Sheik* (1921), *Son of the Desert* (1928), and *The Garden of Allah* (1927).[17] "In many of these films," McAlister argues, "the 'Orient' was associated with women's fantasies and women's sexual power in particular."[18] This is partially due to the rise of the post-Victorian ethics and rhetoric of modernity and the challenges they brought to gender roles and women's participation in the public space within Western culture.[19] On the other hand, Biblical movies such as *The Ten Commandments* (1923 and 1956) and *Ben-Hur* (1925 and 1959) and the way they "promised knowledge and piety through visual representation" can be seen as a cultural reflection of America's "benevolent supremacy," i.e., when the United States gradually became

[15] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 190.
[16] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22.
[17] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 22.
[18] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 23.
[19] McAlister illuminates further that "Commodity Orientalism was associated with the post-Victorian norms that in the early twentieth century produced a multilayered rhetoric of 'emancipation' linking the New Woman, companionate marriage, modernity, and consumption" (*Epic Encounters* 22).

the main political power that almost subtly replaced other colonial powers.[20] These films reveal a different kind of relationship between the "nonimperial rulers [and] the peoples of the Middle East via a relationship of consensual and unequal union."[21]

In the hope to shift the focus to the Orientalist literature in the early twentieth century concerning the U.S. encounter with Saudi Arabia, I particularly reference Abdullah Alrebh's examination of "how authority in a Middle East country was being framed by western journalists (and their editors) and presented to western audiences."[22] Particularly, he analyzes the role of Orientalism in shaping the representations of "authority," leadership, local culture during the establishment of Saudi Arabia as an independent modern state (1901-1932) as he traces representations of King Abdul Aziz in *The London Times* in the United Kingdom and *The New York Times* in the United States. These early practices of representations reflect how the classic forms of discourse—like personal narration, travelogues, and other forms of written exposition—were gradually replaced by the role of media reports in shaping how Western public perceive Saudi Arabia as well as the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a "friend" and "Arabian ally" to the West, even before the discovery of oil. Particularly, it also signals the pivotal shift in how new forms of empires emerge where hegemony is comprehensively based on what can be seen as solely practical or pragmatic economic interests. This notion is usually referred to in the Saudi-American context as the "national interest." It, chiefly, revolves around oil industry, capitalism, globalization and the way United States, as a neocolonial power, or empire, if one may use the term, interacts with the rest of the world, generally, and the Middle East, in particular.

[20] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 22.
[21] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 79.
[22] Abdullah F. Alrebh, "Covering the Building of a Kingdom: the Saudi Arabian Authority in the London Times and the New York Times, 1901-1932," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 24.2 (2015): 187-212 at 188.

These early encounters between the two countries show that the Saudi-American relationship has not always been economically based. Perhaps, it is worth mentioning Matthew Jacobs's exhaustive and close examination of how the US government imagined that the implementation of "liberal developmentalism" in Saudi Arabia, during the 1930s and '40s, would be seen as an example for modernizing the wider Middle East as well as securing US interests against "the alleged" threat of the Soviet Union.[23] For Jacobs, the giant Saudi oil company, ARAMCO, offers "a window" into understanding how Americans have imagined their role in the Middle East.[24] Furthermore, he analyzes the account of Wallace Stegner (1909-1993) in which the novelist considered the early American employees at ARAMCO to be "missionaries" and concludes that such an account is shrouded in "nostalgia and romanticism."[25] These combinations of religious and romantic undercurrents of engaging with Saudi space feature explicitly in George Potter's novel, *The White Bedouin* (2007) that depicts the life of one of the early archeologists who arrived to the Kingdom to help find oil.[26] This young and extremely religious man happens to be a Mormon who will happily endorse nomadism by the end of the story.

[23] Matthew Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918–1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 145.
[24] Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East* 146. ARAMCO, the Arabian American Oil Company, now Saudi Aramco, The Saudi Arabian Oil Company is the world's largest producer of oil.
[25] Jacobs, Imagining the Middle East 147. Stegner, a Pulitzer prize winning novelist was contracted by ARAMCO to write a history of the discover of oil in the Arabian Peninsula, 1933-1945. Stegner handed the manuscript in 1965, but it was not until 1968 that a version of the manuscript began to appear in under the title, "Discovery: The Story of Aramco Then," *Saudi Aramco World*, 19.1 (1968): 17-22; 19.2 (1968): 15-21; 19.3 (1968): 8-15; 19.4 (1968): 8-15; 19.5 (1968): 16-23; 19.6 (1968): 4-11; 20.1 (1969): 12-21; 20.2 (1969): 10-21; 20.3 (1969): 22-31; 20.4 (1969): 20-27; 20.5 (1969): 16-23; 21.1 (1970): 17-21; 21.2 (1970): 9-17; 21.3 (1970): 7.17. The text was also published as Wallace Stegner, *Discovery: The Search for Arabian Oil* (Beirut: Middle East Export Press, 1971) and has been republished with additional material as: *Discovery: The Search for Arabian Oil*, Foreword Thomas W. Lippman (Vista, CA: Selwa Press, 2007).
[26] George Potter, *The White Bedouin* (Springville, UT: Council Press, 2007).

Jacobs's conclusion becomes increasingly imperative when compared to modern-day representations of Saudi Arabia. For example, he juxtaposes Stegner's narrative with other accounts from within ARAMCO that were written by some of the first American employees, such as Karl Twitchell (1885-1968) and Thomas Barger (1909-1986), with other accounts by politicians like William Eddy (1896-1962) (the first US ambassador to Saudi Arabia) and academicians like Robert Vitalis (1955--). Interestingly, American employees and politicians "brought to their efforts to transform" the Middle East all the hegemonic "assumptions" they had about race and religion as well as the superiority/inferiority and East/West binaries.[27] Echoing McAlister's concept of "benevolent supremacy, Jacobs relevantly concludes that "Americans had imagined themselves as benevolently transforming the Middle East in some form or another for decades."[28] Undeniably, the 1973 oil crisis, however, has intensified these encounters and bred new anxieties that were reflected in Hollywood films such as *Network* (1976), *Ashanti* (1979), *Rollover* (1981), *Protocol* (1984), *Power* (1986) and *The Boost* (1988) where America's relationship with Saudi Arabia was the main theme.[29]

Finally, a snapshot of American cultural encounters with the region can indeed give an indication of the cultural underpinnings of the analysis and how the select American works that I examine fit in within the theoretical and analytical framework of my project. But it is also not meant to be exhaustive. American cultural texts tend to vary in their engagement with the Middle East. In the case of Saudi Arabia, for instance, they explore different themes and dynamics in Saudi society. In some of these works Saudi Arabia is the main focus while in others its culture is more like an echo in the background. In his fictional engagement with Saudi space, for

[27] Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East* 149.
[28] Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East* 149
[29] Tariq Al-Haydar, "Women, Gender and The Nation-State in American And Saudi Culture" (Unpublished Dissertation, Washington University, 2015), 94.

example, Potter (re)affirms his Mormonism through his exploration of premodern Saudi Arabia in *The White Bedouin*. The story exploits the spatial and temporal geography of Saudi Arabia in its juxtaposition of two narratives by two different generations of Americans in its depiction of the experiences of Jake Sorensen (1989) and Stephen Markham (1936). Deeply influenced by Orientalist discourse, the main narrator encounters "strange" Saudis who represent a "different sort of human from any I'd ever met before, primitive, as if from a different time."[30] The narrative reads pre- and post-oil Saudi space biblically as it tries to find scriptural connections between Arabian Peninsula and Mormons in Utah.

The 1970s and 1980s prove to be two of the main interesting periods for American writers since they witnessed the urbanization process of Saudi Arabia during the oil boom which has dramatically changed the sociocultural and economic landscape of the society. Vincent Meis in *Eddie's Desert Rose* (2011), for examples, interrogates these dynamics as it blends eroticism with violence in its representation of the Saudi-U.S. oil encounter. In the same fashion, and relying on her own experience in Saudi Arabia, Zoë Ferraris explores gender politics in her trilogy: *Finding Nouf* (2008), *City of Veils* (2010), and *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012). She won some literary awards for her portrayal of Saudi society. The first novel, *Finding Nouf*, for instance, shows Saudis who "practice ... [a] strict form of Islam."[31] On the whole, the story talks about a murder mystery that happens in Jeddah when a young and rich Saudi woman, Nouf, is found dead in the desert. The imaginary world of Ferraris's novels is mirrored in other works. Comparatively, topics like gender, politics, Islam, and masculinities constitute the main themes in other American novels about Saudi Arabia such as Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* (2012),

[30] Potter, *White Bedouin* 13.
[31] Zoë Ferraris, *Finding Nouf* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), 62.

Sandra Woffington's *Unveiling* (2013), Kim Barnes's *In the Kingdom of Men* (2011), and *East of Mecca* by Sheila Flaherty (2013). The same subjects and problematics are also investigated by the Arab-American novelist Mohja Kahf in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2007).

Modernity brings its own challenges to the politics of representation, especially when it comes to representing the Other in the post-9/11 world. Although they are not set in Saudi Arabia, some 9/11 novels, like Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2011), Jarett Kobek's *Atta & The Whitman of Tikrit* (2011), include both key marginal Saudi characters and briefly gloss over the complexities of Saudi culture. They also overlap with Saudi novels in their depictions of extremism and their attempt to understand the mindset of the terrorist/radical Other. Lastly, there are other American novelists who interact with Saudi Arabia to probe the complexities of global economy, both at home and abroad. For example, Dave Eggers's *Hologram for the King* (2016) reflects a country full of contradictions and overlapping inconsistencies as the story depicts different opposing socio-economic microcosms living within the Kingdom. By all means, and after visiting a mountainous village in Saudi Arabia, Eggers's Alan Clay attests that people there "lived. They survived, reproduced, sent their children to the cities to make money. Their children made money and come back to level hilltops and build castles in the same impossible valley."[32] For Alan, Saudi space poses an enigma that defies some of the static, anachronistic, and ahistorical representations that prevail in Western literatures.

[32] Dave Eggers, *Hologram for the King* (New York: Vintage, 2016), 264.

1.2. Orientalism and Shaping the Image of Mormonism in American Culture

Applying a transnational approach to early American cultural history in this section, I will briefly trace the evolution of the construction of the image of Mormonism in the U.S. from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century. Special emphasis, however, will be on the early representations of Mormons because they reflect how Orientalism played a major role in creating and perpetuating the initial discourse that links Mormonism with Islam in American culture. This survey is very crucial in our understanding of the Mormon dynamic in George Potter's *The White Bedouin*, because the analysis of the novel will feature many aspects of such inquiry.

The Mormon Church was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) in New York. He claimed that his scripture, the Book of Mormon, was based on the "golden plates" which an angel led him to discover.[33] After Smith was killed in jail, Brigham Young (1801-1877) journeyed westwards across the American heartland in 1846-7 and eventually settled down in the Great Basin of the Great Salt Lake, Utah. Today, Mormonism is known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). The number of its followers is claimed to be between thirteen and fifteen million members, more than half of them outside the United States.[34] Mormonism is rapidly growing thanks to its highly active and zealous missionary work. According to *Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary World History*, Mormonism is one of today's fastest-growing religions. Like many religious restoration or reformation movements, the Mormon Church aims to restore "biblical Christianity from the distortions and accretions that were thought to have accumulated over the centuries under Roman Catholicism."[35] *The Book of Mormon* focuses on

[33] Christopher Riches and Jan Palmowski, "Mormon Church." *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[34] Richard Lyman Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.
[35] Bushman. *Mormonism* 21,

narrating stories about biblical tribes and, thus seeks to "restore Christ's authority to the early history of Israel and to reestablish the reign of Zion in the western hemisphere."[36] Essentially, genealogy has a tremendous influence on Mormon culture. Explaining the racial, cultural, and religious logic behind this phenomenon, *Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary World History* explains that: "A belief that all one's ancestors can be posthumously baptized into Mormonism has led to an unrivalled commitment to genealogy and the establishment of the world's largest genealogical library in Utah's state capital, Salt Lake City."[37] All of these fundamental disparities between Mormons and their fellow Americans (who were dominantly Protestant) forced them to become an isolated religious sect that was compelled to relocate constantly from one area to another. Other social practices like polygamy as wells as the status of women within their communities added distinctive dimensions to this sense of isolationism forcing Mormons to fight for the very existence of their group as well as safety and freedom as an American minority. Rhetorically speaking, Mormons were culturally and socially seen as "domestic orients" throughout the nineteenth century.[38].

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Mormonism resorted to what Armand L. Mauss defines as a "racialist construction of Mormonism ethnic identity" that designated them as direct descendants of the royal tribe of Ephraim, one of the Ten Lost Tribes and sons of the biblical Joseph.[39] This claim played a central part in the survival of Mormons as a marginalized religious sect within the dominantly Protestant America. Racialism "functioned in large part as a defensive ideology," maintains Mauss, "to counter the pervasive nineteenth-century image of

[36] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 189.
[37] Christopher Riches and Jan Palmowski, "Mormon Church," *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[38] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 185.
[39] Armand Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations and Its Changing Conceptions of Race and Lineage," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 34.3/4 (2001): 103–33, 209.

Mormons as a pariah people."[40] Thus, Mormons see themselves *literally* as Israelites who strive to build the city and temple of Zion in the continental America. For example, Mauss argues that if we take into account the circulating notion of the superiority of the Germanic peoples at that time, we find that this Mormon racialist claim contributed to the initial success of Mormon missionaries in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century.[41] Under those circumstances, it is not surprising to discover that the notion of othering has been part of the ideological structure within the Mormon society itself. *The Book of Mormon*, for instance, recognizes Aboriginal peoples or Native Americans as "Lamanites" and descendants of the biblical tribes and the Mormon Church tried unceasingly to proselytize them into their cult, yet they are "portrayed as a fallen and degraded people … [because they] rejected their ancient American prophets of God."[42] Moreover, this ambivalence towards proselytizing Native Americans was multiplied by their misrepresentations within the wider context of American cultural consciousness throughout most of the twentieth century as well as the tremendous failure of the Mormon church in attracting and retaining them.[43] Another key point in this regard is to notice in what way the national sociopolitical dynamics in America, such as the civil rights movement, had influenced how the LDS church interpreted its own, often coercive, assimilation programs of the Native Americans leading, eventually, to the terminations of such systematic incorporations.[44] These undercurrents also forced them to reevaluate their practice of racial exceptionalism, if one may say so, and how they interpret their ideologies and the notions of social construct and historical development. By the mid-twentieth century and in its relentless

[40] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 110.
[41] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 110.
[42] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 111.
[43] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 112.
[44] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 115.

efforts for universalization, the LDS Church shifted the focus from adhering to racial orthodoxy and Israelite linage to maintaining growth in Latin America and Africa.[45]

Nevertheless, a close examination of the early republic and antebellum history, from a comparativist perspective, reveals astonishing multilayered ideological tendencies, within the American society, i.e., association of Mormonism with Islam. Since the nineteenth century many scholars and writers have compared Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism to Muhammed, the Muslim Prophet. Even Smith's biographer Fawn M. Broodle hinted at this when she titled a chapter "The Alcoran or the Sword" in her biographical account of the self-claimed prophet: *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*.[46] Likewise, in his excellent book, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism,* Timothy Marr devotes his fourth chapter to the analysis of "Mormonism as an American 'Islam'" where he interrogates the significance of the long-standing discourse of Mormon-Muslim juxtapositions. He defines these ideological trends in what he terms, the "domestication of islamicism" or "the way that the religious history and practices of the Mormons were represented as the replication of Islam as an American phenomenon."[47] This shows that it is not an overstatement to say that the history of Mormonism is overshadowed by the critique of the notion of religious authenticity as its pioneers, from John Smith to Brigham Young, fought to establish an independent religious community for themselves.

For most of the Protestant writers, the anti-Mormon rhetoric was foregrounded by the attack on the credibility of Islam as an Abrahamic religion and Muhammed as a legitimate Prophet. These early forms of Islamophobic narratives were rapidly adapted to be the founding

[45] Mauss, "Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations" 130-33.
[46] J. Spencer Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet': Joseph Smith, Muhammad, and the Problem of Prophets in Antebellum America," *Journal of Mormon History* 34.3 (2008): 23-45 at 26.
[47] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 186.

ground for the anti-Mormonism sentiments which were soon to prevail, especially during antebellum era. As a religious historian who focuses on nineteenth-century anti-Mormon literature, J. Spencer Fluhman maintains that Prophet Muhammed is one of the *two* figures that the anti-Mormon writers named when laying the background for their rebuke and denouncement of Smith's prophetic claims.[48] These conjured connections helped anti-Mormon writers to find what Fluhman calls "ready precedents" to put Smith within a specific frame of narrative interpretation that would eventually and "rhetorically helped render the Mormon prophet deviant, controversial, or false"[49] Through applying numerous discursive tactics, anti-Mormon writers created a narrative where Mormons were pushed out of the national (Protestant) identity by associating them with a distant oriental space and culture.

Nonetheless, they also reveal an early exposure of antebellum America to Islamic history through countless junctures between the two sides like the encounters with African Muslims as a consequence of slave trade and the series of naval wars with Barbary States on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. This contact came also as a result of the familiarity of

[48] Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet'" 30. Unsurprisingly, the other figure was none but the New York self-claimed prophet Robert Matthews (1788–c. 1841), known as "Matthias," since he appeared during the lifetime of Joseph Smith and lived in New York, too. Matthews established his own religious community and called it the "Kingdom of Matthias." (Oddly and on a side note, Sojourner Truth [c. 1797–1883], the pioneer African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist who spent her life condemning racial inequalities, worked for him as a housekeeper for a short period.) Fluhman elegantly summarizes the reason behind these comparisons when concludes that "[w]hile Smith's presumably imminent failure drew immediate comparisons with Matthias after the latter had been "exposed" in the mid-1830s, Muhammad ultimately helped anti-Mormons cope with both Smith's assumed chicanery and his otherwise inexplicable success" (30). For a discussion of the life of Robert Matthews, see William L. Stone, *Matthias and His Impostures: Or, the Progress of Fanaticism Illustrated in the Extraordinary Case of Robert Matthews, and Some of His Forerunners and Disciples* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1835); Paul E. Johnson, and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-cen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 [1994]); For the interesting connection between Robert Matthews and Sojourner Truth, see: Sojourner Truth and Olive Gilbert, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 76-82; Sojourner Truth, et al., *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her Book of Life; Also, A Memorial Chapter* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); For more information on the comparison between Joseph Smith and Robert Mathews, see: Fluhman. "An 'American Mahomet'" 30–32.

[49] Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet'" 30.

many American Protestants with the "Christian versions" of that "oriental" history.[50] Certainly, the Holy Qur'an was one of the earliest and most important circulating Islamic texts during that time as Jeffery Einboden illuminates that "it is clear that the Qur'an served as a crucial source of reference and inspiration for a diverse range of leading authors in the early US […] building an architecture of Islamic allusion within the very foundations of early US Letters."[51] The influence of Qur'an can be traced in the works of many notable and influential figures in American popular culture like Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), Washington Irving (1783–1859), Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), to name but a few.

On the negative side, it is also crucial to remember that this early exposure to Islamic culture was sieved through many layers of Orientalism which, in turn, had helped created a (buffer) space where American Mormons were racialized and rendered oriental despised others by their fellow Americans. These othering practices came as cultural and ideological ramifications of associating Mormonism with a foreign and detached history beyond the continental America. To illustrate the impact of orientalization of Mormons on the broader sociocultural milieu during that period, I will give brief examples that shed some light on the representations of the role of polygamy in Mormonism. As mentioned earlier, polygamy was one of the main factors in the progression of isolating and othering Mormons. Attempting to explicate the role of polygamy in Mormonism, Richard Bushman asserts that "Mormons point out that God commanded Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to practice polygamy at the foundation of Israel; plural marriage served the same purpose when the Mormon people were coming into

[50] Fluhman. "An 'American Mahomet'" 32. For more information, see Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Allan D. Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*, Rev. and Updated Ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997).
[51] Jeffrey Einboden, "The Early American Qur'an: Islamic Scripture and US Canon," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11.2 (2009): 1-19 at 2.

existence.”.[52] It may sound surprising to discover that polygamy was, in fact, practiced only by a minority group of Mormons and was officially renounced in 1890. In addition, in 1869 Utah was the second territory in the U.S. to grant women the right to vote.[53] Yet, these facts did not stop anti-Mormon rhetoric from looking at Mormons as an inherently monolithically polygamous society that unreservedly celebrated and indulged in irrepressible sensuality.

Let us shift the focus to the examination of how literary works during nineteenth century reflected the trajectories of gender politics within Mormon society. In her remarkable survey, *Women Writers of the American West, 1833-1927,* Nina Baym maintains that there are about fifty anti-Mormon novels by men and women that were published between 1850 and 1900 (103).[54] Intriguingly, many anti-Mormon women writers raised the issue of women’s status in Mormon society by dissecting polygamy. In their critique of Mormonism, they resorted to conjuring up the image of the helpless oriental woman who is subjugated by despotic patriarchy and forced to live within the realm of the exotic harem. Additionally, marketing was one of the reasons for the rehashing of these images since such desperate renderings of Mormon women dramatically increased the popularity of these works. For instance, some fictional representations show Mormon women as “slave” girls, vulnerable wives, or even “perfect houris.”[55] In 1858, Maria Ward, for example, published one of the most popular anti-Mormon novels when she was able to sell 40,000 copies of *Female Life Among Mormons* in just few weeks.[56] *Boadiccea, the Mormon Wife: Life Scenes in Utah* (1855) by Alfeda Eva Bell (possibly a pseudonym of the publisher Arthur R. Orton about whom little else is known) was another popular novel that used

[52] Bushman, *Mormonism* 20.
[53] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 206.
[54] Nina Baym, *Women Writers of the American West: 1833-1927* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
[55] Qtd. in Marr, *Cultural Roots* 210. Marr, Cultural Roots 210.
[56] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 210. Still, there are some controversies about whether this novel should be attributed to a certain Maria Ward or to Benjamin G. Ferris (1801-1891), see Baym, *Women Writers* 103.

visual illustrations to chronicle "the decent of […] pure love into polygamy and licentiousness," as Marr puts it.[57] Part of the popularity of these novels lies in their recurring utilization of orientalist images in their construction of the perception of Mormon woman. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, anti-Mormon women writers chose to direct their criticism to female Mormons for not confronting polygamy and the degradation of women's status in their communities. Writers like Jennie Anderson Froiseth (1849-1930) in works like *The Women of Mormonism or the Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves* (1882) launched a severe attack on the "cynical hypocrisy" of female Mormon activists, for instance, for serving in the Relief Society which was seen as an "organization formed to encourage and supervise female activities throughout the [Utah] territory."[58] There were other issues that anti-Mormon women raised nonetheless. Baym discusses, for instance, how other anti-Mormon women chose to compare polygamy to the epidemic of slavery in the American South as in Jennie Bartlett's novel, *Elder Northfield's Home: Or, Sacrificed on the Mormon Altar; the Story of the Blighting Curse of Polygamy* (1865).[59]

Intriguingly, Orientalism played a role in the (mis)representations of Islam and its Prophet in the emerging republic, especially since Orientalist discourse was prevalent in biographical and historical works produced by English writers that were amply available to American readers during that time. For this reason, it seems necessary to examine, although briefly, the spatial dynamic between Orientalism, the construction of image of Islam in the U.S., and European culture before analyzing its tremendous impact on shaping the politics of representation of Mormons during antebellum era. In his study of the influence of the Islamic

[57] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 210.
[58] Baym, *Women Writers* 102.
[59] Baym, *Women Writers* 104.

scripture on the formation of the American culture and literary canon, Jeffery Einboden emphasizes the significant role that British and Continental scholarship played in "mediating between American audiences and Muslim sources in the nineteenth century, with Europe conveying and colouring transmissions passing from the Middle East to Western frontiers."[60] The spatial proximity of Europe to the Arabo-Islamic culture has made the Old Continent an important cultural crossroad between Orient and the young American nation in the New World. In fact, the fruitful encounters between several American literary figures that contributed to shaping the cultural consciousness of American society occurred during their visits to Europe. For instance, in addition to the fact that there is a strong evidence of his penchant for Qur'an from an early age during his undergraduate years at Harvard, Ralph Waldo Emerson, bought his own copy of the Qur'an in London in 1833.[61] Washington Irving also visited Europe in 1826 and spent three and a half years exploring the Andalusian heritage in the Iberian Peninsula. Commenting on the cultural significance of this trip, Einboden argues that Irving had utilized his experiences "to pioneer new genres of American writing, composing travel narratives and romantic histories, re-imagining this region as a crucial bridge of culture, linking East and West; Asian and European; Islam and Christianity."[62] This tremendous exposure to Andalusian legacy had a long-lasting impact on Irving and brought a fruitful opportunity for him to produce his own perception of the Islamic history in works like *Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829), *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832), and *Mahomet and His Successors* (1849).

[60] Einboden, "Early American Qur'an" 1.
[61] Einboden, "Early American Qur'an" 1. Einboden refers to Emerson's use of Qur'anic verses in his journal during his third year at Harvard in 1819. It reads: "In aforetime I created Jan from out of a scorching fire;" See "Early American Qur'an" 2.
[62] Einboden, "Early American Qur'an" 3.

On the other side of the Atlantic, many European books were reprinted on American soil. As an illustration, English Orientalist, Humphrey Prideaux (1648-1724) wrote many works that were reprinted a few times in the U.S. and it is important to realize that they depict the Islamic world as backward and sensual, while, simultaneously drawing different degrees of parallelism between the teachings and ideologies of Islam and Catholicism.[63] When read from a historiographical perspective, these writers helped to create a "comparativist discourse," as Marr contends, where they deploy "orientalist allusions and references to the history, geography, doctrines, and practices of Islam as a means of defining the infidelity of the Mormon example and negating its claims to Christian genealogy."[64] In fact, rhetorical attacks on Islam and Catholicism by both Orientalist and Christian biographers and historians were utilized, culturally and theologically, as narrative tools for creating a kind of othering paradigms that gradually developed to become the theoretical framework for undermining Mormonism. Ultimately, these histories and biographies fueled the anti-Mormon rhetoric regionally as many writers were questioning the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*. Works like Washington Irving's *Mahomet and His Successors* (1849) and *Muhammed, the Arabian Prophet* (1850) by George Miles (1824-1871) reflect how literary figures contributed to that socioreligious aura by producing their own renderings of the life of the Muslim Prophet Muhammed.[65] In particular, Irving's attempt to

[63] Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet'" 33-34. See Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet: With a Discourse Annexed, for the Vindicating of Christianity from This Charge; Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age* (London: W. Rogers, 1697).
[64] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 186.
[65] See Washington Irving, *Mahomet and His Successors* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1849); George Henry Miles, *Mohammed, the Arabian Prophet: A Tragedy, In Five Acts* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company, 1850). It is worth noting that some religious historians like Fluhman, for example, look at this phenomenon from an intercontinental perspective when he reads Miles's play in the light of what was circulating in European literary and cultural scenes. To illustrate his point, Fluhman cites (in his footnote) a play by French philosopher Voltaire. The play is titled *Le fanatisme ou Mahomet* (1736) and it was translated into English by James Miller in 1744.See Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet'" 37. For a good analysis of the image of the Prophet Muhammed in in the

rewrite his own version of السيرة النبوية or *Al-sira al-Nabawiyya* (Prophetic biography) reveals an ambivalence towards Islam in general, and, specifically, the Qur'an as Einboden explains: "Irving's treatment of the Qur'an in particular seems to reflect contemporaneous anxieties concerning Biblical authority, identifying the Muslim scripture as both an object of Christian resistance, as well as a subject reinforcing the Christian canon."[66] (4). I think such polemical stance must be read in the context of Orientalism during that period because it was essentially revolving around the notions of originality and authority of the Islamic scripture which, in turn, produced a discourse that commonly challenged Muslim orthodoxy.

These images hinge on the central contention about religious imposture and representations of the Islamic scripture as merely an amalgamation of different stories from the Old and New Testaments as well as different "wild notions derived from other sources" as Irving puts it in *Mahomet and His Successors*.[67] Although they are not entirely new in the West, such discrediting dynamics, even in their literary forms, contributed to the prevailing discourse of questioning the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, in general, and Joseph Smith's integrity, in particular. One can conclude that the representations of Islam and its prophet during antebellum America functioned as the cultural and religious frameworks that many (anti-Mormon) writers depended on in their criticism of Mormonism as they sought to stigmatize it and, ultimately, question and dispute the 'Americanness' of both its origin and members. In other words, the incorporation of both Orientalism and Islamicization in anti-Mormon writings reveals an easier

works of both Irving and Miles, see Holly Edwards's "Yankee Mahomet" in Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem, eds. *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 337-56. Generally speaking, this collection of essays is an excellent comparative and interdisciplinary study that aims to "elucidate Muhammad's visualization in the West vis-à-vis his image in Islam (Publisher's blurb)."

[66] Einboden, "Early American Qur'an" 4.

[67] Qtd. in Fluhman, "An 'American Mahomet'" 41; for more examples, see also Einboden, "Early American Qur'an" 3-5.

way to encounter the new religious sect that forced Americans to reconsider their understanding of "the sufficiency of the Bible, the separation of the church and state, and the sanctity of monogamy."[68] For these writers, rehashing the prevailing misinformation about Islam and Muslim during that time offered a more nationally attractive and less complex rhetorical approach to engage with Mormonism. The attacks on the new emerging Mormon community created a kind of spatial orientalism where the great Basin of the Great Salt Lake is rendered an *oriental territorial extension of the Islamic orient* by distancing it from the "*palatable* Protestant practice."[69] From another vantage point, these images of Mormons and their peculiarities explained why they had gained some notoriety in the wider Christian West and, in turn, attracted the curiosity of many explorers, scholars, and adventurers. Even the famous British explorer Sir Richard Burton, as Marr observes, was attracted to the Mormon society and described Utah as the "Holy Land of the West," while connecting the geographical features of Salt Lake City with the mountainous Mecca region, the holiest city in Islam, when he journeyed through the American West in 1860.[70]

This brief review shows that a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the mid-nineteenth century was framed within a detached orientalist discourse that revolves around exoticism, sensuality, despotism and unfathomable mystical myths. "Muhammad served Americans as a metaphor to explain the unexplainable," asserts Fluhman, "[and] to dismiss what would not go away on its own, and to rhetorically place on the margins what seemed an all-too-immediate threat."[71] (45). Certainly, Fluhman's statement is a very apt

[68] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 187.
[69] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 186, emphasis added.
[70] Marr, *Cultural Roots* 192. For more information on Burton's journey, see Richard F. Burton, *The City of the Saints, and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1861]).
[71] Fluhman. "An 'American Mahomet'" 45.

description that reflects the prevailing ambivalence in antebellum America towards how to approach the Book of Mormon as a 'religious' text. While others were contemplating the sources and structure of Smith's narrative, Mark Twain, for instance, did not find the Mormon textbook intellectually appealing and described it as merely "chloroform in print."[72] These shades of ambivalence can explain how many anti-Mormon Americans simply resorted to conjuring such images of Islam and its Prophet in their efforts to understand and then contain the increasing, yet unexplainable, popularity of Mormonism during various stages of American national history. Although it is succinct, this comparative analysis can help us reimagine how antebellum America reacted to religious difference by reiterating the image of the Islamic other theologically, literarily, and culturally. It will also deepen the critical analysis of George Potter's *The White Bedouin* in the next section.

[72] Qtd. in Fluhman, "American Mahomet" 41.

1.3. An Overview of Saudi Literature[73]

Education

I think it is theoretically and structurally beneficial to give an overview of Saudi literature before delving into the critical analysis of the texts and contexts. Arguably, and besides *Cities of Salt* quintet (1984-1989) of Abdelrahman Munif (1933-2004),[74] little is known about Saudi literature, at least to the vast majority of the Western reading public. This section aims to give a general overview of the development of Saudi literary scene and its main narrative milestones that reflect different stages of its evolution. However, there are few important historical and cultural facts that the reader or critic who engages with Saudi national literature should observe. On the geopolitical level, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is, relatively, a young country that emerged into the international political scene as a new (unified) nation in 1932. On the social level, tribalism was the dominant social dynamism that shaped and controlled people's lives forcing them to continually refigure their defensive alliances.[75] Importantly, on the cultural level, and with the exception of Makkah and Madinah, there was "virtually" no concept or system of formal education in most of modern-day Saudi Arabia during the first quarter of the twentieth century as Mansour Al-Hazmi asserts in his anthology of modern Saudi literature that was published in 2006.[76] The gradual process of the establishment of the country paralleled the development of a formal education as the first school opened in 1935. For this reason, and to

[73] Beside few other sources in Arabic, and to avoid over-quoting, I owe most of my knowledge of Saudi literature discussed here to Mansour Al-Hazimi, 'Izzat Khattab, and Salma Jayyusi's *Beyond the Dunes: An Anthology of Modern Saudi Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Moneera Al-Ghadeer, "Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings." *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, ed. Waïl Hassan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 397-410.

[74] Only the first three volumes have been translated into English, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Peter Theroux (New York: Vintage books, 1987), *The Trench*, trans. Peter Theroux (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), *Variations on Night and Day*, trans. Peter Theroux (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

[75] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 4.

[76] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 6.

expedite the educational process, the first wave of Saudi students was sent to Egypt in 1926 and later to the United States in 1951 (19 students). Besides, the period between 1924 and 1953 is considered the "infancy" period of journalism.

Saudi literature went through different stages or phases of intellectual development until it reached literary maturity that began with a "revival" movement (1932-1953) which, in turn, witnessed the humble start of literary magazines, journals, and newspapers. It was followed by a "renewal phase" (1953-1970) when the education process accelerated rapidly in various forms throughout the country which coincided with launching modern publishing houses like *Al-Yamama* and *Riyadh*. This period also saw the publication of much of what are considered foundational works about the sociocultural past of the country that encompassed Saudi "proverbs, colloquialisms, folklore and mythology."[77] The third literary phase, however, is regarded as the "richest and most complex in the Kingdom's history because it was in this era that the pace of social change exploded, mainly as a result of oil boom in the 1970s."[78] Fittingly, it was named the "modernization" period (1970-2000). Higher education was the backbone of this historic phase and it may not be surprising to know that 20,000 Saudi students were studying in the U.S. between 1975-1985 in addition to other students who were scattered across the continents.

Saudi Novel

Throughout its various stages of development, Saudi novel interacted with and reflected the fast-paced and immense sociocultural and economic ramifications which had to be endured by Saudis. The first Saudi novel was التوأمان *Al-Taw'aman* (The Twins) by 'Abd al-Quddus al-

[77] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 8.
[78] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 8.

Ansari (1906-1983) was published in Damascus in 1930. This novel reflects the "didactic" nature of this early period when writing was not a form of entertainment, but rather an educational tool for social reform.[79] The didacticism of this early period was disrupted by the continuous process of emigration from the desert and small villages to cities as well as the establishment of formal education for male and female, foreign labor, introduction of technology, and international trade that changed the social and cultural dynamics of Saudi society especially after the oil boom in the 1970s and later in the 1980s. Owing to this fact, the "artistic trend" in Saudi novel began with the publication of ثمن التضحية *Thaman Al-Tadhiyah* (The Price of Sacrifice) (1959) by Hamid Damanhouri (1922-1965) and ثقب في رداء الليل *Thuqub fi Rida'a Alliyl* (A Slit in the Night's Attire) (1961) by Ibrahim al-Nasser (1933- 2013). This period saw the publication of the first Saudi novel by a woman, i.e., ودعت آمالي *Wadda'tu amali* (Farewell to My Dreams) (1958) by Samira Khashuqji (1935-1986).[80] These novels, among few others, applied a realistic reading of this "transitional period" in their interrogation of new emerging social and cultural conflicts in Saudi society. The creative and literary maturity of these works is reflected in their "compliance with the terms of the conventional novel as written in the western world, by writers like Dickens, Flaubert and Dostoevsky, from the nineteenth century on" as Al-Hazmi describes it.[81] After a short period of the rise of autobiographical works, the "modernist phase" began in the late 1960s and early 1970s and it championed creative "experimentations." These experiential elements colored the works of 'Abd al-Aziz Mishri (1955-2000) where he tries to mythologize the forgotten premodern past by reconstructing and connecting folk stories with historical incidents to create a sense of authenticity. This obsession with the past prevails also in the works of

[79] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 28.
[80] Al-Ghadeer, "Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings" 397.
[81] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 29.

contemporary novelists like ‘Abdu Khal (1962--) and Raja’a ‘Alem (1970--). Additionally, the 1990s witnessed the publication of numerous notable works like the trilogy *The Adama*, *Shumaisi*, and *Karadeeb*—collectively known as أطياف الأزقة المهجورة *Atiyaf al-Aziqah al-Mahjourah* (Phantoms of the Deserted Alley) by Turki al-Hamad (1952--)[82]—and الفردوس اليباب *al-Firdaws al-yabab* (Barren Paradise) by Liala al-Juhani (1969--),[83] among others.

Moreover, there was an unprecedented rise of the novel in the new millennium by a younger generation of writers that led the prominent Saudi critic Abdulla Al-Ghadhdhami to describe it as a “tsunami.”[84] To illustrate, Al-Ghadeer, for instance, compares literary novelistic production in Saudi Arabia in 1930-1999 and 2000-2011 and notices a remarkable increase: 208 novels in the twentieth century versus 578 novels published in the new millennium.[85] Recent works by younger writers like بنات الرياض *Banat Al-Riyad* (Girls of Riyadh) (2007) by Raja’a Al-Sanea’[86] and الاخرون *Al-Akharoun* (The Others) (2006) by Saba Al-Hirz (pseudonym)[87] represent what Al-Ghadeer calls the “sense of liberation and the negative sublime” where these novelists “carefully depict … violence as the consequence of” various overwhelming challenges resulting in “the negative sublime, demonstrated in tropes of sadism and perversion.”[88]

[82] *Adama: A Novel*, trans. Robin Bray (London: Saqi, 2013), *Sumaishi*, trans. Paul Starkey (London: Saqi, 2013). The third volume is not yet available in English. Since Al-Hamad is actually a (controversial) retired professor of Political Science, he wrote other nonfictional books like الثقافة العربية أمام تحدّيات التغيّر *Al-Thiqafa al-`Arabiyya Amam Tahaddiyat al-Taghayyur* (Arab Culture in the Face of the Challenges of Change) (1993), الثقافة العربية في عصر العولمة *Al-Thiqafa al-`Arabiyya fi `Asri 'l-`Awlama* (Arab Culture in the Age of Globalization) (1999), السياسة بين الحلال و الحرام*Al-Siyasa Bayn al-Halal wa 'l-Haram* (Politics between the Licit and the Forbidden) (2003).
[83] Besides her debut novel *Da'iman sayabqa al-hubb* (Love Always Remains) (1995), Al-Juhani also wrote *Jahiliyya* (Ignorance) (2007) and others. None of her novels have been translated into English, although exerpts have appeared in *Banipal*, a literary magazine for contemporary Arab literature published in London.
[84] Al-Ghadeer, “Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings” 403.
[85] Al-Ghadeer, “Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings” 403.
[86] Al-Ghadeer discusses the weakness of the novel and even describes it as “chick lit.” See: Moneera al-Ghadeer, “Girls of Riyadh: A New Technology Writing or Chick Lit Defiance *Banat Al-Riyad [Girls of Riyadh]* (Book Review),” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37.2 (2006): 296–302.
[87] Saba Al-Hirz, *The Others*, trans. anon. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2009).
[88] Al-Ghadeer, “Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings” 404.

This brief overview of Saudi literature and the literary development of the novel shows the quantum leap in the creative production that allowed Saudi writers to spring out of the local and regional experience and emerge as world-class novelists. Let us, for instance, overlook other international literary awards and look at one of the most distinguished prizes in the Arabic world, i.e., the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) (the "Arabic Booker Prize"). Beside other longlisted and shortlisted Saudi works,[89] we find, for example, that in the last ten years three Saudi novelists won the IPAF: Abdo Khal (1962--) won it for ترمي بشرر *Tarmi Bi-Sharar* (Throwing Sparks) in 2010,[90] Rajaa 'Alem shared the prize with the Moroccan writer Mohammed Achaari (1951--) for her novel طوق الحمام *Tawq al-Hamam* (The Dove's Necklace) in 2011,[91] and Mohammed Hasan Alwan (1979--) won the prize in 2017 for موت صغير *Mawt Saghir* (A Small Death).[92] Likewise, Umaima al-Khamis (1966--) was the first Saudi writer to win the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature[93] in 2018 for her novel مسرى الغرانيق في مدن العقيق *Masra al-Gharaniq fi Mudun al-'Aqiq* (Voyage of the Cranes in the Cities of Agate).[94] The same novel was also longlisted for IPAF in 2019. In the end, it may be hard to believe that the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia was formed only in 1953 when the country, to echo Al-Hazmi, "once characterized as an inward-looking cultural wilderness."[95]

[89] For example, if we look at history of IPAF, we find that Mohammed Hassan Alwan's القندس *Al-Qundus* (The Beaver) was shortlisted in 2013, while the following novels were longlisted: Umaima al-Khamis's الوارفة *al-Warifah* (The Leafy Tree) (2010), Abdullah Bin Bakheet's شارع العطايف *Shari'e al-Aldaief* (Street of Affections) (2010), Maqbul al-Alawi's فتنة جدة *Fitn'at Jeddah* (Turmoil in Jeddah) (2011), Badryah El-Bishr's غراميات شارع الأعشى *Gharamiyat Shari'e al-A'asha* (Love Stories on al-A'asha Street) (2014), and in 2019 مسرى الغرانيق في مدن العقيق *Voyage of the Cranes in the Cities of Agate* by (again) Omaima Al-Khamis.
[90] *Throwing Sparks*, trans. Maïa Tabet, and Michael K. Scott (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2012).
[91] *Dove's Necklace: A Novel*, trans. Katherine Halls and Adam Talib (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2016).
[92] Not yet translated into English.
[93] It is an annual prize, overseen by the American University in Cairo (AUC), and awarded for the best contemporary novel published in Arabic (but not yet in English) in support of contemporary Arabic literature in translation; part of the prize is the publication worldwide in English translation by the AUC Press.
[94] *Voyage of the Cranes over the Agate Cities* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2020).
[95] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 9.

1.4. Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

Applying an interdisciplinary approach, this project examines how Americans perceive Saudi Arabia and its society by analyzing the politics of representation of Saudi women and men, Saudi culture and space, and Islam in the American fiction that focus mainly on this part of the world or feature some Saudi characters in their storylines. Special emphasis will be on the multilayered and diverse forces and transformations of Saudi cultural and spatial landscape since society was catapulted into modernity virtually overnight, which produced " إنه مجتمع معجون بالتناقضات" "a society riddled with hypocrisy, drugged by contradictions," as a young and heart-broken female character puts it in Raja'a Al-Sanea's بنات الرياض *Banat Al-Riyad* (Girls of Riyadh) (2007).[96] Therefore, and to explore these transformations, the study will choose specific moments in the Saudi-U.S. relationship like the initial encounter during oil discovery in the 1930s and up to the terrorist attacks on September, 11. This selective strategy will allow a reasonable amount of variations for the study of politics of representations as it traces the beginnings of these moments of encounter as well as important turning points that often contested, questioned, and complicated what is usually referred to in the global geopolitics as "special relationship" between the two countries. It will also reveal how Saudis interacted with the unusual and diverse forces of sociocultural, political, and religious changes that Saudi society witnessed and endured during the rapid process of modernization in the Kingdom, especially during the 1970s, 1980s, up to the early 1990s. The importance of these works stems from two reasons. First, they reflect a spectrum of themes that range from reproducing and reinstating some stereotypical images about Saudis as the (Islamic/Arabic) non-Western Other to

[96] Raja'a Al-Sanea, *The Girls of Riyadh*, trans. Rajaa Alsenea and Marylin Booth (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 112. بنات الرياض *Banat Al-Riyad: Riwayah* (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2007), 130. (There are some variations in translation between the Arabic and English versions).

establishing a cultural hegemony and surveying nationalist and feminist ideologies. Second, they are produced during (and reflected on) key moments of the relatively long history of the "strategic" relationship between the two countries. Importantly, the project will also cover the perceptions of Saudis after 9/11 when great emphasis was placed on the image of Saudi Arabia and frameworks of its religiocultural and social hermeneutics as more studies and scholarship started to emerge, especially in the American academia.

Certainly, there is a plethora of studies that examine the images of Arabs and Muslims in both Western and American cultures, yet less light has been shed (specifically or exclusively) on the representations of Saudi men and women in these contexts. Generally speaking, one cannot study the representations of the Middle East without discussing the contributions of some influential scholarship that deals, in one way or another, with the classical East-West dynamics like Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), and Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), among others of course. Moving up to the post-9/11 feminist critique of "War On Terror" like "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" by Lila Abu-Lughod "remind us to be aware of *differences*, respectful of other paths toward social change that might give women better lives."[97] Abu-Lughod is not the only scholar who examines what Leila Ahmed calls "The Discourse of the Veil"[98] and the politics of representations. For example, in her *Epic Encounter* (2005),[99] Melani McAlister examines different types of encounters between the West (predominantly the United States in this case) and the Middle East by analyzing the history of wars, movies, debates, and discussions in books and media about the region specifically, and,

[97] Emphasis added; see Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?: Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002). 783–790 at 788.
[98] Leila Ahmed, "The discourse of the veil," *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism,* ed. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair. (New Brunswick: NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 315-38.
[99] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

therefore, showing how these contexts have been shaped by many factors, mainly the presence of oil and the claim to religious origins.[100]

Said, moreover, untangles the widespread theoretical and methodological biases in the West as he exposes the connections between colonialism and the Western imperial projects and the image of the Orient. He affirms that Orientalism "is also an influential academic tradition" and that the "Orient that appears in Orientalism […] is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire."[101] Likewise, Abu-Lughod warns that all "[p]rojects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged."[102] Most of these works are among others that criticize Western scholarship and its sweeping portrayal of the Muslims as religious fanatics, economically and socially backward who are governed by repressive autocratic powers.[103]

However, the widespread sociopolitical and cultural repercussions of the 9/11 terrorist attacks complicated the East/West and Self/Other binaries as they pushed this classical form of Orientalist discourse into becoming a more politically and ideologically charged version that became to be known as neo-Orientalism. It is important to emphasize, at this early stage of my

[100] Succinctly, she elucidates this by emphasizing that "Oil has often seemed the most obvious of these two—an irreducible material interest. and for decades, beginning in the 1940s and intensifying after the oil crises of the 1970s, narrative of a U.S. 'national interest in oil' were presents in everything from presidential statements to car advertisements…Claims to the Middle East as a site of religious origin have wielded a similar power...Because Judaism, Islam, and Christianity each take the 'Holy Land' as their site of origin, religious narratives helped forge the connection that allowed many people in the United States to see themselves as intimately involved with the Middle East, as having a legitimate cultural investment that was sometimes a profound political interest as well" (McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 1-2).
[101] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 203.
[102] Abu-Lughod, "Muslim Women" 789.
[103] There are, of course, some studies that endeavor to present a more balanced and "objective" approach of representations of the Middle East in Western scholarship such as Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (2011), Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori. Muslim Politics (1996), to name but a few.

analysis, that I use the term "neo-Orientalism" in agreement with Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams. In *Globalizing American Studies,* they call it a "phenomenon" and define it as "a mode of representation that, while indebted to classical Orientalism, engenders new tropes of othering."[104] They also delineate three main aspects:

> Although predominantly a North American phenomenon, neo-Orientalism is not limited to the United States; nor is it merely produced by Western subjects. On the contrary, not only do Middle Eastern writers, scholars, and so-called experts participate in its production, but they play an active and significant role in propagating it. Second, unlike its classical counterpart, neo-Orientalism entails a popular mode of representing, a kind of *doxa* about the Middle East and Muslims that is disseminated, thanks to new technologies of communication, throughout the world. Finally, we designate this mode of representation as *neo* rather than *new* in order to signal the continuity between contemporary and traditional forms of Orientalism […] Like its classical counterpart, for example, neo-Orientalism is monolithic, totalizing, reliant on a binary logic, and based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental other. [105]

I will engage critically with different aspects of this concept in this dissertation throughout my analysis of various modes of representations and the Saudi-American contexts and how they intersect with gender politics, culture, oil economics, and postcoloniality. Indeed, Neo-Orientalism proliferates in the wake of 9/11 in the West, especially in the American settings

[104] Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams, "Neo-Orientalism," *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian Edward and Dilip Gaonkar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 283-99 at 284.
[105] Behdad and Williams, "Neo-Orientalism" 284.

that engage directly or indirectly with Muslim/Arab Other. El-Sayed El-Aswad, for example, examines this cultural phenomenon in "Images of Muslims in Western Scholarship and Media after 9/11" and concludes that "Islam has become a center of fear (i.e., *Islamophobia*). Muslims have been debunked and portrayed in much of Western scholarship as the exotic other, the enemy—imagined or real, and the despotic, antidemocratic, and terroristic. Images of suicidal bombings for the United States and Europe, or the West, have become iconic of the Islamic 'culture of death'."[106] Unfortunately, the underpinnings of this neo-Orientalist discourse have become the dominant modes of representation (both textual and visual) in American popular culture reflected in the such complexities that are inherently ambivalent.

The epidemic of Neo-Orientalism in the various post-9/11 engagements with the Middle East necessitated (continual) remeasurement and reassessment of how the U.S. foreign policy utilized such concept ferociously and menacingly. Reflecting on the impact of War on Terror on humanistic scholarship Neil Lazarus wrote an article in 2006 (just three years after the war started) entitled "Postcolonial studies after the invasion of Iraq" where he rereads Homi Bhabha's "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency" and Neil Larsen's "Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism." He reiterates that postcolonial criticism "refuses an antagonistic or struggle-based model of politics in favour of one that emphasises 'cultural difference,' 'ambivalence' and 'the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp' of what 'modern' philosophy had imagined as the determinate categories of social reality."[107] Lamenting the lack of active engagement with global conflict escalations in

[106] El-Sayed El-Aswad, "Images of Muslims in Western scholarship and media after 9/11," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 22.1 (2013): 39-56 at 41.
[107] See Neil Lazarus, "Postcolonial Studies after the Invasion of Iraq," *New Formations* 59 (2006): 10-22 at 19; Homi K. Bhabha, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency," *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge,1994), 171-97; Neil Larsen, "Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism," *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz (Maldon, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 23-52.

postcolonialism, he cautions that such writing has "become no longer merely mystificatory, but-in its abstraction and willful obscurantism-actively political, and actively malign."[108] This reflects the intellectual rupture that followed the Iraq invasion and shows how impactful were the reverberations of the 9/11 attacks on academic scholarship. Lazarus calls for more "necessary corrective" measures by courageous scholars "who are at least able to call domination by its name."[109] Thus, denouncing, resisting, and deconstructing U.S. imperialism become logical and indispensable goals for postcolonial studies in its critical examination of such hegemonic ideologies.

Intrigued by the juncture of Neo-Orientalism and political economy, many scholars tend to dissect its diverse deployment in the U.S. foreign policy. For instance, in her analysis of a photo of Afghan women covered in burqas, McAlister (theoretically in agreement with Abu-Lughod) shows how that photo "helped to justify" the US war against Afghanistan[110] and contextualizes it to offer a fascinating and sweeping post-Orientalist reading of Samuel Huffington's *The Clash of Civilization* (1996), Bush's declaration of "Axis of Evil," and the mission to spread democracy in the region. In the same fashion, Douglas Little in *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (2008)[111] examines U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and its continual "ambivalent" attempts to balance the complicated agenda of preserving American interests, oil politics, and the "democratizing" mission. He systematically incorporates different types of resources into his analysis of how the cultural legacy of Orientalism intersects with American foreign policies in the region. In *The Cultural*

[108] Lazarus, "Postcolonial Studies" 21.
[109] Lazarus, "Postcolonial Studies" 21.
[110] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 281.
[111] Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Roots of American Islamicism, (2006) furthermore, Marr goes even further as he tries to bridge the gap between the depictions of Islamic practices as a religious faith and orientalism as an epistemological practice. [112] The book's argument revolves around two intersecting social and cultural circles that deal both with the images of Self (Americans) and the Islamic Other, on one hand, and with their dynamics within the process of constructing American national identity during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, on the other.

Certainly, these (trans)national dynamics and how they frame the notions of self-image and otherness in American culture are also reflected in the debate within academic and decision-making circles. This point, specifically, is one of the core arguments in *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918–1967* (2011).[113] It is interesting to see how the book delineates and then parallels different "intellectual and personal battles" within the political circles of U.S. foreign affairs (Richard Parker, Joseph Sisco, and Curtis Johns) as well as intellectual circles (Edward Said, Raphael Patai, Bernard Lewis, and Fouad Ajami).[114] In fact, it is undoubtedly gratifying to personally acknowledge how these politico- and sociocultural dynamics within the American community provide intellectual stimuli for the initial goal behind writing this dissertation especially after surveying American academic scholarship that deals with intersections of classical orientalism and neo-orientalism, politics of representation and identity, and postcolonialism, on the one hand, and the reciprocal effects, transmutations of political economy, and complexities of the U.S. foreign policy and its neocolonial hegemony, on the other.

[112] Marr, *Cultural Roots*.
[113] Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East*.
[114] Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East* 245.

1.5. Why Saudi Literature?

The short answer is why not since a "crucial feature of world literature is that it resolves always into a variety of worlds."[115] Indeed, contemporary Saudi literature has been granted almost no place in this variety. Honestly, I had no intention of examining Saudi literature when I started preparing for my preliminary examinations. The reason for doing so is very simple: I was not trained to critically read and analyze Arabic literature since most of my academic studies and personal development revolved around mastering the complexities of Western philosophical thoughts, themes, techniques, and perceptions/projections. These underlying and accumulative processes of developing knowledge about the self and the other were constantly challenged during my study here at Purdue University. However, my own understanding of "rootedness" was dramatically contested when I read "Cross-Cultural Poetics: National Literatures" by Édouard Glissant. In this article, Glissant questions the main principles that constitute that basis of "national literature" and asserts that "a national literature emerges when a community whose collective existence is contested tries to put together the reasons for its existence." [116] Encouraged by my academic advisor, Prof. Ahmed Idrissi, I started to read about Saudi literature and, simultaneously, examine my own understanding of comparative literature. This helped me become more cognizant of discursive contexts of the Saudi cultural space and the overlapping boundaries of world literature and the burgeoning dynamics of comparativity of otherness, identity formation, and gender politics in the literary studies.

[115] Damrosch, "What is world literature?" 14.
[116] Édouard Glissant, "Cross-Cultural Poetics: National Literatures," *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) 248-58 at 254.

In view of this fact and inspired by the comparative study of Fred Jandt and Dolores Tanno[117] on identity formation and othering, this project aims to assess the concepts of otherness and cultural space, among others, in the Saudi-American context. Jandt and Tanno study the pioneer work of the New Zealand scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith and her groundbreaking work *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). Endorsing her Polynesian identity and building on the fact that she is a Māori, Smith "traces the history of scientific knowledge as it developed through racist practices and the exploitation of indigenous peoples, and asserts a challenging vision for how research and education can be used to confront colonialism and oppression." [118] Jandt and Tanno, on the other hand, investigate the difference between European-based research and Māori-based research and conclude that the former yields an opposite result that reflects a "static, rigid concept of the Other that end up frozen over time in print."[119] With this in mind, I plan to examine, and eventually, contest the "rigidity" of both the process of self-perception in Saudi fiction and the monolithic representations of Saudi culture and society as the Other in its American counterpart.

There are various intellectual reasons for conducting an interdisciplinary and comparative study of Saudi literary production. First, and on the personal level, I see this project as a journey of self-discovery because I agree with Zhou Xiaoyi and Q. S. Tong (2000) that "[i]f comparative literature wishes to overcome its own perpetual crises, it has to get rid of the rigidity of its self-definition, it has to reach beyond the level of literature and must direct its attention to other

[117] Fred Jandt and Dolores Tanno, "Decoding Domination, Encoding Self-Determination: Intercultural Communication Research Processes," *Howard Journal of Communications* 12.3 (2001): 119-35.
[118] Emma Lowman and Adam Barker. "Smith, Linda Tuhiwai." Global Social Theory, www.globalsocialtheory.org/thinkers/linda-tuhiwai-smith.
[119] Jandt and Tanno, "Decoding Domination" 117.

forms of cultural production, including literature."[120] I hope to have some concrete answers to most of the questions discussed in the introduction by the end of this project which, in turn, would expand my understanding of Saudi national literature and its relationship to other cultures. For example, البدوي الصغير *Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* (The Young Bedouin, 2016) by Maqbul Al-Alawi offers an intriguing opportunity for rereading Saudi past from a postcolonial and comparative perspective. The novel reflects the early moments of the "oil encounter," especially in its representations of the new emerging dynamics of the relations between the "foreign" stranger other and different segments of Saudi society.

Second, I subscribe to Spivak's assertion in "Crossing Borders" that "the literary is not a blueprint to be followed in unmediated social action. But if as teachers of literature we teach reading, literature can be our teacher as well as our object of investigation."[121] Analogous to Spivak's proposal, let us read Al- Alawi's novel in the light of her premise to show how rereading national literature from a comparatist's perspective can be rewarding in terms of understanding identity formation and its intersection with otherness. *The Young Bedouin* depicts, with mesmerizing details, the often marginalized and overlooked personal details of pre-oil Saudi society and the impact of its exposure to the influx of Arab and Western "strangers." The narrative creates a communal space where these particulars become alive and, more importantly, accessible to younger generations rendering its readers capable of becoming virtual versions of that "young Bedouin." The narrator, Ghassan, for instance, reflects on the massive personal and public changes during the economic boom in the late 1970s and 1980s that transformed the sociocultural space of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, his exposure to different aspects of the notion

[120] Zhou, Xiaoyi and Q. S. Tong, "Comparative Literature in China (2000)" *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature* 341-57 at 354.
[121] Gayatri Spivak, "Crossing Borders," *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature* 380-98 at 396.

of "otherness" at a very young age allows Ghassan to mature intellectually as the story progresses. He initially struggles at his local school in the middle of southwest of the country or "Saudi nowhere," as he puts it. The biggest challenge for him is learning English and yet he wills himself into becoming an accomplished journalist who writes about national and transnational arts, culture, and music. He becomes a global citizen who lives between Saudi Arabia, United States, Dubai, and London.

On the professional level, however, I propose that contemporary Saudi literature shares many features that constitute the core premises of comparative postcolonial, (post)modernist, and cosmopolitan studies. This examination, henceforth, aims to contribute to the wider concept of postcolonial and cultural studies by expanding the scope of how comparative literature scholars converse with non-Western cultures. In particular and although Saudi Arabia, as the main geographical space in Arabian Peninsula, has never been under the (Western) colonial rule (or at least seen as points of interests),[122] contemporary Saudi literature, I believe, shares the same prevailing narrative characteristics as well as ontological framework found in other non-Western postcolonial and (post)modernist works. Some Saudi novels reflect postmodern features such as "distrust of history" and "loss of utopian" as well as the critique of "the arrival of late capitalism to Arabian Peninsula" (Al-Shammari 3).[123] As an illustration, let us examine the character of Miteb al-Hathal in 'Abdul-Rahman Munif's مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh* (Cities of Salt, 1984).[124] He represents the voice of the local native who tries to express his thoughts and concerns before being marginalized and silenced by an uncompromising and far-reaching capitalism. The novel

[122] This is of course, except varying forms and fluctuating degrees of Ottoman suzerainty, mainly in the coastal regions. For example, see Wayne Bowen. The History of Saudi Arabia (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2015).
[123] Alshammari, Mohammed. The Postmodern Novel in Saudi Arabia and America (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2017), 3.
[124] 'Abdul-Rahman Munif, مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah lil-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 1992).

also anticipates the collapse of the Bedouin ecosystem and, therefore, the loss of its "utopian" Wadi al-Uyoun (Valley of Springs) and laments the societal and environmental consequences of such encounter like the fragmentation of (tribal) society, severance of links with traditions and mores, and obliteration of landscape character. Munif's fictional portrayal interrogates the emerging dynamic of two unequal powers, i.e., American oil engineers and local Bedouins. They show that "the conflict is no longer between the individual and the group," contends Magda Al-Nowaihi, "but rather between competing interests and forces in which individuals are mere playthings" (290).[125] Using a Marxist lens, Munif imagines how some local nomadic residents are engulfed by this hegemonizing capitalist project as they become mere vulnerable workers. He frames his portrayal of their attempt to resist the American presence as a form of neocolonialism.

The same postmodern features as "schizophrenia, fragmentation, and suspicion toward grand narratives, which demonstrate instability of personality" shape the novels ترمي بشرر *Tarmi Bi-Sharar* (Throwing Sparks 2015) by Abdo Khal[126] and Rajaa Al-Sanea's بنات الرياض *Banat Al-Riyad* (Girls of Riyadh) (2007). In the latter, for instance, Masha'el (Michelle) launches a harsh attack on her Saudi culture and goes further to reject "a crocked society that raises children on contradictions and double standards."[127] Likewise, the Saudi postcolonial novel, if I may say so, invokes various postcolonial dynamics in its discourse like identity formation and reinterpreting the relationship with past. Fahd 'Atiq explores the struggle with absurdity of modern life and the overwhelming sense of alienation in his 2005 novel كائن مجهول *Kā'in Mu'ajjal* (Life on Hold).[128] The narrative of identity reflects a society that was "disconcerted by

[125] Magda Al-Nowaihi, "The 'Middle East'? Or . . . / Arabic Literature and the Postcolonial Predicament," *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* 282-303 at 290.
[126] 'Abduh Khal. ترمي بشرر *Tarmi Bi-Sharar: Riwāyah* (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2015).
[127] Al-Sanea, *The Girls of Riyadh*, 270.
[128] 'Atiq, Fahd, كائن مجهول *Ka'in Mu'ajjal: Riwayah* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyah lil-Dirasat wa-al-Nashr, 2005).

[…] transformation, the force and pace of which it could not control."[129] This sense of being disconcerted is the direct result of an abrupt and total separation from the humble past after the discovery of oil and the economic boom. Frequently, the story depicts struggling characters who try to overcome their acute nostalgic feelings for the "old Riyadh" and their "simple" days in their pre-oil mud houses, dirty and narrow alleys that were full of smiles, women's faces, happiness, and life nonetheless. Such stances on the notion of unbelonging to the new Riyadh develops into a deep sense of "alienation," fear of "dementia," and intense and constant "boredom." In this new Riyadh, their "days are all much the same here. The truth remains elusive. Especially now, in this age, everything is in an elusive state. In this city of masks, the days have been much the same in their tedium since distant times."[130]

1.6. Contribution of This Study

In addition to what has been discussed previously, there is a remarkable influx of scholarship that interrogates Saudi Arabia, its culture, and society, on the one hand, and examines the Saudi-U.S. socioeconomical milieu from various angles, on the other. In *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (2007), Robert Vitalis, for example, focuses particularly on the Saudi-US "special" relationship and traces its humble beginnings. With its (biased) utilization of historicization of political anthropology, the book is supposed to be an exhaustive study that covers several aspects of the bond between the two countries, yet its main thesis remains largely concerned with oil industries and the emergence of ARAMCO as a global

[129] Al-Hazmi et al., *Beyond the Dunes* 5.
[130] Fahd 'Atiq, *Life on Hold.* trans. Jonathan Wright (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 2.

economic (and political) giant.[131] Other books like *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (2014), *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States* (2012), and *The Gulf Family: Kinship Policies and Modernities* (2007) provide good background on sociocultural and political landscape of the Arabian Gulf region and attempt to fathom the impact of the fast-paced modernization process on the notions of Bedouinism, tribalism, and Peninsularism.[132] However, if we shift the focus to academic studies, the name that is especially significant is that of the Berkeley-educated Saudi critic Moneera Al-Ghadeer and her pioneer work, "The Inappropriable Voice," that studies the oral literature of Saudi Bedouin women.[133] At a later stage, she developed her dissertation into a book that is considered to be the first of its kind in English.[134] Likewise, in 2012 Amira Sonbol edited an excellent collection of fourteen essays that explores different aspects of (Islamic) feminism in its engagement with history of women and gender politics in the Arabian Gulf region. Chapter 6 and 9, "Women and the Economy: Pre-Oil Gulf States" by Hoda El Saadi and "Women and Education in the Gulf: Between the Modern and the Traditional," by Ramadan Al-Khouli respectively, explore different stages of the development in the histories of "girls' education" and the "participation of the working-glass women in the economy" in the region and their contribution in the development of their countries.[135]

[131] Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). The book is belligerently biased in its engagement with Saudi socioeconomic space as well as the political system. But, in spite of this and its various shortcomings and harsh conspiratorial tone, the book was the choice of *The London Guardian* as the 2006 book of the year.
[132] Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Alanoud Alsharekh and Robert Springborg, *Popular Culture and Political Identity in the Arab Gulf States* (London: Saqi, 2012); Alanoud Alsharekh, *The Gulf Family: Kinship Policies and Modernities* (London: Saqi, 2007).
[133] This is actually was her the topic of her PhD dissertation; see Moneera Al-Ghadeer. "The Inappropriable Voice" (Unpublished Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999).
[134] Moneera Al-Ghadeer, *Desert Voices: Bedouin Women's Poetry in Saudi Arabia* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009).
[135] Amira Sonbol, ed., *Gulf Women* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 147-66, 222-40..

More importantly, such influx of scholarship was echoed in by a notable increase in the last few years in the number of MA theses and PhD dissertations that deal with the same problematics. Take, for example these studies that examine with the construction of the image of Saudi Arabia: "Saudi Arab Stereotype and Culture in News Media and Literature" by George Bernard Koors (2014),[136] "Worldviews of the Peoples of the Arabian Peninsula: A Study of Cultural System" by Naser Alhujelan (2008),[137] and Husam Alawadh's "The Evolution of Saudi Print Media Discourse on the U.S. after 9/11: A CDA of *Al-Jazirah* and *Asharq Alawsat* Newspapers" (2014)[138] Other works examine women's issue in the Kingdom. Tariq Al-Haydar, for instance, in "Women, Gender and The Nation-State in American and Saudi Culture" studies how "women's body" fluctuates between the discourse of "protection" and "liberation."[139] There is also a Columbia student, Leigh Llewellyn Graham, who interrogates the dynamics of gender politics and cyberspace: "The 'IT' Girls of Arabia: Cybercultured Bodies, Online Education, and the Networked Lives of Women at a University in Saudi Arabia" (2014).[140] There is even an interesting study that evaluates the representations of Saudi Arabia in the "German-speaking Imagination" (2016).[141]

I totally acknowledge the valuable contribution of previous scholarship on the representations of Arabs and Muslim in the West, in general, and on Saudi culture, specifically.

[136] George Bernard., Koors, "Saudi Arab Stereotype and Culture in News Media And Literature" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Truman State University, 2014).
[137] Naser Alhujelan, "Worldviews of the Peoples of the Arabian Peninsula: A Study of Cultural System, "(Unpublished Dissertation, Indiana University, 2008).
[138] Husam Alawadh, "The Evolution of Saudi Print Media Discourse on the U.S. after 9/11: A CDA of *Al-Jazirah* and *Asharq Alawsat* Newspapers" (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Florida, 2014).
[139] Tariq Al-Haydar," Women, Gender and The Nation-State in American And Saudi Culture" (Unpublished Dissertation, Washington University, 2015).
[140] Leigh Graham. "The 'IT' Girls of Arabia: Cybercultured Bodies, Online Education, and the Networked Lives of Women at a University in Saudi Arabia (Unpublished Dissertation, Columbia University, 2014).
[141] Antonella Cassia, "Saudi Arabia in the German-speaking Imagination: Identity, Space and Representation" (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2016).

However, there is still a need, I argue, for more creative engagements that take into considerations the latest developments in the literary studies. For example, and with exception of few works like the groundbreaking contribution of Muhsin Al-Musawi entitled *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (2003),[142] the 2002 study of "Postcolonialism in Modem Arabic Thought" by Mohammed Alquwaizan (2002),[143] and Khalid Alrasheed's 2015 exposition of Neo-Orientalism in the post-9/11 context,[144] the exclusive analysis of the dynamics of modernity, (Neo)Orientalism, visuality, and postcoloniality in Saudi literature is almost nonexistent in contemporary scholarship. In particular, my goal in this project is to undertake this intellectual inquiry.

Therefore, this research attempts to disrupt the "restricted permeability," to use Spivak's term, of Western canonization of world literature and the process of image-making."[145] Theoretically speaking, I endorse and apply Bill Ashcroft et al.'s 2011 definition of postcolonial theory in my exploration:

> Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by

[142] Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).
[143] Mohammed Alquwaizani, "Orientalism and Postcolonialism in Modern Arabic Thought: Imaging and Counter-Imaging" (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 2002.
[144] Khalid Alrasheed, "Invisible Humans, Visible Terrorists: U.S. Neo-Orientalism Post 9/11 and Representations of the Muslim World: Invisible Humans, Visible Terrorists: U.S. Neo-Orientalism Post 9/11 and Representations of the Muslim World (Unpublished Dissertation, Purdue University, 2015).
[145] Spival, "Crossing Borders," 393.

which all these come into being. *None of these is 'essentially' post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field*.[146]

I posit that the Saudi works examined here can be discussed under the umbrella of postcolonialism. By employing a postcolonial comparatist approach, this project, hence, presents the reader with an analysis that goes beyond the prevailing homogenized image of the Arabo-Islamic world that is usually seen through the lens of the critique of nationalism, ethnicity, and resistance. Specifically, I will probe the limitations of American representations of Saudi society which almost depict a regulated picture of Saudis and reduce their sociocultural space to a manifestation of violent and religiously fanatic, ahistorical, and misogynistic culture. For example, building on the works of many scholars like Edward Said,[147] Mahmood Mamdani,[148] Homi Bhabha,[149] Gayatri Spivak[150] on cultural imperialism and neocolonialism, the project studies the stereotypes embedded in these representations and explores the notion of the "Other" and the process of Othering. Moreover, it questions whether the stereotypical images of Saudi males and females are an extension or a shadow of the "Oriental Other" by engaging the texts and their homogenized depictions of Saudis as well as evaluating some hegemonic, condescending, and even racist rhetoric on Saudi Arabia and its culture.

Finally, the project uses these theoretical frameworks as analytical tools to challenge what Mohammed Muharram calls "the marginalization of Arabic fiction" in the Western

[146] Emphasis added; Bill Ashcroft, et al., eds., "General Introduction," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1-4 at 2.
[147] Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance" *The Nation* 273.12 (2001): 11–13.
[148] Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).
[149] Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).
[150] Taoufiq Sakhkhane, *Spivak and Postcolonialism Exploring Allegations of Textuality* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

academia by interrogating some Saudi fictional works (130).[151] Accordingly, it draws upon postcoloniality and multiculturalism as well as other critical contributions by Waïl Hassan,[152] Slavoj Žižek,[153] and Aamir Mufti[154] in the field of the World Literature. Ultimately, this is an effort to create a space for Arabic fiction within the context of teaching non-Western world literature in general, and specifically a space for Saudi fiction within the "canonical" Middle Eastern studies in Western/American academia.

This plausible transition into the category of "World Literature" is facilitated by the fact that many Saudi novelists probe various themes that are discussed in other non-Western texts and engage a diverse set of problematics such as identity formation, resistance, reexamination of the past, critique of neocolonialism and cultural hegemony. In particular, the topics of (im)migration, minority issues, and critique of slavery, and colonialism are also discussed in works of Mahmud Trawri's ميمونة *Maimounah* (2007), Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's two novels فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhah Ar-Ra'iha* (Wolves of the Crescent Moon, 2003) and الحمام لا يطير في بريدة *Al-Hamam La Yatir Fi Buraydah* (Where Pigeon Don't Fly, 2011), Saba Al-Hirz's الاخرون *Al-akharoun* (The Others, 2006), and Raja'a 'Alim's طوق الحمام *Tawq Al-Hamam* (The Dove's Necklace, 2012). Ultimately, this transition will increase both the readership and criticism of Saudi literature in the Western (academic) scholarship and therefore, enrich the studies of postcoloniality, cosmopolitanism, feminism, and (post)modernism. Importantly, such transition will truly pave the way for future scholars. For example, I had to rely exclusively on the pioneer work of

151 Mohammed Muharram, "The Marginalization of Arabic Fiction in the Postcolonial and World English Curriculum: Slips? Or Orientalism and Racism. *The Minnesota Review* 78.1 (2012): 130–45.
152 Wail S. Hassan. "World Literature in the Age of Globalization: Reflections on an Anthology." College English, vol. 63, no. 1, (2000) pp. 38–47.
153 Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28-51 at 28..
154 Aamir Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," *Critical Inquiry* 36.3 (2010): 458–93.

Mansour Al-Hazmi and his colleagues in my exploration of Saudi literature since their work is the only anthology of Saudi fiction and poetry in *English*.[155] This demonstrates that the demand for such contribution is huge indeed.

[155] Al-Ghadeer, "Saudi Arabia: Modest Beginnings" 397.

CHAPTER TWO
OIL ENCOUNTERS: OTHERNESS BETWEEN POSTCOLONIALITY AND (NEO)ORIENTALISM

American Get Oil Concession in Arabia; Transformation of Desert Life May Result

New York Times, July 15, 1933

The American moment in the Middle East began in 1933 with the Arabian American Oil Company's Saudi oil concession and expanded during the 1956 Suez Crisis

Susan Nance

Introduction

There is an increasing emphasis on (re)examining the connection between the politics of representation, (neo)colonialism, and narratives of empire and imperialism and how they influence the relations between the Arabian Gulf region and the West, especially the Saudi-American relationship. Focusing on Orientalist literature in the early twentieth century, Abdullah Alrebh, for example, examines two of the most influential western newspapers to show "how authority in a Middle East country was being framed by western journalists (and their editors) and presented to western audiences."[156] Particularly, he analyzes the role of Orientalism in shaping the representations of "authority," leadership, local culture during the establishment of Saudi Arabia as an independent modern state (1901-1932). After tracing the representations of King Abdul Aziz in *The London Times* in the United Kingdom and *The New York Times* in the United States, Alrebh concludes that their reports:

[156] Alrebh, "Covering the Building" 188.

> placed [King Abdul Aziz] Ibn Saud in the context of the orientalist literature [that] characterized the Middle East as a society ruled by traditional sultans and tribal chiefs, rather than modern/bureaucratic governance structures. This constructs an exotic image of the other (i.e., Arabs) as different societies who still live in an Arabian Nights [sic] era. However, the coverage overstated the development of the Saudi governing during this period, which could be considered as a part of highlighting the Arabian ally rather than placing him in the exact-same manner of non-allied leaders.[157]

On the one hand, these early practices of representations reflect the crucial role of media reports in shaping how the Western public perceive Saudi Arabia as well as the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a "friend" and "Arabian ally" to the West, even before the discovery of oil. On the one hand, they also reveal the decline of the British Empire as a colonial and territorial enterprise and the rise of an American "Empire," that is subtly more ideological, cultural, and economic. Indeed, "[o]ne specifically American contribution to the discourse of empire," Edward Said contends, "is the specialized jargon of policy expertise. You don't need Arabic or Persian or even French to pontificate about how the democracy domino effect is just what the Arab world needs."[158] This pivotal shift in how new forms of empires emerge is comprehensively based on what can be seen as totally practical or pragmatic economic interests. This notion is usually referred to in the American context as the "national interest" and it revolves around oil industry, capitalism, globalization, and neocolonialism. It conspicuously

[157] Alrebh. "Covering the Building" 205.
[158] Said, *Orientalism* xxi.

organizes how the United States, as a neocolonial power, interacts with the rest of the world, generally, and the Middle East, in particular.

Moreover, the decline and demise of the British Empire with its powerful colonial project signaled the beginning of a new phase in international politics where the United States gradually developed its own ambitious enterprise for global (cultural and economic) dominance. This capitalist ambition can be seen in the form of neocolonialism where the postwar United States, as the most powerful nation, employs some soft power techniques like globalization, trade, and cultural influence as methods to bring other (foreign) nations under its influence. Highlighting this fact, Laurence French asserts that "Western neocolonialism now focuses on Third World resources, a departure of past practices of total domination of the territory and its people. This adds a more impersonal element to the new self-serving political capitalism."[159] The Arabian Gulf region is actually one of key economic magnets where American neocolonialism has been undeniably present, especially after both the discovery of oil during the first decades of the twentieth century and the "devastating" Saudi-led oil embargo by Arab nations following America's support of Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israel war.[160]

Therefore, the "special relationship" between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia offers an intriguing paradigm to interrogate how neocolonialism and (neo)orientalism intersect with politics of representation of the (Oriental) other and the construction of its spatial and temporal geography. Saudi Arabia represents one of the oriental geographies that embodies the connection between the role of economy and the proliferation of different forms of American (Western) domination in the Middle East. Many scholars have studied this political-economic dynamic in

[159] Laurence French and Magdaleno Manzanárez, *NAFTA & Neocolonialism: Comparative Criminal, Human & Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 119.
[160] French, *NAFTA* 119.

their interrogations of the American role in the Middle East. For instance, exposing American dominance in the Arabian Gulf constitutes the core of Robert Vitalis's thesis in "Black Gold, White Crude." Vitalis discusses Douglas Little's analysis of the Saudi- U.S. "special relationship" and agrees that "it is now conventional to begin the narrative of postwar imperial demise with the Saudi case, because nowhere else in the Middle East was *America's rise to dominance so rapid, complete, and seemingly irreversible*."[161] Interestingly, the decline of the British hegemony in the Arabian Peninsula was paralleled by the discovery of oil and the beginning of its production in commercial quantities in 1938. The geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry between the rapidly diminishing British Empire and the rising American enterprise dates even back when the relations took a dramatic and enduring turn toward new dynamics. For instance, a representative of a London-based British syndicate was able to obtain the first exclusive concession to find oil in Saudi Arabia in 1923, but it was revoked in 1928 when they failed to "invest sufficient funds for exploration."[162] This failure reflects some of the early signs of the financial difficulties that began to plague Britain and contributed to the disintegration of its Empire on which "the sun never sets." However, in 1933 an American multinational, Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), was granted a 60-year concession. This agreement has had geopolitical reverberations around the world, because it meant that "the Kingdom broke what had been virtually a British monopoly of oil concessions in that part of the world." This historic moment ushered in the beginning of the oil encounter and helped to plant the seeds of the American incessant yet intricate presence.

[161] Robert Vitalis, "Black Gold, White Crude: An Essay on American Exceptionalism, Hierarchy, and Hegemony in the Gulf," *Diplomatic History* 26.2 (2002): 185-213 at 186. Emphasis added.
[162] Fouad Al-Farsy, *Modernity and Tradition: The Saudi Equation* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1990), 96.

To have a better understanding of what this seismic geopolitical shift in world power means, let us examine the impactful and transformative role of the British Empire in ushering in the oil industry in the Arabian Gulf region. Stimulated by the positive views of the French government mission regarding the potential signs of commercial quantities of oil, the great British mining entrepreneur, William Knox D'Arcy (1849-1917), signed the exclusive rights for discovering oil in Iran in 1901.[163] After some initial economic and logistic setbacks, he restructured his personal enterprise into becoming the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1909. The encouraging discovery of oil in commercial quantities led to a series of "re-evaluation" and "re-negotiation" of the control and profits between the British and the Persian governments. These processes made Iran an area where AIOC operated as a regional monopoly on Persian oil industry. Thus, it is not surprising to realize that the share of the British government in the AIOC raised to 56 percent in 1914 and by 1948 "Iran received a mere 8 percent of profits from AIOC."[164] The societal abhorrence of such level of colonial avarice and monetary monopoly inspired many nationalist ideologies, in particular, the oil nationalization movement in Iran and increased the anticolonial sentiment within the Persian government. It shows nonetheless how deeply ingrained the Britain's imperial and arrogant venture was in the region during the early days of Saudi oil industry. Hence, King Abdul Aziz's epoch-making decision of granting a 60-year concession to an American company signaled the transition in the political economy of oil as the United States gradually but steadily challenged and eventually replaced France and Britain as the dominant player in the Middle East. It is also worth noting that American officials were aware of this change as Melani McAlister, for instance, reveals that

[163] Kabreya Ghaderi, "In Defense of the Great Satan: The Role of Colonialism in Iranian and Saudi Arabian Oil Governance." *Journal of Georgetown University-Qatar Middle Eastern Studies Student Association*, 2015: 9, 2.
[164] Ghaderi, "In Defense of the Great Satan" 3.

in 1945 "one State Department report could proclaim that Saudi Arabia, an area of traditional British influence, was "in a fair way to becoming an American frontier."[165] Indeed, the capitalist "interest" in oil has manifested in the ever-growing American involvements in the region and generally shaped the U.S. foreign policy, which differed ideologically from the various shades of European formal colonialism.

2.1. Shifting Sands: The First Official Encounter

The official relationship between the Saudi Arabia and the United States of America dates back to the historic meeting between King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud and the American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt aboard the USS *Quincy* in February 14, 1945 in the Great Bitter Lake along the Suez Canal, Egypt. The King used an American destroyer, the USS *Murphy*, in his trip from Jeddah to Egypt. In *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States since FDR*, Bruce Riedel states that the "*Murphy* was the first-ever American navy vessel to visit Jidda [sic]" and it "was the king's first trip outside the Arabian Peninsula aside from a brief visit to Basra in Iraq and his first time to travel at sea."[166] This first official encounter between the two countries had already been preceded by the arrival of some Americans in the Kingdom. Likewise, and although he affirms that "FDR was the first foreign head of the state Ibn Saud had ever met," Riedel maintains there were "only 400 foreigners in all of Saudi Arabia, about one hundred of whom were Americans in the oil fields near Dhahran."[167] It seems fitting to emphasize that most of the fictional narratives that explore the oil encounter focus almost

[165] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 34.
[166] Bruce Riedel, *Kings and Presidents: Saudi Arabia and the United States Since FDR* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 3. Bruce Riedel is a former CIA analyst and academician with long experience on the Middle East. Currently, he works at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C.
[167] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 3.

predominantly on reconstructing the experiences of the first wave of Western expatriate workers in Saudi oil fields, their interactions with indigenous communities, and interpretations of local traditions and customs. For instance, Stephen Markham, the main character in George Potter's *The White Bedouin* can be seen as a fictional specimen of the experiences of those 100 American oil engineers that Riedel refers to in his discussion here.

This historic meeting between the two leaders came as a culmination of an important visit to the U.S. by prince Faisal, the king's son and the future king, who toured many American states in 1943.[168] King Faisal was also accompanied by Khalid, his brother and future king. They visited Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. One of the main outcomes of this visit was the assignment of James S. Moose Jr. as the first American chargé d'affaires in 1943.[169] The latter stayed in this position for one year before he was replaced by the famous and multitalented Colonel William Eddy in 1944. On the American side, Colonel William Alfred "Bill" Eddy played a central role in establishing and developing this alliance during that crucial period. There are many social, academic, and professional factors that empowered him to achieve that prominence. In fact, Eddy was exposed to the Arabo-Islamic culture at an early age since was born in Lebanon and spoke fluent Arabic while being from a multi-generational family that had deep roots in the Arab world. Actually, he "often spoke of having been sent by his parents into the beduin [sic] tents in the summer in order to perfect the boy's Arabic and teach him more about his father's flock."[170] (Prettiman 202).[171]

[168] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 5.
[169] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 5.
[170] C. A. Prettiman, "The Many Lives of William Alfred Eddy." *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 53.2 (1992): 200–216 at 202.
[171] If compared to his generation of Americans, the life of William Eddy was wildly unique and intriguing indeed from being a literary scholar to navy officer and intelligence agent. He was born in Sidon, Syria in 1896 (now in Lebanon) to a family of a third generation of American Presbyterian missionaries. He was fluent in Arabic, German,

This exposure, along with his academic interests as a professor of English at Dartmouth and later service in the US Marines during WWI and WWII, had allowed Eddy to play a pivotal role in the early days of the Saudi-US relationship. For example, he served as the interpreter between the two leaders during their renowned meeting aboard the *Quincy*.[172] Such exposure opened the door for Eddy's long and conspicuous diplomatic career when he was promoted later to become the American chargé d'affaires in 1944.[173] Notably, Eddy's role during that decisive meeting and

and French. He finished his undergraduate studies at Princeton University in 1917. During WWI, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps and was awarded the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Cross, two Silver Stars, and two Purple Hearts. His service left him with a permeant injury and he "walked with a limp for the rest of his life and often used a cane" as David Hollinger observes. He joined academia after earning a doctorate from Princeton in eighteenth-century English literature. His academic career took him back to the East where he worked as a chairman of the English Department at the American University in Cairo in 1923 where he wrote "the first basketball rule-book in Arabic" (Prettiman, "Many Lives" 206). He also held a position of an as assistant professor at Dartmouth College in 1928 before serving as the president of Hobart and William Smith College (1936-1942). During his working life in academia, Eddy wrote many articles about Jonathan Swift's masterpiece Gulliver's Travels and the encounter with the Other. Additionally, he authored a book entitled Gulliver's Travels: A Critical Study, which was published by Princeton University—the third floor of Purdue University's HSSE library has a copy of it. His official occupations in the Middle East included serving as naval attaché in Tangier, Morocco in 1942 when he was "Eisenhower's only contact in North Africa at the time," being first American minister to Saudi Arabia 1944-1946, and witnessing the negotiations and signature of the first treaty between the U.S. and the Imam Yahia of Yemen in Sana'a 1946 (Prettiman, "Many Lives" 200-01). He even had an audience with Pope Pius XII in the Vatican (Prettiman, Many Lives" 212). He resigned from the government and spend his last years in Beirut (and occasionally flew to Saudi Arabia) working as a full-time (and later part-time) consultant for the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco) and the Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company (Tapline). He died in 1962 and was buried in Sidon in his own family graveyard in "an Arab Christian cemetery" (Hollinger). Finally, there is an important collection of Eddy's papers that was entrusted to the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library at Princeton University. See, David A. Hollinger, "The Life of Colonel William Eddy," OUPblog, 27 Apr. 2015; David A. Hollinger. "Eddy, William A." *American National Biography Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed April, 2015; Pettiman "Many Lives."

[172] Interestingly, Eddy wrote his own account of the meeting. See William Eddy, *FDR Meets Ibn Saud* (New York: American Friends of the Middle East, 1954); Additionally, this book was translated into Arabic by Ahmed Hussain Al-Uqbi, a Saudi emeritus professor of history at King Abdul Aziz University. In his introduction to the translation, Al-Uqbi explains that, while he was pursuing his graduate studies in the U.S., Eddy's son presented the book to him as a gift when the latter invited him to dinner at his own home in Lansing, Michigan in November 25, 1971. See, Ahmed H. Al-Uqbi.. ترجمة لكتاب (روزفلت يجتمع بابن سعود) مع :روزفلت أسرار لقاء الملك عبد العزيز مع الرئيس الأمريكي فرانكلين دراسة موجزة لتاريخ العلاقات الامريكية السعودية في الحقبة السابقة للاجتماع Asrar liqa' al-Malik 'Abd al-'Aziz wa-al-Ra'is Ruzifilt: Tarjamah Li-kitab (Ruzifilt Yajtami'u bi-Ibn Sa'ud) ma'a Dirasah Mujazah Li-tarikh al-'Alaqat al-Amrikiyah al-Sa'udiyah fi al-Huqbah al-Sabiqah Lil-Ijtima' (The Secrets of King Abdula Aziz's Meeting and American President Franklin Roosevelt: A Translation of 'Roosevelt Meets Ibn Saud').

[173] Eddy's reputation for espionage and his connection with the Office of Strategic Services, which was later developed into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), had been studied by many writers; see for example: *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* by Stephen E. Ambrose (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), *Arabian Knight: Colonel Bill Eddy USMC and the Rise of American Power in the Middle East* by Thomas W. Lippman (Vista, CA: Selwa Press, 2008); Michael J. Cohen, "William A. Eddy, the Oil Lobby and the Palestine Problem," *Middle Eastern Studies* 301 (1994): 166–80; Prettiman, "Many Lives,"and so on.

how the two leaders saw each other have become a recurring point of interest for many historians, politicians, critics, and analysts. Evaluating Eddy's position, for instance, Riedel believes that his "account of the summit on the *Quincy* is the principal firsthand source of what happened" between the two charismatic leaders.[174] On the leadership level, the meeting lasted for five hours and the two leaders parted with considerable respect for each other.[175] President Roosevelt confessed to his special advisor Bernard Baruch that "among all the men that I had to deal with during my lifetime, I have met no one than this Arab monarch from whom I could extricate so little: the man has an iron will."[176] Likewise, King Abdul Aziz praised FDR by stating that he has "never met the equal of the President in character, wisdom and gentility."[177] Although there were major points of disagreement like the issue of Palestine and the establishment of Israel, this mutual respect will reflect positively on the future relationship between the two countries as the kingdom became America's oldest friend and ally in the Middle East.

This brief introduction shows the centrality of oil industry in making the U.S. one of the key contenders in shaping the geopolitics and economics of the Middle East since the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 and the discovery of oil in the region. Therefore, a close examination of the nature of Saudi-American encounter can help us understand the dynamics of the representations of Saudi Arabia and its society in American and

[174] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 6.
[175] See for example, Thomas W Lippman,"The Day FDR Met Saudi Arabia's Ibn Saud," *Americans for Middle East Understanding* 38.2 (April-May. 2005): 10-11.
[176] Quoted in Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 10. See also Joseph A. Kechichian, *Faysal: Saudi Arabia's King for All Seasons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 46.
[177] Quoted in Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 11. For a more detailed discussion of this meeting and how King Abdul Aziz compared his encounter with FDR with his meeting with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, which happened few days after the Quincy summit, see, Thomas W. Lippman."The Day FDR Met Saudi Arabia's Ibn Saud."

Saudi literary works. Tracing the early moments of this encounter, specially from the lens of comparativity that engages both American and Saudi literary production, will cast fresh light on the broader question of otherness and how the (stereotypical) image of the Saudi Other is projected onto the American popular culture particularly, and the world, in general. The deployment of comparativity in such study will make the overarching theme of difference intellectually more vivid and will enrich self-awareness by challenging both self-perception and -interpretation of the rapid transformations in national history and culture and how that framework continues to inform and shape the sociocultural life of various segments of Saudi society as well as Saudis' perceptions of each other.

2.2. Oil Encounter: "Crude" Impressions in Munif's مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh*

Indisputably, oil discovery has allowed Saudi economy to boom rapidly and therefore helped the country to spring from being an underdeveloped country that constitutes most of the barren geography of the Arabian Peninsula into becoming a modern state. The Saudi literary scene is certainly affected by the modernization process the country has witnessed as novelists usually employ dissimilar approaches to explore distinctive dimensions of these drastic multifarious transformations in their works. In fact, there are quite a few seriously engaging Saudi novels that revisit these humble beginnings of the Kingdom and the effort of nation-building and development and try to interrogate the tremendous personal/domestic and (inter)national changes that accompany that struggle. To give an indication of how Saudi fictional works interact with that past, one may cite a few specific examples. Works like Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhah Ar-Ra'iha* (Wolves of the Crescent Moon) (2003)[178] and

[178] The novel was translated into English in 2010; See Yousef Al-Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon:* A , trans. Anthony Calderback (London: Penguin, 2007).

‘Abduh Khal’s ترمي بشرر *Tarmi Bi-Sharar* (Throwing Sparks) (2008),[179] among others, for instance, can give an indication of how Saudi creative writers interact with that past. These novels try to engage and analyze the deep and rapid transformations that Saudi society has experienced after the discovery of oil and the enormously consequential sociocultural changes. By focusing on few Saudi individuals, they dissect the impact of the multilayered process of identity formation on both the personal and national levels. Raja Alem, especially in her tremendously tangled and yet vivid novel, طوق الحمام *Tawq Al-Ḥamam* (The Dove’s Necklace) (2010),[180] chooses to focus more closely on other aspects of the modernization process and urbanization by evoking the intricate spatiotemporal histories of different segments of Saudi society. Thus, it traces, among other leitmotifs and themes, the impact of such changes on the (historic) spatial space and the challenges to preserve the local “unique” identities of sacred places in the country like Makkah (Mecca), the birthplace of Islam. However, these writers tend to give details of the tremendous changes in the cities and urban centers like Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, or Madinah. They do not engage specifically with how the local desert communities (in their scattered habitations) interpreted the arrival of American (and other Western) oil engineers from the late 1930s onward, especially during the oil boom from the late 1960s until the early 1980s. These initial moments of sudden and direct contact between two distant cultures constitute what Amitav Gosh calls the “oil encounter,” because oil exploitation and production was simply the genuine and tangible cause for this sociocultural intersection.

[179] See, ʿAbduh Khal, *Throwing Sparks*, trans. Maïa Tabet, and Michael K. Scott (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation, 2012).
[180] See Raja Alem, *The Dove’s Necklace: A Novel*, trans. Katherine Halls and Adam Talib (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2016).

One of the first and perhaps the most famous Arab novelists to depict these awkward and tensed encounters is arguably the Saudi writer ‘Abdul-Rahman Munif[181] (1933-2004) in his quintet مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh* (1984).[182] Part of Munif’s success in chronicling the impact of oil encounter on the local Bedouin culture lies in his academic training and professional expertise. As a matter of fact, his doctorate was in oil economics in addition to his rich and diverse first-hand experience in oil industry since he worked for a long time as an oil engineer in different parts of the Arab world before writing the novel.[183] Hence, the story starts with a vivid portrayal of an oasis where everyone lives in harmony with nature before the arrival of the Americans and the concept of capitalist economy. The first few lines of the narrative invokes the image of an idyllic oasis with unbelievably robust and green landscape in the middle of the desert:

”إنه وادي العيون ... فجأة، وسط الصحراء القاسية العنيدة، تنبثق هذه البقعة الخضراء، وكأنها انفجرت من باطن الأرض أو سقطت من السماء“

> “Wadi al-Uyoun [Valley of Springs]: an outpouring of green amid the harsh, obdurate desert, as if it had burst from within the earth or fallen from the sky.”[184]

This rustic scene defies the prevailing perception of aridity that unfortunately accentuates the negative associations of perilousness and lifelessness with the desert. Hence, the encounter or

[181] His Saudi citizenship was revoked in 1963 and all of his works were banned in Saudi Arabia. However, in 2011 his novels were sold at Riyadh International Book Fair

[182] See, ‘Abdul-Rahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, trans. Peter Theroux (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). All translations are from this edition.

[183] Munif studied law at the Sorbonne and received his Ph.D. in oil economics from the University of Belgrade in 1961. It is noteworthy that both his work experience and political activities necessitated his frequent movements. These elements contributed to his harsh tone towards neocolonialism. For example, Abdul-Hadi Jiad asserts that “Mounif's constant movements between locations and professions enriched and sharpened his narrative skills to portray Arab life through the critical eye of an insider. They also allowed him to draw upon a rich and varied source of imagery and subject matter;” See, Abdul Hadi Jiad, “Obituaries: Abdul Rahman Mounif: Novelist and Political Activist Who Highlighted the Arab Plight (Obituary)” *The Guardian* (London, England) 05 Feb. 2004: 29.

[184] Munif, *Cites of Salt* 1.

contact with such a place leaves long-lasting impression that defies belief, because Wadi al-Uyoun does not comply with the conventional image of the desert. The narrator notes that

وادي العيون بالنسبة للقوافل شيء خارق، أعجوبة لا يصدقها من يراها لأول مرة، ومن يراها لا ينساها بعد ذلك، حتى ليتردد اسم الوادي في جميع مراحل الطريق، في الذهاب والعودة: "كم بقي لنصل إلى وادي العيون؟" "إذا وصلنا وادي العيون وأمرحنا هناك سوف نستريح أياماً قبل أن نواصل السفر" "أين أنت يا ودي العيون يا جنة الدنيا"

> For caravans, Wadi al-Uyoun was a phenomenon, something of a miracle, unbelievable to those who saw it for the first time and unforgettable forever after. The wadi's name was repeated at all stages of a journey, in setting out and retraining: "How much longer to Wadi al-Uyoun?" "If we make it to Wadi al-Uyoun, we'll rest up for a few days before going on," and "Where are, Wadi al-Uyoun, earthly paradise?"[185]

On the one hand, the context of this discursive insistence on the pastoral uniqueness of this wadi highlights the self-sustainability of the Bedouin ecosystem and foregrounds the locals' unparalleled adaptability and congruity with their harsh environment. On the other, it also makes the recurring juxtaposition between the approaching material world of the "foreigners" and the charming and romantic rustic life of the Bedouin natives, in the ensuing chapters, more tragic and even engagingly absurd as one

هذه الآلات الملعونة التي تخيف الحلال بهديرها الذي لا يتوقف، والتي تسبّبت مرات كثيرة بهياج الإبل وهربها، ثم العناء الذي لحق أصحابها نتيجة ذلك، هذه الأمر لا يمكن أن تتلخص بكلمات، أو تصوّر لإنسان بعيد

> "could see the godless machines that roared ceaselessly and often stirred up and scattered the camels, causing their owners the tremendous inconvenience of rounding them up

[185] Munif, *Cites of Salt* 3.

again. These were things that could not be expressed in words or imagined by anyone who had not seen them."[186]

Simply put, the encounter with the American Other, oil machinery, and the exposure to capitalism creates an atmosphere full of menace to Munif's fictional unspecified Bedouin society.

Indeed, مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh* is a seminal novel that traces the arrival of American oil engineers to an unspecified Arabian desert with undisclosed agendas. Immediately, they are labelled as "foreigners." The narrator cautions that

أن التصرفات التي بدرت من هؤلاء خلقت شكوكاً لا نهاية لها

"[t]he Americans' behavior created endless suspicions" in Wadi al-Uyoun.[187]

These suspicions develop into harsh questions about the real reason behind their arrival because the Bedouin residents do not believe that "they came to look for water." Hence, the environmental binary of desert-water is established in parallel to other sociocultural dichotomies of self (Bedouin) and the foreign Other and nomadism and civilization. The reason for the locals' suspicion, however, is not triggered solely by the notion of otherness since the inhabitants of Wadi al-Uyoun live in a crossroads of caravans. It rather stems from how these "foreigners" unjustifiably cross-question Bedouin and invariably overspend on their project:

فليرات الذهب الإنجليزية و الرشادية التي كانت توزع بسخاء، لقاء أبسط الخدمات، ثم الأثمان المرتفعة التي أعطيت مقابل الصناديق الخشبية والأكياس التي استعملت لخزنة كميات من الرمال والحجارة، وأخيراً ما دفع لابن الراشد مقابل الناقتين اللتين اشتراهما هو هؤلاء، وهذه التصرفات وغيرها جعلت أهل وادي العيون في حيرة كبيرة وحتى الذين أبدو تسامحاً ، وقالوا ننتظر قبل أن نحكم، ساورهم الشك في أن يكون أولئك الأمريكيون قد جاءوا من أجل الماء.

186 Munif, *Cites of Salt* 84.
187 Munif, *Cites of Salt* 44.

وادي العيون الذي تعود على مرور القوافل، ورأى بشراً من أنماط كثيرة، كان الأمريكيون الثلاثة بالنسبة له بشراً من نوع غير مألوف، نوع مختلف تماماً، بطريقة حياتهم وتصرفاتهم والأسئلة التي يسألونها. ثم ذلك السخاء الذي لا يظهر أبداً من المسافرين الآخرين.

> The coins of English and Arab gold they so liberally handed out, the inflated prices paid for the bags and wooden boxes they used to store sand and rocks, above all the sum they gave Ibn Rashed for two camels-these and other things utterly bewildered the people of Wadi al-Uyoun. Even those who had said, 'Let's wait and see before we judge' no longer believed that the Americans had come for water.
>
> For Wadi al-Uyoun, so accustomed to caravan traffic and the endless different sorts of people, the Americans were something completely new and *strange-in their actions, their manners and the kind of questions they asked, not to mention their generosity*, which surpassed that of all previous visitors.[188]

This uneasy encounter sets a pessimistic mood that colors the entire story, especially in the first volume, التيه *Al-Teeh* (the Wilderness)—which is my main focus here.[189] Munif adds a sarcastic twist to this pessimism as Miteb al-Hathal, the protagonist (in the first part), for instance, starts to wonder and complain loudly and vehemently that the Americans

أكيد هؤلاء لم يأتوا من أجل الماء، إنهم يريدون شيئاً آخر. ولكن ما عساهم يريدون؟ وأية أشياء في هذه الفلاة غير الجوع والرمل والعجاج؟ ويقولون إنهم سيقضون هنا وقتاً طويلاً؟ كيف سيعيشون؟ كانوا وهم يأكلون أشبه بالدجاج. والأسئلة التي يسألونها خبيثة، ملعونة

[188] Munif, *Cites of Salt* 44. Emphasis added.
[189] My discussion of Munif's novel is entirely based on my analysis of the first volume of his quintet, because it raises the main arguments that revolve around the notions of encounter, displacement, and the impact of the modernization process.

> "certainly didn't come for water—they want something else. But what could they possibly want? What is there in this dry desert besides dust, sand and starvation? They say they'll be here a long time? How will they live? They look like chickens when they eat. And the questions they asked were damned crafty."[190]

His sarcasm revolves around the questionability of their actions, leaving a space for the reader to generally review and (re)contextualize the relationship between appearances and intentions in the novel on the first hand, and the notions of foreignness and otherness on the other. This mixture sense of uncertainty, unreliability, and potential corruption creates the foundational elements of conflict and suspense in the novel and sets the general mode of this part of the quintet.

Socioculturally speaking, Miteb's problem with the sudden appearance of the Americans in his wadi stems partially from the latter's lack of (unquestioning) conformity with his Bedouin sociological perspective that sets the boundaries of his relations with people around him. The arrival of the Americans, therefore, disrupts his system of thought and social paradigms because—as the narrator foretells or reminds the reader in the first chapter—

> الناس متشابهون في وادي العيون، سواء بالملامح وطبيعة الحياة، فإنه لا يمكن التمييز بين واحد وآخر إلا بحكم السن أو رجاحة العقل، أو ربما بالقرابة من العون الجد

> "everyone in Wadi al-Uyoun was so similar, in both *physical appearance* and *general attitudes*, it was possible to distinguish one from the other only by age or personality, or by the exact kinship to the ancestor al-Aoun."[191]

This early assertion on the importance of likeness, appearance, and intentionality evokes the richness of tribal heritages and ancestral genealogies in Bedouinism and the sociocultural and

190 Munif, *Cites of Salt* 29.
191 Munif, *Cites of Salt* 10. Emphasis added.

ecological sustainability of such a system. From an anthropological perspective, these various elements are deeply ingrained in the Bedouin social and cultural conventions and attribute to the sense of tribalism and belonging. For this reason, Miteb later warns everyone against the real purpose of the arrival of American oil engineers:

يدورون عن جن، عن عفاريت ما يندرى، لكن ابشروا يا أهل الوادي، إذا طلع الشيء اللي يدورون عليه ما ظل منكم أحد حياً

"'they're [Americans] after something. The water is just an excuse.' He laughed mockingly and added, 'They're looking for jinn, or devils-who knows? But be assured of this, people of the wadi—if they find what they're after, none of us will be left alive.'"[192] On the theoretical level, Miteb's cynical laugh interweaves the fear of the metaphysical unknown in Arabo-Islamic mythology which is represented by the supernatural being "jinn" (spirits) with people's trepidation of the unusual juncture of local geopolitics signified by the encounter with the menacing tone of the American Other. Simultaneously, it seems that on the background of his invocation of mythical and mystical powers is the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics where both the nomadic ecosystem and the power relations in society are challenged by the arrival of foreigners who threaten the very existence of local Bedouin sovereignty. In fact, and in accordance with Munif's own standpoint, the narrative is haunted by the notion of biopower as it seeks relentlessly to dissect the biopolitical relationship between power (capitalism/state) and native (Bedouin/Wadi al-Uyoun). A priori, it would appear on the cultural level, that this warning magnifies the foreignness of the western newcomers and reflects how the novel mocks their unfamiliarity with the country, particularly both the aridity of the desert and the Bedouin

[192] Munif, *Cites of Salt* 43.

lifestyle, which, in turn, hints at the possibility of their inability to adapt physically and culturally to their new environment.

The character of Miteb al-Hathal represents the voice of the local native who tries to express his thoughts and concerns before being marginalized and silenced by an uncompromising and far-reaching capitalism. The novel also anticipates the collapse of the Bedouin ecosystem and laments the unwanted societal and environmental consequences of that appearance such as the fragmentation of (tribal) society, severance of links with local traditions and mores, and, more importantly, obliteration of the visual and cultural attributes that give the landscape its unique character. Using a Marxist lens, Munif reflects how some local nomadic residents are helplessly engulfed by this project with its "godless machines" as they become vulnerable workers. The narrative also depicts their attempts to resist the American presence, which is depicted as a form of neocolonialism.

2.3. Oil and the Exposure to the World in البدوي الصغير *Al-Badawi Al-Sagir*

Similar to Munif who utilizes his own experience in oil industry to fictionalize the encounter between Bedouin inhabitants of an unspecified village (presumably somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula) and Americans, Maqbul Al-Alawi reconstructs the personal and national transformations after the oil boom in البدوي الصغير *Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* (The Young Bedouin).[193] The starting point for this novel is the Saudi-American oil encounter as well. However, Al-Alawi sets spatial and temporal boundaries for his narrative, while Munif does not specify a locale or time frame for his story and leaves the reader to infer and surmise that the actions take place

[193] Maqbul M. Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* (The Young Bedouin) (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2016). I am using the original Arabic version because the novel is yet to be translated into English. All English translations are mine.

somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula around the early 1930s. Although it offers a more concise narrative if compared to Munif's novel, the storyline of *The Young Bedouin* does not dwell solely on the moment of the oil encounter as it spans over 30 years (1983 to 2013) and traces the social, economic, and cultural changes in a small, quiet, and peaceful village in the Southwest of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, *The Young Bedouin* tells a mesmerizing story about the often marginalized or overlooked personal details of Saudi society and the impact of its exposure to the influx of both Arabs and Westerners who came to the Kingdom seeking economic and job opportunities. Echoing the same tone in *Cities of Salt*, these non-Saudi others are presented as "strangers" and "foreigners" who look, speak, and act differently with varying degrees of otherness, adaptability, and likeability. For example, Ghassan, the narrator, reflects on the ramifications of the massive personal and public changes during the economic boom in the late 1970s and 1980s that would transform him from being a naive "young Bedouin" into a world-class intellectual who reflects the cosmopolitan character of the new emerging Saudi society. Thus, his exposure to different aspects of the notion of "otherness" at a very young age allows Ghassan to mature intellectually as the story progresses. For example, Ghassan's small community develops rapidly into a mosaic of foreign nationals from Arab, Asian, and Western countries. As a result, he is exposed to the Palestinian issue, (post)colonial legacies, gender politics, rural-to-urban migration, and the power of the global capitalist economy. In such an atmosphere, and in the middle of a "Saudi nowhere," Ghassan struggles initially at school, especially in learning English language and yet he wills himself into becoming an accomplished journalist who writes about the complexities of (trans)national arts, music, multiculturalism, and diversity. The transient nature of his job takes him from Saudi Arabia to United Arab Emirates, England, and the United States.

Like *Cities of Salt*, *The Young Bedouin* shares some features with the postcolonial novel as it depicts the locals' initial mixed feelings about the approaching foreign Other when such sensibilities begin with casual "indifference" and reluctance and then gradually develops into suspicions.[194] The apparent and repeatedly emphasized connection between the foreign oil engineers, as (pseudo) neocolonial agents, and the local (tribal) regime and/or government is often highlighted. The narrative hints and sometimes candidly reveals such association. For instance, Mr. Duncan, the American oil engineer, is introduced as one of the official "guests of the government" who should not be disturbed.[195] This emphasis evokes the dynamics of the politics of oil or petroleum politics and the nation-building process, on the one hand, and the emergence of Saudi Arabia as oil/energy superpower, on the other. Relying on their identity position during that specific period of time and how they interact with their own local histories, the residents interpret this historic encounter, even momentarily, in terms of new forms of sociopolitical pressures or hegemony. Thus for these residents, the sudden appearance of Americans, their subtle approach to the social and cultural spaces of the indigenous Saudi community, and how they hastily begin building their own separate residence on the top of a small nearby hill become reminiscent of another unwelcomed foreign presence/arrival for these residents:

تعجب سكان القرية من ذلك ولم يفهموا لماذا قام القادمون الجدد بتكون هذه الهضبة! لكن الرجال المسنين من سكان القرية لم يستغربوا هذا الفعل، فقد عادت بهم ذكرياتهم إلى الوراء حينما مرت فرقة من الجيش العثماني من هنا لتأديب الشريف الإدريسي فأرغموهم على ردم وبناء الهضبة والقشلة. كل شيء أصبح يعيد نفسه جيلاً بعد جيل.

[194] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 14.
[195] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 15

> The villagers were surprised because they didn't understand why these newcomers have built the hill! But this act didn't surprise the elder members of the village because their memories took them back to the time when they were forced to build a hill and *qishla* [Turkish citadel] by an Ottoman regiment that passed by, en route to punish Sharif Al-Idrissi [near the Southern border of the Kingdom]. Everything repeats itself, generation after another.[196]

Applying a postcolonial reading to the villagers' evocation of a previous abominable encounter, we can understand the surge of anxiety about the arrival of the American oil engineers, led by Mr. Duncan, and the decision to build their private residence on top of a hill. Here, the oil encounter becomes a reminder of a (short-lived) past colonial presence (Ottoman Empire) that was more conventional in its use of confrontational military power to subdue natives.[197] In contrast to the Ottoman hegemony, the new form of power dynamics the novel depicts, throughout the first half of the narrative, is not coercive in its treatment of the locals or exercise of authority. Still, the fictional representations of American neocolonialism bear resemblance to traditional empires in its need for a physical presence, albeit it has to be euphemized as protecting "national interests." In fact, the very notion of maintaining some type of "interests" in a far-flung space is very intriguing because it constructs discourses that blur the associations and boundaries between colonialism, capitalism, modernity, and nationalism. Accordingly, and from an outsider position, the American influential presence, multifarious involvement, and

[196] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 15.
[197] The Arabian Peninsula has never been under the (Western) colonial rule (or at least seen as points of interests) except varying forms and fluctuating degrees of Ottoman suzerainty, mainly in the coastal regions like Al-Hasa in the East. For more information, see Wayne H. Bowen, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2015). For a historical overview of that past, see the following section in this dissertation: "Colonialism on the Arabian Peninsula."

continuous (re)shaping of the Middle East (and other parts of the world) become politically and culturally diluted when presented in terms of maintaining "national interests," "democratizing mission," or "War on Terror" in the post-9/11 context. For all that, the insider status in the novel labels such presence as "mutual interests" and presents it as an economic opportunity for the locals to participate in the building process that accompanies it. It becomes an opportunity to build and modernize that territory as well as creating new jobs for younger generations.

Under more scrutiny, however, these intersections reveal an intriguing relationship between geopolitics, cultural studies, sociology, and economics. Let us, for instance, consider the national-mutual dynamic vis-à-vis foreign-local binary. Although, it sometime slips through the cracks of interrelated currents of (post)modernity and, therefore, goes unchecked, the transition from "national" and foreign to "mutual" and local in international relations parallels the shift from colonialism to neocolonialism. It evokes the inseparability of the epistemologies of coloniality and capitalism in contemporary literary and cultural studies, as I will discuss further shortly. For this reason, the arrival of the Americans in that peaceful Saudi village signals a moment of social disruption and evokes unpleasant memories of (transient) colonial hegemony when the Ottomans forced the locals to build the *qishla* through subjugation and

عن طريق السُّخرة بأوامر قائد فرقة من الجيش العثماني

"forced labor on orders from a division commander of the Ottoman army" as the narrator puts it.[198] However, the sociopolitical dynamics in the Saudi-American encounter differ vastly. For example, the local residents willingly participate in building the hill and the Americans' residence and were not forced into servitude through brute military force. Mr. Duncan and, by extension, his local agents succeed in utilizing the government's new emerging financial system

[198] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 10.

that redefines the traditional trading arrangements where the villagers are used to exchange goods as forms of commercial transactions. Instead, the new "modern" financial system gradually replaces commodities with government banknotes as forms of currency and hence the local commercial dealings and labor market are renegotiated, rearranged, and modernized. The new financial system becomes more popular among young generation as the narrator explains:

> فشاركوا في بناء الهضبة بهمة ونشاط مقابل حفنة نقود قليلة ولكنها كانت ضرورية ومهمة حيث أن اغلب التعاملات التجارية في القرية كانت تتم بطريقة المقايضة: حب ذرة حمراء مقابل حفنة من الأرز؛ تمر عجوة مقابل قليل من زيت الطبخ...
>
> they [young villagers] participated passionately and vigorously in building the hill in exchange for a little yet important and necessary amount of cash because most of the commercial transactions in the village were done in the form of exchange: red sorghum grain in exchange for a handful of rice; some *ajwa* dates in exchange for a small amount of cooking oil…[199]

The oil encounter and its reverberations necessitate embracing different forms of capitalism and technology (symbolized by using "giant machines" in forming the hill) in order to be able to join modern economy. Certainly, it is true that such encounters and the appearance of Mr. Duncan and his crew of multinationals have stirred mixed emotions among the villagers, especially the elders, yet it is also important to notice that the locals, in general, do not show the same level of hostility towards Americans or maintain some kind of ambivalence about oil politics that colors, for instance, Munif's *Cities of Salt.* The initial "enmity" between the two sides in *The Young Bedouin* quickly dissipates and gradually develops into a lasting "friendship" which is

[199] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 16.

epitomized by the strong and multi-generational financial relationship between Mr. Duncan, Ghassan, and Sa'udoun, the protagonist's father who dies almost at the middle of the story.

There is another important aspect to the initial moment of the Saudi-American encounter and the locals' anxieties about forming and building the hilltop residence. It exemplifies the intersectionality of geocriticism and coloniality because the other reason besides financial affairs and labor market that reflect the change in the economic and sociocultural dynamics and the villagers' attitude towards the arrival of (Western) foreigners concerns the practicalities of the location of the new residence. Unlike what the Saudi locals initially thought, the narrator explains that the real reason of forming a hill and building on top of it is not strategic defense against unwanted intruders (locals/subjects) as the villagers initially thought when they remember their experience with the Turks. Instead, American engineers who work for the oil company base their choice simply on environmental criteria:

> كان إجراءً احترازياً استباقياً لكي لا يأتي السيل فجأةً—كما هي عادته دائماً—فيجرف كل شيء في طريقه
>
> "It was a proactive and precautionary measure to avoid the flood (torrent) when it suddenly comes—as it always does—and sweeps away everything in its path."[200]

The logic of the constructional engineering and building a hilltop residence helps ease the initial tension between the two sides since it allows them to coexist in sustainable harmony with the environment as well as the locals. Taken the narrator's awareness of the geopolitics of knowledge into consideration, one can say that the engineering logic serves a basic natural feature against occasional flood for the Americans. In contrast, for the Turks, the hilltop structure means inaccessibility, defensive capabilities, and protection against the possibility of social unrest, military activity, and other potential dangers. There is also the symbolism of the hilltop

[200] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 16.

residences since they can be seen as a visual emblem of power while the elevation signifies the capability to overlook the village. Geographically speaking, the visual allegory of hilltops creates specific cultural frame of reference since they echo the notions of hegemony and dominance within the contexts of global geopolitics and (post)colonial legacy. In short, the facades of these fortresses signal power. This becomes even apparently noticeable in most of the previously colonized countries where colonial defensive networks and fortification systems (relics, forts, and castles, etc.) serve as reminders of the imperial past and, sometimes, enduring and lingering influence.[201]

The huge difference between the two encounters (Ottoman and American) in the imagination and collective memory of the Saudi villagers in *The Young Bedouin* shows how local histories interact with Walter Mignolo's notion of "global designs" and his interpretation of Anibal Quijano's concept of "the coloniality of power."[202] Discussing the U.S. foreign policy and the connections between local histories, capitalism, and coloniality, Mignolo maintains:

> The U.S. position in the world order is radically different from the position that, for instance, Spain occupied in the sixteenth or England in the nineteenth century, due mainly to the power of transnational corporations and its consequences: the expansion of

[201] There is an increasing scholarly interest in the study of the colonial fortification system from geopolitical and sociocultural perspectives, especially in previously colonized spaces. For instance, recent studies like Shadows of Empire in West Africa examines the role of defensive European networks and fortifications in that region form an interdisciplinary viewpoint and argues that "the fortresses are seen implicitly or explicitly as nodal points of entanglement within the sociopolitical spaces, where various forms of local and global connections, interactions, perspectives, networks of exchanges, flows (of goods, people, cultures and ideals) and memories have originated" (19). See, Ellen Smith and John K. Osei-Tutu, *Shadows of Empire in West Africa: New Perspectives on European Fortifications* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[202] Mignolo explains, "in a nutshell, for Quijano constitutes the coloniality of power by way of which the entire planet, including its continental division (Africa, America, Europe), becomes articulated in such production of knowledge and classificatory apparatus. Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of subalternity. from the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs;" See Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17.

capitalist economy to those regions of the planet that have been identified, from the local histories where capitalism emerged, as "Oriental" and, therefore, not likely to become capitalist. That was, precisely, the entire point made through the "Orientalist" imaginary. Capitalism was linked to the "Occidental" imagination, not to the "Oriental" one.[203]

The notion of power dynamics that Mignolo analyzes here enriches the reading of the oil encounter in Al-Alawi's novel and how the narrative of capitalist economy interacts with the discourse of modernity and, therefore, reshapes the representations of local histories. Although it is mainly concerned with the study of anti- and de-colonial history of Latin America, the rhetoric of coloniality that Mignolo highlights here can open a window for understanding the epistemologies of (post)colonial violence and socioeconomic and cultural dominance within the Middle East because he basically sees it as a continuation of some relative works to this study like the Moroccan Abdelkebir Khatibi's critique of modernity and Occidentalism and the elements of comparativity in Martiniquan Édouard Glissant's works.[204] The arrival of Americans with their "giant machines" and the capacity of Saudis to willingly participate in the building process of their own community create a sociocultural momentum where the transient yet unpleasant Turkish colonial moment is erased from, or, at least, pushed to the background of, the (contemporary) memory of that specific Saudi society. The economics of oil reveals the inseparability of domination and modernity, yet it successfully generates a new set of meanings

[203] Mignolo, *Local Histories* 65.
[204] See, for instance, Abdelkebir Khatibi and Catherine Dana, "A Colonial Labyrinth," *Yale French Studies* 83 (1993): 5-11; Abdallah Mdarhri-Alaoui and Patricia Geesey, "Abdelkébir Khatibi: Writing a Dynamic Identity," *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992): 167-76; Mustapha Hamil, "Interrogating Identity: Abdelkebir Khatibi and the Postcolonial Prerogative," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 22 (2002): 72-88; Françoise Lionnet, "Counterpoint and Double Critique in Edward Said and Abdelkebir Khatibi: A Transcolonial Comparison," *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, ed. Ali Behdad and Dominic Richard David (Maldon, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 387-407; For more information on the notion of comparativity and world literature, see Susan Stanford Friedman, "World Modernisms, World Literature, and Comparativity," *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark A. Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 499-525.

within social structure where the encounter of the Other is not framed as fearfully hegemonic or militarily oppressive. Furthermore, the representations of the American Other in Al-Alawi's novel, along with their sophisticated apparatuses, are constructed around the notions of friendship, mutual financial interest, modernization, and change. Here, the oil encounter plays a double role in the formation of Saudi identity. On the one hand, it (re)shapes how Saudis look at themselves and interact with the rest of the world. The new geopolitical dynamic helps to create an intellectual space where Saudi locals are not seen as "inferior" and, instead, they actively contribute to the nation-building process. On the other hand, it introduces the culture of materialism and consumerism, among others, that challenge and change the sociocultural structure of society and, therefore, expose the complicity between knowledge and capitalist and modern economy.

Unlike *The Young* Bedouin, it is the lucid exposition of such complicity that haunts *City of Salt*, especially the beginning of the narrative, and challenges the reader's understanding of the environmental dynamics of oil politics. The novel depicts the gloomy prospects of the oil industry in Munif's imaginary and unspecified Arabian desert community. The genesis of the narrative discourse of oil encounter in Munif's quintet is embedded in the geopolitical contexts of his time and the rise of critiques of coloniality, Western hegemony, and capitalist imperialism as well as the prevalence of Arab (postcolonial) nationalism, Fanonian thoughts, and different forms of resistance to the West in the Middle East. All of these dynamics constitute the intellectual backdrop of the disturbing and daunting vision of oil encounter in C*ity of Salt*, especially in the first volume that fittingly named التيه *Al-Teeh* (the Wilderness) with all the

powerful and yet dreary connotations this word carries of what Mignolo calls "The Darker Side of Western Modernity."[205]

Munif surely opts for a more politicized engagement with the oil encounter and the early forms of modernization by focusing on what he portrays as a "systematic" uprooting and marginalization of Bedouins and the disruption of their ecosystem that ensued from their inability to cope with the multilayered transformations that inundated them. This sense of inadaptability is best exemplified, for instant, in Miteb al-Hathal's failure to speak about his rights when given the chance as he

> كان يود آن يتكلم مثلما تعود دائماً. أن يصرخ، أن يقول كل ما يدور في عقله. فجأة أصابه الخوف ثم الخرس. ما قاله لا يعني شيئاً مهماً، مجرد أصوات عمياء
>
> "wanted to speak as he usually did, to shout at them, to say everything he had on his mind. He had been struck by fear and then dumbness. He had said nothing important-only made blind sounds."[206]

Miteb's plans turn into a fiasco and slowly succumbs to a muted disappearance by the end of the story. Conversely, Al-Alawi comes from an unusual standpoint as he utilizes the archives of (neo)colonialism, economics, and modernisms in the region and craftily deconstructs and rewrites local histories. His vivid narrative reveals Saudi characters that are able to invoke the brief colonial experience and the Ottomans harsh and abusive treatment of previous generations. This short colonial past is reassessed and then linked to the short yet "greedy" and opportunistic nature of some oil engineers. For example, once Mr. Duncan arrives in the village, he frantically starts buying and collecting old silver coins from the locals because these pieces have some

[205] See, Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
[206] Munif, *Cites of Salt* 91.

historical value since they feature the image of "Maria Theresa Thaler" and date back to 1780. Exploiting the locals' unawareness of such importance, Mr. Duncan makes a fortune of selling his various coin collections by the end of the narrative when he returns to the U.S.

In fact, these (one-sided) transactions reveal how the image of Saudis is constructed, conveyed, and even manipulated within the American context. A closer examination shows how Mr. Duncan, for instance, describes his Saudi friend and the main source for the "historical" sliver coins in the village, Sa'udoun, as

هذا مخلوق بدائي ولكنه بالرغم من ذلك سابق لعصره. ذكاؤه فطري. هو رجل مذهل بكل المقاييس

"a primitive human being but he is visionary and has innate intuition. An amazing man by all accounts."[207] Yet, he exploits Sa'udoun's naivety and curiosity by bribing him with some "materialistic" and "western" gifts like radio sets, cassettes, and even a gramophone to play Elvis Presley records. Ironically, Sa'udoun's sense of awe and wonder at his new possessions quickly vanishes when the supposedly universal language of Music is unable to transcend the cultural and linguistic barriers. Sa'udoun and his fellow villagers listen to the songs but are unable to fathom the language and even comprehend the style of Elvis music. As a result, one of them cries to Sa'udoun and asks him to shut the radio off because

هذه ليست بأغانٍ، إنها مجموعة من القطط تتشاكس وتتخاصم

"these are not songs. These are groups of cats playing and fighting with each other."[208] Hilariously, Mr. Duncan even resorts to presenting Sa'udoun with five copies of *Playboy Magazine*. This causes a kind of cultural and moral shock to the latter—who is over fifty years old—leaving him "sweating breathlessly," an event which will be discussed later.[209]

[207] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 48.
[208] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 52.
[209] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 28.

2.4 Portrayals Of Bedouin(Ism)

For countless American readers who likewise imagined the desert as a magical place, the jewel in the crown of non-touristic masculine exploration was Arabia.

Susan Nance

The whiteness of a white subject is so normative that it is often experienced as a nonevent unless activated by comparison with a black subject.

Reina Lewis

Representations of (Bedouin) Saudis in George Potter's *The White Bedouin*

This section looks at the oil encounter from a different aspect, especially after examining the intersections of oil politics, coloniality, and economics in forming the dynamics of mutual othering and the processes of image projection and image perception within the Saudi-American context in *Cities of Salt* and *The Young Bedouin.* For this reason, and in the light of the discussion of the spatiotemporal dimension of Potter's *The White Bedouin* and the ideological transformation that Stephen goes through after his arrival to the Kingdom, it is important to scrutinize the portrayal of Bedouin Saudis. The narrative creates a nonlinear and multifocal representation of Saudis where several characters project various facets of that image during different stages of the history of Saudi Arabia. For instance, the sections of the novel that deals with Jake's visit present an image of Saudis from a relatively more contemporary perspective. Other parts that delineate Stephen's journey give richer and more interesting renderings during the late 1930s. It is intriguingly important to realize that the narrative uses oil discovery and the rapid improvements in living standards as a marker for differentiating between pre-oil generation of Saudis and the post-oil one. In a lucid account, Willy O'Malley, a geologist with

PAMMCO,[210] educates the newly-arrived and younger American, Jake, about his theory of classifications of Saudi society:

> You see, there two kinds of Saudis … the townspeople and the Bedus. When it comes to manual work, the townies aren't worth a goat grab's leftover. They'll do anything to avoid working up a sweat. They wouldn't survive a day in the deep desert. But the desert Arabs—the Bedus or the Bedouin—are tough. They're hard workers but aren't impressed by a paycheck. It's just their way. They have survived in the desert for thousands of years, and they aren't about to change just because we're here sucking out their oil.[211]

This specified, and yet shallow cataloguing of the Saudi social structure comes only after a few pages into the story and the distinction is maintained, on different levels, throughout the story. Although it is addressed to Jake, this discursive sketch cautions the reader that there are cultural and social dynamics that have to be recognized when engaging with the depictions of these people. It also complicates the politics of representations of Saudis by constructing new facets of binaries like city and desert, settled/established and Bedouin, and pre- and post-oil communities.

Willy's observation confirms the special bond between the Bedouin and their harsh environment and their ability to survive its bare landscape. It also reflects a sociological perspective on the effects of the oil discovery on Saudi society and the sociocultural transformations it has ushered in. Since these remarks occur in the parts of the narrative pertaining to Jake's 1989 trip, Willy thinks that his contemporary vantage point enables him to

[210] PAMMCO stands for Pan Arabian American Oil Company. Supposedly, it is a direct allusion to ARAMCO (Saudi Arabian Oil Company) in the novel. Aramco was formerly known as the Arabian-American Oil Company.
[211] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 10.

evaluate the tremendous impact of the modernization process and the dramatic changes in the well-being and mentality of the post-oil generation of Saudis. He maintains that:

> The first oilmen to arrive here, back in the late [nineteen-] thirties, told us that before they struck oil, the Arabs were some of the hardest-working people they'd ever met. Today, it's like the working man's world has completely passed them by. *With each passing generation, the oil money makes them that much more spoiled*. Before the big oil company flowed in, there were no roads, schools, hospitals, telephones, or electricity. There were none of the things that we in the western world take for granted. Today *we offer Saudis* jobs as highly paid laborers, mechanics, and rig workers, and they turn their noses up at them.[212]

Of course, there are certainly some sociological repercussions of the changes in the lifestyles of people as they hurriedly move from rural to urbanized spaces during the economic boom in the 1970s up to the late 1980s. However, Willy's insistence on educating Jake about his perception of Saudi Arabia and its people reveals three main aspects of the Saudi-American encounter. First, there is cognizance of the power of oil economics that has fueled the metamorphosis of society. Second, it shows Willy's attempt to construct a specific and yet monolithic image of Saudis as lazy natives and then project it to a new and younger generation of Americans represented by Jake. This act of sociological analysis of a foreign society can be seen as reminiscent of the myth of the "lazy native" in postcolonial studies. For example, in *Culture and*

[212] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 10. Emphasis added.

Imperialism,[213] Edward Said examines this notion in his discussion of the pioneer work of the Malaysian sociologist Seyd Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977).[214] Said joins in the criticism of colonial capitalism in Southeast Asia and praises Alatas's debunking of the "colonial ideology that created and sustained the "lazy native" idea" (249). Building on Alatas's critique of European "colonial capitalist thought," Said argues that "the myth of the lazy native is synonymous with domination, and domination is at bottom power" (255). Likewise, Willy's portrayal of Saudis as "lazy" workers and how he associates this laziness with oil economy discloses an underlying anxiety about his own job security, among other reasons.

As an illustration, let us consider Jake's own account of the initial and yet *unplanned* meeting between Willy and Hank Parkerson, another geologist who moved from working for PAMMCO to doing consultant work for one of their manpower supplies as he puts it. Jake observes that both "Willy and Hank exuded a kind of nervous energy beneath their calm surfaces" before the exchange between the two begins in this fashion:

> 'So, you're still prostituting yourself and calling it consulting work I see,' said Willy to his old companion.
>
> 'You're not going to pretend hanging around PAMMCO and living off your Arab buddies' goodwill is making an honest living, are you?' replied Hank.
>
> On they went for a while about Hank's consultant status versus Willy's remaining in the PAMCCO payroll. I got the feeling that this was an old argument, like a warm-up for the less-rehearsed insults that they would be hurling at each other.[215]

[213] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).
[214] Seyd Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: F. Cass, 1977).
[215] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 7.

Although they seem harmless bleak witticisms, these verbal jabs between the two friends evince the anxiety of some American oil engineers and geologists during that time about keeping their high-paying jobs. Part of this anxiety, I think, stems from the fact that the time frame of this part of narrative coincides with the peak of what is known as Saudization or the government-led efforts to fill as many (executive) positions as possible with qualified, well-trained, and usually western-educated Saudis in oil industry.[216] For this reason, job insecurity and feeling superior to Saudis may help explain Willy's avowal of the laziness of Saudi workers. The basis of his presumption resembles what Alatas calls the "false consciousness" in the colonialist image of the "Oriental" Asians. "Alatas patiently documents," Said elucidates, "how these descriptions-all of them based on the 'false consciousness' of colonialists unwilling to accept that the natives' refusal to work was one of the earliest forms of resistance to the European incursion-steadily acquire consistency, authority, and the irrefutable immediacy of objective reality."[217] Of course, the notion of colonialism seems far-fetched, but in the Saudi-American context there is definitely the lingering questions of disaffection with the American hefty presence in the Middle East as a form of neocolonialism. Unlike European formal colonialism, the U.S. foreign policy and its neocolonial capitalist hegemony are more complex, indirect, and culturally diverse. Indeed, "the production of meanings *about* the Middle East," asserts Melani McAlister, "has a more general import for the construction of U.S. international power in the postwar [WWII] era."[218] Thus, the contemporary dynamics of oil industry, capitalism and the soft powers of globalization make it inevitable to interpret the American role in the world as neocolonial.

[216] Saudi government completed the nationalization process of Aramco in 1980.
[217] Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 245.
[218] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 55. ,

The third aspect that Willy's representations of Saudis concerns the notion of American "benevolent supremacy," to borrow McAlister's phrase. Benefiting from Charles Hilliard's coinage of this term, and as a professor of American Studies and International Affairs at the George Washington University, McAlister traces how the U.S. gradually became the main political power that subtly replaced other colonial powers and explains the structure and system of the U.S. foreign policy, especially its domination of the Middle East. Such discourse of the U.S. power, she aptly avers, has "framed it as inevitably global in scope, benevolent in intent, and benign in its effect.[219]" The key element in her post-orientalist evaluation of the sociocultural aspect of the U.S. strategy in the region is exemplified in this statement: "the discourse of benevolent supremacy used representations of the Middle East to construct a version of U.S. national power fit for the dawn of the American Century."[220] In the light of McAlister's study, Willy's commentary seems to suggest that the American supremacy is not colonial since it is benevolent enough to build the infrastructure of the Saudi Arabia like "roads, schools, hospitals, telephones, or electricity" and Saudis should be content, if not blessed, and feel lucky to be given these opportunities. The act of "offer[ing] Saudis jobs" is presumably benevolent at best. Semantically speaking, the collective "we" signals the American ethos, on one level, and expresses how Willy masks his anxiety about his job stability and security by accusing Saudis of laziness. It is hinted that, not like formal colonialism, Saudis are confined to the life of (economic) subordination within the dynamics of American neocolonial capitalism as the U.S. seeks to maintain the unequal relationship with Arabo-Islamic Orient.

[219] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 47.
[220] McAlister, *Epic Encounters* 83.

The anxiety of Willy and Hank becomes more intelligible when the reader develops cognizance of the nationalization of PAMMCO at the end of the story and discovers that "the "Saudi government put pressure on the company to promote Saudis onto managerial positions."[221] The epitome of this transformation (known nationally as Saudization) in the executive levels of the company is Ahmed bin Al-Hajri. Ahmed appears as Stephen's Bedouin interpreter at the beginning of the novel and then totally disappears for most of the plot before briefly reappearing as the retired vice president of PAMMCO. The narrative allows only six pages for unfolding Ahmed's transformative journey. This encounter happens when Jake goes to Abdullah's palace to inquire about the potential connection between Stephen, who is considered the "old friend" of the former, and the legend of the "white Bedouin." Explaining to Jake the unparalleled transformation, Abdullah confesses that he "was, as you Americans say, in the right place at the right time."[222] In fact, Ahmed has no formal education and "didn't even have a kindergarten diploma" when he started working for PAMMCO, but since he "spoke such good English," and under the pressure of nationalization, he was sent to the U.S. to complete his education"[223] After eight years in the States, he comes back with a doctorate in business administration from the University of Arizona. Continuing his chat with Jake about this incredible advancement, he states: "With the nationalization, I became the first marketing vice president, while my old American boss became my assistant. Just like that, the son of a goat herder became a vice president of the world's largest oil producer."[224] Abdullah's ephemeral life

[221] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 281
[222] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 280.
[223] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 281,
[224] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 281. Personally speaking, I find it is intriguing to notice that the fictional story of the character of Ahmed bin Al-Hajri and his incredible journey from his local desert community to becoming the vice president of the world's largest oil producer (coincidentally) shares striking resemblance with the real of life Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Naimi. Al-Naimi was also from the eastern part of Saudi Arabia and lived nomadic life during his

in the narrative and later opulent lifestyle, represented, for example, by living in "a life-size replica of the U.S. White House," seems to mirror the impact of oil discovery and the historic shift in the living standards in Saudi Arabia and the creation of stereotypical view that reflects and maintains the image of a "sudden" display of opulence in Saudi society.

While the novel does not give enough space for the development of his character, Ahmed's insistence on and pride in telling his "incredible" story can unwittingly function as an implicit counternarrative as it challenges Willy's representations of Saudis as the lazy Oriental natives who are expected to accept any job deemed suitable by their American managers and higher-ups. He also deconstructs the association between the social and economic welfare programs brought by oil and the image of the lazy citizen. He shows that this fabulous wealth can be utilized effectively in transforming the "land of drought and scorpions" which was "forgotten in time," as the narrative initially portrays, to a young modern state that encourages both self-government and self-reliance.[225] Ahmed's own successful transformation from being an illiterate Bedouin to earning a doctorate in business administration mirrors Aramco's ever flourishing business.[226] It is important to realize that the success story of the nationalization of

childhood. He was born in 1935 and joined Aramco as an "office boy" in 1947. Then he was sent to continue his education in the U.S. and returned with a master's degree in in hydrology and economic geology from Stanford University. He served in different powerful positions in Saudi Arabia. for instance, Al-Naimi the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources from 1995 to 2016. His talent was recognized internationally which can be seen in how the TIME magazine named him one of the influential people in the world in 2008. His name also joins the ranking list of "50 Most Influential" published by Bloomberg Markets magazine. He summarizes his miraculous journey in his biography— fittingly titled: *Out of the Desert: My Journey from Nomadic Bedouin to the Heart of Global Oil* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

[225] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 67, 72.

[226] For instance, in 2019 Saudi Aramco became the most profitable company in the world by far as it "made a whopping $111 billion in 2018, the data shows. By comparison, Apple made $59.53 billion in fiscal 2018. Saudi Aramco also made more money than J.P. Morgan Chase, Google-parent Alphabet, Facebook and Exxon Mobil combined. Put together, those companies made nearly $106 billion in 2018." See, Fred Imbert. "Saudi Aramco made $111 billion in 2018, topping Apple as the world's most profitable company." CNBC, 1 April 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/01/saudi-aramco-made-111-billion-in-2018-topping-apple-as-the-worlds-most-profitable-company-by-far.html; and Reed Stanley. "Saudi Aramco Is World's Most Profitable Company, Beating Apple by Far." *The New York Times*, 1 April 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/01/business/saudi-aramco-profit.html.

Aramco has attracted the attention of economic and sociopolitical critics. For instance, Kabreya Ghaderi[227] applies a comparative analysis to the narrative of nationalization in both Saudi Arabia and Iran, OPEC's[228] two largest exporters, in order to examine the impact of Western influence in oil governance. The nationalization of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) began very early in 1951 under the pressure from Mohammad Mosaddegh, the prime minister at that time, while Saudi Arabia started the process in 1973 and completed it in 1980. Highlighting the disparity between the two stories, Ghaderi argues: "Negatively impacted by Western intervention in Iran's political sphere, Iran continues to perpetuate a "third-worldist" mentality through its oversight of the NIOC. Conversely, Saudi Aramco has in essence remained unchanged […] and has greatly benefited from its adherence to Western importance in terms of efficiency, business autonomy, and recapitalization."[229] The prosperous success of the nationalization process and the managerial ability to keep such momentum is one of the enormous positive repercussions on society. "[W]hile both countries exemplify the rentier welfare states," Ghaderi asserts, "it appears that Saudi Aramco's effective business operations have had a unforeseen positive externality: improving the Kingdom's approach to governance and, consequently, ability to govern."[230] Indeed, Aramco's "exemplary" efficiency and steady and yet diversified financial growth has become the benchmark for both Saudi government and other national companies. Similarly, In *The White Bedouin* Ahmed has enthusiastically exploited both the encounter with the American other and the new socio-economic dynamics and patiently equipped himself with necessary Western expertise to prove himself a man of perseverance, integrity, and resolve. In short, Ahmed character debunks the stereotypes embedded in formulaic representations, which

[227] See, Ghaderi, "In Defense of the Great Satan."
[228] OPEC stands for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and was founded in1960 in Baghdad.
[229] Ghaderi, "In Defense of the Great Satan" 8.
[230] Ghaderi, "In Defense of the Great Satan" 8.

were in turn, embodied in Willy's discourse. Ahmed refuses to be an extension or a shadow of the myth of the lazy Oriental Other who is so mystical and has no appreciation of history or conception of nation formation. Proud of his Bedouin heritage, he symbolizes the Saudi "native" who belongs to both the desert and simultaneously believes in the notion of the modern productive state.

"[T]he unwritten law of the desert": Approaching Nomadism

In a metafictional moment, Jake observes that "[w]hen Willy ran out of descriptions of the Bedouin, Hank took up the narrative."[231] This apparent, but voluntary, announcement alerts the reader to the change in the viewpoint and characterizations of the Saudi Other. Potter channels his representations of Bedouin in the novel through two intersecting circles. First, a generalized image of Bedouin is mediated through snippets of conversations with Western and Saudi characters whom Jake occasionally meets during his 1989 investigative journalism trip to the Kingdom. Second, Stephen provides a more detailed portrayal of Bedouinism during 1930s as he undergoes a transformative passage from being seen as the "foreign" "Ameriki" to being regarded as a "son" and "full-blooded Bedu, not a cowboy."[232] The aim of this deliberate dynamic in the multiple focalization[233] is to enrich the politics of representation in the text as well as framing various elements of Bedouin society as the author strives to present multiple, sometimes competing, voices.

[231] Potter, *White Bedouin* 10.
[232] Potter, White Bedouin 16, 73, 315.
[233] I specifically use the term "focalization" in the sense defined by Alun Munslow: "focalisation refers to the author's choice, regulations and organization of information on the story space in terms of 'seeing' events and existents from someone's point of view, usually a historical agent, narrator or one through the other, and in so doing establishing a focal point for the history. If voice deals with 'who speaks' (the subject of the history narrative, i.e., the narrator), focalisation is concerned with 'who sees' (the subject of focalisation/the focaliser as an agent/character/gender/class/race) within the story space." See: Alun Munslow. *Narrative and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 46.

One of the most salient features of the representations of Bedouin is the appreciation of their ability to "survive" in a barren environment like the Arabian Peninsula, especially near the mythically fearsome desert of الربع الخالي *Ar Rub' al Khali* (The Empty Quarter), the largest contiguous sand desert in the world, which believed to have originated about 6,000 years ago.[234] Comparatively, and as a continuation of Willy's admiration of the Saudi "Bedus," Hank Parkerson contends that the secret for their survival is "the unwritten law of the desert" which is embodied in their firm belief in what he calls the "nomad's covenant of mutual survival" where every group must honor, feed, and protect unconditionally and unreservedly any stranger who stops by.[235] However, these honorable traits do not, ironically enough, exonerate some of these Bedouin from being degradingly and miserably perceived as a "different sort of human … primitive, as if from a different time period."[236] The dramatic shift between the exaltation and denigration and vilification of these Bedouin is remarkable. It shows how unconsciously the primitive-civilized binary (re)surfaces when these Western characters discuss the notion of civility within the context of the Arab Orient. Similarly, Hank condescendingly recalls former encounters with other group of Bedouin and argues that these people are great desert dwellers but, at the same time, they do not belong to the modern civilized world. Here, the Arabian Peninsula is seen as ahistorical "ancient" space where almost every aspect of "the western world" is nonexistent.[237] The characterizations of these Western characters are embedded in the Orientalist discourse that resonates with the Hegelian dialectics of hegemony. Frequently, the

[234] Peter Vincent, *Saudi Arabia: An Environmental Overview* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 41. Vincent gives an excellent, comprehensive, and most importantly, relatively up-to-date study of the geography of Saudi Arabia (41-44)., For more information on the inhabitants of this specific region see Donald Powell Cole, *Bedouins of the Empty Quarter* (New York: Routledge, 2017), especially chapters 5 and 7 which explore the intricate history of the famous transregional Bedouin tribe of Al-Murrah that features in numerous occasions in *The White Bedouin*.
[235] Potter, *White Bedouin* 12.
[236] Potter, *White Bedouin* 12.
[237] Potter, *White Bedouin* 10.

"uncouth" appearance of these Bedouin is cloaked in Orientalist mythology: "Even so, you never saw the Bedouin sweat. Their skin looked as hard and dry as tanned leather. Their hair and eyes were coal-black."[238] Like Stephen, Hank emulates Orientalism as he mythologizes and exoticizes the East. There are, of course, few cases where exoticization is not always intended to be totally negative. For instance, and in a Kafkaesque way, the Sudanese men who accompany American oilmen in the Saudi desert are metamorphosed, figuratively, into "desert rats…because they were so good in the deep desert."[239] If we unpack this figurative and yet suggestive mutation in the context of how the novel deals generally with the intricate politics of Middle East and where the narrative occasionally alludes to and explores the apprehensive atmosphere of the impending WWII, I believe this "nickname" may explicitly hint to the 1953 American war film *The Desert Rats* that tells the Siege of Tobruk in Libya during WWII. The movie partially foregrounds the story of the 7th British Armored Division that famously took a desert-dwelling rodent known as jerboa—which is an anglicized form of the Arabic word (الجربوع (al-jarbue) —as a badge and was stationed in North Africa during that war. [240] Comparatively, Potter employs the cultural associations of such title in the mindset of his (Western) reader to create his own anecdote. His creative deployment of Western popular culture helps shape the fictional imagery, which constitutes the basis of representations and construction of the image of the Other. For readers, the plausibility of sharing a preexisting acquaintance or familiarity with that contextual (social,

[238] Potter, *White Bedouin* 13.
[239] Potter, *White Bedouin* 11.
[240] *The Oxford Companion* to Military History gives some information and interesting details about the 7th British Armored Division. For instance, it expounds: "From December 1940 to February 1941, as part of the Western Desert Force commanded by [Gen Sir Richard Nugent (1889–1981)] O'Connor, the division took part in the audacious defeat and pursuit of the Italian Tenth Army […] The Desert Rat emblem lives on and was seen during the 1990–1 Gulf war, in which the British contribution to the US-led coalition included the 4th and 7th Armoured Brigades, both of which had been original elements of 7th Armoured Division;" See Paul Cornish, "Desert Rats," *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 256.

cultural, and political) references complicates the reading process as they reinforce the sense of danger and mystery in the Anglo-Arab encounter. Still, this given nickname may become problematic, especially when this metamorphosis is sustained throughout the narrative, because these Sudanese men are never given real names in the story. While accentuating the notion of difference, it seems that the function of these repetitive acts of exoticization is to reciprocally confer a kind of credibility to the "authentic" image of Bedouin in the novel who are, nonetheless, seen "different sort of human." It simultaneously creates a spatiotemporal barrier that propels them back into the imaginary realm of "the timeless world of the nomad."[241]

Another example of the correlation between the role of variable focalization in the narrative discourse and the politics of representation occurs when Stephen is en route to Midian, "the land of Moses," and encounters a herd of thousands of camels crossing in front of him.[242] After noticing that Stephen is staring in astonishment at this scene, his Saudi translator/driver, Ahmed (who will disappear shortly and then return momentarily as the retired vice president of PAMMCO at the end of story) explains the seasonal trips Bedouin make in order to trade with other tribes or search for food and water for their animal. He emphatically expounds that:

> Bedouin often wander as far north as Syria and as far south as Oman. The Bedouin nomads do not recognize international borders. What they respect, he added, are the tribal lands where they have relatives or areas where they trade with local tribes for permission to graze their camels. To the Bedouin, nations and international borders are alien concepts created by foreigners, namely the British and French.[243]

[241] Potter, *White Bedouin* 312.
[242] Potter, *White Bedouin* 59.
[243] Potter, *White Bedouin* 59.

This is an intriguing illumination on the economics of the tribal ecosystem and political sociology of the Bedouin who live in the Arabian Peninsula for two reasons. First, there is a direct allusion to the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement in Ahmed's clarification as he reaffirms: "To the Bedouin, nations and international borders are alien concepts created by foreigners, namely the British and French."[244] On the surface level, it demonstrates the Bedouin native geopolitical awareness of the changes in the world politics, especially taken into account the political context of the late 1930s when this conversation between the two characters takes place. It is also, on a deeper level, a reference to the tremendously lasting impact of the Western imperial powers in carving up the modern-day Middle East. In essence, the shaping forces of colonialism and imperialism in the Arabo-Islamic world began with Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 invasion of Egypt, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, French and British Mandates in the Levant, the establishment of Israel in Palestine, up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and the post-9/11 War on Terror. It is important to realize that the novel covers fifty-three years (1936-1989) when almost all Arab countries were under different forms of Western (military) hegemony. In fact, "[i]n 1945 Saudi Arabia and Yemen were the only independent countries in the Arab world" as Bruce Riedel highlights.[245] One may argue, building on the previous observations, that *The White Bedouin* is simultaneously colonial, postcolonial, and neo-Orientalist. Its themes encompass a mesh of multifaceted trajectories that intersect at various slants on the politics of representations, identity formation, foreignness, (neo)Orientalism, oil economics, modernity and tradition, and feminism, to name but a few. The novel, undeniably, covers one of the most pivotal and tumultuous periods in the modern history of the Middle East.

[244] Potter, *White Bedouin* 59.
[245] Riedel, *Kings and Presidents* 7.

Second, Ahmed's commentaries curiously echo the various scholastic definitions I discussed in the beginning of this analysis—which can be easily found in well-known historical lexicons as in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, reputable references such as *Oxford World Encyclopedia*, or even specialized guides to Islam as in the case of John Esposito's *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. In the same token, the characterization of Bedouin in *The White Bedouin* acknowledges particular concepts like sustainable tribalism, nomadism, herding and following grazing areas, and most importantly the love of maintaining an independent system of self-governance. It is true that some of these instances of thematic resemblances are inevitable, yet Potter's employment of narrative recycling, evasion of contemporary history of Saudi Arabia, and deep nostalgia for the ancient past of the Arabian Peninsula are reminiscent of Said's brilliant analysis of what he calls "rewritings the actualities of the modern Orient":

> In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these. Direct observation or circumstantial description of the Orient are the fictions presented by writing on the Orient, yet invariably these are totally secondary to systematic tasks of another sort.[246]

Said's premise surely reverberates in the renderings of the Bedouin Orient in the novel which, in turn, makes the process of bringing native characters to life an arduous task for the author, and by a discursive stretch, the reader, too. A close examination of the characterizations in *The White Bedouin* seems to suggest that the author struggled through the writing process since he was balancing the creation of developed and vibrant characters, on one hand, with reutilizing

[246] Said, *Orientalism* 177.

common Orientalist patterns that correspond to a rigid imagery of the Arab Orient, on the other. This exertion in narrative ambivalence can be effortlessly identified when the reader encounters a beautifully written fictional discourse between various characters that sounds almost elegantly spontaneous. Yet, the reader's hope for further discursive development is immediately thwarted by a monotonous pastiche of old and mechanical clichés.

The overlaps between epistemological foundation and creative writing may indicate that Potter, while researching materials for his novel, took inspiration from reading these educational resources—like *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Oxford World Encyclopedia*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, etc.—and recognizing such patterns and visualizations. They undeniably have influenced the author's approach to characterization. While it may seem a bit raw and crammed with tired cliché, Potter's depiction of Bedouin mirrors his academic training and scholarly interests as a Mormon who specializes in biblical archaeology. His long-term experiences in Saudi Arabia, fortunately, relatively compensate for these stylistic and ideological shortcomings as the story progresses when various aspects of the social and cultural life of Bedouin start to emerge. Once he is able to break away from the crippling insistence on theoretical articulations and discursive epistemology/formation, to use a Foucauldian poststructuralist thesis rather loosely,[247] Potter is able, at several moments of the

[247] See Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). For instance, chapter 2 is titled "Discursive Formations." He defines this concept as follows: "Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation - thus avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as 'science,' 'ideology,' 'theory,' or 'domain of objectivity.' The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division" (Foucault, *Archaeology* 38).

narrative, to present some believable and sophisticated characters that embody the strengths and flaws of human nature.

In the light of our emphasis on Potter's characterizations, I think the characters that seem narratively viable, with varying degrees of depth, are Stephen, Al-Ibrahim, and Norah. Thus, to maintain the focus on the representations of Bedouin here, I will focus on the examination of the roundedness of the two Saudi characters, namely Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim and his daughter Norah—who end up Stephen's father-in-law and wife, respectively. But before delving into the analysis of these two characters, let us examine one more paradigm of the novel's construction of the image of the Oriental Bedouin Other. The last story that Hank Parkerson tells Jake concerns a horrible experience in the deep desert of the Empty Quarter. Hank and Willy rescues an injured Bedouin who belongs to the famous Murrah tribe after his caravan was ambushed and killed by "Yemeni raiders."[248] (15). Next day, some of the Murrah warriors come to thank the two oilmen and collect their fellow wounded tribesman.

The interesting part of the story, however, lies in how Hank visualizes the encounter with these Bedouin and convey that image to Jake. He has some difficulty explaining his perception of them. It seems that part of Hank's struggle as the narrator of that experience revolves around his conceptualization of the notion of alterity and the ability to project that image to the newly arrived young American, Jake. For this reason, he resorts to reutilizing some projections of the uncivilized villain Other that are prevalent in American culture, especially in popular films and books. First, he describes the dramatic appearance of the approaching group riding on camels as being "armed to the teeth and looking like something out of Lawrence of Arabia."[249] (15). This is

[248] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 15.
[249] Potter, *White Bedouin* 15.

an explicit reference to Sir David Lean's well-known film, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), that tells the story of the British spy, T.E. Lawrence, and his role in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during WWI. By choosing a classic film that visualizes a real and yet enigmatic historical Western figure while featuring competing elements like wars, desert, Arabs, and foreigners, Hank alludes to a climactic period of the Anglo-Arab encounters that is still shrouded in mystery and contradicting histories. An epic movie that is usually considered one of the quintessential tales of the Anglo-Arab encounter helps Hank mythologize his own encounter, on the one hand, and allows Jake to panoramically visualize that encounter, on the other hand, since the latter is one of generations that were exposed to variety of Orientalist films.[250] This specific filmic adaptation of the life of a historical figure in Arab world, with all of its cultural contextualization of that encounter, retains an aura of adventure and mystery that creates a distinctive frame which, in turn, stimulates and provokes Jake's imagination to conjure up a series of preconceived images about the Orient. Thus, Hank employs the circulating image of Arabs in American culture to create a sense of subculture and, therefore, prepare his fellow newcomer for his encounter with the Oriental Bedouin Other and assist him gain access to the new environment, i.e., Saudi society. Aesthetically speaking, Potter's exquisite delineation of the image of "a group of Bedouin on camelback, armed to the teeth" can be seen as if it were an intriguingly written commentary by his fictional character, Hank, on a 1963 theatrical poster of *Lawrence of Arabia* by Howard Terpning that shows Lawrence on camelback, still wearing his

[250] There are many scholars who have examined the relationship between Orientalism and cinema, see for example, Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein, *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997); Tim J. Semmerling, *"Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006); Jack G Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2015). Also, Matthew Bernstein, "Giving the Movies Class," chapter four in his *Walter Wanger, Hollywood Independent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 41-54, sheds briefly but interestingly some lights on the Orientalist genre in film industry as it surveys many famous movies like *The Sheik* (1921), Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924), *Casablan*ca (1943), and *A Million and One Nights* (1926), etc.

Western clothes, waving his sword and charging headlong at his enemies, while being followed by many Arab warriors in the desert.[251]

Moving from the panoramic sweeping view, Hank now zooms in on the Murrah warriors: "For all the world, they looked like an Apache war party from the Old American West out to avenge their brothers. All that was missing was war paint and feathers."[252] By and large, Hank, as the narrator, uses an ethnographic lens to describe the Arab Bedouin warriors. He unreservedly parallels the images of the Native Americans with Saudi Arabian Bedouin. The narrator deftly moves from the epic panorama of the Anglo-Arab encounter in the Orient (*Lawrence of Arabia*) to the individuated archetype of the Native-white encounter in Hollywood. Once examined along with his superfluous depiction of the Yemeni warriors, Hank's embedded visualization presents Arabs and Native Americans as "blood-thirsty terrorists.".[253] What brings the two groups together (Bedouin and Natives), according to his portrayal, is their negative and stereotypical representations in movies. This is exemplified in the process of creating of an image that celebrates vengeance, violence, and uncouthness which, unconsciously, endorses the civilized versus savage dialectic.

Hank's reference to "war paint" and "feathers" in his fictional Apache echoes the imaginary portrayal of Native Americans in film industry. By all means, many critics have discussed the filmic representations of what they call "the Hollywood Indian." James Cox, for

[251] Potter, *White Bedouin* 15.
[252] Potter, *White Bedouin* 15.
[253] Potter, *White Bedouin* 17. For more information on the portrayals of Native Americans in movies see: Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005); Hartmut Lutz, "'Indians' and Native Americans in the Movies: A History of Stereotypes, Distortions, and Displacements," *Visual Anthropology* 3.1 (1990): 31-48. Edward Buscombe, *'Injuns!': Native Americans in the Movies* (London: Reaktion, 2006); Daniel Brown. "Sending a Voice: Native Americans in The Movies." *Whispering Wind* 40.6 (2012): 17-21. Michael Hilger, *Native Americans in the Movies: Portrayals from Silent Films to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). Peter Rollins and John E. O'Conner, eds., *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011).

instance, deconstructs the construction and backdrop of such an image when he brilliantly elucidates that:

> With a monopoly on writing, directing, and acting—even in the Native roles—non-Indians controlled the construction of Native identity and culture for the first century of filmmaking in the United States. To construct cinematic Indians, non-Native filmmakers relied on visible ethnic markers, such as artificially browned skin, feathers, paint, and buckskin, that reduced Native identities and cultures to a code of signs easily translatable by a non-Native audience.[254]

These powerful and persistent representations of Native Americans have perpetuated the recurring reference of specific symbols and myths into contemporary times as Ted Jojola vehemently argues: "The Hollywood Indian is a mythological being who exists nowhere but within the fertile imaginations of its movie actors, producers, and directors. The preponderance of such movie images have reduced native people to ignoble stereotypes."[255] Thus, Hank's allusion to ethnocultural markers inadvertently brings together two classic cinematic moments that show the non-Western characters (Arabs and Native Americans) as an extremely dangerous Other. Beside displaying the enormous influence of film industry on shaping different facets of

[254] Potter, *White Bedouin* 74. See also James H. Cox. "This Is What It Means to Say Reservation Cinema: Making Cinematic Indians in *Smoke Signals*," *Sherman Alexie: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jeff Berglund and Jan Roush (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 2010), 74-94.
[255] Potter, *White Bedouin* 12. Jojola continues his scrutiny: "From the novel, to the curious, to the exotic, image after image languished deeper and deeper into the Technicolor sunset. By the time of 1950s John Wayne B-Westerners, such images droned into the native psyche. The only remedy from such images was a laughter, for these portrayals where too surreal and too removed from the reservation or urban Indian experience to be taken seriously" (Potter, *White Bedouin* 13); See chapter 1 "Absurd Reality II: Hollywood Goes to the Indians" in Rollins and O'Conner, *Hollywood's Indian* 12-26.

the image of the Other in American popular culture, this reading of Hank's remarks illustrates how *The White Bedouin*, as a narrative/verbal frame of otherness, interrelates with *Lawrence of Arabia* and other movies, as cinematic/visual frames of alterity. This dynamic of verbal and visual representations reflects the power of the broader sense of intertextuality in culture in forming public opinion and perspective about cultural and racial difference. Lastly, and although the geographies and histories of the Anglo-Arab and Native-white encounters are different, this parallel between the two races in the novel can be seen as unconscious way to connect Arabs with Native Americans. The reinforcing link between this deduction and Hank's description is the fact that Potter is a biblical archaeologist. Potter, as a follower of the Mormon Church or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, recognizes Native Americans as "Lamanites" and Arabs as "Ephraimites" and both are seen as members of the descendants of the biblical tribes of the Israelites—a notion he develops later in the novel. At this moment in the narrative, the perception of the relation of these two ethnic groups to Western (Mormon) culture remains socioculturally constant as both undeniably represent the inferior Other. From Hank's standpoint, the Murrah Bedouin warriors and the Apache war party are the same racialized Other irrespective of cultural and sociological difference between the two which is signified by the lack of the symbolic signifier of "war paint and feathers." [256] Here, he falls short of matching Stephen's more developed sensibility as the latter acknowledges "the peculiar similarity between *the Old and New World* patterns couldn't be a mere coincidence" and confesses that: "There had to be a connection between Lehi's descendants in the Americans and the Arab weavers" as I

[256] Potter, *White Bedouin* 15.

have discussed earlier.[257] Stephen shows a more developed cognizance of the notion of group identity than Hank.

Colliding Images: Representations of Al-Ibrahim

Potter includes the figure of Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim, the leader or chieftain of "the noble" tribe of beni Ibrahim. The name of his people appears early in the narrative as the powerful and fearless tribe that guards the Mount Sinai, a "sacred" spatial space; Westerners should not be allowed to go there. As we have discussed earlier and upon his arrival to the Kingdom, Stephen considers the first Saudi that he meets, the old Saudi customs inspector Abdullah, "the spitting image of Father Abraham!" In like manner, the chieftain of Beni Ibrahim is perceived through the same biblical lens[258]:

> The leader had a commanding gait, and his eyes took no prisoners. He had a hawkish Arab nose, but it was not out of proportion to his strong facial muscles and high cheekbones. His black leather belt held a golden jumbia, and he stood taller than the six-foot three-inch Stephen. His black beard was handsomely trimmed and highlighted with currents of gray. Stephen though he was seeing a young Moses and knew right way the he liked the man.[259]

These stereotypical renderings of Al-Ibrahim[260] have a strong religious bent to them. Yet they are not surprising because they emerge from the same discourse in the novel that presents Saudi Arabia and its people from a distinctive ethnogeographic perspective that supports the construction of biblical literalism in the story "in compliance with the Word of Wisdom."[261] For

[257] Potter, *White Bedouin* 45.
[258] Potter, *White Bedouin* 24.
[259] Potter, *White Bedouin* 137.
[260] I will follow the narrative patterns of the story and refer to the character of Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim by his last name only because Stephen constantly refers to him using that name.
[261] Potter, *White Bedouin* 139.

example, during his first stay with beni Ibrahim, Stephen interprets the hospitably of his host biblically as he remembers that "Elijah was fed [by an angel] that same bread when the Prophet made his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai" and wonders perhaps that same angel "was an ancestor of Al-Ibrahim, the man who rules the wilderness around Mount Sinai." [262] There are two levels of interpretation for this incident. First, eating bread is the symbolic manifestation of the Christian ritual of communion where participants, in remembrance for the Last Supper of Christ, ceremonially consume consecrated "bread" and "wine." For Stephen, this communal act of "experiencing firsthand Arabian hospitality" reconnects him spiritually with his Mormon version of the biblical past, gives him the opportunity to discover "how the Bible has been misinterpreted," and, therefore, allows him to reclaim ancestral (Israelite) heritage by eating the same bread "Prophet" Elijah had and sharing it with supposedly "noble" descendants of celestial beings. Second, and on the physical level, the materiality of the Bedouin-made bread becomes a tangible incentive for continuing this archaeological search to prove the authenticity of the Mormon narrative in the lands of Moses, Mount Sinai, Dumah, and Midian. This eucharistic moment in the narrative shows how Stephen's delusional belief in biblical literalism can throw him into a communion with an unattainable past (only there is no wine presented to him, alas!).

However, the image that Stephen tries to build for Al-Ibrahim, allegedly as another "wilderness sheikh," is challenged once they engage in conversation, in English, at a deeper level that diversely ranges from social, religious, and cultural themes to international affairs and world politics. Stephen confesses that he is surprised to find the sheik of beni Ibrahim "an intelligent man despite his lack of a western-style education" and "that this nomadic desert chief enjoyed

[262] Potter, *White Bedouin* 140-41.

discussing world affairs."[263] His surprise stems partially from his rigid preconceived notion about Saudis, especially the Bedouin who are seen within an extremely Orientalist frame that others them as homogeneously backward, dangerous, and illiterate camel riders. Another reason for Stephen's shock involves how Al-Ibrahim's intellectual awareness defies the former's cultural paradigms for intellectuality. For Stephen, "western-style education" is the criteria for knowledge and, hence, his system of thought is disrupted once he discovers that his Bedouin host lacks this "western" base. Now, there is a nomadic Bedouin who wears "a vivid crimson turban" and lives in the middle of the Saudi desert and yet presents himself as an Oriental intellectual who is knowledgeable not about camels and livestock only but also about world religions, international relations, and American politics, while enjoying listening to BBC radio, too.[264] Stephen's subconscious Orientalist binarism is profoundly questioned since the West is no longer the center and the only source of knowledge rendering his stereotyped conjectures about the Orient largely inaccurate, if not incorrect. Indeed, and a result of his encounter with Al-Ibrahim, Stephen "was taken aback by what the Bedouin chief said. The wilderness sheikh knew details about Mormon faith."[265] It is worth noting that the narrator regularly associates Stephen's amazement of the level of Al-Ibrahim's intellectuality with the latter's spatial space like being the "nomadic desert chief" and "the wilderness sheikh." Stephen's predetermined sense of intellectual demarcation, especially of religious knowledge, collapses when he realizes that the sheik is quite erudite in his interpretation of different aspects of Mormonism like theology, polygamy, and other social and cultural practices and beliefs. Thus, Al-Ibrahim emerges as the unknown and yet knowledgeable Saudi Other who defies Stephen's imaginary perception of the

[263] Potter, *White Bedouin* 142.
[264] Potter, *White Bedouin* 136.
[265] Potter, *White Bedouin* 143.

Oriental Bedouin Other and forces a type of a fundamental reappraisal of his sense of difference and world knowledge representation.

Moreover, the most striking characteristics of Al-Ibrahim in the narrative is his unparalleled cognizance of the image of the Orient in Western culture. There are many occasions in the story where this idea of cultural cognizance about the process of Othering emerges. Yet, there is one moment when Al-Ibrahim emphatically and frankly addresses this conception as he enlightens his American (Mormon) guest:

> I might live in the desert and sleep on the floor of my tent, but I know about the religions of the world. I have a Christian Bible and I have read the essays of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato. Not only am I the governor of my people, I am also their imam. I traveled to Cairo several times and spent months studying with the great Sunni ulemas of Alshams University.[266]

This statement is very important because it reveals many facets of the chieftain's character. First, it reflects his knowledge about other cultures, religions, and philosophies. Here, Al-Ibrahim is almost a cosmopolitan person where he is able to positively interact with and synthesize different and multicultural ideas, principles, and, most importantly, views. Yes, he is still the "Oriental" figure who studied traditional Islamic knowledge, but he is simultaneously the open-minded scholar who embraces a relatively Western-influenced philosophy. Besides being open-minded, his exposure to various ideologies becomes very vital in shaping his views of tribalism, religiosity, and gender politics, which will be discussed later.

Stephen's routine visits to Al-Ibrahim's nomadic "camp" change the former's understanding of the sociocultural dynamics of Bedouinism. These regular encounters help

[266] Potter, *White Bedouin* 144.

reshape their image in Stephen's perception as he moves from being an outsider to an insider. The more he interacts with the Bedouins, the more he appreciates their entire ecosystem and if "April is the [ironically] cruellest month" for the imaginary inhabitants of T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland,"[267] "March is the best month of the year in Arabia" according to Stephen.[268] In fact, throughout his description of these visits, the Bedouin life becomes vividly alive and culturally enchanting. To illustrate this point, let us evaluate his reaction after Al-Ibrahim invites him to attend a "poetry recital by shepherds."[269] Stephen spends the night listening to many poets and is introduced to Norah, Al-Ibrahim's favorite daughter. He admits that these Bedouin poets are able to recite long poems from memory while using "all the gestures of a seasoned Shakespearean actor."[270] The poems interestingly vary widely ranging from pre-Islamic Arabic poems (or poetry from the *jahiliyyah*[271]) by Labid ibn Rabi'ah (c. 560-c. 661) and Imru' al-Qais (c. 501-554)[272] to the English love poem "Bedouin Song" by the nineteenth-century American poet, Bayard Taylor (1825-1878). Mesmerized, Stephen acknowledges that:

> As the evening passed, [he] was fascinated by the *young princess next to him* and the well-seasoned *love poems*. To a *foreigner*, these simple *desert dwellers* had *appeared* to be no more than nomads with the culture of *a singular religious focus* and a void of the

[267] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land, and Other Poems* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc, 2001), 29.
[268] Potter, *White Bedouin* , 29, 157.
[269] Potter, *White Bedouin* 153.
[270] Potter, *White Bedouin* 159.
[271] The term جاهلية *jahiliyyah* simply means in Arabic "ignorance" or "state of ignorance" and it refers to the pre-Islamic period when Arabs were in a state of ignorance "of monotheism and divine law." However, it must not be confused with the current radical interpretations of this concept, especially in the extremist discourse found in the works of Abu al-Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) who view "secular modernity" as the new form of *jahiliyyah*; See "Jahiliyyah," *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For more information on the extremist discourse, see Jeffry R. Halverson, et al. *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 39-49; John Zimmerman. "Sayyid Qutb's Influence on the 11 September Attacks." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16.2 (2004): 222-52; William Shepard. "Sayyid Qutb's Doctrine of 'Jahiliyya'," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35.4 (2003): 521-45.
[272] Although there is no fixed form for its transliteration, the name is misspelled in the novel as "Imr-Al-Quais."

more sophisticated arts. These men had no *formal education*, yet they were well versed in complex theology and *romantic poetry lore*, the most erudite of the fine arts."[273]

Semantically speaking, notice how many aspects of his system of thought are unconsciously revealed through his unwitting diction, or word choice: the impression of exotic femininity (*young princess*), innuendoes and oriental eroticism (*next to him* and *love poems*[274]), the notion of otherness (*foreigner*), spatiality (*desert dwellers*), having a preconceived image (*had appeared*), religious close-mindedness (*a singular religious focus*), emphasis on conventionality (*formal education*), Orientalist undertone (*romantic poetry lore*), etc. If we focus on the last two features, for instance, Stephen seems oblivious of the centrality of convention of orality or oral literature in Bedouin life and the richness of this tradition in the Arabian Peninsula or other places like Africa where it still continues to play a pivotal role in preserving national and ethnical identities as well as adhering to ancestral histories. The juxtaposition of orality, folklore, passion and femininity, on one level, and writing, conventionality, empiricism, and logic, on the other, reproduces another form of East-West dichotomy, which Stephen eventually comes to recognize and shows a willingness to challenge and dismantle by the end of the novel.

[273] Potter, *White Bedouin* 161. Emphasis added.
[274] Actually, this develops into a clash between Stephen and Norah's cousin, Osama, because the latter does not accept the former's flirting behavior during that night. It eventually leads to the "execution" of Osama when he is found guilty of being behind the murder of Stephen's two German archaeologists, Gerhard and Klaus.

2.5. Masculinities of the Encounter: Body and Power in Vincent Meis *Eddie's Desert Rose*

In a previous section, I discussed how Mr. Duncan, in Maqbul Al-Alawi's البدوي الصغير *Al-Badawi Al-Sagir*, gives Sa'udoun five copies of *Playboy Magazine* as gift and a token of (cultural) friendship. The unexpected generosity causes a moment of ambivalence and creates a kind of cultural and moral shock to Sa'udoun leaving him "sweating breathlessly."[275] This notion of eroticism is blend with violence when the Saudi-U.S. oil encounter, at a later stage, turns vicious in Vincent Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose*.[276] This thriller novel tells the story of two young American brothers who decide to leave their home in Greenbrier, Illinois and accept a "high-paying" job offer as English teachers at the newly formed Royal Saudi Navy Academy in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. David (Dave) Bates and his wife, Maura, along with his younger brother Eddie live for about a year in the Kingdom before Eddie suddenly "dies" in a car accident. The story suggests that Eddie dies because of his promiscuous relationship with powerful men in Saudi Arabia. Although Dave flies back to the U.S with a broken heart and casket of his brother in order to bury him in their hometown, he rejects the "official" story about the cause of death. Meis's fictional tragedy puts the light on the "strong" and "special" relationship between the two countries as well as the influence of, what he calls, "oil money" in politics. For this reason, Dave accuses the American government (the CIA) of complicity in the murder by ignoring the threats that his brother faced before his doomed last desert venture. He decides to start his own investigation, while at the same time learning about his brother's secret "adventures" from the latter's daily journal.

[275] Al-Alawi, *البدوي الصغير Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* 28.
[276] Bob Fallstrom explains that "This print version of 'Eddie's Desert Rose' follows the success of the e-book and podcast audio versions available on the Internet since January [2011];" see Bob Fallstrom. "New novel by Decatur native Vincent Meis set in Saudi Arabia." *Herald and Review*, 25 Sep., 2011, www.herald-review.com/entertainment/books-and-literature/new-novel-by-decatur-native-vincent-meis-set-in-saudi/article_ea416ab8-e557-11e0-a171-001cc4c03286.html

In the Kingdom, Dave, Maura, and Eddie spend most of their time in "the residential compound, where the Americans lived."[277] (2). Every morning, Dave and Eddie leave their compound and go to work inside the "the Saudi part of the base" where they are welcomed by "the woeful sound of prayer call" from the minaret speakers.[278] (2). This early and gloomy emphasis on raising the issue of the compartmentalization of society into different camps or parts resembles the scenario of building "oil camps" in Munif's *Cities of Salt* and Al-Alawi's *The Young Bedouin*. Mr. Duncan's insistence, in the latter novel, on building the American camp on the top of the hill becomes a reminder in the story of the short-lived colonial past. Likewise, it signals one of the main turning points in the Saudi-American encounter in Munif's story of Wadi al-Uyoun. Forcing people to live in prearranged camps makes things "undecided and uneasy for several weeks after the camp had been built."[279] Besides, for "the first time in their lives, places seemed hostile; they were so awfully cruel,"[280] Munif's narrative accentuates the notion of compartmentalization to indicate the disruption of the local ecosystem.

Vitalis defines these residential compounds as "oil enclave[s]."[281] For an illustration, he, describes one of them as a "fenced-in compound originally known as "American Camp" where the firm built its headquarters and housed all U.S. employees. Saudis lived apart in Saudi Camp, the skilled Italian builders brought from Eritrea to build the refinery made up Italian Camp, and so on."[282] Meis builds his narrative on this notion of compartmentalization that is based on the "racialized order inside American Camp, where Saudis and others were forbidden to remain after

[277] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 2.
[278] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 2.
[279] Munif, *Cities of Salt* 78.
[280] Munif, *Cities of Salt,* 124.
[281] Vitalis, *America's Kingdom* 200.
[282] Vitalis, *America's Kingdom* 200.

working hours or to enter the part of the camp where American families were housed."[283] The compartmentalization in *Eddie's Desert Rose* can be seen as a "social division of labor" as the French sociologist Emile Durkheim expounds, where members of society are divided into groups on the basis of what he terms "mechanical solidarity […] whose cohesion was exclusively the result of resemblances" (63).[284] In such environment the sense of individuality is almost lost.

This social mechanism is also reflected in the representations of Saudis in the story and partially explains the tragic end of Eddie. On his personal website, Meis explains that "for a brief time I lived and worked in Saudi Arabia, teaching Saudi naval cadets."[285] Building on that fact, it seems that he had to recourse to generalizing his own experience with living in the specially built residential premises for American workers where he was working in Saudi Arabia. Hence, Saudi society is depicted as generally living in compartmentalized communities with the least possible interaction, especially with regard to social class and religiosity, leave alone gender relations. The Saudi government is depicted as being able to sectionalize society into dissimilar groups that are dissociated from their sociocultural context. However, the same dystopian image is ironically portrayed as a *safe zone*, especially for Americans. In a chapter titled "Back in the Arms of Allah," the narrator emphasizes that, "Terrorist acts against Americans in other parts of the Middle East would temporarily stir up talk of increased security, but concern quickly subsided in the safe atmosphere of Saudi Arabia where the people were held in a tight rein."[286] The irony is tripled when the readers notices that the setting is the 1980s when the American brothers, Eddie

[283] Vitalis, *America's Kingdom* 201.
[284] See Emile Durkheim, *On Morality and Society: Selected Writings*, ed. Robert N. Bellah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 69. "Mechanical solidarity" is the opposite of "organic solidarity" where people are "constituted, not by repetition of similar, homogenous segments, but a system of different organs each of which has a special role, and which are themselves formed by differentiated parts […] coordinated and subordinated one to another around the same central organ" (Durkheim, *On Morality* 69);
[285] Vincent Meis. "Eddie's Desert Rose," www.vincentmeis.com/eddies-desert-rose/.
[286] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 135.

and Dave, are supposedly living and interacting with "pre-Al Qaeda fundamentalist Saudis" as the blurb, on the back cover of the novel specifically identifies. Yet, in his own review of the novel on his website, Meis states that "This was all written [the novel] before anyone had ever heard of Al Qaeda. The Middle East at the time I was there was relatively calm compared to what it is now." These are just a few examples of the inconsistencies in the novel and its narrative structure.[287]

The narrative seems to overlook these discursive contradictions, nonetheless. The story presents this Saudi space as socially and culturally restrictive as if it were a pigeonhole where young Americans like Eddie are always eager to escape. Hence, once Eddie dares to venture outside "the American compound," feeling *lonely*, he supposedly encounters the Saudi wider space and discovers these categorizations because his "gayness had gotten him involved with" the powerful elite Saudi society.[288] *Eddie's Desert Rose* complicates these restrictive and menacing imagined dynamics by incorporating the Orientalist notion of the erotic east with its suggestive opulence of odalisques of the harem. Orientalist paintings, for example, are an excellent example of how this discourse has influenced the textual and visual representations of both the "oriental" Other and body. Notable Orientalist painters like Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), and Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824), among others, do feature some homoerotic moments in their works. Similar, associations appear in the works of female artists as the Polish-Danish painter Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819-1881) whose "vignette in the harem creates a *mise-en-abyme*, contrasting harem and European ways of

[287] For instance, the depiction of Eddie's father is problematic because the narrative hints at his sexual abuse of a child and then jumps to his other affairs without any development in the characterization. All this happens before abruptly inventing his weird suicide; he kills himself by monoxide poisoning.
[288] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 175.

exhibiting art in a moment of transcultural humor."[289] Her works are often discussed as illustrations of how Orientalist art "offered [European] women opportunities to transgress restrictions on their role in the public sphere" as Reina Lewis puts it.[290] The same concept of transgressing restriction is implicitly deployed in the novel. It unwittingly surfaces as a result of some Westerners' (gross) oversimplification of gender politics in Arab/Muslim culture and how it is often condensed in merely the notion of gender segregation. The novel problematizes the notion of gender segregation in Saudi society by imagining the Kingdom as a strictly confined space for western men. I argue that the latter point is a result of the Orientalist discourse and how Western (male) writers present the East as an inaccessible place for men, which is fueled by their infatuation with "eroticism" of harem, or, what happens inside it, to be more accurate.

What attracts Eddie to non-Western men is their "oriental" exoticism. For instance, he confesses that he "had been charmed by the *good looks* and *exotic sensuality* of the Pakistani" driver, Adil.[291] The novel shows that these moments in the oil encounter reveal an inherent Orientalist sexual stereotypes embedded within the racialized and gendered discourse of the narrative. Eddie's journal records the moments when the narrative's "fictional gaze has turned inward, becoming ever more introspective, ever more concentrated on its own self-definition" as Gosh elegantly puts it.[292] Thus, the journal divulges Eddie's anxiety about how to simultaneously deal with his sexual orientation—his family is oblivious to his homosexuality—and the cultural encounter with the "oriental" Other on a daily basis. The journal itself can be interpreted as a

[289] Joan DelPlato and Julie F. Codell, *Orientalism, Eroticism and Modern Visuality in Global Cultures* (London: Routledge. 2016), 19, for further discussion see Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[290] Qtd. in DelPlato and Codell. *Orientalism* 17.
[291] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 54. Emphasis added.
[292] Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel," *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 138-51 at 140.

discursive space (within the novel) where Eddie has the opportunity (alas, posthumously!) to "speak with an alternative voice free from or subversive of the dominant (male) discourse."[293] These complexities are highlighted in light of Eddie's interaction with notions of difference and alterity within and outside his American context. His relationship with that Other, in particular, becomes one of "'power, of domination,' [and] governed by 'a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections,'" as Said frames it.[294]

His suppressed emotions lead to muted rage that affects his views of Saudi society and is disseminated through his writings: "What had I been angry about? I don't remember. No doubt a minor annoyance due to an inexplicable part of this culture [Saudi/Muslim]. In this country, opposing cultures collide for two reasons: money and sex. Yet we, my new friend and I, play this game of wanting neither from each other."[295] Part of Eddie's frustration is actually due to his need to resort to bribing other male partners by giving them money in order to experience a fleeting sexual moment that usually tends to be "clumsy and over quickly, much less interesting than the buildup".[296] Sexual bribery maybe the only recourse for Eddie since the narrative paradoxically portrays Saudi Arabia as a space of potential "exoticism and promiscuous sexuality" for Westerners and yet "it was not available to them as a site of heterosexual desire."[297] Thus, he laments these ventures because "they [his assumed ex-partners] usually walk away with a piece of my heart. I guess I should consider myself lucky that this one [Adil] only got 500 dollars, my intuition was right; my guilt about being a privileged Westerner was wrong.

[293] Shirley Foster, "Colonialism and Gender in the East: Representations of the Harem in the Writings of Women Travellers," *Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 6-17 at 7.
[294] Said, *Orientalism* 8. Qtd. in Foster, "Colonialism and Gender in the East"6 .
[295] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 52.
[296] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 54.
[297] Foster, "Colonialism and Gender in the East" 7.

Money or Sex? Sometimes both."[298]. This complex mesh of interconnections between money, oil economics, East/West binary, and sexual frustration parallels Ghosh's argument that "the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic. It is perhaps the one cultural issue on which the two sides are in complete agreement."[299] This "unspeakable" truth or secret about Eddie's life consumes most of the novel and controls greatly the politics of representations (of "oriental" bodies).

Meis aspires to present a political novel but his narrative depicts a politicized interpretations of Eddie's sexual ambivalence and premature disappearance in the story, instead. In a Hamletian moment, Dave's wife, Maura, decries the "unspeakable" clandestine cooperation between the U.S. and Saudi government and believes that "there was something rotten" in this bond.[300] The "special relationship" between the two countries is depicted as purely capitalistic and overtly inhuman once Dave discovers that the U.S. government is trying to cover up. "We are human beings," he cries, "not cogs in a great international oil-pumping machine."[301] Here, he presumes the role of the "other" who resists being pushed to the margins by the "black"[302] and ugly side of neocolonialism. Like his murdered brother, Dave is another "privileged Westerner [who] was wrong" in believing that he has "the freedom to question, the ability to right a wrong."[303] After returning to Saudi Arabia to personally investigate the murder of his brother, Dave becomes the "white" Western who, ironically, does "really need saving," to use Lila Abu-

[298] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 55.
[299] Ghosh, "Petrofiction" 139.
[300] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 117.
[301] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 117.
[302] Presumably the color of crude oil.
[303] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 140.

Lughod's term. In fact, Dave's life is *saved* by a Filipino worker who sacrifices himself to help him and his wife escape a manhunt.[304]

From a postcolonial perspective, the narrative's ambivalent stance on (American) self-perception and how it intersects with the dichotomies of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality reveals a discourse that is riddled with "its [own] fraught internal divisions and the dialectical relationships that mesh together [neo]colonial agents and subjects in unstable cross-identifications."[305] The novel portrays Dave as a person who discovers that economic imperialism is merciless and inhuman by highlighting how it overlaps with multiple non-economic aspects of his life in the narrative, i.e., the crime of murdering his brother. Unable to encounter the neocolonial economic power and navigate its sociocultural and political complexities, he turns his wrath towards Saudi society because he sees it as a product of the neocolonial project that "[has] suddenly been thrust unto the world's light, and with little preparation."[306] David's misdirected anger mirrors his brother's sexual interactions with the residents (both Saudis and foreigners) and both cases reveal the overlapping of an internalized neocolonial ambivalence and the undercurrent of sexual ambivalence in the novel.[307] In fact, the novel tries to sexualize and engender the oil encounter, but it fails miserably in producing a well-rounded rendition of these moments—including the ambiguous relations between the two brothers—as well as in its representations of the (Saudi) Other. It even fails to offer a counter-hegemonic narrative, at least, since it overtly concerns with the critique of economic imperialism.

[304] Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?"
[305] Lee Wallace, *Sexual Encounters: Pacific Texts Modern Sexualities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 109.
[306] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 140.
[307] Wallace touches on this notion of overlapping in terms of approaching ambivalence, especially in colonial discourse, see Wallace, *Sexual Encounters* 110

Consequently, Dave's representations become appendant with generalizations and recycled clichés. For instance, his insistence on uncovering the truth about the murder of his brother is accompanied by tendency towards compartmentalizing Saudi society into two socio-religious categories: people who "want to open up the country to the West…[and those] who would like get out all foreigners and make Saudi Arabia like before, before there was the oil and money. These people will do anything because they believe Allah is with them."[308] Such rigid categorization explains the flat renderings of Saudi characters in the novel. Meis's Saudis can also be seen as distorted versions of pro-American or pro-West individuals, on the one hand, like Ibn Rasheed and Sa'oudon in *Cities of Salt* and *The Young Bedouin*, respectively. On the other hand, Meis's Saudi characters lack the tenacious vividness of Munif's Miteb al-Hathal and al-Alawi's Tala'e Bin Shoun. Indeed, Meis's *Eddie's Desert Rose* falls short of producing a richly developed characterizations, but above all it ultimately fails "to establish a dialogic relation with the Other, in a way that *erodes*, instead of *erecting*, difference."[309]

[308] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose* 109.
[309] Foster. "Colonialism and Gender" 7.

CHAPTER THREE
FEMINISM AND PARATEXTUALITY OF (NEO)ORIENTALISM

The invention of the pornographic East needs to be read against the slow decline of Ottoman power and the rising encroachment of European nation and empire building at its expense. It was against this backdrop that, starting in the early nineteenth century, British authors began to turn their attention away from the Ottoman harem, with its corruption and consequent loss of power, to the romanticized desert of the stalwart, liberty-loving "noble Bedouin"—thus paving the way for the setting and story of *The Sheik.*

Hsu-Ming Teo

Gender was therefore not a sub-domain of Orientalism; it was fundamental to the structuring of an epistemology of the Other and ontology of the Western self.

Lindsey Moore

Introduction

3.1. Cross-Cultural Influence of Orientalist Discourse

The introductory part of this chapter offers glimpses into some the less discussed aspects of the evolution of the construction of the image, perception, space of the female "Oriental" Other from a cross-cultural perspective before delving into reviewing its manifestations in contemporary portrayal of Saudi women. Hence, this analysis tries to go beyond the redundant approaches that focus conventionally on binarism in their engagement with Orientalism, especially in terms of how politics of gender is navigated. Henceforth, as we discuss the role of Orientalist discourse in shaping the representations of Arab and Muslim womanhood in the West, I think, it is imperative to notice that there were some attempts to offer "alternative readings of the Oriental harem" as Hsu-Ming Teo puts it in the introduction of her excellent book, *Desert Passions*.[310] Most of these readings are found in the travel accounts and memoirs

[310] Hsu-Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 7.

by European women travelers who visited or lived for some time in the East during the era of Ottoman Empire such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her observations in *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763). The written accounts of these writers challenged the fixed image of the harem as an exclusively private space and the veil, among others, in the Western imagination and offered different perspectives of how they are mediated and perceived during that epoch. Montagu's letters, for example, provided rare glimpses into the inside world of the harem and, therefore, contested the prevailing European (male) perception of this private sphere which was usually inaccessible to men. Teo argues that the cultural significance of such portrayal stems from that fact that:

> female-authored accounts […] *desexualized* the seraglio and showed it as a *domestic* space comparable to the bourgeois home [and yet] had little impact on the general European romantic imagination. Instead, Western ideas of the harem and the romantic East continued to be shaped by male authors, especially Byron, whose Eastern tales created a palimpsest of Orientalist characters and topoi recognizable in twentieth-century romance novels.[311]

Indeed, it could be argued that the influence of such (male) Orientalist imaginary and the invention of a sexualized Orient remained part of the Western perception of the Arabo-Islamic East from the late eighteenth century through the era of European imperialism in the Middle East in the twentieth century.

However, let us flip the argument over and turn our emphasis from Arab/Muslim womanhood to the analysis of the impact of these "sexualized" representations of the Orient on

[311] Teo, *Desert Passions* 7. Emphasis is mine.

the image Western women themselves as the latter struggle for various kinds of reforms in their communities. The question becomes one of cross-cultural influence and transformation. In many cases, Orientalism in general, and specifically the image of the female Muslim, played an underrated role in shaping the politics of gender within various Western feminist movements and ideologies. Both Teo and Joyce Zonana,[312] for instance, assert that many Western female writers and women's rights advocates like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), and Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) have employed, with varying degrees, the Orientalist discourse to negotiate a space within their respective (patriarchal/masculine) cultures. Specifically and in total agreement with what Saad Al-Bazei characterizes as "transforming the Orient and Oriental Muslims into a vehicle for ... criticism of the West itself,"[313] Zonana reads these cross-cultural deployments of Orientalist discourse in the West beyond the context of power and dominance and the binary oppositions of East and West in her engaging analysis of what she terms "feminist Orientalism" in *Jane Eyre*:

> feminist orientalism is a rhetorical strategy (and a form of thought) by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superiority. If the lives of women in England or France or the United States can be compared to the lives of women in "Arabia," then the Western feminist's desire to change the status quo can be represented not as a radical attempt to restructure the West but as a conservative effort to

[312] Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of 'Jane Eyre'," *Signs* 18 (1993): 592-617 at 592.
[313] Qtd. in Joyce Zonana "The Sultan and the Slave" 594. See also Saad Al-Bazei, "Literary Orientalism in Nineteenth- Century Anglo-American Literature: Its Formation and Continuity" (Unpublished Dissertation, Purdue University, 1983), 6.

> make the West more like itself. Orientalism […] thus becomes a major premise in the formulation of numerous Western feminist arguments.[314]

Zonana shows that these writers used the prevailing stereotyped images of the desperate harem, patriarchy, and despotism inwardly to develop their feminist discourse further and ultimately improve women's status in the West. Here, Orientalism is rehashed culturally to contribute to feminist dialectic beyond the typical sense of the word. It also reveals how cross-cultural discourses were used creatively to gather more momentum during different stages of feminist movements and their campaigns for societal changes in the West.

Furthermore, there are other cases where these (masculinist) conjectures are "counterposed by an alternative set of knowledges constructed through Western's and Oriental women's reports of harem life."[315] Reina Lewis contends that some works by Western women can be regarded as "attempts to establish differently gendered knowledges about the East and West" as they reflect the variances between the male and female (Orientalist) gaze, especially in the case of the dynamics of visual Orientalism and imperialism. As an art historian who specializes in gender history in postcolonial and Middle Eastern studies, Lewis examines a set of specially selected yet less popular and even "lost" works "to explore how far a white Western woman could accede to the enunciative position of Orientalist discourse; or rather, to unpick the singularity of that positionality and reframe it in relation to the evident, if necessarily partial, access available to a gendered subject[s] like Browne [(1829-1901),[316] George Eliot (1819-1880) and others]."[317] Generally speaking, both the textual and visual oeuvres by these writers can be seen as a modest and unaffected version of a counter-narrative/representation that postulate new

[314] Zonana "The Sultan and the Slave" 594.
[315] See Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), 129.
[316] That is the French orientalist painter, who called herself, Henrietta Browne.
[317] Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* 129.

insights to what Leila Ahmed calls "The Discourse of the Veil"[318] and Amira Jarmakani terms "mythologized figures of Arab womanhood" in her discussion of "Veiled Intentions."[319] As pioneer women writers, Lady Montagu, Browne, Eliot, Wollstonecraft, Browning, Fuller, the Brontë(s), Nightingale and many others, raised their voices, challenged the homogenized image of the (female) Other, and therefore, culturally countered the dominant narrative about gender, otherness, and ethnicity within the Orientalist (masculine) discourse.

3.2. Rebranding Orientalist Discourse of (Saudi) Arabia

I personally find it intriguing to notice how Western women, especially Europeans, were able to effectively utilize their connections and positions within their small social circles to push for a more accessible and nuanced narrative about the Arabo-Muslim (female) Other within the public sphere and societal milieu. Women like Sophia Lane Poole (1804-1891) Lady Anne Blunt (1837-1917), for instance, enjoyed a strong "Orientalist family background,"[320] to use Lewis' term, and published their accounts that described their travels, encounters with people, and even their "access" to the harem.[321] Although some of their works could not escape the sense of "superiority" and were heavily edited by their spouses, several women maintained their original voice and provided captivating narratives (both visual and textual). Of particular interest are the writings of Lady Blunt who wrote *A Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates* (1879) and *Pilgrimage to*

[318] See chapter eight of Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 144-68.
[319] For more information, see chapter four, "Veiled Intentions: The Cultural Mythology Of Veils, Harems, And Belly Dancers In The Service Of Empire, Security, And Globalization," in Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.139-84.
[320] Lady Anne Blunt, for example, was the maternal granddaughter of the great English poet Lord Byron (1788-1824).
[321] Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* 145.

Nejd (1881).[322] The second book, in fact and despite its blinkered portrayals of the locals, represents an innovative contribution since Blunt enriched the descriptions of her travels in the Arabian Peninsula with some extremely valuable drawings (illustrations, portraits, and a map) which, in turn, would offer rare visual renderings of the Bedouin life during that time while seeking and projecting an independent feminine voice within the realm of British (masculine) canonical travel writings.[323]

Since the discussion of Lady Blunt's work concerns the Arabian Peninsula, let us consider closely a more recent example of Western women writing about their experiences in this particular area. Sandra Mackey (1937-2015) is an American political journalist who traveled through the Middle East and wrote a few books about her views on the culture, people, and geopolitics of this region.[324] In *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom* (1987) she particularly describes her four-year stay (1978-1980 and 1982-1984) as "an underground journalist" in Saudi Arabia.[325] Like the above-mentioned nineteenth-century women writers who, during their sojourns in the Arab Orient, and as Lewis points out, had "access to things [their male companions were] unable to observe," Mackey theorizes her status and positionality within the Saudi public sphere in such manner when she presents herself as a Western woman writer living

[322] For an excellent review on this topic see Geoffrey P. Nash, *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East 1830-1926* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016). Interestingly, Nash dedicated chapter three to the discussion to the transformation in the ideologies and principles of Lady Blunt's husband Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922).
[323] Opportunely, Google offers a digitized version of the both volumes of *Pilgrimage to Nejd* from the New York Public Library. See, Anne Blunt, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd.* 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1881) <http://books.google.com/books?id=dQsYAAAAYAAJ&oe=UTF-8>.
[324] Besides *The Saudis*, Sandra Mackey has published other books on the Middle East and the U.S. involvement in the region: Sandra Mackey. *Lebanon: Death of a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); *Passion and Politics: The Turbulent World of the Arabs* (New York: Plume, 1994); *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation* (New York: Dutton, 1996); *Reckoning: Iraq and the Legacy of Saddam Hussein* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); *Lebanon: A House Divided* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); *Mirror of the Arab World: Lebanon in Conflict* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).
[325] Sandra Mackey, *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2002), 3.

in Saudi Arabia.[326] While the book offers a politicized portrayal of the Kingdom, her narrative constantly overemphasizes the stereotyped images of an unwavering and homogenized patriarchal society and overwhelmingly suppressed and marginalized women. This point is even propagandized on the back cover as the blurb highlights that Mackey lived there "ostensibly—as far as the [Saudi] authorities knew—as the *wife* of an American doctor. But she saw things and traveled to *places rarely seen by any outsider* (let alone a *Western woman*), and writing under the aliases Michael Collins and Justin Coe she successfully smuggled out a series of crucial articles on Saudi culture and politics."[327] This shows a remarkably overlapping discourse between the two separate generations of women writers and their representations of their engagement with the Arabo-Islamic Orient in terms of self-image, identity, gender politics, and relationship with the Other.

Reflecting an Orientalist sensibility, this discourse presents Saudi Arabia as an ahistorical space of the enigmatic yet dangerous Orient (especially for Western white women) that nonetheless needs to be uncovered, if not dominated, at least culturally. There are still, of course, the elements of the harem, dangerous Oriental men, and mysticism but all of these lingering Orientalist concepts are modernized to meet the imagined expectations and stereotypical prospects of a contemporary western readership. Hence, it is not totally surprising to find chapters titled "The Coming of a Foreigner," "Magic Kingdom, "Servants of God," "Living with Islam," "Bedouin Pride," "Mysteries of the *Hareem,*" and "The Shackles of Sex," and "Castle of Sand," etc.[328] The reader will also notice the political undertone that colors the discourse of neo-Orientalism in other headings like "Swords and Missiles: The Search for Security" and "The

[326] Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* 145.
[327] Mackey, *The Saudis*, from the back-cover blurb. Emphasis added.
[328] Mackey, *The Saudis* 3, 21, 63, 83, 100, 143, 122, 357.

World Creeps Closer." Taking all these dynamics into account, Mackey shrouds her narrative with elements of thrillers—espionage, conspiracies, exotic locales, phobias. She is the heroine who "gained entrance" into a magical space—where "the reindeer becoming camels" in a bleak Christmas—just few years after the 1973-1974 oil embargo with a burning "desire to record the extradentary conjunction of time and place" while simultaneously dodging the dangerous men of the "secret police" or "ducking authorities" as she ardently puts it.[329] As an American female political reporter who is cognizant of her multi-layered sense of otherness, Mackey claims some type of a distinctive minority status. She depicts herself accordingly as a woman who lives in what can be described as a potential double or even triple jeopardy—being a foreign Western woman living and writing about the sociopolitical nature of a "paternalistic" society that is perceived as both "puritan" and unapologetically misogynistic.[330]

The narrator in *The Saudis* plays with one of the typical Orientalist topoi, i.e., "penetration" of the Orient.[331] But, instead of having a white male westerner "penetrating" a feminized Orient, Mackey's book presents a white American female who is able to infiltrate an exotic yet self-enclosed and patriarchal (Arabian) geography. She braggingly asserts that "Saudi authorities had no idea that a political scientist by training and a journalist by inclination—and as an added indignity, a *woman*—had *penetrated* the carefully constructed and relentlessly patrolled walls that Saudi Arabia retains around itself."[332] The main residual Orientalist constituent in her

[329] Mackey, *The Saudis* 1, 93, 5, 372.
[330] Mackey, *The Saudis* 358, 13, 122.
[331] The notion of penetrating the Oriental space is not new, of course. In Orientalism, for instance, Edward Said calls it "the idea of Western penetration of Oriental expanses" in his discussion of multiple examples of the role of "the imperial constellation [in] facilitating Euro-American penetration of the Orient. This has never stopped" (*Orientalism*, 213, 294). He traces the manifestation of different forms of this concept in the imagination of Lord Cromer, Alphonse de Lamartine, Gustave Flaubert, Edward William Lane, Ernest Renan, and Richard Francis Burton, among others.
[332] Mackey, *The Saudis* 3. Emphasis is mine.

declaration here is the concept of Western penetration of the well-guarded and magical Oriental space, both public and private, especially the *harem*.

Hence, if we scrutinize the cultural and sociohistorical construction of the word "penetration," especially from the perspective of the politics of gender and identity, we notice that it is a masculine term that has been closely associated with the representation and colonization of the Orient. Taken into consideration that Orientalism "was an exclusively male province" as Said argues, penetration becomes a more problematic choice here for various reasons.[333] Initially, the term raises the question of subjectivity as it implies the writer's subconscious tendency for Orientalizing, exoticizing and, therefore, othering Saudi culture and geography. In other words, it embodies the feminization of Saudi space where Mackey presents herself like a classical Orientalist for whom "the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler."[334] At the beginning of *The Saudi,* Mackey juggles her representations of Saudi society with her rationales of doing so as well as her femininity. Thus, she states that "inside [Saudi Arabia], my friends perceived me as a dutiful wife stalwartly suffering exile in a fanatical, intolerant Islamic society that regards women as little more than breeding stock" and yet "being a woman gave access to the secluded world of Saudi women. I went to their houses and tents, I watched them shop in the sequestered women's *souqs*. I went to their weddings. I questioned and probed about their lives, marriages, their children, their ambitions, and their lifestyles."[335] Furthermore, she asserts: "My motivation to continue my underground reporting was a desire to record the extraordinary conjunction of time and place."[336] Her fluctuation between suffering

[333] Said, *Orientalism* 207.
[334] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985): 89–107 at 103.
[335] Mackey, *The Saudis* 3, 4.
[336] Mackey, *The Saudis* 5.

from marginality and the near invisibility of her (gender) identity within Saudi society to perceiving herself as having limited but powerful agency indicates her inner struggle for self-presentation within the wider Western/American context. It also parallels her dilemma in maintaining a balance of exhibiting elements of despotism while enhancing the attractiveness of her narrative that Said alludes to earlier.

To expound this model/theory in some details, let us analyze the discourse of her phraseology and wording. On the one hand, words like "fanatical, intolerant Islamic society," "breeding stock," "sequestered," "desire, "extraordinary" reveal that her encounter with Saudi space has indeed put the politics of her identity under pressure as it demonstrates how she constitutes her own cultural and feminine identity by engendering Saudi space and presenting it in a sexualized, colonialist and Orientalist context where its society is in need to be penetrated, explored, if not even hegemonized and controlled by a superior (Western) culture. On the other hand, terms like "questioned" and "probed about" can be seen as distinct conceptual units of Orientalist semantics where the writer promises (or at least explicitly undertakes) to "articulate the East, making the Orient deliver up its secrets under the learned authority of a philologist whose power derives from the ability to unlock secret."[337] (Said 138). Of course, Mackey is not Ernest Renan (1823-1892), the French philologist whom Said refers to here, yet the back cover of *The Saudis* pledges that in "this skillful and thorough examination, Mackey reveals the schizophrenic nature of a country in transformation."[338] This recurring emphasis on the articulation of Saudis', especially women's, emotions and voices as well as promise of divulging their "secrets" from the first lines of the book to its blurb typifies the intersection of

[337] Said, *Orientalism* 138.
[338] Mackey, *The Saudis*, from the back-cover blurb.

(neo)Orientalism, patriarchy, postcoloniality and gaze theory where Saudi society exoticized, explored, and then probed in order to be rationalized and controlled by Western culture—to use Said's terminology.[339]

The use of these particular terminologies parallels the writer's neocolonial gaze, (unconscious) projection of her perceptions of the Saudi political, sociocultural, and geographical spaces and how she imagines/interprets her presence, and, therefore, *role* in these contexts. In fact, the very first two chapters of the book reflect this notion as they are entitled "The Coming of a Foreigner" and "The Magic Kingdom," respectively.[340] She becomes like a heroine who is able to disobey and skillfully manage to elude a patriarchal figure in an exotic locale to insist on her feminine identity and claim a voice of her own. Importantly, and from an Orientalist perspective, she pushes the boundaries of gender politics by adopting male pseudonyms when she publishes her "underground reporting" on Saudi Arabia in the West, while maintaining her alleged anonymity internally by being perceived "as a dutiful wife."[341] "My male pseudonyms," argues Mackey, "not only gave me credibility in the Western press (still not totally liberated from the male mystique) but also afforded an added measure of protection."[342] This reveals her struggle with an existential duality (even if temporarily) between concealing her feminine writing identity locally and claiming a male pen name to gain a hearing within the public sphere of Western readership as she alternates between these two situational identities.[343]

[339] Said, *Orientalism* 138.
[340] Mackey, *The Saudis* 3, 21.
[341] Mackey, *The Saudis* 1.
[342] Mackey, *The Saudis* 4.
[343] I am using this term in line with Stella Ting-Toomey who defines it as: "situational identities refer to role, relationship, facework, and symbolic identities that are adaptive self-image and highly situational dependent. These identities are changeable—dependent on the configuration of the interaction goals, individual wants and needs, roles, statuses, and activities in the situation […] they are less stable and are driven by external situational features and are subsequently internalized by individuals operating in the society;" See Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating Across Cultures* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999),36.

It seems that Mackey goes through transitory periods of complex femininity as she fluctuates between navigating (and implicitly accepting) the traditional gender paradigm within Saudi Arabia and concealing it by wearing the (masculine) mask of "credibility" in the West. These two concurrent sets of gender and knowledge relations can be seen as the author's attempt to rebalance what seems to be a socially and culturally constructed gender binary of private/public spheres and how it intersects with the act of writing itself—or "reporting" as she terms it. This is, of course, inherently problematic. She claims that her "deception" of anonymity, for instance, "afforded an added measure of protection," yet this choice of male pseudonyms also added a layer of (unintentional) uncertainty since it can be read as complicity in regulating or even maintaining such binarism and gender hierarchies/roles in Western symbolic and institutional contexts. It contradicts her criticism of the constructions of gender relations in Saudi Arabia as she argues that "[f]rom a Western point of view, women show an alarming obedience to the basic presuppositions of the Saudis' traditional culture. Although there are pockets of resistance, the vast majority of women continue to accept their imprisonment at the hands of men."[344] On the other hand, and from a gender studies standpoint, this may mirror the struggle of the female authorial voice in finding a space in the conventional structure of the gendered world of "the Western press" and therefore transcending "the male mystique." Thus, she disguises her fear of the male-biased values and gender prejudices in the realm of publishing during the 1970s and1980s (the time of writing her book) by claiming/imagining a "fear" of Saudi "secret police." Employing a neo-Orientalist tactic, she politicized this sense of fear inside the Saudi space as she portrays herself as a new type of hero(ine) who is being chased by Saudi authorities because she is the writer who "reveals the schizophrenic nature" of the Kingdom and

[344] Mackey, *The Saudis* 123.

consequently shakes the "the very core of the Saudi psyche—an obsession with how they appear to others."[345] She unwittingly seems to share this type of *obsession* by regulating how her (feminine) voice *appears* to her westerner audience. She frames herself as a Western feminist who pushes against the constraints of patriarchy and gender discrepancies and biases within both the Saudi and American milieus, respectively. "Yet surprisingly," Mackey contends, "my greatest advantage in reporting on Saudi Arabia was not my strategic position [working as an editor in the Ministry of Planning] but rather the fact that *I am a woman*."[346] Here, she accentuates her feminine identity, again more than her creativity, to "ostensibly" signal her insubordination and resistance of both the imagined public-private sphere binaries and the stereotypical construction of gender roles. For this reason, and since she is, supposedly, addressing readers in the West, Mackey begins her first chapter, "The Coming of a Foreigner," with mentioning her writings for newspapers and journals such as *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Quarterly*, and others while simultaneously linking this with the need of using male pseudonyms and fear of being caught in Saudi Arabia.[347] These oscillations between emphasizing her feminine persona in her writings and referring to her previous publications reflect the overlapping intricacies of gender politics in both cultures, on the one hand, and how Mackey reacts to her reception, status, and even positionality within the implicitly biased marketplace of publishing, on the other, while flaunting to the Western reader her skills in evading the Saudi "secret police."

The latter point of publicity is still endorsed even nowadays by other Western writers. Since the main focus in this study is on the Saudi-US relationship, let us look, in passing, at Zoë

[345] Mackey, *The Saudis* 4.
[346] Mackey, *The Saudis* 4. Emphasis added.
[347] Mackey, *The Saudis*

Ferraris, for example, who advertises on the back cover of her first novel *Finding Nouf* (2009) that she "moved to Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the first Gulf war to live with her then husband and his extended family of Saudi-Palestinian Bedouins, who had never welcomed an American into their lives before."[348] It is undeniably against the backdrop of such classical themes, clichés, and beliefs like Bedouinism, inaccessibility of the harem, exotic sojourns to the East, and foreignness that this short biography on the blurb is mediated to the Western audience.[349] Indeed, these factors influence the reception of the work as they reflect the paratextual nature of the intersectionality of the politics of representation and gender, (neo)Orientalist discourse, and cross-cultural encounter, on the first hand, and the tools and strategies of a rapidly changing and highly competitive world of book marketing, especially the literary marketplace, on the other.[350]

[348] Ferraris, *Finding Nouf,* from the back-cover blurb.
[349] For a taste of the discussion of the dynamics of global publishing marketplace and the world of literature see, for example, Claire Squires, *Marketing Literature: The Making of Contemporary Writing in Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009); Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), especially chapter two: "Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace" (44-75).
[350] There is also an interesting chapter by Ruth Abou Rached that elegantly touches upon the relations between feminism and marketing strategies, see chapter 13 "Feminist Paratranslation as Literary Activism: Iraqi Writer-Activist Haifa Zangana in the Post-2003 US" in Olga Castro and Emek Ergun, eds., *Feminist Translation Studies: Local and Transnational Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017), 195-208.

3.3. Modern Romances, (Neo)Orientalism and Gender Politics

This brief discussion sheds some light on one of the least examined aspects of the West's interaction with Orientalist discourse on the societal level and how some women writers utilized it—among other theories, of course—to challenge the then existing (and still) status quo of gender politics in their respective communities or to publicize their travels in the Arabo-Islamic "Orient." I will conclude now with a more contemporaneous cultural deployment of the Orientalist praxis as I briefly examine one model of the role of Orientalism in American popular culture. Let us, for instance, explore these dynamics in romance fiction since it has become one of the most read genres for the majority of the public readership.[351] The other reason for surveying romance fiction is the fact that the settings of most of these stories revolve around the East-West encounter, or at least engage with the (racial) Other, and where gender relations are saliently and constantly (re)negotiated. The dynamic nature of this literary genre becomes somewhat indicative of various emerging and developing trends (in politics of representation) in popular culture.

Summarizing the literary and cultural significance of romance novels, Amy Burge, for instance, succinctly states in *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction* that:

> In fact, as products of contemporary Western popular culture, the sheikh romances can be revealing of popular attitudes towards the Middle East. Several scholars have considered sheikh romances in light of global politics...For example, Amira Jarmakani notes that sheikh romances 'conflate [...] ethnic/religious/geographic identities, while blurring any direct reference to the Middle East or Islam,' ensuing that religion, so

[351] For example, Teo, *Desert Passions* 4, asserts that even "the al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, saw no diminution in the popularity of these novels…On the contrary, 2002 saw the peak of publications." She estimates that in 2005 there were "fifty-one million romance readers in the United States, prompting ironic commentary in American and British newspapers and Time magazine."

> much a part of Western political discourse on the Middle East, does not overtly characterize these romances,…which tend to elide overt reference to Islam. The hybridity of the sheikh equally speaks to contemporary concerns about otherness. Such changes indicate how the Sheikh genre continues to develop and point to the future evolution of the sheikh romance.[352]

The casual narrative fluidity and evolving nature of romance novels and how they intersect with many theoretical frameworks, especially gender politics, alterity, and sociocultural encounter make them plausible critical candidates for much deeper interdisciplinary (comparative) examination. In this regard, I certainly agree with Hsu-Ming Teo on the belief that the discourse of "feminist Orientalism" tends to constitute the main theoretical underpinning of some characteristics of modern-day romance novels.[353] Such incorporations of Orientalist "motifs" can be clearly seen in the development of the romance novel genre, which has been witnessing a contemporary revival. Tracing the role of Orientalism in shaping the cultural trajectory of romance novels since the publication of Edith Maud Hull's *The Sheik* (1919), Teo contends that:

> Where early twentieth-century sheik romances are obsessed with the specter of miscegenation, and emphasize white women's responsibility to respect and uphold the boundaries of whiteness, their modern-day counterparts are more concerned with the incorporation of the ethnic (male) other into modern Western society. In both cases, far from the imperial West being portrayed as the male "self" penetrating the Oriental female "other," the West is in fact represented by the white female whose attitude toward, and

[352] Kirstin Ramsdell, *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2018), 330.
[353] Tao, *Desert Passions* 8.

acceptance or incorporation of, racial or cultural male others is moderated by prevailing Western social mores.[354]

Hull, as a female writer during the early twentieth century, contributed to the revival and, more importantly, transformation of this genre. Intriguingly, if we put Lady Montagu's writings in conversation with the literary and cultural influence of Hull's romantic fiction on the representations of the Arabo-Islamic Orient, we can notice the following: Whereas the accounts of Lady Montagu "desexualized" the harem as we discussed earlier, the thematic and cultural significance of Hull's *The Sheik* centers on the fact that "it feminized the genre and made white women central to Orientalist discourse as producers, consumers, and imagined participants in Eastern love stories."[355] In short, Hull's novel theoretically narrowed the focus to the narrative of abduction, rape, and sexual slavery.

This succinct review reveals that one of the central features of the modern female-authored romance novels, and as Teo maintains, is the showcase of "the strength and stability of the Oriental family."[356] One of the main premises in *Desert Passions* is that a key function of Orientalism here, despite the enduring debate of "whether romance novels were essentially liberating or oppressive for women," is manifested in how these writers "seek to normalize depictions of Middle Eastern people to a certain extent […] and to renew social bonds between the East and West by incorporating ethnic difference and ethnic culture into contemporary Western societies. Especially during the era of the American war on terror."[357] Indeed, and taking into account the impact of the rhetoric of otherness in the post-9/11 world, these few

[354] Tao, *Desert Passions* 8.
[355] Tao, *Desert Passions* 8.
[356] Tao, *Desert Passions* 10.
[357] Tao, *Desert Passions* 10.

instances discussed earlier help give an inkling of the unusual use of (neo)Orientalist discourse and how some female writers are willing to go beyond framed (casual) binaries of preconceptions and circumvent the redundancy of formulaic images, while others steer entirely clear of tired clichés in order to challenge both gender discrepancies and the notion of otherness—assimilate the other into Western values. It deliberately provides a sample of the dissimilar and cross-cultural deployments of Orientalist discourse between male and female writers in the West.

Bedouin Women Between Romanticizing and Re-inscribing Orientalism

3.4. Visualizing The (In)Visibility: Imagining Norah in *The White Bedouin*

The focus will shift now to the analysis of how contemporary American fiction portrays the Bedouin Saudi women, especially after the previous brief historical review of how Western politics of gender intersects with the construction of the image of the female "Oriental" Other from a cross-cultural perspective and how (neo)Orientalist discourse resurfaces and complicates the projection of the notion of cultural and racial difference in the modern romance novel. George Potter's *The White Bedouin* is a noteworthy example of how some Americans writer still show a keen interest in (re)producing a romanticizing narrative of the (Oriental) desert spaces and terrains and its native residents found in different parts of the Middle East, especially the Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula. As discussed in the second chapter, Potter, as a Mormon scholar, has his own reasons for choosing Saudi Arabia as the fictional sphere for his novelistic inquiries into biblical literalism, genealogies, and religious geography. However, the focus here is the intersection of gender and his recourse to Orientalism, on the first hand, and the representations of Saudi women, on the other. *The White Bedouin*, I argue, relies heavily on various deployment of Orientalist discourse in its portrayal of gender relations within the

boundaries of the Saudi-American interaction. In such context, the novel features some characteristics of a subgenre of romance novel—the desert romance or sheik romance—in in its treatment of the relationship (and later marriage) between Stephen, the American protagonist, and Norah, the young Bedouin princess.

Stephen leaves the U.S. and his (Mormon) fiancée, Jan Roberts, and heads to Saudi Arabia to earn enough money that would allow him to get married and start a family. However, at the beginning of the story and almost two months of his arrival to the Kingdom, Stephen receives a letter from Jan telling him that she cannot wait for two years and that she is leaving him and marrying another man who has just returned from a "mission." Stephen is crushed by this news because "[h]is dreams of a happy life had centered around Jan and his faith that she would honor their engagement while he went abroad to work for the means they needed to get started."[358] This "dishonorable" act has an immense impact on how Stephen looks at his relationship with women, in general, and marriage, specifically, as he struggles to forget about Jan. Hoping to move on in his life, he drowns himself in his archeological work in the desert searching heedlessly for Oil in "the Land of Midian" in northwestern Saudi Arabia; it is there, where he meets Al-Ibrahim and his daughter, Norah.

Unlike Jan who finds her way to the novel merely through letters, Norah meets Stephen during his first meeting with her father. In fact, Jan is the only Western female character in the novel. This absence of Western female characters in the novel is remarkable as it evokes one of the classic characteristics of Orientalist writings about the East that has been discussed by many critics. For instance, Jessica Taylor discusses gender politics in Billie Melman's book, *Women's*

[358] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 57.

Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918,[359] and quotes her emphasizing that: "In Edward Said's script of the exchange between the West and the East, the occidental interpretation of the Orient is a symbolic act of appropriation *from which western women are excluded*."[360] This act of "exclusion" is present, with varying degrees of invisibility, in most of the novels that are examined in this study. In terms of *The White Bedouin*, the characterization of Norah as the enchanting Bedouin princess overshadows other female characters as she becomes the central female figure in the story.

The introduction of Norah comes almost exactly at the middle of the narrative when her father, the chieftain of his tribe, invites Stephen to "[a] poetry recital by shepherds."[361] This romantic encounter with Norah can be narratively construed as a culmination of what might be described as Stephen's Orientalization of Saudi space; a process that starts from his arrival to Al-Khobar harbor or as the title of chapter three frames it: "A Cowboy Lands in Arabia."[362] The characterization of this encounter is Orientalist *par excellence*. Here, Stephen's focus immediately shifts from "colorful rugs" to Norah once she enters the tent.[363] The narrator describes the encounter: "She was holding a large incense burner. She was tall and slender for an Arab girl. Stephen tried to make out the features of her face, but the darkness of the night and the smoke the incense burner veiled her."[364] The discursive visualization of Norah's entrance bears undeniable resemblance to the (visual/pictorial) styles of the nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings of Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), John Frederick

[359] Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (London: MacMillan, 1992).
[360] Melman, *Women's Orient* 5. Emphasis added.
[361] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 153.
[362] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 21.
[363] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 155.
[364] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 155.

Lewis (1804-1876), Gustave Boulanger (1824-1888), to name but a few. It is even analogous to the travelogue, especially pictures, of American journalist Lowell Thomas (1892-1981) who contributed to the construction of the image of the Middle East in the American culture, especially after following T.E. Lawrence and writing reports about the Arab Revolt (1916-1918) as well as his own experiences there. Most of these paintings and visual productions depict almost always Oriental rugs, veiled women, incense, myrrh frankincense, and sandalwood burning in braziers.[365]

In the same fashion and in this enchanting atmosphere, Stephen comes under the spell of princess Norah. Emulating Shakespearean flair, Stephen's language becomes heavily shrouded in Orientalist fantasy:

> [H]er beauty became more evident. Her skin was the color of a creamy coffee latte and appeared invitingly smooth. Her features were delicate but firm, showing the breeding of strong Bedouin stock. The pupils of her eyes, highlighted by black natural powder on her eyebrows and lower eyelids, were like black diamonds sparkling in the light if the campfire. They were innocent eyes, yet they tempted a man to his core.[366]

Here with such emphasis on ethnographic description, Stephen presents himself as if he were looking at an Orientalist painting depicting "Oriental" women.

The previous quotation exemplifies how the textual context of the narrative emulates the visual culture within the framework of Orientalist paintings. This type of paintings usually highlights a range of visual characteristics in their renderings of Arab/Muslim "Oriental" women

[365] For more illustrations of the visual representations of these paintings see Lynne Thornton's *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris: ACR Editions, 2009), 18, 82.
[366] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 157.

like both their skin color and heavy makeup, clothing, and most notably the way they return the gaze of the painting's (male) viewer. Stephen's description highlights the intersection of gender politics, veiling, and the interwoven legacies of Orientalist, racial, and (post)colonial discourses and the role these underlying forces continue to play in shaping contemporary Westerners' view of the Middle East. Since Saudi Arabia is one of the least (geographically and theoretically) explored spaces in the region, the dynamics of Western gaze, the notions of innocence and temptation are at work in the novel, too.

3.5. Veiling and Western Gaze

> Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured.
>
> Toni Morrison

Let us begin with the notion of Western gaze since it is ostensibly present in the narrative. The portrayal of the scene that captures the atmosphere of the encounter, henceforth, is blurred by dim light while Norah has to be envisioned "veiled" by incense[367] to suggest some type of unattainability, temptation, and exoticism. The narrator's description adds multiple layers of covering to the encounter that oscillates between the smoke of burning incense and darkness of the night to outline and then foreground the notion of veiling since Norah's appearance fails to comply with the (Western readers') expectations of a Muslim/Arab woman. "In the Arab society, for example," Franz Fanon emphasizes, "the veil worn by women is at once noticed by the tourist. One may remain for a long time unaware of the fact that a Moslem [*sic*] does not eat pork or that he denies himself daily sexual relations during the month of Ramadan, but the veil worn by the women appears with such constancy that *it generally suffices to characterize Arab*

[367] It is reminiscent also of Conrad's "intended" in *Heart of Darkness*.

society."[368] Fanon deliberately titles his essay "Algeria Unveiled" and alludes to the notion that considers the veil as a symbol for an imagined homogeneous body of Arabo-Muslim women regardless to religious and cultural diversity of their own respective societies. Hence, Norah uncovered face—and later her "forward language"—breaks the conventional "constancy," to use Fanon term, of the stereotyped images of Middle Eastern and North African women, let alone the imaginings (Saudi) Bedouin females that the West usually constructs and desires to preserve.[369]Maintain, even. Indeed, the veil has arguably become one of the influential and prominent visual markers of otherness, sexuality, and more importantly, transcultural Muslim feminine passivity. On other occasions, it signals the "volatility and the danger […veiled Muslim women] posed" to Western society, especially during and after colonization of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as Joan Scot describes it in *The Politics of The Veil*.[370] In other words, it has become a collective symbol of Muslim feminine imagined, sometimes contradictory identities.

The latter notions of "volatility" and "danger" are also present in the novel in many forms. From Stephen's perspective, and symbolically speaking, Norah is a reminiscent of the archetypical *femme fatale* since his life is being constantly threated as he increasingly develops a relationship with her. She is smart and beautiful, but brings troubles and disasters to him as he becomes involved more and more with her. He terms such circumstances, "the enormous cost" he has to pay.[371] Besides the hidden dark force or spirit, Al-Dajja,[372] for example, Osama,

[368] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 35. Emphasis Added.
[369] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 158.
[370] Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 55.
[371] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 300.
[372] Al-Dajja stands for Al-Massih A(l)d-Dajjal (in Arabic المسيح الدجّال) the Antichrist or the false messiah in the Islamic tradition that comes at the end of time or end of the world, but Porter makes an error and misspells it. He is supposed to say "Al-Dajjal" instead of "Al-Dajja." Porter defines this evil being as follows: "The Muslims call him

Norah's cousin, tries relentlessly to harm Stephen. With the intention to kill the Cowboy, Osama attacks him under the darkness of one night while dressing in black and hiding his face "under a black head wrap," but he fails miserably and is captured.[373] He furiously shouts: "I told you to stay away from Norah. Everyone is talking about how she loves you. She will be my [third] wife, you infidel pig!"[374] When all of his schemes founder Osama makes an agreement with the great devil or Al-Dajja to help him get rid of the "Ameriki [American] coward" because "his lies are winning the heart of our princess Norah, the women I need to marry if I am to rule over my people."[375] Eventually, Osama is tribally tried and set for execution for directly causing the death of other foreigners, i.e., the two German archeologists, Gerhard and Klaus—Stephen's only Western friends in Midian. The leader of the Al-Ibrahim tribe adheres to tribal mores and gives Stephen the chance to decide Osama's fate since the Utahn is the only Westerner left in the region. Stephen chooses not to forgive. After some thought he looks "into Osama's eyes as if trying to predict his motives," and then tells the executioner to "kill the poor soul..[376] Such context the novel constructs for Stephen-Norah relationship materializes this notion of danger that "Oriental" women figuratively symbolize. Although this point is not the main focus here, but, I think, this type of framing of a (Muslim) woman is problematic if not misogynist. First,

Al-Dajja, the evil one. They claim he comes from the mountains of Syria, has armies of assassins throughout the middle east, and rules freely the deep deserts and the open areas. They say he is the reason there will be no peace in this part of the world until the Day of the Judgment. He's the one their Prophet Mohammed said would come in the last days and would have one swollen eye. He is al-Dajja. He's the anti-Christ" (Potter, *The White Bedouin* 20). Stephen comically claims that "Al-Dajja's breath had the concentrated essence of a billion sins" (Potter, *The White Bedouin* 301). I'm wondering how one can distinguish a smell of a sin, even figuratively?

[373] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 195.

[374] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 196.

[375] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 200.

[376] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 240. I find the author's choice of this specific name is incidentally intriguing, because Osama may invoke, with a bit of symbolic stretch, a recall of Osama bin Laden who is thought to have been relentlessly seeking to sever the link between the "Islamic" East and "Christian" West. Like Bin Laden, Potter's Osama causes havoc through racial and religious fanaticism and imagined supernatural powers, yet he ultimately fails and is captured and killed under direct order by an American too (here it is Stephen who signals execution while it is the American government in the other's case).

there an implicit element of sexuality in such portrayal because Norah as a young woman should not be represented as helplessly and naively being tossed between two (male) sides. Like any other woman, she should take control of her own life, and more importantly, have agency for herself. Secondly, and similar to American *film noir*, *The White Bedouin* is also written be a male author and it plays on the notion of (en)gendering sexuality and overlapping it with violence and the concept of empowerment. Potter, moreover, adds an Orientalist flair to his projection of Arab Bedouin women by adding elements of tribalism ("blood money"), exoticism (desert, sexy women, dances, poetry), magic (dark forces and spirits), and patriarchy (men in control).

At any rate, veiling, albeit artificial in Stephen-Norah encounter in *The White Bedouin*, has to be invented since Bedouin women mostly tend to not cover their faces. This concept of veiling is important in such context because earlier in the novel the narrator asserts that Stephen "knew the Bedouin women didn't cover themselves with abiyas and veils like the town Arabs."[377] The novel presents the desert as a less confining space for women than the city, yet Stephen visualizes her as being veiled to fit the imagination of his readers and therefore allows his narrative to adhere to the stereotyped conventions promoted by the intellectual legacies of the masculinist discourses of Orientalism, postcoloniality, and race—among others of course. Although the misty incense-laden atmosphere, Stephen is immediately attracted to Norah and continues to gaze at her intently and unabashedly until she "blushed." The most interesting part, moreover, comes when he instantaneously decides that he "needed to know more about the fate of this young woman."[378] This dynamics of veiling and curiosity, on the one hand, and innocence and temptation, on the other are not new in East-West encounter, especially when the

[377] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 112.
[378] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 155.

representations of Arab/Muslim women are the concern of the narrative. The postcolonial feminist critic Meyda Yeğenoğlu, for instance, contends that:

> The veil attracts the eye, and forces one to think, to speculate about what is behind it. It is often represented as some kind of a mask, hiding the woman. With the help of this opaque veil, the Oriental woman is considered as not yielding herself to Western gaze and therefore imagined as hiding something behind the veil. It is through the inscription of the veil as a mask that the Oriental woman is turned into an enigma. Such discursive construction incites the presumption that the real nature of these women is concealed, their truth is disguised and they appear in a false, deceptive manner.[379]

It is remarkable how the same sociocultural and intellectual patterns that Yeğenoğlu delineates are strikingly present in the novel. The smoke-veil that Stephen imagines as hiding Norah's face, or at least part of it, adds another level of obscurity to his already-diminished knowledge of Bedouins and their culture. Being an object of the gaze, Norah becomes "an enigma," to borrow Yeğenoğlu's term, that has to be probed into while her physical presence embodies the notion of the harem where (Western) men are typically excluded from such space.[380] Therefore, both Stephen and the narrator present her initially as a mere ethnographic curiosity where "Her skin was the color of a creamy coffee latte and appeared invitingly smooth."[381]Such textual renderings of a native young woman symbolize the sensual yet exotic beauty of the harem that implicitly surfaces in most of the Orientalist representational discourses of the Arabo-Muslim societies.

[379] Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[380] Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies* 44.
[381] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 157.

In fact, Stephen's language reflects distinctive elements of this hypothesis. For instance, after childishly joking about the enchanting power of "blue-eyes" men and their ability to "steal" women's soul Stephen uses the classical similes of the magical oil lamp and the genie trapped inside—influenced by *Arabian Nights* stories—to flirt with Norah:

> I think I would put your soul in an oil lamp, like a genie, and only let you out when I needed the fragrance of pleasant incense. I would take off the lid, and you would pop out in a cloud of frankincense smoke […] that's where I would have to keep you. If I took you home with me to America, I would have to hide you. If I showed the blue-eyed men of Utah my beautiful *Arabian souvenir*, they would all try to steal your soul. You are too beautiful, and they couldn't help themselves.[382]

Although it is their first encounter, Stephen's language when he speaks with Norah is full of Orientalist cultural allusions, gendered metaphors, clichés, and above all, imperialist undertones where the locals, especially women, are presented as mere curiosities to be collected, brought home, and proudly shown to others as "beautiful Arabian souvenir[s]"[383] It also reflects the male sexist fantasies where Norah is objectified as a helpless feminine subject of Stephen's reiterated masculinist "I" that is eventually appropriated by the possessive pronoun "my" which repeatedly dominates the previous quoted conversation. Her existence is construed into a mere eccentric otherness that is set against the supposedly "superior" macho Western, or Utahn to be precise, self-identity. The background of racial formation in the novel suffers from what can be

[382] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 158. Emphasis Added.
[383] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 158.

characterized as the blue-eyes syndrome where almost all Bedouin women are enchanted by the color of Stephen's eye. It is the same obsession that Pecola develops throughout Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eyes*.[384] Instead of associating non-blue eyes with "ugliness" as in Pecola's case, Stephen equals them with the notion of otherness. In *The White Bedouin*[385] blue-eyes signal attractiveness and seduction or the ability to steal women's souls, as the narrator puts it. Few women consider Stephen to be "as white as a ghost," yet one of them sighs after seeing him during the wedding: "I like his blue eyes."[386] Like Pecola, this woman prays for blue eyes. She adds "you must promise me, Norah, that your first son [presumably he will inherit his father's blue eyes] will marry my next granddaughter."[387] Pecola's obsession with the notion that "if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" lives on in Potter's novel in the character of the six-year-old girl who has "light blue eyes"—she is Stephen's granddaughter.[388]. However, Al-Ibrahim eventually corrects Stephen by affirming that "we [Bedouin] don't believe that nonsense that blue eyes can steal a person's soul. It's only an old myth."[389] Stephen uses such a myth to get closer to Norah and flirt with her and yet her father's assertion on their intellectual independence puts an end to such approach. Norah jokingly protest: "I want to see his peculiar blue eyes under that funny [cowboy] hat. I have never seen a person with blue eyes, only a few goats."[390] Both the father and his daughter allow some space for this infantile thought and behavior and then use the same myth to "tease" the

[384] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016).
[385] It is intriguing to notice that both Morrison and Porter coincidently use certain colors as modifiers in forming the titles of their respective novels knowing that they are heavily loaded with sociocultural sensibilities and racial binarism.
[386] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 316.
[387] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 316.
[388] Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 46.
[389] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 157-58.
[390] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 158.

American and succinctly yet subtly broaden his concept of race, ethnicity, gender, and ultimately change and reconstruct his notion of the Other.

3.6. Intertextuality and Gender

Moreover, if we pay more attention to the intertextual aspect of the invocation of the lamp and genie, we can notice that the master-slave dialectic is at work here too since the influence of the *Arabian Nights* is unmistakably maintained throughout the novel. There is a plethora of archetypes of this inspiration in the narrative. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is presented as "a land full of myths and exotic tales," its residents are the descendants of "Sinbad the Sailor," while some men wear clothes that look "like a costume of a character from one of the tales of the Arabian Nights [*sic*]."[391] In such renderings, Stephen has to be wary during his stay in the Kingdom because "[a]round every corner [he] expected to confront Ali Baba and his forty thieves."[392] In such intertextual reading, Stephen becomes Aladdin (master) who rubs his lamp to summon Norah, the genie (slave) that "would pop out in a cloud of frankincense smoke," as he puts it, to amuse other blue-eyed Utahan men.[393] Probably, the only difference between the two scenarios would be the lack of lighting and thunder in Stephen's case, which usually accompany the genie-summoning ritual in other stories. In the same fashion, Norah, like the genie, becomes the slave and answers only to her master. This reading also intersects with the notion of "volatility" discussed above that veiled women represent since Norah is portrayed like the genie in terms of being a powerful creature with unimaginable potentials and yet bound and enslaved by outside forces. The lamp itself, on the other side, can be seen as a (virtual) medium where

[391] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 106, 109, 66.
[392] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 43.
[393] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 158.

Norah is frozen, preserved, and then presented to Western viewers upon request—represented by blue-eyed Utahans. Such an approach comparatively parallels the function of the oil lamp in creating a confining space for the genie with the use of Orientalist oil paintings on canvases that depict "Oriental" women within specific stereotypical frames. Like the genie of the lamp that it is bound to the wishes of its holder/master in the *Arabian Nights*, the visual renderings/framings in Orientalist paintings are subject to the painter's perspective and imagination. Both Stephen's use of the oil lamp metaphor and the act of painting can be seen to fall within what Edward Said defines as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and for having authority over the Orient"[394] The physical release of the genie is contingent on the whim of its master while the visual portrayals of Arabo-Muslim women in paintings are the products of the painter's sociocultural lens and idiosyncrasies. The oil lamp here represents another form of what can be described as a virtually imagined world of harem to which Western men are usually denied access, and only by summoning the genie (Norah) out of that space they are able to see such exotic "beauty." In a parallel move, painters habitually resort to their imagination to gain virtual access to such domestic space. There is also the metafictional aspect of these parallelisms between representations of otherness/alterity to one's own society and the act of writing itself. As a novelist, George Potter's role in creating *The White Bedouin* resembles the position of both holder/master of the lamp and the Orientalist painter in constructing an imagined medium where the image of that Other is projected. Potter's medium is the narrative and the discourse it conveys for the Western reader. The essence of these parallelisms is the power of visual and textual imagination in generating a discourse that assumes authenticity, credibility, and above all "objectivity" in its framing of the image of the Other.

[394] Said, *Orientalism* 3.

However, Norah plays along with this notion of master-slave dialectic, for a while, and takes it to another level by using it to frequently tease Stephen. For instance, she proposes on one occasion that "I think I will call my master the blue-eyed boy cow [cowboy]," while on the other, she wonders: "shall I call my master a camelbouy."[395] On the other side, the narrator describes how Stephen becomes aware of this game of "establish[ing] dominance" and then resolves that: "She needed to be shown from the very beginning who was the *boss*. Like *breaking a horse* or *training a dog*, if Stephen didn't show Norah who was *dominant* from the get-go, it would be too late to ever reverse the *pattern*, and he would end up being the one inside the lamp."[396] Eventually, he confesses that he is no match for her wittiness: "So much for trying to *establish dominance* with this girl […] She's already in charge."[397] These different phases and levels of verbalizing feelings expose the tension and fidgety in the power dynamics between males and females in the novel and how they communicate. It is shocking to see how Stephen looks at his relationship with Norah as a fight for dominance and not based on mutual understanding and respect or at least sharing some views and maybe ambitions. Yet, it is also strikingly intriguing to notice that Stephen uses the same term that Edward Said uses in outlining the crippled relationship between the West and the Orient. The context reveals that it is not a relationship between two mutual entities with reciprocal rights and duties as Stephen's desperate and relentless efforts subconsciously evoke what Said identifies as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and for having authority over the Orient"[398]The encounter between Stephen and

[395] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 167-68. It is a nonstandard spelling of Norah's speech to supposedly match her mispronunciations of the word "boy." Here the novelist resorts to the convention of the "eye dialect" to convey Norah's foreign accented speech. This practice can be also seen as another inconspicuous aspect of othering the novel embodies.
[396] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 167. Emphasis is mine.
[397] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 168. Emphasis added.
[398] Said, *Orientalism* 3.

the (Saudi) Bedouin Other unmasks his complex understandings of masculinity and the effects of his own cowboy and Mormon upbringing on his views of women, marriage, work, and life as we will discuss shortly.

This muted sparring between the two can be interpreted in terms of gender struggle and gender relations as well as women's status within society as Stephen's (rhetorical) endeavor to create a dominance-submission dichotomy turns into a farce. This happens when Norah eventually outwits him and emerges as a strong-willed, independent young woman even before her father firmly declares that "no more playing master and genie. A Bedouin has no master. We are a free people. We are Bedouin."[399] This puts an end for such game of the "macho cowboy." This affirmative statement puts an end for such game of the "macho cowboy." The counternarrative that Norah and her father depict here is reminiscent of feminist critique of sexuality, subjectivity, patriarchy, and history of the treatment of women. It echoes some distinctive qualities pertaining to gender politics and how social roles and functions are putatively assigned in society, recalling the essence of Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy, especially in *The Second Sex*. In one of her final conclusions, Beauvoir asserts: "To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue nonetheless to exist for him *also*: mutually recognising each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other*."[400] The key shared belief between Beauvoir's feminist vindications of independence as a basic principle and the logic of these two Arab characters is the call for a transition from what Stephen sees—and hopes to establish—as "dominance" to Al-Ibrahim's assertion on the "free" will of people. It

[399] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 167.
[400] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard M. Parshley (New York: Knopf Books, 1999), 731.

is a call for a shift or transition to the concepts of "equality" and empowerment. In other words, it is the idea of reciprocity that they seek.

The other deeper aspect of such infighting between two cultures, genders, and individuals uncovers how Stephen unwittingly shares some lingering thoughts of his grandfather's antediluvian perspective on gender, especially on what kind of characteristics a man should seek in his future wife. Stephen sees his relationship with and potential marriage to Norah as "breaking a horse" just like his Utahn grandfather. While observing Norah lifting endless buckets of water for the camels, he daydreams: "Now that's a girl my grumpy grandpa would like […] He always told me that looking for a woman to marry was like buying a horse. Check her teeth and the width go her hips. You want a healthy woman who can bare you a dozen kids."[401] On contrast to both Stephen's and his grandfather's ridiculously crippled and oldfangled views on women, Al-Ibrahim is presented to be more progressive and having arguably more complex and gender-egalitarian opinions. He defies the confining stereotyped representations of nomadic Bedouin by the end of the story and demonstrates his respect and support for Norah's own decisions and actions. In such a perspective, the gender politics within the dynamics of Bedouinism outshines its (suburban) Utahan counterpart. The notion of freedom in the desert space goes beyond the literal meaning of the word to signify some type of women empowerment, at least it is so on Al-Ibrahim's personal familial scale.

Besides, Stephen, even unwittingly, extends his concept of master-slave dialects into his daily relationship and interaction with animals. For instance, Al-Ibrahim gives him a newborn female camel as a sign of friendship and allows him to share the responsibilities of raising it with Norah. Yet, after few days and when Al-Ibrahim asks him:

[401] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 195.

How is your little camel?'

'Growing like a weed, but she still does not seem to recognize her master.'

'Master?" Al-Ibrahim laughed. 'Don't you know by now that you'll never master a camel? They have a will that is much stronger than a man's. We are our camels' slaves. Didn't I see you drawing water for them earlier this afternoon?'[402]

This instance demonstrates Stephen's unawareness of the significance of such ecology and cooperative nature of the relationship between Bedouins, their ecosystem, and domesticated livestock. It also shows that this (Western) Hegelian concept[403] is not a genuine part of the sustainability of Bedouinism and nomadism on the one hand, and the surrounding environment (both plants and lands) and animals, on the other. This is manifested in how Al-Ibrahim flips this dialectic over and demonstrates that such model is problematic and does not fit into the Bedouin life which specifically relies on some kind of a pervasive cooperation between human and multiple ecosystems in pursuit of survival and sustainability. Given these points, the nomadic life of Bedouins can be seen as a paradigm of biopolitics where the human biology/ecology intersects with politics that Michael Foucault, for instance, describes the function of its power as "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order."[404] Although biopolitics is usually a discourse of domination and hegemony rather than cooperation and ecological responsibility,

[402] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 193.
[403] In fact, the relationship between the "Occident" and the "Orient" is seen as a continuation of the Hegelian dialectics (of hegemony) between European and non-European cultures, which is essentially based on the racial superiority of "white" Europe. For Hegel, Asia is the place of Europe's antithesis; See Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004); For a comparative insight on Hegel's dialectics see Koichi Hagimoto, "From Hegel to Paz: Re-Reading Orientalism in Latin American Writing," *Hipertexto* 17 (2013): 16-31.
[404] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1: *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin,1998), 136.

Bedouins' ability to live in such harsh and barren environment and the way they have internalized and deployed specific modes of knowledge structures for centuries epitomize some aspects of this Foucauldian concept where multiple "positive mechanisms" have the power of transformation and, therefore, maintaining a sustainable social and ecological symbiosis.[405] Additionally, this excerpt of the narrative exemplifies the power of fictional texts to generate new paradigms of knowledge and therefore impact the reader's perception of the Other.

3.7. Rerouting Frankincense Trail: Gender and Identity Politics

I read the incorporation of incense and veiling, however, as one of the subtexts where the cultural and religious contexts intersect with ethnographic history of Mormonism. The backdrop of this hypothesis is the novel's sporadic reference to the ancient trade route known as the "Frankincense trail" or "incense road." Frankincense and myrrh[406] are gum resins extracted from trees[407] mainly in the South of the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa.[408] They have been used over the centuries in medicine, perfumery, and ritualistic ceremonies—religious, social, political, etc.—in Egyptian, Phoenician, Roman, Babylonian, and other cultures. Frankincense and myrrh once "were the most prized aromatic gums of the ancient world and a significant source of wealth in southern Arabia,"[409] This ancient road surfaces quite a few times in *The White Bedouin*

[405] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1, 73.
[406] Martin Watt and Wanda Sellar, *Frankincense & Myrrh: Through the Ages and a Complete Guide to Their Use in Herbalism and Aromatherapy Today* (London: Saffron Walden: C.W. Daniel, 1996), clarify the etymology of the word as the following: "The name frankincense is derived from the Old French: *franc* meaning free, pure or abundant, and the Latin *incensum*, to kindle. It is also known as *olibanum* from the Arabic *luban* (referring to the milky juice exuding from the tree) although both frankincense and myrrh, as well as other balsam trees, were often referred to as luban. the Hebrew called it *lebonah* […] Myrrh is first mentioned in Exodus 30;23, and often referred to as *mor* or *myr*, a derivative from the Arabic *murr* meaning bitter" (2). Wanda Sellar.).
[407] Most of these trees fall under the botanical classification Boswellia. The Arabian species are Boswellia sacra trees. For more details see the "Frankincense" entry in Nigel Groom, *The Perfume Handbook* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1992), 86-89.
[408] There are however other types of myrrh or myrrh-like resins obtained from different tress in India for instance.
[409] Watt and Sellar, *Frankincense & Myrrh* 1.

whereas the incense becomes a recurring theme in the narrative. As an illustration, let us examine how Stephen recalls the ancient history of the Saudi city of Tabuk when he enters it for the first time on his way to Midian. Ahmed, Stephen's Saudi companion and driver, explains the natural, social and tribal dimensions of Tabuk's history but chooses to focus more on its relatively recent past. This northwestern Saudi city, on the other hand, "seemed stuck in antiquity" for Stephen as he evokes its distant past and elucidates that "Tabuk was a major halt on the ancient frankincense trail that started in Damascus and ran south through Arabia. In antiquity it became rich by trading provisions and fresh camels to the caravanners."[410] Both version of the city's history are valid readings yet they reflect how local/native inhabitants, represented by Ahmed, are more concerned with their daily lives, activities, and problems, while Stephen, as a Mormon petroleum engineer, is more engrossed in the ancient and biblical aspects since he interprets and interacts with his surrounding almost always religiously. The substance of Ahmed's conversation with Stephen reveals how the former engages inadvertently in replacing the latter's universalized grand or metanarrative with regional and local (small) narratives, which, in turn would explain the insistence on telling stories about the native tribal history. In short, the pre-modern Saudi past is irrelevant in Ahmed's day-to day struggle to provide for his (extended) family.

In particular, the well-known frankincense trail has a prominent status in the literatures of the Latter Days Saints since its route, according to *The Book of Mormon*, parallels or coincides with the same course that Lehi, one of their prominent Israelite prophets, followed in his journey from Jerusalem to the coast of "Bountiful" before sailing to the "promised land," i.e., the Americas. Lehi is, in fact, one of the most mentioned canonical Mormon figures in *The White*

[410] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 71.

Bedouin since the narrative relies heavily on the impulse of excavating and reconstructing the route he took during his presumed travel through Midian. Expectedly, A plethora of Mormon scholars specialize in this specific issue and some of them did travel through the Arabian Peninsula, study its geography, and even undertake some archeological works to come up with a "model" and "new evidences" for such journey as well as "discovering the best candidates for the Book of Mormon sites," as the description of the novel's author terms it.[411] George Potter himself published some "scholarly" works that include few articles and a book to advocate such theories.[412]

Throughout the story, Lehi's connection to the Arabian Peninsula and Arabs haunts the narrative as Stephen strives to follow in his footsteps. There even is a valley named *Wadi Lehi* and a chapter titled: "Pitching a Tent in the Valley of Lehi."[413] Hence, from the beginning of the novel Stephen tries relentlessly to recreate the linage of Lehi's tribe (Manasseh) and piece it together with the ancestry of Ishmael (the ancestor of the Arabs/Ishmaelites) and how they share "the same patriarchal linage of Father Abraham"[414] He then concludes that "Lehi had Arab bloodlines" and wonders: "Will the Arabs someday emigrate to America and inherit the land of

[411] For a window for such research see, Hugh Nibley and John W. Welch, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co, 1988); Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston. *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey Across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co, 1994); John W. Welch, David R. Seely, and Jo A. H. Seely, *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 2004); Lynn M. Hilton, *The Lehi Trail in Arabia: An Incredible LDS Odyssey of Adventure and Discovery* (Perry, UT: Hilton Books LLC, 2008); Richard Wellington and George Potter. "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor, " *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15.2 (2006): 26–43, 113–16; Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp, 2015); Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton. *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City, UT, Deseret Book Co, 1976); Warren P. Aston and Michaela J. Aston, *The Place Which Was Called Nahom: The Validation of an Ancient Reference to Southern Arabia* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), to name but a few.
[412] For instance, he coauthored a "millstone" book titled: Lehi in the Wilderness. See George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New Documented Evidences That the Book of Mormon Is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003).
[413] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 73, 70.
[414] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 35.

Joseph?"[415] This obsession with using the legendary story of Lehi to bridge the two sides together creates a metanarrative where modern (Saudi) history is framed through a certain (Mormon) lens to claim some kind of affinity to the region, and most importantly, the authority and authenticity of the Mormon chronicles. To legitimize such meta-sense of cultural, racial, and religious belonging *The White Bedouin* strives to meticulously explain and prudently connect diverse historical incidents by interweaving the renderings of the story of Lehi's journey through Arabian Peninsula in the narrative with the frankincense trail and Saudi geography. The narrator describes how Stephen is consumed with these thoughts to the degree that he would, for instance, insist on seeing the colorful assortments of floor rugs and tapestries in the palace of Emir of Al-Hasa as another "sign" of the likelihood that "There had to be a connection between Lehi's descendants in the Americas and the Arab weavers."[416] Even the representations of food and culinary experiences are engulfed by these dynamics, especially when he envisages the *Khalas* date[417] as if "it must have come from Lehi's tree of life."[418]

Under these circumstances, one may realize that the frankincense trail constitutes an indispensable part of the novel's contextual background and it is here where representations of Norah adds another aspect to the kaleidoscopic range of Mormon stories and religious beliefs that the narrative tries to construct. In other words, Norah's imaginary smoke-veil becomes a (spectral) physical part of the fictional deployment of that incense trail. Stephen's disposition toward religionizing and dogmatizing can be understood as the cultural framework of the novel which cripplingly contributes to the construction of his identity and the way he interacts with

[415] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 34.
[416] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 45.
[417] Khalas dates are the fruit of the date palm tree and tend to have a reddish dark brown color. They are one of the most popular kinds in Saudi Arabia and mainly cultivated in the Eastern region in Al-Hasa and central part in Al-Qasim.
[418] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 46.

world around him. As an illustration and although it only exists as a figment of his own imagination, Stephen sacralizes Norah's veil when he gasps, "*She is beautiful. she looks exactly how I imagine the Virgin Mary*. She seemed so innocent yet fair in the warm light of the tent," when he sees her face.[419] Such context depicts Norah as the personification of what Evelyn Bach characterizes as the "perceptions of the Orient as the West's feminized Other."[420] For Stephen, there has to be another qualifying aspect of the "perceptions" that Bach refers to here that is rendering Norah the West's feminized and deified Other. These particular "perceptions" of (Bedouin) Muslim women are actually embedded in the religious undertone of the narrative since they intriguingly (and literally) coincide with how *The Book of Mormon* describes Mary as the "A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins" (Nephi 110.15).[421] Stephen objectifies Norah's existence into an imagined picture or painting of a canonical religious figure. To better understand this comparison, one must remember the role of religious imagery in Christianity and the changes in the representations of Mary herself in Western art and culture throughout the ages. For this reason, it is interesting to highlight few important cultural and aesthetic similarities or points of convergence between the representations of both Norah and Mary as *literary* characters. There is the symbolism of their veil, for example, where it signifies modesty and religiosity though Norah's veil—that Stephen invents and I previously termed "imaginary smoke-veil"—adds another sense of distant historicity to Stephen's encounter, especially when he creates the link between a modern and ancient characters. There is also the emphasis on meticulously depicting/imagining them averting their gaze from the viewer as a sign

[419] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 155. Italics in original.
[420] See Evelyn Bach "Sheik Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance" *Hecate* 23 (1997): 9-40 at 12.
[421] See Joseph Smith. *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1973), Nephi 11.15.

of chastity, innocence, and purity. Frankincense and myrrh denote another spiritual dimension to the contextual invocation of Mary particularly if the early history of early (Eastern) Christianity is engaged. Beyond these explicit and implicit references, the narrative essence of such allusion to Mary, I think, is how her own story, like Norah's, is always framed and written by someone else whether be a painter or a writer to express theological, cultural, artistic opinions, etc. In other words, both characters lack the agency to represent themselves within these framed and imaginary cultural contexts.

Throughout the novel, history, anthropology, and archaeology are meshed together with stereotypical images to become conduits for creating an imagined feminine Other. These illustrations reflect how the undercurrents of racial and religious identity, on the one hand, and spatiality and Orientalism, on the other, interact with the fact that Stephen (and by extension Porter) as a Mormon—who belongs to a nonhegemonic group within Western culture—chooses to interrelate with a different "subordinate" Oriental culture by ritualizing all his experiences in Saudi Arabia. His travels through Saudi space is like flipping through the Book of Mormon and where every encounter with locals and places is interpreted through his racialized religious lens. They also demonstrate how the story genders and racialize the frankincense trail in order to further develop the theory of Mormonism's connections to both Abrahamic religions and ancient Arabia—which will be used later to justify Stephen's marriage to Norah. Similar to how the frankincense trail linked different peoples, cultures, and places together, *The White Bedouin* utilizes this human history to build the story frame of the novel. The notion of the trail as a transcultural trade road between multiple geographical, economic, and social spheres and the

way the novel utilizes it is a reminiscent of the "holy incense"[422] that used to be brought in from South of Arabia and yet compounded and burned in innumerable (Jewish and Christian) places of worship all over the ancient world. In the narrative frankincense symbolizes values of multiculturalism, spatiotemporality, and spirituality/religiosity.

Under these circumstances, the marriage between Norah and Stephen at the very end of the story becomes a multifaced symbolic union. This intriguingly constitutes a significant moment of convergence between *The White Bedouin* and contemporary romance novel discussed earlier. Commenting on the marriage plots in romance novel, Hsu-Ming Teo maintains: "Quite often, *interracial*, *interreligious*, cross-cultural unions between white women and Arab men [that] represent a healing of the family and society, as well as a wistful, *nostalgic return* to a more *idyllic*, ordered national *utopia* that accommodates both women and ethnic others."[423] Similarly, Potter imagines an interracial and interreligious union between a white man and an Arab woman who is from a Bedouin tribe that has been guarding part of frankincense trail and the "Holy Mount of Sinai." She is a Muslim woman who defies tribal conventions, stereotypes, and even religious "rules" by marrying a religious Other/"stranger." The Marriage between Norah and Stephen symbolically resembles the trading road that connects different cultures and religions. Fittingly, this bond reaffirms Stephen (Mormon) identity and reconnects him to his "biblical" roots where he "and Norah will play Adam and Eve [in] the valley [that looks] like a beautiful garden."[424]

[422] In his description of the historical and religious significance of frankincense, Nigel Groom touches upon this notion and explains that "Under the Roman Empire frankincense was the principal incense used, and enormous quantities of it were imported from South Arabia and the Horn of Africa for the purpose. The 'holy incense' of the Jews was compounded in the time of Exodus, and incense was burned in Christian churches from the 5th century AD" (Groom, *The Perfume Handbook* 110).
[423] Tao, *Desert Passions* 10. Emphasis added.
[424] Potter, White Bedouin 313.

3.8. Scheherazade Revisioned: Norah in (Saudi) *Arabian Nights*

> Many Americans experienced the Muslim world by engaging in the same practice and turning for information and inspiration, not to scholarly literature, newspapers or even travel narratives, but to the Oriental tale, through which they mystified the Middle East as the land of the *Arabian Nights*. The *Arabian Nights* existed in the West, not as a static text, but as a creative practice found in every venue of American communication: in poetry, prose, illustration, and performance, as well as the promotional embellishment of Middle Eastern people and objects in the US. Americans similarly mystified the *Arabian Nights* itself by lending it historical authority, retelling and embellishing it in their own art, using it as a vehicle for satire or morality tales.
>
> Susan Nance

It is not surprising to notice that the narrative implicitly invokes the Scheherazade character in its representations of Norah, especially after explicitly utilizing three stories of ألف ليلة وليلة *ʾAlf Laylah wa-Laylah* (The Thousand and One Nights)[425]— namely, "Sinbad the Sailor," "Ali Baba and the forty thieves" and "Aladdin and the magic lamp."[426] As discussed above, the novel draws a parallel between the potential danger Stephen might encounter upon his arrival to Saudi Arabia with adventures of Sinbad and the risk Ali Baba faces once he discovers the secret cave of the forty thieves. It also resorts to the dull deployment of a simile that condenses Norah's character into a metaphor for supremacy, slavery, and above all conveying an aura of exotic sensuality. Yet, the invocation of Scheherazade narrative heritage takes the novel's appropriation of *Arabian Nights* to a different discursive level where she offers the writer a point of entry to the Arabo-Islamic culture as Norah becomes the embodiment of the characterizations of this legendary figure in her love of poetry, the gift for storytelling, and wit. In sum, she metamorphoses narratively into the Bedouin Scheherazade. By choosing a well-known literary

[425] Henceforth, I will refer to it as *Arabian Nights* as a shorthand.
[426] Ironically, these are "orphan tales" not appearing in the best manuscripts of *ألف ليلة وليلة, ʾAlf Laylah wa-Laylah,* but first appearing in *Les Milles et une nuits* (12 vols., 1704-1717), by Antoine Galland (1646-1715).

figure, the novel claims some kind of kinship and affinity to that rich cultural heritage and therefore authenticity as she creates an access to the representation of both society and culture.

The novel, I argue, invokes the Scheherazade character in the way the narrative introduces Norah to the reader. The appearance of both characters is linked to their ability to spin stories for others. Norah is initially introduced during a poetry recital when her father invited Stephen and other tribal notables, while *Arabian Nights* is narratively built on Scheherazade's mesmerizing and tantalizing stories. Yet, in *The White Bedouin* Norah tells stories to entertain men, on some occasions, and, on others, narrates anecdotes to joke with and make fun of Stephen, whereas in *Arabian Nights* Scheherazade invents a plethora of tales to save her life from King Shahryar's wrath and vengeance.

Both of these two young female characters share the gift of telling stories which, in turn, enables them to capture their listeners'/readers' attention. In fact, Scheherazade becomes a cross-cultural epitome for storytelling and the power of oral narrative that eventually triggers and leads to a positive dramatic social change—in her case it is to put an end to King Shahryar's tyrannical misogyny and femicide. She is endowed with narrative talent, courage, cunning, and above all, unparalleled overwhelming and uplifting presence that embolden such melodramatic change by stealing the King's heart. On the other hand, Norah, although with less potency and grandeur, captures Stephen hearts almost instantly. Her first appearance and encounter with the cowboy occur when she sings Bayard Taylor's[427] famous poem, "Bedouin Love Song":

From the desert I come to thee,

[427] Bayard Taylor (1825-1878) is an American poet and diplomat who traveled extensively and visited many places in the Middle East. He was also known for his numerous travel accounts such as *Travels in Arabia* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1854). Opportunely, this book contains some illustrations and it has been fully digitized by World Digital Library and available online at wdl.org.

On a stallion shod with fire;

And the winds are left behind

In the speed of my desire.[428]

The narrator portrays Stephen's immediate reaction as the following:

> Her voice was golden. As she sang, Stephen felt as of her lovely voice had hypnotized him. And the way she slowly and delicately painted the emptions of the song with gentle arm and hand gestures made Stephen desire her love more than anything he had ever experienced. As she sang, her hands softly danced like the mystical smoke of an enchanted fire.[429]

It is no surprise to see how the scene, under its Orientalist veneer, easily invokes gender and sexuality. This becomes even clearer when Norah tells Stephen, on another occasion, the amusing folktale story of Abu al-Kasim Al-Tanbori and his old shoes. Mesmerized by her theatrical versatility, Stephen starts wondering silently about "how wonderful … it would be to have a wife who could tell children's bedtime stories with such animation and passion."[430] This is only their second encounter and he is already daydreaming about marrying her.

It is amusingly intriguing, nonetheless, to notice how their verbal exchange reveals different aspects of the characterization process within the narrative discourse of the novel. Despite such Orientalist framing, Norah, for instance, enjoys these moments and reutilizes her narrative ability to mock Stephen as she compares his love and the unsuitability of his "cowboy boots" to the desert climate with Al-Tanbori's doomed shoes. The latter refuses to replace his badly worn-out shoes because he "liked [them] so much," but when he eventually decides to get

[428] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 162.
[429] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 162.
[430] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 188.

rid of [them] a series of comical incidents unfolds. On that ground, Norah retorts, "perhaps you [Stephen] don't know how to wear regular shoes […] Then perhaps you have made a sacred promise to never wear regular shoes?"[431] On contrary, Stephen fancies himself, or to be more accurate, his boots as a heroic part of an Oriental saga: "Stephen realized his boots had gotten him into one of those long but intriguing Arabian tales that had probably been told around campfire for a thousand years"[432] For Norah, storytelling becomes a tool of empowerment and creation of multifaceted opportunities for self-agency, whereas for Stephen it stimulates his (re)imagination and Orientalist fantasies.

Norah is given a discursive space to tell stories, recite poems, and sing (to entertain other men), but her character falls short of developing or wielding the power of having her own independent narrative voice and be able, for instance, to transform into another narrator in the novel. Within such limited space, she tells the stories of all other people except her own. The author seems to be content in portraying Saudi women, in general, and Bedouins, particularly, as being able to speak only when they are spoken to by others because this is the case here. Norah almost always never starts or initiates a conversation and she only replies when addressed. Building on this observation and the fact that Norah is the only main female character in the novel, I argue that such reading reveals that Stephen becomes the male version of Scheherazade's younger sister Dunyazad (Dinarzad). It is true that she seemingly takes the back seat to Scheherazade in the *Nights* yet Dunyazad is the real stimulus for storytelling after plotting preemptively yet secretively with the latter to ask for a story, as a farewell token, to postpone and evade Shahryar's order of execution. This uncanny tactic works perfectly by initiating a

[431] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 186.
[432] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 187.

profusion of stories that eventually leads to sparing Scheherazade's life. In the same fashion, Stephen's position *The White Bedouin*, especially during his first few encounters with Norah, is akin to Dunyazad's role in inaugurating the cycle of storytelling and long conversation in *Arabian Nights*. This also sheds some light on how Norah resembles Scheherazade in terms of bringing stories, tales, and anecdotes to life—with her vivid and energized presentations—as well as stitching them together to create the body of the narrative. Her character constitutes, even literally, the backbone of the story as her relationship with Stephen inspires most of the story's actions which culminated in their marriage.

Norah's character has some shining moments and appears as an attentive, daring, and intelligent young woman, despite being narratively cut short. The ambivalence of such renderings, I believe, is due, in part, to the intellectual legacy of Orientalist discourse and to the author's limited experience in Saudi Arabia and restricted sociocultural exposure and interaction with its society, especially during his stay in the Kingdom. To compensate for these shortcomings, the author resorts to reading/citing many resources to formulate a presentable fictional framework and then provide the reader with as engaging reading experience as possible.[433] Thus, Saudi space is presented through an imaginary lens of cultural proximity, reliance on regurgitated preconceived perceptions, and close adherence to biblical literalism. What we end up with then is a mesh of formulaic renderings of Saudis and their country that are interwoven with Potter's idiosyncratic interest and religious beliefs evidenced by his substantial quotations and use of endnotes—which can create/reveal a discourse of their own. This is, of

[433] This inference is drawn from the stylistics of the narrative discourse and the abundance of quotations and references in the endnotes of most of chapters of the novel.

course, despite some ephemeral moments of genuine engagement with sociocultural and historical landscape of that space and the (narrative) accessibility to human dimension of life.

In this sense and if we invoke the cultural impact of Orientalist paintings on the formation of the image of the Arabo-Islamic world in the West, the textual portrayal of Saudi women in *The White Bedouin* becomes analogous to the visual representation of Muslim/Arab women in the Orientalist paintings. The main aesthetic and ideological point of convergence is the way these women are depicted. Like the narrative discourse of the novel, the human aspect of women in such paintings is neglected and erased as their existence is frozen; let alone how the painter's scrupulous attention to details usually present them with a downward gaze to imply submission, passivity, insecurity, etc., or pictured evading the viewer's gaze while the latter unreservedly stares at them. Likewise, Norah's character is portrayed within the frames of her interaction and relationship with Stephen and almost uprooted from any type of sociocultural context whether be it personal, societal, tribal, or even national. Her appearance in the narrative is merely associated with the Stephen's frequent visits to her tribal "camp."

3.9. "Mechanical Sea Monster": Travel and Encounter with Technology

Probably the most perplexing moment for the characterization of Norah, nonetheless, happens when she accompanies her father and Stephen to Cairo to visit an Azhari[434] scholar who is willing to share "his unusual views on Mormonism."[435] (259). Her journey to Egypt is

[434] An Azhari scholar is a person who is schooled in Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. As a learning center, the university is part of the renowned and prestigious Al-Azhar Mosque which was founded during the (Shia) Fatimid Caliphate in 969. The name means in Arabic "the most resplendent or the brilliant" and itself is an allusion to Al-Zahra, the title of the prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah—hence Fatimid. The head of the Mosque carries the title of Grand Imam or Sheikh of Al-Azhar and is considered one of the highest and most influential religious authorities in the Islamic (Sunni) world. For more information see Donald Malcolm Reid. "Azhar, al-" *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2009.
[435] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 259.

depicted through unnecessarily forced archaic textual renderings that are reminiscent of early writings about the East-West encounter found in various travel accounts particularly during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the early Arab travelers who visited different parts of Europe during different stages of Industrial Revolution wrote numerous accounts that convey their first impressions of seeing modern technologies of that era. Generally speaking, these accounts reflect a mixture of the travelers' amazement at sciences and technological advancements and simultaneously bewilderment at how to approach and interpret such industrial gap between their native countries and Europe. They even struggle on the linguistic level on how to translate and incorporate the abundance of new terminologies and innovations into Arabic. The struggle of those writers stemmed from what can be described as an unprepared exposure to the great rapid technological and mechanical shifts occurring concurrently in the West and exemplified by the rise of machines, and use of steam power, and mechanization of factories. They also applauded economic superiority and praised political organization in Europe. Like most of their Arab countries that were seemingly oblivious to modernity and the quick-paced transformations in the West, these writers faced the dilemma of understanding these changes and bringing such knowledge back to home, or at least some of the key principles to narrow that gap.

The language those travelers used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the way their refer to and describe these "machines" resembles the narrator's textual representations of Norah's exposure to machinery of the modern world. To illustrate this point, let us examine how the narrator depicts Norah's reaction to seeing the ferry that will take them from Dhiba port in the northwestern coast of Saudi Arabia to Egypt via the Red Sea: "The situation grew critical

when the ferry appeared on the horizon and closed in on the Duba[436] [Dhiba] pier. The largest *machine* Norah had ever seen was Stephen's truck, and to her the rusting ship was a *mechanical sea monster*. Stephen could only guess what was going on her mind. Her anxious gestures evolved into tears and panic."[437] One needs to deconstruct and read closely this excerpt since there are three main points of interest here. First, the reader never hears directly from Norah and this task is left for the narrator and "Stephen [who] could only guess what was going on her mind."[438] She has no agency and therefore becomes the subaltern who cannot speak and could only express herself in "tears and panic," instead. Second, marine transportation has been invented since the dawn of humanity, yet Norah, albeit living in 1938, is depicted anachronistically as having all sorts of difficulties in comprehending this intuitively rudimentary fact. Third, the use of words like "machines" and "mechanical sea monster" creates a textual context where Norah is seen as "a woman from a different time, a different land, and a different religion," as described later.[439]

The last point can be construed as a preparation for Norah's shocking scream—"They are naked. They are naked"—after seeing some women aboard the docking ferry "dressed in western-style fashions."[440] The reader once again hears nothing from those women, presumably Egyptians, and their reaction is merely conveyed through the narrator: "They must have thought that the Bedouin girl was some kind of human dinosaur."[441] This is the climax of the Othering technique in the narrative when Norah is othered, dehumanized, and objectified after initially

[436] Although it a transliterated word and can be open for various spellings, the writer seems to habitually misspell most of the Arabic words in the novel.
[437] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 247. Emphasis Added.
[438] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 247.
[439] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 252.
[440] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 246.
[441] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 247.

presented as a naïve young Bedouin who falls in love with the first "white" and blue-eyed Westerner she encounters. Such representation is a typical feature of Orientalist discourse where the "Oriental" Other is presented as culturally inferior and intellectually inept and less sophisticated. Indeed, the linguistic structure of Stephen's and narrator's own semantics reflect these notions as Norah's (and by extension, other women's) voice is muted and degraded to the level of "human dinosaur." Such deconstructionist reading can disclose the narrative's subtextual meaning and how the author/narrator unwittingly endorses the notion of Othering socially, culturally, and even racially.

This encounter with the ferry, "the tight-fitting, high-hemmed dresses" of women, and overcrowded streets of Cairo prove to be overwhelming for both Norah and Stephen and reveal several moments of ambivalence towards how to see and interact with the Other and difference, whether be it a person, culture, or space.[442] For instance, Stephen faces a dilemma of interpreting Norah's "frenzy" after seeing those women and then reconciling it with both his perspective of the (female) Other and concept of religiosity/Mormonism. He seems confused between conceding that she is indeed a "human dinosaur" and seeing her as "pure and innocent and understood, without compromise, the way a righteous woman should dress."[443] Part of this state of perplexity may stem from the construction of Norah's image since she is portrayed as a Bedouin who doesn't cover her hair and body with "black abiyas like [other] Saudi women in the cities" and therefore does not match the stereotypical image of a (Saudi) Muslim woman. [444] He tries to overcome this situation by engaging in a discussion with her about femininity, female body image, and piousness, yet he fails miserably, and she eventually withdraws to her cabin and

[442] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 249.
[443] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 248.
[444] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 56.

refuses to go outside. It is here where the novel fails to actively and creatively engage with the complexities of veiling, cultural and religious heterogeneity of Arabo-Muslim world, and the debate between modernity and tradition within Muslim world.

Finally, this narrative failure can help explain the plagued and crippled representations of women in the story which lead to Norah's withdrawal to her cabin, and later her room once they reach Cairo. Figuratively speaking, the framed renderings of Norah's character bring us back to inherent cultural and artistic legacy of Orientalism because they are, once again, reminiscent of Orientalist visual art.[445] The way Norah's image is meticulously framed within a specific framework of imaginary perspectives and ideological concepts that control how the reader perceives her resembles how "Oriental" female figures are confined/painted and attached to the (oil) canvases of Orientalist paintings (or photographs, postcard, etc.) featuring Arab/Muslim women, often in imagined scenarios. The element of confinement or controlled presentation is apparent. For instance, the narrator argues that Norah's visit to Cairo might be like "Dante's inferno."[446] Norah is pictured as being "afraid to venture out" while in Cairo because she has been living in "the sheltered wilderness of Midian." She simply cannot live outside her "camp" and yet is consumed with her love for Stephen. Likewise, the majority of Orientalist paintings show Arab/Muslim women within their limited and "confined" social and domestic space since the main artistic focus is usually revolves around the painters'/observers' obsession with the harem. While the painted female figure is never able to return the viewer's gaze, Norah too does not narrate her side of the story independently. Both of them are not allowed to assert their own identities and power and rendered a mere passive object of the viewer/reader. They are

[445] The scholarly interest in visual representation of the Middle East and the legacy of Orientalism never seem to cease. For examples, see Ali Behdad, *Camera Orientalis: Reflections on Photography of the Middle East* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); DelPlato and Codell, *Orientalism, Eroticism*.
[446] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 254.

objectified. Both modes of representation (textual and visual) reflect a woman who cannot live outside such imaginary limited space in the literal, sociological, and aesthetic sense.

CHAPTER FOUR
GEOGRAPHIES OF DIFFERENCE AND THE POLITICS OF IMAGINING SAUDI (ARABIA) SPACE

> The geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways. Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is "out there," beyond one's own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own.
>
> Edward Said

Religious Spatiality

4.1. Saudi Arabia as Biblical Space: Representations of Saudi Spatiotemporal Space in *The White Bedouin*

This deconstructionist reading of the title of George Potter's novel can serve as a springboard for the analysis of the politics of representation of Saudi society in the story. Also, and since the focus has been on the ethno- and socio-linguistic dynamics of the novel's title, it is fitting to start with the examination of the representations of the Saudi spatial landscape and how it overlaps with the construction of the image of Saudis. It is also important to initially remember that the story parallels, although unevenly, two generations of characters and oscillates occasionally between them. First, the lengthy parts of the narrative (thirty-two chapters) a) revolve around Stephen's transformative journey from Utah to "the Land of Midian" in the northwestern of Saudi Arabia, b) give detailed projections of Bedouin life, and c) pay great attention to biblical archaeology. With richly developed characterizations, they depict a sample of a Saudi generation that witnessed the unfolding of the oil discovery in Saudi Arabia during the second half of the1930s and the state-building process, although the story focuses mainly on rural and geographically remote areas rather than urbanized centers. This generation is represented by the charismatic chieftain of Beni Ibrahim tribe, Ibrahim Al-Ibrahim who guards

the “sacred” Mount Sinai on the east coast of Gulf of Aqaba region in the Kingdom. Second, the much shorter chapters (fourteen) that track the progress of Jake’s journalistic investigation during his summer internship in in Saudi Arabia in 1989. In this part, the characterizations are less developed while urban space dominates the spatial landscape because it reflects the life of a different Saudi generation that is more settled and westernized as it reaps the fruits of the modernization process.

The relationship between Saudis and their spatial environment is established very early in the narrative as the novel shows that it is hard to draw a line between the representations of the people and their geographic space. There are two intersecting levels of these renditions: religious/spatial (geographic) and sociocultural/human (ethnic). As a devout Mormon, Stephen looks to the Saudi spatial landscape through a religious lens rendering Saudi Arabia an ahistorical biblical space. His perception of the present of Saudi Arabia and its people is constantly reinterpreted from the vantage point of his sense of biblical literalism of the past in Arabian Peninsula. This controls his perception of the Other and the construction of self-image. The dynamic of self-Other binary is engulfed by Stephen’s obsession with the distant (imagined) past. For this reason, his journey to Saudi Arabia, though to search for oil, becomes a journey to a non-Western and pre-modern enigmatic past.

This notion is immediately anchored to the narrative structure as soon as the main protagonist “was about to enter the guarded Muslim Holy Land—the land of Mohammed, Mecca, veiled women, and a thousand more secrets hidden from the West.”[447] This image of the Islamic past resurrects the East-West binary with all of its theoretical associations that have contributed to such dialectics as Orientalism, patriarchy, racialism, etc. For example, the narrator

[447] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 22.

describes Stephen's initial bewilderment when he arrives in the Eastern city of Al-Khobar after a short stop in the south of England.

> As Stephen made his way toward the trunks, all he could make out was a busy swarm of white-robed men fighting over the baggage. It was pure mayhem. He was no longer in the *civilized world* of the English porters at Southampton who had carefully and politely put his personal items aboard the *Lady Ann*. He was all too aware that the ship had sailed from what he knew as civilization into *a world that seemed lost in time.* He was realizing with both eyes and both ears that he would soon be stepping into the impoverished, yet *exotic, world of Arabia*. Seeing Arab men dressed in the threadbare robes and screaming at each other for a chance to pick up minuscule tips remind him of the Great Depression back home. Even so, to this newcomer from Utah, the Arab porters looked like a band of greedy pirates scouring the plunder of their latest shipwreck.[448]

This long quotation reflects how the narrator constructs a specific image that would help conjure up all the preconceived ideas about the Arabo-Islamic world during the Western hegemony over the incipient states in the region in 1930s. Hence, there is the prosperous and "civilized world" of the West that is presented as more systematic and where the rule of law is respected, on the one hand. On the other, there is the contrasting image of the chaotic, exotic, and "impoverished" Orient. For Stephen, driving through the oriental Saudi city is "like turning back the pages of time."[449] His sense of foreignness in the new socio-geographic space casts a series

[448] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 23. Emphasis added.
[449] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 28.

of doubts about the cultural, racial, and religious aspects of his identity and his relationship with the Other.

Excited by the fact that he is now living in part of the broader geographical concept of the "Holy Lands," Stephen starts to rethink his relationship with the citizens of this area, especially "if the pre-Millennial gathering of the Lord's people would actually come from people who lived in today's Muslim nations"[450] Since it is assumed to be mentioned in the Book of Mormon, such possibility reveals a moment of epistemological ambivalence for Stephen. In fact, he is torn between, on one side, his mythological sense of racial exceptionalism as a Mormon who believes that he is one of the direct descendants of the Israelite royal tribe of Ephraim and, on the other side, his strict adherence to biblical literalism. It seems that the cause of this dilemma is a conflict between what he intellectually embraces and the actual ethnogeography of this region where Muslims live and constitute the overwhelming majority of the population nowadays. "*Perhaps, he questioned, those to be gathered will not be Muslims, but small pockets of Jews that are still living in those [Middle Eastern] countries*."[451] Admittedly, Muslims, for one reason or another, were not supposed to qualify for fulfilling this prophecy.

Stephen's arrival in the Kingdom has triggered a new mechanism of thoughts about religiosity, racial identity, and his relationship with the Other, especially the non-Christian Other. He "couldn't believe he had only been in Arabia a couple of hours, and already he was thinking backward. *The Jews are the good guys*, he reminded himself. *The Muslims are the bad guys*. He was now confused"[452] The core of this ontological struggle is centered around the notion of binarism like self-Other, East-West, religion-secularism, home-foreign, and more importantly

[450] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 31.
[451] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 32.
[452] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 32.

past and future. These examples show that Stephen imagines a future that scares him and because it ultimately creates many existential concerns. Such concerns stem from the fact that, throughout the novel, Stephen's spatiotemporal consciousness fluctuates between reliving the ancient scriptural past and envisaging the prophesied future.

At the beginning of the narrative, Stephen is represented as a Mormon who is mainly concerned about the far future. His notion of the future is based on a set of exclusive racial prejudices and religious beliefs in the context of the prophetic prophecies that provide particular scenarios about the end of the world and the preparations for the Second Coming. Yet, his arrival in an oriental space and the encounter with the Saudi Other has created an aura of foreignness that begins to challenge these taken-for-granted paradigms. For example, the change of his engagement with the principles of brotherhood and linage seem to be responding to Stephen's new sociocultural and religious realization. One of the main initial cultural shocks that he would face upon his entrance to Al-Khobar happens when Abdullah, an old Saudi customs inspector, who "looked like a prophet straight out of his [Stephen's] Old Testament primary lesson" embraces him while whispering "we are brothers. Allah is love."[453] This "brotherly hug" surprises Stephen because it comes after a farcical confrontation with Abdullah who "was the spitting image of Father Abraham!" This unforeseeable incident disrupts Stephen's sense of (religious) brotherhood and forces him to seek further clarification from his fellow oil engineer Timmy Cullerson since the latter has spent more time in the Kingdom. Reflecting a level of rigidity in his perception of Muslims, Timmy fumes and disputes the actuality of this incident entirely by reminding the American newcomer (with a heavy Texan accent) that "Arabs think that we are all infidel dogs … The Muslim brotherhood is strictly a religion thang that we ain't

[453] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 24, 27.

invited to. Yep Abdullah is gone clear mad"[454] While Stephen helplessly agrees that he may have misheard Abdullah, Timmy's remarks do not stop his stream of consciousness about that encounter. The flow of his internal thoughts, associations, and beliefs intensifies and shows signs of a slow yet steady ideological transformation. Entranced by that experience, Stephen begins to wonder: "Could he [Abdullah] be my Ephraimite brother? … Are Arabs my brothers?"[455]. Accepted binaries like self and the Other, East and West and past and future become blurry as a result of Abdullah's acknowledgment of other "believers in God."

Stephan's impression from that encounter changes how he would visualize the Mormon and Arabo-Islamic cultures. It also undermines his religious ideology and inaugurates an ambivalence towards how to reinterpret Mormon scripture as a sacred text. Like other Mormons who were obliged to find suitable approaches for coexistence with different races and sects such as Native Americans, blacks and Latin Americans, he starts to reconsider all possible connections between himself and Arabs by playing on the notion of racialization. Abdallah, as an Arab, becomes an Ephraimite and a member of the descendants of the biblical tribes. Hence, racial orthodoxy (his sense of an Israelite lineage) starts to dwindle. Importantly, this realization signals a genuine shift in Stephen's cognizance of the connection between the two cultures that goes beyond the East-West dichotomy. He carefully examines, for instance, the colorful patters of traditional Saudi floor rugs and tapestries found in the palace of Emir of Al-Hasa and concludes:

> Each seemed like an exact copy of rugs made by the native tribes of South and Central America, Mexico, and even the Navajos and Hopi Indians of American

[454] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 30.
[455] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 33.

> Southwest. He realized that the peculiar similarity between *the Old and New World* patterns couldn't be a mere coincidence. There had to be a connection between Lehi's descendants in the Americans and the Arab weavers.[456]

Although it is a broadly based or hypothetical racial connection, Stephen's remarks reflect an early tendency in the narrative to go beyond the home-foreign confining Mormon localism and, therefore, celebrate the shared human heritages. At the beginning of the story, Stephen is mainly concerned about the far future or distant past but gradually he starts to enjoy his present moment, which can be seen as one of the main reasons for his decision to disappear and live the rest of his life as a proudly independent nomadic trader.

Fittingly, the city of Al-Hasa brings Stephen's concept of the past to the foreground of the discussion. "Indeed," he posits, "Al-Hasa was a living window into a distant past."[457] He qualifies this historiographic characterization religiously by curbing its pastness to "somewhere in the Old Testament times." As discussed before, Stephen's understanding of the past of Saudi Arabia revolves around his interpretations of the ancient scriptural past. It is very interesting to notice the temporal proximity in how Stephen refers to the ancient past as if it were relatively just few years or decades ago. To demonstrate how he perceives the temporal distance of the Peninsular past, let us consider the following case. He wonders, while he is driving by some scattered Bedouin tents: "What peaceful lives these Bedouin have."[458] Yet, instead of observing the presentness of this life or turning to some recent events, Stephen's mental focus delves deep into the distant past of these people. For him, the present shows no signs of historical

[456] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 45. Emphasis added.
[457] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 43.
[458] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 112.

progression. For that reason, it appears that the contemporary past is totally erased as he immediately jumps to the biblical time. The scriptural perception of that past has to be summoned, almost unconsciously, once his thoughts shift to the past of those Bedouins: "Jeremiah called the Arabs notorious highway robbers."[459] His indifference towards his socio-spatial milieu and the spontaneity of these recollections and associations renders the contemporary and modern Peninsular past ahistorical and frozen. It also manifests that the spatiotemporal elements of his conception of the past of the Middle East is exclusively limited to his connotations of biblical stories, nostalgia, originality, and authority/authenticity. His journey in Saudi Arabia goes through two stages: initially, it is transformed into an experience of reliving and reviving that past throughout the first two-thirds of the narrative, before he eventually decides to abandon these habitual thoughts and embraces the present Bedouin nomadic life after two years of his initial arrival to Saudi Arabia.

Such transfiguration from the obsession of biblical archaeology into Bedouin nomadism that Stephen's life undergoes is ironic if considered from Jake's temporal perspective. Jake represents a different generation of Americans who visited Saudi Arabia and there is a gap of fifty-three years between the two (1936-1989). With this in mind, Stephen becomes part of the Saudi past that Jake investigates and relentlessly aims to reimagine and reconstruct, because the former's mythologized existence is narratively (re)interpreted from the vantage point of the latter's present. At the end of the story, Jake is able only to glean some information but is not able to confirm the existence of Stephen as "the White Bedouin." Some of the closing thoughts of the novel are conveyed through Jake's following queries: "Is Stephen Markham dead or alive? Did he fake his death in 1938? If so, what was his motive for abandoning his life in Utah? Why

[459] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 112.

would he have just faded away into the culture of the nomad?"[460] These journalistic questions reflect the image that novel tries to frame for the Saudi-American encounter: an encounter that is still shrouded in many mysteries, myths, and secrets and where the dynamics of religiosity, modernity, and capitalism are still being negotiated and defined in light of the conventional paradigms of traditions, sociocultural mores, praxis, and nationalism. Hence, in the final picture, Stephen succeeds in mythicizing his existence by choosing to go native. He is absorbed inside the frame of the exotic and legendary image of Bedouins that Orientalism usually constructs. By gradually assimilating into the wandering life and falling in love with a Bedouin girl, he moves from being a foreign outsider into becoming a nomadic insider. His life in the Saudi desert with Bedouin blurs all of the preconceived binaries. On that account, the story abruptly ends leaving Jake's enquiries to reverberate endlessly, while simultaneously creating, in Mohsin Hamid's expression,[461] a space for the reader's thoughts to echo as well.

[460] Potter, *The White Bedouin* 318.
[461] In the story, Erica handles the manuscript of her novella to Changez and passionately proclaims: "It leaves space for your thoughts to echo;" See Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008) 51.

Identity Politics: Otherness, Desert Space, And Cosmopolitan Modernity

Translation is always a shift not between two languages, but between two cultures.

Umberto Eco

4.2. Between Two Spaces: Mapping the Personal and Spatial Narrative in *فخاخ الرائحة* *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha*

In contrast to the spatial renderings of the Saudi space in American novels, Arabic novels written by Saudis construct a more vivid image that enriches the reading experience and makes it knowledgeably more pleasurable. American novels like *Finding Nouf*, *The White Bedouin*, *The Hologram for the King*, and others, do engage, with varying degrees of narrative success, with the geographic landscape of the Kingdom. The notion of spatiality is anchored around what can be seen as the regional settings of the stories. They fall short, however, of envisioning the thematic, emotional, and cultural resonance of space. On the other side, Saudi fictional works such as فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha*, ميمونة *Maimounah*, and الحصون *Al-Hosoun* (The Bastions) go beyond depicting spatiality as they discursively flourish in weaving a spatiotemporal dimension to the narrative of localism and its intersectionality with transnational Arab identity. Saudi space comes to life in these imaginary worlds and works as a genuine part of the plot dynamics. These works read through spatiality and reveal various sociocultural dynamics on both personal and national levels that accompanied the modernization process and affected directly the core values of society.

In فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* (Wolves of the Crescent Moon),[462] Yousef Al-Mohaimeed creates a narrative that elegantly employs spatial dynamic to weave together the lives of three different characters. All these characters, in one way or another, seek to map out their identities by reconstructing and construing various facets and fragments of their past. The novel revisits different moments in the modern history of Saudi Arabia as it traces the unwanted and circumstantial relocation of Turad, the protagonist, from unspecified desert space to the city of Riyadh before the oil boom and through the 1970s and 1980s just as the modernization process was reaching its peak. Turad's story is paralleled with Tawfiq's tragic journey of enslavement and, therefore, forced migration from Sudan to Saudi Arabia as well as the insipid life of Nasir, a much younger character, in an orphanage. What brings these three stories together are the notion of disability (physical and psychological) and sense of alienation in modern cosmopolitan world and their tremendous impact on the personas' self-image and identity as their fates intersect spatially and interlink at different moments of the narrative. Al-Mohaimeed's elegant style and ability to weave a colorful tapestry of genuine human experiences, races, and geographies allow him to create a multidimensional space that transcends the locality of the Saudi context which, in turn, explains why Benjamin Lytal, for instance, labels it "the first great Saudi novel" in his review of the novel.[463]

The story is mostly told directly from the first-person perspective that is intertwined with the voice of an omniscient narrator or commentator. The language is a mixture of standard and colloquial Arabic as well as Hejazi, Nejdi, and Sudanese dialects as the narrative's focus shifts frequently yet effortlessly from one spatial position to another (river, sea, forest, desert, Sudan,

462 The choice of this specific title for the English version constitutes a certain interpretive act in itself as I will discuss later.
463 See Benjamin Lytal. "The First Great Saudi Novel." Dec. 26, 2007, www.nysun.com/arts/first-great-saudi-novel/68553/

Riyadh, Jeddah, Mecca) and juggles through temporal perspectives (1930s, 70s, and 80s). The narrative shifts between monologue and dialogue (in the form of flashbacks) for the story unravels as Turad remembers joining Twefiq in

لنضئ ليل الرياض، النائمة كعجوزة بدينة، بالحكايات والحزن الطويل

"whil[ing] away the Riyadh night with stories and sad memories, while the city sleeps like a fat old woman."[464] The novel opens in a bus station where Turad, unheeding, watches the electronic board in the terminal in order to decide where to go next as he grumbles at everything and then mumbles:

سأذهب فوراً إلى مكتب التذاكر، وإن سألني إلى أين، سأقول له إلى جهنم

"I'll go straight to the ticket counter, and when the clerk asks me where I'm going, I'll tell him I'm going to Hell."[465] He is in his late-fifties and anxious to "escape" from what he recurrently calls هذه المدينة الملعونة "this damn city," i.e., Riyadh, because, among other reasons, he is fed up with the way other people in his workplace treat him.[466] Although his job allows him to live in the margins of (working) society—and therefore pass unnoticed—part of Turad's misery is the way he hysterically wraps his *shmagh*[467] tightly around his face and how this compulsive behavior attracts the curiosity of other coworkers as they continuously and mockingly try to pull it off. These relentless attempts make him furious and he resigns few times. When the story starts, he is still reluctant to leave the city since he actually has no other place to go to and for other existential frailties mirrored in his questions: "Dear Lord, should I really be leaving the city, its people, its intimate mud houses, and its warm cozy alleys just because of what

[464] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 159. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from this edition.
[465] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 12.
[466] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 4.
[467] شماغ *Shmagh* is the traditional Saudi men's head cloth and usually patterned in red. For more information, see the glossary section at the end of the English version of novel.

happened? Was I right to resign from my position? He laughed sarcastically. Could you call that job a position? Can the role of an entertainer or a clown dressed in a crumpled *thobe*[468] be called a وظيفة 'position'?"[469] This paralyzing reluctance reveals a deep sense of insecurity, frustration, and identity crisis of an urban personality who has lived most of his adult life in the city.

Taking into consideration that most of the novel's actions take place during the inception of modernity in Saudi Arabia, Turad's incapacitating hesitancy portrayed in فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* is reminiscent of the social and personal dilemma of J. Alfred Prufrock. The latter is another insecure and frustrated urban fictional character, created by modernist writer T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) in his well-known poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."[470] Both Turad and Prufrock are products of modernity who are afraid to face society with their own amplified sense of imperfection while being haunted with an "overwhelming question," that never gets answered. One facet of this "question," for Prufrock, is whether he can meet another person (presumably a woman) while inclined:

> To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
>
> Time to turn back and descend the stair,
>
> With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
>
> (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
>
> My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
>
> My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —

[468] Thobe is also the traditional Saudi garment for men and typically white. For more information, see the glossary section at the end of the English version of novel.
[469] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 8.
[470] Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 3 7.

(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")[471]

His fragmented stream of consciousness reflects how his own inner thoughts exaggerate what he sees as physical disability and cripplingly paralyze him. Although the "song" begins with an open-ended and unclear, vague invitation "Let us go then, you and I," most of the actions in the poem happen inside his head and reveal his psychological damage, despair, and disillusionment. Prufrock drags the reader with him since the persona cannot step out of such stream of thoughts and confesses that "Till human voices wake us, and we drown."[472] (131).

Likewise, Turad spatially stays within the perimeters of the bus station throughout the story until he eventually decides to return to his residence after an abrupt call to his old friend Tawfiq. Al-Mohaimeed's novel, intriguingly, starts with a spatial interrogative إلى أين؟ "Where To?"[473] as if it were a response to the offered invitation found in Prufrock's imperative call, "Let us go then, you and I," at the beginning of "The Love Song." Turad is also inconclusive and goes nowhere since the story consists largely of a series of flashbacks unraveling as he reads and flips through a green file that another traveler forgets on a nearby seat. Just like Prufrock, Turad's sense of physical disability is inflated as he endeavors throughout the story to keep his *shmagh* well-wrapped around his face. He constantly and obsessively tries to cover the left side because his ear is completely cut off. This disfigurement leaves a deep psychological scar that never heals and plagues him with unceasing emotional distress which is amplified by his ever-growing and crushing sense of alienation in the city, especially when his coworkers hysterically laugh while

471 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 4.
472 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 7.
473 This is, in fact, the first line in the novel. Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 3.

comparing him to Vincent van Gogh, the Dutch post-impressionist artist who قطع أذنه وأهداها لحبيبته! "cut off his ear and gave it to his girlfriend!"[474]

Turad's life in urban space in Riyadh intensifies his sense of loss and uncertainty and, as a result, he yearns unceasingly for his nomadic life. For him, dignity is associated with regaining the "Bedouin" spirit of his nomadic past in the desert, which is unattainable (as I will explain later). Although he literally struggles to provide for himself once he moves to the city, he ridicules himself and scorns at doing what he sees as lower jobs like washing cars:

كان يقول لنفسه بصوت مسموع: ما فيها عيب! لكن الصوت الغائر في داخله يعاتبه: يا ابن القبائل الحرّة، يا ابن البراري والهاد الفسيحة، كيف تتقبل أن تصير خادماً أو ماسحاً أو عبداً! كلنا عبيده؟! يعزي نفسه

> 'There's nothing dishonorable about it,' he told himself out loud, but the voice residing deep inside chastised him: 'You, son of the free tribes, son of the wild lands and the wide canyons, how can you accept becoming a cleaner, a servant, or a slave?' 'We are all His slaves,' he would say to console himself.[475]

Being pressured to live in urban space while being oblivious to modern epistemologies—unprepared and uneducated—overwhelms him intensely. In that sense, he shares Prufrock's inadequacy complex. As Marc Manganaro argues that "Eliot's Prufrock is typical of pre-conversion personae who inhabit contemporary urban settings that are at odds with anthropological versions of "primitive" tribal life, which is said to be at one, both practically and spiritually, with the natural environment."[476] Both characters feel powerless and fear/fail to face the complexities of the modern world with all of its sociocultural and emotional entanglements. Turad is indeed totally preoccupied with questions like

474 Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 11.
475 Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 7.
476 See Marc Manganaro, "Mind, Myth, and Culture: Eliot and Anthropology," *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David E. Chinitz (Maldon, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 79-90 at 87.

هل لك حقوق في هذه المدينة؟ ثم من سيضمن حقوقك؟ ألم تكن قرداً يتسلّى به هؤلاء الملاعين، في أوقات فراغهم؟!

"Do you have any rights in this city? Who would look out for your rights? Weren't you just a monkey for those bastards to amuse themselves with when they had nothing better to do?,"[477] but he often heartbrokenly gives into serving

لأعود إلى خدمتهم وأنا أشعر بالانكسار والأسى والغربة!

"them again, feeling broken, aggrieved, and totally alienated."[478] On the other side, Prufrock declares "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;" and asserts that he is "no prophet"[479] These moments of crisis expose their weaknesses, suppressed desires, and frustration as individuals living in an uncompromising modern world that render them unable to even answer the haunting question, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" as Prufrock ironically envisages it.[480] Instead, their souls and sense of identity are disturbed.

Indeed, a genuine part of Turad's problem with his urban life lies in the way he was "forced" to leave the desert in the first place and sever his tribal roots. The dichotomy between his life in Riyadh during a period of multifarious rapid changes and the spatial politics of the desert is established early in the narrative. As a Saudi writer who was born in Riyadh in 1964, Al-Mohaimeed is able to reconstruct some of the sociocultural dynamics that shaped Saudis' lives during that phase of modernization as more people continued to move to urban centers and, therefore, face daily difficulties and challenges of modernity. Unlike other American novels discussed in this study that habitually deal with the desert as merely a barren and desolate geographic space where people embrace nomadism almost mechanically, Al-Mohaimeed ingeniously utilizes the role of olfactory perception in environment to create a captivating

477 Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 9.
478 Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 9.
479 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 7, 6,
480 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 4-5

narrative. He achieves his goal by dissecting what I call the spatiality of olfaction, or the role of one's ability to smell and connect to nature in shaping the individual dimension of spatiality, especially in open spaces like desert or rural areas.

For this reason and while I greatly appreciate the dedicated efforts of Anthony Calderbank[481] in translating the novel into English as the *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, this translation is cultural and literal. The process of translation is an essential component of the study of comparative literature since it creates a narrative space or medium that allows the original text to move from the local context to the global one. The process of translation itself is both cross-cultural and trans-linguistic. "[T]ranslation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another," maintains Susan Bassnett, "it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place mediated by the figure of the translator."[482] It seems that the Calderbank's translational choice of the title is symbolic rather than descriptive as it focuses on highlighting certain themes and milieus. Hence, I believe this title takes away an essential component from the narrative identity and structure because a) it disregards and overlooks the olfactory dimension of the novel that the Arabic title conveys, and therefore, shifts the narrative emphasis, and b) it fails to encompass the other two intertwined stories—the two intersecting plots Tawfiq and Nasir that the Arabic title alludes to. There might be other *marketing* reasons for such titular choice which would evoke certain cultural resonance within "the eventual target language readership,"[483] but I think other "alternative" options such as "The Lure of Scent," "The Traps of

[481] Anthony Calderbank is an English translator of modern Arabic literature who lived in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. He also translated other Arabic works like Rhadopis of Nubia by Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz.
[482] Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.
[483] Bassnett expounds that "The translator is seen as a liberator, someone who frees the text from the fixed signs of its original shape making it no longer subordinate to the source text but visibly endeavouring to bridge the space between source author and text and the eventual target language readership" (*Translation Studies* 6).

the Smell/Scent" or simply "Smell Traps" would have reflected the thematic unity of the novel more inclusively. In short, the current English title is a smart marketable choice, but it does not acknowledge the notion of *in-betweenness* of olfaction as a symbol "that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" within the transformation and interchange in cultures that Homi Bhabha explores in his prominent book *The Location of Culture*.[484] Such title does not appreciate other discursive actualities within the original text which show that the ability to smell is the genuine driving force behind most of the actions and that the exploration of olfactory perception adds a sense of "roundedness"[485] to Al- Mohaimeed's reading of the Saudi past.

Turad was raised by his frail parents in the desert along with his two elder brothers in their tribal community. His special relationship with spatial environment grew as he did. The epitome of this bond is his natural affinity with wolves, one of the most feared animals in the desert, plus his spontaneous respect for both personal and spatial boundaries within surrounding space. The narrator, for instance, eloquently describes such affinity between Turad, as a Bedouin, and spatiality:

وقت أن كان طراد وحيداً في الصحراء، صادقته الكائنات كلها. الرمل استحال له فراشاً. الكثيب والتلّ والنفود عرفته جيداً، كما فتحت له الدخول صدورها واحتوته، أسقته الوديان والشعبان وغسلت جسده. عرفته الفياض والخبارى. ظللته أشجار الطلح والعوشز والسدر. أدفأته جذوع الغضا والسمر بنارها وجذوتها في الليل الصحراء البارد. حتى الذئاب لم تفكر أن تهاجمه وهي التي تشاركه الطعام، إذ تهرول قربه ويحذف لها أعضاء من فريسة

[484] At the end of "The Commitment to Theory," Bhabha discusses the concept of "Third Space" asserts that "we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture." Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* 38.

[485] In his 2016 article "Storytelling and the Spectrum of the Past," Amitav Ghosh approvingly cites Pedro Machado's idea that historical fiction is a "distinctive" "mode of inquiry" that defies restrictions that usually bound and limit historical research from recreating what he calls the "roundedness of experience" of its people. Ghosh thinks that this sense of "roundedness" can enrich the reconstruction of the past because "in rendering a setting through the eyes of individuals, a novel can take on the task of re-creating the multifaceted nature of a character's experience," see Amitav Ghosh, "Storytelling and the Spectrum of the Past," *The American Historical Review*, 121.5 (2016): 1552-1565 at 1557, 1555.

اصطادها، حتى تبتعد قليلا وتقف على رأس التلّ تطالع القمر دون أن تعوي على غير عادتها، كأنما كانت تقف تحرسه من عوارض ووحوش وزواحف الصحراء، كأنما تحرسه حتى من البشر

> When Turad was alone in the desert, all the creatures were his friends. The sand served as his bed; the dune, the hill, and the plateau knew him well. The caves opened their hearts to him and offered him shelter. The riverbeds and springs watered him and washed his body, the pasture lands and the fresh desert shoots recognized him when he passed. The acacia and the *awshaz*[486] and the *sidr* offered him shade. The burning embers of *ghada* logs and *samr* roots kept him warm on cold desert nights. Not even the wolves thought to attack him, for they shared his food. Edging upp to where he sat, he would throw them pieces of the game he had just hunted, and they would withdraw a little and stand on top of the hill […] It was as if they were standing guard over him against misfortune or wild beasts and desert snakes. They even kept a watchful eye over him when other humans were about.[487]

This passage reflects how Tarrad is in total harmony with his desert setting. His spirit lives in accord with the diverse natural elements of that place. These (anthropological) dimensions of how Saudi (local) people interact with their environment are still almost always absent in American fictional works that engage with Saudi space. For instance, *Finding Nouf* by Zoe Ferraris engages directly with desert space and its symbolic spatiality in Saudi culture, especially in the character of Nayir, the "heroic desert guide," yet it portrays a contrasting and

[486] *awshaz*, *sidr*, *ghada*, and *sam*r are the Arabic names for some native trees of the Arabian Peninsula and other similar regions.
[487] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 122.

homogenized image: “they [Saudis] were all the same: rich and pompous, desperate to prove that they hadn’t lost their Bedouin birthright even though for most of them the country’s dark wells of petroleum would always be more compelling that its topside,”[488] The desert spatiality proves to be very challenging for American writers as they seem to be eager to feature it in their storylines. Their representations of the relationship between Saudis and their space become forced, detached, and even mechanical. Thus, it is not surprising to notice that *Finding Nouf* is novel about the murder of a rich Saudi young woman (presumably by her adopted brother) who lives privately on a separate island where “a two-kilometer bridge” connects it to the modern city of Jeddah and yet the family “kept so many camels on a useless island in the middle of the sea.”[489] Such renderings reveal some kind of irreconcilable narrative discord between the indigenous cultural spatiality being depicted and some Western/American writers who engage with that “foreign” space. Even the portrayal of the relationship between Nayir, the desert guide, and that spatiality seems to lack the sense of affinity (if not authenticity) discussed in Al-Mohaimeed’s novel since that character “wasn’t a Bedouin by blood but he felt like one.”[490] All these elements add different layers of distance between the local space, imagined world of the story, and reader within the narrative discourse that the novel constructs for itself. In view of that fact, the plot merely “felt” like a strained engagement with Saudi space that is too pat and contrived.

The discussion of signs of narrative discord in *Finding Nouf* brings us back to the portrayal of the intersectionality of desert spatiality, its (bio)politics, and disruption of the ecological dynamics in فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra’iha*. The main protagonist is Turad who is

[488] Ferraris, *Finding Nouf* 164, 3.
[489] Ferraris, *Finding Nouf* 22, 46.
[490] Ferraris, *Finding Nouf* 5.

forced to flee his tribal home in the desert after he was caught stealing from a pilgrim caravan en route to Makkah to perform annual Hajj. As a punishment, Turad and his fellow bandit, Nahar, are handcuffed and buried up to their necks in the desert sand except for their head to allow them to breathe. Turad was sweating profusely because of the heat and fear when a wolf follows the smell, kills Nahar, and tears off the former's left ear from the root.[491] Luckily, Turad survives. The ability to smell is rendered an essential element of Bedoon harsh life and the story tries to portray that. For example, although Turad describes himself and Nahar as a pack of desert wolves, they are caught because they commit an act of خيانة "treason" against nature (and entire ecology) and, therefore, lose their sense of affinity with spatiality. After befriending Nahar,

مذّاك بدأ طراد يغّير علاقته مع الكائنات النبيلة حوله. سخر من الرمل، وأهان الأودية، وجزّ العواشز والطلح، وقتل الذئاب الجائعة اللاهثة

"Turad changed his relationship with the noble creatures around him. He mocked the sand and insulted the wadis and chopped the *awshaz* and acacias; he killed the hungry, panting wolves."[492] These series of treasonous actions create a widening rift between him and his spatial space. In addition to such discordance between man and nature, these two bandits fail once to smell traps where failure means the end. Sensory acuity is one of the most fundamental survival abilities and skills in the desert that in need for a continuous honing cycle. Hence, once the two young Bedouin are in discord with their surroundings, Turad and Nahhar are no longer part of that harmonious ecosystem where their sensory acuity is impaired or become a bit lazy. Losing his left ear in such unbelievably humiliating way rankles Turad throughout the story.

[491] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 169.
[492] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 123.

Humiliated within his tribal community, Turad flees the desert and migrates to the city. Urban space does not allow him to regain his dignity either. Instead, it proves to be disturbingly complicated for him. In Riyadh, he fails to accept, or at least, comprehend, the new politics of spatiality as well as embracing his disfigurement. Feeling crushed and alienated, he allows his sense of physical disability and longing for the nomadic spirit (and recognition) to haunt him. In that respect, he is like his friend Tawfiq who is abducted from Sudan when he is just eight years old. Tawfiq is a victim of both national and international slavery, but he is already in his late-sixties and a free man when the story begins. After being chased for days in forests, the Sudanese slavers exploited their wretched condition and tricked him and other starving men and women:

كنّا مثل البهائم نعيش على عشب الأرض وخشاشها، كان الجوع يقطّعنا، إلى أن وقعنا في الفخ [...] هؤلاء الملاعين شكّوا قطع شحم في أسياخ الحديد، ووضعوها فوق النار، شفت كيف يا طراد خدعونا. بماذا؟ بشحمة تشويها النار، حتى استكثروا أن يخدعونا بلحمة!

> We were like animals, living off grass and vermin. Hunger began to take its toll, until we fell into the trap […] The bastards had put lumps of fat on the skewers and placed the on the fire. See how they tricked us, Turad? With fat and gristle roasting on the fire. They couldn't even be bothered to trick us with real meat.[493]

The depiction of this demonic lure of scent is so captivating as Al- Mohaimeed foregrounds both the human misery and trafficking associated with the intercontinental slave trade and then intertwines it with spatiality of olfaction. This is one of narrative moments in the novel where Saudi writers are able to outshine their American counterparts in terms of capturing the

[493] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 30-32.

interhuman relations and representing racial, ethnic, sociological diversity within Saudi society. Most of the fictional works written by Americans discussed in this project, I argue, tend to homogenize representations of Saudi space. They portray flat and less developed Saudi characters with no discursive complexities. These characters appear as if they were narratively uprooted from their local space—as seen in the characters of Nayir, Osama, Noura. Such characterization and thematic tendencies reflect no cultural or social depth since there are, usually, no genuine progress in identity structure or development in the portrayal of inner lives dynamics as well as interhuman relations.

Saudi original voices, for instance, create fictional characters like Tawfiq that put Saudi narrative discourse in conversation with globalized contexts, especially in terms of probing human nature and the relationship between literature and place. The novel shows the complexities of his characterization and the author's effort in probing into human psyche through a mixture of vivid dialogues and revealing monologues. His sense of physical and psychological disability surpasses Turad's but it is devastatingly muted as Tawfiq resorts to silence:

بعد شهور شفيت من جرحي العميق، والرعب الذي اجتاحني آنذاك، ونسيت الحادثة تلك كمان نسيت اسمي.

أنا الآن توفيق، وفي بلاد غريبة ونائية يفصلها عن بلادي واسمي بحر وغابات ووحوش وتجار وغزاة وسماسرة وسفن وبيوت وطرقات وأحزان طويلة جداً.

> After some months my deep scar began to heal, and the devastating terror that had swept over me at that time receded. I forgot the incident as I forgot my own name. Now I am Tawfiq, in a strange and distant land, separated from my own country and name by a sea and jungles and wild animal and merchants and raiders and middlemen and ships and houses and trails and tracks and innumerable sorrows.[494]

[494] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 111.

The notion of sociocultural dislocation is overpowering here. Tawfiq was abducted from his hometown in Sudan, transported via Red Sea on one of the slave ships (ironically named *Africa Moon*), raped by a fellow slave, and smuggled through pilgrim caravans during Hajj season. Then, he was sold in Jeddah after they changed his name from Hasan to Tawfiq—it paradoxically means "good fortune." After that, they castrated and sold him again as a eunuch to a wealthy family where he would spend most of his life until the official abolition of slavery in Saudi Arabia in 1962. Tawfiq is another heartbreaking reminder of the horrific experiences of millions of Africans (and other people) and their ghastly journeys of enslavement, rape, displacement, and death. فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha,* and similar Saudi novels like Mahmud Trawiri's ميمونة *Maimounah*, create a narrative that tries to map the personal (and cultural) in contemporary Saudi literature. They also challenge (Western) perceptions of Saudi Arabia—even self-image within the paradigm of local/national literature—that are prone to generalized and homogenized images by dissecting the concept of localism and its intersectionality with (trans)national Arab identity.

Al-Mohaimeed's ability to weave global perspective into the local to create a captivating human narrative that goes beyond the national fictional discourse bears a thematic resemblance to Amitav Ghosh's approach in *Sea of Poppies* (2008),[495] especially in mapping the personal by utilizing the spatial narrative of untold and/or marginalized history. Although it becomes an abridged version of a saga once compared to Ghosh's intricate epic, Al-Mohaimeed's فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* puts the light on one of human tragedies that often goes unnoticed by most in modern society. Tawfiq's forced intercontinental journey from Africa in the early twentieth

[495] Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

century is like that of Ghosh's Deeti whose destiny is to be one of the indentured servants aboard the *Ibis*, despite the original gender politics behind her forced dislocation. A title of a chapter in Al-Mohaimeed's novel elegantly echoes Deeti's miseries of oppression and displacement and labels such passage as رحلة العذاب الأبدي "The Journey of Eternal Torment."[496] Both novels create a spatial narrative that features various moments of convergence of characters, themes, and places, which, in turn, reflects the agonies of marginalized (cultural, racial, societal) groups. These moments of interhuman relations pushes against and scrutinizes self-other and local-global dynamics.

Being part of the Ibis Trilogy,[497] Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, with its rich archival uncovering and linguistic fusion, can be approached as an intriguing anthropological and historical novel that serves as a presentation of the convoluted dynamics of migrations, economics, and the drastic changes to the sociocultural structures that the British Empire—and by extension, global superpowers—has brought to South Asia as well as other parts of Asia and the world. Indeed, when we glimpse into the past as we read fictional works like فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* and *Sea of Poppies*, we find ourselves "slipping into a spell of melancholy remembrance," as Ghosh elegantly frames it, of the colonial and slave past and how our (postcolonial) present still socially, culturally, and economically, with varying degrees, bears the marks of the British Empire and other imperial, neocolonial, and capitalist forces.[498] For instance, one aspect of Al-Mohaimeed's novel pictures the multiracial and multicultural world of slavery and the brutalities associated with that heinous intercontinental trade. Tawfiq, in an

[496] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 27.
[497] Ghosh's Ibis Trilogy features historical convoluted narratives that reconstruct the role of British East India Company in human trafficking of coolies during the tensed time of opium trade that eventually led to the Anglo-Chinese War. The three novels are *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015).
[498] Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* 129.

epiphanic moment of economic awareness, sarcastically exclaims:

هل كنّا نحن، أنا وجوهر وعنبر والذين اختطفوا قبلنا، والذين سيختطفون بعدنا، هل نحن الكنز؟ الكنز الذي عثر عليه أبو يحيى، الكنز الذي جعله يحرق عربة الحلوى، ودكانه وسط البلد، ويشتري بأثماننا أراضي وعقارات، وينشئ مخططات جديدة في البلد؟

> And were we—Jawhar and Anbar and I [his fellow slaves], and all those who had been snatched before us, and those who would be stolen after us—were we the *treasure*? The treasure that Abu Yahya [a slave-trading opportunist] had discovered, that made him burn his pastry cart, and his shop in the town center, to buy land and property with the price of us and undertake new development projects in the country?[499]

The innermost discursive essence of such narrative moments lies in how they effectively yet subtly expose the flow of capital from slavery and how it fiendishly yet implicitly develops into and intersects with capitalism, power, and globalism. Abu Yahya presents himself as a person who found a buried treasure in order to explains and justify his sudden wealth, while in reality he is part of the (domestic) notorious slave trade. Here the local and global framework of slavery is exposed and untangled.

These novels, among others of course, reveal that such marks of oppression and hegemony "are imbricated processes," as Lisa Lowe explains, "[and] not sequential events; they are ongoing and continuous in our contemporary moment, not temporally distinct nor as yet

[499] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 118. Emphasis added.

concluded."[500] Tawfiq's description of his post-emancipation life and the financial difficulties he faces in simply providing for himself offer a sense of "imbricated" continuity that Lowe alludes to:

بعد يومين من التيه والتسكّع في الشوارع والمراكز التجارية عدت إلى القصر، وطلبت أن أبقى مؤقتاً، حتى أدبر عملاً يقيني شر الزمان وسطوته. لم تكن الحرية، وأي حرية بعد أن راح عمري دون عمل أو وظيفة أو زوجة أو طفل يؤانس وحدتي وعزلتي. كنت مثل طير يُفتح له باب القفص فلا يطير، ليس لأنه لا يفهم الحرية، وأن يكون جناحاه حرّين وطليقين، أبداً والله، ولكن لأنه أكثر حكمة ودراية، فقد تعلّم في القفص أن يأتيه الحبّ والماد، فكيف له توفير ذلك في الخارج وهو لم يتعلّم ذلك من قبل

After staggering around the streets and shopping centers for two days, I went back to the palace [where he was put to work as a slave] and asked if I could stay temporarily while I sorted out a job that would keep me together in those dark oppressive days. That wasn't emancipation! What freedom could I enjoy after my whole life has gone by without a career, or a wife and children to keep me company in my loneliness and isolation? I was like a bird who doesn't fly away when the cage door is open for him. It is not because he doesn't understand freedom, or that his wings are incapable of flight. No, that's not it at all. He's wiser and more intelligent than that. He has learned in the cage that seeds and water come to him. How can he provide for himself outside the cage if he has never learned how to be before?[501]

[500] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 7. This is a well-researched book that uses an interdisciplinary approach to study, as its title indicates, the interactions across four continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas) in terms of colonial projects, slave trades, and the evolution of (Western) liberalism between the end of eighteen and the beginning of nineteenth centuries. Summarizing her book's main thesis, Lowe "suggest[s] that the "coloniality" of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection" (*Intimacies* 8).
[501] Mohaimeed, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* 156.

This passionate and lucid exposition offers a distressing demonstration of the devastating, shameful legacy of slavery. It also puts the Saudi novel in conversation with global slavery studies as it engages with the notions of subjugation, economic inequality, sense of personal inadequacy, and lack of self-dependency or interdependency. Tawfiq seems to suffer what Joy DeGruy diagnoses as "vacant esteem" or "the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority"[502] This is part of her theory of the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) which consists of three main characterizations or symptoms: Vacant Esteem, Ever Present Anger, and Racist Socialization.[503] Like other oppressed and physically and psychologically abused individuals, Tawfiq becomes socially isolated—or "alienated" as the novel describes it—as he develops a daunting sense of both powerlessness and vulnerability. For him, the freedom comes too late and after losing his "manhood," home, identity, and any hope for a better future, especially as he starts showing some signs of physical frailty of old age whilst he reaches his late sixties. These new dynamics are fully explored in the discussion of Mahmoud Trawiri's ميمونة *Maimounah* in the next section.

[502] Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005), 125.
[503] DeGruy defines PTSS as a recognizable set of distinctive behaviors or conducts perceived in African Americans (and their communities) that came as outcomes of "transgenerational adaptations of behavior…associated with past traumas of slavery and ongoing oppression" (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* 13).

4.3. "Grandma is my Library": The Gendering of Diasporic Space and Positioning Oral Heritage in *ميمونة Maimounah*[504]

O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no favor of an Arab over a foreigner, nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin, nor black skin over white skin, except by righteousness.

Prophet Muhammed

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word.

Mikhail Bakhtin

ميمونة *Maimounah* by محمود تراوري Mahmoud Trawri offer a complementary sociocultural dimension to Al-Mohaimeed's فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha.* This side is related to the deconstruction of (black) African heritage in modern Saudi culture as the novel tries to rediscover a more obscure past where colonization, religiosity, migration, and slavery intersect and interact on various levels. Trawri writes one of the most elegant novels examined in this project employing a captivating, poignant, and almost poetic language. Part of the beauty of this novel lies in how it presents itself as a precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial simultaneously as it covers a vast scope of geographies and histories. By writing *ميمونة Maimounah*, Trawari is able to connect precolonial Africa with pre-Saudi space and gradually take the reader down to the modern time of the Kingdom. The story delineates the migration of some Muslims from different parts of the west coast of Africa to Makkah and Madinah (Medina), the two holiest Islamic places located in modern-day Saudi Arabia.[505] The characters' enchanting journeys occurred during dangerous times of political instability, poverty, colonialism, and slavery. Relying on the

[504] Mahmoud Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona: Riwaya* (Damascus: Al-Mada, 2007). All translations are mine from this edition.
[505] Alongside with Makkah and Madinah, Jerusalem is the third holiest city in Islam, and it features in the story when Essa travels there.

rich history of oral tradition, especially in African communities, Trawri succeeds in weaving different histories, nations, races, cultures, epochs, and geographies into one seamless mesmerizing narrative as he tells four interconnected and overlapping stories about three generations of African characters/chroniclers and their assimilation into the larger society of the Arabian Peninsula.

Although it begins in an unspecified African space, the narrative traces the journey of various groups of West African Muslims from different western parts of the continent through Sudan during the notorious European imperial and colonial project in Africa in the late nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth centuries. The novel takes its name from Maimounah, the protagonist and the main narrator. The reader hears her voice even before she is born while being inside the womb of her mother and then follows her narration until she reaches old age and becomes a grandmother of قدس Quds, her granddaughter and another chronicler who inherits the passion for narration. The story shows how the demeaning and dehumanizing rule in Africa and slavery forced عيسى Essa, Maimounah's father, to leave their homes and ran away to escape "وحشية النصارى" "the barbarity of the *Nassara* [Christians]"[506] and lead other Muslim survivors and migrate to Hijaz region to seek refuge either in Makkah or Madinah since these two places were not colonized by European forces (or at least seen as points of interests) but experienced varying forms and fluctuating degrees of Ottoman suzerainty.[507] During their painstaking journey, they lost some members to the wild animals of the African jungles, slavers, diseases, and famine, while others were killed in the Arabian desert in confrontations with

غوغاء اعراب ألقاهم التاريخ على قارعته، يجدون في مرور قوافل الحجيج فرصة لسد جوعهم

[506] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 15.
[507] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 15.

"Arab mobs that have been cast aside by history and who find in passing Hajj caravans a means of subsistence (and satisfy their hunger)."[508] Fortunately, Essa, his pregnant wife, and younger brother, عمر Omar were among the few who arrived safely to Madinah. One of the key narrative techniques in the novel is the constant shift of narrators as the story reveals different points of views, either in third-person pronoun or when characters speaks directly, and even when the narrator directly addresses the reader.

The focus, for instance, shifts smoothly between the portrayal of Maimounah's childhood in the Hijaz region, her father's journey to Jerusalem, and the life of her uncle Omar in enslavement in Jeddah. Likewise, Omar's narrative indulgence in telling his niece, Maimounah, about her African culture is stopped abruptly when he is tricked and sold to slavery by his Bedouin friend. Unlike Al-Mohaimeed's Tawfiq who surrenders to his fate as a slave, Omar bravely yet unsuccessfully tries few times to escape his captivity. Through his agonizing pain as one of the Pasha's "annoying" slaves, Omar gives vivid and unparalleled description of the inside of the harem during that period, especially the houses of "the elites." His vantage point as an insider exposes the Pasha's domestic life as well as his (multiracial) wives and slaves and brings that to the foreground of the narrative. Trawri parallels this narration of the past with Maimounah's account of her adult life in Makkah as her mother chooses to settle there after hearing about the fate of her husband—he presumably marries another woman and relocates to Sudan.[509]The last chapter of the novel concludes the narrative with the depiction of the daily struggles of the third generation of the family after the establishment of Saudi Arabia through the eyes of Quds[510] and her "troublemaker" and "rebellious" brother, زكريا Zakaria.

[508] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 27.
[509] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 25.
[510] It means Jerusalem in Arabic.

In contrary to other American novels that deals with the representations of Saudis and their sociocultural space, Trawri's *ميمونة Maimounah* deconstructs the flat and homogeneous image of Saudi society by reviving the rich African oral heritage. The novel also successfully challenges the self-image within Saudi culture (and Muslim world) through the examination of the long and prosperous history of African Muslims and their contributions to Islamic history in general—that unfortunately often overlooked by mainstream literature and media. Thus, the novel contests (mis)representation on various levels: personal, national, and global. This happens through the examination of Maimounah's small family as she tells her early years in (Pre-Saudi period) Madinah where she was born near Al-Masjid an-Nabawi (Prophet's mosque) while her father, Essa, was en route to Jerusalem to visit Al-Aqsa mosque. She describes her infancy as full of "عطش وغربة وحزن وترمل، ويتم لم نتحقق منه" "drought, alienation, sadness, widowhood, and uncertain orphanage"[511] Then her rough childhood is shaped by different social and cultural forces as she grows up in the multi-lingual, -cultural, and -racial Medinese community that have "توحدوا في هوية متناغمة. انتموا للحرم" "united into one harmonious (Muslim) identity where they belong to the Haram [the sacred mosque]."[512] From a spatial perspective, the two Islamic sanctuaries are rendered paradisal spaces where people's sense of spirituality breaks and transcends cultural, racial, and color barriers serenely. Such a long and perilous journey through colonial Africa, treacherous desert, and later resettlement in Makkah or Madinah can interpreted symbolically as regaining, at least part of, the paradise.

The spiritual driving force behind the notion of migration to and settlement in the two Islamic sanctuaries is the dream of "neighboring the Haram" as Essa affectionately and

[511] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 93.
[512] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 28.

repeatedly reminds his fellow migrants[513] This dream is inspired by the call of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) in the *ayah* (verse) thirty-seven of *surah* (Chapter) 14 in the Holy Qur'an:

رَّبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنتُ مِن ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِندَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْئِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُم مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ

O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation by Your Sacred House [the *Ka'bah* at Makkah]; In order O our Lord! that they may establish regular Prayer: So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with Fruits: So that they may give thanks.[514]

This verse actually refers to the Abrahamic call for annual hajj or pilgrimage, yet most Muslims still embrace its symbolic meaning and, therefore, dream of living or spending part of their lives in Makkah and Madinah.

In the case of Essa and his group, however, the European colonial brutalities in Africa added an urgency for human survival to this spiritual dream:

خرجوا هاربين من وحشية النصارى، ملبين نداء ذلك الرجل المدهون بألوان الطيف ... وقف على جبل (أبي قبيس) يؤذن ليأتيه المؤمنون رجالاً يصطحبون نساءهم وخلاصهم

[513] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 15.
[514] The original translation of the meaning is from *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* by Abdullah Ali, but I also incorporated some words from the interpretation of Al-Hilali and Khan to add readability and give a clearer context. See, Abdullah Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2001), pp. 703-704; Taqi al-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Khan, *The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Al-Madinah al-Munawarah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Tiba'at al-Mushaf al-Sharif, 1999),333-34.

> They fled the barbarity of the *Nassara* [Christians], answering the call of that man [Abraham] who is shrouded in a spectrum of colors … He stood on the Mount Abi Qubais [in Makkah] to make a call so believing men may come along with their wives and salvation."[515]

The dire colonial context in African (Muslim) communities transforms this divine call into a literal need for deliverance from harm and, what is even worse, slavery and subjugation.

Trawri creatively connects multiple generations in feeling the agonies of colonialism and imperialism by depicting Maimounah, while still in the womb, listening to her father, who represents the knowledgeable and proud African Muslim leader, telling others about such horrors that forced them to flee their home. This narrative frame allows her to bond with her African heritage even before she is born and eventually contribute to her later maturity into the main narrator in the story. She bears corporeally/bodily part of that horrific legacy as the reader discovers that she has no left ear and was born with a twisted foot that causes her to limps on one leg and, therefore, move with difficulty. It can be also ironically argued that Maimounah's unparalleled inclination to hear from others while she is not born yet may explain why her left ear "التصقت بجدار رحم أمي" "was stuck to the (inside) wall" of her mother's womb.[516] his implicitly hints to the cross-generational effects of colonialism and demonstrates the devastating existence of a multigenerational trauma as well as the power of oral tradition in connecting these dispersed generations of Africans together through stories.

[515] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 15.
[516] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 46.

The main common theme that connects these three intersecting levels, i.e., personal, national, and global, is the celebration of the often-overlooked African heritage in all of its rich diversity—tribes, religions, customs, cultures, myths, songs, etc. The reader glimpses a kaleidoscopic history through Maimounah's original voice as she carefully and passionately opens up her سحارة *Saharah*[517] (figuratively means "box of stories") and tells her granddaughter, Quds, about their glorious past. The passion for storytelling and the African past creates a powerful bond between Maimounah and Quds as they casually exchange a series of stories from different times and perspectives.

قدس حبيبتي، قولي للناس كل اللي سمعتيه مني. حكيهم يا بنتي، لا يحسبونا مقطوعين. انت فكيتي الحرف أحسن مني، يمكن تقولي شيء.. أي شيء، وكلما احتجتِ شيء، افتحي السحارة وعبّي.

> "My beloved Quds," Maimounah pleads, "tell people everything you heard from me. Tell them, my baby, so they don't think we are rootless. You could decipher [Arabic] better than me. You can say anything, anything, and every time you need something, open the *saharah* [the box of stories] and take more."[518]

The oral history becomes the link of Quds's generation to their "roots" and the cultural identity associated with them. Likewise, Maimounah confesses that

فراحت ترشوني بالحكايات التي تمثل رابطاً اليافاً بيننا

> "she [Quds] bribed me with stories that represent a familiar bond between us."[519]

[517] Saharah is a wooden box that usually used as a treasury for keeping valuables in security. The word comes from the old Hijazi dialect.
[518] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 135.
[519] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 32.

This notion of forging a close bond through the art of oral storytelling tradition creates a sense of transgenerational unified identity. I argue that the discourse of the story adds an aura of cultural authenticity to Trawri's narrative which transcends the novel's representations of the black minority in Saudi society because Maimounah (and by extension Quds) can be seen as some kind of a Saudi version of the West African griot.[520] Quds, in fact, proudly declares: "جدتي هي مكتبتي" "Grandma is my Library."[521] Maimounah functions as a human repository of oral African tradition.

Emulating the intellectuality of her father who الغابات أدغال من جاء "came from the thickets of forests" somewhere in west Africa,[522] Maimounah embodies the character of the griot. In most of the West African cultures, the griot functions as an oral historian who plays an important role in preserving and relating the oral history of the community.[523] Many critics have examined the complexities of this role in maintaining African history, particularly in the western part of the continent. For instance, in "The Role of the Griot," D'Jimo Kouyate, asserts that: "It is important that people understand the roles and power that the griot has been endowed with since the beginning. One of the roles that the griot in African society had before the Europeans came was maintaining a cultural and historical past with that of the present… the griot was the oral historian and educator in any given society."[524] This role goes beyond the performative act of the griot and has been appropriated effectively in African and Western literature alike. Maryse

[520] In fact, the novel is full of folktales, songs, and short poems.
[521] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 142.
[522] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 11.
[523] "Griot," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 2: 94.
[524] Kouyate D'jimo, "The Role of the Griot," *Talk that Talk: An Anthology of African-American Storytelling* (New York: Touchstone, 1989), 179-181 at 179.

Condé's *Segu* (*Ségou* 1984)[525] is an excellent example of a fictional work that embraces this sociocultural concept as the "the African griot's epic forms inspire [the novel] and help explain the attitude of irreverence that colors the narrative's discourse."[526] In *Segu*, Condé employs the tradition of having an oral historian who recites history as she tries to reconstruct the early days of Islam in different parts of the west African region during the eighteenth century. As "a contemporary griot,"[527] she (re)envisions the (pre)colonial past and represents Islam—along with Christianity, the slave trade, and colonization—as a disrupting political force that challenges and problematizes the war-plagued and highly diverse African scene of Bambara Kingdom rather than a mere religious doctrine—although she often provides fine details of various Islamic schools of religious doctrines that are prominent in West Africa like Tijaniyya and Sufism. Trawri's ميمونة Maimounah shares this responsibility of the oral narration in modern literature and, therefore, resembles Condé who "as a woman has usurped the terrain of griot generally belonging to men" as Chinosole phrases it.[528] Indeed, Maimounah takes onto herself the task of preserving and then passing the knowledge of African past with all the pains and hopes associated with its narration. Trawri's incorporation of the notion of the griot is a show of his pride in the cultural and social heritage of Africans. The literary fusion between the local Hijazi culture and the traditional role of the griot within the context of modern Saudi literature creates a space for the novel in the wider concept of the African diaspora and paves the way for a conversation with contemporary Western novels and be part of world literature.

[525] Condé's describes *Segu* as a "commissioned work" because Robert Laffont "commissioned her to write a historical saga about Africa." See Victoria Lodewick, "Truth or Lies? Ethnography as Fiction/Fiction as Ethnography in Maryse Condé's *Ségou*," *Romance Review* 10 (2000): 65-76 at 68. Segu has a sequel, *Segu II* or *The Children of Segu* (1985); See.
[526] Chinosole, "Maryse Conde as Contemporary Griot in Segu," *Callaloo* 18.3 (1995): 593–601 at 594.
[527] Chinosole, "Maryse Conde" 594.
[528] Chinosole, "Maryse Conde" 600.

The pride in African identity is established at the beginning of the novel. Throughout most of the plot, for example, Maimounah and her mother live on the hope of father Essa's return, but they never reunite with him since he disappears in the narrative after visiting Jerusalem. In spite of this disappearance and the allusion to his second marriage and relocation to Sudan, Maimounah embraces him and celebrates his cultural identity:

أبي جاء من أدغال الغابات ومناجم الذهب والنحاس والفوسفات والألماس والكاوتشوك والقهوة والكاكاو وزيت النخيل والقحط والقلوب التي تهفو للخلاص

"My father came from the thickets of forests, and from the mines of gold, copper, phosphate, diamond, ivory, rubber (caoutchouc), coffee, cacao, palm oil, drought, and the hearts that yearn for salivation."[529] This sense of pride also resurfaces habitually in the novel in the form of anticolonial sentiment and the narrator's occasional references to the Europeans' failure—at least initially—to infiltrate the African jungles and forests or what used to be labeled, even in the story, as "the graveyard of the white man."[530] The tenacious resistance to colonialism is also proudly highlighted in the narrative, especially the role of the Muslim revolutionary leader Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817)

وكيف جيّش قبائل الفولاني، مطلقاً صيحات الجهاد التي واصلها من بعده ابنه محمد بلو ثم أحمول وبو الذي اشتبك مع الفرنسيين حينما غزوا جهات الغابة

[529] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 11.
[530] Various tropical parts in Africa (and elsewhere) came to be known by this label simply because many Europeans died of malaria within weeks of their arrival to forests, especially during the early waves of colonialism.

"and how he incited the Fulani tribes with the calls for *jihad* that continued with his son Muhammed Bello and then Ahmadu Lobbo who collided with the French when they raided parts of the forest."[531] The representations of the tenaciousness of Africans is usually paralleled with the portrayal of the viciousness of colonizers in subduing the natives and

خراب ودمار خلفوه ورحلوا، أحرقوا القرى والحقول، ونشروا الأوبئة خلال عمليات النهب، وغارات صيد البشر وحيوان، فتوقف العمران، وتعطلت الزراعة ...

"the destruction and havoc they caused before leaving. They burned villages, fields, and spread plagues during plundering and hunting raids on human and animals until construction stopped and agriculture was disrupted…," as Essa mournfully remembers.[532] The anticolonial discourse in the novel haunts both the characters' interaction with and representation of African history. It is also transferred to Quds's younger generation, even if it is pushed slightly to the background of their collective memory as she pledges to challenge and expose

"جنون التاريخ وقدرته على الزيف" "the madness of history and its ability to falsify" in her works as a Saudi character/writer.[533]

Narrating this sense of "madness" in human suffering is a core theme in the story for the atrocities of slavery and the politics and economics of slave trade are occasionally examined from a comparative perspective. To demonstrate this point, let us look at how the narrative frames the captivity and servitude of Maimounah's uncle. Lack of financial independence during a drought season in Medina renders Omar unable to provide for his niece and her mother as he promised their father, Essa. This creates an unbearable sense of "weakness" for him and,

[531] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 21.
[532] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 13.
[533] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 135.

therefore, makes him too susceptible to being lured into slave trade. His "Bedouin" friend, مناور Menawwir, persuades him to go to a caravan of pilgrims and trick a few African boys who lost their parents during the arduous hajj journey. On a whim, or an "epiphanic moment," as he terms it, Omar exploits their neediness and the shared cultural history between him and the hapless boys—in his eyes both sides are "descendants of forest men"—and coaxes them into coming with him (39). Instead of becoming one of the African traders in "black ivory," Omar finds himself tricked and chained while asleep during their trip to the "unofficial" black market of slavery in Jeddah. He discovers too late that he walked straight into a trap that was set up by Menawwir, whose name in Arabic literally yet ironically means a maneuverer or a cunning, devious person. At that moment Omar realizes his unrepairable, horrendous mistake and has flashbacks of his brother's stories about the greatness of some black صحابة *sahabah* or companions of the Prophet like Bilal plus more recent African figures like Mansa Musa[534] (1280-1337) and Askia Muhammad[535] (1443-1538). On one of his attempts, Omar is able to escape, but, to add insult to injury, he is shortly captured by معتوق Ma'atouq, an African fisherman, who tricks and hands him back to the Pasha, the slaveholder. Although it initially almost seems to succeed, Omar's plan is ironically thwarted because he trusted a fellow black person even though he was initially reluctant to do so. Reflecting on his past experiences with distrust and failure,

[534] Officially known as Mansa Musa I and considered one of the most significant Muslim rulers of the Mali Empire (1235-1670). His massive wealth and unmatched generosity made his Empire legendary and helped bring Mali to (Muslim) world's attention. During his thirty-year rule (1307-1337), Mansa Musa "played a key role in the expansion of Islam into West Africa. He was also responsible for much of the expansion of the west African gold trade to the eastern parts of North Africa and the Sudan [as well as developing] diplomatic relations with Egypt and Morocco, sending ambassadors to both nations and receiving their consuls in return" (164); See, "Musa, Mansa I," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* 2: 164-65.

[535] Askia Muhammad Touré, the ruler of the Songhai Empire (1493-1528). He established Islam as the official religion of the Songhai ruling family. He is also known also as "Askia the Great," because "during his reign, he seized vast lands from Mali as well as from the Hausa States and the Berbers. In those years, Timbuktu flourished again as an Islamic center of learning. Invaders from Morocco overran Songhai in 1591." Muhammad Touré, Askia," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* 2: 149.

Omar has his own doubts and questions the intersection of race and the notion of trust even before his recapture: "هل حقاً أنا مطمئن لمعتوق أم لونه؟!" "Am I really trusting Ma'atouq or his (skin) color?!"[536] Unluckily, Omar is recaptured for the fifth time and succumbs into muted melancholy and loses himself to a series of long, suppressed philosophical soliloquies and existential questions—even while being auctioned. He reproachfully believes that these thoughts would not redeem him, because he sees himself as a person who is reduced to eternal slavery for exploiting the vulnerabilities of a helpless group of young and parentless black boys. The story, fittingly, ends while he is still a "despised" and "mistrustful" slave.[537]

The element of comparativity is maintained throughout the story particularly in depicting the dehumanization of slaves once they are in captivity. The narrator, for instance, describes how Omar was forced to walk barefoot on the rough desert terrain:

انضم عمر بعد فكاكه من غيبوبة يقظة حادة، إلى سلسلة الحبال التي قيد فيها الغلمان، وأذن للجمال ببدء السحب للكتل البشرية المكممة الأفواه، السائرة مكبلة فوق رمال موغلة بين جبال لا تخلو كثيرً من الأشواك والعقارب والزنابير والقسوة.

"Once he snaps out of his sharp daydream, Omar joins the series of ropes that bound the [enslaved] boys together. The camels were given the signal to pull the chains of human beings. They were gagged and shackled while marching on rugged sands between mountains that are not short of thorns, scorpions, hornets, and cruelty."[538] (41). This moving description is strikingly reminiscent of the famous "chain-gang" scene in Joseph Conrad's classic, *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

536 Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 128.
537 Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 115.
538 Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 41.

> A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.[539]

In spite of his biased language[540], Conrad creates a narrative sketch that conveys the inhumane treatment of African slaves and how they are transported from one place to another during the European colonial rule in African at the end of nineteenth century. ميمونة *Maimounah* and *Heart of Darkness* are relatively short novels (both less than 150 pages) that care about language, style, and imagery to communicate human experience. Omar's sense of bafflement about his first-hand experience with servitude in rural Hijaz parallels Marlow's first encounter with the colonial subjugation of the natives along the Congo river. Both scenes, with their varying, distinctive perspectives, give the reader a glimpse into the ugly world of slavery which, to use Achebe's phrase, "depersonalizes a portion of the human race" whether in the Arabian desert or African

539 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Robert Kimbrough and Paul B. Armstrong, 4th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 15.

540 Many scholars have criticized Joseph Conrad of what Frances Singh terms "The colonialistic bias" of *Heart of Darkness,* in an article with the same title; including Chinua Achebe in "An image of Africa," Edward Said's "Two Visions in Heart of Darkness," and others. Peter Firchow summarizes the debate as the following: "In Heart of Darkness the stereotypical images are primarily those relating to Africa, both as a place and as a people-or, rather, several different places and different peoples, including a variety of distinct African ethnic groups" (xiv). See, Peter Firchow, *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's* Heart of Darkness (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Frances Singh, "The Colonialistic Bias of *Heart of Darkness*," *Conradiana* 10.1 (1978): 41-54; Edward Said "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*," *Culture and Imperialism* 19-30.

jungle (1790).[541] From a comparative (world) literature viewpoint, Trawri's ميمونة *Maimounah* shows that there is no spatiality to human misery degradation by shedding some light on the transnational and transcontinental slave trade during that period and its transgenerational damaging reverberations. For Maimounah, slavery, colonization, imperialism represent the spatiality of race relations of the past and help overcome the contemporary discrimination and racial alienation within modern societies.

This notion of racial spatiality brings the focus back to modern Saudi space and how the narrative criticizes the existence of racially loaded and derogatory words like تكارنه *takarinah* (and its singular form تكروني *takroni*) that some Arab communities may use to refer to Maimounah and her minority, especially within Saudi space. Rejecting the term, the narrator refers to the etymology of the word *takrouni* and explains that it originates from the name of the Toucouleur (Tukulor) people[542], but there was a drift in its pronunciation in Arabic because the letters changed over time and after many years of living in the Hijaz region.[543] Linguistically speaking, it seems that the Arabic word *takron* appeared when its original form (Tekrur) went through a morphological process in which an internal modification occurs at the end of the word resulting in a shift in denotation (beyond the immediate cultural context). Thus, this change in

[541] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), 1783-94.
[542] Tukulor (Tukolor, Toucouleur) are Muslim people of a Fulani subgroup located mostly in present-day Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania and speak Fulfulde. Their name derives from Islamic kingdom and empire of Tekrur (900-1700). They converted to Islam during the eleventh century. In 1854 Al-Hajj Umar Tall (1794-1864) declared himself a caliph (of the Tijaniyya) and established Tukulor state (or Segu Tukulor) and called for jihad in West African after the army of Moroccan Sultan, Ahmad al-Mansur (1549-1603), put an end to the Songhai (Songhay) Empire (1460-1591) at the Battle of Tondibi (1591). Later, the colonial French forces overran the Tukulor state and conquered important cities like Segu, Macina, and Timbuktu forcing his son Ahmadu Séku to surrender as they eventually assimilated it into its federation or French West Africa in 1893. See, "Tukulor empire" *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2017); "Tukulor," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* 3: 289; For more information see also, B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin. *The Segu Tukulor Empire* (London: Longman, 1978); On the Songhai Empire refer to David Conrad, *Empires of Medieval West Africa: Ghana, Mali, and Songhay* (New York: Chelsea House, 2010).
[543] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 33.

word-formation has transformed Tekru*r* into Tekru*n*. Arguably, this phonological process might have made the pronunciation easier since /r/ is replaced with /n/. [544] In short, what concerns us here is that the word Tekrur was borrowed into Arabic and gradually converted into something of a derogatory antonomasia for all those who are black or of African origin. Maimounah repudiates how society collectively refers to blacks whether they are from the tribes of the

الفولاني والهوسا والونقرة والبرنو والزغاوة واليوروبا والزبرما والكمبيجو والفوتا وكل المنتمين لغرب الغابة

"Fulani, Hausa, Wangara, Barno, Zaghawa, Yoruba, Zaberma [Zarma], Kambejo, Futa, and the rest of who belongs to the West of the forest" as *takarinah* even though they have seemingly integrated into the mesh of society as well as

ينسربون متداخلين بين الأعراب والجاوا والهنود والترك والشراكسة والمصريين والشناقطة والشوام والألبان والبوسنيين والأفغان والمغاربة، فينعتهم الناس بالتكارنة.

"intertwining with Arabs, Javanese [Malays], Indians, Turks, *Sharkas* [Circassians], Egyptians, *Shanqitah* [Chinguetti/Mauritanians], *Shawam* [Levantines], Albanians, Bosnians, Afghans, Maghrebis /Maghrebians, but people still label them *takarinah*."[545]

Trawri's novel creates a counternarrative that deconstructs these collective racial slurs by taking a sweeping and panoramic view of African history inside and outside the "black continent" and then connecting such fictional historicization with the influential Islamic presence there. For this

[544] I owe the notion of "derogatory antonomasia" to David Hicks and his analysis of the political rhetoric and terminological origin of the slogan "Mauberism" in chapter nine of his book; David Hicks, *Rhetoric and the Decolonization and Recolonization of East Timor* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 191.
[545] Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 173.

reason and after generally exploring the tribal, cultural, and societal diversity within Africa, the emphasis shifts to narrating the lives of few prominent Muslim figures and their legacy. To understand Trawri's distinctive narrative dynamic, one needs to examine the recurring reference to Mansa Musa, Askia Muhammad, besides others of course like and Leon the African or Leo Africanus, and their glorious journeys to the Islamic east and Europe. I will highlight two examples from the novel to contextualize the discussion before delving into the analysis.

Mansa Musa, in particular, is a central figure in Trawri's narrative discourse as the novel relies heavily on frequently referring to the lasting impact of the unbelievably luxurious entourage that accompanied him on his extravagant hajj journey in 1324 from the west coast of Africa to Makkah through Egypt where:

> سكان القاهرة ظلوا يتحدثون عن هذا الموكب الفخم طيلة مائة عام بعد مروره بها. ولما وصل منسي موسا الحجاز، فاضت خيراته وهداياه على سكان الأراضي المقدسة حتى لهج الجميع بشكره والدعاء له. ولم تكن خيرات الإمبراطور مقصورة على مصر والحجاز، بل نعم بها الناس والقبائل على طول الطريق من مالي إلى مكة المكرمة.

> The Cairenes had continued to talk about that lavish procession for a hundred years after its passing. When Mansa Musa reached Hijaz, his bounties and gifts had been extended to the people of the holy lands until they thanked him and prayed for him. The Emperor's bounties were not limited to Egypt and Hijaz, but they blessed the people and tribes, along the way from Mali to Makkah.[546]

[546] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 81.

Indeed, the fame of this religious trip went into history (often with scrupulous attention to minute details) as a turning point in how Africa is viewed and imagined within regional and international sociocultural frameworks. *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture,* for example, highlights the huge significance of this journey in shaping the representations of the Muslim kingdoms of the Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the Islamic world, and asserts that:

> Ultimately, Mansa Musa's pilgrimage changed the way the world thought about Mali—and Africa. In 1339, four years after his return, Mali began appearing on Arabic maps. Indeed, by 1375 at least one cartographer included on a map an illustration of a clearly wealthy king carrying gold. In the wake of Mansa Musa's hajj, trade between Mali and Egypt soared, and as news of the riches and splendor of the king's entourage reached the Middle East and Europe, Mali became an object of fascination. The curious, the greedy, and the devout all were attracted to Mali, transforming it into a center for everything from Islamic scholarship to trade."[547]

Likewise, Askia Muhammad is another African King who is portrayed as trying to surpass Mansa Musa in showing his generosity and hospitality by spending extravagantly on his way to Makkah in 1495 and eventually buying some date palm orchards on the outskirt of Madinah and making them into *"وقف"* waqf lands—inviolable Islamic trust or endowment[548]—for the Toucouleur (Tukulor) people living near the Prophet mosque, where

[547] "Musa, Mansa I," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* 2: 164-165 at 165.
[548] The *Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* defines it as the following: "Waqf [literally means] stoppage, immobilization (sc. of ownership of property), from waqafa to stop, come to a standstill). In Islamic countries, endowment or settlement of property under which the proceeds are to be devoted to a religious or charitable purpose; land or property endowed in this way;" see Jennifer Speake and Mark LaFlaur, "wakf," *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). John Esposito explains that "The three most typical kinds of waqf are religious (mosques, as well as real estate that exclusively

ذاب الكل في الكل، تزاوجوا، وتصاهروا. تداخلت الأعراق، وتوحدوا في هوية متناغمة. انتموا للحرم.

"all [African tribes] melted into one. They married interracially; their races intermingled and united into one harmonious identity. They belonged to the Haram."[549]

The aim of this scrupulous and often detailed representation of these historical Muslim characters and how the narrative juxtaposes the exceptional material wealth and power with acts of piety and charity is to debunk still prevalent stereotypes, prejudices, and myths about Africa and Africans. According to these constructed images, Africans irrespective of the huge diversities—cultural, racial, tribal, social, religious, historical, etc.—within the continent are seen as poor, uncultivated, dangerous and even violent people, while their countries seem to lack both history and progress as well as being plagued by the widespread of disease, instability, corruption, poverty; and like other preconceived ideas about the Other, this contrived list unfortunately goes on.[550] Yet, the novel challenges such imagery by resurrecting some "forgotten" aspects of the glorious African past, especially that of Muslims.

provides revenues for mosque maintenance and service expenses), philanthropic (support for the poor and the public interest at large by funding such institutions and activities as libraries, scientific research, education, health services, and care of animals and the environment), and posterity or family awqaf (whose revenues are first given to the family's descendants; only the surplus, if any, is given to the poor);" see "Waqf," *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

549 Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 28.

550 There are dozens of books on the image of Africa and its people. For a theoretical contextualization of this topic, one may begin with reading, for instance, Valentin Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana Univiversity Press, 1995) and Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow. *The Myth of Africa* (New York: Library of Social Science, 1977); Carol L. Magee, *Africa in the American Imagination: Popular Culture, Racialized Identities, and African Visual Culture* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); Jeffrey B. Leak, *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2005); For representations of African American women, see Melissa V. Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); This book deals with images of Africa in Children's Literature, see Vivian S. Yenika-Agbaw. *Representing Africa in Children's Literature: Old and New Ways of Seeing* (New York: Routledge, 2008); For the discussion of Africa in

The discursive function of the (re)construction of the precolonial past is twofold. First, it deconstructs such stereotypical images of Africa and its people within the representational discourse of Africa prevailing outside the continent—primarily within Western and Arabic culture in the novel. Importantly, it simultaneously decomposes similar formulaic ideas circulating within African space itself. Within this sociocultural paradigm, Africa is seen and represented negatively by Africans and non-Africans alike. There is almost always one face of Africa and it is unfortunately an uninvitingly fixed and preconceived one. This of course problematic and it corresponds exactly to what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Nigerian novelist/writer, terms "The Danger of a Single Story" in a 2009 TED talk with the same title. [551] In her talk Adichie explains the power of popular images in constructing a "single story of Africa [that] ultimately comes … from Western literature." She also warns that popular images frame Africa within specific modes of representations rendering it as "a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner." This "white foreigner" does appear in Trawri's *Maimounah* not as savior, but as a ruthless colonizer who embodies the malicious prosecution and violence during the age of colonization and imperialism or "the barbarity of the *Nassara*," as Essa puts it—hinting to the often implicit socioreligious justifications of European conquest of Africa.

(post)colonial studies, see V. Tarikhu Farrar, *Precolonial African Material Culture: Combatting Stereotypes of Technological Backwardness* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020) and Chielozona Eze, *Postcolonial Imaginations and Moral Representations in African Literature and Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).

[551] Chimamanda Adichie. "The Danger of a Single Story." TEDGlobal, July 2009, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

Although he wrote ميمونة *Maimounah* few years earlier[552], Trawri joins Adichie in her criticism of "The Danger of a Single Story" by creating a narrative that probes into both the notions of blackness and belonging (to both African and Saudi identity). Maimounah's "box of stories" serves to invite Arabs/Muslims to reflect upon how to see Africans and simultaneously challenge how Africans look at themselves by asking what it means to be African, or African Muslim, to be more precise. The narrative seeks to create a dynamic where black/African self-representations and self-images are deconstructed and then renegotiated. For example, one of Trawri's keys narrative tropes to achieve this goal is to reimagine the legendry history of Mansa Musa and his amassed power, uncountable wealth, and above all, pious and meek character as Maimounah enthusiastically acknowledges that she

أنصت لحكاية (منسي موسى) التي التصقت بذهني عميقاً. لأرويها بعد سنوات لأبنائي وأحفادي، لينفضوا عنهم غبار التجاهل، وأنبههم ألا تأخذهم أقاويل تزيف ماضيهم، وتحتقر جذورهم.

"I listened to the story of Mansa Musa that stuck deeply in my mind to recount it to my children and grandchildren years later, so they would brush off the dust of indifference [lethargy] and warn them not to be swayed by sayings that falsify their past and despise their roots."[553] Although she is portrayed as an uneducated woman, Maimounah is cognizant of the prevailing prejudices and how they would shape thinking and perspectives of her offspring. Hence, she plays on words by intentionally using the Arabic word أقاويل (aqawil) that can be translated as both "claims" and "sayings" to indicate that these (false) *histories* are not *facts* and, therefore, create a narrative context for her refutation of these *subjectively* constructed *epistemology* that

[552]After some difficulties in publishing, *ميمونة* Maimounah came out in 2007, but it won the Sharjah Award for Arab Creativity in 2001.
[553] Trawri, *ميمونة* *Maimona* 13-14.

are often entangled in a web of stereotypes and misinformation within the sociocultural milieu of society. She vigorously demonstrates her point by building her confutation on the precolonial history and the story of this legendry African leader. Mansa Musa is an incomparable historical figure not as a Muslim Emperor but as a symbol of African affluence and wealth who is considered to be "the richest man who ever lived" and "who once disrupted Egypt's economy just by passing through," as Jason Daley contends, when this journey "actually devalued the metal [gold] and led to a currency crisis that took Egypt 12 years to dig itself out of."[554] He is even compared to T'Challa or Black Panther, the contemporary fictional superhero and the king of the imaginary African country of Wakanda.[555] The recurrence of Mansa Musa and other prominent characters from different angles in the novel created a counternarrative that unmasks the narrowminded and erroneous depiction of Africa and its people that has been circulating since the age of colonialism, and even before as I will discuss later. Among the leaders of this counternarrative are the Africa writers Achebe, Adichie, Tayeb Salih, Nadine Gordimer, Mariama Bâ, Ngugi wa and Thiong'o plus other new emerging voices in Africa. These writers embrace their local identity and negotiate an independent African voice since their writings go beyond the narration of (post)coloniality to examine social, cultural, and political problems of their respective societies and how they intersect with nationalism, race, identity, and gender just as in intellectual debates found in other communities.

[554] Jason Daley. "New Exhibition Highlights Story of the Richest Man Who Ever Lived." Smithsonianmag.com, 5 Feb. 2019, www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/richest-man-who-ever-lived-180971409/. There is also a curious comparison between Masa Musa, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, and the ten richest men of all time, see Naima Mohamud. "Is Mansa Musa the richest man who ever lived?" BBC.com, 10 March 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47379458.
[555] Thad Morgan. "This 14th-Century African Emperor Remains the Richest Person in History." History, 31 Aug. 2018, www.history.com/news/who-was-the-richest-man-in-history-mansa-musa.

In ميمونة *Maimounah*, Quds represents the black intellectual who is able to successfully embrace his/her African identity and become a writer or a chronicler who fights to characterize the challenges within her own local community/minority, in particular, and reflect the transformations in her country, in general. Her close relationship with her grandmother Maimounah enriches her sense of belonging and self-image and empowers her to continue her legacy in narrating their story so others "don't think we are rootless" as the former cautions.[556] The discourse of the two female characters is in total agreement with Adichie's warning that "The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar." These intellectual endeavors of both Maimounah and Quds move this Saudi novel from its local context and push it into the dynamics of regional and transnational perspectives on race, tradition, and heritage. Maimounah herself starts this task by criticizing the representations of black people within Arabic cultural heritage. For instance, she quotes Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), a Muslim explorer of great renown, and questions how he so casually accuses some black Africans of cannibalism while simultaneously commending their close observance of Islamic teachings and even etiquettes. She bemoans how "صوت ابن بطوطة" "the voice of Ibn Battuta" throws "sand: in her ear and then she mockingly asks her absent father,

كيف تقرؤون القرآن وتأكلون لحم البشر وتفسدون في الأرض

"how do you recite Qur'an, eat human flesh (cannibalize), and cause corruption in the land."[557]

556 Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 135.
557 Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 77.

Maimounah addresses her father here because he represents the intellectual independent African mind who travels greatly and has a considerable knowledge of racial and cultural difference as well as being cognizant of the world affairs around him.[558] Maimounah's voice reflects her awareness of her father's passion for Arab/Muslim epistemology and becomes heavy with sarcasm as she hints to specific Quranic verses and utilizes them to expose multilayered hypocrisies within the Arab/Muslim tradition and its truncated discourse of representations of the black Other.

Building on the notion that Maimounah plays the role of the griot in the narrative, I find it intriguing to discover that one of the earliest references to the presence of griots occurred in Mali and was reported by no other than Ibn Battuta himself when he visited the royal court of the Mali Empire in 1352 and wrote of the man known as Dugha, the king's royal griot ("Griot" 94). Even back then Ibn Battuta "was unable to see past appearances or protocol to understand Dugha's actual function, which entailed lengthy recitations."[559] In the novel, Maimounah recourses to a religious language to unmasks Ibn Battuta's jarring juxtaposition of images: Islam and barbarity, representations and misrepresentations, and reality and imagination. In this context, the narrative's deconstruction of the politics of race, identity, and othering symbolized by the novel's harsh criticism of these stereotypical representations within Arab/Muslim tradition recalls some distorted accounts found in Western literature about early encounters with

[558] This is, for example, evidenced by his clash with some fellow Arab travelers, on their way back from Jerusalem, about Arabism, elitism, and race which turns into a heated argument about misogyny, brotherhood in Islam, desert spatiality. See pages 82-84 of the novel.
[559] "Griot," *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* 2: 94.

indigenous people whether in Africa, the Americas, or other parts of the world. In these accounts the image of the Other, like history, is a conceptual or ideological construct.[560]

Likewise, Maimounah's granddaughter, Quds, continues this criticism with more intensity. She expresses herself and her fears in writing unlike her grandmother who relies on the African oral tradition of conveying knowledge and history. The novel's implicit depiction of the transition from oral narration (Maimounah) to written account (Quds) can be seen as the response of the newer generation for existing challenges and, therefore, the need for (re)positionality and seeking innovative ways of perceiving and projecting the dynamics and relations between identity, race, heritage. Being an educated Saudi young woman, she writes about what she hears from her grandmother about African history, migration, alienation, slavery, and assimilation to the wider local and national culture. She also joins Maimounah in showing her disapproval of Zakaria's "indifference" towards his family and others and ceaseless quest for "gratifications."[561] Yet, her approach to history seems to be more philosophical and tends towards comparative anthropology. She, for instance, looks at her brother's sharps witticisms and "indifference," especially to public opinion, as a type of resistance. She also historicizes slavery as a form of oppression and traces its different forms at different junctures of history as she wonders:

[560] For a further discussion of the literatures about the early encounters with indigenous people, see Edward Gray and Norman Fiering, *The Language Encounters in the Americas, 1492-1800: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Bergbahn Books, 2008); Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Michael Householder, *Inventing Americans in the Age of Discovery: Narratives of Encounter* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2016).
[561] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 139.

يمتلئ رأسي بالحرب التي تلد الرق وتبرره. روما الإغريق، اليونانيون، النخاسون، سبارتكوس يخرج قبل الميلاد، يجمع الآبقين في قمة فيزوف ليغنوا الآمهم (سيزيف لم تعد على أكتافه الصخرة / يحملها الذين يولدون في مخادع الرّقيق / و البحر.. كالصحراء.. لا يروى العطش / لأنّ من يقول "لا" لا يرتوي إلاّ من الدموع!)

My head is preoccupied with a war that begets and justifies slavery. Rome, Greeks, slavers, Spartacus appears, before the birth of the Christ, and gathers fugitive slaves on Mount Vesuvius to sing their pain [out]. 'Sisyphus no longer has the rock on his shoulders / Those born in the slaves' quarters are carrying it / The sea, like the desert, does not quench thirst / For he who says 'no' drinks his fill only of tears'.[562]

Trawri's Quds beautifully weaves the story of Spartacus, the Roman slave, and his unsuccessful rebellion as a form of a slave uprising against the Roman Republic with an Arabic poem entitled, "كلمات سبارتكوس الأخيرة" or "Spartacus' Last Words," by أمل ابو القاسم دنقل Amal Abul-Qassem Donqol (1940–1983)—a key Egyptian literary figure in what is known as the contemporary political Arabic poetry[563] that reached its peak in the sixties and seventies as a popular echo to the anticolonial sentiment and the rise of various nationalist resistance movements. This literary fusion between ancient history and modern setting adds more ontological depth to the notion of marginality in the novel. Quds shows that subjugation in any form and at any point of time must be rejected whether in the world of the ancient Romans or prevailing attitudes of neocolonialism and (neo)imperialism.

562 Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 136. The English translation of the poem by Amal Abul-Qassem Donqol (1940-1983) used here is by Suneela Mubayi. She also translated the whole poem. See, Amal Donqol. "Spartacus' Last Words." Trans. Suneela Mubayi. Jadaliyya. www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26934.

563 Besides Donqol, there are other poets who engage with political Arabic poetry such as his fellow Egyptian أحمد فؤاد نجم Ahmed Fouad Negm (1929-2013), commonly known as الفاجومي Al-Fagommi, and mostly writes in Egyptian vernacular, the Iraqi poet أحمد مطر Ahmed Matar (1954--), the celebrated Palestinian "national poet" محمود درويش Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), among others of course.

Quds continues her globalized approach to the reexamination of the African past in general, and within Saudi society particularly. The discursive culmination of this narrative tendency occurs at the end of the novel as Quds puts the local history of her minority community in conversation with the wider context of African diaspora, especially the African American community. Quds neatly intermeshes her own dream of a brighter future with Martin Luther King's famous speech of 1963, "I Have a Dream." In a philosophical soliloquy, she illuminates:

اغتسلت بضوء الكتاب، صليت نافلة. بين يدي حلمي. هل أملك غير حلمي. ما لون حلمي؟ أيشبهني؟ لا.. لا لا، الحلم كالإنسانية لا لون لها. ماذا لو كان للحلم لوني؟ ستختلف الصورة. ربما أكون واهمة ... ربما (امتلك حلماً). لكن "لوثر" امتلك حلمه في مكان واضح حد السفور، وحلمي ينبت في مساحة مكتظة القتامة، مترعة بالظلال، زيف يمشي على قدمين كسيحتين. حلمي لن يقوى على هاتين القدمين، لن يخرجني من ضنكي، أو يذيب قهري الدبق.

I bathed in the light of the book, prayed a supererogatory prayer [*Nafilah*].[564] For my dream. What do I have other than my dream. What is the color of my dream? Does it look like me? No. no no. Dream is like humanity has no color. What if my dream has my (skin) color? The picture would be different then. I may be delusional […] Maybe (I have a dream). But "Luther" has his dream in a nakedly blatant place and my dream is growing in a crowded gloomy space, full of shadows. Falsity walks on lame feet. My dream will not be strong enough for these feet and will not get me out of my depression or melt away my sticky repression.[565]

564 In Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), there are two types of prayers: a) obligatory prayer, which includes the five daily prayers (Fajr at dawn, Duher at midday, Asir at afternoon, Maghrib at sundown, and Isha'a at evening); 2) and supererogatory prayers that are not required but considered additional or optional and bestow extra rewards or benefits.

565 Trawri, *ميمونة Maimona* 143.

Quds's dilemma is exposed here as she struggles between two visions of life. The first one is influenced by her grandmother's "despair, fear, frustration, and hope," while the second concept is seen in how Zakaria indifferently "faces the cruelty of the streets with love [music and self-indulgence]."[566] Echoing King's confidence in stating his dream openly, Quds chooses "to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope," to uses the former's phrase, and "fearlessly" cries "I am dreaming."[567] Within the African minority living in modern Saudi space, and in accordance with the element of comparativity in the novel, Quds imagines her own Saudi version of MLK's dream. Furthermore, Maimounah's longed-for but never-fulfilled dream of seeing her erudite and open-minded father (Essa) as well as the grandeur of her great-grandfathers transfigures intellectually into Quds's dream of having her own independent voice heard and accepted by society and "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" as King eloquently puts it. This discussion of racial spatiality in Trawri's novel and the intergenerational dialogue represented by Maimounah, Quds, and Zakria and how they variously approach their identity and notion of blackness demonstrates the complexity of the politics of representation of Saudi culture. It also deconstructs the flatness of characterizations of Saudis that plague most of the American fictional and nonfictional works that try to depict this society, especially in most of the post-9/11 works which will be discussed in the next chapter.

[566] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 142.
[567] Trawri, ميمونة *Maimona* 145.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONTESTING RADICAL DISCOURSE: 9/11 FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

9/11 Arabic fiction in English translation should be part of the postcolonial curriculum worldwide.

Mohammed Muharram

Who really knows more than the moment he's in? What do you trust? Memory? History? No, these are just stories, and whichever ones we choose to tell ourselves .... there are always gaps.

Jess Walter

5.1 An Overview of Fictions of 9/11

The inherently religious dimension of the Saudi character and space and how it shapes the identity of both the individual and society is crucial in deconstructing the politics of representations of Saudis. The previous chapter, for example, uses the concept of geographies of difference to explores these dynamics whether from biblical, spatial, or diasporic perspectives. In fact, the Arabian Peninsula has always been a religious center of some sort and a crossroad of different spiritual passages. This image was solidified even further when its geography became the cradle of Islam and the heart of the first Islamic society during the seventh century and what has become known as the era of الخلافة الراشدة the Rashidun Caliphate or الخلفاء الراشدون the Rashidun Caliphs.[568] Later Damascus and Baghdad replaced Medina as the capital of the Islamic rule during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, respectively. Yet, the power of this image, along

[568] This title refers to the first four succeeding خلفاء caliphs or successors of Prophet Mohammed after his death in 632. They are respectively Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali. They collectively reigned for around thirty years. The word Rashidun comes from the singular form of the Arabic word راشد rashid (pl. راشدون) which can be roughly translated as "a rightly guided person."

with the religious roots of the modern Saudi state that dates back to the 1744,[569] have continued to be an influential sociocultural factor in shaping the politics of representation of Saudi Arabia and its people in modern time, especially in fictional works. These ontological facts and circumstances feature occasionally in previous chapters of this project as discussions shed some light on the examination of Saudi Arabia as a biblical space, for example, in George Potter's *The White Bedouin* and the reimagination of the enduring religious journeys and migration of Africans, among others of course, to the two holy mosques in Islam as in ميمونة *Maimounah* by Mahmoud Trawri.

There are other historic moments where the religious dimension of the Arab world is purposefully foregrounded for one reason or another. Undoubtedly, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in September 11, 2001 has brought the focus back to the notion of religiosity in the Islamic world in general, and within Saudi society particularly, as well as the wider context of the representations of Islam and the rhetoric of Islamophobia. The newly (re)inforced dynamics are exploited by many writers who try to capitalize on this emerging post-9/11 rhetoric. As I have discussed in the introduction, some opportunistic writers go further and try desperately to increase the readership of their previously published (pre-9/11) works by rehashing islamophobia for commercial reasons. To illustrate, let us look at how Sandra Mackey *re*presents her book, *The Saudis*—which I discussed in chapter three—for the second time to the (post-9/11) western reader. It is around the first anniversary of the attacks when she published her "updated edition" of the book in 2002. Mackey exploits the traumatic context of the tragedy of 9/11 and the circulating rhetoric on the Kingdom during that period to give her *fifteen-year-*

[569] This date signaled the establishment of the First Saudi State (1744–1818), followed by the Second Saudi State (1824–1891), up to the Third Saudi State (1902–present) or the modern Saudi Arabia and the official unification of the Kingdom in 1932 by King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud (1975-1953).

old book a marketing boost by claiming that: "With a new introduction and afterword, *The Saudis* provides essential background to the Saudi crisis as the country *finds itself* the mother state of international terrorism."[570] Yet, she actually barely discusses the 9/11 attacks since she does what she promises the reader only in passing in the *four-page* "Introduction," and merely dedicates a few paragraphs for it in the *eleven-page* "Afterword" of the *446-page* book. She even fails to update population data and statistics in Saudi Arabia, at least on her footnotes if she wants to maintain the historicity of certain events during the original writing of her book in 1980s.[571] Mackey moreover centers her discussion of Saudi Arabia's image in other chapters on Fouad Ajami's conjecture of "petro-Islam" and what she conceives to be "the sheer circumstance of being the cradle of Islam" that gives the Kingdom's its prominent status among Muslims (327).[572] In the same fashion, the settings and the narrative frame of Vincent Meis's *Eddie's Desert Rose* have no connection with 9/11, as my discussion in chapter two reveals. Yet, the description on back cover of the novel implicitly insinuates the contexts of both post-9/11 rhetorical culture and War on Terror into the structural framework of the novel by claiming that the story depicts the "pre-Al Qaeda fundamentalist Saudis."[573] Whatever the circumstances, it incorrectly gives that impression. This maybe partly due to Meis's own failure to attractively

[570] Mackey, *The Saudis*, from the back-cover blurb. Emphasis added.
[571] Commentating on the Saudi national security, she states: "Within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a quarter of the world's proven oil reserves lie in 865,000 miles of largely empty land, bordered on two sides by 1300 miles of coastline fronting two seas. All this must be defended by a population of perhaps six million people, three-quarters of whom are women, children, and the elderly" (Mackey, *The Saudis* 292, emphasis mine). When the updated edition was published back in 2002, the population of Saudi Arabia was estimated at 21,800,000 people according to United Nation data; see "The Population of Saudi Arabia," *Worldmeter*, 01 March 2020, www.worldometers.info/world-population/saudi-arabia-population/
[572] For further details on the theoretical base of Sandra Mackey's understanding of this pejorative notion of "petro-Islam" see Fouad Ajami, "Stress in the Arab Triangle," *Foreign Policy* 29 (1977): 90–108, especially pages 91-92, 102.
[573] Meis, *Eddie's Desert Rose*, back-cover blurb.

fictionalize the oil Saudi-American encounter and create fully-developed and engaging renditions characterizations of Saudis.

For these reasons, the discussion of this topic in this chapter differs slightly from the comparative analysis employed in previous chapters since it is not primarily pertaining to the representations of Saudi Arabia and its society, even though it entails a good part of that on various occasions. This chapter briefly examines how both Saudi and American writers represent the "Islamic other," society's reaction to such tragedy, and the reexamination of the intersectionality between the notions of religiosity, extremism, and (inter)national security.

The novels discussed here exemplify how writers, in their endeavors to understand what happened in 9/11 and why. In order to achieve this goal, they create a discursive space for the "enemy" Other where such voice is heard, examined, and deconstructed. Works like *The Zero* by Jess Walter and *Atta & the Whitman of Tikrit* by Jarett Kobek provide the reader with such opportunity. Although it relies on the notion of trauma in its portrayal of the new dynamics within American society like other post-9/11 fictions, *The Zero* utilizes this as a springboard for its satirical criticism of sociopolitical response, especially the War on Terror campaign and media (mis)representations of the Muslim Other. On the other hand, Kobek takes advantage of his own unique cultural position since he was raised in an interfaith household that allowed him some insight into Islamic culture which is reflected in his depiction of religious extremism in *Atta*. Taken this into consideration, the two novels stand in total contrast to other post-9/11 works where the writers seem to be in a hurry to produce a rehashed "response" that end up conjuring stereotypical images, cliché's, and recycled archetypes and pictorial tropes such as John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2005) and short story collection *Varieties of Religious*

Experience (2002) and Martin Amis' short story "The Last Days of Mohammed Atta" (2006), among others.

Building on the fact that this is an interdisciplinary study and if we look at the Arabian Gulf region from a theoretical perspective, we notice that this geographic space, especially since the Iranian revolution of 1979, has increasingly become a heated area in postcolonial and cultural studies as it is considered one of the most concerning epicenters where oil, capitalism, globalism, terrorism, and U.S. neocolonialism collide. One of the multilevel reverberations of the 9/11 is the circulation of "neo-imperial violence" and the "emergence" of a "new Orientalist discourse" in Western rhetoric.[574] It is also important to realize that in her impassioned article, "Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11," Sangeeta Ray convincingly refutes some claims against the field of postcolonial studies and discusses the reemergence in the significance of the term "postcolonial" in academic scholarship that engages the wider "war on terrorism" as well as the increasing role of the American global domination. Criticizing what she calls the "latest imperial imaginary defining spaces and bodies," Ray contends that "9/11 is to remain remarkable in the US calendar as a date that must be nationally mourned; 9/11 is the date when the nation must gather for an unqualified reflection on the 'us and them' divide; 9/11 is the date that reminds citizens of the necessity for homeland security, for the denial of civil liberties to those that refuse to become us."[575] These arguments about the intersection of the revived binary system of othering and global terrorism are narratively explored by Saudi and American novelists alike from diverse perspectives.

[574] Moneera Al-Ghadeer, "Cannibalizing Iraq: Topos of a New Orientalism," *Debating Orientalism*, ed. edited by Ziad Elmarsafy, Anna Bernard and David Attwell (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 117-33 at 117.

[575] Sangeeta Ray, "Postscript: Popular Perceptions of Postcolonial Studies after 9/11," *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). 574-583 at 576.

The unprecedented fiendish audacity of 9/11 shocked the world and disrupted the American literary scene. Indeed, the tragic enormity of the attacks on the World Trade Center towers signaled a drastic shift in postmodern (contemporary) narrative. The unpredictability of such a horrendous act and its wake disarmed writers, particularly Americans, of their creative powers of representations, at least temporarily. This fact arguably manifests itself on different levels and in the numerous unsuccessful, if not failed, attempts of many writers, artists, and filmmakers, who felt daunted by the magnitude of the attacks, to approach and explain what happened in that day. For instance, in *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*, Kristiaan Versluys discusses Oliver Stone's 2006 movie *World Trade Center* and concludes that the "long-awaited" 9/11 film "became an instant dud."[576] This "predictable" failure lies in how the nature of 9/11 and its conspicuous aftermath, according to Versluys, is "unpossessable." Likewise, after analyzing various post-9/11 works during the first anniversary of the attacks, John Duvall and Robert Marzec conclude that it was still "too soon for artistic representations," especially when it comes to visual renderings of the victims as in the case of Sharon Paz's 2002 exhibit. [577]

Other critics have looked at such (narrative) sensitivities from a different angle. For instance, Martin Randall, the British critic, critiques how most of post-9/11 discourses have created what he describes as some kind of a sacralization of the 9/11 attacks: "As has been seen, many of the more dominant discourses surrounding 9/11 have spoken about the events in *memorialising* and even *sacralising* ways. These discourses have had an enormous impact on the

[576] Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

[577] John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec. "Narrating 9/11," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011): 381-400 at 382. They explain that "Sharon Paz exhibited a work called Falling; it consisted of numerous cutout silhouettes, all in different attitudes of free fall [people who fell to their death from the two towers], that were placed in the windows of the Jamaica Center for the Arts."

‘Literature of Terror’.”[578] He goes on to elucidates on the difficulty that some writers face when they engage specifically with the sociopolitical and cultural aftermath of 9/1:“the ‘Literature of Terror’ reflects on 9/11 with an appreciation of the intrinsic difficulties in representing an event so globally significant and so visually stunning […] But as the ‘Literature of Terror’ displays, such sentimentality and self-appointed ‘ownership’ of the attacks remains mostly in the mainstream media, in political rhetoric and in conservative discourses that, for evident ideological reasons, seek to maintain deliberately simplified perspectives on 9/11.”[579] These different analyses may help explain why most of the post-9/11 fictional works initially tended to reflect both the personal psychological traumas of Americans and the national social trauma. These fictional commitments came from well-known authors like Don DeLillo in his short novel, *Falling Man* (2007) as well as others like Ken Kalfus’ *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The visual echo of the same response is also found in graphic novels like *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman (2004). The intersectionality of the personal and national aspects of trauma explain the centrality of the notion of domesticity that colored most of these works. Furthermore, these different forms of creative responses to 9/11, whether successful or not, reveal people’s sensitivity and anxiety towards the notion of (mis)interpretation of such far-reaching tragedy as Ann Keniston and Jeanne Quinn assert that “no one wants 9/11 to be misrepresented, politicized, co-opted, or distorted.”[580] Such sensitivity reveals the need for a “dizzying balance between the real and the surreal, between vivid description and dreamy inexactitude” people had experienced

[578] Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 16. Emphasis added.
[579] Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* 17.
[580] Ann Keniston and Jeanne F. Quinn, *Literature After 9/11* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1.

in that day as Jess Walter, the American writer and novelist, puts it in a conversation with Amy Loyd about *The Zero*.[581]

However, there are some novels that offer more developed, well-rounded characters, such as Jess Walter's *The Zero*, Jarett Kobek's *ATTA*, and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.[582] While the main story revolves around trauma and the US covert counterterrorism operations after 9/11, Walter's *The Zero* (which will be discussed later in this chapter), for instance, provides a promising depiction of the Islamic Other in the character of Jaguar, a western-educated Muslim professor who works as an informant for Remy, the novel's covert operative protagonist. Jaguar is a very attractive character as he offers insightful comments about the cultural rift between the Islamic world and the West. Yet, after he discovers that the agents he has been cooperating with have betrayed and framed him, Jaguar uses the same bomb that these agents gave him earlier, and blows himself up; and thus descends into the trap of being the "enemy Other" that the counterterrorism government agents have always wanted and imagined him to be. Some scholars have commented on Jaguar's role in the novels and how he functions and interacts with other characters. For example, in his discussion of the notion of the "enemy Other," Duvall argues that *The Zero* tries to provide a more nuanced representation of the Islamic Other by depicting Jaguar as an intellectual secular Muslim, yet it ultimately falls short because the character serves "a somewhat marginal function" in the white-male-dominated narrative.[583]

[581] Amy Loyd, "A Conversation with Jess Walter," Jess Walter, The Zero, (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 3-7 at 4.
[582] Although *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is an exceptionally excellent novel, it will not be discussed it in this project because it does not meet the criteria of this study since Mohsin Hamid is simply a British Pakistani novelist, while the focus here is on Saudi and American authors only.
[583] John N. Duvall, "Representing the Enemy Other: Jarett Kobek's ATTA, Postmodern Narrative, and the Architectural Unconscious," *Narrating 9/11: Fantasies of State, Security, and Terrorism*, ed. John N. Duvall and Robert P. Marzec (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 245-62 at 246.

5.2 A Distant Echo of 9/11: Conceptualizing Terrorism in Kobek's ATTA, Thabit's الإرهابي ٢٠ Al-Irhabiy 20, Al-Hadhoul's الانتحار المأجور Al Intihar Al Maajour

Jarett Kobek's *ATTA* tries to fill the complete absence of realistic representations and remedy the "truncated depictions" of the Islamic Other. Probably, alongside Mohsin Hamid's Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Kobek succeeds in creating a character that is intriguingly different from other existing depictions of the Islamic Other. Kobek is arguably among the most successful American novelists to tackle the dynamics of contemporary conceptualizations of terrorism and religious fundamentalism. In "Geopoetics of Terror(ism): Spatiality and Visuality in Two 'Post-9/11' Novels," Dana Bönisch argues that "The novel is in no way apologetic, nor does it turn Atta into a likeable character. Yet it does offer a reading of Atta's radicalization which, rather than linking it simply to a broad anti-Western and religious fundamentalism, contextualizes it within global politics,"[584]. Indeed, Kobek is able to construct a multi-dimensional representation of Mohamed Atta, the architect of 9/11, which disrupts the reader's expectations of how to interpret Atta's radicalization process and his views about the world around him.

ATTA is a chronological re-imagination of the life of Mohammed Atta from his childhood in Egypt, academic life in Germany, and through his final days in the U.S. before boarding, hijacking, and crashing Boston flight. "Drawing a psychological portrait of the hijacker Mohammed Atta in the weeks prior to September 11," Noura Wedell maintains, "the novel tells of his years in Germany as an urban planning student, unveils his crusade against modernist architecture, recounts some uncanny cross-dressing incidents, and performs a hallucinated

[584] Dana Bönisch, "Geopoetics of Terror(ism): Spatiality and Visuality in Two 'Post-9/1' Novels," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 51.1 (2014): 15-26 at 21.

rewriting of the current state of the American dream."[585] For Kobek, this process requires a delicate balance between representing a well-rounded depiction of the enemy Other, while carefully and consciously "reach[ing] for some widely circulated clichés in [his] fictional accounts of terrorists," as Pankaj Mishra puts it.[586] Fittingly, being raised in an interfaith household with a Turkish Muslim father and a Christian American mother and on the east coast of America, Kobek is culturally equipped with an insider's insight into Islamic culture, which is intuitively and narratively reflected throughout the novel.[587] His extensive reading of the history of radicalism and fundamentalism and how they conceptually intersect with the notion of religiosity played another epistemological role in formulating his ideas and shaping his characterizations of the radical (Arab/Muslim) Other as he personally told during his book tour for his book *I Hate the Internet* in 2016 here at Purdue University.[588] This is reflected in how he added a sense of cultural roundedness to his work by writing an appendix at the end of the novel or a "creative approximation," as he puts it, of Mohammed Atta's MA thesis in architecture that

585 Noura Wedell interviewed Kobek in San Francisco about the novel; see Noura Wedell, "Jarett Kobek's Portrait of a Hijacker." *Bomb Magazine*, 8 March 2012, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jarett-kobeks-portrait-of-a-hijacker.

586 Pankaj Mishra, "The End of Innocence," *The Guardian*, 19 May 2007, para. 24. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/may/19/fiction.martinamis/print. Mishra discusses Martin Amis' short story "The Last Days of Mohammed Atta" and John Updike's *Terrroist*, both of whom employ some "wildly circulated clichés" when they choose to represent the Islamic Other. Also, he harshly criticizes them for visiting "the same websites of Koranic pseudo-scholarship" in order to invoke "the raisin-virgin controversy" because "one of Updike's fanatical Muslim characters echoes Amis' little joke that the substitution of virgins with dry fruits 'would make Paradise significantly less attractive for many young men.'"

587 In an article in New York University Alumni Magazine, Kobek sheds some light on his unique cultural position: "My father is a Turkish Muslim turned New Ager. My mother is Irish-American and raised me Catholic. This upbringing left me fascinated by those who elude easy categorization."

588 Jarrett Kobek, *I Hate the Internet* (Los Angeles: We Heard You Like Books, 2016). Kobek stopped at Purdue University during his book tour for a reading, book signing, and Q&A session in March 10, 2016. He was the Literary Reading Series featured reader (sponsored by the Department of English, Modern Fiction Studies and the Creative Writing Program). I enjoyed talking with him about the theoretical and religious frameworks of ATTA before and after the sessions.

shows how "Atta proposes to replace modernist western architecture in Aleppo with what he termed "The Islamic-Oriental City."[589]

The narrative reconstructs what can be identified as Atta's own sense of exceptionalism and illustrates how it drives him to become one of the most notoriously dangerous extremists in modern history. Kobek's Atta shows a terrorist as an ideological zealot whose relationship with other characters in the novel is clouded with a deep-rooted sense of exceptionalism and religious and cultural supremacy. He looks down on almost everyone and everything else around him. Hence, the narrative seeks to decipher the ideological roots for such a delusional paranoid mind and traces the discernible effect this has on his intellectual development as a character that represents the "radicalized" Other who has metamorphosed into the embodiment or quintessence of the callousness and cruelty of world terrorism and simplistic, static binarism.

Likewise, the multifarious and yet deep repercussions of the terrorist attacks on New York also reached the Arab Islamic World, particularly Saudi Arabia. The impact of 9/11 on society in the Kingdom was unprecedently huge because 15 of the 19 terrorists were, unfortunately, Saudis. After absorbing the disbelief, some of the initial responses were ambivalent and revolved around navigating and deconstructing the new emerging discourse of "War on Terror" that was spearheaded by George Bush. The focus gradually shifted to the negotiation of self-examination and reevaluation of various concepts that range from the notion of national identity, religiosity, difference, and tolerance in society. Ultimately, the tragic attacks of 9/11 and their sociocultural and political aftermath forced Saudi society to "relinquish its self-imposed, pristine isolation […] moving from 'exclusivism' to accommodation of the 'other'; thus bolstering its position as a mainstay in the Islamic and Arab world, while facing its post-

589 Wedell, "Jarett Kobek's Portrait of a Hijacker."

9/11 critics."[590] These deep and multifaceted changes are interrogated in fictional works either directly like Abduallah Thabit's الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* (Terrorist No. 20), Alaa Hadhoul's الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Ma'ajour* (The Hired Mercenary 2004) and ريح الجنة *Reeh Al-Jannah* (Smell of Paradise 2005) by Turki Al-Hamd. 9/11 and its multifarious repercussions also surface, with variants, in Raja' Sani''s بنات الرياض *Banat Al-Riyad* (Girls of Riyadh 2007), Fahd 'Atiq's كائن مجهول *Ka'in Mu'ajjal* (Life on Hold 2005), and سعوديون مبتعثون *Saʿudiyun Mubtaʿathun* (Saudi Students on Scholarship 2016) by 'Audah Al-Huwaiti.

However, most of the American literary works that engage with the post-9/11 world and notion of "extremism" appear to lack the depth of presenting well-developed and convincing characters that play the role the "Islamic other." For instance, John Duvall describes Don DeLillo's portrayal of (Muslim) terrorists in the characters of Hammad, a young Arab émigré, and Amir (Mohammed Atta, the main leader in the attacks) as "truncated depictions."[591] Duvall's interpretation shows that part of the writers' narrative deficiency, if one may call it so, is related to their lack of an epistemological depth that would function as the foundation of these authors' portrayal of that Other. This paucity of knowledge explains why the trope of the "enemy Other" appears in Michael Cunningham's noir thriller *The Children's Crusade* (2005), John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2005) and short story collection *Varieties of Religious Experience* (2002), Martin Amis' short story "The Last Days of Mohammed Atta" (2006), and Jess Walter's *The Zero* (2006). These fictional works demonstrate that a mere reliance on imagination is not enough to understand and approach the mindset of a different ideological Other who does not necessarily share the writer's social, cultural, and religious values and backgrounds.

590 Muhammad Al-Atawneh, "Wahhabi Self-Examination Post-9/11: Rethinking the 'Other,' 'Otherness' and Tolerance," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47.2 (2011): 255-71 at 268.
591 Duvall, "Representing the Enemy Other" 246.

For a better understanding of how to fill this ontological vacuum in the fictions of 9/11, I will examine two Saudi novels, الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* (Terrorist Number 20*)* by Abduallah Thabit that debunks the discourse of (religious) extremism and Alaa Al-Hadhoul's الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Maajour* (The Hired Mercenary) that reflects on the sociocultural repercussions of 9/11 within Saudi society. In الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* (Terrorist Number 20), Thabit patiently delineates how the life of a young boy, Zahi Al-Jibali,[592] from Asir, south of Saudi Arabia, is completely transformed from being a naïve boy who cares for his goats into a potential terrorist before reaching the stage of intellectual maturity and ideological independency. The narrative specifically tells that Zahi was born in 1973 in Abha. Zahi's date of birth is crucial in understanding the sociocultural background of the narrative because the ideological dimension of this spatiotemporal specificity haunts the rest of the novel for two reasons. First, the conceptual distortion of the image of religiosity in Zahi's generation comes as one of the consequences of two climactic events in the modern history of the Gulf region, namely the 1979 Iranian revolution and the seizure of the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca by the Saudi extremist Juhaiman Al-Otaibi (1936-1980) and his followers in the same year who was "protesting against what they saw as moral corruption—songs and women appearing on the television and so and so forth," as Zahi explains,[593] Second, the Asir region was one of the most intellectually torn regions in the Kingdom where two conceptualizations of Islam were colliding reluctantly, on some occasions, and unabashedly, on others. From the beginning of the story, the impulse of tracing and dissecting the notion of religiosity within Saudi society haunts the narrative and gradually

[592] Al-Jibali is derived from the Arabic adjective "mountainous," while Zahi means a "bright" or "vivid" color/thing. These connotations will be discussed later.
[593]Abdullah Thabit, الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-Irhabiy 20* (Terrorist Number 20) (Beirut: Dar Al Saqi, 2011), 38. This translation is by Peter Clark who translated some excerpts of first chapter of the novel for *Beirut39* project. Unless noted otherwise, most of the subsequent translations are mine.

develops into a recurring theme or trope that signifies different crucial moments in the story. The novel is set against the backdrop of these deep ideological changes in Saudi culture in general, and, particularly, Asiri society since it covers the period from the beginning of 1970s to 2004.

Generally speaking, الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* is partially biographical because it mirrors the life of its writer and his journey from ideological zealotry to tolerance and intellectual enlightenment. Thabit in fact works as schoolteacher—like Zahi at a later stage of the narrative—in Jeddah and writes columns on cultural aesthetics, arts, and social issues for *Al-Watan* newspaper. Therefore, it is not surprising to notice that the narrative suggests two parameters or matrixes to measure the (conservative) sense of religiosity that, mostly, revolve around the society's ability to embrace tolerance towards women's issues and how it shows signs of aesthetic appreciation of arts and music. In an interview with *Le Figaro* in 2010,[594] Thabit reflects on how he was indoctrinated into a notoriously exclusionary discourse of religious and cultural intolerance (mostly during his teenage years) and then reevaluates his religious zealotry and describes himself as being "a small Islamic Savonarola," the Italian friar and puritan fanatic.[595] From their own narrow-minded and exclusionary perspective, Thabit and his fellow zealots see Saudi society as collectively being "not Islamic enough." He explains that these radical views were fueled by the teachings of محمد سرور Mohammed Surur (1938-2016), the former Syrian member of the Muslim Brotherhood, during the الصحوة *Sahwa* movement (Awakening) in Saudi Arabia and what can be described as their "doctrine of exclusion" and

[594] The interview was originally published in French and then translated into English by RAYA (an online literary agency for Arabic literature); See Pierre Prier. "Insight into Thabit's Story," *Le Figaro*. RAYA, March, 2010, www.rayaagency.org/2010/10/insight-into-thabit-s-story-le-figaro.
[595] Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) was an Italian (Dominican) friar and puritan fanatic in Renaissance Florence. He was known as a passionate preacher who called for a restoration of Christian values and openly condemned the rise of civic cultural activities during his time as well as the humanistic movements of the Italian Renaissance. He was executed by hanging and his body was burned on the scaffold as a symbolic gesture.

puritanism where they see themselves as "as the only true Muslims. All the others were unbelievers, including princes and ulama, the religious officials [etc.]" as Thabit terms it.[596]. in his novel, Thabit endeavors to unmask and then deconstruct what can be described as the purposeful adaptation of religious discourse (and the consequent skewing of understanding) to serve radical ideologies and, consequently, meet extremists' needs/goals. Such extreme notions of religious exceptionalism that Thabit conveys in his portrayal of Zahi's embrace of a culture of dogmatism and ideological purity resemble the explicit anti-modern chauvinist mentality that Jarrett Kobek's *Atta* embodies and even advocates for in his MA thesis in *ATTA* when he "proposes to replace modernist western architecture in Aleppo with what he termed 'The Islamic-Oriental City'."[597]

The author of ٢٠ الإرهابي *Al-irhabiy 20* preemptively warns the reader against this convoluted dynamic and sheds some light on the symbolism of the title itself. This warning comes after the dedication page and before the first chapter. It reads:

كتبت هذا العمل بين ١٩٩٩-٢٠٠٥

هذا كتابٌ اجتهدت ألاّ أصنفه. قصدت منه أن تعرفوا زاهي الجبالي، هذا الذي كان احتمالاً أكيداً لتمام ال١٩ قاتلاً في سبتيمر أمريكا، فهو الإرهابي ال٢٠. وكان احتمالاً أوثق لتمام قائمة ال٢٦، فهو الإرهابي ال٢٧ في السعودية، وحرت كثيراً في الطريقة التي أقدم بها هذين الاحتمالين، وأخيراً رأيت أم يمضي العمل هكذا عفواً، فَسَحته لزاهي، يتحدث عن نفسه، على طريقته، التي لا أسمّيها!

I [Thabit] wrote this piece between 1999 and 2005.

It is writing that I tried hard not to classify. It was my intention that the reader get to know Zahi al-Jibali, the man wo was probably, almost certainly, the complement to the

596 Prier. "Insight into Thabit's Story."
597 Wedell. "Jarett Kobek's Portrait of a Hijacker."

> nineteen killers in America's 9/11. He was the twentieth terrorist. It is more likely that there were twenty-six on a list, and he was the twenty-seventh in Saudi Arabia. I have hesitated about the way I might present these two oppositions. In the end I thought the piece would proceed as in the following way, without any embellishment. I have left it Zahi to speak for himself.[598]

The first point to notice here is how Thabit situates the reader in the wider ideological context of radicalism by stressing that he *began* writing his novel before the attacks on 9/11. This serves to show his cognizance of the unthinkable dire consequences of the creeping menace and muted danger these discourses pose to the local society and the rest of the world. It also explains the chronological account of Zahi's life—and by extension his whole generation—and his spiritual journey of self-discovery and self-healing. The narrative, therefore, reflects the author's meticulous attention to details and his strives to capture the essence of these ideological transformations.

In الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20*, the narrator gradually creates a theoretical framework that would allow him to discuss the notion of religiosity since it is a sensitive topic in his tribal and "conservative society."[599] He does this by throwing some occasional hints here and there about the level of religious tolerance within his local society towards different aspects of life. For example, he initially reminds the reader that most of the people in the Southern part of the Kingdom used to embrace the *Shafi'i Madthab* (one of the four schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence) before the unification of the country in 1932. Building on this religio-historical

[598] الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 7. This translation is by Peter Clark.
[599] الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 9.

fact, Zahi emphasizes and praises the *suitability* and applicability of the *Shafi'i* praxis to Asiri people and their natural qualities or what he calls the الجمالية التي تسكن الجنوبيين "aesthetics that resides within the Southerners."[600] The reason for this suitability is the ideological endorsement that the *Shafi'i Madthab* shows for المتسامح مع الفنون ويقف إليها، ولا يتشدد في مسائل المرأة "tolerance towards and support for arts, and leniency towards women's issues."[601] The novel's reliance on historicization and how it rereads the religious identity of society is associated with the impact of post-oil modernization as Zahi moves from his small mountainous village to the city. Zahi, for instance, asserts that his people على نزوع قبليّ، فثاراتهم وحروبهم ومعاركهم لا نهاية لها "are tribal, and their feuds, wars, and battles are endless," but at the same time they

> حبون هنا، وتبدأ كل حكايات الحب إما من نبع الماء، وإما من المرعى وإما حتى من لقاءٍ عفويٍ ما بين بيوت الطين، أو خلف صخرةٍ ضخمةٍ أو حائطٍ أو بستان

"are great lovers. All love stories start at springs or in pastures, or as a result of a chance encounter among the mud houses, or behind some huge rock or wall, or in the garden."[602]

Unfortunately, the very close nature of the human interactions in the village is lost in the city and rendered mere marginalized memories of an unattainable impulse. For Zahi's generation, modernity means exposure to new social and religious dynamics that constitute an impending sense of cultural hegemony. The novel shows how some of these (competing) forces gradually and yet tactically indoctrinate helpless youth like the protagonist into their own rigid (religious)

600 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 19.
601 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 20.
602 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 35. This translation is by Peter Clark.

discourses—a process which he defines as a البرمجة الذهنية في أولئك الصبية "mental programming of […] youngsters."[603]

This devastating process of "mental programming" that targets Saudi youth in الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* is also echoed in الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Maajour* (The Hired Mercenary) by Ala'a Al-Hadhoul who continues this intellectual mission of deconstructing radical discourses and becomes the first Saudi woman to write a novel about 9/11 and terrorism. Ala'a writes a story that explores the nature of extremism and the dynamics of terrorist recruitment of younger Muslim generations. Particularly, she sheds the light on the ideological underpinnings and (implicit) propaganda strategies of some extremists in Saudi Arabia and other Arab/Muslim communities during the last few years right before the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the United Sates.

The novel tells the story of a young Saudi, Khaled, who graduates from high school, but, for various reasons, fails to join the military, university, or even find a side job. As an aspiring young man, Khalid develops a sense of "humiliation" as he fails to secure his future or, at least, being able to support his poverty-stricken family. This feeling haunts him throughout the narrative. The rest of the novel traces the negative transformation in Khaled's life and portrays how his anger towards different branches of the government grows stronger. This anger stems from his inability to navigate the intricate network of the bureaucratic system. Therefore, Khaled fails to provide financial aid or any other type of social support for his unfortunate family, especially his sick mother. These financial and social hindrances are presented as forces that drive young Muslims to desperation and eventually make them easy prey for terrorist recruiters like Sheik Abu Majed. Khaled resembles Zahi in the inability of both of them to cope with the

603 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 204.

rapid changes of life around them and their failure to navigate the ever-evolving mesh of sociocultural dynamics and bureaucracies.

الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* explores such changes and challenges that face young Muslims in modern communities. Thus, against the backdrop of relocating to a bigger, and somewhat tribally and culturally heterogeneous, community, which, in turn, creates a sense of loneliness and unbelonging, Zahi finds himself drifting sustainably towards apathy and asociality. This social and communal vacuum is exploited shrewdly by a group of المتطرفين، الوافدين من بلدان مجاورة "radicals who came from neighboring countries [mostly from Egypt and Syria]" and who employ religious discourse to lure young hapless Saudis like Zahi.[604] Here, the narrative implicitly alludes to the flocks of members of Muslim Brotherhood—the spearhead of political Islam movements in the Middle East—who fled to various states in the Arabian Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, fearing what they call "crackdown" and "persecution" in their home countries during the 1960s and 1970s. However, some of their senior leaders, notably from Egypt, took advantage of their status as refugees to disseminate their religiopolitical ideas in Saudi society and to inspire similar movements, especially in the educational sector where they had varying degrees of influence. Others established various types of businesses.[605] The narrator tries to deconstruct the ideological accumulated impact of this religious discourse by exposing his own troubled sense of

[604] الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 30.

[605] In 2014, Saudi Arabia, along with Egypt, Russia, and United Arab Emirates, labeled Muslim Brotherhood (and its offshoots) as a terrorist group for the (explicit and implicit) use or espousal of violence. For the evolution of this movement and their role in what came to be known as the "Arab Spring," see Carrie Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), especially chapter eight where the author looks at this Islamist group from a comparative perspective; For a better understanding of Muslim Brotherhood's rapidly growing presence and influence in both Europe and North America and the dichotomies of integration, segregation, separation and assimilation the group faces in these communities, see Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Martyn Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: A History of Enmity and Engagement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); for a more recent evaluation of its role in the Arab world, Nawaf Obaid, *The Failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab World* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2020).

religiosity and (unwitting) transition to radicalization. Zahi narrator sees himself as a direct victim of what he calls موجة التديين "the wave of religiosity" that infiltrated and swept though many schools.[606]

For Zahi, this wave was luckily accompanied with his discovery of the pleasure of reading, especially after sneaking into his elder brother's library and reading *Arabian Nights*. The fictional world of this classic book has a tremendous impact on him and triggers his

ولعي بالقراءة، والذي انطلقت بعده إلى أغاثا كريستي وقصص الأنبياء وقراءة أية قصة تقع بين يدي!

"fondness for reading as [he] went on to Agatha Christie, stories of the Prophets, and consuming any story [he] would get [his] hands on."[607] The mixture of his simultaneous exposure to "the wave of religiosity" and his (secret) habit of reading voraciously sparks off a series of endless existential questions and the contradictions they instill in Zahi's personality. He confesses:

إذن وبعد وقتً من هذا التحرر من الرعب والخوف كانت قد تكونت بداخلي من العالمين النقيضين عالم الرهبانية والعصا والمخاوف والكراهية، ثم عالم الحرية واللهو!. لقد كانت نقائض لا تنتهي، فأنا العابد حيناً والفاسق حيناً آخر، وأنا الناسك والمجاهر، والطيب والمعتدي، والفاضل والسافل، والمنضبط والعبثي، وكل ضدين كنت أنا هما في وقتٍ واحد.. هذا انعكس على تعاملي مع الحياة واقعاً وشعوراً!

After a while of [gaining] this freedom from the terror and fear, there were many contradictions within me. This is an inevitable result of what had echoed within me of the two conflicting worlds. The world of monasticism, the rod [corporal punishment], fears, and hate and then, the world of freedom and fun! They were endless contradictions. Sometimes, I am the worshiper and, on other times, the libertine. I am the hermit and the

606 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 65,
607 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 65.

lecherous man, the good and the aggressor, the virtuous and the dissolute, the orderly and the chaotic. And every other two opposites, I was both of them simultaneously. This was reflected on my approach to life emotionally and in reality![608]

Zahi delineates the schizophrenic state of his internal struggle throughout the story and his ceaseless flow of questions as well as encounters with fellow narrow-minded members of his group. These encounters become physical and even "bloody" violent in many occasions. However, the climax of what can be described as Zahi's intellectual or ideological schizophrenia occurs when he continues his reading

فبالرغم من إقناعهم إياي بأن الشاعر نزار قباني كافرٌ ومنحل، وأن عبدالله البردوني قومي ملحد، وأن غازي القصيبي، ومحمد الثبيتي، ومحمد زايد الألمعي، ومحمد جبر الحربي، وعبدالله الصيخان، كل هؤلاء حداثيون كفرة، ومن يقرأ لهم لا شك سيتأثر بضلالهم وجحودهم بآيات الله ورسوله، بالرغم من كل هذا إلا أني أدمنت ما كتبوه ويكتبونه، وصرت أتابعهم، وأحاول تقليدهم والتفكير في ما يقولونه!

…despite how they [his fellow radicals] have convinced me that the poet Nizar Qabbani is a lecherous disbeliever, Abdullah Al-Baradouni is an atheist nationalist, Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, Muhammed Al-Thubaiti, Muhammed Zayed Al-Alama'i, Muhmmaed Jabr Al-Harbi, Abdullah Al-Saikhan all are modernist unbelievers and who reads them will be affected by their delusion and denial of the teachings of Allah and his Messenger. Despite all of this, I became addicted to reading what they write and their books, followed them, and tried to emulate them and contemplate what they say![609]

608 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 65.Translation is mine.
609 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 132. My Translation.

This confession shows how Thabit intentionally and systematically blurs the fine line between fiction and reality—he even dedicates chapter thirty to narrate his own interview with the *New York Times*—by referring to other real Saudi other Arab intellectuals as well as Western philosophers, thinkers, and writers like Ernest Hemingway, Victor Hugo, Gabriel García Márquez, Henry Kessinger, Nietzsche, Hegel, Kant etc. Both the wide and cross-cultural scope of Zahi's reading and his the cross-disciplinary approach to knowledge shed the light on and challenge how the radical Other sees and frames difference within a narrow and exclusionary perspective. In fact, Thabit's narrative audacity in portraying a once hegemonic exclusionary discourse has forced him to leave his hometown, Abha, and relocate to Jeddah on the west coast of Saudi Arabia.[610] The depiction of Zahi's arduous struggle also aims to reflect the deep (cultural and ideological) rift between different factions of Saudi society, and, by extension, the wider Arab/Muslim world, and how each side approaches the never-ending duality of modernity and tradition.

These often-colliding discourses and the growing pressures of modern life and how radicals employ them in their heinous and terroristic schemes also features in Al-Hadhoul's الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Maajour* . For example, as a veteran jihadist-turned-terrorist-recruiter, Abu Majed exploits the mixture of anger, "humiliation," and asociality and adopts Khaled gradually by providing him with some cash. Like Kobek's Atta, Khaled's childhood dream is that of becoming a famous person. Although it is supposed to be ironic, Atta, in a moment of epiphany, declares: "This is also my story . . . I am Sayyid Qutb! I am an immigrant success."[611]

[610] See Pierre Prier. "Insight into Thabit's Story."
[611] Kobek, *Atta* 61.

In the same fashion, Al-Hadhoul mocks Khaled's dream of having his own picture published on front pages of newspapers. So, instead of becoming a known "hero" whom people would love to meet, Khaled is surprised to find himself identified everywhere as a wanted terrorist. The novel ends when he is branded as everyone's "enemy." The narrative also hints that Khaled is forced into finishing his life by driving a car as a suicide bomber after his identity is revealed, because Abu Majed "tied him tightly with robes" to the driver's seat of a loaded car and asks him to drive into one of the residential compounds where most of the "foreigners" live.[612] Ironically, Khaled complains to Abu Majed about his fears of being arrested, but the latter ignores him and continues to watch his favorite soccer team that is playing on TV. This is the moment that Khaled discovers that he was tricked into doing terrorist activities by surrendering to the mentality of ex-mujahedeen of Afghanistan (represented by Abu Majed), but it was too late.

Fortunately, Zahi's "intellectuality" awakens before he reaches Khaled's fateful end. Zahi eventually develops his own strong and independent personality and is, therefore, able to reject all the "extreme" ideologies. He refuses to merely use the term "rebellion" to refer to his successful emancipation from what he labels the "colonization" of the mind.[613] Instead, he calls it a

تمددٌ علمي أخرجني من الضيق إلى السعة، ومن التشدد إلى التسامح، ومن ظلمة الكراهية إلى فناء الحب، الحب لكل الناس!

"scientific expansion that took me out of the narrowness to broadness, from intolerance to tolerance, from the darkness of hate to the space of love. Love for all people!"[614] This emancipatory moment of enlightenment occurs a few years before the 9/11, which he watched on

612 الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Maajour* 118, 121.
613 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 146, 135.
614 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 147.

TV while being "terrifyingly stunned."[615] Commenting on the famous picture that became known as the falling man, Zahi sobs:

منظر ذاك الذي ألقى بنفسه من أعلى البناية ينزع القلب من مكانه! وتخيلي للراكبين بالطائرات، التي تصدم بالبناية، ومجرد الخيال كان مبكياً ومأساوياً!

"The sight of the falling man […] rips the heart out of a person! And imagining the passengers aboard the crashing planes [into the towers], just imagination is tearful and tragic by itself!"[616] At this climactic moment, he screams that he has made the right decision of abandoning his previous radical ideologies. Otherwise, he would have become "the twentieth terrorist" and

ولكنت طرفاً في جريمة من أكبر جرائم التاريخ بحق الإنسانية مهما كانت المسوّغات السياسية أو الدينية أو غيرها.

"be part of one of the biggest crimes against humanity in history, regardless to whatever all political, religious, and other justifications."[617]

The unimaginability of 9/11 and its convoluted impact on the "image of Saudis" reinforces his firm belief in the discourse of enlightenment and bolster his confidence to publicly critique radicalism and extreme ideologies. Hence, he becomes an intellectual who preaches tolerance and love of art. Zahi becomes an accomplished writer who, in weekly columns in newspapers, describes the ongoing struggle between the (Saudi) state and different shades of extremist groups where the former supports cultural expressions and encourages intellectuals of his type while the latter despise them and fight back. As an intellectual, he is symbolically in the "battleground" struggling to "promote enlightenment" as well as cultural and socio-religious tolerance (201).

615 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 174.
616 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 174.
617 الإرهابي ٢٠ *Al-irhabiy 20* 175.

5.3 "To New Opportunities. And Old Loyalties": Beyond Trauma: Post-9/11 Satire, War on Terror, and the Saudi Other

Jess Walter's *The Zero*[618] is a political novel that tries to navigate its way across a tumultuous ocean of anxieties, traumas, and politics of representation in order to help the reader come to some kind of understanding of what happened that day and its sociocultural, political, and economic repercussions. It also repeatedly examines the traumatic intersections between the personal and national experiences of its characters. From a comparatist's perspective, the narrative interrogates the notion of otherness by unmasking the human interactions between a multi-ethnic and cultural group of characters at a critical moment of American modern history. Walter uses stinging satire on American cultural and political response to the 9/11 attacks as well as on the emergence of a security state to create a discourse where the reader encounters the need "to distinguish between the fundamentalist other and otherness in general," to use Aaron Derosa's terms.[619] The novel ultimately seeks to challenge the discourse that prevailed (and still does) during the wake of 9/11 and was fueled by the exclusionary and chauvinistic political rhetoric and the distorted media coverage of Arabs/Muslims and Islam in general. The discussion here will examine Walter's creative deployment of both the issue of trauma and his use of satire, especially in the character of Remy, before covering the representations of some Saudi and other Middle Eastern individuals in the story.

The novel begins with the portrayal of the chaotic and dusty scene near the World Trade Center (WTC) after few moments of the 9/11 attacks where "[b]urning scraps of paper […]

[618] Jess Walter, *The Zero* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006). The novel was a finalist for the 2006 National Book Award, winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist, PEN USA Literary Award Finalist, plus a Washington Post, Seattle Times, and Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year.
[619] Aaron DeRosa, "Alterity and the Radical Other in Post-9/11 Fiction: DeLillo's Falling Man and Walter's The Zero." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 69.3 (2013): 157-83 at 158.

Fluttering and circling and growing bigger, falling bits and fanatic sheets."[620] This scene echoes the opening view of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* when "[s]moke and ash came rolling down streets […] with office papers flashing past."[621] This disorienting experience narratively fits the characterization of the protagonist of the story and his underqualified team of investigators. Walter's novel tells the story of Brian Remy, a retired NYPD officer and one of the first responders, and shows how he desperately tries to connect the "gaps" in his memory with real events in his daily life.[622] His eyes also suffer from a "macular degeneration and vitreous detachment [as he sees] flashers and floaters" most of the time.[623] When the novel opens, Remy is working for "the even more secretive Documentation Department, the Double-D's, the Docs, comprised mainly of retired military intelligence offices and some handpicked librarians and accountants rumored to have Special Forces training."[624]The Documentation Department is a public façade for a covert agency, established at Ground Zero, to search through the "piles" of debris for papers with the goal of anticipating and preventing potential terrorist networks.

Remy's life represents both the chaotic scene of the attacks and the national sense of traumatic and helpless bewilderment. Physically, Remy is in a very deteriorated state as if he were a human replica of the physical state of the Twin Towers just few moments before their ultimate collapse. No one thought or could tell that they were about to give up and be gone forever. Still, all the photos taken during that decisive moments show flying and floating objects, shattering windows engulfed by clouds of grey smoke. No one thought that the steel frame of the two buildings would melt; yet, under tremendous pressure of different factors, it all eventually

[620] Walter, *The Zero* 3.
[621] DeLillo, *Falling Man* 3.
[622] Walter, *The Zero* 5.
[623] Walter, *The Zero* 65.
[624] Walter, *The Zero* 19.

came down. The overwhelming symbolic steel structure of the Twin Towers tricked everyone to believe that they would endure such impact. In fact, 9/11 was the second direct attack on the World Trade Center as it "proved" its strength and "continued to stand" after the 1993 terrorist attack by Ramzi Yousef.[625] Likewise, all characters in the novel misunderstand Remy's occasional states of delusion and how he strays away from the reality around him and instead they think that Remy is "good," even "[s]cary good" and look at him "with something between respect and fear."[626] Yet, Remy's eyes, deterioratingly, reflect "streaks" and "floaters and strings."[627] The narrative suggests also that he has some serious signs of chronic "back pain," even if he repeatedly denies it. His struggle with an ongoing back pain parallels the tremendous pressure that the steel frame, which is fittingly known as "skeleton frame" in architecture, endured after the impactful terrorist attacks. Literary and figuratively speaking, both Remy's body and the steel frame of the towers suffer from injured backbones that supposedly should be able to withstand pressure put on their structure. Yet, Remy eventually collapses, like the structural framework of the towers, as the narrative ends while he is laying on a hospital bed, "severely" injured, and refusing to open his eyes.[628]

Additionally, his mental state of confusion and inability to keep track of things mirror the chaotic images of running people, smoke, and the showering debris during that day. Just like the badly damaged structural frames of the Twin Towers, Remy is physically disintegrating as the novel progresses until his body gives up and collapses. Even his "post-surgical eye trauma [which] presents a truly unique sort of pain" reflects both the blurred line between the individual traumatic experience of the survivors and the families of the 9/11 victims and the collective

[625] Kevin Hillstrom, *The September 11 Terrorist Attacks* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2012), 36.
[626] Walter, *The Zero* 14.
[627] Walter, *The Zero* 3, 4.
[628] Walter, *The Zero*, 235, 236,

traumatic experience of the American nation as Dr. Destouches, Remy's ophthalmologist, explains that Remy's pain is not "localized…you can't touch it" but rather a "generalized" and "diffuse" one.[629] Both the 9/11 attacks and Remy's eye surgery can be interpreted as a "severe violation" and "unique shock on every level." Intriguingly, his eye surgery and the physical impact of the airplanes have disturbed the relaxed "central nervous system" of both Remy's body and America's psyche because the system "doesn't know what to make of it when someone goes poking around on *the top floors*."[630] Therefore, Remy's physical disintegration and his long struggle to cope with the rapid degeneration of his health as well as "the gaps" in his memory reflect both the surreal scene just moments after the attacks and the beginning of the long journey of mourning for Americans particularly, and the world in general.

However, besides depicting the parallel between the traumatic experience of the individual and the collective national trauma of the country, *The Zero* examines also the "rupture," to use Kristiaan Versluys's term, in the narrative's representations of the Other after 9/11.[631] The novel shows the other "dark" side of the multicultural America as its protagonist, Remy, becomes gradually involved in the "War on Terror" and its legitimation of the mistreatment of the suspect terrorists, propaganda, and abuse of human rights. "Walter's novel is a tour de force narrative," Duvall and Marzec argue, "in which the central character can maintain his innocence about what the US government does in America's name—from the harassment of Arab Americans to the torture of suspected terrorists."[632] Yet, Remy seems innocently unaware of his involvement in such violations until the end of the novel when it is too late for him to stop

[629] Walter, *The Zero* 265.
[630] Walter, *The Zero* 265. Emphasis mine.
[631] Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 80.
[632] Duvall and Marzac, "Narrating 9/11" 387.

the "blast."[633] He heartbrokenly confesses to himself, "if you can trust yourself in the moments between bouts of consciousness. *What am I doing in those moments I don't remember?*"[634] Throughout the novel, Remy's character, again, blurs the binary of good and evil as he fluctuates between being a "hallucinating" victim of the attacks to being a force that is brutal and "scary good" that serves as a mere cog in the big machine of the U.S. counterterrorism covert operations.

If we agree with Versluys that September 11 is "ultimately a semiotic event, involving the total breakdown of all meaning-making systems," then we need to (re)consider our own understanding of the relationship between different cultural references in Walter's novel as well as the politics of representation.[635] The unpredictability of 9/11 challenges our cultural system; particularly the ingrained tendencies of constructing binaries such as us-them, East-West, Self-Other, religious-secular, and terrorist-victim. Thus, in order to examine these "meaning-making systems" and how 9/11 has blurred many binaries, this analysis will study closely the relationship between Remy and other Middle Eastern characters in the novel from a postcolonial perspective and show how even a relatively informed post-9/11 U.S. novel cannot escape the (mis)representations of Arabs that rooted in the (neo)Orientalist tradition, especially in the case of the depictions of Saudi and other Muslim characters.

The tragedy of 9/11 signaled a "rupture" in the apparently seamless multiculturalism of the American image of being the "melting pot" of the world. Most of the ideals about coexistence and assimilation were suddenly juxtaposed and challenged by a call for war and an unwavering surge of othering and exclusionary sentiments. In the same fashion, a character in

[633] Walter, *The Zero* 323.
[634] Walter, *The Zero* 181.
[635] Versluys, *Out of the Blue* 2.

the novel named the Boss, who apparently represents the Mayor of New York, echoes the speech of President Georg W. Bush and declares: "These bastards [terrorists] hate our freedoms. Our way of life."[636] (51). Walter reduces Bush's speech to a political satire as the Boss continues: "They hate our tapas bars and our sashimi restaurants, our all-night pita joints […] this is a war we fight with wallets and purses, by making dinner reservations and going to MOMA…"[637] Here the novel parodies the politically charged dichotomy of "us" versus "them," which was immediately resurrected as one of the immediate consequences of the exclusionary ideology behind the U.S.-led campaign of War on Terror or the Global War on Terrorism that exceeded the traditional definition of the word "war" in (world) politics. This dichotomy prevailed after the attacks and served as a powerful lobbying force for immediate military reaction. In *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945,* Douglas Little discusses how President Bush occasionally used to lecture about Islam as a religion of "respect" and that "terrorists are traitors of their own faith," yet he concludes that "lurking just beneath Bush's rhetoric of tolerance was a subliminal impulse to demonize Islamic terrorists that echoed *earlier orientalist diatribes.*[638] These "orientalist diatribes" against the Muslim/Arab World are one of most significant and recurring themes in *The Zero* as the novel seeks to construct some kind of a counternarrative against such practices.

Although Walter's novel presents the issue from "a ludic post-modern position," it seriously shows how 9/11 has "radically destabilized the US sense of Self and thus necessitated a particular reassertion of state identity that pivots violently on gender and race" as Meghana

[636] Walter, *The Zero* 51.
[637] Walter, *The Zero* 51.
[638] Little, *American Orientalism* 42. Emphasis is mine;

Nayak puts it.[639]. Thus, in order to reclaim their sense of identity, most of the characters in the novel recourse to an Orientalist ideology that revives the traditional East-West binary and eventually stigmatizes Arabs as the despotic, violent and fanatical Other. So, the narrative has to conjure up these traditional Orientalist images once the first Middle Eastern character is introduced. Interestingly, the first encounter does not happen face-to-face but rather through a photo presented to Remy by Shawn Markham, another important character who too works for the "Documentation Department." This twofold introduction serves, first, to maintain the space between that "Oriental" Other and the reader in order to avoid any possibility of developing affinity between Remy, and by extension the reader, and that character, because he is the main protagonist. It also removes any hope for Remy or the reader to develop an independent perspective or analysis of that person. Secondly, the photo serves as an invocation of the centuries-old tradition of introducing the Orientalist representations, especially visual, of Middle Easterners through the Orientalist paintings and travel accounts by western artists and writers who visited various parts of region. This tradition had deeply influenced the construction of the image of Arab-Islamic world in the west. The role of this Orientalist tradition is discussed at various earlier moments of this project as in the case of *The White Bedouin* by George Potter and Vincent Meis's *Eddie's Desert Rose,* and it features even in the analysis of nonfictional works like *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom* by Sandra Mackey.

Consequently, the reader encounters Bishir Madain, the first important Middle Eastern (Saudi) character, when Remy and his partners start their fictitious investigation into March Selios's connection to a "potential" terrorist group, because she is a paralegal worker at WTC

639 JDuvall and Marzec, "Narrating 9/11" 386; ; Meghana Nayak, "Orientalism And 'Saving' US State Identity After 9/11," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8.1 (2006): 42-61 at 42.

who *presumably* got out of the building after receiving a phone call just few moments before the attacks. Parodying the xenophobic wave of panic after 9/11, Walter frames Remy's reaction to these imagined assumptions as the following:

> [Remy asks] "You think…she shouldn't be…on the official list [9/11 casualties]?"
>
> "We have reason to believe…" Markham paused again. "There are indications…" He stopped again. "There is some *evidence* that…Ms. Selios may not have died that day. She may, in fact, be alive […] we are exploring the theory that she may have gotten advance warning and fled moments before…"[640]

Walter further his satire by opting for extensive use of ellipses, italics, and the quick transition from "reason," "evidence," to "theory" to indicate the absurdity of the situation and to add an illusory element of enigma. For this reason and after finding a handwritten recipe by March for a "pecan encrusted sole," the investigators think the caller was her ex-boyfriend, Bishir, who is depicted as a "handsome young […] man, his hair and beard both at stubble length, his deep-set eyes seeming to peer through the camera."[641] This description is almost an ahistorical nostalgic reminiscent of the Orientalist visual discourse (representations) of the people of the Arab-Islamic world that are mostly found in Orientalist paintings as well as Western travel accounts. This assumption becomes apparently more plausible since Markham gives Remy a photo of both March and Bishir before providing any information about their personal or professional life or even saying their names. This means that, for Remy, the photo functions as a "visual report," to use Reina Lewis's term, that constructs a discourse or an

[640] Walter, *The Zero* 58.
[641] Walter, *The Zero* 59, 62.

"ethnographic portraiture" of the Other before knowing that person's name, story, or background (138).[642]

The other Orientalist feature is seen in the way these photos, especially the ones that reflect the relationship between Bishir and March, are taken and presented to Remy: "This [photo] was taken on the roof of March's apartment building. March cooked the meal and a neighbor served them and took this picture." First, the setting of this photo, like most of the Orientalist paintings, is a domestic space where gender, exoticism, and eroticism intersect. For example, March is presented as a second-generation Greek immigrant who

> Spoke fluent Greek, but also Arabic and a bit of Farsi. Did a lot of work with Middle Eastern and Mediterranean companies: Greek, Italian, Saudi Syrian, Lebanese. Intelligent girl, single, moderate drinker, liberal politics […] A bit of a wild child, a drinker, no drug use […] She wasn't afraid of sex, but then, she was in her twenties.[643] Even the technician "had always found Ms. Selios to be […] *smoking hot.*"[644]

This ethnographic emphasis on Marsh's background with such explicitly sexual undertone of the niceties of her femininity ("round cheeks, dark eyes, and long black hair, a beautiful girl") and private life parallels the notions of the enigmatic allure and (interracial) intimacy in Orientalist discourse. The detailed evocative characterization continues in the narrative. Hence, Bishir has to be both "handsome" and "young" in order to fit, on the one hand, the traditional Orientalist image of "Oriental" Arab as an exotic figure, and, on the other hand, the post-9/11 neo-Orientalist (politicized) portrayal of the dangerously young mind of an easily motivated potential

642 Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism,* 138.
643 Walter, *The Zero* 58.
644 Walter, *The Zero* 63.

Arab/Muslim terrorist. Such characterizations demonstrate how the narrative unconsciously fluctuates between rehashing traditional Orientalist discourse and disseminating the post-9/11 political rhetoric of neo-Orientalism. Between being handsome and being a menacing young mind, Bishir serves as a link between reviving and perpetuating the traditions of the (neo)Orientalist discourse and, therefore, assumes the predetermined position of "the enemy" Other within the post-9/11 narrative/context. Furthermore, there must be a beard. *The Zero* is a satirical novel, yet Walter imagines Bishir with a beard, even if it is at "stubble length," in order to give his character more stereotypical assets to fit more easily into the American sociocultural presumption of how a potential terrorist would look like.

Likewise, Walter's narrative choice of depicting Bishir as a "handsome young" man prepares the reader for the role that he will play later in the novel. Bishir's existence revolves around his attractiveness more than his intellectual capabilities. To be more precise, his character oscillates between being sexy and being sexist. For instance, Markham introduces him for the first time to the reader by linking him to March Selios, *one* of his ex-girlfriends who supposedly died in the attacks. This indirect introduction that associates him early on with a female "victim" puts the last artistic touches on the exoticization of Bishir as a representative of the sexually attractive yet menacing Oriental figure. Unsurprisingly, after few moments of introducing his character, the novel describes Bishir as an "Arab student, *real womanizer*."[645] This serves as a reminder of the traditional image of the Orient who lives in a sexual deviancy by suppressing and marrying many women. Edward Said touches upon this notion when he asserts that in the Oriental discourse "the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of

[645] Walter, *The Zero* 81. Emphasis mine.

licentious sex.”.[646] This image is developed further when Bishir is linked to another woman, Lisa Herote, a rich woman who lives in Virginia. Apparently, Bishir was wholeheartedly enjoying his time with her and did not have to worry about money because it seems that “she used to pay for” him.[647] Her account of Bishr reveals the latter’s “licentious” behavior and how she “had a difficult breakup [… because he] wasn’t exactly … committed to the relationship.”[648] As a (Saudi) character who represents the “enemy” Other, Bishir never shows any signs of development or change until his questionable death at the hands of “the bureau” for being a member of “the cell” or (CELL 93), a supposedly terrorist group that, paradoxically, consists mainly of informants. These informants follow the orders of Remy, his colleagues, and other “twenty competing agencies busting in doors and swinging through windows, dropping through vents” which fail miserably to coordinate among themselves and instead always fight “over what…turf” to continue their bogus investigation.[649]

Bishir’s decadent behavior becomes even more problematic when the text offers some glimpses into his relationships with these two women. While enjoying his “pecan encrusted sole,” Bishir laughs at the “crazy-ass theory” of the possibility that he contacted his ex-girlfriend, March, to warn her about the attacks just few moments before the actual impact.[650] The important thing to notice here is not just the facts that a) he, ironically, had no idea about the attacks and that b) March was actually on the phone with her angry sister, April, who was livid to find out that her husband was sleeping with her younger sister, but also to notice the way the text frames Bishir’s reaction to that “theory.” First, Bishir refers to March as merely “an old

[646] Said, *Orientalism* 190.
[647] Walter, *The Zero* 198.
[648] Walter, *The Zero* 198.
[649] Walter, *The Zero* 254.
[650] Walter, *The Zero* 254.

girlfriend" and seems to have even some difficulty remembering her name. All of the human aspects of his relationship with that woman are condensed into the coldness of being "this chick, March"![651] March becomes just another number in the victim list of this Saudi Arabian "womanizer." For him, she only "was a sweet girl. Good lay, too." [652] Ludicrously, he is able to recall only the materialistic sense of pleasure.

Second, it is intriguing to see that what can be described as Bishir's sexual deviancy or mistreatment of women go undetected and only brought to light after the attacks on 9/11. Structurally, 9/11 does not necessarily initiate a new discourse of representations of Arabs/Muslims. It only signals a disruption of how these (mis)conceptions used to be negotiated, regulated, and presented. This means that post-9/11 narratives utilize what *was already there* and the existing discourse as the traumatic experiences on both the individual and national levels have helped in bringing these stereotypical (Orientalist) images from the background of the collective consciousness of society to the foreground of the daily discursive frames of representation. Many scholars and critics have noticed and examined this ideological dynamic in Western culture in general, and particularly American sociocultural context. For instance, and after a lengthy discussion of the representations of Arabs throughout the history of American popular culture in his book *American Orientalism*, Little concludes that a "quick look at how Arabs have been depicted in everything from pulp fiction to television during the past twenty years [he published his book in 2002] confirms that orientalism American style remained alive and well in both popular culture and the mass media."[653] To give an idea of how these cultural associations between the image of Arabs/Muslims and, say, the notion of "Oriental" exoticism

[651] Walter, *The Zero* 254.
[652] Walter, *The Zero* 254.
[653] Little, *American Orientalism* 36.

function implicitly in Walter's *The Zero*, one needs to look no further than to how the narrative frames Bishir in the post-9/11 (sociopolitical) context of the novel, especially when it comes to giving him a "code name." The counterterrorism group casually gives Bishir the name of "Tarzan."

There are two reasons for choosing that name. First it is directly related to his promiscuous relationships with women. Bishir and Kamal, another (Saudi) member of the imaginary "sleeper cell," "shared a fondness … for American women."[654] So immersed in the American popular culture, Bishir and Kamal develop their own coding system that is, ironically, based on "the movies" and label American women "vines" because "a man in America could swing from vine to vine here [USA] without ever touching the earth."[655] In fact, the group of investigators, on the other side, refer to Bishir as "Subject Number Three" and give him the codename "Tarzan."[656] This shows how the novel so sarcastically yet simultaneously criticizes both the representations of the Self and the Other. The function of the Other is seen as a stylistic tool for self-criticism. The other reason, moreover, for using Tarzan as a code name for Bishir is more complicated and implicitly linked to the orientalist imagery that pictures the Arab-Muslim Other as exotic, violent, and backward. Initially, Bishir is introduced as a "Saudi ex-pat[triate]" who has been living in the United States for twenty years.[657] Even Assan Al-Hassan, a fellow Saudi character and another informant, also confesses that he "barely knew him [Bishir] … in his dress and speech, he is very … American."[658] Yet, Bishir's long stay in the U.S. and the way the novel depicts how westernized he has become does not relieve him of exhibiting some

654 Walter, *The Zero* 138
655 Walter, *The Zero* 138.
656 Walter, *The Zero* 270.
657 Walter, *The Zero* 62.
658 Walter, *The Zero* 139.

Orientalist traits. For instance, after spending some time with him, Remy finds it "surprising" that the supposedly wild, violent, and, backward Arab has "a precise, cultured manner."[659] This noticeably shows that 9/11 has complicated and challenged the us-them, Self-Other, and terrorist-victim dichotomies. The basic binary system is no longer capable of conveying all the convoluted anxieties and traumatic experiences and, thus, a new "triangulating discourse in which the confrontation with Other is the central concern."[660]

The other manifestation of the Orientalist tradition of representations in *The Zero* is specifically related to Islam as the dominant religion of most of the residents of the Arab-Islamic world. Generally speaking, a great number of Westerners usually consider the Arab-Islamic world as one homogenous and bland entity. For example, they often do not differentiate between the diverse residents of the Arab world (whether Muslims or not) and other Muslims in Pakistan, India, and Indonesia, etc. Collectively, they see them as either Arabs or Muslims regardless to the huge disparity within their cultural, racial, ethnical, and social backgrounds. This comes as a geopolitical and cultural legacy of the long tradition of Orientalism where all non-Westerners in that part of the world used to be labelled as "Orientals" irrespective of the vast spatiality such otherness would encompass. This inability or failure to differentiate between people occurs also in Walter's novel. The narrator introduces Mahoud Tasneem, a Pakistani restaurant owner and a member of the "sleeper cell" as "vaguely Middle Eastern."[661] This smart trick challenges the reader and distorts his/her reading experience because Mahoud is very angry since his restaurant becomes a regular target for a wave of "vandalism." The narrative refuses to directly disclose the

[659] Walter, *The Zero* 253.
[660] Versluys, *Out of the Blue* 183.
[661] Walter, *The Zero* 111

reason for these attacks as Markham, Remy's partner and the representative of the government, affirms that "[t]here are a lot of cases like this."[662]

Furthermore, Mahoud shows a letter that reads: "Go home, camel-fucker. We know where you live."[663] This letter reflects the Orientalist legacy of treating all Muslims as nomadic Arabs because it refers specifically to the camel, an animal that embodies one of the biggest symbols for what is imagined as the Oriental Arab. It is almost considered the "true" representation of the geopolitical and cultural aspects of that part of the world. When Said discusses the "contemporary Orientalist attitudes [that] flood the press and the popular mind," he asserts that "Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization."[664] Similarly, no one recognizes why Mahoud is even angrier when he shows that letter and instead, they focus on the "pig's ear" that was attached to the note. Furiously, Mahoud protests that his son is in fact serving in the American Army and that he has been asking futilely for help before he starts crying. He eventually recourses to declaring that he is "Pakistani not Arab."[665] (112). This ironic situation is smartly organized to allow the reader to draw his or her own conclusion and hints at Mahoud's future role in the novel.

Apparently, for the Pakistani-American Mahoud being "a citizen of this country" is not good enough to be excluded from the possibility of being a suspect terrorist. Markham, as a representative of the double standards of the U.S. government on its War on Terror, fails to answer Mahoud's justifiable question of why he should explain that he is not a terrorist since he is a citizen of this country, too. The situation becomes even more perplexingly ironic when that

[662] Walter, *The Zero* 111.
[663] Walter, *The Zero* 111.
[664] Said, *Orientalism* 108.
[665] Walter, *The Zero* 112.

poor guy is recruited as an informant and therefore a member of the fictional "sleeper cell." Walter does an excellent job by juxtaposing Mahoud's well-justified and supported argument with the U.S government's reliance on speculation in its War on Terror. As Remy's boss and the leader of the investigation unit, Dave remorselessly confesses that they are "*not entirely sure* of his [Mahoud's] involvement *or* his motivations … all we know is that he recently *contacted* Bishir and volunteered to be involved, *possibly* in a support role, providing transportation, *or* safe house.".[666] Here, Mahoud is the Other whose mere existence as an Arab or Muslim counterpart signals a devastating threat that jeopardizes the very existence of the American Self or identity. As a result, the "bureau" and other covert agencies have to act quickly and reclaim their hegemonic position within the East-West dynamic rendering Mahoud another (oriental) causality of that "fever dream" of violence, because he is also killed at the end of the novel.[667] (326).

The other major Saudi character the novel depicts stands in a stark contrast to the characterization of Bishir. He is older and much wiser than Bishir who lives some kind of a playboy lifestyle. As the Middle Eastern Other who supposedly represents the mastermind of the terrorist group, he is codenamed Jaguar because his real name and is not divulged in the novel or known to other informants. Jaguar works also as an informant and is paid by both Remy and the Boss, but other investigators are oblivious of this fact. He is portrayed as a former university professor who is in his late fifties or early sixties. Like Bishir, Jaguar is introduced to the reader through "a grainy photo of two men leaning on the railing of a ferry."[668] From an aesthetic perspective, the graininess of Jaguar's photo hints to the elusive and enigmatic character he

[666] Walter, *The Zero* 27, Emphasis mine.
[667] Walter, *The Zero* 326.
[668] Walter, *The Zero* 273.

represents in the narrative. Such graininess is also a common characteristic of old photographs or blurry images of low-quality videos. From a sociocultural perspective, however, it is reminiscent of the "grainy videos" of various terrorist figures that were widely circulated in the American media coverage of Muslim world after 9/11 as Mohsin Hamid asserts in an interview that "there are not many of us from the Muslim world who are getting heard over here [the west]. And the ones who are mostly seem to be speaking in *grainy videos from caves* [or] *the grainy picture* that stands for 30 seconds before the bomb hits and blows up whatever building that is."[669] Furthermore, the graininess of Jaguar's photo mirrors the haziness of the "prevailing discourse, that of the media and of the official rhetoric, relies too readily on received concepts like 'war' or 'terrorism' (national or international)."[670] Indeed, Jaguar bears some resemblance to vagueness of these purposefully chosen and propagandized images because he stays an enigma for most of the other characters and seems to be reiteration a thesis, at least until his final moments, to such "truncated depictions," to use Duvall terms.[671]

Throughout the novel, Jaguar represents the role of the intellectual who is able to freely criticize the role of the American government in the world, especially after 9/11. One of the main reasons for assigning this role to Jaguar as a non-American character is his ability to "live between the two worlds;" a job that Remy, ironically, tries to achieve through his insistence on overcoming his episodes of amnesia by finishing and connecting sentences. For example, Remy and Jaguar, remarkably, react and analyze the photos of the victims of 9/11 differently. While Remy "could mentally break them [the photos of 9/11 victims] into three strata" based on their

[669] Mohsin Hamid, "Critical Outtakes: Mohsin Hamid on Camus, Immigration, and Love," interview, conducted by John Freeman, *Critical Mass: The Blog of the National Book Critics Circle Directors*, 30 Mar. 2007. Emphasis added.
[670] Jacques Derrida, in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 100.
[671] Duvall, "Representing the Enemy Other" 246.

status in the American society, which is paradoxically supposed to be "classless," Jaguar, on the other hand, "believed that are two kinds of people: those whose every day is a battle to rise up, and those whose every day is a battle to fit in."[672] Interestingly, Remy, as an insider, is only able to categorize people according to their financial status and the psychological impressions on their faces reflected on their photos. Yet, to be more precise, Remy is aesthetically able to recognize the imprinted financial differences between the different faces on the wall and therefore he categorizes them hierarchically. On the other hand, Jaguar, as an outsider, is able read through the same faces the daily intersections between the social eagerness to "fit in" and the financial struggle to "rise up" in their life. Therefore, he is able to categorize them horizontally as well as vertically.

However, these various theoretical arguments reveal the dilemma that the intellectual encounters in his/her interaction with the society. Jaguar, for example, suggests a complicated roadmap that is based on "the ideal and childlike optimism" of "Communism."[673] This reliance on his nostalgic sense of "miss[ing]" or longing for Communism can explain the outcome of his analysis of the photos mentioned above. He does not believe in the practical side of Communism and only hopes for a blind application of its "ideals." Jaguar criticizes the core of the "white values of democracy and freedom," to borrow the term of Ahmed and Matthes[674] when he reproachfully explains to Remy that: "Entertainment is the singular thing you produce now. And it is just another propaganda, the most insidious, greatest propaganda ever devised, and this is your only export now—your coffee and tobacco, your gunpowder and your wheat. And while

[672] Walter, *The Zero* 73-74.
[673] Walter, *The Zero* 75.
[674] Saifuddin Ahmed and Jörg Matthes, "Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis." *International Communication Gazette* 79.3 (2017): 319-44 at 231.

people elsewhere die questioning the propaganda of tyrants and royals, you crave yours."[675] His onslaught on the economics of American popular culture develops as he turns his criticism towards what can be identified as the intersectionality between culture of commodity and consumerism and the exploitations of the religious discourse by both sides (Western governments and extremists):

> You demand the propaganda of distraction and triviality, and it has become your religion, your national faith. In this faith you are grave and backward fundamentalists, not so different from the grave and backward fundamentalists you presume to battle. If they are barbarians knocking at the gates with stories of beautiful virgins in the afterlife, then aren't you barbarians too, wrapping the world in cables full of happy-ever-after stories of fleshy blondes and animated fish and talking cars?[676]

Such a convoluted narrative and how it elegantly dissects the government's circumvention of its entanglement with religion parallels the "secular" role of the intellectual that Jaguars embodies in his cross-cultural analysis of the post-9/11 culture. Edward Said similarly underscores the same notion when he asserts that the role of the intellectual has to be "secular." For instance, he emphatically argues in *Representations of the Intellectual* that "the true intellectual is a secular being,"[677] This role is assigned to Jaguar who is also symbolically known in the narrative as *Ibn 'Arabi,* the "pacific Sufi teacher."[678] This association with Ibn

[675] Walter, *The Zero* 231, 222.
[676] Walter, *The Zero* 223.
[677] Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures (*New York: Pantheon, 1994), 129.
[678] Walter, *The Zero* 271. Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) was an Arab Andalusian philosopher and poet mostly known in the Arab-Islamic world as محي الدين ابن عربي Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. Some scholars regard him as a controversial mystic figure while other see him as an embodiment of "pure" Sufism. His followers refer to him as الشيخ الاكبر al-Shaikh al-Akbar (the Greatest Master). He travelled extensively and wrote on Islamic philosophy. Among his

‘Arabi may explain the philosophical tendencies of Jaguar’s arguments and adds both an element of controversy—how and why he kills himself at the end—and mystic charm to his characterization.

In order to achieve this goal, the Middle Eastern man distances himself from any religious interpretation of the society. He confesses that when he was “a young man [he] believed that [his] faith [Islam] was a path through the violent thicket of modernity,” yet he seems to be in an agnostic in a dilemma now. The incomprehensibility of the 9/11 attacks has shattered to pieces his sense of religiosity as he becomes more doubtful of his understanding of that “path.” As a result of these doubts, he embraces his role as a free intellectual and begins a journey of enlightenment in the novel with his severe criticism of what we can call the American sense of naivete and how the U.S. government capitalizes on this geopolitically and economically. Most of the Americans—like any other group of people throughout the world who are overwhelmed with meeting the daily demands of modern life—do not know much about other cultures, particularly that of the Arab-Muslim Other. Building on that fact, the Middle Eastern man surprises Remy with this question: “Did you know that Jesus is mentioned ninety-three times in the Koran?”[679] Remy is oblivious of the basis of Jaguar’s point and has no idea how to reply, because he represents a middle-class American with no great exposure to multiculturalism, let alone religious principles of another faith. Even though Jaguar asks something about Islam, the purpose of this question is not to find out whether that number is correct or not, but to expose the vast scope of the notion of difference and, therefore, establish a

notable books are فصوص الحكم Fusus al-Hikam (The Bezels/Ringstones of the Wisdoms) and الفتوحات المكية al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah (The Meccan Illuminations/Openings). Ibn ’Arabi spent the last years of his life in Damascus where he taught, wrote, died, and is buried. The life and thought of this controversial figure still intrigue some contemporary Arab writers. For instance, the Saudi novelist Mohammed Hasan Alwan won the 2017 International Prize for Arabic Fiction for writing موت صغير *Mawtun Saghir* (*A Small Death*) about the life of Ibn ‘Arabi.

679 Walter, *The Zero* 75.

solid background for a genuine intellectual interaction between different religions, cultures, and traditions. For this reason, Jaguar is one of the few characters in the novel who does not speak in an elliptical fashion.

Importantly, Jaguar represents the real force of change that the intellectual is capable of, even though this force enigmatically turns to be deadly by the end of the story. Throughout his enigmatic style of asking provocative questions, citing some verses from the Holy Qura'an, and criticizing American government, especially its hegemonic foreign policy, he seeks to create some kind of an intellectual rupture in the narrative that would parallel the physical attacks since "9/11 is a rupture for everybody," as Versluys argues, and "as consequence, there is a globalized need to comprehend, to explain, and to restore."[680] Truly, Jaguar is the embodiment of what Said hopes for:

> the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug.[681]

Jaguar's convoluted arguments about religions, politics, and the role of the government are true representative of the role of the intellectual who is entirely independent and refuses any kind of "old loyalties."

[680] Versluys, *Out of the Blue* 4.
[681] Said, *Representations* 11.

Unfortunately, however, the eventual fate of Jaguar is not well developed and becomes a bit ambiguous. Although, he stays faithful to his principles until the end of the story, he surprisingly becomes the antithesis of his own discourse when he uses the bomb to kill himself and six other victims—other supposedly informants. The narrative does not divulge the reasoning behind Jaguar's decision to denote the bomb. However, the script of the suicide video the group was filming was written by investigators while the bomb itself was supposed to be "fake." Even the Boss, ironically, facilitates its purchase with the money he paid to Jaguar. It turns out that the whole scenario is in fact a plot orchestrated by different branches or agencies of the government. Commenting on Walter's brilliant utilization of postmodern irony in *The Zero* to criticize the post-9/11 state of exception, Duvall untangles the dreadful mess:

> The novel's implicating postmodern ironies make clear that the most significant work of the Homeland Security State has been to produce the simulacrum of security by constructing plots. These plots, as ludic as any conceived by a postmodern novelist, allow most Americans to believe they are safe from another major terrorist attack, while at the same time ensuring that they willingly give up their civil liberties and turn a blind eye to those foreign- looking others who suffer as a result, effectively legitimizing the state of exception in a way that preserves the fantasy of American exceptionalism.[682]

This is exactly what Remy, at the very end of the novel, identifies when he says, "This was what life felt like. This."[683] For Remy and the reader this is the new "normal" where the counter-terrorism procedures take the lead on national and global levels in post/9/11 world.

[682] John N. Duvall, "Homeland Security and the State of (American) Exception(alism): Jess Walter's *The Zero* and the Ethical Possibilities of Postmodern Iron," *Studies in the Novel* 45.2 (2013): 279-97 at 295.
[683] Walter, *The Zero* 325.

Regardless of any kind of assumption the reader may draw from this complicated farce of "anti-terror" operation and how Jaguar chooses to end his life, the closing lines of the novel particularly put the news of the explosion within the frame of the politicized media coverage of American War on Terror. Remy hears a report on TV, while being treated in the hospital, stressing that "the recent bounce in The President's popularity was entirely due to the recent victory over a terrorist cell, in which four of the five members were killed and only one bomb was detonated . . . on a mostly empty train platform . . . killing only six . . . including the bomber . . . and severely wounding a retired police officer—[Remy]."[684] The fragmentary style of how Remy hears "the dream television" or the "televised dreams," as he puts it, reflects both the fragmentation of evidence by "the Bureau" and the dispersal of society into marginalized, harassed, and racially-profiled groups. Walter's Mahoud powerfully condenses such socially and culturally policed practices and how minority citizens/groups within the American society experience racial profiling even by other members of his own community when he uncompromisingly states to Remy and Markham: "I think in this country I should not have to expla that I am not a terrorist. I think these [racial] things are not anyone's business but my own […] This is outrageous […] I am a citizen of this country too."[685]

Walter's treatment of (covert) state-sponsored violence and how it generates even more violence intersects conceptually with Jacques Derrida's ideological stance on the Western, particularly American, problematic cultural and political response to 9/11 and what he calls the effect of the notion of "autoimmunity" in his famous interview—along with Jürgen Habermas, but in a separate meeting—with Giovanna Borradori in New York just a few months after the

[684] Walter, *The Zero* 325.
[685] Walter, *The Zero* 112.

attacks.[686] Derrida emphatically states that "What will never let itself be forgotten is thus the perverse effect of the autoimmunitary itself. For we now know that repression in both its psychoanalytical sense and its political sense-whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy-ends up producing, reproducing, and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm."[687] Likewise, in a parody of the government's unapologetic and routinely utilization of torture, Remy, his partners, and their controversial covert "anti-terror" operations, which included torture, fabrications, and killings—as in the cases of the circumstantial death of Bobby Al-Zamil and the torture and killing of Kamal Al-Hassan's young brother, Assan—represent the manifestations of the aggressive milieu that fueled by the fervor of the post-9/11 nationalistic rhetoric. Moreover, the fabricated investigation and how it becomes a political space for different colliding agendas is reflected in how Remy's partner, Markham, disapprovingly cries, "Is there anyone in this cell who happens not to be a government informant?"[688] This leads to the disastrous bombing at the end of the novel which can be seen to be reflecting how the policy of the U.S. has become increasingly reactionary, especially in the way it engages socially, politically, economically, and culturally with Arab/Muslim Other.

Finally, Jess Walter's *The Zero* is a very engaging novel that adds another angle to pos-9/11 narrative. It represents the writers' dilemma after the attacks and the stylistic and cultural difficulties they face in recreating the traumatic experiences of individuals as well as the whole nation. The novel is written in the same fragmentary style where the reader plays the role of a detective. To be more accurate, the reader, to some extent, plays the same role that Remy tries to

[686] Borradori interviewed Habermas in December 2001 after her conversation with Derrida on October 22, 2001 See, Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* 179, 186.
[687] Derrida, in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* 99.
[688] Walter, *The Zero* 294.

play: that is to connect the dots or, at least, to guess what is missing. Stylistically, the novel reflects the disruptive effect of 9/11 and how it is related to the fundamental question of how people understand what happened in that surreal day. The surrealist aspect of that day can be inferred from the entanglements of reality with dream-like nature and the unexpectedness of the attacks. The whole scene of the attacks and its unjustifiably unexplainable nature renders it a gigantic surreal image with too many details to process/take in. Yet, one of the most successful aspects of the novel is its ability to challenge the us-them and self-other dichotomies and therefore establish more space for cross-cultural intellectual intercalations. By utilizing the rich history of the Orientalist representations of the Arab-Islamic Other, Walter brilliantly unmasks the true face of War on Terror as Duvall rightly points to Jaguar's "most pertinent question in the entire novel: 'Does a man ever realize that he has been the villain of his own story?"[689]

[689] Duvall, "Homeland Security" 295.

CONCLUSION

If you only read the books that everyone else is reading, you can only think what everyone else is thinking.

Haruki Murakami

Building on David Damrosch's essay "What is World Literature," in this dissertation I have attempted to open new horizons in contemporary Saudi American (literary and cultural) studies by examining the politics of representation of Saudi Arabia, its space and people. As an interdisciplinary and comparative examination of Saudi and American literary corpora, this study has focused on the historical and cultural development and pivotal shifts that have contributed to the modern-day portrayal of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in this analysis of the Saudi American contexts, I have juxtaposed the dynamics of image projection and perception of the Saudi space and people by American writers with their counterparts in works written by Saudis. This interdisciplinary study blends aspects from cultural theory, anthropology, geography, postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, media studies, and literature and the arts. It also draws from discourses on gender, masculinity, femininity, and veiling.

To achieve this goal, I dedicated the first chapter to the reviewing of the early encounters with the "Orient" in American culture as well as giving a synopsis of Saudi literature. It provided historical and theoretical backgrounds to the discussion since this dissertation engages with a wide range of theoretical approaches ranging between such critics as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Susan Friedman, Neil Lazarus, Lila Abu-Lughod, and other theorists of the Western and of the Eastern worlds. Utilizing these backdrops, the second chapter examined the notion of the "oil encounter" and, consequently, outlined the history of Saudi politics, with

special emphasis on the 75-year-old "special relationship" between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States between the years 1945-2020.

Chapters two and three drew from discourses on (neo)Orientalism, postcoloniality, gender studies, and the spatial relationship between desert and urbanized spaces. I examine how American culture looks at these early moments of encounter by analyzing George Potter's *The White Bedouin*. This novel illustrates, for instance, how Potter, as a Mormon writer, reimagines the connectedness between American popular culture and Saudi Arabia, especially from a socioreligious and anthropological perspectives. In my discussion of the American representations of the oil encounter, I explored Vincent Meis's unsuccessful attempt to create a racialized and sexualized political thriller in his novel *Eddie's Desert Rose*, which I termed "masculinities of the encounter." The story plays on the concept of the tensions between body and power, religious and secular. The novel fails to achieve its goal through its emphasis on what I called the compartmentalization of Saudi society into two rigid camps: pro-West and anti-West individuals. I have posited that my analysis of these two novels—and other works such as *Finding Nouf* by Zoë Ferraris, *A Hologram for the King* by Dave Eggers, and up to Sandra Mackey's non-fictional account, *The Saudis: Inside the Desert Kingdom*—shows that we need a modified set of parameters and reflective methodologies when using previously established theoretical approaches, especially to the gaze and to visualizing of Saudi (Bedouin) women. In particular, in chapter three I addressed a wide range of literary texts and utilized the scholarship on modern romances, while simultaneously shifting attention to some important writings on neo-Orientalism, the Western gaze, and the politics of imagining Saudi Arabian space. This has been further demonstrated in the exposition of the role of the legacy of (neo)Orientalist discourses in Potter's depiction of the Norah character and how contemporary American women writers like

Ferraris and Mackey fall short of going beyond the confining modes of representation in their portrayal of the Saudi domestic space and women's role and status in Saudi society. These depictions are usually in sharp contrast with the image of Saudi women found in Saudi female-authored novels that feature independent, strong-willed, and energetic female characters. Such an inquiry would help us gain new cultural dimensions on the Saudi-American context from a variety of perspectives as all relevant within Comparative Literature.

Furthermore, I put these sociocultural frameworks in conversation with works written by Saudi nationals, namely 'Abdul-Rahman Munif's مدن الملح *Mudun Al-Milh* (Cities of Salt) and Maqbul Al-Alawi's البدوي الصغير *Al-Badawi Al-Sagir* (The Young Bedouin). These two novels reveal two distinctive approaches by two different generations. On the one hand and reflecting the sociocultural and geopolitical milieus of Munif's time, *Cities of Salt* looks at the early arrival of "foreigner" oil engineers as a menacing threat to the ecosystem and society of Wadi al-Uyoun. On the other hand, Al-Alawi's *The Young Bedouin* reimagines the oil encounter more positively and shows how the new wealth and the exposure to the outside world would enable local Saudi communities to develop economically, culturally, and socially. Despite their dissimilar renderings, the notion of oil encounter for these two novels signal the advent of modernization and the use of technology and, therefore, the renewal of the modernity and tradition debate and the rise of the discourse of the Other within Saudi society.

In chapter four, this debate resurfaces in my discussion of identity politics, otherness, and the concept of cosmopolitan modernity in فخاخ الرائحة *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* (Wolves of the Crescent Moon) by Yousef Al-Mohaimeed and ميمونة *Maimounah* by Mahmud Trawiri. Al-Mohaimeed's novel uniquely reimagines the spatial relationship between Saudis and desert space. It effectively employs the olfaction to create what Amitav Ghosh calls the "roundedness of experience" of

local residents as I discussed earlier in the dissertation. Therefore, *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha* offers insights into Bedouinism and the human-animal-environment dynamisms and interactions as well as the transitioning to cosmopolitanism. The juxtaposition of the spatial and personal narratives is inimitably maintained throughout the story. Similarly, Trawiri invokes the West African concept of the griot and neatly weaves it into the context of modern Saudi literature. By writing an intricate human story and making the protagonist a woman (of color), Trwairi single-handedly forms a literary space for his distinct narrative in the wider literature of the African diaspora and, consequently, engages in a cultural dialogue with contemporary world literature. I argue that such slant on oral heritage can stimulate more interest in the study of Saudi oral literature that even dates back to the pre-Islamic Arabia, which, unfortunately, is often overlooked in the literary circles inside and outside the Arab world. Indeed, narrating the concept of space varies greatly from American to Saudi writers. Americans look at the Saudi space either as a desert that is arid, barren, backward (*Eddie's Desert Rose*), and antithesis of the Western culture (*A Hologram for the King*), or romantic, biblical and even pastoral (*The White Bedouin*). Whether or not these writers are aware of the influence of (neo)Orientalist discourse, their projection of Saudi Arabia and its sociocultural and spatiotemporal space reflect the complexities and anxieties of oil encounter, modernization process, and social changes. On the contrary, Saudi writers see desert an independent and sustainable ecosystem (*Cities of Salt* and *Fikhakh Ar-Ra'iha*) or a peaceful, self-closed and communal (*The Young Bedouin*) or as religious, multicultural, multiracial space (*Maimounahh*). Thus, Saudi works present a more complicated image of a desert space that has multidimensional characteristics, while their American counterparts depict almost a mono-color, static, homogenized image.

In the fifth and last chapter, I pushed the boundaries of critical and literary comparativity by paralleling and contrasting various responses of American and Saudi writers to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the radical discourse these assaults disgracefully embody. In "Conceptualizing Terrorism in Post-9/11 Novel," I analyzed the very notion of radicalism and the ideological and sociocultural circumstances that lead to radicalization, particularly, of some Arab/Muslim individuals in Jarrett Kobek's *ATTA*, Abduallah Thabit's ٢٠ الإرهابي *Al-Irhabiy 20* (Terrorist Number 20), and Alaa Al-Hadhoul's الانتحار المأجور *Al Intihar Al Ma'ajour* (The Hired Mercenary). This comparative analysis shows that terrorism is far more complex than most of the post-9/11 discourses argue because it is a result of diverse, sometimes competing, factors such as familial and personal problems as portrayed in Jarrett's Atta with the latter's unfathomable and idiosyncratic interest. Social and financial struggles are also presented as the driving force behind Khaled's radicalization in *Al Intihar Al Ma'ajour.* Likewise, the danger of early indoctrination in the exclusionary and negating discourses is sophisticatedly depicted in the character of Zahi in Thabit's novel. The dissertation, however, concludes with a lighter tone focusing on how Jess Walter goes beyond depicting post-9/11 trauma (both personal and national) in *The Zero* and his use of (political) satire in his critiques of the U.S. War on Terror and how it affects the politics of representation of the Arab-Islamic Other. Although the novel relies frequently on Orientalist stereotypical clichés in its portrayal of the Saudi Other, Walter presents a stimulating yet funny interpretation of the prevailing post-9/11 politicized and exclusionary discourses that fuel and perpetuate the us-them, self-other, east-west dichotomies.

I hope that my critical endeavor in this project would help open new horizons for future scholarship in this rapidly developing context of contemporary Saudi American studies, because there is still a plethora of topics and areas that call for a close examination. There are many

promising Saudi fictional and non-fictional works that engage with the American space and yet to be recognized, discussed, and presented to the world. For example, سعوديون مبتعثون *Saʿudiyun Mubtaʿathun* (Saudi Students on Scholarship 2016) by ‘Audah Al-Huwaiti portrays the changes in the lives of many Saudis who come to the US to study and the impact such journeys have on them once they return home. The novel explores new socio-cultural dynamics that emerge from having many Saudis living sporadically in the U.S. as students. These dynamics vary and range from scrutinizing the self-image and self-perception of Saudi culture, renegotiating gender roles in society, women’s agency, to exploring the relationship with the Other. Furthermore and building on Carol Fadda-Conrey’s[690] excellent work on Arab-American literature, one may focus more closely, for instance, on the unexpected and limited encounter between Arab-American Muslims and Saudi characters and the problematic representations of Saudi Arabia and its culture in Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2007).[691]

Finally, I want to reiterate that the goal of this dissertation, with its original historical and critical contextualization of the Saudi-American context, is to contribute to the study of Arabic fiction in serious world scholarship and, purposely, open more space for Saudi literature within the these seemingly rigid categories. In this humble project, I discussed select works from a comparativist perspective for the very first time in academia, especially from a Saudi perspective. One of my aims is to ultimately unsettle the prevailing geopolitics that colors most of the criticism on the Arabian Gulf region and, therefore, shed light, specifically, on what I view as inherently static and monolithic image of Saudi Arabia by addressing oil economics, identity

[690] Carol Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

[691] Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*: *A Novel* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006).

politics, gender roles, orality, ethnicity, and migration. Such a critique is key to challenging the homogenized representations of the Kingdom and showing the societal and cultural diversity within its society. "Again," and as Mohammed Muharram contends, "what we ask for is a fair treatment of Arabic fiction in English (both originally written in English and that translated into it)—no more and no less than the level of attention other Englishes enjoy in our global village today. Is that too much?"[692] This research is a step in that direction.

[692] Mohammed Muharram, "The Marginalization of Arabic Fiction in the Postcolonial and World English Curriculum: Slips? Or Orientalism and Racism. *The Minnesota Review* 78.1 (2012): 130–45, at 143.

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