

BEYOND ORIENTALISM: A STUDY OF THREE  
ARABIC WOMEN WRITERS

A THESIS

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BY

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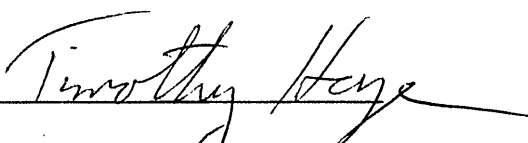
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TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY  
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To the Dean of the Graduate School:


I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Samah Samih Elhajibrahim entitled "Beyond Orientalism: A Study of Three Arabic Women Writers." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Government.

  
Timothy K. Hoyer, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

  
  
  
Department Chair

Accepted:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the love of my life, who occupies my soul, my heart and my mind; Who gives meaning to my life and on my path shines light, to my Palestine. For you Palestine, I decorated my heart to be your mansion; I gave you my soul to be your garden and my mind to be your handmaiden. And today I give you my work to be a fruit in your land taken. I hope that one day you rescue me from my exile and plant me in your land.

I would also like to dedicate this work to (مودتي ورحمتي) my Godsent, my friend and my partner, Bassil Kublaoui, whose kindness always goes beyond my dreams. His faith in my ability to achieve my goals gave me the strength to surpass all obstacles. All of my academic success and achievements would have never been accomplished without him being there for me. I could not ask God for a better friend and loving, caring partner.

Last, but not least, this work is dedicated to my parents, Salwa and Samih and my siblings, Rani, Rabie and Sally. From a very young age, my parents instilled in me the value of education and a love of lifelong learning. I also dedicate to them the following poem by Susan Polis Schutz:

*I have gone through so many different stages changing ideas and goals  
while searching for the right kind of life for me. You were always ready to  
help me at all times. It must have seemed like I would never follow one*

*straight path. Now that I know what I am doing and where I am going I can only show you my extreme appreciation for your support by being true to all the ideals and values that you tried to teach me. Thank you forever for standing by me. I love and appreciate you forever.*

I thank them for their prayers and their never-ending support and love. I owe them everything I have today and I know that I will always be in debt to them. Also, I dedicate this thesis in loving memory of my uncle, Assad, who encouraged me when I was 12 years old to be independent and voice my opinion.

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## ABSTRACT

SAMAH SAMIH ELHAJIBRAHIM

BEYOND ORIENTALISM: A STUDY OF THREE ARABIC WOMEN WRITERS

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In 1978, Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary theorist, published his famous book, *Orientalism*. The book was an attack on the concepts of “Orient” and “Occident”. Said described orientalism as a discourse that helped the West colonize the East. Recent events such as the illegal occupation of Iraq, the war on Afghanistan and U.S. interference in Lebanese affairs, all helped to bring orientalism to the fore. Today, some Arab scholars are questioning if orientalism actually ended. This study argues that orientalism did not vanish but has simply taken on a new form. The aim of this thesis is to study Edward Said’s theory of orientalism and examine his notion that literary production provides the raw material of politics. To examine orientalism and colonialism in the Arab world, I use novels written by three Arab women writers (Fadia Faqir, Pillars of Salt; Yasmin Zahran, A Beggar at Damascus Gate; and Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Memory in the Flesh). The novels are used as tools with which to build the thesis that orientalism and colonialism continue, largely unchanged, and form the basis for the troubled relationship between the Western world and the Arab world. I argue that orientalist discourse still functions to justify and perpetuate the political, economic and

military hegemony. This thesis also highlights the solutions introduced by Edward Said and the three novelists in order to move beyond orientalism and colonialism.

By using novels to examine Edward Said's theory of orientalism, this thesis provides a twofold contribution to the field. First, it provides an example of how novels can be used to study social and political phenomena and how novelists are political thinkers who raise the consciousness of the society. Second, this thesis demonstrates how the study of the literature of other cultures can provide the reader with the opportunity to make a place in their mind for a foreign "other." Unlike the media which have the tendency to magnify the differences between cultures, novelists focus on the humanity of the characters, thus diminishing the differences between the reader and the character and providing the reader with light that illuminates, otherwise invisible problems.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: ORIENTALISM, COLONIALISM AND THE NOVELIST

#### AS POLITICAL ANALYST

##### Novelists as Political Thinkers

The French poet and novelist, Louis Aragon said, “The novel is the key to forbidden rooms in our house” (qtd. in Faqir, *In the House of Silence* 86). Novels allow the reader to invade every corner of society. Novels address important subjects through the experience of the individual within the context of his or her surroundings. The novel addresses the reader who is then able to visualize and internalize the experience of the characters. Because human beings experience reality in a subjective fashion, the narrative is a powerful tool that enters the reader’s consciousness and experience of reality from a subjective point of view. Therefore, novels have a great advantage over didactic models of disseminating information. Unlike textbooks that tend to teach by preaching, novels teach the reader by showing. Georg Lukacs, a philosopher and literary critic argued that novels can depict history more fully than “factual reporting” because in novels,

...Historical necessity is no otherworldly fate divorced from man; it is the complex interaction of concrete historical circumstances in their process of transformation, in their interaction with concrete human beings, who have grown up in these circumstances, have been variously influenced by

them, and who act in an individual way according to their personal passions. (qtd. in Zuckert 687)

Thus, a novel has the capacity to discuss its topic in the context of human experience not in an abstract and detached form. Moreover, it can transcend artificial boundaries that divide people of different backgrounds and civilizations by addressing every aspect of the humanity of the character. This interacts with the humanity of the reader on many levels, thereby magnifying the similarities and diminishing the differences between the reader and the character. A novel can allow an individual from a vastly different cultural background to deeply understand the cultural reality of the characters. Simply stated, novels can bring people closer to one another. Like no other medium, they are able to reveal the fundamental similarities of human experience.

Novelists tickle our imagination, which is the first stage of cognition in Plato's divided line. The line contains four stages of cognition: imagination, belief, understanding and knowledge, respectively (204). Like Plato's divided line, which attempts to direct us towards true knowledge and the discovery of reality, novelists take us out of the cave and put us on the path to knowledge by stimulating our imagination, hoping that at the end of the novel, the reader will reach the highest level of the divided line. Roger Spegele, author of "Fiction and Political Theory" argued that there is no difference between political novels and political theory (114-127). Thus, one can say that novelists resemble political thinkers. They choose a distinctive medium to study social and political phenomena. Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary theorist, said:

The one place in which there's been some interesting and innovative work done in Arab intellectual life is in literary production generally, that never finds its way into studies of the Middle East. You're dealing with the raw material of Politics... You can deal with a novelist as a kind of witness to something. (Middle East Report 33)

Here, Said hints that Arab intellectual life has been less than innovative except in literary production where it is relatively free from external influences. As such, it is uncontaminated raw material that can be utilized to study politics. In keeping with Said's notion that literary production provides the raw material of politics, I will use novels written by three Arab women writers (Fadia Faqir, Pillars of Salt; Yasmin Zahran, A Beggar at Damascus Gate; and Ahlam Mosteghanemi, Memory in the Flesh) to examine orientalism and colonialism in the Arab world. More specifically, the novels will be used to examine Edward Said's thesis on orientalism and the validity of his statement about literature and politics. They will also be used to reveal the historical impact of colonialism on Arab society. I will discuss the ongoing forms of orientalism and colonialism with respect to current events affecting the relationship between the West and the Arab world.

### Orientalism

*"We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large."*

*Balfour, June 1910 (Said, Orientalism 33)*

*“America's mission in Iraq is to defeat an enemy and give strength to a friend -- a free, representative government that is an ally in the war on terror, and a beacon of hope in a part of the world that is desperate for reform...the world understands that success in Iraq is critical to the security of our nations.”*

*George W Bush* (The White House, June 28, 2005)

Some modern intellectuals consider the scholarship on orientalism to be dead (Mtabakati). The current tension in relations between the West and the East in general and the West and the Arab and the Islamic worlds in particular, has revived the issue of orientalism. The events taking place in the Arab world, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Iraq war, the Lebanese-Israeli war and lately the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia in which the United States took part, all help to bring orientalism to the fore. Many Arab intellectuals argue that orientalism and orientalists are still alive and well. In fact, some Arab intellectuals and scholars believe that orientalism has persisted largely unchanged from the colonial era to the present. Orientalists and the scholarship of orientalism are accused of paving the way for colonialization and imperialism.

The word “Oriental” is derived from the Latin word *Oriens*, which means to rise, referring to the East and the rising sun (Al-Alian). Thus, the Oriental is an inhabitant of the East. The counterpart to the “Orient” is the “Occident” which is derived from the Latin word *Occidens*, which means fall, referring to the West and the setting sun. Therefore, orientalism is the study of the East, its civilizations, societies,

languages, cultures and peoples by the Occident or Western scholars and intellectuals (Al-Namleh). However, both terms “Oriental” and “orientalism” have acquired negative connotations. For example, in Washington State it is illegal to use the term “Oriental” in all public texts. The state of Washington considers the term “Oriental” offensive because of the negative stereotypes associated with its use in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>. Orientalism, according to some scholars implies a prejudiced study of the East and its peoples by Western scholars (Al-Namleh). Traditionally the term “Orient” was used to refer to what is now the Middle East. With the European and American openness to East Asia, the term “Orient” began to include the Far East in addition to the Middle East. However, there is no consensus between scholars on a specific date for the establishment of the scholarship of orientalism. Some scholars believe that the scholarship of orientalism started after the Islamic reign in Spain in the tenth century AD, in which Arab interaction with Europe encouraged Europeans to study the Islamic civilization. Others believe that orientalism is one of the consequences of the crusades and actually began with the last crusade (Al-Alian 22-17). Scholars such as Edward Said, Adnan Wazan and Nazir Hamdan specify the beginning of orientalism with the decision of the Church Council of Vienna in 1311-1312 to establish a series of chairs in Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac in Paris, Oxford, the Vatican and Bologna (Al-Namleh). After the Council of Vienna there was a thrust to translate books from Oriental languages to Latin. The study of the Orient went through two important phases. The first

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<sup>1</sup> See Washington State Senate Bill 5954, <[www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)>.

phase was characterized by the establishment of orientalist societies such as Batavia in 1781, the Royal Asiatic society, in London 1834, and the American Oriental Society, in 1842. The second phase was characterized by the organization of orientalist congresses. The first congress took place in Paris in 1871 (Abdel-Malek 74). It is important to note that sixteen congresses took place before the First World War. Although orientalism existed as early as 1311, Arab scholars such as Edward Said and Anouar Abdel-Malek assert that it was towards the end of the nineteenth century, in the period of colonial intervention that orientalism became effective and rigorous. European domination expanded with the development of orientalist institutions. From 1815 to 1914, European colonial domination expanded from about 35 percent of the earth's surface to about 85 percent of it (Orientalism 41). During this period of time orientalist institutions and scholars grew and spread vigorously. Many scholars have questioned the motivation behind the widespread scholarship into the Orient. Orientalists were accused of having various ulterior motives. Some were accused of having purely religious motives, like converting Muslims to Christianity. Others were accused of studying the Orient for the purpose of providing information for their governments that would help in colonizing it (Al-Namleh 43-75). Many Arab scholars were skeptical about orientalist scholarship to the extent that some orientalist scholars were thought to be engaged in espionage for their governments.



## Arab Scholarship on Orientalism

### *Anouar Abdel-Malek*

Examination of the scholarship of orientalism by Arab scholars began in the early 1960s, with Anouar Abdel-Malek, and developed in the late 1970s, with the renowned work by Edward Said titled Orientalism. In 1963, Abdel-Malek, an Egyptian intellectual and a professor at the Sorbonne in Paris, wrote an article titled “Orientalism in Crisis.” In his article Abdel-Malek called on scholars to revise and reevaluate the orientalist’s knowledge of the Orient, their general conceptions, their methods and the instruments by which they studied the Orient. He argued that the rise of the anti-colonial and national liberation movements in the East after World War II plunged orientalism into a crisis. He explained that orientalists were heavily dependent on the colonial powers, which provided them with financial and logistical support to study the Orient including libraries with relevant texts and manuscripts. By virtue of their colonialization of the Orient, Western governments provided orientalists with a laboratory containing the main object of study. With the end of colonialization, access to the Orient became more limited. Abdel-Malek defined the orientalist as follows: “A scholar versed in knowledge of the Orient, its languages, literature etc” (74). He distinguished between two types of traditional orientalists. The first type studied the Orient and the Oriental from afar, at universities and societies in the West, rarely interacting with the object of study. According to Abdel-Malek this contributed to making their results inauthentic. The second type of orientalist studied the Orient and the Orientals by working in the

field. They traveled to the Orient and interacted with the natives. This type of orientalist consists of academics, businessmen, military men and missionaries. According to Abdel-Malek, these field orientalists were reconnaissance agents who gathered information on the object of study in order to help the colonial powers in subjugating them. He accused both types of orientalists of conceptualizing Orientals as objects of study, passive, non-participant and non-autonomous. He charged that orientalism made the West the center and the Orient the periphery (77-90). Abdel-Malek explained that there is a contradiction in the characterization of the Orient by traditional orientalists, one that appears historical but is in fact a-historical. The “historical” aspect is the portrayal that the characterization has been this way since the beginning of their history. The characterization of the Orient is reduced to an essence that is intrinsic to the Orient, unchangeable, inalienable and doesn’t evolve, unlike history. Rather than examining historical and sociopolitical forces as causes leading to the current situation in the Orient, traditional orientalists attributed the lack of development and passivity to an intrinsic essence of the Oriental human. The orientalists named the Oriental human “*homo Arabicus*” or “*homo Africanus*,” as one does in the taxonomy of the animals (77-78). Meanwhile the European man is a “normal” man that does not succumb to this characterization and transcends this taxonomy. Abdel-Malek went on to say that since 1945 this equation has changed. The Orient who used to be the “object” of study became a sovereign “subject” engendering a crisis for the orientalist. Abdel-Malek’s article generated criticism as well as praise. It provoked some orientalists such as Francisco Gabrielle and Claude Cohen to publish

articles defending themselves and their profession. His article also served its purpose, in stimulating scholars and intellectuals to revise the methods and the instruments of orientalism. Abdel-Malek's article became the point of departure for Edward Said's book Orientalism.

*Edward Said*

In 1978 Edward Said published his book Orientalism. Said placed the orientalist scholarship of the last two centuries under rigorous examination. The book was translated into 36 languages. It has been described as one of the most influential books ever written. The American historian, David Gordon, described it as "A work that in certain circles has been almost Koranic in its prestige" (93). The Jerusalem Post described the book as "An important book...Never has there been as sustained and as persuasive a case against orientalism as Said's" (Orientalism). Nevertheless, Orientalism antagonized many scholars and orientalists. Clive Dewey, a British historian of India, vigorously criticized Said's book saying, "It was, technically, so bad; in every respect, in its use of sources, in its deductions, it lacked rigour and balance. The outcome was a caricature of Western knowledge of the Orient, driven by an overtly political agenda" (10). Orientalism also enraged the orientalist Bernard Lewis, whom Said criticized in his book. Lewis called Said "reckless", "arbitrary", "insouciant", and "outrageous" (The Question of Orientalism). He wrote a fighting reply accusing Said of "poisoning" the field of "Oriental" studies and of "polluting" the word "orientalism". Thus, it is evident that Edward Said's book polarized scholars between those who heaped praise on it and

those who harshly criticized it. In addition to the different reactions to the book, scholars have also disagreed on its main theme. Some scholars described it as a defense of Islam, a defense of Arabs or an attack on the West (Middle East Report 33). Others defined it as a critique of the academic field of Oriental Studies and its perceptions of the East in general and the Middle East and the Islamic world in particular. Kamal Abu Deeb, who translated Orientalism into Arabic, wrote in his introduction that the book is not about orientalism or its history but about cultural power. According to Abu Deeb the book studies “the truth” in relation to “representation” and “knowledge” in relation to “power” (2). These conflicting views of the book are due to the fact that Said deals with a series of concepts that connect disciplines as different as literature, philology, history, and politics. The book is replete with general questions such as, “Is the notion of a distinct culture a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation or hostility and aggression?” and “How does one represent other cultures?” (Orientalism 325) This made Said’s task complicated and his book packed with history, analysis and questions. According to Said, the book studies orientalism as “A dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by three great empires-British, French, and American-in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced” (Orientalism 14-15). Said describes his book as “Tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history” (Preface to Orientalism 1). Its aim was to produce “Things that become a box of utensils for other people to use” (Middle East Report 33). Said was surprised by how the book was misinterpreted saying,

“Orientalism, almost in a Borgesian way, has become several different books” (Orientalism 330). After a quarter of a century from its publication, Orientalism continues to generate a great deal of controversy and raise many questions.

Said’s book demonstrates how orientalism has helped the West dominate and control the Orient. He exposes the unequal relationship between the West and the East. In his introduction, Said acknowledges the limitations of the scope of his book, which focuses more on the Middle East and the Islamic Orient, excluding China, Japan and other Far East countries. Said also admits that his book does not do justice to Russian, Spanish, Portuguese and German orientalism, focusing on British, French and American orientalism (17). Furthermore, Said announces his awareness of being an ‘Oriental’ and growing up in two British colonies namely, Palestine and Egypt (25).

According to Said, orientalism can be defined on three different levels. First, it is an academic discipline, where the orientalist teaches, presents and writes about the Orient. Second, it is a style of thought based upon “An ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and “the Occident” (2). Third, it is “The corporate institution for dealing with the Orient” (3). Said argues that this institution (orientalism) was used as an instrument for “Dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient” (3). He asserts that orientalism becomes undecipherable if it is not examined as a discourse.

The term discourse has been used by many disciplines and has acquired many different meanings. In the simplest form, it points to “Language which

communicates a meaning in a context” according to Litosseliti and Sunderland (9). A more complex definition of discourse is “A form of social practice” based on ideology. It describes the language used to define reality from a certain ideological perspective. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough discourse is, “The sort of language used to construct some aspect of reality from a particular perspective, for example the liberal discourse in politics” (63). Defined more simply, it is a recognizable way of seeing the world.

To explain how the colonial powers were able to manage and control the Orient, Said uses Michel Foucault’s definition of discourse. Foucault defined a discourse as follows, “The delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (qtd in Kennedy 12). According to Foucault, a discourse places the boundaries of a field of study. It defines the subject it is studying, sets out the norms and identifies what is a legitimate characterization and representation of the subject. Thus, for Foucault a discourse is an exercise of power. Said argues that the West or more specifically orientalist scholars, who study, observe, judge and define the Orient have abused this power. He asserts that orientalist discourse polarized the differences between the West and the East, presenting the West as the superior culture (Orientalism 6-12). Thus, this discourse, which is a representation and does not necessarily reflect the truth, becomes accepted as fact. Since a discourse is an exercise of power, it is capable of changing mentalities and attitudes. That is, it created the concepts of “Occident” and

“Orient”, where those in the Occident believe in their superiority and the “otherness” of the Orient, and those in the Orient believe in their inferiority. Since the distinction between the Orient and the Occident is ontological and epistemological, the Orient (or the East) will always be inferior and the Occident (or the West) will always be superior. “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”, said Rudyard Kipling<sup>2</sup>. Thus, through orientalist discourse, the West was (is) able to concoct a relationship with the East that was always based on superiority. Said wrote, “Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Orientalism 7).

Said describes the relationship between the Orient and the Occident as a relationship of “power” and “domination” (5). Drawing on Vico’s observation that, “men make their own history,” Said points out that concepts of the “Orient” and the “Occident” are man-made (4-5). They reflect each other. The orientalist always represents the Occident as superior to the Orient, “He [the Westerner] comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second” (11). The Orient however, is made and defined by the Occident or the orientalist. “The Orient was almost a European invention...” Said wrote (1). Thus, the “Orient” is what exists in the eye of orientalists. Said accuses orientalist scholars, of producing a false image of the Orient and Orientals. He believes that orientalists have imposed their own definitions and

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<sup>2</sup> This verse is taken from Kipling’s poem “The Ballad of East and West.”

stereotypes on the Orient. They represented and spoke for the Oriental. “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” Karl Marx noted (79). Orientals are presented as passive and non-participant. To control the Orient, the West chose to speak for it, created an image and a body of knowledge about it. Giving a voice to the Orient means giving them power and authority. Orientalists have created, shaped, and framed the characteristics of the Orient and presented it to the Western reader, who accepts orientalist codification as truth. Thus, the Orient and the Oriental became like a machine that can be easily operated by reading the instructions of the orientalist (or orientalist discourse). Said argues that the Orient was (is) presented by the orientalist as a threat to the West. Thus, it should be conquered and controlled. According to Said, the orientalist has produced an Orient, which is not “a free subject of thought or action” (Orientalism 3). He maintains that according to the orientalist, the Oriental is an object that can be easily described, judged and conceptualized. Since the Oriental is viewed as an object, then any change in the characterization of this object is considered by the orientalist to be unnatural. All of the given characterizations of the Oriental are concrete and definite. Said mentions Cromer’s<sup>3</sup> last annual report from Egypt as an example, in which Cromer interpreted Egyptian nationalism as an “entirely novel idea”, “a plant of exotic” rather than of indigenous growth” (39). Thus, Said claims that orientalist have distorted and misrepresented the true nature of the Oriental. This claim leads Said to address the issue of the relationship between representation and truth. Although Said asserts in his

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<sup>3</sup> Cromer was the British Consul-General in Egypt between 1883 and 1907.



introduction that what culture circulates “is not ‘truth’ but representations,” in his last chapter Said questions the possibility of having a true representation (21). Because all representations depend on languages and on social power structures, Said questions if “There can be a true representation of anything” (272). He argues that if we agree that true representation is not possible to achieve, then we should agree and accept that a representation carries with it many other things besides the “truth”. Said leaves the issue of “truth” and “representation” to the reader saying that his main point is not about “The misrepresentation of some Oriental essence” but about the ideological purpose that is behind this representation (273). That is, representations always have purposes and the purpose of the orientalist representation of the Orient is to dominate it.

In his book Said also argues that orientalism helped define Europe’s self image. He suggests that the Orient was (is) represented as the opposite image of the Occident. Orientalist scholars presented the Orient and the Oriental as, “irrational”, “depraved”, “childlike” and “different” (40). The West on the other hand is defined as “rational”, “virtuous”, “mature”, “normal” and most importantly, opposite to all that is Oriental (40). To illustrate his point, Said examines an array of nineteenth century-French and British novelists, poets, and politicians, and examines written and spoken historical commentary by Western figures such as, Arthur James Balfour, Napoleon, Chaucer and many others. Among many other examples Said quotes Cromer, who said, “I content myself with noting the fact that somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European” (39). Said claims that

the Orient is essential to Europe (or the West) and is instrumental in defining the West (1). The Orient was merely created to help engrave and intensify the image of the West. Thus, Said asserts that orientalism is about the West, the Occident and not the Orient. Orientalism is a means of defining the relationship between the Orient and the Occident and controlling it. Said also argues that the Orient is always represented and defined in relation to the West. Said's argument becomes evident, when one examines the names that were given by the West to define the different regions of the East, namely, Middle East, Near East and Far East. These regions are defined in relation to the West, with an implicit assumption that the West is the center of the world. They are "Middle", "Near" and "Far" in relation to the West. Thus, these regions are only viewed through Western eyes and they are instruments used to define the West. Abdel-Malek described this phenomenon as "Eurocentrism" (77-78).

Orientalism exposed the ugly face of power. It unquestionably produced "a box of utensils" that are being used today by many different fields (Middle East Report 33). Said's theoretical model is used today to analyze representations of otherness. He created a broad framework within which all aspects of power were defined: the relationships between the powerful and the powerless, the language used in these relationships, the utilization of the discourse of power to effect control over the other. Although Said defined this framework for the Orient and the Occident, it quickly became clear that this framework was universally applicable to many other power relationships in many other fields.

## Orientalism, the Intellectual Wing of Colonialism

Like Abdel-Malek, Said accuses orientalists of providing the means for European governments to colonize the Orient (Orientalism 1-7). Said amassed several examples from scholarship and literature. He cites the French author Chateaubriand, who claimed to know what was best for the Oriental. Like some orientalists today who call upon the United States to teach the Muslim world the meaning of democracy, Chateaubriand called upon Europe to teach the Orient the meaning of liberty, saying, “Of Liberty, they know nothing, of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father” (Orientalism 172). First, by placing himself above the Orient, Chateaubriand demonstrates the unequal relationship between the Occident and the Orient. Second, he presumes to know the Orient, claiming that Orientals require conquest. Third, he not only justifies Western imperialism but goes so far as to describe it as an act of justice. Thus, Said argues that Chateaubriand, like many other orientalists, provided the rationale for Western colonization. Said argues that such a discourse by orientalists led the West to view Oriental culture as inferior and incapable of evolving. It led the West to be “The spectator, the judge and jury of every facet of Oriental behavior” (Orientalism 109). Said believes that, “Colonial power was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact” (39). Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Said emphasizes the relationship between power and knowledge. He observes that academic disciplines

produce power in addition to knowledge. He believes that orientalists used their knowledge about the Orient to dominate and control, “Knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable, knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge and so on...” (36). However, he explains that this knowledge that orientalists acquire is not true knowledge. It is not “the result of understanding, compassion careful study and analysis for their own sakes” but it is a “campaign of self-affirmation” (Preface to *Orientalism* 2). According to Said, the orientalist’s knowledge of the Orient is used as a tool to manipulate situations and dominate the Orient. It is clear that orientalism paves the way for colonialism.

The three novels that will be discussed depict different Arab societies in different times. Fadia Faqir’s Pillars of Salt is set in Transjordan of the 1920s during the British mandate. Yasmin Zahran’s A Beggar at Damascus Gate is about a Palestinian woman in exile and takes place in many countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Ahlam Mosteghanemi’s Memory in the Flesh is set in Algeria and Paris and spans an era from the 1940s to the 1980s. I will begin each chapter with a historical background about the time and place encountered in the novel. This will be followed by a summary of the novel and an analysis of the characters and themes discussed in the novel. In the final chapter, I will use the novels to examine the theory of orientalism and the impact of colonialism on Arab societies. I will go on to describe ongoing forms of orientalism and colonialism with respect to the Arab world and how this impacts the relationship between the West and the Arab world. Since Edward Said’s Orientalism, there has been

a great deal of scholarship in the field, which examined theoretical and empirical aspects. Here, I will use Edward Said's suggestion to examine Arab literature as "the raw material of Politics". The novels will be used as tools with which to build the thesis that orientalism and colonialism continue, largely unchanged, and form the basis for the troubled relationship between the Western world and the Arab world. I will expose several works that claim to work towards improving the status quo in the Arab world and bettering the relationship with the West but in fact continue orientalist discourse and aim to achieve colonialist goals.

Ahlam Mosteghanemi said:

The novelist does not hesitate to open secret doors before you; the novelist dares to invite you to visit the lower floors of the house and the cellars and locked places in which dust and old furniture and memories gather and every corridor of the self where electricity is not yet installed and from where a suspicious stale smell emanates. (In the House of Silence 86-87)

The three novels that will be discussed open secret doors in the houses of the Arab world and the Western world. They expose the skeletons in the closets and invite the reader to examine them. They provide the reader with light that illuminates, otherwise invisible problems. As such, the novels will be used as guides to finding solutions for the troubled relationship between the Western and the Arab worlds through humanism.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW ORIENTALISTS SPIN ARAB HISTORY

*“I write to bear witness and do justice. I also write to ward off fear, to exorcise it.”*<sup>4</sup>

Fadia Faqir is a contemporary Arab woman writer. She was born in Amman, Jordan in 1956 and moved to Britain in 1984 to study creative writing at Lancaster University, where she earned her Masters degree in 1985. Faqir completed her Ph.D. in critical and creative writing at the University of East Anglia in 1990. From 1994 to 2004, Faqir worked as a lecturer at the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in Durham University in Britain. Most of her works focus on women's rights in general and Arab Muslim women in particular, as well as human rights and reform in the Arab and Muslim world. Her novels include Ninsat and Pillars of Salt, which won the Danish literary award given by ALOA (Centre for Literature from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania) in 2002. She edited and co-translated several books and wrote several short stories.

#### The Political Landscape of the 1920s

From a land full of peace and war, love and hate, generosity and cupidity, honesty and mendacity, from the land of myths and legends comes this fictional story

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<sup>4</sup> Fadia Faqir <http://www.fadiafaqir.com/9236/index.html>

which, embodies the contradictions rooted there. Pillars of Salt is a novel that takes place in Transjordan, in the early 1920s, during a critical time of Arab history and identity development. This era witnessed the beginning of European domination and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled the Arab and the Islamic world for over 400 years. The era in which the story develops is one of the basic pillars of the novel. The novel cannot be discussed and analyzed without placing it in the historical context of the 1920s. In this era the map of the Arab world was being redrawn and the people were being humiliated and deprived of their right to self-determination. Thus, the events of the novel are set in the midst of a crisis in Arab history, in which chaos, confusion and uncertainty about the future were the order of the day.

In the 1900s, the Ottoman Empire was known as the “sick man”<sup>5</sup>, because it had lost much of its power and was continuing in its decline (Polk 94). Thus, the territories of the Ottoman Empire were desired by the dominant European countries, namely Britain and France. During the Ottoman Empire, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, etc. were all states inside what was called *Billad Al Sham* or Vilayet of Syria (Polk 94-96). The Ottoman Empire ruled the Arab countries under the umbrella of Islam. Thus, Arabs did not reject Turkish rule, until the Young Turk revolution of 1908, in which the Ottoman government started forcing their Turkish identity upon the empire (Polk 95)<sup>6</sup>. They

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see Baram Uzi and Carroll, Lynda, *A Historical Archaeology of the Ottoman Empire: Breaking New Ground*, New York Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> For further information about the Ottoman Empire in the Arab world, see Hassan, Kayal, *Arabs and Young Turks : Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, Berkeley University of California Press, 1997.

forced all school systems in the empire to use the Turkish language and to teach the virtues of the Turks. Not until then, did Arab national identity begin to evolve. During World War I, most Arabs hoped to gain their independence from the Ottomans. In July 1915, letters were exchanged between the Sharif of Mecca, Hussein Ibn Ali (a Hashemite), and the British high commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon. Britain wanted Hussein to mobilize the Arabs to attack the Turks, while the Arabs wanted independent Arab states spanning all the Ottoman Arab domains (Hourani 316-317). McMahon promised Hussein independent Arab States, but he excluded some territories, claiming that they are not purely Arab. These included the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta in modern day Turkey, and portions of Syria lying to the west of “the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo” (Polk 100). Based on these promises to Hussein Ibn Ali, the Arabs entered World War I on the Allied side. In addition, to these promises to the Arabs, Britain made contradictory promises to France and the Zionist movement. In 1916, Britain and France signed a secret agreement (Sykes-Picot Agreement) to dismember the Ottoman Empire after the war. When the Ottomans lost World War I, Britain and France declared parts of the Arab world “mandate” territories. The Sykes-Picot Agreement gave France control over Syria and Lebanon and granted Britain control over Iraq, Transjordan and a small area around Haifa. Palestine was to be placed under international control (Polk 100). Thus, in July, 1920, France annexed Syria and expelled King Faisal, the son of Hussein Ibn Ali. In 1921, Britain stepped down from



direct administration of its mandate in Iraq and created a monarchy, and Faisal was made the King of Iraq.

In addition to the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in November, 1917. This declaration, which led to the creation of the State of Israel, was a letter of only sixty-eight words. The letter was from the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Arthur James Balfour, to Lord Rothschild the leader of the British Zionist community. Balfour promised Rothschild the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine (Hourani 319). In 1919 King Faisal and Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization, signed an agreement. In this agreement, Faisal accepted the Balfour Declaration in exchange for the independence of the rest of the Arab states<sup>7</sup> (Polk 103). After these promises, the Arab peoples realized that the Europeans were not coming as liberators but as occupiers, and their hopes for independence were dashed. They also realized that Hussein Ibn Ali and his sons were conspiring with the Europeans in order to fulfill their dream of establishing a Hashemite dynasty in Syria, Transjordan and Iraq. Britain claimed that Sykes-Picot and the Balfour Declaration were consistent with the Hussein-McMahon correspondence.

<sup>7</sup> See Polk, William, The Arab World. (P: 103-106). In his letter to Lord Rothschild, Balfour said the following,

*“...His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object...”*

In a confidential memorandum to the Foreign Office in 1919 Balfour wrote the following,

*“...The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”* This statement is quoted in The Arab World (P: 106)

Later on, however, Lord Balfour told the chief political officer “We had not been honest with either French or Arab, but it was now preferable to quarrel with the Arab rather than the French, if there was to be a quarrel at all” (Polk 11). In order to confine the anger of the Arabs, Britain declared that Transjordan was not subject to the Balfour Declaration. Transjordan was created as a separate unit by European colonialization and refers to the area east of the Jordan River, which was part of the British mandate of Palestine. Britain gave Prince Abdullah (son of Hussein Ibn Ali and brother of King Faisal) control over Transjordan, after he promised not to attack the French in Syria. On May 26, 1923, Transjordan was declared a national state. However, Britain continued to control matters of finance, military and foreign affairs until 1946. After World War II, on March 22, 1946, Transjordan was proclaimed a kingdom and Abdullah became its king. Today Transjordan is called the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

At the end of World War I Britain was incapable of honoring all its promises and agreements. The Arab States were not given their independence as McMahon had promised on behalf of the British government but, they were placed under a British and French mandate for more than 20 years. Britain also violated both the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration by placing Palestine under its mandate. It was not until 1947 that Britain announced the end of the mandate in Palestine passing the responsibility onto the United Nations.

Under colonialization, the Arabs came to resent the Europeans, specifically Britain and France who had exercised the policy of “divide and conquer” in

order to strengthen their power in the region. They changed the map of the Arab world by creating borders which led to the establishment of new countries, such as Transjordan and Lebanon (Polk 120). They denied the Arabs the right of self-determination, claiming that they don't understand the concept of self-government. Balfour justified the British occupation of Egypt, saying:

Western nations as soon as they emerge into history show the beginnings of those capacities for self-government ...you may look through the whole history of the Orientals in what is called, broadly speaking the East, and you never find traces of self-government... Conqueror has succeeded conqueror; one domination has followed another; but never in all the revolutions of fate and fortune have you seen one of those nations of its motion establish what we, from a Western point of view, call self government...(Orientalism 32-33)

Arabs were perceived as subjects who don't know what is in their best interest, and the colonial powers often spoke for them. It is apparent from Balfour's statement that he believed that it was good for the Arabs to be governed by the British. He raised a question and claimed the authority to answer it, presuming that he knew best what was good for the Egyptians. He asked, "Is it a good thing for these great nations that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing" (Orientalism 32-33). Under the mandate, Arabs grew up believing that they were inferior to the

Europeans. Etel Adnan, an Arab woman poet born in Lebanon, in 1925, illustrates this point in describing the memory of her childhood under the French mandate. She says:

Somehow we breathed an air where it seemed that being French was superior to anyone, and as we were obviously not French, the best thing was at least to speak French. Little by little, a whole generation of educated boys and girls felt superior to the poorer kids who did not go to school and spoke only Arabic. Arabic was equated with backwardness and shame...The method used to teach French to the children was in itself a kind of a psychological conditioning against which nobody objected...there was a system in all the French-run schools which charged a few selected students to "spy" on the others: anybody heard in class or in recreation speaking Arabic was punished and a little stone was immediately put into the pocket of that child; speaking Arabic was equated with the notion of sin.<sup>8</sup> (Adnan)

This quotation describes the relationship between the Arabs in the mandate territories and their colonizers. It is an example of how the colonizers perceived and treated Arabs, their language and their culture as inferior.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.epoetry.org/issues/issue1/alltext/esadn.htm> For more information about her work see Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels. Syracuse University Press, 2002 (P:200-230)

## A Feminist Vision of Orientalism

These Arab men and women of the mandate territories are the subject of Fadia Faqir's Pillars of Salt. Faqir describes her novel as "a feminist vision of orientalism."<sup>9</sup> In her story, she encapsulates all the contradictions of Arab culture and history. She displays the history of Arab culture, religion, and the painful reality of colonialization, male domination and the oppression of women. The novel consists of recurring chapters titled *The Storyteller*, *Maha* and *Um Saad* but it rotates between only two perspectives namely, the storyteller and Maha. The *Um Saad* chapter is narrated by Maha. The novel opens with the half-Arab storyteller called Al-Adjnabi reciting verses from the Quran to his audience. Then he introduces us to our protagonist, Maha, a Bedouin from Transjordan. Al-Adjnabi claims that Maha became a "she-demon" after her mother died. He tells us that Maha wanted to kill her brother Daffash and poison her father in order to inherit their farm. Maha starts narrating her story from a mental hospital and introduces us to her roommate, Um Saad, a Syrian woman. The story of Maha focuses on her experience as well as Um Saad's experience in a male-dominated society. Maha narrates her story by retracing what led to her hospitalization. She had lived with her father, Sheikh Nimer and her brother Daffash. Daffash worked for Englishmen in the city and for Samir Pasha, a Jordanian aristocrat. According to the storyteller, Daffash is a good young man, "A thin, bright man full of ideas and keen to modernize his backward village" (29). Maha on the other hand, describes Daffash as a brutal womanizer and a

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<sup>9</sup> FadiaFaqir.com. [http://www.fadiafaqir.com/9236/index.html?\\*session\\*id\\*key\\*=\\*session\\*id\\*val\\*](http://www.fadiafaqir.com/9236/index.html?*session*id*key*=*session*id*val*)

rapist who had raped her friend Nasra as well as another woman. According to Maha, Daffash also used to beat her. Maha gets married to the love of her life, Harb, a fighter against the British mandate. Harb, the “Twin of [her] soul” dies in battle against the English, leaving her pregnant.

Um Saad, who was married against her will at age 11, was beaten by her father and later by her husband. Through Maha, Um Saad describes her hatred for her father who, while fighting against French oppression in Syria, was an oppressor at home. Um Saad also describes her husband’s oppression, how he beat her and brought home a young wife. As the story develops, the reader receives contradictory information from the storyteller and Maha, culminating in completely different endings to the novel. According to the storyteller, the story ends with Maha marrying a stranger and living like a queen in a castle with her son Mubarak. According to Maha, the story ends where she first started, in a mental hospital. Maha was accused of insanity by Samir Pasha and her brother Daffash, who took her son Mubarak from her and placed her in a mental hospital.

#### The Storyteller as a Neo-orientalist

Faqir awakens the tradition of the storyteller, or hakawatti, and uses him to narrate his own version of Maha’s story. Hakawatti is an old Arabic tradition that takes place in cafes at night, especially during the month of Ramadan. The hakawatti, who is always a male, narrates classic Arab tales like One Thousand and One Nights. Each night of Ramadan the hakawatti reveals a new chapter and ends on a high note of suspense to encourage the listeners to return the following night. In Arabic tradition, the hakawatti is

considered an art. Not anybody can be a hakawatti, because the hakawatti is more than a storyteller. He is also a comedian, a historian and an actor. He sometimes inserts poems and jokes and has the freedom to augment the story. In fact, a creative hakawatti should add exciting sometimes horrific scenes to the story to keep the interest of those who already know the original story. Thus, people come to hear the hakawatti's version with all of his colorful additions and props. Today, with television and satellites, being a hakawatti has become a dying art. Faqir revives the hakawatti tradition and gives him a major role in her story turning the tables on the hakawatti whose job was to bring to life stories written in books.

The hakawatti in the novel is called Samir Al-Adjnabi. Ironically, while his art is known for its falsehood and its myth, he starts by reciting a verse from the Quran that says, "Confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth" (1). Faqir uses the hakawatti like Shakespeare uses the jestor whose words are wise and intentions vague who sees the story from afar. Like all hakawattis, Al-Adjnabi wants to convince his audience that what he is about to narrate is a true story. He is a controversial character in the story. He tells the readers that he is half-Arab, half-foreigner and keeps repeating the statement, "I'm a foreigner in their land" (28). In fact, Faqir gives the storyteller a name that suits him, Al-Adjnabi, which means "foreigner" in Arabic.

Al-Adjnabi represents the orientalist and Western voice in the Arab world with all of its ramifications. He represents Western orientalist discourse, power and interference in Arab affairs. To recap, the elements of orientalist discourse are: defining

the limits of discussion to fit one's ideology, speaking for and defining the Oriental, and magnifying the differences between the Orient and the Occident, while defining the Oriental as inferior and at the same time as one to be feared. With regard to orientalism, Al-Adjnabi acknowledges his orientalist discourse, as "spin" when he said, "I am the storyteller. My box is full of declarations. I am the yarn-spinner. I spin and spin Balfourations" (29). As in orientalist discourse, he changes the facts of Maha's story to fit his agenda. The inclusion of Al-Adjnabi in the story, with a completely different version of events, functions as a pervasive metaphor in the novel about how facts about Arabs tend to be turned upside down in the West. The most blatant example of orientalist discourse changing historical fact to fit an ideology is the use of the false statement "A land without people for a people without a land" to refer to the creation of Israel. Likewise, Al-Adjnabi changed Maha's story from a struggle against Western and male domination to a story about possessing a piece of land. According to Al-Adjnabi, Maha wanted to kill her brother Daffash and poison her father in order to inherit his farm. He limited the discourse to avoid addressing the brutality of Daffash as a violent rapist. Limiting the discourse to fit one's agenda is glaringly similar to the way current Western discourse about the Arab world selectively defines who is "our friend" and who is "our enemy." The brutality of Arab dictators is of no consequence in current discourse in the West and has in fact been strongly supported for decades, on-end, if the dictator supports Western policies. The same brutality is "highlighted" when the need arises to do away with a dictator that does not obey the colonialist and neo-colonialist powers. In fact, this



can be the case in the same dictator in the same regime in a different time. This was the case with Saddam Hussein, arguably the most brutal of Arab dictators for many decades. The discourse in the West ignored his brutality, and supported his regime in its brutality against Iran and his own people. When he was no longer useful, he was deposed, tried and executed for the same brutality that was previously supported.

The two versions of Maha's story are reminiscent of Arab and Western versions of history in general and Western reductionism of the Palestinian struggle to a struggle over land. Another way that Al-Adjnabi's discourse represents orientalist discourse is that he speaks for and defines the Oriental, namely Maha. Faqir highlights the extent to which orientalist speak for the Oriental by giving Al-Adjnabi a separate chapter to talk about Maha. He defines the Oriental in derogatory terms that elicit fear, such as jinn (a demon) "Opened her mouth wide, exposing long sharp teeth. The wind she blew out of her mouth whirled in the village for three days" (86).

Al-Adjnabi, being half-Arab, represents the seed planted in the Arab countries by the colonial powers before leaving. He represents the neo-orientalist, an Arab, trained by Western orientalist to perpetuate orientalist discourse. Ahmad Al-Sheikh, author of Orientalist Dialogue and *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, argues that orientalism today is operated by Arabs themselves. He uses the term, "neo-orientalism" to describe this new phenomenon. This will be discussed later in more detail. Drawing on Al-Sheikh's representation of Arab orientalist, one can argue that Al-Adjnabi is the first seed of this new phenomenon. Al-Adjnabi, who is very knowledgeable of Arabic

traditions and the Quran, skillfully transforms reality to fit his world-view. Like the neo-orientalists described by Al-Sheikh, Al-Adjnabi is well informed about Arab culture and traditions and employs this knowledge to further his agenda. He says, “Although I am a stranger in their land, I manage to learn their shameful news” (30). Like the Arab neo-orientalists, Al-Adjnabi did not care about the society in which he lived, as is evident in his words, “I waved to the peeling red faces of the mandate and continued walking. Mandate or no mandate, I didn’t care” (3). On the other hand, Maha depicts her own exasperation about colonialization as well as those Arabs who work with the colonizer, “Maha became an open land where every shepherd could graze his sheep, where every nurse could stick her needles. They poison your running blood, push you into sand dunes and say, ‘We belong to Allah and to him we shall return’” (5).

At the beginning of the novel, the storyteller said, “I...will reveal to you the tale of Maha, unfold the multi-layered secrets of both past and present...” (1). Indeed, Al-Adjnabi does unfold the secrets of Maha’s story, which represents the story of the Arabs. Colonialization has shaped the story of the Arabs, past and present. Since the time of colonialization, Arabs have recurrently been left with only two artificial choices, being “with the West or against them.” The two distinct endings of Maha’s story represent these two choices. One ending, leads Maha to a mental hospital, while the other leads her to a big castle. Choosing to challenge the neo-colonialist ruler who is allied with the West as represented by Samir Pasha, caused her to be placed in a mental hospital. Maha’s fate, resembles that of Arab dissidents jailed for speaking against Arab leaders. In the second

ending of the story offered by Al-Adjnabi, Maha represents those rewarded for working for colonial interests against the interests of their people. She lives in a castle, propped up by foreign powers and hated by her own people. The two endings embody the consequences of the choice of being with the colonial powers or against them.

Faqir creates a dilemma for the reader. Who should the reader believe, Maha or the storyteller? It is similar to the dilemma faced by a neutral observer of current events in the Arab world. The treatment of news events in the Arab media often differs drastically from that in the Western media. The news on CNN appears quite different in its representation of events from the news on AlJazeera. Both describe the same facts but each gives it a different “spin”.

#### Western Colonialization as Rape

Faqir introduces to the reader Nasra and her bad news. Nasra was raped by Daffash. Although, the people of Hamia village had heard the news of Nasra, they did nothing to punish the rapist. The only person who faced Daffash with his crime was his sister Maha. This rape can be said to represent the Palestinian catastrophe. Like Palestine, Nasra’s life was ruined and her home was stolen from her. As with Nasra, the rape of Palestine continues to go unpunished. Faqir presents another rape in the story, but it is hidden under the name of marriage. Um Saad was raped by her husband Abu Saad, after she was invited to her wedding as a guest at the age of 11. Nobody asked her opinion about marriage as her father decided for her. Um Saad’s story represents the old Arab generations who were manipulated by the colonial powers. When Abu Saad brought his

new wife to the house, Um Saad's son, Walid told his mother "I'm glad you know. The whole of Amman knows" (178). Similarly, the entire world, except for the Arabs, knew what Britain and France were doing during the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration. Unlike the rape of Nasra, the rape of Umm Saad was less intense and can be said to represent the mandate. She had a home, but she had to share it with the new young, blond wife. Like Um Saad, who was first abused by her father and then by her husband, the Arabs were first abused by the Ottoman Empire and then by the West.

### Arab Identity and Dignity

Although Faqir suggests that the identity confusion present in the Arab world is partly due to orientalist discourse and colonialist hegemony, she lays a large portion of the blame on Arabs themselves. Faqir exposes the divisions present on many levels in Arab societies. She reveals that many Arabs work for material self-interest with no regard for the interests of the society, as is the case with Samir Pasha and Daffash. She exposes petty tribal and parochial divisions, as is illustrated by Um Saad's first reaction at meeting Maha, "I am an urban woman from Amman. I refuse to share the room with a grinning bedouin" (6). Maha, on the other hand, is aware of Arab divisions and fights bitterly against the very idea of divisions among Arabs, "Allah created people and created parting. They brought me .... to this hazy hospital besieged by lulling voices and fog because I would not even hear of the word parting" (5). In this way, Maha represents the younger generation, who attempt to transcend the divisions present in Arab Society but fail to do so because of all the divisive forces around her. Al-Adjnabi also comments

about her struggle when he says, “She was a sharp sword stuck in the sides of the Arabs’ enemies: the Tartars, the Crusaders and the Romans” (2).

Despite the helplessness that predominates in the story, Faqir presents a character that provides some hope to Maha and the Arab people. Hakim, “The embodiment of Arab’s anger and resistance, never stopped breathing, would never die, and would always roam the deserts and mountains of Arabia. Many sought his blood, but he managed to survive” (55). Hakim represents the dignity of the Arabs. Arab dignity is often personified. In a 2005 article published on the website “the Electronic Intifada”, named “Where is the Bride”, the author discussed the Palestinian election (the wedding). Dignity is the bride, “The bride's name is Karaamah, "dignity". She was not able to attend yesterday's wedding/elections because of 30-foot high walls... anger, despair... Her groom can do little to alter the realities she faces” (Irani). This image alludes to the Apartheid wall in the West Bank which interferes with the ability of Palestinians to participate in elections. Hakim’s existence is disputed by the inhabitants of Hamia village representing Arab dispute about the importance of Arab resistance.

Pillars of Salt is a story about women and men in the Arab world and their relationship with Western colonialism in the 1920s. The characters in the story represent various players in Arab society and the omnipresent Western orientalist. We have the simple collaborator in Daffash, the neo-colonialist leader in Samir Pasha, the young Arab generation in Maha and the older Arab generation in Um Saad, and finally the neo-orientalist in Al-Adjnabi. It paints a complete picture of the actors in the colonized Arab

World. The story is not only a criticism of Western orientalist and colonialist policies, it is a criticism of the Arab response. It exposes the disunity, the placement of material self-interest over the interest of the nation, the collaboration against one's own people, the impact of colonialism on the fragmentation of Arab society and the role of women in attempting to rejoin the dismembered parts. It examines Arab culture from an Arabic perspective (Maha) and gives an Arabic view of a Western orientalist perspective (Al-Adjnabi). It reveals the presence of two opposite narratives. The Arab perspective, that of Maha, is presented as reality while the Western orientalist perspective is a discourse with an agenda. Pillars of Salt is not merely a fictional novel about two women in a mental institution but the story of the relationship between any oppressed person or group and their oppressor.

### CHAPTER III

#### OPENING THE GATE THROUGH DIALOGUE

##### The Gate to Palestine

*“Don't you want to open this gate for me? My hands became tired, and still I knock, knock on your door. To your house I came, requesting a little quiet, a little peace... If you are still here, then open the gate —Open. Veil not your face before me! See — I, who have become an orphan and lost in the ruin of the world, which destroyed, on my shoulders, of the earth wronged, and horror of the fright of fate<sup>10</sup>...”*

*Fadwa Tuqan, “Before the Closed Door.”*

Yasmin Zahran is a Palestinian archeologist and a writer. Zahran was born in Ramallah, Palestine. She was educated at Colombia University and the University of London. She earned her doctorate degree in archaeology at the Sorbonne in Paris. Zahran worked for UNESCO for a number of years. She also taught at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem. Her career as an archeologist and her education in the West allowed her to include both the West and the East in her works. Zahran's first novel, *الحن الاول* (The First Melody) was directed toward the Arabic reader, for it was written in Arabic in 1991. However, in 1993 Zahran decided to address a Western audience by writing her second novel *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, in

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive/fadwa\\_tuqan.html](http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive/fadwa_tuqan.html). Fadwa Tuqan was known as the poet of Palestine. For more information about her read her autobiography, *A Mountainous Journey*, Paul, Minn.: Graywolf Press, 1999.

English. Zahran wrote several other books: Philip the Arab: A Study in Prejudice, Zenobia Between Reality and Legend, Ghassan Resurrected and Septimius Severus: Countdown to Death.

### Only Palestine is Real

In A Beggar at Damascus Gate, Zahran brings Palestine to the forefront for an audience that is rarely exposed to it. She defies the world by replanting Palestine in the memory of the West after it had faded away. She furnishes her novel with the Palestinian Diaspora and the subsequent struggle. Edward Said stated that “There is no getting away from the fact that, as an idea, a memory, and as an often buried or invisible reality, Palestine and its people have simply not disappeared” (Palestine has not Disappeared). In her novel, Zahran confronts the Western reader with this reality that Palestinians and Palestine still exist. Zahran tries to revive the Western conscience toward the Palestinian problem through the characters in the novel. In fact, she begins the novel with the statement, “All characters in this book are fictitious, only Palestine is real” (i).

Like most Palestinians who live in exile, deprived of their homeland, Zahran’s novel is homeless, deprived of a location. The story begins in Petra, Jordan but its events take place in over twenty countries until it finally reaches its final destination, Palestine. The novel consists of four chapters titled, *Overture*, *The Two Faces of Love*, *The Hidden Face of the Moon* and *Epilogue*. The story is about a relationship between a Palestinian woman writer in exile, Rayya and a British Archeologist, Alex. It depicts the



interaction between the Orient and the Occident and the mistrust that exists between them. It begins in Petra, Jordan, in 1980 with the narrator, Mr. Foster, an American Archeologist born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon. In his hotel room, Mr. Foster finds the journals of the two protagonists, Rayya and Alex. The narrator reads their Journals, which begin at their meeting in London in 1969. The story of Rayya and Alex depicts the conflict between their personal relationship on one hand and their national identities and political allegiances on the other. Rayya is a Palestinian refugee who is affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Alex is apparently a spy for an unknown foreign agency. The story is told from both of their perspectives, which at times differ in their perceptions of reality. It is akin to a split screen film where the viewer is able to see both points of view simultaneously. They have an intimate relationship and yet they mistrust one another. The story depicts a kind of Cold War between the two lovers, full of espionage on both the personal and national levels. The narrator attempts to unite both perspectives of the story and states, "My task was to join the two versions which were as different as the two faces of the moon, conflicting and contradictory and yet the two sides of one reality" (25). Both are aware that the other may not be what they seem. For example, at one point in the story, Rayya discovers that Alex reads Arabic after she finds him looking at her journal. Alex suspects that Rayya works for the PLO. We know very little about Alex because he only wrote about his life with Rayya, whereas Rayya wrote about her life with and beyond Alex. They lived separately and met during their travels. Their relationship ends when Alex mysteriously

dies in Petra as if murdered by a spy agency. In her attempt to escape without being interrogated by the police, Rayya hides the manuscripts, which are later found by Mr. Foster, the narrator. The remainder of the story consists of Mr. Foster searching for Rayya to get her permission to publish the journals. After nine years he finds her in Jerusalem where she is a beggar at Damascus Gate, working with the Palestinian resistance during the first Palestinian Intifada.

### Nakba: The Palestinian Catastrophe

To understand the struggle of the Palestinians, we have to understand their history and their experience, which is replete with displacement, instability and uprootedness. We have to understand what makes most Palestinians speak about loss and suffering, and what it means to be a Palestinian refugee. However, the Palestinian experience will not be decipherable unless we see it through Palestinian eyes. Thus, I will provide a brief background of the Palestinian Diaspora using the terminology they use to describe their experience. Therefore, my intention here is to bring to the front, perspectives and voices rarely heard in the West.

“Being at home or going home is something most people take for granted, but for many Palestinians having a homeland and feeling at home are not part of the daily experience” (Hammer 2). The Palestinian exile started in 1948. Palestinians refer to this year as the year of *nakba* (catastrophe). This term “nakba” depicts the disaster that had befallen them in 1948. Although the Zionists claim that Palestine was a land without a people, the massacres that took place during this year and that led to the dispersion of

hundreds of thousands of Palestinians confirm the opposite (Masalha 12). This Zionist slogan that Palestine is a “land without a people for a people without a land” was first coined by Britain and specifically by Lord Shaftesbury:

If Lord Shaftesbury was literally inexact in describing Palestine as a country without a people, he was essentially correct, for there is no Arab people living in intimate fusion with the country, utilizing its resources and stamping it with a characteristic impress; there is at best an Arab encampment.” (Masalha 13)

In 1914 Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Congress who later became the first president of the state of Israel said:

In its initial stage, Zionism was conceived by its pioneers as a movement wholly depending on mechanical factors: there is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country. What else is necessary, then, than to fit the gem into the ring, to unite this people with this country? ...” (Aruri 37)

Like all colonial movements, the Zionist movement dehumanized the Palestinians in order to justify their occupation. The Palestinians were depicted as “conniving”, “dishonest”, “lazy”, “murderous” and “Nazis” (Masalha 12). In 1930, Menahem

Ussishkin, one of the leading figures of the Zionist Yishuv<sup>11</sup> said: “If there are other inhabitants there, they must be transferred to some other place. We must take over the land. We have a greater and nobler ideal than preserving several hundred thousands of Arab *fellahin* [farmers]” (Masalha 14). Palestinians were displaced by Jewish people and a part of Palestine was renamed Israel. It was an artificial concoction. The expulsion of the Palestinians was the main strategy of the leading figures in the Zionist movement such as Israel Zangwill, Chaim Weizman and David Ben Gurion. In the 1930s, the Zionist plan was to transfer the Palestinians to Syria, Iraq and Transjordan, following the precedent of the transfer of the Greek and Turkish populations in the 1920s (Masalha 19). They conducted their plan, first by putting restrictions on Palestinians such as issuing taxes and confiscating their lands. The evacuation of the Palestinians was done with the help of the British government, for Palestine was still under its mandate. Weizman held extensive secret discussions with Britain, to transfer one million Palestinians to Iraq in order to settle Polish Jews in their place (Masalha 24). However, this plan of transformation was later replaced by an expulsion plan. The intention of the Zionist movement was revealed by Yosef Weitz, the director of the Settlement Department of Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the head of the Israeli government’s official Transfer Committee of 1948. In his diary Weitz wrote:

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<sup>11</sup> The term Yishuv refers to the Jewish community living in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel.

Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country. No 'development' will bring us closer to our aim to be an independent people in this small country. After the Arabs are transferred, the country will be wide open for us; with the Arabs staying the country will remain narrow and restricted ... There is no room for compromise on this point ... land purchasing ... will not bring about the state ... The only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, all of them, except perhaps Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Old Jerusalem. Not a single village or a single tribe must be left. And the transfer must be done through their absorption in Iraq and Syria and even in Transjordan. For that goal, money will be found – even a lot of money. And only then will the country be able to absorb millions of Jews ... there is no other solution. (Masalha 107)

Likewise, Ben Gurion believed that the indigenous inhabitants of the land had to be expunged in order to succeed in their plan of establishing a Jewish state. Thus, he entered the 1948 war with the intention of expelling the Palestinians. In his war diary he wrote, "During the assault we must be ready to strike a decisive blow; that is, either to destroy the town or expel its inhabitants so our people can replace them" (Aruri 43). The year of nakba witnessed several massacres, which were mainly committed to terrorize the Palestinians and cause them to flee their homes. Arie Yitzhak, the Israeli military historian believes that between 1948 and 1949 the Zionist movement had committed

about ten major massacres and about 100 smaller massacres (Aruri 46). Deir Yassin is one of the most notorious massacres and it is still engraved in the memory of the Palestinians. Over 250 unarmed villagers mostly elderly people, women and children were murdered and many were raped (Aruri 46). Public knowledge of this massacre was a major cause for Palestinian flight. Its atrocity and the exaggerated rumors that accompanied it precipitated the Palestinian Diaspora. After 1948 and after the establishment of the state of Israel, as many as 750,000 Palestinians became homeless, scattered all over the world, most of them deprived of basic human rights (Aruri 228). With the end of the 1948 war, the Palestinians who fled their homes were deprived of going back and all of their properties and lands were confiscated and given to the new inhabitants. Thus, the year of nakba witnessed the birth of the problem of the Palestinian refugees.

In the 1967 war or the so-called “six day war”, Palestinians were once again forced to flee their homes. As Israel occupied Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 325,000 Palestinians, sought refuge in neighboring Arab countries (Global Exchange). Some of these refugees had already been displaced in 1948. This dispersion of the Palestinians was generated by the destruction of several villages, threats, mass detention of male civilians and many other policies. Thus, this was the second exodus of the Palestinians but not the last. The Palestinian displacement continued during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. An average of 21,000 Palestinians per year are forced out of Israeli-controlled areas (Global Exchange). Despite the fact that in 1948 Israel's

admission to the UN was conditioned upon an Israeli commitment to carry out UN resolution 194, which calls on Israel to recognize the right of the refugees to return to their homes, Israel has failed to comply with this resolution. The resolution states that, “Refugees who wish to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return” (Global Exchange). Today, the Palestinians are considered the largest refugee population in the world; estimated at about 5 million (Global Exchange). This only includes those registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Palestinian refugees consist of two major categories, those displaced in 1948 from what is now Israel, and those displaced in 1967 from what is now the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian refugees tend to identify themselves as either the ‘48 lot or the ‘67 lot. The return of the ‘48 lot to Israel constitutes a major stumbling block in Peace negotiations and a “demographic” problem for Israel.

#### Rayya and Alex: The East and the West

Yasmin Zahran limits her novel to two main characters, Rayya and Alex, highlighting the relationship between the West and the Arab world. By using their journals, Zahran provides an opportunity for each character to describe the relationship and how they perceive one another. In addition, Zahran presents a third point of view, that of the narrator, which comments on the relationship between Alex and Rayya. Therefore, the reader hears the story from three different perspectives.

Long before meeting Rayya, Alex had heard tales about her. She was described as “an institution” and an “unchanneled, rushing river whose direction could not be known” (29). The friend who introduced them described her as a “phenomenon” (29). From their first meeting, Alex became obsessed with conquering Rayya with all her mystery, “My obsession grew as did my love. I wanted to possess her past, her present and her future” (34). This resembles Western obsession with conquering the Arab world beginning with the crusades, passing through World War I and ending with more recent conquests. In London, in 1969, Alex encountered this “phenomenon” and shortly afterward, he fell a victim of this “rushing river”. In his journal, Alex described his first meeting with Rayya, “She was sitting in a corner of our common friend’s flat in Grosvenor street in a red pleated silk dress” (29). Rayya spoke with a mysterious accent. Alex later found out that Rayya was able to speak English and French like a native but she intentionally kept her accent to “mark her foreignness, her rootlessness and her exile” (30). This depicts Rayya’s desire to declare her identity as a Palestinian. Having lost her homeland Rayya appears to compensate by holding on to trivial things, such as her accent. By speaking with an accent Rayya made a political statement, reminding her English listeners of her Palestinian cause and her origin.

Alex and Rayya fell in love with each other despite having separate lives full of turmoil and flux. Their journals revealed their multifaceted relationship full of love, passion, fear and mistrust. Alex described Rayya as an “Artist hiding behind many veils, following a thousand roads...” (48-49). Likewise, Rayya described Alex as



elusive, ephemeral and that she never felt on solid ground with him, “A subterranean creature, a dweller of the half-shadows...” (32). Thus, they were both elusive and they feared and mistrusted each other. The thorn that is ever present in this already unsteady relationship is the complex that is based on their national origins and all of its implications. Mr. Arthur James Balfour was omnipresent between Rayya and Alex. Balfour was the wall that separated the two lovers. This is clear from Rayya’s journal in which she wrote: “I cannot say to you- your people shall be my people, your gods shall be my own...Your people sold my people. Your people gave away my land, my earth, my blood. Your kin bartered my heritage, my future...” (72). Alex behaved much like the British government, which promised Palestine to the Arabs and the Zionists at the same time. Alex was engaged in an intimate relationship with Rayya while spying on her. Rayya on the other hand, was unlike the Arabs who had trusted the British back then. She was mistrustful of Westerners and the West, like most Palestinians who heard one thing from the West and saw another. Palestinian mistrust of the West was also pointed out by the narrator, Mr. Foster who said about his encounter with the Palestinian cook at the hotel, “What amazed me though was not his anglophobia, for it is rare to find a Palestinian who is not” (15). Rayya grew more suspicious of Alex when she caught him reading her journal and discovered that he reads Arabic. Their relationship was full of manipulation. Rayya started manipulating Alex by inserting false information about the PLO in her journal and intentionally making it available for him to read. Likewise, Alex used Rayya to gain information about the PLO, to have her introduce him to her

Arab friends, and to travel with her to the Arab world where he took pictures of “forbidden sites and targets” (121). By creating a relationship based on manipulation and mistrust, the author symbolizes the larger relationship between the West and the Arab world. Alex’s and Rayya’s relationship is a microcosm of the relationship between the West and the Arab world in general and the West and Palestine in particular. In his journal, Alex described his relationship with Rayya as follows, “Both running on divergent orbits to reach-where? Both racing to outwit and outpass each other. Both living under a cloud of duplicity. Who is cheating whom?” (49). This quotation can also describe the relationship between the West and the Arab world. Rayya and Alex’s relationship resembles a relationship between two countries, two enemies and not between two lovers. Likewise, duplicity has plagued the relationship between the West and the Arab world for centuries. The duplicity was present during the time of Henry McMahon (1915) who promised the Arabs their independence while signing the Sykes Picot agreement with France, in which they decided to conquer and divide the region. Western duplicity with respect to the Arabs and to the Palestinians in particular is with us to this day. During Israel’s recent war on Lebanon, the United States spoke about peace while shipping smart bombs to Israel. There is also duplicity in the enforcement of international agreements. The West, especially the United States and United Kingdom, tend to strictly enforce UN resolutions passed against Arab countries and ignore resolutions against Israel. Recent examples of this include UNSC resolution 1559, which demanded Syrian withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territory and UNSC resolutions

465 and 476 which demanded Israeli withdrawal from all Arab occupied territories. In the case of 1559, the United States and Britain threatened Syria with military force if it did not comply. Conversely, the United States continues to turn a blind eye to Israeli occupation of Arab lands and the building of settlements on these lands while sending billions of dollars in aid to Israel. These stark examples practically define the duplicitous relationship of the West with the Arabs beginning with Sykes-Picot and continuing until today.

#### Alex, the Face of Orientalism.

Edward Said stated that the orientalist's knowledge of the Oriental is not a true knowledge, "it is not the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes. It is a campaign of self affirmation" (Preface to *Orientalism* 2). Despite their passion for each other, both Rayya and Alex failed to be compassionate or understanding toward one another. This lack of compassion and understanding is evident in their journals, where Alex said, "Rayya was beyond certain limits of my comprehension...What do I know of this glittering creature, for wherever I turn, only the top of the iceberg is revealed" (19). Likewise, Rayya wrote, "There is nothing simple about him...(65) Is he a man? A force? What is he?" (10). What made Alex an orientalist was not that he failed to be compassionate and understanding towards Rayya and her cause but because like an orientalist, Alex tried to define Rayya and used typical orientalist discourse with her. Rayya, like most refugees, unable to return to her homeland and lacking a connection with her nation, compensated for this void by

holding onto various ephemeral characteristics that she associated with her identity. These are sometimes trivial behaviors or attachments like deliberately speaking with an accent. Rayya goes to great lengths, grasping at straws to attach herself to this identity. Despite this grasping attachment to Rayya's disappearing nation and nationality, Alex is unable to simply empathize with her. He is cold to her loss, yet his reaction is not neutral. His reaction towards her loss resembles the prejudice of the orientalist. He presumes to know not only what is best for her but also presumes to know who she is. He presumes to define her and is unable to accept her definition of herself. To him she does not have a natural right to define who she is. He says, "Tell me modern and westernized as you are, what do you have in common with an Omani Arab, or a Mauritanian Arab?" (39) and "For she was living in France and whether she liked it or not was very Parisian" (90). Throughout the book Alex's treatment of Rayya carries an agenda. He does not seem to care for a true knowledge of who she is. He appears to be on a "campaign of self affirmation." It is as if Rayya's identity as a Palestinian Arab creates too much cognitive dissonance in his mind, that he prefers to define her in a more palatable way. In giving himself the prerogative to define her identity, he practices the essence of orientalist discourse, namely that the Oriental is an object that can be described, judged and conceptualized and not a free-thinking subject.

In addition to Alex's bizarre attempts to rip Rayya from the roots of her Palestinian identity, he tries to create distance between her and other Arabs. He tries to convince her that Arab unity is a failed cause. He tells her, "I only want to know how

this projected utopia of a united Arab world would help your cause. Your Arab brothers seem to have forgotten about Palestine.” The question that arises is why does Alex seem threatened by Arab unity? This following quotation explains his fear:

I wondered if it ever occurred to Rayya that the West had interests in the Arab world all of its own. And an image flashed in my mind of a very honorable gentleman moving his cane over a huge map and saying, ‘If that dream of Arab unity is one day realized, it will become an immediate threat to our way of life and our standard of living. Just remember that raw materials will become expensive and scarce. Strategically we will be at their mercy for they are at the crossroads of a shrinking world... And the group of people that you must watch, split, harass and if necessary destroy, are the Palestinians, for they, more than any other Arab people, need this unity for survival. Strike at the Palestinians and you shatter the core of Arab unity. (69)

His statement reveals his understanding and participation in orientalist and neo-colonialist thought and behavior. Firstly, his description of the man with a cane as honorable, states his position. Secondly, his statement begins as justification for the West’s action, namely to protect their interests. What is alarming about his statement is the extent to which the ends justify the means according to Alex. The “honorable” gentleman imagined by Alex, openly advocates destroying the Palestinians if they have to. The ease with which Alex, in his journal, advocated genocide as a means to

a rather mundane end, namely the protection of Western interests, is an example of the banality of evil. Alex's tactics are eerily similar to the tactics used by the British Empire, namely, divide and rule.

In his analysis of orientalism, Edward Said suggests that the reaction of the Oriental can be either a passive acceptance of this discourse or a rejection. Rayya rejects this discourse on every level. She vehemently argues with Alex about her identity, "My westernization is fake. It is only a thin veneer... I can accept the term 'westernized' if you mean by that the common heritage the Arab world shares with Europe- which begins with the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Romans" (39). The author is effective in portraying orientalism and orientalist discourse through Alex's views, and behaviors and in how he relates to Rayya.

#### Rayya, Palestine's Banner

*"I ask nothing more than to die in my country. To dissolve and merge with the grass. To give life to a flower that a child of my country will pick..."*

*Fadwa Tuqan*<sup>12</sup>

"I am the olive tree on the hills of Palestine. I am the spring of water in its valleys. I am the smell of its parched, naked soil" (157). This is how Rayya described herself. After the loss of their homeland and after the world had refused to recognize their country, the Palestinians chose to equate themselves with Palestine. Like Rayya, most Palestinian refugees choose to have Palestine inhabit their life since they are unable

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive/fadwa\\_tuqan.html](http://www.thewe.cc/contents/more/archive/fadwa_tuqan.html)

to inhabit Palestine, “She [Rayya] had to carry Palestine, whether in her heart or on her shoulders, at all times, and wherever she was, for this was the only way she could endure her exile” (90). The Palestinian refugees chose to defy the world by preserving Palestine through them. To compensate for the loss of their homeland, Palestinian refugees adhere to their national identity. This strategy allows Palestinians who were born in exile and never saw Palestine to keep their identity. Through Rayya, the author reveals to the reader the impact of exile and uprootedness on every aspect of Palestinian life. Yasmin Zahran shows the reader how Rayya’s experience in exile shaped her personality. Like her life, Rayya’s journal is chaotic. Rayya lacked any sense of time or direction. Like many Palestinian refugees, Rayya was fixated on two dates, namely 1948 and 1967. The fact that Palestinians to this day refer to themselves as the “’48 lot” or “’67 lot” shows that time has stopped there for them. In his journal, Alex described how Rayya was disoriented, “This creature ...did not have any sense of direction or distance and could never tell North from South; she could even lose her way home” (48). The author uses Rayya’s lack of a sense of direction as a symbol of her rootlessness, “I was born without the faculty of direction, something which reduces my defenses against the world” (48).

We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere. As if traveling is  
the way of the clouds...We have a country of words. Speak speak so I can

put my road on the stone of a stone... We have a country of words. Speak  
speak so we may know the end of this travel<sup>13</sup>.

This poem captures the bereavement of Rayya and all Palestinian refugees. In the novel, Mr. Foster said, “It seemed to me that for Rayya a voyage was an end in itself, a search for things past that was mirrored in the search for her fragmented self” (49). Having nowhere to call home, Rayya’s excessive travels are a search for something missing. What is missing is the coalescence in one place of a shared national identity, a sense of belonging, an acceptance by others, and a legitimacy for your existence. A pertinent analogy here is a comparison with the homeless. There are a great many comforts that are taken for granted by most of us who have places to live. Being homeless impacts many aspects of daily life, leading to instability, vulnerability and a feeling of rejection by society. Similarly, a stateless person lacks many of the comforts taken for granted by those who belong. These are less tangible but also destabilizing to the psyche. Palestinian refugees lack a sense of belonging. This was pointed out by Rayya who said, “Everybody has a right to belong, but I am deprived of that right!” (31). At the end of the novel Mr. Foster said, “She [Rayya] symbolized for me the uprooted, the exiled, the oppressed” (133). In addition, Rayya was the banner of Palestine. The author skillfully chooses the name of her protagonist. In Arabic the word “Rayya” means banner.

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<sup>13</sup> The Palestinian Poet, *Mahmoud Darwish, We Travel Like Other People*  
<http://www.shaml.org/A%20country%20of%20words.htm>



### Mr. Foster: Fostering Hope

Edward Said, wrote, “Above all we must, as Mandela never tired of saying about his struggle, be aware that Palestine is one of the great moral causes of our time. Therefore, we need to treat it as such. It's not a matter of trade, or bartering negotiations, or making a career. It is a just cause...” (Thinking Ahead). Mr. Foster tried genuinely to understand Rayya and her cause. He did not have a specific agenda. His only agenda was to give Palestinians the right to tell their story, which is rarely heard in the West. True to his name, Mr. Foster nurtured and brought to light the story of Palestine, “I felt all powerful, for I had the means to expose the story of a Palestinian girl to the light, lining up behind her thousands of silent women who lived in the shadows and who, culminating in her, had at last the power to speak” (24). Unlike Alex and orientalist, Mr. Foster’s interest in Rayya and her cause was authentic. Unlike Alex, Mr. Foster did not impose his own views on Rayya, but was able to empathize with her and her people, “I was seeing things with Rayya’s eyes seeking the light of the Jerusalem hills she had so longed for...” (143). Alex on the other hand, was thinking primarily of his and his country’s interests when he said, “It frightens me to think that if one day there is an Arab-Jewish alliance we would be done for in the Western world!” Mr. Foster saw it simply as a just cause. By portraying Mr. Foster as a just Western observer, the author provides a good example for her Western audience of how Arabs and Palestinians would like to be treated and seen. Mr. Foster shows us that orientalism is not innate or a necessary byproduct of having a Western perspective.

A Beggar at Damascus Gate is, first and foremost, a story that brings Palestine to a Western audience that has largely forgotten about it and its people in Diaspora. It is a strong rebuttal to the words of former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir who said, “There are no Palestinians<sup>14</sup>” The story is a window into the relationship between East and West, portrayed through two characters, who, also happen to come from Palestine and Britain, a former colony and a former colonizer. It displays their chaotic, mistrustful relationship and the conflicts that exist because they each carry historical baggage that they are unable to shed. The story exposes the lingering presence of orientalism as a style of thought in the Western mind but also rejects the notion that orientalism is inevitable by providing an alternative, good example in Mr. Foster. In this way the author provides a solution to the problem of orientalism and a way forward out of the lingering effects of colonialism. Zahran also implicitly reiterates that the relationship between the West and the Arab world can only be rehabilitated by resolving the Palestinian problem. The road to a healthy Western-Arab relationship passes through Palestine.

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<sup>14</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/israel\\_at\\_50/profiles/81288.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/israel_at_50/profiles/81288.stm)

CHAPTER IV  
DECOLONIZING THE ARAB MIND

The Algerian Sun

*“Ahlam Mosteghanemi is an Algerian sun which enlightens Arabic literature. She has carried Algerian literature to a level which evolves into the history of the Algerian fight.”<sup>15</sup>*

*Ahmad Ben Bella, Algerian President*

Mosteghanemi is a notable Algerian poet and writer. She hides in her novels and poems an honorable father and a great country. She is the eldest daughter of Mohammed Cherif, an Algerian revolutionary leader, who left his fingerprints on Algeria and on all of Mosteghanemi's writings. Cherif is a native of Constantine, who fought against the French occupation and lost his two brothers during the Algerian revolution in the 1940s. In 1945, the French occupation forces arrested him for participating in a demonstration. During this demonstration 45,000 Algerians were killed<sup>16</sup>. Thus, Cherif was lucky to be arrested and then released two years later. He was then forced to leave his beloved country to live in exile with his family. Cherif, his wife and his mother moved to Tunis, where most Algerian activists were exiled and where Ahlam Mosteghanemi was born. He worked as a French teacher. He had to teach the

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mosteghanemi.com/english/Criticisms.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.mosteghanemi.net/aboutus.asp>

language of the colonizer, a language that was forced upon Algerians. Thus, Cherif decided to give his daughter what he was deprived of. By deciding to send Ahlam to an Arabic school, he reinstated the missing part of Algerian identity, namely the Arabic language. After independence in 1962, Cherif and his family returned to Algeria and Ahlam was sent to the first Arabic school in Algeria. Before Mosteghanemi received her Bachelor degree, her father suffered a mental breakdown after an assassination attempt. This event forced Ahlam to work to support her family. For three years, she presented a late night show called “hamassat” or “whispers” on Algerian radio, which witnessed the birth of a new poet. During these three years, Algerian listeners enjoyed her musical voice and her Arabic poems. In 1971, Ahlam received her Bachelor’s degree in Arabic literature from the University of Algiers and published her first poetry anthology *Ala Marfa’ Al Ayam* (On the Harbor of Time). Several years later, Ahlam left for Paris, where she married a Lebanese journalist. In 1982, she earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1992, Ahlam’s father died leaving her with the Algerian wound and his personal history. He died knowing that he gave his country a daughter that will immortalize him and Algeria in her writings and always be a symbol of Algerian struggle against occupation. He gave his country its language and its voice. When Cherif was asked in one of his interviews about his achievements as a leader of the war of independence, he said, “If I came to this world to give birth to Ahlam that is sufficient pride. She is one of my most important accomplishments. I want to be called

“father of Ahlam”, I want to be affiliated with her like she is affiliated with me<sup>17</sup>.” In 1993 Mosteghanemi wrote her first novel Zakirat al-Jassed (Memory in the Flesh), becoming the first Algerian woman to write a novel in the Arabic language. She dedicated her novel to her father, “To the memory of my father, who may find someone there who knows Arabic to read him this book, his book” (iii). She also dedicated this novel to her literary father, the Algerian poet and novelist Malek Haddad. Ahlam became the voice of her father, who did not read or write Arabic, the voice of Malek Haddad, who swore after Algerian independence not to write in a language that was not his. She became the voice of every Algerian who was forced to speak the language of the colonizer. Among her works translated into English are Chaos of the Senses (1997), Lies of a Fish (1993), Writing in a Moment of Nudity (1976), Passant D’un Lit (2003), Passer by a Bed (2003), in addition to several essays and poems.

#### The Algerian Struggle for Liberty

*“The Algerian revolution is not a holy war but an attempt to regain our liberty. It is not a work of hate but struggle against a system of oppression.”*

Letter from the Front de Liberation Nationale to the French (qtd. in Bourdieu 147)

*“The war in Algeria is not the war of Arabs against Europeans nor that of Moslems against Christians, nor is it the war of the Algerian people against the French people.”*

*Ferhat Abbas, an Algerian revolutionary leader (qtd. in Bourdieu 147)*

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

The name “Algeria” is derived from the Arabic world for “Islets”, referring to the four islands which lay off the capital city’s coast. Algeria is the second largest country on the African continent. The Algerian war of independence demonstrates a heroic resistance and struggle against colonization. It is considered to be one of the most brutal colonial wars. However, the colonial system and the war of independence left a wound on the face of Algerian society that has not healed yet. Many intellectuals and artists, such as Ahlam Mosteghanemi believe that it is their responsibility to heal their societies of their wounds, establishing healthy societies, proud of their past and looking forward to a better future.

In 1830, France occupied the cities of Algiers, Oran and Annab. This occupation led to resistance from important Algerian personalities such as prince Abd-Al-Qadr, Ahmad Bey and Fatma N’Somer. The latter was an important female figure in the Algerian resistance. However, in 1847 France succeeded in suppressing the revolt by initiating a campaign of pacification. The so-called “pacification” was brutal and destructive. To gain control over hostile areas, the French army destroyed villages and property. Quotes from two French generals, Bugeaud and St. Arnaud, depict the destructive nature of the “pacification” operation:

More than 50 fine villages, built of stone and roofed with tiles,  
were destroyed...

...I began to chop down the fine orchards and to set fire to the  
magnificent villages under the enemy’s eyes.

I left in my wake a vast conflagration. All the villages, some 200 in number, were burnt down, all the gardens destroyed, all the olive trees cut down. (Quandt 4)

After this “pacification” operation, France extended its influence to the rest of the country and Algeria became a part of metropolitan France. Algeria was divided into three sections Alger, Oran and Constantine. A critical point in the history of Algeria occurred in 1848, when large numbers of French migrated to Algeria to help keep Algeria a French territory (Gordon, 1966, 15). By 1870, European settlers had reached 225,000 and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Europeans represented one-tenth of Algeria’s population. This colonial system carried with it, impoverishment, discrimination and racism against the colonized people. The richest and most fertile lands were confiscated and given to European settlers. Algerians were treated as second-class citizens. Muslim Algerians were denied the right to preach in mosques. Algerians were also deprived of civil and political rights and educational opportunities. In the 1950s, over ninety percent of the Algerians were illiterate and those who were fortunate enough to go to school were forced to receive a French education and the use of Arabic was forbidden (Gordon 51). European settlers also controlled 90% of the industrial and commercial activity. Thus, by the 1900s France dominated all aspects of the Algerian’s society (Gordon 51). The goal of the French government was to separate Algeria from its Arabo-Islamic history and transform it into a French nation. The revolts against the system of colonization that were taking place in Arab countries such as Lebanon and

Syria encouraged Algerians to revolt against the French. In time, Algerians became convinced that only a revolution can bring them liberty. Thus, in the 1940s and with the end of World War II many anti-colonialist movements and organizations such as the Party of the Algerian People (PPA) started organizing demonstrations in the cities to demand independence. The French army responded to these protests by firing on largely unarmed protestors, killing thousands. To control the protests, French troops attacked several neighborhoods and villages, committing massacres, such as the Setif massacre (Gordon 53). These hostile events were followed by extensive retaliatory attacks against French military installations and facilities. The attacks were launched by the National Liberation Front (FLN), which was established in 1954 in Cairo. By 1956, the FLN had the support of most Algerians and was organizing frequent attacks in the cities. The revolt spread to all cities in Algeria, which forced France to increase its forces. In 1957, France succeeded in quelling the uprising for a short period of time. At that time, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Morocco had all gained their independence from French colonization and Algerians were determined to follow the neighboring countries and gain their liberty and dignity. France on the other hand was concerned that the events in Algeria would encourage other African colonies to demand their independence. France was also concerned about the future of the European settlers in Algeria, some of whom were born there. The demonstrations of the 1940s were only the beginning of a long brutal war that officially started in 1954. Suppressing the revolt was not an easy task this time. The revolt became a revolution and France became increasingly polarized, between



those who supported the French settlers and those who along with world critics condemned French brutality. These challenges brought down the Fourth French Republic and raised De Gaulle to power as head of the Fifth Republic. Since a military solution had failed to defeat the revolt, De Gaulle decided to negotiate with the Algerians. He offered the Algerians a peace plan conditioned upon keeping Algeria within the French Empire not as a colony but as a local government. The FLN refused the offer and established a provisional government in exile. The Algerian war of independence continued until 1962. When De Gaulle saw no hope for an end to the conflict except by giving Algeria its independence, France and Algeria signed the Evian agreement on May 18, 1962. This agreement ended 132 years of occupation. After the war of independence many French felt that a part of France had died.

The war had cost Algeria the lives of more than one million people and as many as two million people were left homeless. After the war, Algeria was a war-torn impoverished nation. French colonization in Algeria left a disordered and baffled society. The colonization left behind Algerians who spoke French fluently, dressed like the French, ate French cuisine but who resented France. It left behind Algerians who favored their Arabic and Islamic roots but could neither read the language nor relate to Arabic traditions. Thus, colonization created a society lost between two identities and two civilizations. After colonization, Algeria became the illegitimate daughter of France. It carried in its heart mixed feelings of nostalgia, hate, love and resentment. The complexity of the relationship between France and Algeria is better described by Malek

Haddad, who said that France was “my exile” but also “my only arm of combat” (Gordon 53). This complex relationship can also be seen by the fact that it was not until 1975 that a French head-of-state, Valerie Giscard-d'Estaing, visited Algeria. On March 2, 2003, Jacques Chirac became the second French president to visit Algeria.

The independence for which Algerians fought so bitterly became a reality and the end of colonization was the beginning of a new era. However, it concealed an uncertain future. Algerians were eager to erase what was left of French colonization and to rediscover themselves and gather what was left of their broken identity. In 1962, Ahmad Ben Bella, the FLN leader was the most popular figure in Algeria. He was elected president of Algeria in an uncontested election in 1963. Ben Bella directed his country toward “Arab socialism.” Several years later Ben Bella became autocratic in his rule, arousing opposition. In 1965, Ben Bella was overthrown in a military coup by his defense minister Houari Boumedienne, who suspended the constitution and designated himself as president of the country. In the beginning, Boumedienne faced some resistance from regional groups but later he gained the support of most Algerians. In 1978 Boumedienne died and was succeeded by FLN leader, Colonel Chadli Bendjedid. In the late 1980s, Algeria’s economy came under severe strain and the country witnessed massive demonstrations against President Chadli Bendjedid. There were also riots by Berbers against legislation that made Arabic the only official language. At the same time a massive earthquake struck Algeria killing 45,000 people. Thus, Algeria entered a major

recession in the late 1980s, which led to a long civil war taking away the dream of “New Algeria.”

### Exposing the Ravages of Colonialism

Ahlam Mosteghanemi's novel Memory in the Flesh embraces Algeria's past and present. It starts with the Algerian revolution in the 1940s and ends in 1988 with its eye on the future. In her novel, Mosteghanemi takes the reader on a trip through the ravages of colonialism and its consequences in Algeria. The complexity of her novel reflects the complexity of the Algerian experience during and after colonization. Through her work Mosteghanemi continues what her father started in the 1940s, namely the process of decolonization. According to Mosteghanemi, the liberation of the land was the beginning of decolonization, not the end of it. By writing in Arabic, Mosteghanemi accomplishes another victory over the system of colonization. Her use of the Arabic language helps erase the barbarian marks of colonialism.

Mosteghanemi destroys one of the pillars of the system of colonialism, by allowing her protagonist, not the colonialists, to present Algeria's story. She rebels against the notion that “history is written by the victor”, by giving the victim, Khalid, empty pages to tell his story. Thus, Mosteghanemi's novel is a rare phenomenon, where history is written from the point of view of the victim. Khalid, a former Algerian warrior, who lost his left arm in fighting the French in the 1940s, starts filling the empty pages with words full of grief and pain. He addresses his words to Ahlam, a young Algerian novelist and daughter of Si Tahir, a revolutionary leader. Khalid's memory takes him

back to his childhood, when he first met Si Tahir. At the age of sixteen Khalid was arrested for participating in a demonstration. For six months he was placed in the same cell as Si Tahir where he developed a great admiration for him. Ten years later, three months after the death of his mother, Khalid joined Si Tahir in his armed struggle against French colonialism. He joined the front, leaving behind a brother and a father busy with his new young bride. Khalid discovered in Algeria his dead mother. His feelings of orphanhood were diminished and replaced by his love for another mother, Algeria. He was full of energy and dreams until two bullets from the colonial army found their way to his left arm. He was forced to leave the battlefield and his country to receive treatment in Tunisia. Before leaving to Tunis, Si Tahir asks Khalid to visit his family in Tunis and register Si Tahir's newborn daughter, giving her the name Ahlam, which means dreams. This mission given to him by his mentor, gave him hope to live and survive the journey and the subsequent amputation of his left arm. He visits Si Tahir's family and registers his daughter in the civil records. Si Tahir dies a few years later in 1962. The story jumps forward 20 years when Khalid fortuitously meets Ahlam at an exhibit of his famous paintings in Paris. At their first meeting, he is taken back by Ahlam's traditional bracelet to memories of Algeria, his mother and his life when he was whole. This moment forms the beginning of an unrequited love story. Khalid's desire to recapture old Algeria through Ahlam proves fruitless. He is caught between memories of the past, a transformed present and an unknown future. He realizes that Ahlam represents a new Algeria with different values, those of materialism and western influence. Ahlam ends

up marrying a wealthy Algerian businessman who represents the new Algerian bourgeoisie. Khalid reflects on the loss of his arm, the loss of his love and the loss of his country. The novel describes the ongoing impact of colonialism on Algerian society despite its liberation from France. The novel ends with Khalid going back to his country to raise his nephews after his brother died. He goes back to participate in building a new healthy society.

### Society Deformed by Colonialization

Khalid said, “Art is everything that touches us, and not necessarily just everything we understand” (30). Indeed, this is what one experiences when reading Mosteghanemi’s novel. Her art vigorously shakes your feelings and makes your mind wonder without rest. You feel and sympathize with the characters of the story before you come to understand their secrets. To illustrate the complexity of colonization and decolonization, Mosteghanemi creates complex characters that embody within themselves many contradictions. The characters resemble Algeria with its wounds, pain and dilemmas. Like Algeria, the characters of the story are caught between the Arab-Islamic civilization and the French and Western civilization. Like Algeria, the characters have psychological and physical deformities.

At twenty-seven, the age during which most people are occupied with establishing themselves and starting a new family, Khalid had a part of his body amputated. Like Algeria, Khalid’s wound was deep and the bullets he received during his fight against colonialism perforated his left arm. Like Algeria, Khalid had no choice

but to have his left arm amputated. Therefore, Khalid's amputated arm represents French colonialism that would have infected the whole body if it were not removed.

Mosteghanemi shows the reader how amputating his left arm doesn't solve Khalid's problems. The physical amputation of his arm resolved his immediate physical problem, namely the risk of death from infection. Likewise the expulsion of the French troops from the country resolved the immediate physical presence of the colonizer and halted the erasure of Algerian identity and its replacement by French identity. The injury does not stop there. Khalid's scar is a physical deformity, as well as a psychological deformity with which he has to live, for the rest of his life. Throughout the novel, the author goes on to reveal the effects of this psychological scar on Khalid and Algeria. Mosteghanemi captures the impact of colonization on a country using the impact of an amputation on an individual. In this way, Mosteghanemi allows the reader to visualize and capture the reality of decolonization more clearly. After creating Khalid as a main character in her novel, Mosteghanemi gives him the authority to show the reader sketches of his psychological suffering as a handicapped person.

Immediately after his amputation, Khalid describes himself as being neither dead nor alive, only in pain. Likewise, the amputation of the French colonizer from Algeria, left Algeria with not only the physical scars of a country ravaged by war, and its economic impact, but also with a psychological scar in the form of an identity crisis, whereby Algeria and its citizens did not know who they were and where to begin. They were lost between being Arab and French. Most of them did not speak, read or

write their own language. They lacked true independence and needed to build relations anew without the all-encompassing presence of the colonizer. They needed to build institutions from scratch as all the former institutions were built and based on the relationship with the colonizer. Likewise, after amputation Khalid needed to build a different relationship with the world. He had to accept his new life with only one arm. As his doctor said: "I think losing your arm has caused you to have an unbalanced relationship with your environment. You've got to build a new bridge with the world through either painting or writing" (35). Shortly after his release from the hospital Khalid collides with the painful reality. He realizes the tragedy of his loss when he goes to visit Si Tahir's family and tries to hold Ahlam, who was six months old, "I was unable to catch you with my single shaky arm, to put you on my lap and play with you, without you slipping away from me" (73). This tragic scene captures the larger reality of being unable to embrace "New Algeria," which Ahlam represents. The loss of his arm forces Khalid to question, "What if you are a woman who can only be painted by the left hand, the one that is no longer mine?" (123) Here Khalid questions Algeria's ability to rebuild itself.

The analogy between Khalid's amputation and his scar and the scar left by expelling the French goes further. The feelings of inferiority that Khalid feels when he interacts with whole individuals are similar to the feelings of the formerly colonized when they interact with their colonizer. Khalid describes his feeling as follows: "I am therefore often ashamed of this arm that accompanies me to the Metro, to the restaurant,

to the café, to the airplane and every party to which I go” (44). Thus, Khalid resembles the colonized who feel inferior to the colonizer. On the other hand Khalid’s French girlfriend, Catherine resembles the colonizer who feels superior, “She did not like to appear with me in public. She was probably embarrassed lest some of her acquaintances see her with an Arab, ten years older and one arm missing” (43). The power relationship remains after colonization. This is evident in unfair business dealings that continue between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized. The power dynamic implanted by orientalist discourse, into the minds of both, the colonizer and the colonized, the orientalist and the Oriental, appears to transcend the colonial era and remains in the heart of both. Like the colonized who still hold the painful memory of colonialization, Khalid still holds his memory in his flesh, “I also discovered that during the twenty-five years I had lived with one arm, the only place where I could forget about my handicap was in exhibition galleries...” (43). Khalid describes his feelings about his scar as an amalgam of pride, anger and hopelessness. Likewise the expulsion of the French undoubtedly generated these same feelings in the Algerian population. They were proud of achieving their freedom, angry at the realization of the scars of the war and hopeless about the future of a country in ruins. The “memory in the flesh,” remains in both scars. It becomes a part of their identity. Khalid’s identity in Algeria is highly related to his scar. Immediately after the liberation, he did not have to explain his scar. It was an obvious sign of his achievements as a war hero. He said, “This was my personal documentation, my identification” (30). Likewise the liberation from the French is and



always will be a part of Algerian identity with all of its associations including the discourse that defines the orientalist, and the Oriental, the colonizer and the colonized, and the former colonizer and the formerly colonized.

Throughout the novel, the author keeps the reader puzzled by Khalid's character. Is he proud of his scar or is he embarrassed by it? The author presents Khalid with his contradictory feelings about his scar and his country, which will be discussed later. This makes it difficult for the reader to understand Khalid. However, it also allows the reader to share Khalid's authentic dilemmas. Khalid's contradictory feelings toward his amputated arm come from the varied reactions he received about his disability. He says: "It is an awkward contradiction, to live in a country that recognizes your talents but rejects your injuries, to belong to a country that respects your injuries but refuses the person" (44). This creates Khalid's conflicting feelings toward his amputated arm. In Algeria Khalid's scar makes him a hero, while in France it bears no meaning. France recognizes Khalid as an individual and respects his talent, while in Algeria the individual has no value. These conflicting feelings about his scar are transformed into conflicting feelings about France and Algeria later in the novel.

#### Khalid and Ahlam: Intergenerational Dialogue

Let me hold in you all those whom I have loved. I look at you and recall

Si Tahir's features in your smile and in the color of your eyes. How

beautiful it is for martyrs to return that way in your looks! How beautiful

it is for my mother to return in the bracelet in your wrist, and for my homeland to return today in your presence! (40)

This is how Khalid perceived Ahlam when he first met her. He saw in her his lost homeland and his dead mother. Despite being in exile, Ahlam's presence brought him face to face with his country. She revived his dormant feelings about his past and his broken dreams for his country. Khalid, who had returned to his homeland from Tunis after independence, carrying with him lofty dreams about the future of his country, had been disappointed. He had returned with a desire to start a cultural revolution, to continue fighting for decolonization directed at the Algerian mind. Khalid wanted to liberate the Algerian mind, to throw out all the remains of colonialism and create a new identity. However, his dreams were thwarted when he found his people taking a different path to rebuilding their country, a path that invests in building factories and industries but doesn't invest in the development of the people. Khalid states:

There were changes in factories, farmers' villages, buildings, and big plantations, but human beings were being left to the last...All the industrial revolutions in the world started within human beings themselves, and for the same reason Japan and Europe have become what they are today. But Arabs went on building big buildings and calling the walls a revolution. (97)

Khalid tried to survive in this corrupt atmosphere. He worked as head of press and publications in Algeria until he met Ziad, a Palestinian poet, who shook Khalid's

conscience. Khalid whose job was to edit and censor dissident voices, asked Ziad to change parts of his anthology that vehemently attacked some Arab rulers. Ziad's adamant refusal made Khalid realize that he was participating in the corruption of the Algerian mind and not its liberation. Ziad's eyes "stopped at my missing arm for a second, and then looked at me in a humiliating way. 'Don't amputate my poems, sir. Give me back my poems and I'll get them published in Beirut'" (98). This humiliating gesture and the words that accompanied it shocked Khalid. "It made me feel like I was selling my people tins of food that were past their sell-by date. I felt somehow responsible for the corruption of their minds" (98). Thus, Ziad, with his intact values and ideals had revived Khalid's conscience. This would create a dilemma for Khalid in this corrupt environment. Khalid describes his dilemma as follows: "What would I do with that arrogant, stubborn man who concerned me and who refused to compromise his freedom? Did he have to live, and learn to sit on his principles and adapt to every shift in the wind? I had to choose in order to survive, and thus I chose" (99). Khalid chose exile. He chose to live away from his country rather than compromise his values and play a part in the corruption. He decided to bury his past with its dreams and leave to France, where he became a distinguished painter. However, in meeting Ahlam in Paris Khalid rediscovered his lost dreams. Ahlam with her Algerian features forced Khalid to remember the past he wanted to forget. She brought back all of the past with its pain. In her eyes, he saw his city, Constantine, and decided not abandon her this time.

The author created a landscape, upon which she began a dialogue between the old Algerian generation, represented by Khalid and new Algerian generation represented by Ahlam. However, to Khalid, Ahlam was not only a representative of the new Algerian generation but was Algeria itself. The dialogue allowed them to discover their need for each other. “We were silently discovering that we complemented each other in an alarming way. I was the past that you did not know, and you were the present that had no memory...” (64). According to Khalid, Ahlam was not an individual but a reflection of people he loved and a homeland he abandoned. He frequently referred to her as his homeland, “Bashful and confused, homeland sat by me” (53). For Khalid, Ahlam was similar to his city Constantine. Both of them carry two names and more than one date of birth. Constantine’s other name is Cirta and Ahlam’s other name is Hayat meaning “life”. Ahlam was named Hayat while she was waiting for her father to give her a name and register her. Like Constantine, which was given different birth dates every time it was liberated from foreign troops; Ahlam had two different birth dates. One reflects the actual date of her birth and the other when she was registered. Both Ahlam and Constantine carry the name of Tahir Abd Al Mawlla. Constantine carries it as one of its streets and Ahlam as her last name. To Khalid, even Constantine’s curves and bends look like Ahlam’s body. Thus, Khalid believed that by placing Ahlam on his path, fate had given him another chance to reclaim all that he had lost. Ahlam on the other hand, saw in Khalid her father who was stolen from her during her first years. Ahlam was

searching for a past taken from her with the death of her father. Like Khalid, Ahlam was a victim of colonialism:

Both of us were victims of the war. Destiny had placed us in its pitiless quern, and we emerged, each carrying a different wound. My wound was obvious and yours was hidden deep. They amputated my arm, and they amputated your childhood. They ripped off a limb of my body and snatched a father from your arms. We were the remnants of a war: two broken statues under clothes. (64)

Through Ahlam's character, the author affirms that colonialism didn't only deform the old generations but that its fire had reached the new generation and caused a deep scar. The new Algerian generation was indirectly affected by the system of colonialism. They were orphans of the past. They were detached from their past and their roots, leading to identity confusion, Westernization, and being lulled by the comforts of materialism. This is illustrated in Ahlam's name. Khalid breaks down her name into a four letter acronym, A for "*alam*" or pain, H for "*hirqa*" or burning, la for "*la*" or no and m for "*muta'a*" or pleasure. Her name exactly describes the transitions that take place in the book. It begins with the pain of colonialism, moves to the burning of the revolution, then onto the "no" of caution against Westernization and finally to the pleasure of the bourgeois life.

The young Algerian generation was left hanging without a connection to their roots. All that was left of their past were streets with the names of heroes. This can

be applied to all Arab countries after colonialism. Riyadh Al Sulh in Lebanon, Saleh al Ali in Syria, and Ahmad Orabi in Egypt are all streets, named after revolutionary leaders who fought against colonialism. Arab regimes used the names of the leaders and forgot to use their ideas. They built streets with their names and forgot to create schools to teach their philosophies. Thus, like most of the young Arab generation today, Ahlam is suspended between ghosts of heroes from the past and corrupt regimes of the present. She is suspended between the glory of the past embodied by her father's name and the viciousness of her present-day. Therefore, Ahlam had no examples to follow; all she inherited from the past were names and slogans. Ahlam resented her father:

The fact that father left me a big name doesn't mean a thing to me,  
because I've inherited misery with the weight of that name...I'd have  
preferred an ordinary childhood and an ordinary life to have had a father  
and a family like anybody else...(66)

Ahlam blamed her father for choosing to be the father of Algeria and forgetting that children are like the land, needing fathers to grow and build their identities. Ahlam grew up with a conflicting identity like everything around her. She was proud of her Arabic identity, "Arabic is the language of my heart...We write in the language in which we feel" (56). Ahlam was also proud of her Islamic identity, "Of course I fast. It's my way of defying this city, my way of communicating with my homeland and my past" (157). In addition to this pride about her past and her roots, we discover another part of Ahlam's identity that is detached from the past and more Western. Unlike Khalid, Ahlam

was incapable of seeing the features of her country in herself. She perceived herself as an individual only, unaware that she carries with her all of Algeria. Ahlam failed to understand how Khalid saw her and painted her as Constantine. She was even offended by this description of her, “You’ve got some of the crooked line of this city, the shape of its bridges, its pride, its dangers, its caves...” (109). Her reaction was as follows, “You’re dreaming...How can you make a comparison between me and that bridge?” (109-110). Individualism had reached Ahlam’s spirit and prevented her from seeing herself except as an individual. Ahlam resembles her country with its identity crisis that swings between the West and the East. This identity confusion is a remnant of the impact of colonialism on the minds of individuals, which programmed the colonized to believe that Western culture is superior to theirs. This belief is still alive and well today. It is evident when one observes how the young Arab generation has substituted their traditional greeting *عليكم السلام* (peace be upon you) with “Hi”, which is a meaningless greeting according to the English dictionary. This belief in one’s relative inferiority, left by colonialism is translated into actions, actions that are prevalent in many Arab countries today, like favoring a job applicant because he or she was educated in the West, or using English or French phrases to feel superior to others around you. Therefore, colonialism has turned Arabs themselves into orientalist applying and propagating an inferiority complex and many aspects of orientalist discourse. Like many in her generation, Ahlam had the tendency to take off her Arabic-Islamic identity and put on a Western identity. This is illustrated by Khalid’s accusation: “What you wanted was,

in the end, just to become another copy of Catherine, to become an ordinary painting with an obvious mood, and a face with lots of makeup that looked like her face..." (110). The identity confusion present in the young generation is pervasive, diverse and for the most part, a subconscious phenomenon. Khalid's criticisms of Ahlam and her generation illustrate these points:

Khalid: Constantine came along with your looks, with your walk, and your accent and in the bracelet that you were wearing.

Ahlam: Ah you mean that miqias bracelet? Well it happens, I wear it for some occasions but its heavy and hurts my wrist.

Khalid: Memory is always heavy. My mother wore one for years on end and never complained of its weight... You belonged to a generation that found everything heavy to carry, and so swapped the old Arab dresses for modern ones made of just one or two pieces of clothes. Your generation also cut down on old jewelry to wear lighter pieces that could be put on and taken off quickly. They summarized all history and memory in a couple of pages in the school textbooks, and only one or two names in Arabic poetry... We belong to nations that only wear their memory on occasions. (76)

The diversity of this identity confusion is illustrated in the fact that it applies to the way people dress, the influence on schools and school texts, and the influence on memory.



Ahlam speaks about her bracelet and is unaware of the weight of her statements.

Khalid's seething criticism of the amputation of history and memory that has taken place in this young generation is elicited by Ahlam's innocent yet weighty statement about the heaviness of her bracelet, a statement that illustrates the degree of her obliviousness about her past and its relationship to her present. Ahlam and her generation are cut off from their past. They carry some characteristics of their history and memory but like someone with dementia, there are many holes and the loss is pervasive. The holes occupy seemingly random portions of their memory and more importantly those who are disconnected from their memory lack the insight to be aware of their loss. Ahlam and her generation go along innocently unaware of their disconnection from the past. Khalid says:

You must realize that you will not understand anything of the past you are looking for, nor of the memory of the father you never knew, unless you understand the traditions of Constantine and adhere to them. We don't discover our memory by looking at a picture, postcard or even a painting like this one. We only discover it when we touch it, when we wear it and live by it. (77)

Khalid's solution for discovering one's memory is to live it rather than looking at a picture or a painting. He argues that understanding the traditions and adhering to them is necessary to understanding anything about our past. This statement implies a process of thinking about everything you do and why you do it. It does not preclude the inclusion of

new Western ideas and practices but prescribes the understanding of ones' traditions and practicing them prior to embarking blindly on simpler more comfortable actions. While preaching to Ahlam about memory, and history and the importance of living with Constantine and its traditions, Khalid had escaped from his past, and was hiding in exile.

The ability to forget is a gift that allows us to temporarily forget our own mortality, but also a double-edged sword that can detach us from our roots. On one extreme, we have the existentialist, with a limited ability to forget, who constantly contemplates his own death. On the other, we have the hedonist with a broad ability to forget, who lives in constant denial of his death. Khalid, although not a hedonist, abuses the gift of forgetting by trying to bury his past, and live in utter denial in the capital city of his former colonizer until he is vividly awakened by Ahlam. Human beings are endowed with the ability to temporarily forget their mortality, yet we are reminded that we have a tendency to abuse this forgetfulness. This warning is embedded in the Arabic word for human being *insan*, that is derived from the root word *nasa* which means to forget.

Therefore, Khalid and Ahlam are similar. They are both victims of colonialism, and both had unfulfilled dreams. Like Ahlam's, Khalid's dreams were also amputated:

You looked like me...I would prefer to have been an ordinary man with two hands doing ordinary, everyday things and not to have turned into genius with one arm...My dream was not to become a genius or a

prophet, nor a defiant and rejected artist...My dream was to have a wife and children..." (67)

Khalid is suspended between two lives, Paris and Constantine. The author uses Khalid's paintings of bridges as a metaphor for his and Ahlam's suspension in between worlds.

Khalid's painting of bridges, is a subconscious expression of his suspension. His turmoil comes to a boil and surfaces from his subconscious after seeing and falling in love with Ahlam. He begins to paint more and more bridges.

As I painted those bridges, I thought I was painting you. But in fact, I was only painting myself. The bridge was simply an expression of my situation that is forever in suspense. I was unconsciously reflecting onto it my worries, my fears, my turmoil. (137)

### Colors and Ideologies

This novel is devoid of ideology yet it exposes the reality and weakness of ideology. The author avoids the common, simplistic, heroic, Hollywood story of good and evil. Her protagonists are complex, real characters with the full spectrum of characteristics. The reader who is searching for an all-good hero and an all-evil villain is sorely disappointed. The absence of such characters creates frustration and cognitive dissonance for those accustomed to watching Hollywood movies and reading best-seller books. Indeed the absence of heroes and villains, and the creation of this cognitive dissonance in the reader, itself illustrates the degree to which we are programmed to expect a clear hero and a clear villain in every story. Just when we get attached to one

character and begin to feel confident that this is our hero, the author exposes the reality of their complex life with their faults, thereby disappointing us. The author uses Khalid the painter to challenge all ideologies. The metaphor used by the author to expose the poverty of ideology is that ideologies are like absolute colors, like black and white whereas art contains the full spectrum of colors available to the artist which when mixed together create even more complexity and more colors. Khalid says, "I hated absolute colors," (30) and "the color black usually meant dishonesty just like white" (220). Whereas art is rich in the unique mixture of colors, ideology is empty with its black and white colors.

Mosteghanemi's novel addresses the impact of exile on the nation. She depicts the corruption and difficulties faced by those whose goal is to invest in the people of the next generation. Khalid describes Algeria in the aftermath of the expulsion of the French, as follows: "I was distressed to discover that not only were we lagging behind France and Europe, we were lagging behind where we had been half a century earlier under colonialism" (196). She uses Khalid as an example of a war hero who chooses to escape to the capital city of his former colonizer rather than face the difficulties required to build a nation. In this depiction of exile, Mosteghanemi urges those in exile to return to their land in order to nourish the development of the coming generations many of whom are amputated from their past. This is vividly shown by Khalid's realization at the end of the novel when he states: "We take the homeland as furniture for our exile. We forget when the homeland puts us down at its door, when,

unaffected by our tears, it closes its heart against us without so much as a nod at our suitcases. We forget to ask who will take our place after we go” (185).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: A NEW MIDDLE EAST?

#### Ongoing Orientalism and Colonialism

*“You have to understand the Arab mind. The only thing they understand is force - force, pride and saving face.”*

*Captain Todd Brown*, a company commander with the Fourth Infantry Division

New York Times, December 7, 2003, Sunday

*“With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people [Iraqis] that we are here to help them.”*

*Nathan Sassman*, Battalion Commander Lt.Colonel,

New York Times, December 7, 2003, Sunday

Colonialism is the main theme that brings all of the three novels together. Despite the fact that each novel took place in a different region in the Arab world and different era, in their works, the novelists seem to tackle similar issues, such as orientalism, reductionism and colonialism. This implies that these “isms” are still prevalent and potent today. In Pillars of Salt, which took place during the beginning of European colonialism, Fadia Faqir exposed the system of colonialism, reminding the Arabs and the West of their past, (hoping that history will not repeat itself) and warning the reader from the discourse of neo-orientalists and the misrepresentation of the Arabs in the West. In A Beggar at Damascus Gate, which took place in the 1980s during

the first Intifada, Yasmin Zahran highlighted the result of colonization on Palestine and that is the establishment of the state of Israel and the Diaspora of the Palestinians. In Memory in the Flesh, Ahlam Mosteghanemi revealed the impact of colonization on Algerians and stressed the need for Arab intellectuals to come back from their exile to participate in decolonizing the Arab's mind from the orientalist discourse and building a healthy society. It is important to point out that all of the three novels were written in the 1990s, which is a long time after the end of colonization in Jordan and Algeria. The axiomatic question here is why are these novelists writing about colonialism in an era where colonialism in their countries ended? In Memory in the Flesh Mosteghanemi raised the question if Algeria had really gained its independence, Khalid said: "My homeland was absent that evening. Its wounds and its ugly new face were there instead. It was a French evening. We spoke in French about foreign-interest projects financed by Algeria. Had we really gained our independence?" In A Beggar at Damascus Gate, Yasmin Zahran referred to the Arab leaders as "CIA agents" alluding to the possibility that the Arab leaders represent the neo-orientalists (Zahran 40). In Pillars of Salt, Fadia Faqir placed her protagonist Maha, who represent the Arabic public, in a mental hospital, which looked like a jail. Thus, Maha resembles the Arab people who are bound inside their countries by their neo-orientalist leaders. The characters in these novels and the terminologies being used today like the "New Middle East," urge you to question if the Arab world today is being placed under a system of neo-colonialism and neo-orientalism? The term "Middle East" which was used and publicized in 1916 by Mark

Sykes brought with it the Sykes-Picot agreement (Fromkin 224). Now, the question is what would the term “New Middle East”, which was first used in 2006 in Tel Aviv by the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice bring? (Nazemroaya) In July 2006, during the Israeli war on Lebanon, Rice urged the Israeli government to ignore the calls for cease-fire and described the war as follows:

What we're seeing here, in a sense, is the growing -- the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one...So this is a different Middle East and it's a new Middle East and it's hard and we're going through a very violent time. (U.S. Department of State)

What are the characteristics of this “New Middle East” that Rice and the West in general are referring to? Is the division that is taking place today inside Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine an indication of the “New Middle East”? Is the West still playing the Balfour game, the game of lands and are the Arabs still taking the shape of pillars of salt?

In an Article titled “Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look”, Ralph Peters, a retired United States Army Colonel, novelist and essayist said:

The most arbitrary and disorted borders in the world are in Africa and the Middle East. Drawn by self-intersted Europeans... We are dealing with colossal, man-made deformities that will not stop generating hatred and violence until they are corrected...Begin with the border issue most



sensitive to American readers: For Israel to have any hope of living in reasonable peace with its neighbors, it will have to return to its pre-1967 borders... Nearly 100 percent of Iraq's Kurds would vote for independence... As would the long-suffering Kurds of Turkey... As for the Kurds of Syria and Iran, they, too, would rush to join an independent Kurdistan if they could. The refusal by the world's legitimate democracies to champion Kurdish independence is a human-rights sin... And by the way: A Free Kurdistan, stretching from Diyarbakir through Tabriz, would be the most pro-Western state between Bulgaria and Japan... A just alignment in the region would leave Iraq's three Sunni-majority provinces as a truncated state that might eventually choose to unify with a Syria that loses its littoral to a Mediterranean-oriented Greater Lebanon: Phoenecia reborn. The Shia south of old Iraq would form the basis of an Arab Shia State... Yet, studying the revised map, in contrast to the map illustrating today's boundaries, offers some sense of the great wrongs borders drawn by Frenchmen and Englishmen in the 20th century... Meanwhile, our men and women in uniform will continue to fight for security from terrorism, for the prospect of democracy and for access to oil supplies in a region that is destined to fight itself...

Although the content of this article resembles the Sykes-Picot plan, the date of the article shows that it was written in July 2006 and not 1917. Peters continues the rest of his

article drawing new borders in the “Middle East” dividing it and creating new states such as Azerbaijan and Baluchistan. This article shows that colonialism and orientalism did not fade but are being covered in a different wrapper, namely “the war on terrorism” and the “spread of democracy in the Middle East”. Like most orientalists, Peters perceived the “Orientals” and the “Orient” as subjects that can be used to experiment “How a better Middle East would look” from a Western point of view. Peters arrogates to himself and his country the right to define the region and talk in the name of the Arab people. Ironically he used Sykes-Picot agreement to justify his attempt to rip the region, claiming that redrawing the boundaries is an attempt to mend what the Europeans had done. Although he addressed the need for Kurdish self-determination he completely ignored the Palestinian problem. Like the colonial powers, Peters is following the strategy of “divide and conquer.” To “correct” the borders in the “Middle East,” Peters is applying gerrymandering. In his plan, he is ‘cracking’ the Arab world into small minorities based on ethnicity and religious sects. Thus, Arabs will be divided to the extent that the term “Arab” would be meaningless since the region will not be composed of Arabs but of Assyrians (Iraq), Phoenicians (Lebanon), Pharaohs (Egypt) and Arameans (Syria). Peters went further than just suggesting redrawing the map of the “Middle East.” He provided a map that has been circulated around since mid-2006. In the same year, Peters wrote an article called “Last Gasp in Iraq”, in which he said the following:

I was convinced that the Middle East was so politically, socially, morally and intellectually stagnant that we had to risk intervention... Yet, for all our errors, we did give the Iraqis a unique chance to build a rule-of-law democracy. They preferred to indulge in old hatreds, confessional violence, ethnic bigotry and a culture of corruption. It appears that the cynics were right: Arab societies can't support democracy as we know it. And people get the government they deserve... The violence staining Baghdad's streets with gore isn't only a symptom of the Iraqi government's incompetence, but of the comprehensive inability of the Arab world to progress in any sphere of organized human endeavor.

This appalling statement carries with it the orientalist discourse, which has perpetually perceived the “Orient” and the “Orientals” as inferior. This discourse, which is premised on the superiority of the West, is being utilized to justify the war in Iraq and U.S. interference in the Arab world. Peters’ notion that “Arab societies can’t support democracy as we know it” is similar to Balfour’s statement, in which he argued that the Orientals do not understand the concept of self-government. Balfour used the term “self government”, for at that time the term “democracy” was not fashionable yet (Orientalism 33).

Edward Said believed that behind the scene, some Western scholars are nurturing and fostering these orientalist ideas that are being held and acted upon by government officials. Today, orientalism is being sustained by both Western and Arab

scholars. This new phenomenon of having Arab orientalist is what I call 'neo-orientalism' and which I will discuss later in detail. Let us now consider the following statements:

Why are most Arabs, unless forced by dire necessity to earn their livelihood with 'the sweat of their brow', so loath to undertake any work that dirties the hands? (Patai 121)

The all-encompassing preoccupation with sex in the Arabs mind emerges clearly in two manifestations...(Patai 133)

...In the Arab view of human nature, no person is supposed to be able to maintain incessant, uninterrupted control over himself. Any event that is outside routine everyday occurrence can trigger such a loss of control ... Once aroused, Arabs hostility will vent itself indiscriminately on all outsiders. (Patai 169-171)

These statements are taken from a book that has been described by Publisher's Weekly as "admirable", "full of insight and objective" (The Arab Mind). Likewise, The Washington Post found the book useful, "Its truth would appear to live on" (The Arab Mind). This book titled, The Arab Mind is considered to be "The Bible of the neo-cons on Arab behavior" and "The single most popular and widely read book on the Arabs in the US military" (Hersh). Although the author of the book, Raphael Patai died in 1996, his book has continued to be published and used. The Arab Mind was first published in 1973, revised in 1983 and since then it has been reprinted. In 2001, Norvell De Atkine,

director of Middle East studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center and School wrote the foreword of the present edition, which was published in 2002. “This book is worth being kept as a valuable reference for your library, to be read again and again, and never allowed to go out of print.” Indeed, the institutions that procreate orientalism will never allow such a book to go out of print (Series: Getting Into their Minds).

Ironically, in his book Patai utilized Arab novelists to argue that Arabs have a split personality. He quoted one of the characters in Halim Barakat’s novel, Return of the Flying Sailor to the Sea. The character said:

We are people who have lost their identity and their sense of manhood. Each of us is suffering from a split personality, especially in Lebanon. We are Arab and our education is in some cases French, in some cases Anglo-Saxon and in others Eastern-Mystic, a very strange mixture. We need to go back and search out our roots. We’re all schizophrenic...(Patai 214)

This quotation from Barakat’s novel carries with it a similar criticism and message to the three novels we have been discussing. It is clear that most of the Arab novelists are aware of the problems in the Arab society and are taking responsibility to educate their people and lift their societies from its state of decay. Thus, the question here is, what is the difference between these novelists who also criticize the Arab society in their works and Patai or any other orientalist scholar? It is important to mention here that Patai’s description of Arabs and Arab society is not all based on false beliefs and myths but most of it is true. In fact most of the issues he discussed in his book such as, Arab

stagnation and polarization had been highlighted by our novelists. This raises a lot of questions. First, why do we consider Patai an orientalist, while the novelists who seem to be doing the same work are considered to be political thinkers? What makes Patai an orientalist? Is it his Western identity? And are Western scholars prohibited from studying, describing and criticizing Arab society? The short answer to both of the latter two questions is-no. What makes Patai an orientalist is not his Western identity and Western scholars indeed do study, describe and criticize Arab society without being classified as orientalists. To answer the question, as to what makes Patai an orientalist, we have to go back to Edward Said's book Orientalism. There, Said wrote:

Any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies. Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. (6)

It is clear from Said's comment that orientalist discourse is not simply a set of lies but a formidable system of ideas in which there has been over many generations a great deal of material investment. Thus, the problem is not that orientalists create false information to represent the Orient and Orientals. The problem does not lie in the data that exists, which for the most part can be agreed upon. The problem lies in the interpretation of the data, the conclusions reached and the proposed use of this "created body of theory and

practice.” So to continue this analogy, the non-orientalist (such as our novelists), and the orientalist may agree on the fact that Arab society is in economic disarray. The divergence takes place in the next analytical step. The non-orientalist would either attribute this disarray to extrinsic factors such as historical experiences or attempt to find intrinsic factors in a manner that is the result of “understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes.” (Said, Preface to Orientalism 2). Mosteghanemi for example, who vigorously criticized Arabs in her novel and blamed them and held them responsible for lagging behind in economic and technological development, did not claim that Arabs are a homogenous group or that they are static and unchangeable. However, her criticism was constructive, in which she presented some solutions, such as the return of Arab intellectuals to their countries. The orientalist, on the other hand, would automatically attribute Arab stagnation to unchangeable intrinsic factors such as what is illustrated in the title of Patai’s book, The Arab Mind. This title implies that the Arab mind is a fixed, monolithic unchangeable entity. If according to the orientalist there is hope of change for this mostly fixed mind, then the prescription is equally paternalistic namely, to simply become Western or imitate the West. This prescription to become Western is used to control Arabs as was the case in Algerian history as described in chapter four. The “solution” presented by orientalists is opposite to the solutions given to us by the three novelists. All of our novelists were provoking Arabs to strengthen their national identity and unite. In *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, Zahran emphasizes the

importance of Arab unity through her protagonist Rayya, who was attached to Arab nationalism.

To illustrate the difference between the orientalist, such as Patai and our three novelists, let us examine the stance taken by Patai and Ahlam Mosteghanemi on the Arabic language. Patai states that the Arabic language is a dying language, that Arabs feel that their language is not useful in modern times, he said, “To admit to themselves [Arabs] that Arabic was an inferior medium, a language inadequate for the expression of many thoughts and things which had become important for them as a result of their French or English education” (327). Mosteghanemi goes in exactly the opposite direction. By writing her novel in Arabic, despite the attempt of the colonizer, France, to expunge the Arabic language from use in Algeria, Mosteghanemi demonstrates to herself, her generation, Arabs and orientalists alike that the language is alive and well and a useful medium to portray one’s ideas. Patai’s system is a discourse similar to that of the French in Algeria, whose aim appears to be destructive, namely to diminish the use of the Arabic language and replace it with Western languages. Mosteghanemi’s actions are not only constructive for her people; they fight back against Western orientalism. Thus, the differentiating feature between orientalist and our three novelists’ use of the information is that the former is destructive and the latter is constructive. The former is divisive and the latter is uniting. The former appears to work towards colonizing the Arab mind and the latter towards decolonizing the Arab mind. The former appears to be an attempt to erase Arab national identity whereas the latter is an attempt



to strengthen this identity. On every level the orientalists and our three novelists, begin with similar information but take it in diametrically opposite directions.

Another aspect of orientalist discourse, which reveals the subtle existence of an agenda is the description of Arab leaders. Here again, is a topic on which the novelists and the orientalists are diametrically opposed. The orientalist perspective is exemplified by Patai's statement on Arab leaders:

The political leaders of the Arab world are all westernized men, all know either English or French (occasionally better than Arabic), and all are inclined to measure the cultural, social and economic level of their countries by western standards rather than by their own time-honored traditions which they tend to consider outmoded.... Almost all the Arab political leaders are deeply influenced by the west. And being Westernized they cannot help looking with western eyes at the interests of their non-Westernized, traditional, muslim, Arab countrymen who constitute the majority of the population in every Arab state. Their task, therefore as they see it is twofold: to bring western-inspired innovations to their peoples and to reeducate them so that they should see in those innovations improvements and be willing to accept them. (328)

Here, the facts about Arab leaders are true, namely that they are men, that they are Westernized, speak western languages, and tend to see things from a western perspective. The interpretation and conclusions are opposite to what our three novelists,

is poor, even when reading from a script. He fails to represent his people in more than these superficial ways.

The novelists on the other hand, portray the Arab leaders just as they are seen in the Arab world by the majority of their people. In A Beggar at Damascus Gate, an Egyptian dissident yelled, “Those fascist dogs, CIA agents” (40). When Alex asks Rayya, “Who does he mean?” Rayya replied, “Arab regimes” (40). With good reason, the majority of Arab leaders are seen as doing the bidding of the West. When they speak Arabic with a thick British accent, it is no surprise that they are seen as transplants placed by the Western powers to control their populations.

#### The New Face of Colonialism and Orientalism

The term neocolonialism was coined by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first post-independence president. According to Nkrumah:

Neo-colonialism is... the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case. (xi)

Indeed, neocolonialism is a much more efficient system for controlling a country than colonialism which was costly to colonialist powers, such as France in Algeria. The

neocolonialist system of supporting pro-Western dictators against their populations generally requires little investment on the part of Western powers. Classically, the term neocolonialism refers to economic control but as Nkrumah states, it is much more than that:

...Imperialism simply switches tactics. Without a qualm it dispenses with its flags, and even with certain of its more hated expatriate officials. This means, so it claims, that it is 'giving' independence to its former subjects, to be followed by 'aid' for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about 'freedom', which has come to be known as neo-colonialism. (239)

Sometimes the system fails to do the job it was intended to do and classical colonialist strategies, such as regime change, become necessary. In the case of Iraq, both classical colonialist strategies (regime change), and neocolonialist language (freedom and democracy) are being used.

The prevailing political climate perpetuated by the regimes in the Arab world is described by Ahalm Mosteghanemi in *Memory in the Flesh*, "A human being spends his first years learning how to speak, and the Arab regimes teach him silence for the rest of his life" (15). This encapsulates the terminology used by Nkrumah, to describe neocolonialism, namely "Power without responsibility and exploitation without

redress.” The insinuation by Zahran in A Beggar at Damascus Gate, that the Arab leaders work for the CIA shows the fact that the Arab publics are fully aware that their leaders function primarily to perpetuate colonialism rather than serve their interest. Prior to his disillusionment, Khalid in Memory in the Flesh contributed to the neocolonialist system by working as head of press and publications in Algeria, censoring written material prior to its publication. When he realized this contribution, he said: “What prevents me, I ask myself, from exposing these foul and bloody political regimes, over whose crimes we kept silent” (99). Similarly, in Pillars of Salt, Samir Pasha, represents the neocolonialist, one who, like King Abdullah of Jordan is seen as a Westerner, not an Arab, “His gleaming white teeth and the long rubber boots which prevented his bare feet from touching the ground spoke of his foreignness” (153). Maha, who represents the Arab public, ends up in Mental hospital and having been taken there by Samir Pasha, who represents the Arab regimes, and her brother Daffash, who represents the collaborators. In the three novels, the reader is aware of the continuity of colonialism, the sense that colonial influence remains. This becomes apparent when we consider the fact that the novels were written in the 1990s long after the “independence” of these nations.

Like neocolonialism, where the colonial powers were replaced by indigenous neocolonialists, orientalism is now adopted by both Western and Arab scholars. The Arab scholars are more effective in delivering orientalist discourse, due to the fact that they slip under the radar of skepticism of Western scholars and their orientalist discourse among Arabs. As described by Ahmad Al-Sheikh, author of Arab

intellectuals and the West, orientalism today is practiced by Arabs themselves (AlJazeera). According to Al-Sheikh, neo-orientalism represents the highest stage of orientalism since it has superceded traditional Western orientalism. Al-Sheikh suggests that Arab orientalists are educated and live in the West and begin to view the Arab world from a Western viewpoint. In his analysis he suggests that Arabs who live in the West come under a great deal of pressure and some succumb to this by pleasing their western audience and beginning to behave like traditional orientalists. In fact, Al-Sheikh argues that Arabs should not be expending their energies on defending the Arab image in the West. Although the image is important and deserves to be defended, this should not be at the expense of building their nations. These scholars abound in the United States and are quite popular on U.S. media outlets.

Orientalism is the intellectual wing of political expansionism. It has been over a quarter century since Edward Said wrote his book Orientalism. Yet it is clear from our three novels, and events taking place today that orientalism, colonialism and the newer forms of each are alive and well today. Although there have been many changes in the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the West and the Arab world, these changes are superficial, and in some cases semantic. The fundamentals of orientalist discourse remain. They may take on different forms and may even be exercised by Arabs themselves but the basic discourse remains. The creation of the other and magnification of differences between the West and the rest as in the case of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, the description of Arabs, Arab language and culture as intrinsically inferior

to everything Western, the tendency to describe them as a monolithic unchangeable entity all remain. The belief that the West needs to “liberate” them and teach them “Western style democracy” is in the forefront today. The discourse still functions to justify, rally, and perpetuate the political, economic and military hegemony. In the time leading up to the war in Iraq, a great deal of misinformation was created in order to convince the American public to go to war. Where it was suitable, old discourse was recycled such as the use of the concept that “Arabs only understand force.” In fact, it was classical orientalists and neo-orientalists who influenced the current administration in its war planning. As Edward Said put it, “The major influences on George W Bush's Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped the American hawks to think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and the centuries-old Islamic decline which only American power could reverse”(Preface to *Orientalism* 3). There have been shifts in the relationship. There have been changes in the players, but the relative relationship remains the same. As Edward Said, presciently said, in *Orientalism* in 1978, “In a quiet constant way, orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7).

Although the colonial power/empire has changed, the discourse and the hegemony remain the same. One cannot expect the Empire-builders to change their behavior. They may change their presentation and modify the discourse to fit the time

and circumstances in order to convince their public that this empire is different. As Edward Said said in 2003: “Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires” (Preface to *Orientalism* 3). However we can expect more of ourselves.

### Beyond Orientalism

How do we proceed from here? To answer this question, I will return to Edward Said and to the three novelists. In his article “Preface to *Orientalism*”, Said reflected on his book in the context of the events of the preceding quarter century and focusing on recent events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His solution to fighting the empire-builders is “Worldly Humanism.” According to Said,

Humanism is centred upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and authority. And lastly, most important, humanism is the only, and I would go as far as to say the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history. (9).

This suggests that as individuals we need to actively utilize our analytical and intuitive capacities rather than passively following our leaders and media, which utilize a discourse with an unrevealed agenda.

The terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics such as "America," "the West" or "Islam" and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed. (8)

Said argues that this task will be difficult due to our desire for rapid results and our antipathy to the slow work of community.

Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and sceptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction. (8-9)

As Said's suggested, these novels demonstrate that literature is the raw material of politics. All three novels address important sociopolitical issues in their respective Arab societies. In each novel the characters represent individuals in their society as well as the relationship between groups and societies. For example, Rayya and Alex represent not only the relationship between two individuals, one Arab and the other Western but also the relationship between the Arab world and the West. Also, Khalid and Ahlam represent the relationship between two generations of the same society. Al Adjnabi represents the field orientalist and his relationship to the Arab world. The novelists use their characters to address the psychological and sociopolitical states of



citizens in these societies, which have been largely neglected. According to Ahlam Mosteghanemi, the author of Memory in the Flesh, “Perhaps one of the causes of our present problems is our neglect, after the revolution, of the emotional and psychological make-up of people and our preoccupation with agriculture and an exemplary economy” (In the House of Silence 82).

Edward Said suggests that one path to worldly humanism is the study of the literature of other cultures, in which, “the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign "other". And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's mission” (Preface to Orientalism 6). Our three novelists make it their primary goal to examine the emotional and psychological difficulties faced by characters representing members of their society. They demonstrate a commitment to nurturing the sociopolitical health of members of the society as a means of building a healthy society. In this way, they seem to adhere to Plato’s notion that “Society is a man writ large.” By addressing Western audiences, they provide these audiences the opportunity to make a place in their mind for a foreign “other” and in this way engage in Said’s worldly humanism.

As intellectuals, they also provide solutions to the problems faced by their societies. Their solution, like Said’s solution, places the responsibility on the individual for the overall betterment of their society. Khalid is urged to return to Algeria to help build his nation. He is urged to listen to his “subjective intuition” rather than received

ideas. Rayya returns to Palestine to help liberate her country from Israeli occupation. The symbols used by each author share a common theme. Each symbol is a solution for the problems of its society. In Transjordan of the 1920s, the society lacked the basis of a national identity. The characters and the country displayed identity confusion. The symbol used by Fadia Faqir as solution is a pillar, which represents a solid strong body. In Algeria, after liberation, there was alienation and detachment from their Arab identity. The Algerians were forced to speak French and they were disconnected from their language and history. The young generation was also disconnected from the older generation. The symbol utilized by Ahlam Mosteghanemi was the bridge, a much-needed connection that brought everyone together including those in exile. In Palestine, what is missing is a true dialogue. The missing dialogue is both between Palestinians and Israelis as well as Arabs and the West. The solution, here, is symbolized by a gate, Damascus Gate, an entry to Jerusalem's old city. A gate provides an opening in a wall or fence allowing bi-directional movement. It is interesting that Mr. Foster, who represents the solution, the positive example of a Western attitude conducive to true dialogue, meets Rayya at Damascus gate. Meanwhile, Alex never met Rayya in Palestine. It is important to note the symbolism of Palestine as the gate through which the relationship between the West and the Arab world can be improved. It will be noted that unlike orientalist discourse, the solutions suggested by the novelists adhere closely to Said's humanist solution for our complex world, to "concentrate on the slow working together

of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together” (Preface to Orientalism 7).

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