Geoffrey Nash

The Anglo-Arab Encounter

Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English

Peter Lang

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FOR MINA

Once again, for your understanding and patience…

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Introduction
The Anglo-Arab Encounter

In this book I will be examining the corpus of a group of writers from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Sudan who have taken the decision to incorporate Arab subjects and themes into the English language. There is a qualitative difference between Arabic literature, Arabic literature translated into English, and a literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arab background.[1] To explicate these differences and set out the parameters of my study I shall take Edward Said's term the 'Anglo-Arab encounter' as embodied in Anglophone fiction and autobiography by writers of Arab ethnicity. Overarching this category must be considered the formative influences on contemporary international literatures: the *postcolonial,* with its theorisation of inter-cultural relations by reference to the impact of colonialism and imperialism on non-Western literatures; the *internationalisation of literatures,* which is where the cutting-edge effects of globalisation impact today upon the production of writing for transnational markets; and *feminism*, in this case the issue of the transposition of specific Arab/Islamic feminisms (and the Western influences that went into their construction) into a literature composed for a non-Arab/Islamic audience. As far as Arab Anglophone writing is concerned, these conditions operate within the spaces first opened by the later twentieth century creation of international audiences and markets for non-Anglo-Saxon literatures in English (placing fiction by Arab writers in English in a similar context to that of African, Indian and other non Anglo-Saxon writers in English.)

1 Here it may be relevant to note the profile of Arabic literature in the West, tied up as it is with issues of translation. Said argued that this was hampered by a prevailing prejudice against Arabic literature in America (Said: 1990). Also, there is a widespread view that English translations of Arabic texts are often of poor quality. On both these issues see Salih Altoma (2005).

In addition to a thematic discussion of the specified texts attention will also be paid to the issue of writers' choice of language, expected audience and text reception. Contemporary Anglophone writers use English rather than Arabic as the language for their fiction/autobiography for a variety of reasons including personal preference, avoidance of cultural restriction and censorship, and to optimise exposure. For some ethnic Arab writers, embedded within an English-speaking environment either in their own country of origin or in Britain, English is virtually a native language and therefore a natural one to write in. Others, especially those for whom Arabic is their first language but who acquired English through the medium of education at a relatively late stage, may make a considered choice of English, aware that there will as a result be both losses and gains. Excluding the relatively small readership bilingual in Arabic and English, the writer must assume an audience predominantly Anglo-American or European in their cultural perspectives. Choosing to address such a readership necessitates cultural translation and all the problems inherent in trying to present an alien culture to the globally dominant one. This study will attempt to apply these insights to the topics under consideration. Though variegated and distinct, the work of each Anglophone writer of Arab origin contributes to a nexus of topics, the central link of which is the notion of Anglo-Arab encounter. Said foregrounded Arabs (supply: students, *émigrés*, immigrants, tourists and visitors) within an English setting dealing with English people, as central to such texts. The new crop of Arab writers in English engages with the West – primarily England – and in the process discrete identities, both Arab and English, are blurred, even hybridised.

Writing in 1992, Edward Said argued that while a considerable literature in English existed in the domains formerly colonised by Britain, in spite of its being once divided between Britain and France, the Arab world was an exception. Even compared with the literature in French produced in North Africa and Lebanon, the roster of writings by Arabs in English was on the whole unimpressive (Said: [1992] 2001, pp.405–7). In the decade and a half since these comments were written, the situation has been transformed. Ahdaf Soueif, whose novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, Said was reviewing when he wrote the above, has received increasing critical exposure. She would appear to

be the most commercially viable of a growing number of writers of Arab ethnicity who use English. (It might be worth pointing out that her publisher, Bloomsbury, also owns the Harry Potter series.) Soueif's literary output begins with the transitional collection of stories, *Aisha* (1983), and moves through an engagement with cross-cultural sexual politics in, *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992), *Sandpiper* (1996), and the part historical romance, *Map of Love* (1999). Jamal Mahjoub, whose first three pieces of English fiction were published in the Heinemann 'African Writers' series, has disclosed Sudanese perspectives to the Anglo-Arab encounter. His first novel, *The Rainmaker*, like Soueif's early writing, was composed in the 1980s (1989). Together with, *Wings of Dust* (1994), and, *In The Hour of Signs* (1996), it creates a trilogy of writings interweaving strands of Sudanese history from the age of Gordon and the Mahdi, through the period of decolonisation, ending in the late eighties. However, Mahjoub is a writer who is wary of categorisation in terms of ethnicity. *The Carrier* (1998) widens the scope of cross-cultural inquiry to include Arab North Africa and Northern Europe in the Renaissance, while *The Drift Latitudes* (2006) adopts as its central focus the experience of a successful young woman of mixed Jamaican-German parentage.

British-Palestinian writer Tony Hanania has written three novels that are broadly concerned with Levantine settings juxtaposed alongside seemingly incongruent British ones. His acclaimed novel, *Homesick* (1997), moves between English public school life and civil war in Lebanon. *Unreal City* (1999) fetches the westernised Lebanese hero back home where he joins the resistance movement, Hezbollah. Hanania's third novel, *Eros Island* (2000), presents again the central character of 'a young man of mixed parentage who is caught between the Middle East and the West, and who has a shaky sense of identity' (Tarbush: 2000, p.78). Jordanian writer and feminist, Fadia Faqir, engages with the struggle of Arab women against colonisation and indigenous patriarchy in her two strongly original novels, *Nisanit* (1987), and, *Pillars of Salt* (1994). In the latter work British involvement in Jordanian affairs takes the form of colonial army officers and a shadowy medical officer within the asylum where the novel's two main female protagonists are violently incarcerated. In the first decade

of the twenty-first century, a new phase in Faqir's fiction has emerged. Still challenging and experimental, her writing focuses on the migrant experience within the British context, while it carries over the concern with traditional patriarchal norms and their impact on Arab women on display in her earlier fiction. Leila Aboulela began publishing fiction at the beginning of the new century and while adopting similar topoi to the other Anglo-Arab writers, mixes migrant situations with changing neo-Muslim identity. Her debut novel, *The Translator* (2000), uses Scottish and Sudanese settings to highlight an Arab-Muslim woman's choice to establish a cross-cultural relationship with a Scottish academic on her own spiritual territory. This was followed by her collection of short stories, *Coloured Lights* (2001), which again mixes Sudanese and Scottish locations and probes cross-cultural relationships within a modern Islamic context. Aboulela's most recent novel, *Minaret* (2005), is ground-breaking in its representation of migrants endeavouring to establish a Muslim identity in London.

How can this sudden turn around – from the trickle of Anglophone novels by Arabs mentioned by Said in 1992, to the stream of authors and texts just cited – be accounted for? An effective way of responding to this question is, I suggest, to refer it to the frame of cultural translation pioneered a decade or so ago by Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett. Lefevere's study, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992), not only displaced the more narrowly based linguistic systems approach to translation, it instituted a systems theory of its own centred on the manner in which a literary canon in diverse cultures and periods is produced. Broadening the scope of translation to include alongside translators, editors, compilers of anthologies, and writers of literary histories and reference works, Lefevere promoted the concept of 'rewriting' to encompass all of these activities. By rewriting the text its position is reinforced or, if it is being introduced as a new text, confirmed into the canon. The system is presided over by the components of poetics, patronage and ideology; in the late twentieth century an 'undifferentiated' patronage applies, that is one in which the profit motive and the institutions that endeavour to enforce the poetics of the canon gain supremacy over the ideological component that was more operative in the past (Lefevere:

1992, p.19). Each participant in the process of rewriting is engaged in manipulation and power-play because 'all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way' (p.vii).

To situate the emergence of Anglo-Arab writing, it might be argued that we need look no further than the market. But that would be to leave out the important role institutional (or quasi-institutional) actors such as literary prize-giving committees, reviewers (and even academics) play in the valorising of literary texts. For example, as Roger Allen notes, the awarding of the Nobel prize for literature to the Egyptian writer Naguib Mafouz in 1988 'may be seen as a significant watershed', even though it was Mahfouz's pre-1967 novels that the committee specifically cited (Allen: 2001, p.205). Allen's point in fact underlines Lefevere's insistence on the vital role played both by poetics and ideology in canonisation, since Allen argues that 'the Western world's plaudits in 1988 for Naguib Mahfuz as the author of [*The Cairo Trilogy*] a family saga written in Arabic and published in 1956–57 do point to some interesting questions regarding cultural hegemony and future directions for the Arabic novel' (p.207)). Not only was the English translation of *The Trilogy* given space on Western bookshelves, Mahfouz was thereby confirmed as an international author of note, although Allen opines:

> none of those works written by the Nobel laureate in which he follows the more 'particularizing' trend […] by attempting to utilize the styles and structures of more indigenous [i.e., Arab] narratives […] – none of these translated works has earned a broad readership in European or Anglo-American markets (p.208).

(Some Arab critics went so far as to ask whether Mahfouz's apparent endorsement of the 1978 Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel did not also help weigh the balance in his favour for the Nobel committee.) If it was mainly a partial, 'westernised' Mahfouz who was well received by a Western readership, Anglo-Arab writers take note: a literature taken as too tied to the unfamiliar codes and preoccupations of Arabic literary culture would be unsuccessful unless it were domesticated to meet the expectations of a Western readership.

A further not unrelated dimension to the issue of the successful emergence of work by Arabs writing in English is embedded in the traumatic politico-cultural history of the Arab world in the twentieth century, which Allen outlines in his survey of the Arabic novel (Allen: 1995a). To the extent that Arab and Islamic-oriented events in recent history have impacted on the West, it might be argued, the level of interest they have raised feeds into a dissemination and consumption of texts that might be deemed to interface with (and even partially 'explain') those events, the most obvious recent instance being 11 September 2001. We would be justified in concluding this had a direct influence on the remarkable increase in sales of translations of the Qur'an in the United States and Europe. Similarly, the success in the United States of the novel, *The Kite Runner* (2005), by the Afghan-American writer Khaled Hoseini, is surely related to America's intervention against the Taliban regime in 2001. The emergence of Anglo-Arab writing in the last decade of the twentieth century could therefore be influenced by factors of this kind. To further apply Lefevere's argument, we might see in the breakthrough of a 'Third World' writer like Salman Rushdie via the institution of the British Booker prize in the mid-1980s, a process spectacularly inflected by the *Satanic Verses* affair at the end of the decade, an opening up of the increasingly sterile looking Anglo-American literary canon to writers from outside (Brennan: 1989). The 1990s, a decade which started with the Gulf War and which saw the West's lateral perception of the Middle East stimulated by the Oslo accords, terrorist attacks on foreign tourists in Egypt, and the emergence of Osama Bin Laden-style attacks on visible Western targets abroad, widened this space, making way for a new crop of Anglo-Arab writers to present 'insiders'' narratives apparently starting out from Arab and Islamic source cultures. Soueif's novel, *A Map of Love*, was placed on the Booker list for 1999, while other British-connected Arab authors also achieved prominence. Hanan al-Shaykh, Ghada Karmi, and Leila Aboulela, each had their work either serialised or presented and discussed on BBC radio in the early 2000s. All of this suggests that a combination of topicality, and the openness of publishers and prize committees to new 'ethnic' material, created an environment favourable to the rewriting of both Anglo-Arab and Arabic texts in translation into an enlarged literary

canon. However, as the case of Naguib Mahfouz demonstrates, the incorporation into the Western literary mainstream of texts by Arab writers, whether directly translated from Arabic or 'translated' in cultural terms by authors using English, more often than not comes at a price.

Colonialism, Migration and Diaspora

As with Maghrebi writers who choose to write in French, the decision of writers of Arab descent to use English – if less controversial – is nevertheless one that stimulates discussion. The generation or so of Arab writers that begins with Ahdaf Soueif was not the first to experiment with English. Several earlier generations, operating in what we would now term the colonial period, but often in very different contexts, produced a disparate corpus of English writings that may have had minimal influence on metropolitan London or New York, but nevertheless inscribe a specific period within Anglo-Arab relations. I have already discussed the political content of some of these writers' work – Ameen Rihani, George Antonius and Edward Atiyah – in an earlier study (Nash: 1998). However, a chapter has been devoted here to writers of the generation or so after them, whose work arguably focuses as much on the cultural and the aesthetic as the political. These are the Palestinians, Isaak Diqs and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and the Egyptian Waguih Ghali. My discussion of the these writers from an earlier phase of Anglo-Arab writing moves that category, in genealogical terms, from a time when such writing might have been thought of as an oddity, through the postcolonial era and into the world of confused, dissolving identities that is synonymous with the present period of globalisation.

Anglophone writers of Arab origin arguably represent a constituency that is even more difficult to categorise than Arab/Maghrebi writers in French. Maghrebi Francophone literature is, however, a useful object of comparison, since it holds out some key differences

from Anglophone writing by writers of Arab ethnic origin. These differences hinge on the factors of colonial policy and globalisation, and the impact of these on the Arabised societies of North Africa (*al-maghreb*) and the Arab Middle East (*al-mashreq*) respectively. French colonialism in North Africa – beginning in Algeria in 1830, in Tunisia in 1881, and Morocco in 1912 – has had profound and lasting effects on these societies. The French colonial policy of assimilation derived from the notion of a *mission civilisatrice* and the expectation that a class would emerge from among the colonised that was Francophile in taste and culture and predisposed towards French colonial rule. Indeed the policy did produce educated Francophone-speaking elites in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. At the same time, the French denigrated and did their best to eclipse the local Arabic traditions in these countries. A further factor behind the creation of Maghrebi Francophone writing was the fact that the Arabic language and its literature, with to some extent the exception of Tunisia, was not as widely diffused in North Africa – with its substantial Berber populations – as it was in the *mashreq*.

This set of conditions in Francophone North Africa produced important effects in the field of literature. As far as the period up to 1950 is concerned, ethnic Arabs and Berbers who had been assimilated into French culture produced writings in French that have often been described as seeing their native societies with a colonial eye (Monego: 1984, p.17).[2] However, the arrival in the 1950s – just as the Franco-Algerian war of independence raged – of Francophone Maghrebi writers such as Driss Chräibi, Mohammed Dib and Taha Ben Jelloun, 'caught in the socio-historical drama of colonisation' (Harter: 1998, p.9), testified to a love-hate relationship between the Maghrebi elite and France that continued long after. Driss Chräibi's novels oscillate between criticism of traditional, patriarchal Moroccan society in *Le Passé simple* (1954) and in later work criticism of the treatment of the Maghrebi immigrant communities in France. For Algerian feminist writer Assia Djebar, living as a literary 'exile' in France means being

2 The issue as to whether Muslim Algerian writers were assimilated to colonial codes is addressed by Zahia Salhi (1999) who opens out the debate over the Algerian novel pre-1950; see also Lucy Stone McNeece (1995, pp. 32–33).

linked to two worlds, one native the other metropolitan French, and belonging to neither.[3] In her autobiographical novel, *L'Amour, fantasia* (translated with the English title, 'Algerian Cavalcade'), she attempts to create polyphonic voices, including those of Algerian Arab women, whose oral language is transcribed and set alongside the standard French used by French officials and soldiers. This is one strategy among others by which Francophone writers have challenged the official language and culture of metropolitan France, including canonical French literature. According to Hargreaves (1999), 'the contours of a seemingly secure French national identity were the reverse side of the coin on which the face of *francophonie* was minted' (p.49). Today, the colonial inheritance continues to affect the Maghrebi migrant community in France, having a special impact on the second generation who are popularly known as 'Beurs' (Arab spelled in reverse). Arab Francophone writers were not given a choice in the matter of language. Deficient as they were during the period of colonisation in a formal education in Arabic, writers from the Francophone Maghrebi elite absorbed French language and culture through their education and on their arrival at maturity this constituted a *fait accompli*. Their embrace of the language and culture of France created that searing division that only the simultaneous inhabiting of the distinct and opposed cultures of the coloniser and the colonised can bring.

Overall, therefore, the effect of French colonisation was markedly different to the impact of the British on the countries of the Arab Middle East over which (excluding Lebanon and Syria where a strong French influence prevailed even before the mandate period of 1919–1940) they exercised informal control. These were never incorporated into a British-style system of education nor were they exposed to a widespread use of English during the colonial period (as was the case in the West Indies, Africa and the Indian subcontinent). While they

3 Assia Djebar's ambivalent attitude to the French language is exemplified in *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Algerian Cavalcade), in which she suggests for a Maghrebian woman to write in French is to strip bare and at the same time veil the self. On this issue see John Erickson (1998, pp.46–51), Belinda Jack (1995), and Samia Mehrez (1992, pp. 124–127).

may have been educated by colonial-style British institutions, for Arabs of either Egyptian-Sudanese origin or with links to the *mash-req*, this was when the governing British presence in their home country was either receding or had for some time been withdrawn. They thus became Anglophone writers largely without duress, choosing English more freely and as a result becoming attached to it in a far less intensely ambivalent manner than the Maghrebis were to French.

These considerations are particularly important when we consider the relative absence of a distinctively 'migrant' Anglophone literature written by writers of Arab ethnic origin. Put simply, there has in recent history (say up to the 1980s, and with the exception of the small Yemeni community) been very little migration into Britain of Arabs of working class/peasant origin. Needless to say, this is a very different situation from that obtaining in France, and even other European countries such as Germany and Italy.[4] As a consequence, there is in Britain no obvious division between writers from an educated Arab elite 'in exile' (strangers or é*trangers* as they are known in France) and those whose parents were first generation immigrants (*immigrés*) (Hargreaves: 1991, p.4). While Anglo-Arab writers may evince an awareness of the migrant predicament, their adoption of English is not so much forced upon them as a result of colonial policy or migration/ diaspora. It is more likely to be the outcome of a privileged education and therefore represents a freely chosen adherence to a foreign language and to a lesser extent its culture. For these reasons, Anglo-Arab writers can, except in isolated instances, hardly be compared to migrant writers in a multicultural context, whose writings demonstrate what Caryl Phillips, referring to African-Americans, terms 'twoness', that is: existing both as part of mainstream culture while at the same time being set apart on account of race, with the temptation to retreat

4 Arab migrant writing in Europe (with the exception of France) has yet to be analysed in terms of a discrete 'Arabness'. A more generic approach has been taken by Seyhan (2001), who argues for the existence of a category of writing by 'immigrants, exiles and transnational subjects' that is 'not the result of colonial experience but of migration, resettlement and redefinition of identity' (p. 12). This perspective enables her to discuss in the same context the German writings of Rafik Schami and Emine Sevgi Özdamar, who are of Syrian Arab and Turkish origins respectively.

from white rejection into the ghetto of 'black essentialism' (Phillips: 2002, pp.12–14). Neither do Anglo-Arab writers elect to identify themselves as belonging to a migrant minority of Arab ethnicity as do second-generation Arabs writing in French (the so-called 'Beurs'). Their fiction as a consequence does not have much to do with the struggle to gain acceptance and rights in the host nation/culture. Leila Ahmed, Ahdaf Soueif, Tony Hanania and Leila Aboulela each come from pro-British elites rather than poor immigrant families. Far from being migrants who would prefer to leave the ghetto and join the Anglophone cosmopolis, they sometimes seem to be asserting membership by right, and have impressive connections with Britain through education, or hybrid race, and visible cultural expertise to support their claim.

Postcolonialism and Minor Literature Perspectives

My method in this study is not to apply one theoretical position as the key to unlocking the meanings of Anglophone Arab writing. The writers discussed under this rubric are diverse and it is not claimed that they constitute a school or literary movement. In this section several possible theoretical approaches are discussed, and where it seems appropriate they reappear in the chapters dedicated to individual writers. One way of looking at the Anglophone Arab writers is to focus on their representation of Arab cultures and issues pertaining to Arab histories. In this respect they can hardly resist at least partial categorisation according to the culture/religion they bring with them from their respective national backgrounds, since so much space is devoted to these in their writings. While postcolonial models have only recently begun to be applied to modern Arabic Literature (e.g., Hassan: 2002; Al-Musawi: 2003), certain high-profile Arab intellectuals in particular have been for some time past locked into cultural debate with the West over the issue of Arab national and religious identities. Given the power, scope and influence of Edward Said's

argument in *Orientalism*, and the fact that the greater part of its analyses derives from Middle Eastern material, there is a sense in which, because of this work (and Said's other writings too) the colonial and postcolonial encounter in the Arab context has been inscribed into a specialised field. Discussion of a hybrid term like 'Anglo-Arab' (which as we have seen, Said himself proposed as a proper designation for a writer like Ahdaf Soueif) might therefore imply a dialogue – or more likely a contest – between two discrete cultures: British and Arab, which became engaged as a result of the imperialist age. Theorisation of the balance of that relationship is bound to be indebted to Said's articulation of its inequalities, resulting, he argued, from the West's history of colonial interference in the Middle East region. Adoption of English in itself implies a shifting of the terms of that engagement in that, as Said argued,

> Because of [its central role in Arab culture and history as the language of the Qur'an], and because it has always been associated with resistance to the imperialist incursions that have characterized Arab history since the late eighteenth century, Arabic has also acquired a uniquely contested position in modern culture, defended and extolled by its native speakers and writers, belittled, attacked and ignored by foreigners for whom it has represented a last defended bastion of Arabism and Islam (Said: 2001, p.317).

Paradoxically, however, as Wail Hassan has argued in a probing essay on the relationship between postcolonial theory and modern Arabic literature (Hassan: 2002), Arabic literature has largely been studied in the Western academy within the modes of analysis Said exposed as characteristic of Orientalism. Francophone Arab writing has on the other hand been accorded the accolade of being studied under the rubric of postcolonial literature. Hassan argues that postcolonial theory has continued to privilege literatures from former colonised territories that are written in English and French, the languages of the former colonial powers (p.45). Furthermore, 'in its very attempt to challenge Western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms of colonial discourse itself' (p.46). Hassan criticises postcolonial theory – which he connects to post-structuralism – from the perspective of its inapplicability or limited applicability to an understanding of Arabic

literature and culture. To adopt a postcolonial analysis of texts produced in the Arab world would imply assigning them to that larger abstract entity 'the postcolonial world', or 'non-West' which remains out there in a state of unknowableness (p.52).[5] With regard to the West's colonial interference with the Arab world, Hassan makes important points concerning the specificities of Arab cultural memory which, he argues, 'mark[] colonial history in the Arab world with a unique character, which should neither be theorized in terms of a universal postcolonial condition, nor elided in a unitary conception of "the postcolonial world"' (p.54). While postcolonial theory is a definite improvement on Orientalism, particularly in the way it focuses on the significance of colonialism and imperialism within literary debates, its inability, for example, to account for the complexities of Arab cultural politics – particularly developments such as Islamic fundamentalism – leads to its adoption of abstractions that are in some ways as mystifying as Orientalist ones.[6]

Hassan's remarks have obvious significance for Arabic literature, which he rightly points out has too often been schematised according to Western criteria, particularly with respect to periodisation (the use of romanticism, realism, modernism) and the attribution of categories such as 'Romantic' and 'neo-classical' (p.58). But could his insights be applied to Anglo-Arab writing as well, or is this to be seen as irredeemably fixed within the postcolonial stream on account of its employment of a language used by a metropolitan former colonial power? The answer may not be a straightforward one. To begin with, there are obvious issues to be raised regarding the dangers of stereotyping Arab cultural norms as well as Arab political memory by the

5 In insisting that postcolonialism is directly linked with post-structuralism as a production of Western postmodernity, Hassan is reiterating a point often made by critics of postcolonial theory; for a discussion that problematises the connection, see Pal Ahluwalia (2005).

6 Interestingly, in his adoption of postcolonial perspectives Al-Musawi prefers to 'construe a postcolonial stance within and *beyond* [my emphasis] th[e] immediate encounter [between coloniser and colonised]'. He chooses to focus on postcolonial Arabic texts for their 'narrative tendency to interrogate fundamentalist, traditionalist and colonialist scriptory traditions, as this particular narrative drive is basically geared toward subversion and demystification' (p. 27).

adoption of English – a language replete with European values and therefore colonial attitudes. Should using English constitute a weakening, strengthening, re-configuring (or even dissolution) of the contest Said describes above? Would the Arab writer in English have at the outset taken a step towards capitulation in giving up such a potent tool as the Arabic language in that struggle? Alternatively, to argue from a position very similar to that which valorises the adoption of French by Maghrebi women writers like Assia Djebar, does the use of English bring freedom from the restraints of traditional, patriarchal Arab culture, thereby providing Arab women, for example, with a voice and access to a wider readership? English, postcolonial theory argues, also has the potentialities for being used as a tool of resistance to colonial and neo-colonial codes, remoulded to express the pain of those on the receiving-end of imperialism. Again, where postcolonial analysis might score highly is in its employment of the term 'hybridity' to break down colonialism's Manichean aesthetic with its forms of representation that posit native inferiority as metaphysical reality (Jan-Mohamed: 1983).

While Anglo-Arab writers have rarely taken up fixed theoretical positions on these issues, they have nevertheless been very much alive to the language question. Ahdaf Soueif, for example, has stated that her adoption of English represents no act of subjugation or capitulation. She has followed the path of Said by using status gained in another field, in his case literary criticism in hers novel-writing, to move into a second career of political journalism (written in the first instance in English and covering much the same areas as Said did, viz. Palestine, the West's stereotype of the Arab/Muslim world, and so on). She writes – in the context of Palestine and the issue as to whether for an Arab to speak Hebrew represents a capitulation:

> I have often been asked whether I have a problem with English as the 'language of my oppressor'. I understand the question but I do not feel it; the British occupation was out of Egypt before I was born. English was the language of my first reading and I love it (Soueif: 2004, p.49).

No one, it might be argued, has privileged rights over a language; in a globalised environment, a writer of any origin can inhabit whichever

language s/he feels comfortable in and use it to fashion his/her own ideas and articulate his own needs. Unlike the Francophone Maghrebi writer, there is little sense that Soueif, or indeed other Anglo-Arab women writers like Leila Ahmed or Leila Aboulela, have been wrenched away from their native Arab identity by adopting English as a result of a colonial education.

Francophone literature is also engaged with the relationship between French history and postcolonial cultures, 'a relationship that is conceived in many ways' (Salhi, K: 2000, p.ix). Again, as already pointed out above, the connection between France and her former Arab colonies, and Britain and her quondam Arab 'protégés', differs to a crucial degree. It can hardly be said that Anglophone Arab writers remain fixated by the impact of Britain upon the histories of their countries of origin in the same way that Francophone writers are engaged in a 'dialectic determining the links between French as a language of historical, cultural development and a nation of torn identities with origins in French, Berber and Arabic societies' (*ibid*, p.x). It is possible, however, that something comparable to the complexity and ambivalence to be descried in the relationship of the Maghrebi writer to French, can be said to hold a presence in the case of an Anglophone writer like Jamal Mahjoub. Mahjoub is of mixed British/ Sudanese parentage and in his Sudan trilogy we can observe an intimate perspective on British culture as well as a specifically Sudanese interface with Britain that is connected to earlier socio-cultural trends, as well as an approach that is less individualistic than Soueif's writing and more aligned with the postcolonial canon. His second novel, *Wings of Dust*, is imbricated in postcolonial codes. Its adoption of a historical frame to represent the generation of Sudanese migrant-students in England during and immediately after the period of colonisation resembles V.S. Naipaul's *Mimic Men*, and its plumbing of the corruption of African politics pursuant to decolonisation allies the work with Achebe's novels of the 1960s. Mahjoub's writing, like many of his fellow Africans', could be said to approximate to Jameson's (admittedly much criticised) category of 'national allegory' (more closely, anyway, than other Anglo-Arab writers). In so-called 'Third World' fiction, Jameson argued, the individual always

represents the collective.[7] In *Wings of Dust* the story of Sharif and his friends could easily be read as an allegory suggestive of the experience of the generation that became tied up in the decolonisation of Africa. Not only can Sharif's individual story be said to allegorise that of the Sudanese elite as a whole, it includes in the peripheral figures he encounters in Africa, including the next generation in search of 'purity' and ready to invoke the old religious puritanism for new political purposes, an array of representative characters for whom the personal is indistinguishable from the political.

A further perspective that may repay investigation is that of the French critics Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They applied their theory of 'minor literature' originally to Franz Kafka in a study of his writing in 1976, but it might profitably be used in relation to Anglophone Arab writing given that writing's self-evident marginality in relation to a canon of what the Frenchmen term a 'major' (in this case English) literature. The notion of minor literatures has been especially enthusiastically taken up in the United States as a valuable theoretical underpinning for 'ethnic' American literature. Whether Deleuze and Guattari's theory sits more comfortably in this context than its original, that of a Jewish central European author who gave up Czech to write in German, has been questioned by Azade Seyhan in her study, *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001). Seyhan concentrates on different cases of migrant writing within Europe and America in order to privilege this as a new form of communication within the major languages, rather than merely a 'writing back' from the postcolonial peripheries.

7 Frederic Jameson, 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism' (1986). Jameson's argument has been attacked for its supposedly patronising assumptions that Third World societies are pre-modern (Ahmad: 1992) and its writers, engaged almost entirely with 'socially realistic' narrative strategies, are outside the aesthetic sophistication of metropolitan writers (Brennan: 1989, p. 37). Brennan's argument that the writings of the likes of Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, and Vargas Llosa evince an awareness of 'widely different traditions […] placing them within the same frame of reference [as sophisticated 'First World' authors]'(p.39), has been largely superseded by the immense body of postcolonial criticism built up over nearly two decades since his study was written. For a recent positive reading of Jameson's theory see Julie McGonegal (2005).

Her questioning of the validity of Deleuze and Guattari's extension of their theory to take in Black American writing is logical. Whereas they had argued: 'the first characteristic of a minor literature […] is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari: 1986, p.16), it is clear that far from being deterritorialised, Black American writing is rooted in its locale of origin. On the other hand, a hybrid Anglo-Arab writer like Tony Hanania interfaces equally well with the deterritorialised realities of life in the metropolises of Western Europe as with the upheavals of twentieth-century Middle Eastern history. What Caryl Phillips writes of his own relationship to St Kitts and northern England could as well be applied to Hanania's links with London, Beirut and southern Lebanon: 'I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don't belong. I am of, and not of, this place' (Phillips: 2002, p.3).

Another issue of Anglo-Arab writing Deleuze and Guattari's theory illuminates is that of language. The terminology they employ derives from a tetralinguistic model delineated by four functions: the *vernacular*; the *vehicular*; the *referential*; the *mythical*. It is useful to elucidate this by reference to their subject, Kafka who, they argue, used Czech as a rural or vernacular language; Yiddish, as 'a nomadic movement of deterritorialization that reworks German', and Prague German both as vehicular (the language of government, commerce) and referential (cultural), with Hebrew in the background as a mythic language. The language of Kafka's fiction, the major language with which he works, is German, and Deleuze and Guattari claim 'he makes it take flight on a line of escape […] He will push it toward a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth, that will be an absolute deterritorialization' (p.25). Of all the Anglo-Arab writers, Tony Hanania, I argue in chapter three, is the most aware of the outlandish possibilities of English, as he fuses recondite dictionary lexis with Lebanese vernacular, with Standard Arabic serving the mythic category. Where Kafka 'always takes [his Prague German] farther, to a greater degree of intensity, but in the direction of a new sobriety, a new and unexpected modification, a pitiless rectification, a straightening of the head' (pp.25–26), Hanania Arabises his English, investing it with extravagant metonymic equivalences that deliver it into a deterritorialised realm far beyond the bloodied terrain

out of which it grew. Hanania's novels also exemplify Deleuze and Guattari's statement that minor literature's 'cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it' (p.17). The political condition connects in turn with Deleuze and Guattari's third characteristic of minor literatures: 'everything takes on a collective value […] what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. The political domain has contaminated every statement' (*ibid*). The Frenchmen's telling remark about Kafka – '[his] solitude opens up everything going on in history today' (p.18) has, I think, a special resonance in the case of Hanania's fiction too.[8]

The Internationalisation of Literatures, Transculturality, and Translation

> They don't want to be inside that ghetto; they want to be part of the Anglophone cosmopolis.
> Elleke Boemer and John McLeod (2004)

A further context to Arabs writing in English is what has been called the internationalisation of literatures, the situation writers may find themselves in today whereby outlets for distribution of their work have become transnational and transcultural. Clearly the internationalisation of literatures offers the Arab writer, as it does the African, Caribbean, Indian, and Chinese writer, greater opportunities in reaching a wider readership, not to mention the financially lucrative rewards this may bring. (In 1997, a celebrated British novelist was reputed to have received a half million pound advance on his latest

8 Seyhan is right when she argues, contrary to Deleuze and Guattari, that a marked political orientation is absent in Kafka (pp.27–28).

book. At the same time, I asked the Egyptian writer, Gamal al-Ghitany, how much he made from his books. He merely shrugged his shoulders and laughed).[9] The benefits of being able to reach global audiences have, however, to be offset against dangers of damage to the writer's identity and credibility. According to Bernth Lindfors, in gaining an international readership, the African writer/scholar 'finds himself writing and teaching for foreigners, not to fellow Africans, and being evaluated by foreign standards'. Success brings a proportionate diminution in the impact s/he can expect to make on the minds of students from his/her own culture (Lindfors: 2000, p.157). The corollary of this is occlusion of writers who write in non-European languages. Arnab Chakladar points out that Indian literature in the Western academy remains largely and implicitly defined by English, not Indian languages, and instances the success of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as the trigger for a flood of publications by Indian writers in English. Rushdie's own negative evaluation of 'vernacular' literature supports the notion that 'apparently, an Indian novelist is one who lives outside India' (Chakladar: 2000, p.197). Indian critics have charged Indian-born writers who have achieved fame in the West with catering to a First World audience while still mining the Third World for fictional material, and argue that 'in hoping to be accepted among the mainstream of the majority of the population these writers only extend and perpetuate a colonial mentality' (Jussawalla: 1988, p.591).

To be part of the world free-market publishing scene can also have its down side, such as ghetto-isation as the token Zanzibarian or Malian writer and falling victim to 'the market-cycles of international competition, in which non-European writers become token representatives of the Third World, enter the limelight briefly, and then give way to the next round of sensational discoveries' (Dharwadker: 1996, p.67). Alternatively, the exchange of a national language for an international one can prove liberating. This is especially true in the case of

9 In noting that publishers of Arabic literature usually have small print-runs making rates of remuneration commensurately small, Robert Irwin (1996) states: 'it is more or less unknown for a[n Arabic] novelist to support himself by creative writing alone' (p. 37).

French and North African authors: 'French is a functional language used in writing as well as in intercommunal discourse. Being globally more accessible than Arabic, it has allowed Maghrebian francophone writers to acquire a wider international readership' (Mortimer: 2001, p.13). Moreover, 'apart from being more flexible than standard Arabic, French is also a medium in which writers can express themselves more freely than in their mother tongue' (*ibid*, p.15). As far as Arab women writers are concerned, Miriam Cooke has written of the price to be paid for discarding the bonds of censorship, tackling topics that were previously taboo, signing up with an international publisher – and being labelled westernised.[10]

> Does the celebration of an Arab woman's writing in the West necessarily contaminate both the writer and the message [she asks] so that the advantages gained from reaching a broader readership are outweighed by the risks of being accused of cultural betrayal and threatening national cohesion?' (Cooke: 2000, pp.27–28).

Each of the Anglo-Arab writers discussed may have had their own reasons for choosing to write in English rather than in Arabic, but it is difficult to sustain the proposition that the choice is a negligible one. 'A writer's preference of language makes a lot of difference, and a novel originally written in English or French has another target, another agenda [to one written in Arabic], but it certainly offers a glimpse into its own cultural context' (Al-Musawi: 2003, p.8). Tayeb Salih comments on writers who adopt the course of writing about Arab topics in English: 'It is a compromise ultimately. They have inevitably to lean towards the language they are writing in, a language which has its own rationale, its own logic. And their drawing of their characters, even the mode of expressing ideas, how much they are daring in their writing, is limited by this medium' (Shaheen: 2001, p.82). Unusually, from writing in French the Algerian writer Rachid Boudjedra reverted to Arabic because 'he recognized that much of Algerian experience was being lost in translation' (Serrano: 2001,

10 On the issue of the Arab writer and the censor see Mohammed Shaheen (1989) and Fadia Faqir (1998).

p.28). As Pakistani-British writer Rukhsana Ahmad, thinking of her decision to write in English and not her native Urdu, comments:

> Without a doubt it is not just your style, but also, the content of your work which is modified by the choice of language in which you choose to write. I am sure I would have approached issues differently and written much more about *some experiences on which English imposes a silence* (Ahmad, R: 2000, p.114; emphasis mine).

Ahmad does however point out the felicity with which Salman Rushdie 'not only transferred the linguistic patterns of Urdu quite uncannily into English, [but] he also demonstrated a strategy for transposing rhythms and intonations from the subcontinent into it so successfully' (*ibid*, p.113).[11] For her part, Ahdaf Soueif sees a similar malleability in English and both critics and readers from Arab backgrounds endorse her aptitude for transposing her Egyptian characters' idioms and colloquialisms into English dialogue.

Is it accurate to argue therefore that – in spite of the inevitable losses – there is a 'value-added' quality to writing about the Anglo-Arab encounter in English? The translator and Arabist, Peter Clark, seems to be moving in this direction when he writes of Anglophone Arab writers:

> Such a shift gives perspective to their own background. The use of English language in expressing Arab sentiment, technically easy [for writers like Faqir, Mahjoub and Soueif] is a reinforcement of a physical and psychological, but not emotional, detachment from the Arab subject matter of their narratives (Clark: 1998, p.75).

Could such practitioners be classified as cosmopolitans of the kind Homi Bhabha may have had in mind when coining a term such as the 'third space' from which 'Third World' writers might challenge 'colonial discourse' abstractions like 'The West'? Mahjoub has preferred the term 'Transcultural' to characterise a literature which he argues:

11 G.J.V. Prasad (1999) points out that 'Indian writers are […] not so much translating Indian language texts into English as using various strategies to make their works read like translations' (p. 54).

> demands more, both of reader and writer. It does not have the support of those cheering waving crowds who would like you to be European or Third World, Black, or African or Arab. It can rely only on that thin crack of light which lies between the spheres of reader and writer [...] Gradually that crack grows wider and where there was once only monochrome light, now there is a spectrum of colours (Mahjoub: 1997).

As suggested above, the commodification of literature can not but help exercise an allure that Arab writers – whether they write in Arabic or English – might find it hard to resist. If the benefits to writing in English are greater exposure and commensurately greater commercial success, the limitations are also clear to see. Tilting towards the West's image of the Orient – by 'exoticisation', or indulging a taste for its putative 'backwardness' or 'barbarism', or its availability as a site for erotic fantasy or mystery and romance is a temptation.[12] Nevertheless, writers like Faqir, Mahjoub and Hanania have required of their readers effort in endeavoring to decode the culturally unfamiliar, with, perhaps, the prize of a larger cross-cultural awareness and understanding that must surely be the more appropriate aim of the Anglo-Arab disclosure.

There is one further perspective I would like to interrogate for the light it might throw on Anglophone Arab writing, in particular for the way it reconfirms what has just been written. In discussing the choice (real or virtual) facing a writer of Arab ethnicity as to whether to write in Arabic or English, I wish to return to the matter of translation. A recent London symposium on Arabic translation organised by the British Council (in March 2006) established a need for better mechanisms for translating both classical and modern Arabic literature into English. This requirement was recognised not least by the Arab translators, novelists and poets attending, underlining the point that 'for many authors writing in other languages, the benchmark of success is to be translated into English' (Munday: 2001, p.154). However, since the 1990s the application of cultural, feminist and postcolonial theories to translation by such figures as André Lefevere, Gayatri Spivak and Lawrence Venuti, has strongly called into question the

12 Ahdaf Soueif specifically acknowledges this in an interview (Massad: 1998, p.86). On 'postcolonial exotic' see Graham Huggan (2001)

conditions surrounding production of English translations of foreign language texts. Lefevere argued that 'issues such as power, ideology, institution and manipulation' have long governed 'the acceptance or rejection, canonization or non-canonization of literary works' (Lefevere: 1992, p.2). Translators were involved in 'rewriting literature and governing its consumption by the general public' (Munday, p.128). Spivak's argument – which begins by taking to task Western feminists for demanding Third World women's writings 'must be made to speak English' (Spivak: 2000, p.399) – develops the point that from wherever they originate such writings are homogenised for the benefit of a Western readership.Making the same point as Chakladar, she adds: 'Sometimes Indian women writing means American women or British women writing, except for national *origin*' (p.405; emphasis in original).

The interposition of power asymmetry between the non-European source text and its translated English version differs little today from the colonial past, according to Spivak. She calls for the translator to 'surrender herself to the linguistic rhetoricity of the original text' as well as to 'be able to discriminate on the terrain of the original' – that is to know the difference between able and mediocre writers in the source language (*ibid*). In his critical work on translation theory, Lawrence Venuti re-posits this imbalance and the challenge it presents to translators by what he terms 'the invisibility of the translator'. This is produced by the publishers' demand that translations show above all the quality of 'readability', that they remove 'any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities' from the source text (Venuti, quoted in Munday, p.146). Venuti terms this excision of foreignness from published translations 'domestication', and argues that it amounts to 'an ethno-centric reduction of the foreign text to [Anglo-American] target-language cultural values' (*ibid*).[13] Like Spivak, he wants translators to be alive to the pressure to domesticate unfamiliar texts, advocating a strategy he calls 'foreignising' or 'resistancy', that is:

13 Some have criticised Anglo-American translations of Arabic writing for this sort of domestication of Arab and Islamic issues. See for example Amal Amireh's article, 'Framing Nawal El Saadawi, Arab Feminism in a Transnational World' (Amireh: 2001).

> a non-fluent or estranging translation style designed to make visible the presence of the translator by highlighting the foreign identity of the S[ource] T[ext] and protecting it from the ideological dominance of the target culture (Munday, p.147).

Venuti's translation paradigm is significant for Anglo-Arab writing in several key respects. I shall argue that the position of an author of Arab ethnicity writing in English can be compared to that of Venuti's translator. S/he may be tempted to adopt a stance of 'invisibility' and by underplaying the differences between Arab and British cultures domesticate the foreignness of her Arab material so as to insure her work's readability for an Anglo-American audience. Alternatively, by incorporating into her writing a strategy of resistance, she may highlight the foreignness of her source material – not by orientalising or exoticising it, which would only be to conform to the expectations of her readership – but by foregrounding its structure and syntax, whether linguistic or cultural. In this study I hope to show both how some of the first Arab writers in English performed this almost unreflectively, owing to the closeness of their writing to Arabic codes, and how others did so more deliberately, either as a point of departure (see my discussion of Soueif's *Aisha* in chapter two), or as a means of constructing hybridity and deterritorialising their English writing (as in Hanania's work in chapter three), or as a challenge to an English readership by guarding the foreignness of their material and in the process coming closest to Venuti's prescription (Faqir's writing, discussed in chapter four).

Feminist perspectives in Anglo-Arab women's writing

It is no accident that the roll call of writers discussed in this study displays a preponderance of women. In contemporary Arabic literature women's voices are increasingly heard, and Nawal al-Sa'dawi and Hanan al-Shaykh are amongst the best-known writers in Arabic in the West and, not coincidently, the most translated. The parallel between

Arab Anglophone and Maghrebi Francophone writing, specifically when taking into account gender inflection, has already been touched on above. Similar considerations of freedom of expression undoubtedly play their part in the composition of both literatures, as well, it should be added, as the commercial viability of publications in French or English written by Arab women that might be taken as 'reports' on the situation of their gender within the respective Arab national societies. It is important to stress that a variety of positions with respect to feminism, nation, religion and identity are to be found in Anglophone Arab women's writings. This being the case, it is doubtful whether, in discussing this literary production, much mileage is to be extracted from over-emphasis of the notion of its being a conduit of 'Third World subaltern women'. There is no uniformity either over the debate as to which position should be taken up (if one is to be taken at all) on an issue which has naturally enough exercised Algerian women writers: religious fundamentalism and its treatment of women.[14] Although they leave no doubt as to her secular feminist orientation, Ahdaf Soueif's writings for the most part steer clear of Islamic topics, except to rewrite them into the Egyptian cultural struggle with colonialism and neo-colonialism. As a prominent and influential writer on women within Islamic societies past and present who has developed an individual feminist position of her own, Soueif's compatriot Leila Ahmed rewrites women's histories by way of oral family and cultural memory in her autobiography, *A Border Passage: from Cairo to America*. Ahmed's mix of women's traditional oral Islam and modern feminism is quite unlike the feminised Islam of Leila Aboulela – a writer from a later generation – whose fiction is attuned to emerging female Muslim voices within the migrant communities of the West.

Fadia Faqir's writing is closer than any of the above to a recognisable Middle Eastern feminist encoding in the sense that she engages with feminisms of the region that, as Deniz Kandiyoti puts it, 'have been both intensely local, grappling with their own histories and

14 In the new Algerian women's voices (expressed in French) 'writing is equated with survival, and for the victims of militant fundamentalist violence it constitutes a form of remembering' (Mortimer: 2001, p. 8).

specificities, and international, in that they have been in dialogue, both collaborative and adversarial, with broader currents of feminism and activism' (Kandiyoti: 1996, p.7) Editor of an important series of translations of Arabic women's autobiography and fiction, Faqir's own novels are taut articulations of the predicament of Arab – especially Bedouin – women caught between the conflicting but dual patriarchal forces of colonialism and nation. The localised conception extends to Faqir's highly individual style of writing which makes little concession to an Anglophone readership in its attempt to encode Arab meanings. If her writing were to be judged according to the typology for women's narrative in modern Arabic literature developed by Sabry Hafez from the schematisations of feminist literary critics like Elaine Showalter, Hélène Cixious, and Julia Kristeva, it would not be that easy to categorise. Allowing for the variation in the socio-cultural environments in Arabic-speaking countries as various as Kuwait and Egypt, Hafez (1993) takes Showalter's well-known division of women's literature into *feminine*, *feminist*, and *female* stages, and applies it to women writers in Arabic.[15] The message of Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*, consisting of a strident protest against patriarchal standards and values, would appear to place the text firmly in the 'feminist' camp.Maha's refusal to prepare food for the British killers of her husband Harb represents an anti-colonial stand that takes on a gendered signification because of her brother's support for the British. The combination of British colonial power and the patriarchal authority of the village lead directly to Maha's incarceration in an asylum

15 Hafez employs three contemporary women writers to demonstrate the respective categories: the Kuwaiti Layla al-Uthman (feminine), and the Egyptians Nawal al-Sa'dawi (feminist) and Salwa Bakr (female). If the first stage is to be associated with the literature produced roughly in the period 1880–1930 by upper class women of Egypt and the Levant imitating the dominant literary discourse; the second, coinciding with the spread of education to the urbanised middle-class during the eras of decolonisation and Arab nationalism from the 1930s to the1970s, advanced an adversarial message demanding autonomy vis-à-vis patriarchy; the last is a (more contemporary) style of writing demonstrating release from some of the dependency of opposition, and embarks on a journey of self-awareness in which the woman writer is 'now relatively free to express female "experience"' (El Sadda: 1996, p. 129).

presided over by a British doctor. While these incidents may possess confrontational Sa'dawian (*feminist*) overtones, *Pillars of Salt* is softened by contexts demonstrating a sisterly collaboration not unlike those found in the novels of the Egyptian writer Salwa Bakr, whose work has been celebrated for its *female* characteristics by several critics.[16]

Bakr's novel, *The Golden Chariot*, is a text that aptly fits into that category of writing on account of its portrayal of women's experience apart from the dependency of opposition to men. *The Golden Chariot* was published in English translation (1995) in the Garnet series edited by Fadia Faqir. In her introduction, Faqir describes the prison in which the novel is set as 'a haven. Salwa Bakr creates a space in a women's prison outside the traditional private and public spaces. The imposed roles of daughters, wives and mothers subservient to fathers, husbands and sons have no relevance here. The women prisoners get rid of the masks that a patriarchal society imposes on them' (p.vi). Faqir's own fiction, with its unaccommodating feminist argument with native patriarchy – continued in, *My Name is Salma*, a novel about a Bedouin girl who flees to Britain to escape becoming victim to an 'honour killing' – may tread the thin line of promoting the cause of underprivileged Arab women and 'reaffirm[ing] stereotypes of [the Third World] as underdeveloped and backward' (Amireh: 2001, p.42). In Faqir's defence I would argue that her writings rarely descend to the level of stereotype, that her vividly alive central women protagonists – joint victims of Arab and Western male chauvinism – break the conventional patriarchal moulds for female identity and convincingly recast the voices of suppressed women.

16 On Bakr's 'female' writing see Hafez (1993), El Sadda (1996), and Al-Nowaihi (2001).

Outline of chapters

1: Connections and Disconnections: from Arabic to English

This chapter discusses English fiction written by Arabs mainly up to the middle of the twentieth century focusing especially on the 1960s. It begins by contrasting the French fiction of Maghrebi authors that predates the decolonisation period of the 1950s and has often been said to 'see with a colonial eye'. Both Anglophone and Francophone texts on the cusp of the colonial period raise critical issues with respect to the degree of their conversancy with the aesthetic forms of the European novel. Aside from an entirely anglicised Arab writer like Edward Atiyah, whose fiction employed colonial tropes of backwardness in relation to traditional Muslim society, other Arab writers in English of roughly the same period demonstrate a far closer connection with Arabic patterns. These might be translated into English, either as forms of traditional storytelling and nostalgia for the past (Isaak Diqs, *A Bedouin Childhood*), or as the contemporary alienation of Arab intellectuals from the politics of postcolonial Arab societies (Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club*; Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street*.) Connection with Arabic forms and/or ways of thinking is not totally absent in the early production of writers like Soueif and Faqir. In addition, one Arabic text from the 1960s combines traditional storytelling devices with exploration of topical postcolonial issues that looked forward to the Anglo-Arab encounter: Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* is an excellent analogue to later Arab Anglophone fiction even if it is composed in Arabic.

2: Ahdaf Soueif: England, Egypt, sexual politics.

Soueif's first published piece of English writing, *Aisha*, remains connected to traditional Arabic forms of narrative, while at the same time displaying Orientalist features in its presentation of the bizarre, the

exotic, and the violent in ostensibly 'traditional' Egyptian episodes. If her use of these traditional forms was intended to constitute formalistic innovation challenging her Western readership, Soueif drops them altogether in her first formal English novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*. Autobiographical strands in *Aisha* reappear in the later work that seeks, not always successfully, to combine the private and the public by simultaneously writing the individual (through the novel's chief protagonist, Asya Ulama) and the nation (Egypt/Arabia). Problematic here is Asya's elite social background and engagement in cross-cultural (especially sexual) experiences that can hardly claim to be representative of the conservative, predominantly Islamic culture of Egypt. Orientalist tropes reappear, this time with respect to a sexual encounter in which the Western male appropriates the Egyptian female to satisfy his image of exotic Eastern sexuality. Some have seen in the ending of *Eye of the Sun* a feminist inflection that Soueif allows more pointed expression in 'The Water-Heater,' one of the short stories in the collection, *Sandpiper*. Similar love elements to *Eye of the Sun* are reconfigured in *The Map of Love*, albeit through the unashamedly European genre of historical romance (revisiting Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*). A Victorian love affair between a male Egyptian aristocrat and a female English aristocrat is doubled by a modern-day liaison between an American woman and a Palestinian/ Egyptian man. Sitting awkwardly alongside the romance are the politics of both epochs, which Soueif inscribes with one eye on postcolonial perspectives, and another on an elitist absorption in European culture. By analysis of the ambiguities of Soueif's fiction, I endeavour to tease out her attitudes towards such diverse topics as postcolonial thought, representation of Islamism, and the possibilities of cross-cultural understanding.

3: Jamal Mahjoub and Tony Hanania: unravelling Anglo-Arab hybridity

Jamal Mahjoub's and Tony Hanania's fiction focuses on specific Arab societies under stress in Sudan and the Levant. Main protagonists are often, like the authors themselves, of mixed Arab-English race. This

chapter analyses the novelists' creation of situations in which their characters' English/Arab experience leads to a probing of identities. In both *Navigation of a Rainmaker* and *Homesick*, Arab identity is mixed/merged with a British one, either by education, intimacy of association, or racial hybridity, giving rise to defamiliarised perspectives and the emergence of re-formed individual loyalties under pressure. Past colonial and recent postcolonial situations in which British and Arab peoples have interfaced and engaged in conflict have significant bearing on how the Anglophone Arab writer negotiates the present/rewrites the past. This engagement can be seen both in terms of Orientalism or the West's image of the Arab East, and the shadowing of the public by the private in rewritings of imperialism/Western intrusion that are intimately connected to the writing of nation allegory. Other critical perspectives that offer insights are in Mahjoub's case postcolonial theory, and in Hanania's Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of minor literature. Intertexts to Mahjoub's novels are as likely to be African, Black British or French as they are Arabic, as they probe the corruption of native regimes and the pleasures and deracination of exile. In each of his novels discussed a motif straining toward transculturation and rebirth can be seen in the form of individuals struggling to move beyond the boundaries of their own societies and epochs. Hanania, on the other hand, explores the Britain-Levant connection by incorporation of original Arabic lexis together with ironically recycled Orientalist tropes. He uses language as a tool to deterritorialise both Western and Middle Eastern landscapes. Through his interrogation of how Arab and British characters engage with the Palestinian and Lebanese Civil War, and how Palestinian/Lebanese refugees negotiate being in Britain, Hanania situates his narrators in the interface of cultures and succeeds in challenging the notion of the purity of the metropolitan, former colonising culture.

4: Fadia Faqir: Women's choices/women's resistance

In her various writings, Fadia Faqir develops the Anglo-Arab encounter into new areas. Her exploration of the dual themes of political resistance and the predicament of Arab women caught between Arab

patriarchy and nativism on the one hand and Western colonialism on the other is set within the domain of 'Third World' feminist discourse. *Pillars of Salt*, arguably, represents a novelistic treatment of these issues from an Arab feminist perspective as subtle as anything to be found in Arabic fiction. Certainly, Faqir adopts a far less didactic format than al-Sa'dawi, while in her imaginative experimentation her approach is comparable to that of the contemporary Egyptian novelist, Salwa Bakr. Stylistic innovation in *Pillars of Salt* can be seen in the manner in which Faqir, like Tayib Salih, adopts traditional oral Arabic narrative forms, but uses them to subvert patriarchy and traditionalism. The scope of her latest work is cross-cultural in context as well as form, and like the work of Mahjoub and Hanania relentlessly probes boundaries and at the same time delivers challenging, painful and, to the 'host' society, uncomfortable truths about the migrant experience.

5. Leila Aboulela: Islam and globalisation

In contrast to Fadia Faqir's strident feminist radicalism, Leila Aboulela incorporates a new, feminised Islamic thematic within a mainstream of 'Third World' women's writing, using intertexts as various as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and Tayeb Salih's *Wedding of Zein*. Though she eschews the realism with which Soueif inscribes cross-cultural sexual encounters, like her she uses romantic frames but sets them within the migrant experience. Aboulela's work is particularly interesting for its incorporation of late twentieth/early twenty-first century neo-Muslim perspectives, which work out of and pass beyond ethnic traditionalism (of her native Sudan) and stress a 'born-again' religiosity. The heroine of *Minaret*, in particular, is a Sudanese woman from an elite background who undergoes re-conversion to Islam while in exile London. Aboulela's use of the novel in English to present largely non-British characters at the cutting edge of developments in the British Muslim migrant communities is discussed in terms of the sociologist Olivier Roy's conceptualisation of a globalised Islam.

6. *Arab Women's autobiography and memoir in English*

Historically, autobiography has been a form of writing largely confined to men, as was certainly the case in Arabic literature until the twentieth century when writers like Hoda Sha'rawi and Fadwa Tuqan produced influential exemplars of the genre. This chapter sets the autobiographical English writings of Laila Abou Saif, Leila Ahmed, Ghada Karmi and Jean Makdisi alongside women's Arabic autobiographies in order to articulate some of the key distinguishing factors of Anglophone Arab writing. The choice of English is almost an inevitable one given the writers' educational backgrounds, their condition either as members of an Arab diaspora, or as long term residents in Anglophone environments, and the globalised world in which their texts have been written. Arab women's autobiographies both in English and Arabic start out from similar gender restrictions. Such autobiography frequently begins as childhood memoir which, especially in the English versions, record intercultural engagement both through education and acquired cultural tastes, in part interposed or imposed by the presence of colonial European powers within Arab societies. A text like Ahmed's *A Border Passage, From Cairo to America*, announces its subject's transmigration from Egyptian to Western culture, engaged by now familiar notions of mixed identity and exposure to cultural deracination. Laila Abou Saif's *A Bridge Through Time* can be read as a text that antagonises traditional Middle Eastern notions of female representation. Feminist and postcolonial issues are studied and rephrased according to Arab women's personal experience and predilections. From privileged backgrounds, each writer emerges from these formative exchanges into a position of enfranchisement, memoir opening a space for the investigation and inscription of individual and collective memory. The writers have been able to excavate and valorise the lives of their female relatives and compatriots and partially recreate female voices absent from official histories as exemplified by Makdisi's attempt to revive the historical social and individual circumstances constitutive of the lives of her mother and grandmother in *Teta, Mother and Me*. Political events in the Arab world also have a specific bearing on writing exile in Karmi's *In Search of Fatima*, a narrative that inscribes a diasporic

Palestinian presence at the metropolitan heart of the British empire, and inscribing Palestinian memory in the English language reinstates a missing episode from Britain's colonial history. Arab women's auto-biography in English is in many ways seen to be an epitome for Arab Anglophone writing in general in the manner in which it inscribes the thematic and formal challenges and possibilities such writing opens up.

Chapter 1
Connections and Disconnections: From Arabic to English

The pattern of Maghrebi fiction in French in the first half of the twentieth century has already been touched upon in the introduction. Although debate as to its worth is still current, the influence of the colonial context clearly has a bearing on how it is viewed. Joan Phyllis Monego argues for the limitations of native Maghrebi writers of this period in grasping 'many subtleties of the imported art form and [...] the finer parts of structure and form. Even the Western way of thinking was alien to them. In content too the works of the native writers were restricted.' Written for a French-reading public as these texts clearly were, they often 'emphasized the ethnographic and folkloric aspects of North Africa thereby appealing to the Frenchman's yearning for the exotic' (Monego: 1984, p. 17). I would argue that this pitfall is not limited to bilingual writers of the colonial period alone: the temptation to import Orientalist tropes into their fiction has also faced Anglophone novelists working in postcolonial moments and environments. I intend to approach the issue of these Arab writers' conversancy with the European novel form and the ease with which they were able to compose in a European language from a slightly different perspective. In the case of the first Anglophone Arab writers in English, these, in comparison with the Maghrebi writers who had been educated in French rather than Arabic, often possessed a superior grasp of Arabic literary language and forms.

To what extent then do Arabic models and patterns of thought linger or leave their traces in Anglophone fiction? I intend to interrogate the genealogy of this writing partially in terms of Arabic forms which to varying degrees remain linked to a different referential system: that of an Arabic system of culture (Bassnett: 2000, chap.1). This cultural referent within Anglophone fiction by Arabs, as well as the overarching situational and thematic form which I have termed

'the Anglo-Arab encounter', will be essential to my discussion in this chapter. It would, however, be wrong to imply that there is in operation here some sort of organic transition from Arabic, smooth or traumatic as the case might be, to Anglophone writing. As with the situation of an Indian writer writing in English, the issue of bilingualism may be of significance with respect to the textual strategies adopted by an Anglophone writer of Arab origin. That is to say: how competent is this writer in both languages – would he or she have been able to write in Arabic if s/he had chosen? What reasons lay behind the decision to write in English? If, as is most likely the case, Arabic cultural referents impact on the Anglophone text, are they incorporated merely as 'local colour', or with the aim of challenging the Western reader through a process of defamiliarisation, or, viewing the text as a translation, what Venuti terms 'foreignisation'? The position of the writer may be one in which the reader's cultural assumptions are being challenged, or s/he may have made the decision to 'conform to the dominant audience's culture, linguistic and literary expectations' (Tymoczko: 1999, p.30).

The earliest novel by a native Arabic speaker is an oddity. For a start, it pre-dates by several years the generally accepted earliest canonical novel in Arabic, *Zeyneb*, by the Egyptian writer, Muhammad Husayn Haykal. Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, it could be argued, is a piece of American emigrant literature, though it begins and ends within a Syro-Lebanese setting, and is eager to propound, among other topics, Sufi and Pan-Arab messages. The eponymous hero is a Lebanese migrant to New York who learns to survive in America through peddling gaudy trinkets and exploiting his exotic oriental attraction to American women until the political and philosophical currents of the day lead him back to the East and into propagandising for the Young Turk revolution. Rihani's treatment of a cross-cultural relationship between – in this instance – an American woman and an Arab (Lebanese) man is forerunner of both later Arabic and Anglophone writing.[1] Steeped in Anglo-Saxon Romantic inter-

1 Nedal Al-Mousa ((1993) cites a number of Arabic novels in which the hero travels to the West and there 'undergoes experiences, inevitably including love affairs, which are part of his initiation into life' (p.224). This pattern can be

texts, and at the same time conscious of Ottoman and Syro-Lebanese linguistic and cultural forms, Rihani's novel stands out as a piece of innovative and experimental writing which – though it was imitated in other English writings by members of the Arab-American *mahjar* school – established no lasting influence.[2]

In contrast, the novels of the Lebanese-born, Cambridge-educated political writer, Edward Atiyah, are entirely conventional in their use of narrative style, dialogue and plot. Atiyah married a Scottish woman, settled in England, and sired two sons who have had eminent academic careers, and for all intents and purposes wrote like a British novelist. So far is this the case that his most commercially successful production, *The Thin Line* (1951), is an exclusively English home-counties melodrama with no Arab content whatsoever. However, a Sudanese setting is to be found in *Black Vanguard*, a novel which develops out of the colonial context (Atiyah had worked for the British as a political agent in Sudan in the 1920s) and has as its main protagonist an Oxbridge-educated Sudanese, Mahmud, who rejects the harem-world of his native womenfolk and marries a Scotswoman with whom he has greater cultural affinity. In its treatment of the colonial issue, the novel is the polar opposite of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, as well as Jamal Mahjub's *Wings of Dust*. Atiyah unashamedly advocates the westernisation of backward Arab societies, and his novel of Lebanese social manners, *Lebanon Paradise*, has the message that Arab Muslims must catch up with Arab Christians and establish with them an enlightened pro-Western Arab modernism in order to recuperate the catastrophic effects of Zionism.[3]

I now wish to turn to a small group of novels by Arabs, written in English during a relatively distinct period – the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties – constituting, depending on one's perspective, either an overture to the 'fully-fledged' Anglophone fiction of the Anglo-Arab writers that began in the eighties, or a fortuitous handful of disparate texts. They are: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Hunters in a Narrow Street*,

extended beyond what she terms 'the Arabic *bildungsroman*' to include Arab women's memoir and Anglo-Arab autobiographical fiction.

2 See Nash (1998), chap. 2.

3 See *ibid*, chap. 5.

Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club*, and *A Bedouin Childhood* by Isaak Diqs. In her discussion of these novels, Hilary Kilpatrick (1992) argues for a comparative approach that would set them in the context of both the English and Arabic literary traditions, and, deciding not to privilege the matter of language, looks instead at their intertextuality with Arabic literature. From this standpoint, although last in terms of the chronology of its publication, Diqs' piece is perhaps the easiest to categorise. As its title suggests, this is the account of his early years by a young Bedouin (Palestinian) Arab. From the point of view of poetics, it is also the closest to Arabic literature of the three. In particular, Kilpatrick notes the following congruities: i) The work is more a collection of short stories than a novel, or a series of pieces that she compares with the traditional Arabic narrative style. The chapters are anecdotal in tone and structure, and independent in themselves (narrating incidents or episodes witnessed by the storyteller first of all from the daily life of his tribe and later on in town life when at school). ii) The traditional anecdotal *akhbar* (lit. 'news-relaying') style structures each chapter with a lengthy introduction followed by a short climax and no follow-up. iii) The stories each 'relate to a few central themes' (p.49) – the alienating effect of Western ways on a traditional non-Western society, the 'disappearance of the ageless Bedouin way of life', and the Palestine exodus of 1948 and the consequent plight of the refugees. Each of these themes is dealt with in Arabic literature. The elegiac mood of regret at the loss of the land and traditional way of life are even traceable to a 'much older substratum of Arabic literature' (p.50).

Kilpatrick only touches on the main peculiarity of *A Bedouin Childhood* when she intimates that its publishers (George Allen and Unwin) may have had political motives in bringing out the book. In the author's note at the front, Diqs admits English is 'neither my native language nor perfectly known to me', and singles out an English teacher at Riyadh University for his encouragement (and corrections?). The book does have an embedded political message, and this is expressed near the end. The narrator, having received a modern education in a school presided over by a valued English headmaster, is now grown up and a qualified agriculturalist. His tribe has left its traditional lands as a result of the 1948 *nakba*, and are now scattered,

with some, like himself, working in urban centres on the West Bank. He has cause to meet a man from his tribe whom he at first fails to recognise:

> I felt ashamed, because I knew many of Abu Lihiah's people and I knew a man of this name, but he was younger and a little different from the man standing in front of me reminding me of happy days passed. I was about to express my sorrow, when he continued: 'You are not to be blamed, my boy. You were too young when it was lost. It is land, and land only, that can keep people together.' As he spoke he pointed to the new-grown grass at our feet (Diqs: 1967, p.171).

The quotations from reviewers included on the dustjacket of the text's second impression of 1984 all foreground the simplicity of the author's narrative style and imply nostalgia for the lost way of life it attempts to represent. There is a parallel here with the famous opening of *Orientalism*, in which Said quotes the lament of a French journalist at the destruction in the Lebanese Civil War of 1975–1976 of downtown Beirut 'that had once seemed to belong to […] the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval' (Said: 1978, p.1). Nostalgia for the desert life portrayed in *Bedouin Childhood* is connected to guilt on the part of the former coloniser for the dispossession of the Palestinian Arabs who are its subjects. One of the book's reviewers makes the parallel explicit in comparing Diqs' style favourably with the prose of Doughty and Lawrence (presumable T.E.). The power of the book for this specialist 'Anglo' reader resides in its authenticity, its intimate proximity to Britain's 'Orient' – the Arabian desert. Thus, in spite of its formal connections with Arabic, *Bedouin Childhood* can be understood according to a Western (in this instant a specifically British) cultural 'grid', a process articulated by Andre Lefevere whereby 'Western cultures "translated" (and "translate") non-Western cultures into Western categories to be able to come to an understanding of them, and, therefore, to come to terms with them' (Lefevere: 1999, p.77). While it is unlikely that Diqs intended this sort of reading when he wrote the text, the issue of patronage might be considered here. That is to say: the audience the publisher had in mind for the book could have been a mixture of the former colonisers (Britain) and an international readership, which in practice means an American one which acts as an

arbiter between the former coloniser/formerly colonised (Tymoczko: p.32).

A very different author to Isaak Diqs, Palestinian intellectual Jabra Ibrahim Jabra graduated from Cambridge with a BA in English in 1943. Poet, novelist and writer on literature, Jabra taught English literature in Palestine before being forced to leave in 1948. He went then to Baghdad and taught there intermittently before and after taking up postgraduate studies at Harvard. In his 1986 introduction to Jabra's only piece of English fiction, *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, published in 1960 but according to Issa Boullata (2001, p. 216)) written between 1953 and 1956, Roger Allen suggests that the subject matter – the claustrophobic socio-political climate of Iraq in the last years of the Hashemite monarchy – may already have become outdated, but the themes of the neurosis of Arab intellectuals and the issue of women's rights certainly had not. Jameel Farran, who like some of the other central protagonists in Jabra's Arabic fiction, bears similarities to the author, is an educated Palestinian exile in Baghdad, whose degree in English enables him to set up as a tutor to Sulafa al-Nafawi, a young woman from a rich, albeit stiflingly traditional family. The novel sets Farran's clandestine love affair with his tutee against his other relationships – with Salma, an Americanised society hostess, and his first love Leila, whose death – blown to pieces in her house in Jerusalem by Jewish terrorists during the *nakba* of 1948 – is repeated in Farran's mind in the form of flashbacks. This traumatic national event features strongly in the novel (Boullata: p.216), as does one of the central themes of modernism – the loneliness of the individual in the city – only in this case we are in an Arab city, replete with women covered from head to toe in their *abayas*, and defrayed sexual desire that can reap the extreme punishment of a brother's 'honour' killing of his sister. Modern, educated, secular Arabs, Farran and his friends are strongly critical of their countrymen's treatment of women – 'We live in cities and yet we follow the law of the desert' – but Brian Finch, an Englishman living in Baghdad is fixated on the 'passion' of what he sees around him, and having witnessed the killing proclaims: 'Love here must be very exciting, very exciting' (Jabra: 1997, p.46).

Hunters in a Narrow Street, like Jabra's Arabic fiction, is 'full of political, literary, and philosophical discussions' and this raises the

issue as to which readership they are addressed (Allen: 1995a, p.71). The question becomes all the more angled in the case of *Hunters* – critics and translators asking whether or not it is distinct from the major part of his writings. Kilpatrick (1992) notes *Hunters*' utilisation of the same techniques – such as letters and flashback – and themes – an expatriate Palestinian main protagonist, love affairs with repressed women, 'profound involvement […] in the political, social and intellectual crises of Arab society' – as his Arabic fiction (p.47). What is clear is that – in spite of the novel's inclusion of English characters, and its author's evident conversance with Western culture – *Hunters* confirms Said's pronouncement on the predominantly Arab and (in spite of the Jabra's Christian background) 'Muslim' content of Anglophone fiction by Arabs pre- the 'Anglo-Arab encounter'.

Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964) continues the theme of the alienation and tendency towards nihilism of later twentieth-century nationalist and radical intellectuals in the Middle East. Set in 1950s Egypt (during more or less the same period as *Hunters in a Narrow Street*) the novel has as its anti-hero and first person narrator, Ram, an upper-class but short-of-funds communist-sympathiser, who is in love with Edna, daughter of a rich Jewish-Egyptian financier who also supports the revolution:

> It was Edna who introduced me to Egyptian people. It is rare, in the milieu in which I was born, to know Egyptians. She explained to me that the Sporting Club and the race meetings and the villa-owners and the European-dressed and – travelled people I met, were not Egyptians. Cairo and Alexandria were cosmopolitan not so much because they contained foreigners, but because the Egyptian born in them is himself a stranger to his land (Ghali: 1964, p.53).

Journeys to the West were by no means a new topic in Arabic fiction when Ghali was writing. However, his representation of English life relies upon a close knowledge of the political and class construction of 1950s Britain. It is Edna who pays for Ram and his friend 'Font' to accompany her to England. There the young men gain an *entré* into middle-class English life by virtue of their Leftist politics, but soon learn to look for meanings below surface politeness. Ram realises that working people are more likely to say what they mean – people like the non-political but honest and straightforward Vincent Murphy who

alone of his English acquaintances helps Ram when he is penniless. And Steve, who encapsulates the squadie's xenophobic experience of Suez: 'He came out with such things as: "the natives'll fleece you if you're not careful", and "not safe after dark…you know what the wogs are like"' (p.85). The English visit turns out a significant factor in Ram's eventual disillusionment. As a Copt who has been educated in English, speaks the language fluently, and has spent time in England, Ram is as close to Ghali as Farran is to Jabra. Authors and protagonists are cut off from the societies in which they live either by their class, religion (both are Christians by birth) or nationality, and their knowledge of English and England. Ram has lost his virginity to an English aristocrat in Cairo who used the pretext that he would teach her Arabic. Though he speaks English 'without an accent', in talking to her husband, Lord Tannely, 'slowly and involuntarily, an Oxfordish tinge began to colour my speech; and when I tried to erase that accent I found it difficult to do so. Strange' (p.128). In short, Ram is like Farran a deracinated intellectual, who can play a part among the English working-class in an English pub, and who seeks with his closest friend, Font, to re-enact its rituals in the snooker club back in Cairo. Ultimately though, his mimicry of English ways is but another sign of his troubled, empty life.

In its use of dialogue and psychological observation, *Beer in the Snooker Club* is for Hilary Kilpatrick 'technically far in advance of contemporary Egyptian novels in Arabic' and notable for its disillusion with and condemnation of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Free Officer's regime (p.52). In this it is similar to Mahfouz's *Miramar* – a cynical exposé of the opportunism of beneficiaries of the Nasserite revolution. Lacking, as the passage quoted above suggests, knowledge of the 'real Egyptians', Ghali may have been unable to match Mahfouz's presentation of representative figures from that epoch, but Kilpatrick still sees his novel as similar to other works of modern fiction in Arabic, because it is 'rooted in Egyptian life' and 'its starting point is reality in the Arab world' (p.53). However, there is greater scope for arguing that, in the context of the fiction of the Anglo-Arab encounter, *Beer in the Snooker Club* is a worthy analogue. In its portrayal of 'a concern with cultural dichotomy' (the phrase again is Kilpatrick's, but she uses it to highlight the novel's connection with 'very many works of

modern Arabic literature' (*ibid*)), especially in the way in which its hero, Ram, embraces English culture only to be rebuffed by England (and not only in its politics as Kilpatrick states), *Beer in the Snooker Club* looks forward to a text like Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun*. Like Soueif's heroine Asya, Ram returns from Britain chastened and dissatisfied, although there has been nothing in his experience to approach Asya's deleterious affair with the Englishman Gerald Stone. We can presume though that both *Beer in the Snooker Club* and *Eye of the Sun* were written for an English not an Arab audience, because, unlike Diqs' or even Jabra's English texts, there is little that is culturally strange in the representation of an Arab society (Egypt) in either of these novels.

A more recent piece of English fiction postdates Ghali's by three decades. *The Qadi and the Fortune Teller* (1996) is nevertheless less Western in approach. Its Lebanese author, Nabil Saleh, uses specialist knowledge of Islamic law to present a tale of private and public, set in Beirut and its environs in the year 1843. The narrative is conducted in the voice of the Qadi himself through the device of a recently discovered diary – 'This diary is not intended to be seen by any human eye, thus when I started it I vowed to be unreservedly candid about what I would say in it' (Saleh: 1996, p.127). The novel is innovatory neither in style nor structure, but underwritten by a traditional moral vision that human lives are ruled by *qada wa qadar* (fate and destiny). The 'touching human' quality of the self-made Qadi, Abdallah 'Abu Khalid', open though he is to venality and 'gifts', is that for the short period traced by the narrative he is beset by qualms and self-questionings. His knowledge of Islamic law, and his partnership with his childhood friend Abu Kasim, 'with his money and my knowledge of the arcana of the law, we could do great things together' (p.97), enable the Qadi to increase his wealth and raise his social position. But steering a conservative course between the medieval jurist al-Hanifa's codification of the shari'a and the new tensions brought about by the penetration of the Ottoman domain by foreigners – European consuls, merchants and missionaries – places the Qadi in an increasingly precarious position. It takes the elopement of his daughter – already affianced to Abu Kasim – to set into motion a trial of reverses – including a murder being laid at the Qadi's door – that results

in his fall from grace. Saleh's understanding of English and his likely conversance with its literature (and perhaps the French too) lend the Qadi's narrative a fluency and believable quality that is enhanced by the writer's knowledge of the historical period and its scenery. He evinces a subtle grasp of the culture of the Qadi and his close friends and associates, and through this the reader gains entry into the 'Muslim mind' of the time, ranging from the conservative but tolerant bent of the Qadi himself to the anti-European position of hardliners.

In its combination of psychological and historical realism, *The Qadi and the Fortune Teller* succeeds in disclosing a commendable array of insights concerning East-West encounter at a turning point in a crucial area of the Middle East. Indeed the novel is – no doubt designedly – not merely an exercise in historical realism but an allegory for the situation that led to the Lebanese civil war of 1976–1991. Sectarian divisions, particularly between Maronite and Druze, unfold almost at the periphery of the Qadi's vision, although not of the British consul's dragoman. This figure's oily presence mediates the destabilising force of the British, which is represented indirectly through him. The dragoman's detachment from his own native society is such that no precise sectarian origin is identified for him, other than that he is a Christian who holds to the oriental fashion of living. The Qadi is entirely unaware of the consequences of allowing himself to be manipulated by the dragoman to further Britain's support of the Druze (whom they defend against the French-sponsored Maronites) and the Jesuits (whom they favour as a means of dividing the Catholics). But Saleh cleverly brings this home to the Muslim jurist near the end in the form of the dragoman's wife whom the Qadi has secretly lusted over. She informs him that the dragoman is busy trying to sort out the looming sectarian divisions in 'the Mountain' – and by implication unable to assist the man he had formerly used before his fall from favour. Western intervention by proxy in Ottoman Muslim society presages that society's collapse. But Saleh is not unmindful of the weaknesses of the world's last Islamic empire, both in its decline from the former greatness of Arab science, its inability to master the new economic and technological ways of the foreigner in the same way as the *dhimmis* (the previously inferior oriental Christians and Jews), and

its tendency to throw up a Muslim backlash in the form of mob attacks against Christian, Jews, and foreigners.

A Western author could possibly have acquired sufficient knowledge of Saleh's subject to be able to present it from the 'inside' equally effectively, although whether he would have had the sympathy to do so is another question.[4] Alternatively, there is nothing to suggest Saleh could not have produced his novel in Arabic. There are, after all, no firsthand European protagonists in *The Qadi and the Fortune Teller*, and the thought and idiom of its characters being entirely oriental, Arabic might have suited them better. This judgment is borne out by the conclusion of the narrative, which scarcely delivers the usual de rigueur climax of the standard Western novel, nor plays with alternative endings as a postmodern text might. The reader is simply told that the Qadi gave up his diary but regained his prosperity, suffered further tests, then died, the moral being that this is no more than any believer can expect. What Nabil Saleh has written amounts to a translation into English of the mores and anxieties of a traditional Arab society on the verge of informal colonisation (this being nineteenth-century Lebanon's fate). Such translations from a 'minority' culture to a hegemonic one are invariably required to explain the marginalised culture to the readers of the dominant one. This Saleh does by 'frontloading' a substantial amount of information about the law, customs and beliefs of a preponderantly Islamic society. To that extent, the enterprise retains its strangeness for a Western reader, the author having chosen to 'translate' unfamiliar information from the source culture rather than to simplify.[5]

4 Perhaps the occidental who came the closest to connecting with the Middle East was the British novelist and convert to Islam, Marmaduke Pickthall, a contemporary of D.H. Lawrence and E.M. Foster who both commended his representations of oriental life 'from the inside'. Saleh's novella might be said to resemble Pickthall's fiction in its fineness of social detail and concern with the impact of Western values on traditional eastern ones. See Clark (1986) and Nash (2005), chap. 6.

5 According to Tymoczko (p. 29), in representing a 'marginalised culture' to the readership of a dominant one it is necessary for 'cultural background [to be], so to speak, explicitly "frontloaded" for the reader'.

Said's point about the English novels of Wagih Ghali and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra was that they are to be distinguished from the production of a writer such as Ahdaf Soueif in that, the former were 'dealing with characters who were [almost] entirely Muslim', and mainly confined to Arab environments, whereas her writings were about 'being in England' and interfacing with English characters. This contrast does not entirely work for Ghali as we saw, though it largely holds true for Jabra and Diq's novels. Nabil Saleh, writing over a generation after these, still uses English for what is a 'translation' of an Arabic-flavoured narrative about Arab/Muslim characters. The same could also be said about Ahdaf Soueif's first exercise in English, *Aisha (*1983), as I shall show in the next chapter. If this is the case, it will be necessary to refine Said's statement, because the demarcation between the earlier fiction by Arabs writing in English, and that of the authors I have identified as writing from within the category of the 'Anglo-Arab encounter', is probably not as clear-cut as Said suggested. That encounter might still be foregrounded as a prominent but not totally inclusive aspect of a larger project that gets underway earlier in the twentieth century: the translation of Arabic culture into the English language for an Anglo-American audience from a contemporary Arab perspective. Obviously, this is not the same as the project that began with Sir William Jones translating oriental literatures – Arabic foremost among them – for an audience imbued with colonial attitudes toward inferior eastern cultures. Arab writers from the first part of the twentieth century like Rihani, Antonius and Atiyah were committed Arab nationalists, and to compare their portrayals of Arab societies with those of contemporary British expatriate writers such as D.J. Enright, P.H. Newby or Laurence Durrell is to observe at once their different priorities.

Much of my discussion in this chapter has been informed by the study, *Post-colonial Translation*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Harish Travedi, and in particular by the essays of Maria Tymoczko, G.J.V Prasad, and Andre Lefevere. The central premise of that work is, in the words of Susan Bassnett, that 'the act of translation always involves more than language. Translations are embedded in cultural and political systems, and in history' (Bassnett and Trivedi: 1999, p.6). I specifically endorse the case made by Maria Tymoczko that interlin-

gual translation provides an analogue for postcolonial writing. The two practices, she argues, may be distinct, but they have much in common as well. In both cases the 'writing converges on the shared limit defined by cultural interface' (p.22). A modern Arabic text may wrestle with similar issues of cultural interface as one written in English by a writer of Arab origin. When the former is translated into English a viable field for comparison is set up. Such texts as: Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, and Hanan al-Shaykh's, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* and *Only in London*, come to mind. Indeed, we might ask how different S*eason of Migration* is in its representation of the Anglo-Arab encounter, from that of the Anglophone writers already discussed. Salih's work is especially notable in this context as it is arguably the best known and most influential piece of Arabic postcolonial fiction. I wish to argue that, as distinct from the early Anglophone writers discussed above, Salih sketches out a territory broadly congruent to that inhabited by the later writers of the Anglo-Arab encounter. We may see from a reading of Salih's text that a qualitative interface between Arab and British characters does not exclusively demarcate the boundaries of fiction written in English by Arabs from the novel in Arabic. In fact it is possible to argue that the experimental nature of Salih's work makes it an even better analogue for Anglophone novels of the 1990s than the handful of texts written by Arabs in English in the 1950s and 60s.

It is worth pointing out that while facing censorship in Arab countries, Salih's work has at the same time raised issues which have been considered topical in both the Arab world and the West. Since it has been translated it has been widely discussed in English, whereas the novel was for a long time available in Arabic only in Beirut. Salih has of course not been alone in facing the problem of censorship. Naguib Mahfouz's *Awlad al-Haratina*, first banned in the Arab world forty years ago, was initially published in English as *Children of Gebelawi*. Although the 1967 Beirut edition of the novel is available in many Arab countries, controversy surrounding this work re-emerged in the 1990s, a decade which saw a fanatic attempt to assassinate the aging Nobel Laureate in a Cairo street. Hanan al-Shaykh, whose novel *The Story of Zahra* also faced censorship, has effectively

taken to simultaneous publication of English translations of her Arabic novels, obviously with an eye to an international readership.[6]

If, as Hilary Kilpatrick (1992) has shown in respect of the earlier English stories by Arabs, their literary fiction ought to be considered within the Arabic literary tradition, it might be argued that Salih was working out of this tradition and at the same time succeeded in establishing himself as a bona fide postcolonial writer in English translation. Salih's work might be considered intertextual for Arab writers in English in several key respects. It has pointed the way to a new generation of Arab writers who, having been educated in English, are able to write and publish their fiction in that language, thus allowing them to circumvent the censorship restrictions endemic in the Arab world. At the same time these writers have also been able to continue to articulate the thematic issues raised by Salih such as re-writing and challenging imperialism, and representing cultural hybridity, specifically as it pertains to the Anglo-Arab encounter. To begin with, in *Season of Migration* traditional Arabic literary techniques are employed, such as *mu'arada* (juxtaposition of opposing or contradictory voices) and *hakawati* (oral tale that addresses an audience) alongside a sophisticated adoption of the European novel form, and its thematic reference to Western literary texts (Harlowe: 1985, Makdisi: [1992] 1994). *Season of Migration* can therefore be adjudged significant in its mix of literary forms; thematically it has also been highly influential in its fusion of the issues of cultural hybridity and colonisation of the East. For Mona Takieddine-Amyuni (1980), the novel 'illustrates [Salih's] perfect assimilation of Arabic and Western cultures' (p.2).

Mustafa Sa'eed is a creation of Western imperialism; he has no living father, and – an obvious trope for his relationship to his colonised homeland – is emotionally detached from his mother, finding surrogate parents in a white English couple. In Europe, he

6 Issue 26 (1995) of *The Journal of Arabic Literature*, entitled 'The Quest for Freedom in Modern Arabic Literature', fills in much of the background to the censorship of modern Arabic literature. See especially Roger Allen's essay, 'Arabic Fiction and the Quest for Freedom.' In particular (pp. 48–9) Allen discusses why novels by Naguib Mahfouz, Hanan Al-Shaykh, and Abdul Rahman Munif were not able to escape the censor's pen.

adopts a multitude of roles and personas. In revisiting upon European women a vengeance for the West's invasion of the Islamic Near East, *Season of Migration*, it is often argued, inscribes a resistant post-colonialism – part of the 'voyage in' of postcolonial writers as Said (1993) termed it. But there is no assertion of a 'nativist' Arab identity in the novel – rather an iterative intercultural destructiveness that appears to have no end. This lack of closure might forestall dogmatic assertions about Salih's intentions, but the Sudanese locus with which the novel starts and finishes might be taken as an indication of his priorities. It is the Arab/African homeland that matters, as the following frequently quoted section from the anonymous narrator, clearly indicates:

> I must be one of those birds that exist in only one region of the world […] The fact that they [the British] came to our land, I know not why, does that mean we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country, just as many people throughout history left many countries […] and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were […] (Salih: [1969] 1997, pp. 49–50).

However, as Saree Makdisi argues quite correctly, Salih's achievement is to deconstruct the possibility of pseudo Arab traditionalism:

> The existence of pure and unaffected traditional cultures to which postcolonial intellectuals can "escape" is exposed as an illusion. Indeed, the very existence of any culture in some sort of absolute isolation from others is shown to be impossible in the postcolonial world (Makdisi: [1992] 1994, p. 543).

In the context of *Season of Migration* it is obvious, though it may still need pointing out, that Sa'eed's Anglo-Sudanese entanglement is a metonym for the European imperialist adventure, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Salih himself noted, I think ironically, that his novel was well received in France: 'The process of alienation to which French colonial peoples were exposed was in a way more severe than the British, but somehow the French felt the novel did not apply to them' (John: 1992, p. 210). Sudan's experience of colonisation at the hands of the British has its own flavour which is represented in the novel, but this can also be read as paradigmatic of the love-hate relationship between coloniser and colonised, involving

emulation, assimilation and rejection on the part of the Sudanese, and on the part of the British, what Salih calls 'a strange attraction to the Arab world, the type of romanticism which I started to challenge in the novel' (Takieddine-Amyuni: 1985, p.15). While not unique in Arabic literature in its treatment of intimate personal relationships between Arab and European men and women, *Season of Migration* is certainly groundbreaking in its presentation of these within a colonial context. The raw materials of the Anglo-Arab encounter are in fact all here, beginning with cross-cultural personal relationships in both Sudanese and English settings, which eventuate in the undermining and mixing of identities, embodied above all in the figure of Sa'eed, but also to be seen in the narrator, as well as in Ann Hammond, a devotee of exotic Oriental tropes, and to lesser extents in other characters on both sides of the racial divide who catch the 'infection' resulting from colonial encounter.

Born soon after Kitchener's avenging massacre at Omdurman, Sa'eed grows up under the British mantle, is educated in their colonial institutions in Khartoum and Cairo before proceeding to Oxford, and thereafter spends twenty years in the imperial metropolis. In his person he therefore incorporates the interconnected Arab and British past. In England, Sa'eed mimics the progressive colonialism of the Fabians, both projects/refuses an Othello complex, cynically connects himself with the tableau of the Arabian Nights, and surrounds himself with all the paraphernalia of Orientalism. Salih claims that through his acquired knowledge his character 'manipulated' the British social system, but was never 'under the illusion' that he belonged to it (John: p. 212). Is Sa'eed's locked room in the Sudanese village stuffed full of English books and artifacts intended only as parody then, as is his cliché-ridden Afro-Oriental bedroom in England? Certainly the locked room contains the writings of some of the English authors that helped Sa'eed construct his project, as well as the trophies of his English female conquests. But the involuntary recitation of English poetry that first attracts the narrator's shocked attention might testify to the depth of Sa'eed's imbrication in the coloniser's culture in spite of his mimicry of it.

> I wanted actually to create a confusing world which is a reflection of the confusion we live in as regards our relation with the West […] one moment one admires the British, in another one hates their guts […] Our attitude is so ambivalent (John: p.209).

Mustafa Sa'eed's relations with his English mistresses are, however, an obvious analogue for the Anglo-Arab encounter (particularly as seen in Ahdaf Soueif's work). His relationship with Jean Morris is discussed in a postcolonial reading by Al-Musawi (2003) as representing a quintessential East-West struggle in which the woman plays the role of the arrogant, cold, and superior colonialist who 'looks upon others as "savage", "ugly", but nevertheless attractive, making her the culminating destination in a quest for confrontation and redress no matter what the consequences are' (pp.198–9). By using Sa'eed as his Arab arm of vengeance, Salih, asserts Al-Musawi, adopting the argument of Fanon, reverses the 'image of the East as feminized, inviting penetration and control', his murder of Morris signaling a refusal to be assimilated into the world of the white man (p.203, pp.200–1). While Salih intended Sa'eed's seduction of English women to be a form of resistance to the coloniser, the gendering of the colonial encounter in *Season of Migration* remains complex and nuanced. Without, for example, Jean Morris's matching of Sa'eed blow for blow, the counterpoint of Bint Mahmoud's resistance to Wadd Rayes would not impact on the reader in the way it does. Sa'eed's murder of Morris satisfies an urge to self-destruction and 'completion', implying a tragic fission between East and West, Sudanese male and English female. However, Bint Mahmoud's killing of her aged, chauvinist Sudanese husband is a sort of mimicry of the former act in that it seeks to assert a new, unheard of equality between Arab Muslim men and women. Salih claims he 're-enacted the tragedy of Mustafa Sa'eed in a Sudanese village so that the Sudanese or Arab readers do not feel absolved that all this happened solely because of colonialism' (John, p.210). The text accounts for the inconceivable – a Sudanese woman killing her husband – by the infiltration of modernity into native society through the agency of colonialism – 'What an impudent hussy! That's modern women for you!' (Salih: 1967, p.123) That the immediate instrument of this modernity is Mustafa Sa'eed himself deepens

the novel's articulation of the ambiguity attaching to the colonial encounter.

Salih's representation of English characters other than Morris often probes a Western absorption with the East concerning which he was deeply critical. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson and Ann Hammond are obviously steeped in the genre of romantic Orientalism that Salih identifies with British travellers and Arabophiles like Richard Burton and T.E. Lawrence. That the 'romantic affair' with the Arabs conjured up by such British authors was full of 'illusions' and did not constitute a realistic *modus vivendi* was exemplified by – from an Arab point of view – 'the single most catastrophic act in modern European history' the creation of Israel, for which the British held prime responsibility (Takieddine-Amyuni: 1985, p.16). What I wish to foreground, then, is a reading of *Season of Migration* that accepts as given the postcolonial referent argued for by Al-Musawi, without at the same time losing hold on the ambiguity of the colonial encounter as proposed by Salih himself. Sa'eed may indeed stand as a 'prototype for many expatriates, émigrés, exiles, and displaced intellectuals' of the postcolonial world. However, to argue that Sa'eed has 'the right to speak for the whole [Sudanese] community' is to argue that the homecoming intellectual has entirely thrown off the theories of his 'metropolitan "masters"' (Al-Musawi: p.201, p.203). It is certainly the case that through the layered and often contradictory testimonies about Sa'eed made by himself and others, Sudanese and British, the British colonial adventure in Sudan is condemned. Nevertheless, a residue of space remains, and it is this 'in between' part that accounts for the hybridity of Sa'eed's personality, which however much it is steeped in parody cannot be entirely shaken off.

I have attempted to argue through hermeneutic investigation of its content and ideas as well as analysis of its poetics, that *Season of Migration* represents an important intertext for our reading of later Anglophone writing by Arabs. In its mix of the poetics of Arabic oral narrative and the experimental structure of the modern European novel it is an important exemplum for the literature of Anglo-Arab encounter. Both Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir revisit these aspects in their earlier writing. Then again, Salih's pioneering presentation of East-West sexual encounter in terms of a colonial/postcolonial alterity of

coloniser and colonised, imbricated in tropes of Orientalism, cannot fail to resonate for the educated reader of Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* and *Map of Love*. And Salih's inscription of the Anglo-Sudanese colonial/ postcolonial context, especially his endeavour to re-write its history from an Arab perspective, clearly exercises Jamal Mahjoub in his own Sudanese Trilogy. Finally, a British fixation with the Arab world founded on an illusory Orientalist romanticism is also intrinsic to both *Season of Migration* and the novels of Tony Hanania.

Chapter 2
Ahdaf Soueif: England, Egypt, Sexual Politics

The Anglo-Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif can be considered a pathfinder in the wave of Arab writers in English of the last two decades of the twentieth century. Soueif was born in Cairo in 1950 to academic parents. She lived in London between the ages of four to eight, later resuming her education in Egypt where she graduated from the University of Cairo with a BA in English literature in 1971. Soueif continued her studies in English and American literature at the American University of Cairo, obtaining her MA in 1973. She then took up doctoral work in Literary Stylistics at the University of Lancaster, the cold north of England campus-university that forms the setting for Asya's Anglo-Arab encounters in, *In the Eye of the Sun*. The next six years were spent lecturing at Cairo University. Between 1987–89, Soueif continued her academic career at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – the country that provides the background for, 'I think of You,' a short story published in her collection, *Sandpiper*. In addition to writing novels and short stories, Soueif is a translator of Arabic writing into English, has engaged in the promotion and mediation of Arab culture in association with a number of cultural organisations. She also is a regular contributor to literary magazines and newspapers as well as appearing on radio and television in England, The United States and the Arab world. Her collection of articles on political themes, *Mezzaterra, Fragments from the Common Ground*, appeared in 2004.

Soueif's first publication, *Aisha* (1983), is experimental in several key respects. According to Hilary Kilpatrick (1992), it is neither a novel, nor a collection of independent stories. Including *Aisha* in her discussion of the English fiction by Jabra, Ghali and Diqs, Kilpatrick opines: 'Soueif has combined modern techniques such as stream of consciousness and flashback with a preference for formally independent but thematically related narrative units such as are very common

in older Arabic literature' (p.51). The main character, Aisha, is a middle-class Egyptian who is partly educated in a London state school where her superior English sets her apart from the local students.

> The white girls lived in a world of glamour and boyfriends to which I had no entrée. The black girls lived in a ghetto world of whispers and regarded me with suspicious dislike. I was too middle of the road for them (Soueif: 1983, p.32).

The duality of her English and Egyptian experiences is expressed in Aisha's mastery of standard English on the one hand, and her immersion in traditional Egyptian cultural practice through her nurse Zeina. The nanny's stories reveal a world of raw emotion, realism, and religious fatalism that withdraws Aisha from the rationally ordered life of her parents.

Revisiting her marital problems (already raised in the opening narrative), in particular her inability to conceive, the last story shows how Aisha, accompanied by her nanny, attends a z*ar* ceremony of exorcism at which psychologically scarred women desperately seek healing. Having acquired a taste for peasant/lower class manifestations of religious emotion, she returns alone a few days later to a saint's birthday celebration, but her escort, a man who works in the nearby slaughterhouse, lures her to a cemetery where he rapes her. Nine months later Aisha dies in childbirth. Here the interface of upper-middle class Aisha with the life of the ordinary people is, as it most often is in Soueif's writing, highly self-conscious and ungrounded in any real structural purpose. Her presentation of the *zar* in *Aisha* only serves the purpose of othering the Egyptian lower classes in relation to Aisha's world of social privilege.[1] These are incorporated into the narrative as exotic colour, in a manner comparable to a Western Orientalist travelogue. Kilpatrick points out that the cultural schizophrenia of the book is not untypical of Arabic literature, as is the frame of eight interconnected narratives. Soueif's use of stream of consciousness and flashback is, in contrast, a modernist device, which, however, was adopted into the Arabic novel by the Egyptian writer,

1 In comparison, Nawal al-Sa'dawi's use of a *zar* ceremony in *God Dies on the Nile* (1986) serves the aim of exemplifying the peasants' immersion in a popular religion that their rulers use to manipulate and oppress them.

Naguib Mahfouz, thirty years before *Aisha* appeared. With the exception of a story about a Coptic woman's rejection of marriage suitors, overall *Aisha* displays a Muslim-Arab ambience and, according to Said (1992), this transference of Arab subjects into English means 'the oddness of the enterprise never wears off'. Soueif herself agrees 'these early stories might just as well have been written in Arabic' (Massad: 1998, p.6).

Though her later writings may be said to smooth out this strangeness, and indeed become adept in translating Arab (or more specifically, Egyptian) idioms into English, Soueif's crossover into British and Western culture retains its problems. Her writings are permeated by a series of motifs that resurface in several of her books, and which carry the imprint of modified autobiography. It has been asserted that Soueif's location of her characters within 'liminal spaces between East and West' is a strength of her writing, and accords them the cachet of conforming to Bhabha's theory of 'hybridity, in-betweeness, the beyond' (Ibrahim: 1999, pp.154–55). However, knowing as her rehearsal of the language, canonical literature, and popular music of her adopted culture is, the formal and idiomatic fluency of Soueif's English writings do not always protect her from lapses into cross-cultural confusion.

In the Eye of the Sun (1992), Soueif's first novel, represents a much more ambitious fictional project than the slim volume of short narratives collected in *Aisha*. For Said (1992), the English setting of *In the Eye of the Sun* marks the emergence of a form of writing by Arabs that is 'about being in England, having to do intimately with English people and so on'. This, he implied, underwrites the appropriacy of English as the medium of transmission, compared with 'the oddness of the enterprise' in *Aisha*. Reviewers have gone so far as to link *Eye of the Sun* with George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, or with Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*. In its portrayal of successive generations of an Egyptian family, the Cairene section of the novel has been said to possess a 'Victorian richness,' reminiscent, if stylistically very different to the work of Mahfouz (Booth: 1994; Clark: 1998; Hassan: 1994).

As in *Aisha*, Soueif has clearly drawn on autobiographical material. Towards the end of *Eye of the Sun*, her main character, Asya, reviews the significant events of her life.

> It is as though the brain were a split screen, one half examining a frozen frame, a moment where time has stopped, the other vaguely registering the continuation of the action; storing up the passing frames for closer inspection later (Soueif: 1992, p.763).

Soueif's technique is to work with a series of close-ups sequenced not entirely according to time, but carrying the reader in broad chronology from Asya's childhood and youth in Egypt, her postgraduate years in England, to her return home in her early thirties. In a sense these sequences are a continuation of her short stories, in which women characters are caught at defining moments, often crises, in their personal lives. At the centre of the novel is a failed relationship that might be said to build on Soueif's first story, 'Returning,' in *Aisha*. In fact, Soueif goes so far as to incorporate identical incidents (and sometimes complete passages) from *Aisha* and *Sandpiper* into *Eye of the Sun*. This raises issues of editing rather than narrative style, for she does not appear to reshape, recreate or re-contextualise material from her earlier work (as does a writer like Naipaul, for example), nor is there a sense that she is meaningfully engaging in self-quotation. The author's narratological problems centre on: how to condense dialogue and curtail her main character's incessant interior monologues, when to edit the frames, when to stop the camera rolling. Some reviewers/ critics (Ahmed: 1993; Malik: 2000) have noted Soueif's closeness to Asya and her failure to detach herself from Asya's elitism (Malik, p.152). This turns into a stylistic issue when Soueif transports her heroine to Switzerland where she develops a conversance with European culture. This is relayed in meretricious French and Italian phrases that barely rise above the level of the phatic. The presentation of Mediterranean male characters is also painfully clichéd, while, at a higher level of cultural discourse, frequent quotation from canonical English literature texts demonstrates a pretentious gaucherie. All these features put together confirm the lack of distance between author/ narrator/protagonist.

In addition to its depiction of an elite Egyptian domestic setting, the novel also lays out its store by making great play on political events. The story sets out to trace the formation of its central protagonist, Asya Ulama (literally translated, Asia of the learned clerics), against the background of Egyptian and Arab affairs between May 1967 and April 1980. These thirteen years, inclusive of the Arab-Israeli wars of June1967 and October 1973, the decline of Nasserite Arab socialism and the emergence of a Palestinian national resistance, are a defining period in modern Egyptian and Arab history. They begin with the last years of Gamal Abdel Nasser – who died three years after the catastrophic Arab defeat of '67 – and go on to cover almost the entire presidency of Anwar Sadat, whose time as Egyptian leader was marked by huge social upheaval. In her juxtaposition of the private and public, specifically her building of a political dimension into her narrative, Soueif's technique in *Eye of the Sun* can at times be laboured and obvious. If, as Said (1992) suggests, she is an extraordinary chronicler of sexual politics, her characters' frequent engagement in conventional discussion about public affairs appears extraneous to the private, domestic dimension that forms the heart of the novel. Events in the novel are situated in the political landscape of the Middle East by means of interspersions that have a newsreel quality, and as such mainly impact as background. Except at rare points, such as when the June Six Day War interrupts students studying for the *Thanawiyya Ama* (the Egyptian equivalent of the baccalaureate exams), the impact of political events on the lives of the characters remains largely exterior. Indeed, Soueif admits:

> the politics in the novel do interrupt the flow. I used to think that I, as the writer, had not found the ideal way of merging the political information necessary for this book into the narrative. That the method I chose – of cutting to documentary, as it were – was not ideal (Massad: 1998, p.84).

Part of the problem is that the public and the private hardly intersect: despite her younger sister's marriage to a quixotic left-wing dissident, Asya's privileged upper-middle class existence (her father is a Dean at Cairo University and her closest friend's father is a former government minister) protects her from the fallout of the successive Arab

military and political defeats. At one point in the novel her mother, pondering how Asya could yield herself to an impecunious English student who lives on her husband's money, surveys her sleeping form and concludes: 'She looks expensive' (Soueif: 1992, p.575). Like her prototype, the young Egyptian girl in *Aisha* who is unable to shake off her foreignness in England, Asya remains set apart, an unusual representative of the Arab-Islamic nation she comes from (Ibrahim, p.157). Although she is a Muslim, Asya's privileged background enables her to indulge in sexual experimentation, covertly in her own land, but more freely in Switzerland, where she travels as a student, and in Beirut, Damascus and London, in the company of her fiancé, Saif. Asya's premarital intimacy with Saif stops short at complete sexual congress, and once the pair have accomplished the traditional marriage rituals, they find themselves unable to consummate their union, even though Saif is neither impotent, nor Asya frigid. From Asya's point of view, her relationship with Saif (who is unable to accept her on her own terms) seems to represent the limitations of her cultural inheritance, and the need she feels to go beyond this finds expression in her search for emotional and sexual fulfilment with European men. Excluding her early experiences in Switzerland, her first attraction is to Saif's friend, Mario, a South African of Italian extraction. The affair is frustrated on both sides by each character's sense of honour and loyalty. But when Asya moves to England to study, she plunges into a liaison with an Englishman. Technically, Gerald Stone is not responsible for Asya's loss of virginity (she had actually miscarried Saif's baby, though conception had taken place without penetration). However, he is the first man to satisfy her sexually. Their physical relationship quickly intensifies into an obsession on his part.

Asya's own personal Anglo-Arab encounter encompasses the second part of the story, as she struggles to complete her Ph.D. in literary stylistics (like Soueif herself) at a university in the north of England. If Asya adopts English literature as a vocation in the first part of the novel, the second part develops the unravelling of her marriage with Saif against her erotic but destructive affair with the British student, Gerald Stone. What Said termed the 'Anglo-Arab encounter' was rarely so prominent a feature of earlier Arabic fiction,

even though, as we saw in the previous chapter, it appeared in Waguih Ghali's, *Beer in the Snooker Club*, and as a crucial external dimension to Tayeb Salih's influential *Season of Migration to the North*. In exploring 1970s British cultural territory, at least in so far as it impacts on her Egyptian female character, Soueif negotiates the cross-cultural encounter by an accumulation of synchronic cultural references, defamiliarisation of English manners as seen through the eyes of the immigrant/outsider, and engagement with tropes of Orientalism. At the level of simple cultural transference, Soueif has the disconcerting habit of extracting banal lyrics from British pop songs of the period, in parallel to the Umm Kulthum songs she quotes from in her Cairene sections. This hangover from Arabic narrative practice is an incongruous weave within the texture of the section of the book which otherwise might be taken as a rewriting of the British university campus novel.

But the chief intercultural moment – a very long moment which revisits Mustafa Sa'eed's career with women in *Season of Migration* – is the unfolding of Asya's tortuous affair with Gerald Stone, an egregious post-hippy student from Canterbury, England.

> 'Could we – please – at least switch off the light?' she says.'No.' He shakes his head. He pulls her head round by the hair and holds it so that she has to look into the mirror. 'Look at you, baby. Look at you. I never want you to get dressed when we're married. Be like this for me, babe: naked and perfumed, your hair falling over your shoulders, wearing only your jewels.' Her jewels that Saif had bought.
> 'An odalisque you want?' she smiles.
> 'A what?'
> 'A concubine. A female slave.'

The episode concludes with the young Englishman exclaiming: 'I'm the one who's the slave, your slave, my beautiful, beautiful Eastern butterfly' (pp.565–66). Gerald's pseudo-American form of address, the hint of Orientalist sado-masochism, and the reference to Asya's Egyptian husband, Saif, who on account of buying her jewellery, it is implied, is her legal possessor, all contribute to the over-determined quality of material here. Saif remains in the background at this point, standing for Arab culture: loved, but constrictive and patriarchal.

Once again, it is the Western lover (now male) who is importunate, and the Eastern partner who is required to act out a part. Aware as she seems to be of the cultural artefact of the West's production of the Orient, Asya passively yields to Gerald's obsession, even as she is enslaved by her own masochistic desire for the English boy. In spite of her superiority in terms of cultural knowledge, she has been presented as another victim of Western subjugation of the East, 'humiliated' as the passive object of a still unreconstructed Western male chauvinism (Ibrahim, p.157). There is some truth in this, but it misses out the ambiguity of Asya's cross-cultural experiences, notably her earlier willing experimentation in sexual liberation in Switzerland. If Saif signified the virtues and limitations of home, Gerald can be seen as a predator who, without being conscious of his Orientalist tastes and sadistic urges, nevertheless subdues and enslaves his 'eastern butterfly' as the Western Imperialist had conquered the East. While aware of the postcolonial overtones to this relationship, it has to be conceded Soueif does not allow her characters to degenerate into crude stereotypes. Neither does the obvious feminist dimension to the novel develop out of step with the cultural boundaries of Asya's Arab/Islamic society. When she eventually succeeds in breaking free of Gerald she returns to Egypt, still in love with Saif but unable ever again to live with him. At the end, Asya comes across a recently discovered statue of a dancer from the age of Rameses. The female figure, which is 'in complete possession of itself', signifies a primordial Egyptian feminine identity against which Asya is able to locate a facet of her own nature.

Another passage in the novel shows Soueif to be aware, albeit in simplistic terms, of how postcolonial issues inhere within the Anglo-Arab encounter. Said saw an intersection between the public and the private in the replacement of the British by the elite to which Asya's family the Ulama belong, and the decision of Asya and her mother, Lateefa, to speak English instead of Arabic. This act hardly accords with the national and Pan-Arab aims of the Nasserite project (which *Eye of the Sun* seems in part to endorse), but looks forward to the later manifestations of globalisation to which Soueif's success as a writer is directly connected. It is possible to see a split signification in the overtly Arab nationalist/pro-Palestinian orientation in Soueif's writ-

ings, and her identification with the language, literature and culture of her country's former coloniser. Asya is walking along the embankment in London, a setting replete with unavoidable colonial connotations, when her thoughts set English history alongside her own nation's by musing on the translated adage: 'Great Britain is the gift of the Thames'. Reviewing the monuments evidencing Britain's imperial past, she concludes these were

> Built of course on Egyptian cotton and debt, on the wealth of India, on the sugar of the West Indies, on centuries of adventure and exploitation ending in the division of the Arab world and the creation of the state of Israel etc.etc.etc. Why then does she not find it in her heart to feel resentment or bitterness or anything but admiration for and pleasure in the beauty, the graciousness, the harmony of this scene?

In fact, Asya 'feels almost proud of all this', tracing her own intimacy with British culture to a

> middle-aged spinster from Manchester [who] came out to Cairo in the 1930s to teach English. A small, untidy twelve-year-old girl fell in love with her and lived and breathed English Literature from that day on. That girl was my mother, and here, now I am.

Addressing an imaginary speech to a passing English gentleman in a pin-striped suit she declares: 'You cannot disclaim responsibility for my existence, nor for my being here beside your river today' (pp.511–12).

This situation is replete with postcolonial ambiguities that Soueif's writing lacks the sophistication to tease out. The setting to Asya's musings inevitably recalls the opening of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which the first narrator evokes in triumphalist mode 'all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled – the great knight-errants of the sea' (Conrad: 1983, p.29). But Asya's acceptance of Britain's imperial past as past, comparable to the ruins of 'Abu Simbel or Deir Bahari', defuses Marlow's ambivalence towards empire. In Asya's response to London there is no sense of the colonial aporias to be found in postcolonial texts by the likes of V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Tayeb Salih, or Sam Selvon. Asya's assertion of a personal identification

with this imperial history, at the same time as she makes a claim on it, is fraught with postcolonial difficulties. Asya – surely here the mouthpiece of Soueif herself – proclaims: 'I bring you poetry as great as yours but in another tongue [...] I bring you Islam and Luxor and Alexandria and lutes and tambourines and silk rugs and sunshine and incense and voluptuous ways [...] She smiles, and the man [...] glancing up as he passes her, smiles back and walks on' (p.512). The closure of reciprocity masks the fact that we do not know how the gentleman might have responded if Asya had actually delivered her speech asserting a commonality between his culture and the literature and religion of her own first-nation. And why, because she has so thoroughly ingested the literature of England, must the gentleman accept responsibility for Asya? Simply because she has appropriated his culture, does she expect her presentation of her own culture will convince the Englishman of its equality with his? The romantic Orientalist cliches in which Egypt and Islam are presented suggest that although Asya claims for the two cultures an equal weighting, her appeal to British culture implies a filiation of her own to the former.

Soueif develops the feminist potential of *Eye of the Sun* in more sophisticated directions in *Sandpiper* (1996), a collection of seven short stories, three of which date from the eighties. This time (in comparison with *Aisha*) there is no apparent interconnection, each of the stories remaining discrete. 'Mandy' appears to be a sketch of the Asya-Saif relationship that sits at the centre of *Eye of the Sun*. Indeed, its closeness to a specific series of incidents in the novel makes its inclusion in the later published volume of short stories somewhat mysterious. (Several of the Alexandrian Greek characters from 'Chez Milou' also made their appearance in similar circumstances in the novel.) In the opening and closing pieces, 'Melody' and 'I Think of You,' both of which have expatriate contexts, Soueif appears to be drawing on her experience of living in the Arabian peninsular. Overall, the stories establish the typical themes of Soueif's fiction: fraught, sometimes cross-cultural, personal relationships between men and women, in situations characterised by cultural as well as gender confusion, both of which contribute to the dislocation of the main female protagonists.

In ‘Melody,’ the Turkish mother, whose child is run over by a speeding Arab motorist and whose husband shows videos of the child’s dead body to outsiders, is observed by an uncomprehending Western woman who nevertheless shares her cultural displacement by living on the same expatriate compound. A cross-cultural marriage between a European woman and an Egyptian, in ‘Sandpiper,’ begins as a love-match then dissolves against the background of his family’s apartment in Alexandria:

> My foreignness, which had been so charming, began to irritate him. My inability to remember names, to follow the minutiae of politics, my struggles with his language [...] He was back home, and needed someone he could be at home with, at home. It took perhaps a year. His heart was broken in two. Mine was simply broken. (Soueif: 1996, p.33)

Even within the Arabic-speaking world, cultural and religious differences obtrude. A female Egyptian academic, married to an estranged Englishman, awaits delivery of a second baby in a hospital in the Arabian peninsular. Her fellow patients are not even sure if she speaks Arabic, while their processes of covering/uncovering in the presence of doctors/male visitors are culturally alien to her. As in *Aisha*, the stories seem to be testing out ways of escape from cultural confusion. The Coptic woman in the final story (‘I Think of You’) achieves a rare success by managing to live a fulfilled life as a career woman in a traditional society, at the same time as maintaining a hold on family life and the respect of the ordinary Egyptians around her.

Soueif’s women characters in *Sandpiper* therefore move in isolation, between boundaries of inimical discourses, implicitly questioning traditional stereotyping of women’s role at the same time as negotiating their own way around contemporary Western norms. As does Hanan al-Shaykh in her novel of the desert, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, Soueif’s achievement in *Sandpiper* is to mediate a space between a Western-derived metropolitan culture and a culture of the Arab desert. In Soueif’s case, the different strands of Egypt – Pharaonic, Coptic, African, Arab-Islamic and European – inform the narratives leaving them with the imprint of shifting multicultural perspectives. ‘The Water-Heater’ specifically addresses antithetical Westernising/Islamic articulations of feminine issues, registering a

refusal to allow either of these dominant discourses the final word. Set in contemporary Cairo, the story's chief protagonists are an ambitious law student in his final year of university, and his sixteen year old, school-girl sister, with whom he lives, together with his old widowed mother, in a modest city apartment. Within the pressurised urban setting, with its cramped buses and crowded spaces, the young man struggles to maintain the codes of a strict Islamic propriety. Soueif's purpose in the story is encapsulated in the title – the water-heater is a metonym for Western intrusion into the patriarchal-ordered family consisting of the man and the two women in his charge. Before its arrival, the sister prepared the hot water for her brother's bath by lighting a primus stove, as well as cleaning and laying out his clothes. The installation of the water-heater allows the girl to take her baths on a level of equality, in the process exciting the young man's repressed lust and threatening to corrupt his rigorously practised faith.

> He sat on the sofa holding the beads, suddenly wary of pronouncing the names of God. His consciousness revolved around one fact: they were alone in the flat. His mother would not be back for another hour yet. The water-heater was quiet. Faten must be drying herself now. Rubbing her body all over. Bending to reach an ankle or raising her leg to the edge of – if he went on like this he would be lost. He would be lost to both this world and the next; his studies and his future would be lost. His soul would be lost. (p.81)

Soueif ensures the struggle within the young man does not engage our sympathies by fully unpacking the woman-hating articles of his creed. He spurns the girls he encounters outside in the city as 'outdoor girls', 'sullied'. His sister – whose face his religion permits him to look upon – in the first place attracts him because he imagines her as accepting, respectful, and pure, until his lusts assail him and he doubts even her – all females are 'deficient in brains and morality' (pp.75–76). At the crisis, he transfers recognition of his own moral failings onto his sister, beating her for possessing a French magazine given her by her schoolteacher – 'Is this what we send you to school for? To learn rudeness and obscenities?' (p.83) But only the premature reappearance of the mother prevents him from stripping the girl of her gown. Hurriedly, the man returns to his mother's plan of marrying the girl

off to her cousin – a plan he had previously rejected in his repressed desire to keep his sister for himself.

Soueif's story is admittedly crude in its sacrifice of characterisation for concentration on the man's religious bigotry. Though the girl does express a softening attitude to religious legalism – in a scene where brother and sister watch from their balcony a crowd in pursuit of a thief – she remains little more than an object in the male consciousness. In 'I think of You', the final story in the book, Soueif does however succeed in presenting a stronger mediating stance between the harsh religious code of the desert and the crusading zeal of the West. An Egyptian woman, married to an Englishman but alone and foreign in a hospital ward in a strict Arab country, experiences the segregation of the sexes by marking the routines of covering and uncovering of the Arab women alongside her. The liberal-minded, professional, North African woman observes their defensive manoeuvres as they respond to the intrusions of male visitors and doctors. Grotesquely swelled by pregnancy, her movements further incapacitated by high-blood pressure, she is brought, in a manner of speaking, to a condition of equality with her Arab sisters. Difference between the women is expressed in dress and personal habits. 'So what if she spits into the sink. She didn't spit on me' – even by a common language – 'You do not speak Arabic? […] 'Yes, I speak,' I say, but my voice comes out in a shaky whisper' (p.135). To the sisterly sympathy of her fellow patients and an outsider Filipino nurse, a jarring note is supplied by a contest of cultural stereotypes between a religious hospital visitor and a Scottish matron. The former cannot comprehend her having married an Englishman, and believes Westerners are 'animals' who 'copulate on the streets'. For her part the Scottish matron dismisses Muslims as 'animals' who 'don't understand a thing. They think if they have rules it makes them civilised' (pp.143–44). From a space situated between these mutually uncomprehending cultural battle-lines, the narrator registers flashbacks of her dying friend, a successful Coptic woman playwright, who she links with Egypt's Pharaonic past – 'Elevated, theatrical, your bed was worthy of Cleopatra' – and who also achieved fulfilment as a hostess – drawing the inference: 'I wonder what these women […] would make of you.' 'Comparatively happy' in her second marriage, loved by her son, and

prayed for by her Muslim servants, the friend is presented not as a paragon of western feminism, but, from within her own culture, the creator of her own space (pp.132–33). Soueif's concern is to unfold the solidarity of sisterhood, East and West, not to patronise the Arab Muslim women. In these stories she underwrites the call of her fellow countrywoman, Leila Ahmed, for the 'humane treatment of women nothing less, and nothing more', eschewing debate over 'the intrinsic merits of Islam, Arab culture, or the West' (Ahmed: 1992, p.168).[2]

In her second novel, *The Map of Love*, Soueif attempts to build on the dual elements of an Arab-Egyptian historical perspective and exploration of the Anglo-Arab encounter started with *Eye of the Sun*. She seems to have determined that the successful reception of *Eye of the Sun* would allow her to explore in her next novel an even closer connection between an Egyptian historical dimension and the Anglo-Arab encounter. *The Map of Love* (1999) joins these two preoccupations as intimately as the subject of a love-match between a widowed Victorian British lady and an Egyptian aristocrat can allow. But where her first novel has the freshness and immediacy of lived contemporary history, the later work bears the imprint of historical reading grafted on to the genre of romance. A reference in *Eye of the Sun* to Ruth Prawer Jhbvala's *Heat and Dust* suggests that, half-consciously at least, Soueif may have already had the Indian novel at the back of her mind, to surface in her depiction of two generations of Anglo-Egyptian lovers in *Map of Love*. The discovery in 1997 of a trunk containing old letters, notebooks, journals and personal relics from the turn of the century is the talisman for an intertwining of histories of different generations of Anglo-Americans and Egyptians, originally connected by the marriage of Lady Anna Winterbourne and Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi. The story begins when Isabel Parkman, an American divorcee and descendent of Anna and Sharif, meets and falls in love with Omar al-Ghamrawi, a New York-based Egyptian

2 The fact that Soueif turns to Pharaonic Egypt in both *Eye of the Sun* and *Sandpiper* for her feminist icons and does not attempt to rehabilitate figures from Islamic history such as the Prophet Muhammad's wives or female Arab Muslim mystics like Rabiyya is itself a firm indicator of her secular nationalist feminism.

who also has blood links with the Anna-Sharif marriage. Isabel travels to Egypt to deliver the trunk to Omar's sister, Amal who then acts as the editor of the Anna-Sharif story, piecing together the primary sources while supplying research and sympathetic guesswork to fill in the gaps. The two Western female protagonists, Anna and Isabel, are initiated at different historical moments into Egyptian and Arab perspectives, propelled by their intimacy with their Egyptian lovers at the same time as being immersed in the political events of their respective epochs.

The plan of the novel is quite ambitious, undertaking 'a pattern of juxtaposition and analogy […] involving the dual history of life in Egypt in the first and last decades of the twentieth century' (Malik, p.152). Its didactic core is the project of unifying Egypt and the West around a generous understanding of Egyptian and Arab aspirations already indicated in the autobiographical passage about the Thames from *Eye of the Sun* quoted above. This is connected to political currents that form the background to the time spent in Egypt by the novel's British heroine, Lady Anna Winterbourne, during which she marries an Egyptian aristocrat, Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi. The time frame of the Anna-Sharif story is from 1897, when Anna comes to Egypt freshly widowed, until 1911, when she returns to England after the assassination of her second husband. Encompassing the last decade of Lord Cromer's rule, this period marked both a culmination of the British domination set in motion by their occupation of Egypt in 1882, and the inception of a fully self-aware Egyptian nationalist movement that reached its watershed after World War 1 under the leadership of Sa'd Zaghlul.

The Anna-Sharif relationship develops on Egyptian soil and is seen to validate Egyptian national aspirations. Hovering in the background is the Cardinal Richelieu-like figure of Lord Cromer (ostensibly the British Agent and Consul-General, he was virtually sole-ruler of Egypt) who actually appears on stage in the scene in which Anna and Sharif go to the British Agency to get their marriage registered. Anna is connected through her father-in-law, Sir Charles Winterbourne, to a tiny group of British anti-Imperialists centred on another historical figure, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the Tory advocate of

oppressed Eastern nationalities. She is therefore predisposed to accept Egyptians on their own terms.

Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi, we are told, is the nephew of Urabi's Prime Minister Mahmoud Sami Pasha, of whom Blunt wrote: 'he is one of those who first planned the National movement as long ago as Ismail's time. He suffered a great deal for his liberalism yet stuck to his principles' (Blunt: 1922, p.249). Sharif Pasha is shown throughout to be as worthy a patriot as his uncle, though an increasingly isolated one, as the British entrench themselves in his country and the Egyptians are polarised between the pro-British Constitutionalists on one hand, and the extreme forces which ultimately accomplish his death. Married to an Englishwoman though he is, Soueif is at pains to establish Sharif as entirely independent of the British, even though his friend, the Egyptian Chief Mufti, Shaykh Muhammad Abdu, was able in reality to accommodate himself to them as he grew older. Her inclusion of historical figures like Cromer, Muhammad Abdu, the proto-feminist Qasim Amin, and others, has leant a depth to the novel that excites some readers. Wail Hassan (2002), for instance, in referring to the historical Arab figures, writes: 'The anti-colonial fervour of [these] intellectuals […] is movingly captured […] in Ahdaf Soueif's semi-historical novel' (p.58). This time Soueif's political commitments are quite evident. Her endorsement of a moderate early 1900s anti-Islamist/Constitutional nationalism embodied in Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi, a fictional member of an historical Turco-Egyptian patrician family, gives her novel a more fixed political grounding than the deracinated, inconclusive political sympathies of Asya Ulama and her family. In the earlier time frame Egypt is also seen to be effected by a continuing intrusive Western presence and the emerging threat of Zionism, seen at its beginning in the Anna/Sharif section of the novel.

Anna's late twentieth-century Anglo-French-American relative, Isabel Parkman, appears in the second time period, the late 1990s. The love interest in this episode is between Isabel, and Omar al-Ghamrawi, a descendent of Sharif al-Baroudi and therefore a distant relative of Isabel's. Their relationship is set against a period of Islamist insurgency and state repression, which the author locates within the wider context of American hegemony in the Middle East, and the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. When Isabel is invited by Amal to the

family estate in the south, she is caught up in the Islamist insurgency and the Government's draconian response. This provides one opportunity (there are also others) for the state of the contemporary Arab world to be discussed. However, this is only done by the more articulate and high born. Baroudi's second generation Egyptian relative, Omar al-Ghamrawi (a radical Arab-American orchestral conductor, whose mother was Palestinian, and who bares more than a passing resemblance to Edward Said) has developed his ancestor's political commitment along lines commensurate with the cynical, comprador '90s, and also receives Soueif's imprimatur.

The problem raised by all this politicking is, however, one of literary aesthetics. Skillful though her evocation of the two political eras is, Soueif's marks for political merit and demerit are somewhat too easily assigned.[3] Her political loyalty, though consistently attached to most if not all of the historical Egyptian intellectual-characters, is mildly criticised by Amin Malik on account of its 'privileged-class perspective' (p.152). But Malik, whose discussion of the novel is particularly insightful, also finds Soueif's approach especially convincing for its 'novelistic hybridization', and 'polyphonic discourse', especially in its experimentation with forms of Egyptianised English, though he probably goes too far in identifying all this as part of an 'evolving Arab-Muslim feminist discourse' (p.161). *Map of Love* certainly takes its place alongside a whole corpus of postcolonial literature in which terms of empire have been renegotiated, and the history of the colonised subject asserted alongside that of imperial power. The commonality of this experience, fractured as it is according to whichever perspective is adopted, the coloniser's or the colonised, has been termed by Said (1993) 'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories.' This can be said to frame his argument for 'contrapuntal' readings of literature, in which a canonical text is set beside a

3 A more searching assessment of Qasim's Amin's 'feminism' is given by Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam*, in her chapter, 'The Discourse of the Veil' where she clarifies Amin's pro-British stance, something to which Soueif makes no reference. The same can be said about Soueif's portrayal of Muhammad Abdu.

postcolonial text, so that the latter might supply perspectives omitted or occluded in the former.

Soueif's concern in *Map of Love*, however, seems not only to be about rewriting a colonial encounter from the point of view of the colonised (although this she certainly does), but to posit an alternative meeting of equals, as embodied in the coming together of the two couples and their families. Both Western women develop strong empathetic ties with their respective sister-in-laws. Anna's relationship with her sister-in-law, Layla, is closely paralleled by that between Isabel and Omar's sister, Amal, who acts as the editor of Anna's letters and diaries, so performing the crucial bridging role of the novel. The two Western women are eager to speak Arabic and learn about Arab culture. Soueif ensures that both Anna and Isabel come to sympathise with the Egyptian/Arab cause. It might be argued, however, that the women characters in the novel, with the possible exception of Amal, lack distinctiveness; their homogeneity makes for confusion in switching from one to another member of the quartet. Anna Winterbourne's voice grows somewhat insipid as the novel progresses, as does her relationship with Sharif. But the death of Baroudi, doubled by the hinted assassination of Omar at the end, indicate both the author's pessimistic appraisal of the 'Arab predicament' and an almost Forsterian recognition that the time for a wider brotherhood between Anglo-Americans and Arabs has not yet come. 'Despite its potent anti-colonial discourse, the novel reveals a conscious progression towards a reconciliatory universalist stance' (Malik, p.157). Yet the wished-for but ultimately doomed unions of Anna-Sharif/Isabel-Omar represent an unattainable object of desire: a sublimation, no less, of Soueif's own cultural dichotomies, in which the issue of cross-cultural contacts are romanticised and their consequences deferred.

In *Map of Love* a rosy glow of romance, if not sentimentality, also seems to filter through Soueif's feminism, which barely extends across the spectrum of Egyptian women. She herself acknowledges: 'I am influenced by all the Mills and Boone books that I read as a teenager, which are a kind of subliterary rendition of *Wuthering*

Heights and *Jane Eyre*' (Massad, p.88).[4] This may be one cause behind her choice of historical romance in English rather than the Arabic magic realism which the radical feminist writer, Salwa Bakr, uses to grapple with the multifarious obstacles facing Egyptian working-class women (El Sadda: 1996). Also, in comparison with Naguib Mahfouz or Yusuf Idries, whose portrayals of Egyptian life are weighted by the kind of aporias we might expect writing on such a complex, socio-politically variegated society would throw up, and for whom the tragedies of individuals often possess a universal quality, Soueif's fiction, with its surprising lack of contradiction and ambiguity, might be considered somewhat jejune. Readers of *Map of Love* might well find the character of Anna somewhat two-dimensional; and it is true that we see very little development in her marriage with Sharif beyond the odd early tiff. Interesting as Soueif's translation of the idioms used in her novels by lower class or older Egyptian characters is, she has increasingly conformed to the demands of her English medium, adopting the diary form (also used in *Eye of the Sun*) as well as flashback and an editor-narrator. While she began by experimenting with Arabic forms of storytelling in *Aisha*, with *Map of Love*, Soueif has clearly reached the stage where her mode of writing is dictated by a well-established genre of English writing – the historical romance. In the following passage she toys with vocabulary suitable to describe the arrangement of her Victorian English heroine's hair:

> She wears a peignoir (is it peignoir? I like the word; tasting of the nineteenth Century, of fashion and a certain type of woman, of Europe and the novel. Anna Karenina might have worn a peignoir as she prepared for bed; certainly Colette's heroines did, but my English Anna seems worlds away from Coline and Rézi who are her contemporaries) – a peignoir gathered at her shoulders and falling over her breasts in silken folds. Perhaps it has a trimming of soft fur around the neck and at the end of the long, loose sleeves. It is in a pale, pale grey shading into blue. The card propped up on my dressing table calls this colour 'Drifter'. This colour card has been of no use to me for years, and yet I

4 While they differ in the secular or religious inflections they place upon their respective feminisms, Soueif and Leila Aboulela are remarkably similar in their penchant for Mills-and-Boone-type fiction and nineteenth-century British romance novels.

> cannot bring myself to throw it away; it startles me that an object of such beauty should be held in such low esteem – and yet there they were in B&Q, Sainsbury's HomeBase, etc., not to mention the specialised paint stores and hardware stores: hundreds of cards, stacked, inviting the most casual passer-by to pick one up, glance at it, and throw it into the nearest bin. But look what it does with the seven basic colours; it lobs you gently into the heart of the rainbow and turns you loose into blue; allows you to wander at will from one end of blue to the other: seas and skies and cornflower eyes, the tiles of Isfahan and the robes of the Madonna and the cold glint of a sapphire in the handle of a Yemeni dagger (Soueif: 1999, p.65).

The first thing to note here is the meretricious overuse of cultural referents, all of them European, ranging through the nineteenth century novel, to contemporary British shopping chains and clichéd oriental images. The intrusive authorial voice intentionally or unconsciously mimics Soueif's favourite Victorian author George Eliot; the attempt to valorise her heroine by connection with those of canonical nineteenth-century French and Russian literature, and the trajectory of her lexical animadversions from the pretentious 'peignoir' to the reductio ad absurdum of advertising lingo and banal comercial names, all attest to the author's immersion in a muddle of Anglophone registers. Nevertheless, by adopting the medium of English – and it must be said by relinquishing any attempt to challenge or undermine its cultural forms – her gain has been a much wider readership (*Map of Love* was short-listed for the Booker Prize for fiction in England) than any contemporary Egyptian writer would dare hope for.

Finally, there is the issue as to how far Soueif presents a feminist voice (even a specifically Arab/Egyptian one) in her fiction. Through a female character like Asya, whose relative freedom and choice of sexual experimentation goes far beyond the experience of most Arab/Islamic women, Soueif would seem to be linked to a discourse of feminism that scarcely exists in any collective form in the Arab world, where, as Leila Ahmed and Deniz Kandiyoti have argued, the issue of women's rights is still confused by the Islamic world's relations with the West.[5] While Soeuif's compatriot Nawal al-Sa'dawi has gone

5 See Ahmed (1992) and Cooke (2001). From an ideological point of view, Kandiyoti (1991) links the situation of women in Muslim countries with those of the wider postcolonial world in which 'women were variously portrayed as

much further in challenging traditional religious axioms as patriarchal and inimical to the development of Arab women, Soueif may have purposely avoided direct criticism of the Islamic religion, other than the practice of veiling adopted by lower middle-class university students in *Eye of the Sun*, and the chauvinist attitudes of the young male student in 'The Water-Heater.' In her fiction 'Islam and Islamic men and women are relegated to a peripheral narrative space' (Ibrahim, p.279).[6] Moreover, as Ahmed (1993) points out, if Soueif is a feminist – and a Muslim one at that – her feminism has to be identified as linked to her class background:

> Asya, in a confrontation with veiled university students, is enraged (much as a Western woman might be) by their veils and their attitudes toward Islam and colonialism). Asya is of middle-class background; the Islam of the middle and upper class, an urbane, cosmopolitan, secular or near-secular Islam, is of course not the only Islam there is.

Indeed, rather like her mentor Edward Said, Soueif has judged it politic to avoid the religious issue. She prefers to promote somewhat watered-down postcolonial positions and a discourse foregrounding the possibilities of cross-cultural understanding.

It was Ahdaf Soueif's first novel that elicited Said's coinage of the term, 'Anglo-Arab encounter', and in her writings we certainly meet a number of the categories so far identified as being thematically integral to the genre of writing I have been discussing. Indeed, there could be few more obvious takes on this area of cross-cultural engagement than *Map of Love*, a work that certainly reveals an astute and intelligent author, but also illustrates the dangers as well as the opportunities open to the Anglo-Arab writer. In discussing Soueif's fiction I have been probing the uses to which she has put thematic material

> the victims of their societies' backwardness, symbols of the nation's newly found vigour and modernity, or the privileged repository of uncontaminated national values' (p.440).

6 Ibrahim's discussion of the treatment of Islamic themes and characters in fiction by Soueif and al-Shaykh is very informative. See sect. 'Religion in Arabic Feminist Narratives' (pp.251–83). Ibrahim demonstrates how 'within a feminist literary scene, Islamic women with avowed Islamic voices, not specifically fundamentalist, are totally absent' (p.259).

closely related to the Anglo-Arab interface. The West's taste for fictional Orientalism, or what she has herself has acknowledged as the 'exoticization' of the East – the 'traditional […] ritualistic […] brutal […] and […] sensual' Orient (Massad, p.86) is a key element. Not only in some of the stories from *Aisha*, but also in her representation of the relationship between Asya and Gerald, does she employ such tropes. Amin Malik has argued well for the success of Soueif's employment of hybridity, at least at a linguistic and sometimes a symbolic level. However, her failure to problematise Asya's sense of connection with Britain, and the vague, undetermined sympathy that holds the Western and Egyptian characters together in *Map of Love,* leave us unsure as to how far Soueif is able to extend her appraisal of cross-cultural relations beyond her own personal engagement with British and Egyptian culture. Her attempt to rewrite the imperial episode that forms so potent an ingredient in the historic Anglo-Arab encounter also raises the question as to the effectiveness of the medium of historical romance in the treatment of such an issue. (Compare my discussion below of Jamal Mahjoub's exploration of a similar topos in, *In the Hour of Signs*). From an aesthetic point of view, Soueif's blending of political commentary with her various other narrative forms is another problem in her fiction. While her political perspective has been considered socially elitist even by her admirers, her work is particularly praised by some Egyptian and Arab critics for whom part of her appeal seems to be the novelty of seeing a pro-Arab, pro-Palestinian orientation in works of English fiction (Malik; Hassan: 2002).[7] This suggests a dual populist stance underpins Soueif's writings. Their politics ingratiates her with her small bilingual (and in Arabic translation, much larger) Arab/Egyptian audience while their commercial features lead her to make concessions to the taste of her Western readership.

7 Journalist Aida Edemariam (2005) quotes some interesting responses to *Map of Love*. The Egyptian novelist, Radwa Ashur, believes Soueif's insertion of material relating to the nineteenth century Zionist colonisation of Palestine was 'courageous […] in a novel published in England'. One of the Booker judges 'later wrote that a perceived anti-Zionism gave [the panel] pause […] [although another judge] has since denied the issue ever came up'.

Chapter 3
Jamal Mahjoub and Tony Hanania: Unravelling Anglo-Arab hybridity

Jamal Mahjoub

His subject was extraterritoriality – the state of being neither here nor there.

> Edward Said (2001, p.99)
> 'You're British?'…
> 'Yes…no.'
> Jamal Mahjoub (1989, p.178)

Jamal Mahjoub was born in 1960 of a Sudanese father and a British mother. After a period in Liverpool the family moved to Khartoum where Jamal received his education at Comboni College, an institution run by Italian priests. He later went to Atlantic College in Wales on a scholarship, then Sheffield University where he obtained a degree in Geology. After returning briefly to Sudan, he has gone on to live in London, then Aarhus in Denmark, and latterly Barcelona. Mahjoub has worked as a freelance journalist and translator from Arabic, Danish and Catalan, and has won a number of literary prizes, including the Heinemann/Guardian African Short Story Prize. Of the writers discussed in this study, Mahjoub's shifting of location and his own statements on the craft of writing probably make him personally the least well disposed toward being categorised according to ethnicity. However, I include him under an Anglo-Arab rubric for the main reason that he starts out by writing the hybrid elements of his own Anglo-Arab/African self, and from this beginning moves toward the confrontation of nations and cultures. Eventually he extends this meeting of opposites as far as to describe two intersecting circles: the

civilisations of Northern Christendom and the Islamic South. Of all the authors I discuss, Mahjoub's vision is potentially the most all embracing even as it remains focussed on individuals who, either through nature or nurture, use hybrid identities to impel them toward growth and development beyond the given limitations of race, nation, culture and religion.

Mahjoub's first three novels are about Sudan, and are linked by a similar concern with nation and identity. These emerge within a specific engagement with the Anglo-Sudanese relationship.For Caroline Mohsen they 'can be read as a trilogy which records the historic progression of political events in Sudan since the inception of British colonization of Sudan down to the late 1980s' (Mohsen: 2000, p.541). From the beginning, Mahjoub's fiction establishes patterns of individual and national search for identity, as well as the apocalypse that, he seems to be suggesting, inevitably arises from the imperialist/native encounter. His first novel, *Navigation of a Rainmaker*, is set in the corrupt postcolonial Sudan of the 1980s. The novel's main character, Tanner, is an outsider/self-conceived exile who travels to Sudan in the endeavour of rediscovering his roots, but gets lost in the mundane procedures of a Western oil company which signify the persistent threat of neo-colonialism to Africa. Offspring of a Sudanese father and a British mother, he is doomed to be out of place in whichever of the two societies he lives. In England, which is metonymically fixed in his mind by 'the low ceilings and the narrow smoke-stained walls' (Mahjoub: 1989, p.105) he goes by the name of Tanner only, the dropping of a forename indicating formality and distance from a society in which his claims of connection will always be viewed with scepticism. Tanner tries to tell his father, whom he has rarely seen since childhood, of his desire to go to Sudan. 'It began to occupy that part of him which had always been empty' (p.31, pp.15–16). But he cannot accept his father's advice to 'forget about that part of you. You don't need it' (p.18). Instead he goes to Sudan 'to start a new life, to find out if he had a home [t]here' (p.69). Slightly lighter in complexion than the 'deep brown skin' Arabs of northern Sudan, his given name – Tariq El Mirgani – is rendered otiose by his inability to read it in Arabic. Even the locals cannot understand why he wants to stay in a country with 'no petrol, no sugar, no food, nothing' (p.32). Although

he affects 'solitary disdain and detachment' from the impending catastrophe of drought, famine and civil war in Sudan, Tanner's distaste for the country's nouveau rich – 'living in a Third World country […] their hopes and dreams firmly embedded in the western […] "first" world' – shows he has already taken sides (p.43, p.50). Tanner haunts the back streets of Khartoum observing 'the regret and the discarded misery of other people's lives […] If he was a foreigner both here and in Britain, then he would be a foreigner wherever he went and therefore he could go anywhere' (p.105).

Tanner's desire to break out of an unwanted hybridity is articulated right up to the end of the novel as an existential quest in which Mahjoub's anti-hero struggles to swap European detachment for commitment to his father's native land. Tanner's struggle achieves focus when the company sends him to the south to accompany Gilmore, an African-American who he believes is a seismic expert, but whose deceptive air of ease and flexibility conceals a more sinister purpose. In this large black man of faceless expression, Tanner discerns an emptiness similar to his own. But as they penetrate deeper into territory stalked by terror and insurgency, he grows suspicious about Gilmore's meticulous interest in tracking movements. They argue over the justice of intervening in the civil war and Tanner is torn between a desire to get away and the American's ambiguous hold upon him. Gilmore turns out to be something more than Greene's Quiet American transposed from Vietnam to Africa. He may represent the same destructive political urges as the latter, but Mahjoub makes him in some respects Tanner's other, darker self. When Tanner threatens to leave, he receives the riposte: 'You're here for the same reason I am, […] There's no where else where you can think of where you'd rather be' (p.150). By accusing him of being a half-caste, empty-headed dreamer and at the same time declaring his own mission to 'instil confusion, to sow the seeds of discontent' in the cause of a larger, Manichean conflict, Gilmore forces Tanner to take a stand (p.168). When the ensuing struggle turns violent Tanner sustains a fatal wound but kills the Black American agent who has come to wreck division on the country. He dies knowing he has achieved the fulfilment he has all along been seeking. 'He had acted finally and in so doing he had killed a man, but he had also released himself from the years of

frustration and lack of direction. He had seen in an instant what he had to do and he had carried it out' (p.181).

Tanner's journey toward this existential epiphany is not, however, the only thread in Mahjoub's novel. The influence of Rimbaud and Camus is observable in the banal/flat passages of narrative and dialogue in which Tanner features, but there are also italicised sections in which the author endeavours to animate an apocalypse implicating everyone from the nomads driven from the drought areas of the west to the equally transient postcolonial leaders of the capital. These passages foreground the geography of the country in order to materialise and 'narrate the experiences of the victims: the nomadic tribes, the displaced refugee populations, and the premonitory nightmares of Tanner […] about the Sudanese crisis' (Mohsen, p.548). The rainmaker of the title is a mythic priestly-prophet figure who emerges out of the landscape and history of Pharaonic Egypt-Sudan. Like Tanner he is both insider and outsider, and Tanner first encounters his story in a small settlement where he is said to have erected a pyramid structure and promised the people he would bring rain. Later on, during Tanner's malarial-wound-induced hallucinations, the rainmaker returns with a wild dishevelled appearance that also reminds him of his father He and tells Tanner he is like himself, the product of 'a split direction […] both North and South at the same time', and that they both derive their power from this (p.158). Mahjoub clearly intends a linkage of Tanner and the rainmaker; together they announce a double unity of north and south: that of Sudan (which the rainmaker himself embodies), and that of the two hemispheres, which Tanner carries as a result of his mixed race. The trail of destruction is followed back to the death of Gordon, then on to Europe and the Great War. For this reason, at his death Tanner achieves more than an individual freedom. He is transformed from the discordant hybridity that has dogged him from the beginning; he has killed his dark other, Gilmore, who negated his southern part by siding with the neo-colonial north. Tanner killed him because he knew he must strike a blow against the recurring cycle of war and famine: like the rainmaker, 'he was born out of opposites, the coming together of differences'. Both knew 'integration' was 'the only solution' (p.162).

Mahjoub's first novel therefore takes Anglo-Arab encounter as its starting point, as embodied in its main protagonist, Tanner, whose struggle is to break free of an inherited, hyphenated identity. Apart from the text's incorporation of a visionary/apocalyptic mode of writing to which it will be necessary to return, the narrative mainly adheres to a literary-existentialist format. The reader is never quite sure to what extent Tanner is contained by the African environment or – an outcast from Europe like Marlow/Kurtz – whether he is merely using it as a background in which to discover his authentic self. However, with his second novel, *Wings of Dust*, Mahjoub enters a recognisably postcolonial domain where the experiences of individuals in key respects allegorise the nation, and the personal connects unavoidably with the public. The locus of the opening section is Britain and Western Europe, while the later part is set in an emblematic, newly postcolonial African nation. We see both places through the eyes of the generation of elite Sudanese who inherited the leadership of their country during the moment of decolonisation in the nineteen-fifties. Events take place a generation after Mustafa Sa'eed's adventures in *Season of Migration*, and the dimension of the Anglo-Arab relationship is inscribed with far less intensity and ambivalence. Again, the main protagonist, Sharif, is an exile, whose experience, under the exigency of the hour, simultaneously maps his own life and his country's in its 'progress from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium to the rise of nationalism and from the euphoria of independence to the subsequent disillusion and the beginnings of civil war' (Mohsen, p.546).

Thematically and intertextually, *Wings of Dust* connects with a number of key postcolonial strategies and texts. The British/European part conforms to the category of postcolonial metropolitan or migrant writing, and invites particular comparison with the novels of Sam Selvon and V.S. Naipaul. Unable, like Trinidadian political émigré Ralph Singh in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, to return to his native land, Mahjoub's protagonist-narrator is held up in a boarding house in a metropolitan location (France in this case). For well over half the novel, Mahjoub focuses on a period of about a decade, starting with Sharif's student period at Oxford, where he meets and marries an English girl, and with the years that follow when he lives the life of a

transient habitué of the Western metropolises. Sharif circulates within the black migrant scene in Liverpool, London, Paris, and New York, frequenting bordellos in each, as well as high establishments like the Ritz. As scholarship-students privileged in their own land but the butt of racism in Europe, the young Sudanese are incorporated into a demi-monde milieu where they are indistinguishable from poor West Indian immigrants (in England) and migrants from Africa and the Francophone Caribbean (in France). We find them in the same situations using the same stratagems – claiming African Princely status, or getting out of depth with the lowest class of English girl – as Selvon's or Colin MacInnes' 'spades'. Arab is thus elided into African which in turn fuses with the black diasporas.

It is in a Harlem Jazz club that Sharif meets and subsequently falls in love with a black American singer, known as the Contessa, with whom he travels round the world.

> Fidel Castro once offered me a cigar (I declined). I've slept in marble palaces and muddy ditches. I discussed racehorses with the Agha Khan. I've been offered riches beyond compare and I've been robbed in broad daylight. I've lived a life of charmed luxury and never had to pay the price – until now (Mahjoub: 1994, p.67).

The clichés – *marble palaces/muddy ditches/riches beyond compare /robbed in broad daylight/charmed luxury* – distinguish Sharif's narrative voice from Singh's patrician, Gibbonesque prose (and come to that, Moses' Caribbean English in *The Lonely Londoners*) but without fixing him in any distinct way. He is neither a hopelessly anglicised mimic man, nor a spectacular colonial oddity like Mustapha Sa'eed – nor is the reader persuaded of Sharif's native roots. Instead he postures as the international writer manqué, and is part of the larger problem of Mahjoub's writing here, in which romantic flourishes – the failed poet and academic Shibshib is described as 'carr[ying] the soul of the nation on his back' (154) – cohabit with a cynical Camus-like affectation of disillusionment.[1]

1 One of the clearest demarcations between Mahjoub and writers like Achebe and Ngugi may be that the latter found 'themselves caught up in the transition from communal societies to ones based on individualism [and] their novels naturally

After its long opening dealing with migratory issues and themes, the later section of the novel conforms to the type of postcolonial narrative that inclines toward narrating the nation. Sharif returns to Sudan and accepts the post of provincial governor. Now the hero follows a familiar path of corruption and eventual disgrace. Territory such as this has been covered by a roll call of African writers, most notably in Achebe's novels. In the corrupt postcolonial African politician's self-justification we catch the note of the *Anthills of the Savannah*:

> 'Didn't I lay the foundations for the construction of the largest sugar factory in the world?' 'Yes sir.' But they do not tell him that the foundation stone over which all the fuss was made was as far as the construction got and the site still lies out there overrun by goat droppings. Gradually the nightmare begins to dawn on him. Plead ignorance? Weep like a child? No sir, this is no time to display weakness, we must go on. And the bitterness descends from the statues and minarets, from the slogans and broken promises it settles down over the land like a fine coating of dust that passes silently overnight, filling the eyes and clogging the ears (p.189).

But Mahjoub's sympathetic, largely uncritical presentation of his central character deflects the didactic accusation found in postcolonial African writing away from Sharif and his generation – the colourful if self-servicing first wave of foreign-educated postcolonial politicians – on to rulers in waiting: inflexible narrow-minded military men and jealous, hypocritically puritanical religious students. In the end, the reader is unsure of how to assess Sharif. Have his adventures changed him in essence from the carefree, sad, cynical spectator of his country's short and sudden decline – or have they, as Mahjoub seems to suggest, delivered him to the verge of transformation – 'I will travel in whatever direction the wind takes me. I am reborn'? (p.217)

> reflect a concern with the disintegration of totalized oral cultures and with the subsequent position of the individual' (JanMohamed: 1983, p.8). While *Navigation of a Rainmaker* mystifies the totalized oral culture in the form of the rainmaker, in *Wings of Dust* Mahjoub ultimately identifies most with the predicament of the individual from the colonially-educated African elite. The implication is that as far as African society is concerned Mahjoub retains the distance of an outsider.

The Rainmaker and *Wings of Dust* leave the reader without a sense of completion. They seem to be sketching out broader themes which cohere around the impulse to escape a destabilising in-betweeness which might be imposed biologically and culturally by an individual's racial hybridity, or acquired through colonial education. Mahjoub's third novel, *In the Hour of Signs*, takes the reader back to the age of imperial conquest that is the essential antecedent to Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration*. In *Hour of Signs*, we see an extension of the patterning of Mahjoub's previous novels backward into an even earlier past, sifting for motifs that appear to recur in the present thus giving, in Mahjoub's own words (Mahjoub: 2001), 'a sense of history moving in circles.' Mahjoub creates a different character to Tanner and Sharif, both products of the uprooted, secular twentieth century, to bear the conscious weight of this project. The peripatetic Hawi is a medieval Muslim figure whose reputation has spread beyond Egypt through the Arab *mashreq* as far as the mountains of Persia. It is Hawi who tries to make sense of the 'Signs' he and his contemporaries live though: The advent of Muhammad Ahmad, the Mahdi, his sweeping victories (including the defeat of Gordon) in Sudan up to the border with Egypt, his sudden death and the break up of his movement under the successor-caliphs – above all the cataclysmic re-conquest of the Sudan and the British vengeance at Omdurman. Hawi's experiences and the events he witnesses through his journeys lead him to question the beliefs that sustain the Mahdist world-picture:

> Like many who choose to steer the course of their lives according to ideals rather than accepting the nature of the world as it is, he eventually strayed too far. He began to question the very ideas he was supposed to defend, to talk of a second hidden message concealed within the holy scriptures (Mahjoub: 1996, p.17).

Hawi's eventual fate is to be hung for apostasy, to be a martyr who has broken the circle. His revelation on the point of death is that God is greater than that man imputes of him, and so commensurately, is man. The lesson carries connotations both for individual and nation, especially when one knows that in creating Hawi Mahjoub had in mind the Sudanese religious thinker Mahmud Muhammad Taha, also hung for apostasy, by Jaffar Numeiri. This kind of writing ensures

Hour of Signs is not a 'purely historical novel but a novel which seeks to use history to interrogate the nature of national identity' (Mahjoub: 2001).

Part of Mahjoub's achievement is to split the apocalypse of 'Signs' between those religious ones pertaining to the Last Days, and the signs of the age of imperialism, of the European later nineteenth century. This splitting is carried on through to the clash of civilisations constituted by the West's invasion of *Dar al-Islam*, and the staging of Islamist resistance. Mahjoub unfurls the two sets of signs: the comets, dreams and miracles of the Muslim visionaries, against the rail track, locomotives, iron-clad steamers and machine guns of the imperialists with the result that these are presented not so much as antithetical to one another, as historically disjunctive. The automaton-like British, whose bullets and bully beef assure them totalised victory against spear-wielding tribesmen, are dehumanised in proportion to their success. Major Ellesworth, the main English character, is a hollow man whose advice to a Sudanese prisoner on the eve of Omdurman: 'You can stay in the stone age-or you can be in at the start' is thrown into relief by the preposterous massacre that ensues.

> It all seemed so hopelessly inadequate to justify such time and effort; too small a price to pay for all these lives which now lay strewn across the plain […] The age of war was a quaint memory; this was meticulous slaughter' (pp.240–41).

Mahjoub may be the first writer to present the Mahdist episode in English from a Sudanese point of view. It is evident that he has drawn upon Sudanese sources as well as British to construct his narrative.[2] At times this gets so close up to the Sudanese forces that we can almost hear their last breath departing. Note in the following sentences how the Arabic phrase, set against the apocalyptic English closure, dramatises perfectly the clash of cultures: 'They are coming. *Allah i khalina min al shaitan*. This time nothing could stop them. The future

2 One reviewer of *Hour of Signs* saw in Mahjoub's 'dual heritage' a key to the research and 'vision' that went into its writing; complimenting him on allowing the reader access to 'the fruits of his considerable labour', he concludes: 'his novel marks a new maturity in literature in English about the Sudan' (Gibbs: 1997, p.445).

is making its way upstream and the riverbed is shaking' (p.235). In *Hour of Signs*, Mahjoub fuses several of the constituent elements of the Anglo-Arab encounter, though events take place entirely in Sudan. In the process of re-writing a defining imperial episode dual perspectives of the contesting Sudanese and English forces are built into the narrative, but it is ultimately with the Sudanese that Mahjoub is concerned. Mohsen argues that his adoption of 'stylistic diversity is also symptomatic of the plurality of origins of the modern African nation' and a refusal to privilege one narrative over another (Mohsen: p.541). The dominant European Manichean image of the backward Sudanese Other is in turn set against the struggle contemporaneously stirring within the heart of Sudanese society. With *Hour of Signs*, Mahjoub therefore reverses the historic progression of political events in Sudan, writing himself back to the point of origin of the Anglo-Arab encounter, at least as far as the Sudanese branch is concerned. In his writings he travels on a trajectory that moves from the Anglo-Sudanese hybridity of Tanner, through the partially anglicised Sharif and his fellow Sudanese students in Britain, back to the enigmatic Hawi, who seems finally to transcend his historical Mahdist identity. Through the character of Hawi, Mahjoub both interrogates the religious fervour behind the Mahdist movement and establishes a prolepsis for the Sudan of the 1980s – the epoch during which the novel was written.

Besides its adoption of standard diegetic and mimetic narrative streams to represent historical and contemporary events, Mahjoub's fiction is not infrequently constructed into dream sequences, and apocalyptic, mythological and historical visions, that can be construed as the author attempting to break out of time-locked epochs, with their tribal, religious and political walls of separation. As well as Hawi, Mahjoub creates another near mythic figure from a pre-modern time-frame in the form of the talisman rainmaker. At first both are gladly received by the people of their superstitious societies who recognise in them something of the unknown, only for them to cast be out of their respective milieus because their prophecies are no longer believed, or they are suspected of heresy or practising the dark arts. But their stories encode a message for readers: by excavating them we can recover their embedded vision and use it as a means of moving

beyond the barriers of our own time. It might be argued that *Hour of Signs* represents a more convincing fusion of an individual quest motif with an apocalyptic strain than is to be found in Mahjoub's two earlier novels. In their own ways Tanner and Sharif have similar aims at the end of their respective stories, even if they are both tainted by the mundane, secular world of modernity, and by a disorientating hybridity. However, of the main protagonists in the trilogy, Hawi, the peripatetic teacher of wisdom, is Mahjoub's most achieved creation of an individual who outgrows his age and who at death is attenuated toward transformation.

The accomplishment of the Sudanese journey might imply Mahjoub's having written himself (for the time being at least) out of the Anglo-Arab encounter. But his fourth novel, *The Carrier*, retains obvious connections with the trilogy, also building on an individual protagonist's desire to pass beyond the limitation of his own time in order to enter the wider possibilities of another. The encounter of specific European and Eastern societies is now enlarged to comprehend recent Western and Islamic civilisations in their entirety. Rashid, the chief protagonist in *The Carrier*, is another character who seeks to go beyond the boundaries of his own time, in his case the accumulated knowledge of the Islamic Middle Ages, by embracing the new scientific developments of the European Renaissance. If the scope of the Sudan trilogy – with its use of English to re-write the dominant narrative of the host nation – introduces the 'margin' to the 'centre', in *The Carrier*, Mahjoub decides to turn away from a model so axiomatic to postcolonial theory. Instead, he allegorises the fin de siecle 'clash of civilisations' as a past episode, an imagined earlier moment of West-Muslim encounter. By inscribing this 'clash' as an interface of equals, he upsets what has now become a stereotype – the challenge to the metropolitan West of an aspiring once-colonised and oppressed Other standing for an undifferentiated 'Third World'.[3]

There is a framing narrative to the historical part of *The Carrier*. Hassan, a hybridised academic from the University of Copenhagen, is

3 In this Mahjoub is, like Wail Hassan (2002), affirming the limitations of postcolonial theories as applied to the interface of Arab/Islamic cultures with the West's; see above, chapter 1.

sent to Jutland to an out of the way village not far from the coast to decipher an inscription on a navigating device found during an excavation. He meets prejudice not only from the rural population, but also from the archaeologist in charge of the project, who was expecting a Danish colleague. Hassan tries to piece together the set of events that led to Rashid al-Kenzy's arrival in this isolated spot, as evidenced by the Arabic inscription, and realises that just as no one welcomes his own presence there, it is unlikely they would show any enthusiasm to know about his Muslim antecedent. But by his persistence in upholding Rashid's story, Hassan casts doubt on the proclaimed universality of the West, filling in the dark spaces left between the shining luminaries of its official, teleological, linear history with a narrative to date left untold.

The novel's main time frame – the early seventeenth century – represents the point at which the civilisational torch of fire and invention was passed from the Muslim south to the Atlantic north. Rashid is a mix of Arab and Nubian Egyptian blood through his father's seduction of his servant mother and is therefore a hybrid, not untypical of the Muslim societies of his time. His natural bent for knowledge is fortuitously nurtured by the local madrasa and later at an out of the away academy of science which preserves the eclectic wisdom that was the apogee of medieval Islamic learning. A further year spent reading Arabic literature in the library of an old merchant confirms Rashid as the quintessential Muslim hakim. Then his luck seems to leave him; he is imprisoned for murder by sorcery and left in gaol to rot until the Dey of Algiers offers him freedom in return for accomplishing a unique feat: he must sail to Northern Europe to find a 'Dutch optical instrument', actually one of the earliest telescopes. The journey confirms Rashid as belonging to the ranks of those who are set apart; but it also represents a trial of spirit for a man who would leave behind him the familiar constellations of knowledge and set out on the search for new truths: 'The stars illuminate but a fraction of the heavens, their brightness dazzles while the key lies buried in the dark, unlit spaces between' (Mahjoub: 1998, p.102). In Rashid the outsider becomes a figure who moves toward a margin where the contiguity of his own declining culture meets that of an awakening one.

Mahjoub's coup de grace is not to deliver Rashid to London where the new scientific energies were building, or even to the Italy of Galileo and the Copernican revolution, but to a far-flung area of darkness, Jutland. Here, on the estate where he rears horses, Heinesen, a Danish nobleman and astronomer, has set to work on constructing an observatory. Shipwrecked and taken into captivity on this unfamiliar marginal terrain, the Muslim hero gradually discloses himself to the Dane as a savant and potential co-worker. Rashid 'struggles day after day to fathom the knowledge of this new world' (p.215), pushing his linguistic knowledge and scientific reasoning to the extreme to master the materials in Heinesen's library. These take him in the process 'through the dark labyrinth of doubt' and cause him to cry out against their heresy, 'is the earth become an idol, a god?'(p.242, p.237) Meanwhile, the local populace, which is ruled over by an obscurantist church and state and is sunk in superstition and ignorance, threaten and eventually defeat Heinesen's project. Their reception of the Arab emissary of civilisation simultaneously as beast, devil incarnate, and sorcerer, challenges and eventually undermines European notions of superiority. This ignorant racism is shown to persist to the end of the twentieth century when it bates Hassan as a monkey. (Both Rashid and Hassan speak Danish only to evince either shrieks of laughter or patronising praise from their Danish listeners). At the end of the novel, after Heinesen has been buried and his sister set fire to the house and burnt it down, Rashid escapes to look for a ship home. By shifting the axis back to the south, Mahjoub asks us to consider the possibility of Rashid's return to the Muslim world, a carrier of the knowledge he has received and absorbed to the Sultan in Istanbul. We know that if he did get there, the response was negative or the knowledge was suppressed. But this would have been little worse than the behaviour of the people of Denmark or of the Roman Church that imprisoned Galileo.

The main challenge of Mahjoub's narrative is to recover a lost historical memory, or one which through its modern hegemony the West has chosen to forget. Muslim civilisation once stood on a position of parity if not superiority to Europe; any cultural hegemony is necessarily limited to a certain time and space and will inevitably be either destroyed or superseded. The modern Danish archaeologist

stands for a triumphant West whose savants prefer to ignore Rashid's story, because to do anything else would require them relinquishing their belief in their own culture's uniqueness. One of the achievements of Mahjoub's novel is that it does not underwrite 'the certainty of historical representations but offers alternative forms of explanation' (Seyhan, p.63). Those who uphold teleological views of Western history might prefer to omit such intrusions because they disrupt its putative coherence; in imagining other possibilities, Mahjoub diminishes the force of their authority.[4]

We have seen how Jamal Mahjoub's fiction focuses on specific Arab/North African societies as they meet the traumas of change which encounter with the hegemonic power of the coloniser invariably brings. His main protagonists, like the author himself, blend different, frequently antagonistic cultural strands, which under stress strain individual identity to breaking point. In *Navigation of a Rainmaker* and *Wings of Dust*, the chief characters engage with a British dimension that is subsumed by new loyalties only for these to undergo severe pressure within the varying contexts of postcolonial Sudan. In Mahjoub's writing of the present/recent past of that country, the private and the public are connected so intimately as to suggest national allegory. But if his own African connections remain in part ambivalent, as even more so do his European ones, his lack of commitment to any specific national society is to be contrasted with his employment of a recurrent motif of individuals struggling to move beyond the boundaries of their own societies. While we might read Mahjoub's early fiction within the contours of postcolonial theory his recent work calls that theory's more simplistic binaries into question. A writer can not avoid his own dislocations, and it would be very unfair to accuse Mahjoub of sublimating his in an escapist universalism. It is might be more apposite to see his move in a direction beyond Anglo-Arab hybridity as a likely, even a probable destination of the Anglo-Arab encounter itself, as it is dissolved within processes that unravel

4 Seyhan's discussion of history and memory in *Writing Outside the Nation*, (chapter 2, 'Geographies of Memory') confirms Mahjoub's use of historical argument in *The Carrier*.

antimonies and demonstrate transculturation not as an aberration but eventually a norm.

Tony Hanania

Like Jamal Mahjoub, Tony Hanania is of mixed parentage, Palestinian on his father's side, English on his mother's. Educated at Winchester College and the Warburg Institute, London, Hanania also spent substantial periods of his childhood and adolescence in Beirut. Lebanon and England are the settings for his first two novels, *Homesick* and *Unreal City*, in which Hanania – as he told Syrine Hout – 'through the idea of Lebanon, through Lebanon as an idea, […] explore[s] exile as alienation' (Hout: 2001, p.289). In fact he goes further and identifies 'the modern everyman' as a Lebanese, thereby implicating modernity as the deliverer of exile and alienation to the world, and making the Lebanese the index of twentieth century rootlessness. It is tempting to read *Unreal City* as a novel that is primarily concerned with Lebanese responses to Lebanon's civil war. For example, Hout classifies it alongside several other novels as a narrative focussed on disjuncture between the narrator's generation – who stayed through at least some of the conflict – and an older, absentee generation represented by the narrator's liminal father. While I would not wish to underestimate the significance of the Lebanese characters and their relation to the war itself, in my discussion of Hanania's work, since I wish to maintain focus on the notion of Anglo-Arab encounter, Arab/Lebanese culture and Lebanese locales will be juxtaposed – as they are in Hanania's writing – alongside the English language and English locations.

Homesick starts out as a schooldays narrative in which the narrator-protagonist appears to undergo a double alienation: the child suffering away from home at prep-school is also in exile from a homeland which is at the same time disintegrating as a result of civil war. Hanania brings a new twist to the English novel's topos of schoolboy savagery and war games by setting these alongside the reality of

Lebanon's inter-communal, inter-Arab strife. However, to view *Homesick* as a re-writing of *Lord of the Flies* with a Middle Eastern tie-in, or, to be less trite, as commentary on a universal aspect of the human condition, may be valid in certain respects, but it does not tell us much about the nature of Hanania's achievement, in particular how it draws cross-cultural parallels and perspectives on exile and alienation in the context of postmodernity. Similarly, to emphasise Lebanon as the sole object of loss is to miss Hanania's subtle crafting of an English dimension, in which English geography is picked over to provide strange connections with 'home', and English characters like Ferrers in *Homesick* and Leighton in *Unreal City* find in the Lebanese civil war their own objects of desire.

At one level Hanania's narrative reads like what Said, writing of Conrad, describes as the émigré's 'obsession with his own fate and with his hopeless attempts to make satisfying contact with new surroundings' (Said: 2001, p.179). In the opening three pages narrator-protagonist Toby Shadrach, looking upon the landscape of Southern England with educated eyes, juxtaposes signs to 'unvisited towns, Farnborough, Fleet, Farnham' alongside 'the pine terraces of Sanine', 'deserted wadis of the Chouf', and 'ruined villas of Damour and Tyre', sites where 'corpses from the camp massacres' have been freshly discovered. Estranged from the new lives of his former school associates: 'whenever I returned now it was as a shabby tourist around my friends' protected breeding programmes and their bloodless dinner-tables', tropes of England's sheltered, sterile 'post-historic' continuity are set against Lebanon's rituals of slaughter to emphasise the narrator's aloneness and bitterness (Hanania: 1997, pp.1–3). The narrator's take on Winchester empties it of its grand narrative significations deterritorialising it in terms of twentieth century urban anomie: 'We had been told that the town itself had once been the capital of Christian England, the seat of legendary warrior kings, but all I had seen was a muggy high street and some boys outside the Wimpy with long hair and silly lapels, smoking in the drizzle' (p.27). In the narrative that follows Shadrach and his schoolmates enter an unrelenting, telescoped, choreographed world of chiefs, fighters and skirmishes.

To begin with Shadrach's entry into the atavistic rituals of English schoolboys falters at the sign of foreignness – his name. Where his native fellow freshmen undergo initiation through flyting by encapsulating their identity in their father's profession in an unproblematic way, Shadrach's response – 'my father is a dean in the Middle East'– provokes a tortuous chain of interrogation that is only aborted by the alarm for fire practice. But then, re-siting Shadrach's exile in this alien milieu, the sparklers the boys throw evince the whiff of explosive on the cap of the family chauffeur, Omer, who we later learn has joined the Palestinian fighters in the civil war. This is only one among a series of connections (or disconnections) drawn between England, Lebanon and the Middle East. Often apparently tenuous and arbitrary, they serve not merely as indicators of the narrator's personal alienation, but as metonyms that contrive to de-familiarise an entire scene or episode.

> The immediate world beyond the school and Hobson Wood [where the boys enact their war games] was spectral, discontinuous, glimpsed through condensation, from a taxi or a passing train. Glimpsed yet unapprehended, this world was possessed of a sublime irrelevance; the smoke from the tower of the town hospital, visitors to the garden centre next door, the comings and goings around the bus stop on the Sarum Road: we observed such things with the glacial indifference of Bedou tribesmen watching a 747 slowly passing over their empty horizon (p.28).

Hanania's predilection for exotic words from the English lexicon as well as his importation of many Arabic nouns and pronouns serves to create a landscape that is rarely familiar to an English-language readership. But rather than simply encompassing an estrangement from English settings, the experiencing-I-narration comes across as protean, ready to practice on new influences: 'The encroaching nights had persuaded me that I might never again see my house, hear the electric cicadas singing […] but I longed to explore this exotic new world of mists and darkness […]' (p.47).

This effect of freshness and juxtaposition of strange or unlikely comparisons is evident above all in the extended military conceit that connects the apparently disparate conflicts of English public school life and bloody warfare in the Middle East. It is clear that Shadrach is

adept at negotiating both worlds – indeed, at the beginning of the novel the device of prolepsis is employed to connect Shadrach with the schoolboy world; first when the boy's parents present him with a set of knights on horseback, then abandon him 'in a wild and savage place' – the school – having 'privily divined my nature and chosen to throw me back among my own kind' (pp.12–13). His friendship with the war-obsessed and apparently inviolable Ferrer gains Shadrach a cachet that is enhanced by Shadrach's putative expertise in the Lebanese conflict, initially fabricated but later substantiated by the stories Omer relates to him, and by the spent rounds and cartridges he is able to supply to the school black market. Hobson's Wood, where the bulk of the schoolboy mock military outdoors manoeuvres take place, had originally been intended as a locale for standard, Baden-Powell-type scouting pursuits, and the boys' activities start out from an innocuous Englishness. But as they proceed they take on a sinister quality in part supplied by association with the Middle East. The faction leaders' names are quintessentially English sounding – Sackville, Standish, Barnsley, Duff-Revel – but Hanania meretriciously links one of them with the Turkic warrior caste, the Marmelukes – 'Duff-Revel and his fighters had all begun their distinguished careers as slaves' (p.56).

The association with the Middle East directly impinges on the consciousness of the boys when the fighting in Lebanon becomes headline news and the schoolboy chieftains themselves begin to draw parallels. At the same point, their games appear to escalate in significance as Duff-Revel begins to construct new tunnels that are 'a twin town to the water-logged settlements spread out along the airport road from Chatila where Omer's family lived' (p.80). But it is Ferrers, with whom Shadrach recognises an affinity from the beginning, who, from declaring an interest in terrorism, will be drawn so deeply into the world of Shadrach's narratives that he fetches in his company to Beirut, the real theatre of conflict, where 'with his dark wiry hair and almond eyes' he is almost camouflaged (p.221). The climax of the novel occurs when Ferrer encounters in a refugee camp a Jewish woman who was married to a Palestinan and with her husband survived the massacre at the village of Dassein in 1948. This meeting creates a twist that completely re-sites the military conceit. Inexplicably, and much to Shadrach's disdain, Ferrer's obsession with killers

suddenly evaporates, and with it the entire mythus of the school war games.

The Anglo-Lebanese encounter embedded in *Homesick* may be resonant with meaning or forced and meretricious depending on one's point of view. The sometimes obscure metaphors linking the two worlds may evidence to Hanania's mannered, far-fetched stylistic ingenuities, or evoke an elusive world of correspondences and antimonies deeply imbricated in postmodernity, its fantasies and deracinated identities. Hanania's staging of schoolboy mock-epic engagements alongside actual atrocities, whose Arabic names acquire an incantatory quality as the novel proceeds, both deterritorialises the conflicts and at the same time reterritorialises them within the symbolic terrain of late twentieth century global warfare. Hanania's use of language is very different to Kafka's intense 'withered vocabulary' and 'incorrect syntax'; it functions and achieves its affect through the continual deployment of metonyms that both associate and dissociate English and Lebanese contexts. This challenges the assertion of Deleuze and Guattari (1986) that the language of minor literature manifests a 'strange poverty' (pp.22–23). On the contrary, Hanania's writing strains toward richness and overdetermination rather than stripping language to its bare essentials. In the process the reader is forced to question his own cultural certainties. The fact that Ferrers turns out to be a deceiver, having been Duff-Revel's spy all along, and is unable to sustain his ghoulish pre-occupation with Lebanon's agonies and atrocities when confronted by the Jewish woman (while the native Shadrach is disgusted by the English boy's weakness) indicates the power of 'in-between' in Hanania's writing. This not only represents a Lebanese perspective on the civil war – it also challenges Englishness by demonstrating

> the inadequacy of those "structures of feeling"(as Raymond Williams would have put it), through which we experience our cultural authenticity and authority as being somehow "natural" to us and part of a national landscape' (Bhabha: 2000, p.141).

Authentic Englishness is further destabilised by the hints Hanania drops along the way that Ferrers, his fascination for Nazi military

paraphernalia notwithstanding, has submerged a Jewish identity which renders partly explicable his volte-face in the refugee camp.

Unreal City, the sequel to *Homesick*, continues Hanania's exploration of Anglo-Arab hybridity, resetting the balance between English and Lebanese locations strongly in favour of the latter, but by no means diminishing the English input, rather fusing both elements in a troubling vision of postmodern rootlessness and spiritual enervation. The unnamed narrator is the scion of Shi'ih nobility from southern Lebanon (Shadrach having been Greek Orthodox); he too has undergone public schooling in England, and also possesses an academic father who disappears to the United States. A substantial part of the novel concerns the narrator's connections with Lebanese and Palestinian characters. He is fixated on Layla, his youthful lover from the Palestinian refugee camp, Ein Helweh, which lies a few miles below his family's ancestral village in the hills of south Lebanon. The narrator pursues Layla, along with her brother Asad, through a self-destructing Beirut that is in turn besieged by the Israelis. The Shi'ih component in the novel, which spills over into the narrator's shadowy involvement in an attempt to assassinate a Salman Rushdie-type apostate writer in London, is more fully realised in the depiction of the Bey, the narrator's aristocratic relative back in Lebanon, and the two brothers-turned-militia-men from the village, Ali and Jaffar. As well as showing the tragedy of Lebanon and the Palestinian refugees – especially Layla and her brothers – through Arab eyes, the narrator's response to the devastation of his 'home'/'native' environments and relationships is complicated by his English connections.

Beside the specifically Arab element, Hanania manages to animate another perspective, less umbilical, but almost as formative, representing Arabs who are significantly westernised. This is applicable not only to the narrator, but also to his father's generation – similar father-son figures recur in all three of Hanania's novels. The fathers, in their restless, cosmopolitan lifestyles, represent the experience of 'a lot of Lebanese, Palestinian and Jordanian people of that generation […] growing up in the West and being educated there.' According to Hanania, such people 'have a very amoral, apolitical sensibility that comes from having been introduced to a sort of Western cultural decadence through their schooling' (Tarbush: 2000, p.78). In a character

such as the Bey, the connection is represented as a form of colonial mimicry. Inside his house in the hills above Sidon 'feels like England in a heat wave' (p.61), and the Bey's Cambridge experience is recycled in the narrative at the height of the civil war when he lives barricaded in his house 'watching films from the forties, dancing across the marble floors to big-band records in his boater and striped blazer' (p.161). The same disregard for twentieth century Middle East realities is expressed in *Eros Island*, in the car journey the narrator's father and his twin take from Cambridge home to Palestine in the 1930s. 'They arrive to find the streets of Jerusalem deserted, the curfew in force since dusk, at the roadblocks the dust-caked Studebaker with it GB plates ushered on towards the silent lit avenues of Mamila' (Hanania: 2000, p.77).

This Arab *folie anglaise* is matched by English characters' parallel obsession with the Middle East. Besides Ferrers, another minor English character fetches up in Beirut in *Homesick*. Of Trench we are told:

> Wars are honey pots for junkies: so many heavy painkillers and so little regulation: for years the chemists of Ain Mreisse had been servicing his habits, supplying him with pethidine, Tuinal, Seconal – the works (Hanania: 1997, p.246).

Shadrach has to force Trench on to the boat to Cyprus, but like other sketches in the novel he returns writ large in *Unreal City*, where the narrator develops a friendship with a public schoolboy who stays with him in Beirut. Leighton, the English character with 'the strange name', is like Trench a confirmed drug addict. Though he attended the narrator's school he left shortly before he arrived; they meet for the first time in Sidon where the English youth is among a party of tourists. At the beginning of *Unreal City* Leighton is encountered in extreme fragility, the semi-authorised custodian of a derelict former hostel in west London, peering through curtains in anxious anticipation of his drug supplier. This is, however, much later in his relationship with the narrator, specifically after they have lived, together with Leighton's black sidekick and drug-fixer, Verger, through some of the dark days of the civil war in the narrator's

father's house in Beirut. Absorbed in Orientalist fantasies, Leighton enters the chronically unstable end of the 1970s Middle East scene a mix between an upper class hippy and a very late traveller who has missed the colonial epoch in its entirety. Against the background of the systematic destruction of Beirut, Leighton is engaged by the imagined lifestyle of a nineteenth-century European Orientalist, and, in particular, a pedantic devotion to the task of mapping Burton's journey in Lebanon at the end of his ill-fated period as British consul in Damascus. No less than the Arab father and son in *Eros Island*, who Hanania condemns for their amoral apolitical sensibility, the upper class Englishman has tried to escape history by retreating into his private island of desire (Tarbush, p.79). Hanania replaces Salih's colonial English characters – one of whom, Mr Robinson, was capable of mastering Arabic, converting to Islam, and getting buried in a Cairo cemetery – with degraded, narcissistic postmodern individuals like Leighton – public school, weak, effete, homosexual, addicted to opium – and the writer Julian Crossley who thieves the narrator's manuscript in London – each in their way parasitic on a dead and exploded image of the Arab world.

However, the presence of these English characters in *Unreal City* has an even more sinister aspect beyond their necromantic dealings with British Orientalism. The English characters enact responses that are facets of the narrator's own self, because he is, largely though education but also through his mother's English blood, an Anglo-Arab hybrid. These orientations become lodged in the narrator's own split consciousness, playing upon that part which is vacuously English, heightening his deracinated sense of unbelonging. Fully aware that Leighton's declarations about the route of Burton's last walk in Beirut are incorrect, the narrator not only indulges his English companion, but is also induced to share in his drug taking. As a returned native, unable to find a role in his own land, in his morbid pursuit of Layla the narrator plumbs further layers of chaotic instability in which he has a hereditary investment as the child of a part-Palestinian mother who had herself succumbed to the superficial English side of her background. Furthermore, his father is a collector of Middle East arte-facts and *objets d'art*, and by inheriting his aesthetic detachment the narrator simultaneously predisposes himself toward his English

friend's Orientalism and takes on the Arab elite's disabled detachment from the political realities of their own land. The role of religious terrorist which he eventually embraces is itself presented as a sort of twentieth-century mutant of traditional Shi'ism, as self-consciously fabricated as the beard the Bey 'work[s] up to appease the growing religiosity of the village', and Ali's affectation of a Persian accent (Hanania: 1999, p.55, p.59). (Leighton, the outmoded ersatz Orientalist, is himself later upstaged by Verger when his antiquarian oriental acquisitions are plundered by associates to whom Verger owes money, the Brixton Black Englishman having in the meantime joined the Nation of Islam – another modern Western-produced mutation of traditional Middle Eastern provenance).

Before his transformation into a born-again radical-believer-martyr, the narrator retreats from Lebanon to London and Madrid. Here Hanania has him toy with the West's postmodern image of the twentieth century Arab – playboy and terrorist:

> My self-disgust found consolation in antiquated radical posturings. From fashionable artists I commissioned grand homages to Leila Khaled and Carlos the Jackal. When coming down I dreamt of my fallen body in a dry wadi on the borderland; to those who pretended to consider me original I claimed there was more poetry in the bark of a kalashin than in all the stanzas of Christendom (p.195)

In addition to registering the narrator's schizophrenia our suspicions are aroused as to the author's investment in the narrator's play not only with life but also with his text. The engrossed, lurid inscription of rituals, be they a restaging of the Shi'ih festival of *ashura (*which also fascinates Leighton) or painstaking delineation of the real-life reduction and slaughter of the Palestinian camps, first by the Israelis and later by the Syrian-backed Amal militia, imply the hegemony of stylistic presentation over meaning and response.[5]

5 Arguably, the stylistic detachment that characterises Hanania's writing of the Lebanese civil war is precisely what is missing from Arabic texts on the same subject. For discussion of Arabic novels concerned with the civil war, see Roger Allen (1995a, pp.85-88) and Evelyn Accad (whose study also includes several French novels (1990)).

When the reader arrives at Hanania's third novel, *Eros Island*, he can be forgiven for noting the predominance of form over the other aspects of the writing. The themes and devices used up till then to produce the sufferings of 'alienation' and 'exile' of 'everyman' through Hanania's hybrid central protagonists have been eclipsed by stylistic formulae which also, it might be argued, relegate the Anglo-Arab relationship to a subsidiary role. The two worlds – the Arab context is now the aged father's reminiscences of Palestine before and immediately after the *nakba* – and the contemporary one, Southern England, London, and a Spanish island – are no longer convincingly juxtaposed. Along with the new unnamed narrator, we doubt there is a link connecting the two ends of the Mediterranean – the Spanish one inhabited by English expatriates from the London media and fashion scene – the Arab by 'the underground hospitals with intermittent power, the maimings, the mutilations, the shelling as remote in that secret hollow as cruel fables in an old film' (Hanania: 2000, p.34). While the novel's re-presentation of the 1948 Arab exodus from Palestine produces memorable horror-filled tableaux, there is little significance in its transposition into the consciousness of the femme fatale obsessed, former public school narrator. So much is this the case that Peter Clark (2000) argues 'the Arabic element of this novel is like an exotic intrusion' (p.79).

But there is another way of reading Hanania's unlikely, some might consider forced connections. In discussing how he achieves his effects I have suggested his form of Anglo-Arab writing might be related to Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of 'minor literature'. For example, they invite us to consider the Habsburg Empire and the effects of its disintegration on Kafka and other important intellectual figures:

> The breakdown and fall of the empire increases the crisis, accentuates everywhere movements of deterritorialization, and invites all sorts of complex reterritorializations – archaic, mythical, or symbolist (p.24).

In a comparable way, an Anglo-Arab writer such as Hanania, situated within the fin-de-siècle American empire, experiences and incorporates into his writing the crises on its Middle Eastern periphery, while

living himself – and asking his main protagonists to live – a nomadic deracinated existence in its metropolitan centres. It is, I would suggest, by writing the breakdown and fall of the Western empire through the apocalyptic imploding of one of its 'peripheries' that Hanania succeeds in inscribing a 'minor' literature within the major language of a dominant culture. Deleuze and Guattari state that Kafka pushes 'German to a deterritorialization that will not be saved by culture or myth […] an absolute deterritorialization' (p.26). In his exploration of the Britain-Levant connection, Hanania also uses language as a tool to deterritorialise both Western and Middle Eastern landscapes, emptying them of their cultural and mythological pretensions. In his writing, as we have seen, Arabic lexis features alongside ironically recycled Orientalist tropes. Through his representations of the strangely symbiotic manner in which Arab and British characters engage with the Palestinian *nakba* and the Lebanese civil war, and how Palestinian/Lebanese refugees negotiate being in Britain, Hanania situates his narrators in the interface of cultures and succeeds in challenging the notion of cultural purity, especially that of the metropolitan, former colonising power. At the end of their chapter on minority literature, Deleuze and Guattari contest 'there is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor' (p.26). Hanania's orotund but ultimately bleak delineations that explode all the destructive and self-deceiving aspects underlying the Anglo-Arab encounter compellingly bear this out.[6]

6 I am aware that recent interpretation of the significance of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the term minor literature has emphasised the oppositional stance this must necessarily adopt toward its 'major' counterpart. However, I have not felt this emphasis is applicable to Hanania's writing for the reasons implied by my argument concerning his investment in the Anglo-Arab encounter. Though his writing demonstrates some degree of 'anti-essentialist undercutting of the narratives of development and coherence which are used to bolster the self-identity of the dominant culture' (Huggan: 2001, p.84), it is more concerned with the deterritorialisation of both dominant and minor cultures within a common urge toward self-destruction.

Chapter 4
Fadia Faqir:
Women's resistance, Women's choices

> Turn a critical face both ways, towards the country of origin and its traditions and the country of reception. The challenge, the alienation, the 'offence' are two-sided.
>
> Fred Halliday (1989)

Born in Jordan where she gained a BA in English, Fadia Faqir holds two postgraduate degrees in creative writing from the universities of Lancaster and East Anglia respectively. She has taught creative writing at the University of Exeter and was Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Durham, England (where she now holds a research fellowship). Actively involved in Middle East Women's Studies, a declared Arab feminist and promoter of Arab women's writing, Faqir is now a full time writer. Compared with other writers of the Anglo-Arab encounter, her writing is distinctive, both in its conscious connection to Arabic narrative forms, which she co-opts in an innovative manner into her English fiction, and for her contextualisation of that encounter alongside a gendering of the Arab nation. In her contribution to a collection of autobiographical writings by thirteen Arab women writers, Faqir adopts the persona of Shahrazad, a much beloved figure in Middle East women's feminist discourse, and sets her within an allegory of late twentieth century global politics in which she has sought exile in the West from the sultan's court in Baghdad (Faqir: 1998). Faqir's conceptualisation of the Anglo-Arab encounter may be characterised as a process that begins and ends in self-enunciation and dissent. The journey commences with estrangement from the Arab society constructed on tradition and patriarchy, and the 'consensus […] that denied woman a voice' (p.52). Refusing to 'let her song be silenced or distorted', she commits herself to a life in exile.

> In exile, you quickly develop a double vision, where images of the streets of Basra merge with those of Kentish Town. You begin looking forward at the country of adoption while always looking back at the country of origin […] You keep examining and re-examining your loyalties to both the still picture in the mind and the present living landscape […] You become a hybrid, forever assessing, evaluating, accommodating (p.53).

Shahrazad is a more vulnerable and at the same time more self-sustaining figure than Soueif's Asya, although like her initially she gratefully accepts in Britain the freedoms denied her in her homeland. Refusing to embrace the seductive charms of the West, but committed to 'survival' within its hostile domains, she follows the path from rejection to detachment vis-à-vis the host society's reception of herself as an alien individual, and its hostile and reductive representation of her native Arab culture. The temptation to resist this image by a return to nativism must be eschewed, first and foremost because such a stance offers very little to women. Shahrazad has her own resources as a storyteller, her own predisposition to celebrate 'differences and similarities', to sustain 'uncertainty and dissent' (p.60).

Faqir is perhaps singled out among the Arab Anglophone writers in that her knowledge of Arabic literature, and her (relatively speaking) late induction into English culture, has presented her with the option of writing in Arabic. Again, her conscious articulation of the issue as to which language to write in, sets her apart from the other Anglophone Arab writers. The implication that her choice of English has been well thought through, and constitutes more a decision of the head than the heart, is born out by her quotation of Halliday's remarks (p.54, ftn.4) on the dual alienation of opposing at the same time both the repressive country of origin and the imperialistic country of reception. The choice of a language other than her native one is meshed into Shahrazad's decision to leave her homeland, and her rejection of its codes of censorship and denial of women's right to a voice. 'She would sing loud and clear and so she crossed from one language into another, committing herself to a life in exile' (p.53). But when Shahrazad becomes angry at the coloniser's representation of her land and people, she vows never to 'utter another word in English' (p.56). Thus Faqir demonstrates a sympathy and understanding of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's reversion to writing in Gikuyu. But a return to nativism is

not an option for an Arab feminist. Projection of Shahrazad as a free, independent truth-teller entails that 'she unties her sore tongue and begins singing in whatever language comes first […]reconciliation with the English language takes place despite her ambiguous feeling toward it'. Faqir, then, does not write in English out of affinity or regard for commercial consideration: she is aware of its 'predominantly white tapestry' and the need to 'write her [Arabic] colours' into it (p.60). She adopts English for tactical reasons, intentionally 'foreignising' it to challenge her readership, rather than recycling Orientalist tropes to titillate them.

Faqir's first novel, *Nisanit*, is concerned with the territory of Palestine-Jordan-Israel, and presents two time strands. The first concerns a family who must face the consequences of the father's arrest for involvement in a failed coup attempt in the fictional 'Democratic State of Ishmael'. The second strand takes place almost two decades later in 'The Democratic State of Israel' (so designated as to demonstrate the complicity of both states) and features Shadeed, a fighter who takes part in a guerrilla raid on a group of West Bank Jewish settlers. Afterwards, he and his two comrades shelter in the mountains where the Israelis attack them and he sees his friends killed by security forces after which he is taken and tortured. The two narratives are linked by a central female protagonist, Eman, who as a girl witnesses the state's brutal repression of her family when her father is put on trial and later executed. As a young woman she becomes emotionally involved with the guerrilla Shadeed. The outstanding feature of the novel, which is clearly based on the writer's native Jordan and (as she informed this writer) research into Latin American guerrilla groups, is Faqir's adoption of a stream of consciousness technique to enunciate the thoughts of both torturer and victim. Her presentation of Arab subject material (oppressed Palestine and the rule of self-serving elites in the Arab world) is broadened by gendering the predicament of the three women who, left unprotected after the death of the husband/father, are preyed upon by an uncle, and by focusing on the mental development of the torturer David, the book's one serious Israeli character. Although there is no significant Anglo-Arab dimension to *Nisanit*, Britain is present in a symbolic form, as the colonial power that preceded Israel in Palestine. Prior to embarking on his

mission, Shadeed opens a wooden box containing his father's army uniform, dresses in it, and puts on his father's boots with 'made in Britain' on their sole. 'He had probably taken them from a dead soldier during the Mandate' (Faqir: 1988, p.14). The symbolic meaning behind the boots' transfer of ownership, of course, is the continuity of struggle against colonial occupation.

Like Mahjoub, Faqir goes on to historicise the colonial encounter in her second piece of fiction, *Pillars of Salt*, a work that also takes the strain of gendered resistance present in the earlier novel and makes it the centre of a dual narrative concerning the lives of two different women confined to an asylum. Maha, a Bedouin woman from the al-Qasim tribe living adjacent to the Dead Sea, makes a village love-match with Harb, a horseman and resistance fighter against the British. At first she fails to conceive his child, and while he is away in the mountains has to undergo the humiliating rituals intended to exorcise the demons that prevent her from getting pregnant. Her battle with her chauvinist brother Daffash, who prefers the city and the company of the elite and the British, is conducted around her custodianship of the land – for which he cares nothing – and later her son, born after Harb is killed by British aeroplanes. Matters come to a head when Daffash tricks his sister into going to the Pasha's house to cook an authentic Bedouin dish ('true bedouin *mansaf*') for his party guests, who turn out to be British (Faqir: 1992, p.162). Maha leaves in disgust after she discovers she has prepared food for her husband's killers, having spat in the face of one of the British officers and denounced her brother to the assemblage. Daffash comes to the village, breaks his father's stick, and beats her. To make matters worse, Maha has to run the gauntlet of the men of her village, foremost among them the old headman who claims her as his wife. The women try to protect her, but Maha is again assaulted by her brother and soon after taken away to the mental hospital at Fuhais.

The other woman with whom Maha is incarcerated at first looks down upon her as a dirty Bedouin. But as a Bedouin woman Maha has enjoyed greater freedom of movement than town-dweller Umm Saad. Daughter of a political refugee from Syria, Umm Saad is virtually her father's prisoner, escaping only to attend the girls' Qur'an class and occasionally to visit the market. There she falls for Muhammad, a

Circassian shopkeeper who reciprocates her love but is turned away contemptuously by her father when he calls with a proposal of marriage. Umm Saad exchanges the captivity of her paternal home for that of a foul-smelling butcher who is forced upon her in marriage. She bares him nine sons, but when her hair is grey he brings a younger woman into the house and she is expelled from the marital bedroom. A short time after, with no one to speak on her behalf, Umm Saad is also taken to the asylum.

The historical period against which the narrative is set moves from the period of British mandate in Transjordan through to the establishment of the independent Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The novel, if such it can be called, goes further than *Season of Migration* or *Aisha* in its adoption of the oral story-telling tradition of ancient Arabia, raising issues of translation. (It is actually shelved with Arabic fiction in the library of Durham University where Faqir used to teach). At the same time it demands to be read as an accomplished piece of postcolonial fiction. Maha is main narrator and main protagonist, but a storyteller whose narratives are interpolated between hers acts as her anti-self; both narrators produce a poetic and archaic discourse which means that, rather like Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, the author has opted to write a first nation story in English, using the idiom and speech rhythms of her native people, in this case oral and literary Arabic. Also like *Things Fall Apart*, the narratives represent a people on the verge of colonisation. The coloniser is consigned to a place on the periphery of native consciousness at the same time as his presence destabilises the entire national society. The treatment is therefore different to Mahjoub's in *Hour of Signs*, where the two narratives of coloniser and soon-to-be colonised are in head-on confrontation. Similar outcomes do develop with respect to prioritising the Arab voice within the Anglo-Arab encounter; but it is in Faqir's foregrounding of the struggle of two Arab women that a telling counterpoint is created. The narrative of national resistance is at one and the same time gendered and split. The two Arab women protagonists, Maha the Bedouin woman, and Umm Saad, the lower middle-class housewife from Amman, carry the scars of national struggle, scars that are doubled by virtue of their subaltern position within their own national society. Maha is in fact thrice othered: as one of the colo-

nised, as a woman, and as a bedu from the village. Her narrative is countered and distorted throughout by the storyteller's misogynistic voice of male tradition. While Maha relates her own story, Umm Saad's is relayed through her dialogue with Maha.

Faqir's strategy is to present the extremities of Arab women under the pressure of colonial and native patriarchy. As she writes in another context:

> Arab women are treated as a minority in most Arab countries. They feel invisible, misrepresented and reduced. Perceived as second rate natives, they are subjected to a peculiar kind of internal Orientalism. Native males assume a superior position to women, misrepresent them and in most cases fail to see them. This parallels the Orientalist attitudes with which westerners have treated the Arab world for so long. Arab women are therefore hidden behind a double-layered veil (Faqir: 1994, vii).

Faqir here works on a similar terrain to her contemporary, the Egyptian feminist writer Salwa Bakr. *Pillars of Salt* bears comparison especially with Bakr's *The Golden Chariot*, a novel Faqir herself edited, supervised and wrote an introduction to in its English edition.[1] Both Faqir and Bakr present ordinary women in extremis – in prisons or asylums – exploring in the process the social injustices perpetrated against them in the world outside and the spaces the women themselves create within their confined environments. According to Magda Al-Nowaihi (2001), the prison trope, which she notes has in recent years been adopted by several Egyptian novelists, 'can function both as a microcosm of and an oppositional space to the nation' (p.78). In *The Golden Chariot*, Bakr has the women prison inmates tell their stories, each of which account for the crimes they have committed (and in several cases not committed) by the women's ill-treatment at the hands of men or society's chauvinistic norms. Bakr creates an environment in the prison that is in some respects kinder than the outside world, and therefore points a finger at 'a nation gone awry' (Al-Nowaihi, p.81). But though the social structures outside are in part

1 The full title in English would be: *The Golden Chariot Does Not Ascend to Heaven* (al-araba al-dhahabiyya la-tas ad ila al-sama). Faqir's introduction appears in the English translation of the novel (Faqir: 1995).

replicated in the prison, the prison space enables them to be disrupted and contested.[2] In *Pillars of Salt*, however, the women are able to create little in terms of a replacement network since they are only two, and their enclosure only allows them the opportunity to articulate their stories. The English doctor and his minions continually break up the women's disclosures, denying them the space to 'connect individual stories with the life of the nation' (Al-Nowaihi, p.70), and radically unsettling the possibility of nationhood while at the same time keeping open the wounds of patriarchy. Although Faqir uses devices that signify the self-defining space and histories of women (Maha's attempts to complete the weaving of the carpet begun by her mother and to plant a garden, and the other village women's practice of massage that constitutes female bonding) all these are collapsed into the alien space of the asylum. Arab women, Faqir seems to suggest, have got no further than the mad women of nineteenth century British fiction, where constraining walls signified women's social, cultural and political bondage.[3] The narratives of defeat and torment Maha and Umm Saad share with one another in the asylum are heightened and intensified by the callous treatment meted out to them by the native warders and British doctor who represent the twin arms of Arab women's oppression – native patriarchy and colonial power.

In making Maha's brother, Daffash, an agent of the British as well as an enemy of women, Faqir foregrounds this double-othering of Arab women. It is true that Maha lends support to her fighter-husband Harb (meaning 'war') as his group of village *mujahideen* fight with the British. But Maha's role in the struggle against the coloniser not only goes unappreciated but is specifically negated by her own people.

2 This aspect of Bakr's writing – her prioritising of women's experience and potential, rather than directly opposing the structures of patriarchal oppression as 'feminist writing' seeks to do – has caused some critics to label her a 'female' writer. See Introduction, n 16.

3 The stories of Maha and Umm Saad parallel the Arab women's autobiographical narratives published by Badran and Cooke (1990) in the section of their study headed 'rejection'. They comment that 'the texts in this section illuminate the depths of women's pain and despair' (p.xx), and list among the specific features of these narratives: seclusion, psychological disorder, and physical violence.

Even Harb refuses to take Maha into his confidence about his role as a resistance fighter and will not endorse her passion for the struggle as evinced by her claim to have seen Hakim, the legendary fighter of the past, climbing the mountain (p.59). Harb's action is seen as heroic but doomed, and the success of Daffash, who leaves the village to live in the capital, implies the betrayal of the postcolonial state. His alliance with the Pasha and the British draws Maha unwittingly into going to the Pasha's house to cook for the British. Her tears of frustration open up the unexpressed aporia in Fanon's alignment of women with the nationalist struggle, and collapse the united front in the national culture. The coloniser's aggression against the culture of the colonised, Fanon argued, could only be met by a totalised, antithetical resistance. The issue of women was completely subsumed by the struggle against the coloniser and the fundamental requirement of maintaining the colonised culture intact.[4] Faqir's position in *Pillars of Salt* represents a feminist riposte to both coloniser and the patriarchal national society. Implicit in the novel is the argument that women are ideological tools for both sides, and that with respect to Arab women there is a patriarchal complicity behind both the narrative of the

4 For Fanon a 'few shreds of national existence' among which he included the veil should remain intact 'as the assertion of a distinct identity' for the duration of the national struggle. This argument is found in his piece, 'Unveiling Algeria', where he asserts the significance of women in the struggle against the coloniser: 'Converting the woman, winning her over to foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture' (Fanon: 1980, p.17). On Fanon's articulation of the role of women in the Algerian struggle, and their function within a gendered nationalism, see McClintock (1995, pp.360–68). Of his theorising of women's relation to national struggle and liberation, she writes: 'Women's liberation is credited entirely to national liberation and it is only with nationalism that women "enter into history". Prior to nationalism, women have no history, no resistance, no independent agency. And since the national revolution automatically revolutionizes the family, gender conflict naturally vanishes after the revolution' (p.367). Faqir's pessimistic placement of the two women within the asylum contends that in the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods, Arab women have continued to have 'no history'.

coloniser and that of the bourgeois national state.[5] With the death of Harb the authentic spirit of national struggle is defeated, and Daffash stands for the joining of Arab regimes in common cause with the Western powers, and the delivery of Arab women up to a 'modern' slavery. Faqir has Maha express this recognition in a language of feminist resistance which invokes the spirit of the original national revolt: 'Our enemies. My brother. Why couldn't I defend myself? Why couldn't I hit back? Why couldn't I pluck out his eyes? I choked because my throat was full of blood and tears' (p.176). At Maha's final confrontation with her brother in front of the villagers she denounces him in the names both of gender and national honour: 'I don't talk to rapists […] to disobedient sons […] to servants of the English' (p.233). Daffash's sexual politics and colonial collaboration are underwritten by the traditional storyteller who accomplishes the final coup de grace of having Maha survive the apocalyptic destruction of her village to fall in love with 'a stranger, an occupier, an invader […] the majestic crusader' (p.243) and so accomplishes her ultimate defamation. The irony here is not far to seek. The Arab woman patriot is condemned by her own society for collusion with the enemy.

In this way the device of *mu'rada* (opposition or contradiction) is used to articulate the voice of a tradition which is male and misogynistic, and which contradicts and attempts to negate all that is positive in the female struggle for identity. The primacy afforded this voice reenforces Faqir's point that Arabic, like other languages, 'is misogynist and whenever the gender is not clear the masculine overpowers the feminine' (Faqir: 1998, p.18). In utilising myths and stories that were incorporated into Arabic from older sources, such as the Rabbinic, Coptic and Persian, Arabic legend being 'ultimately derived from stories common to the Ancient Eastern civilization' (Norris: 1983, p.376), Faqir is actually undermining tradition. In her rendition the incorporation of these into the narrative of the storyteller – not an unproblematic figure from the point of view of religious orthodoxy

5 'Throughout these ideological battles, women were variously portrayed as the victims of their societies' backwardness, symbols of the nation's newly found vigour and modernity or the privileged repository of uncontaminated national values' (Kandiyoti: 1991, p.440).

anyway – discloses a number of ambiguities which reinforce his significance as a voice of tradition and simultaneously undermine the validity of his utterance. Sami al-Adjnabi (lit. 'stranger'/'foreigner') is only 'half-Arab' (p.3) and an outsider who, like traditional storytellers, uses Qur'anic texts to embellish his narrative even as his claim to authority is weakened on a number of counts. To begin with, the educated Muslim elite (*ulama*) held storytellers in the same disdain as did Muhammad himself, for whom their mischievousness was epitomised by Nadir ibn Harith who in his lifetime quipped 'In what respect is Muhammad a better storyteller than I?' (Norris: 1983, p.376) Sami reveals himself as wedded to pre-Islamic superstitions and is ignorant of the correct way of performing Muslim prayer (Faqir: 1992, p.19). But in his association of Maha, her mother, and her friend Nasra with the evil djinn (Harot and Marut) who perform the devil's magic (pp.30–1) and his application to them of a miscellany of misogynistic epithets – 'vultures', 'birds of prey', 'black widow', 'she-devil', 'ghoul' and 'daughter of a ghoul' – the storyteller is situated within a traditional Arab misogyny which Malti-Douglas (1991) connects to *The One Hundred and One Nights* and other medieval Arabic texts, and which Lane also confirmed as embedded in Arab males' attitudes toward women: 'That women are deficient in judgment is held as fact […] but that they possess a superior degree of cunning is pronounced equally certain and notorious' (Lane: 1971, p.219). It is this last aspect – 'women's cunning is great' (Faqir: 1992, p.62) – that most animates the storyteller, who has Maha plan to kill Daffash in order to inherit the farm, bewitch Harb in the River Jordan, seduce the Pasha, and assail her brother when he justly seeks to chastise her.

However, the sharpest device Faqir uses to discredit the storyteller besides his self-contradiction and doubtful religious orthodoxy is her aligning of him with an acquiescent – even complicit – attitude toward the coloniser.

> While trotting down to the village, I noticed that the plateaux were swarming with young English soldiers […] My friend the English traveler,[6] who turned over every pebble of their plains and mountains measured the land and then took notes, called it the 'Mandate'[...] I waved to the peeling red faces […] and continued walking. Mandate, or no Mandate, I did not care (p.3).

The politics of this land – which is not his own – is of no account to him: his preoccupation is with Maha; everything else is grist to the misogynist mill. 'I am the storyteller. /My box is full of declarations. / I am the yarn-spinner. / I spin and spin Balfourations' (p.32). Towards the British themselves, as the power within the land, the storyteller perhaps expresses no more than the neutrality of traditional society. Their planes – 'winged jinn' – wound her husband 'as a warning' to Maha. In her opposition 'she kept playing games with the codes of the soldiers and our master Solomon' (p.93). In Middle Eastern legend Solomon had power over both the good and evil djinn/angels. The English soldiers are therefore a part of Solomon's agency in the world. At the end the storyteller's reversal of Maha's rebellion – from opposing the invader she is made to fall in love with him – underscores his contradictoriness and unreliability, alongside a sizeable portion of tradition.

From this we can also see that, though Faqir's story may lack the English setting and relegates English characters to the periphery, it is saturated with the coloniser's presence. At the same time this 'behind the scenes' agency is aligned with the brutal power of postcolonial authoritarian-patriarchal native states – represented by Daffash and his patron the Pasha – and thus imposes double oppression on the female section of their populations. The British are afforded a generalised presence – the only Englishman to be given a name is Dr Edwards, who in conversation with Umm Saad Maha calls 'a doctor from a land called England' (p.42). They manipulate natives like Daffash by using him to map out the territory of the state they have fabricated, its very existence umbilical to the dispossession of other Arabs (the Palestinians).

6 This may be a reference to Harry St.John Philby, the British political officer, traveller, and later upholder of the al-Saud, who was the first coloniser to survey the land of Transjordan.

> [Harb] stopped talking and his body stiffened. I followed his eyes to see some lights crawling on the west bank of the Jordan.
> 'Who are they?' I asked.
> 'The English.'
> 'What are they doing in our land?'
> 'Digging out the bones of Salahadin.'
> […]He looked at the west bank and shook his head like an angry horse, 'No, I am not like your brother Daffash' (p.56).

Though he is illiterate the British Orientalists teach Daffash standard Arabic, which none of the Bedouin understands ('nobody spoke the language of the holy book in Arabia' (p.32)). A blonde Englishwoman who speaks the 'funny Arabic' of her other countrymen patronisingly carries Daffash round in tow. (She 'patted him on the shoulder and said, "You are an open-minded Arab. Not many of them around"'.) (p.45) Through the Pasha the British make Daffash 'watchman and manager of the plantation' (p.65). Daffash – who also carries an English rifle – rejects Maha's charge that they killed Harb: 'Rubbish. These people are not capable of killing a fly' (p.171). Through the British, it is true, modernity comes to the land and Maha is able to save her orange trees by spraying them with the chemicals she hears recommended over the radio (which also broadcasts the English songs Umm Saad's sons learn). But metonymically, her brother's Land Rover, which he has sold some of their land to purchase, stands for the coloniser/client regime, when it runs over and flattens her herb garden, and it is he who eventually dispossesses her of everything. Once the British gain entrance to the land, categorise its historical sites, collect its Bedouin pottery in museums which are visited by European tourists, and build its lunatic asylum, their power to discipline and control is complete. Umm Saad tells Maha: 'They brought me to Fuhais where Christians live and where mad people go' (p.19). Later, she declaims of the country's independence day: 'They left our country and I saw the celebrations and procession from the veranda […]The Jordanian flag fluttered on our roof […]The country was happy and free, my sister, but it was the beginning of my slavery' (p.190). Immediately afterwards Umm Saad's husband brings his new (superficially westernised) wife into the house, signifying the tendency of the post-colonial states – for all their modernist trappings – to entrench rather

than rid themselves of the patriarchal mentality: 'We are just vaginas. That is how men see us. That is what men are about' (p.169).

It is not too tendentious to affirm Faqir's construction of her radical feminist tale in English rather than Arabic as a conscious act of self-liberation from the constraints facing Arab women writers who write in their native language. At first reading, *Pillars of Salt* requires from the uninitiated English reader a serious effort of decoding. This is because Faqir has constructed the text – with its incorporation of a corpus of Arabic/Middle-Eastern lexis, idioms and mythological references – so as to read like a translation – one in which the 'translator' has adopted what Venuti would call a strongly 'foreignising' strategy. As a consequence, the novel contests those forms of writing that seek to enlist the reader's interest by domestication. It offers no easy repertoire of Oriental exotica, nor even a political message conveyed by exterior commentary or overt political didacticism. The writer's choice of building into her text traditional Arabic, gender-marked forms of storytelling by which to wage war against traditionalism represents a bold throw indeed. It is perhaps noteworthy, as I have argued above, that Faqir does not allow her female characters to successfully create for themselves spaces to occupy. This is surely historically rigorous and correct with respect to the Jordan of the 1930s and 40s. In *Pillars of Salt*, Faqir's project is to displace the engagement with Orientalism centred on the West's othering of the Arabs per se, and instead to expose how this othering works on women within an Arab society. By these means she demonstrates how a rewriting of imperialism is incomplete or truncated if the gendering of nationalism is left out. And while Faqir's writing here operates out of a similar oppositional terrain to Arab feminist ideologue Nawal al-Sa'dawi's, its conscious artistry means that poetics are engaged with in a way we seldom find in the Egyptian's fiction.

So far I have suggested that it is not particularly useful or appropriate for Anglo-Arab writing to be viewed as a class of migrant writing, except in the specific case of Jamal Mahjoub's *Wings of Dust* which shadows Caribbean fiction and non-fiction of the 50s and 60s. This is where a work like Azade Seyhan's, while it is perhaps not comprehensive enough to be definitive, is nevertheless important for its attempt to engage the movement of individuals and groups that

leads to authors writing outside the nation and where the stimulus behind texts is 'not the result of colonial experience but migration, re-settlement, and redefinition of identity.' Such conditionality, she argues, means the questions that inform her study

> differ, to some extent, from the concerns of postcolonial studies. In this case, the diasporic writers and their compatriots do not share with their hosts the kind of historical, cultural, and linguistic intimacy (however problematic) that exists between the colonizer and the colonized (Seyhan: 2001, pp.12–13).

It is the case that up till now much of what has been said about the Anglo-Arab encounter has pertained to historical connections going back to the era of European colonisation of the Middle East. However, it is just as important to stress that, particularly with respect to the last quarter of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, migrants can be said to have specifically located themselves in Britain in a manner not dissimilar to the way in which they have in the United States and Germany, two countries Seyhan scrutinises. In respect of Arabs from the *mashreq*, who have not typically established themselves in Britain in the same considerable numbers as communities from Asia, the Caribbean and Hong Kong have, it would be correct to say that they have come with no significant sense of being former colonial subjects of the British (as indeed technically they are not). The refugee/asylum seeker is in a specialised category, but, like recent economic migrants, more often than not comes to Britain without any consciousness of historical or cultural connection between Britain and their homeland.

These remarks are, I contend, a necessary preface to Fadia Faqir's recent writing, as well as, I shall be arguing in the next chapter, the work of Leila Aboulela. Having started out from what might be considered a broadly postcolonial terrain, Faqir's recent writing has moved into the space of the migrant experience. After a silence of more than a decade, she resumed production of fiction with a short story 'The Separation Wall' (Faqir: 2005). This adopts the device of three parallel narratives, whose juxtaposition signifies simultaneously congruence and difference. The narratives are centred on two locations – North East England and the Palestinian West Bank – and two

moments in time: 197–217 and 2004 A.D. In both time segments empire connects the Middle East and Britain: the Ancient Roman and the modern-day American-Western. A Roman soldier sent to the outlying province of Britannia to police Hadrian's Wall writes letters about his disintegrating health to his son in their native Syria. An out-of-place Iraqi exile, missing the Baghdadi desert, finds himself working for a North East telecom company and constructs a wall around his garden to separate himself from neighbours and Secret Service agents. Two Palestinian women, the remnants of a family the sons of which have either died in the struggle with Israel or migrated away, are left in the daughter's West Bank house. When the mother dies the daughter is unable to return the old woman's body to her home for burial, the two places being cut off from each other by the occupying force. The trope of the separation wall plays both on/with Hadrian's Wall (dividing England and Scotland), the contemporary 'apartheid' wall going up on the West Bank, and the general theme of human divisions embedded in politics and race. Congruities of power, division and exile connect the otherwise discrete episodes. A Roman woman is stripped of her citizenship, mutilated and 'hung […] naked on the main road' for falling for a barbarian Pict farmer (p.186). The Iraqi migrant is intercepted by police outside the house of the English girl he has come to court, and the daughter of the Palestinian woman is left alone suffocating 'as if heavy slabs were placed right on top' of her chest (p.190). Each character inhabits specific politico-cultural spaces different and therefore alienating in relation to the spaces immediately outside them; to attempt to traverse these is to call down punishment from the dominant political and military power.

The new direction of Faqir's writing appears to be exploration of the nullification of choice in the context of globalised power systems in which the individual is often transplanted across lands and cultures with next to no say in the process or its outcomes. In her latest novel, *My Name is Salma*,[7] this predicament is inscribed in specifically

7 *My Name is Salma* was still in press as I was writing this study. I am very grateful to Fadia Faqir for letting me read it in manuscript and for her publishers, Doubleday, for allowing me to quote from it. This also explains the absence of page references for the text.

Anglo-Arab terms, but now, because the context has switched from homeland to a land of migration, the textures of colonial and post-colonial encounter partially explored in *Pillars of Salt* are superseded by the predominating late-twentieth-century threads of border crossing, hybridity and cultural contestation. The central protagonist is Salma, a young shepherdess from a similar, possibly identical village as Maha (passing reference is made in the novel to a figure named Daffash who is tied into a blood feud with Salma's brother Mahmoud). From a later generation than Maha, Salma is in peril of falling victim to 'honour killing' at the hands of her brother because she became pregnant by her lover, Hamdan. Having spent a period of voluntary incarceration in gaol for her own protection, Salma flees her Bedouin locale, passing en route through Lebanon and the Mediterranean, to end up in the former imperial motherland, a reluctant asylum-seeker. At the centre of the novel is an articulation of the asylum-seeker's condition that is gender-specific, emphasis falling on an Arab female's experience of being caught between two cultures: barred from returning to her Arab village on pain of almost certain death, and trapped within the circle of an alien otherness that is the lot of Muslim Arab refugees in the West.

Salma exchanges the repressive colonised Middle Eastern territory of Maha's suffering for the supposed open and tolerant space of contemporary Britain. These epithets are tested by a narrative that simultaneously juxtaposes her treatment in her new place of domicile against her memories of her lost homeland. In short, Salma's story is about her having to face the predicament whereby (to repeat Halliday's words) 'the challenge, the alienation, the "offence" are two-sided'. Salma is no Shahrazad in the sense that she is unprivileged, barely educated, a girl from the village, and has the decision to embrace exile made for her. Still, in so far as she is a woman, her struggle is formed by the gender-phobic codes of traditional Arab society, for had these not declared her a non-person, or one worthy of having her blood shed, she most probably would not have found herself thrown on to the mercy of a Western nation. Faqir identifies the honour code that Salma falls foul of specifically with her Bedouin village. Salma's 'offence' can thus be construed as contravention of

the codes of Bedouin society, writing of which Lila Abu-Lughod observed:

> The more women are able to deny their sexuality, the more honorable they are [...]
> The modest woman admits no interest in men, and makes no attempt to attract them through behavior or dress, and covers up any indicator of a sexual or romantic attachment (even in her marriage). The woman who does not is called a 'slut' (*qhaba*) or a 'whore' (*sharmuta*) (Abu-Lughod: 1989, p.152).

Although she associates this attitude toward sexuality with Islam, Abu-Lughod argues 'religious ideals are then confused with social ideals', in particular 'the tribal social-structural model, based on the priority of relationships of consanguinity and organized in terms of patrilineal descent' (pp.145–46). Salma's punishment for her 'crime' of fornication would therefore be for her father or brother to carry out, given that she has maligned family and tribal honour. However the physical space in which Salma is in danger for her life extends beyond Bedouin tribal territory to incorporate much of the Middle East. There is, in other words, also a wider connection with the Arab world as a whole. In spite of her protective incarceration Salma runs the risk of being murdered so long as she resides on Arab Islamic soil; Faqir is pointing toward the culpability of modern Arab states in which the Arab judiciary show a 'tendency to tolerate certain forms of traditional honour killings' (Abu-Odeh: 1996, p.185).[8]

Structurally, the narrative alternates between a series of discrete time-blocks in Salma's life. Although Faqir's decision to break up Salma's story in this way is challenging to the reader, it perhaps conveys the fragmentation and dislocation of her experience more successfully than a linear narrative would.[9] Besides emphasising the

8 Lama Abu-Odeh notes the vacillation with respect to adjudicating on honour killings in Faqir's (and we may suppose Salma's) native Jordan, specifically with regard to the applicability of a reduction of penalty for the perpetrators whose act might be partially justified if 'the killing was done in a fit of fury caused by the victim's unrightful and dangerous act', that is, if it is 'a material act that touches on the defendant's honour' (p.160).

9 Faqir's choice of a broken narrative that reinforces the migrant's entrapment is markedly different to Bharati Mukherjee's linear narratives in which her

main protagonist's precarious set of life-experiences, this form of telling juxtaposes the various experimental inner selves she toys with in order to orient herself toward her shifting surroundings, as well as the outward personas she must adopt in order to survive. The isolation of the immigrant is rendered doubly debilitating in Salma's case by the fact that she belongs to no recognisable diasporic community. The reaction even of the young British-Pakistani woman (who is soon to become her friend), when she first meets her at the community hostel where both have taken refuge, declares Salma's foreignness:

> When she looked at me she could only see the slit of my eyes and white veil so she turned to [the porter], 'where does she come from?'
> 'Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,' he said and laughed.
> 'I am not going to share the room with an Arab,' she spat.

Salma's own response to the paraphernalia of difference that attaches to herself on account of her dark appearance, imperfect knowledge of English, and Arab/Muslim cultural formation, is further complicated by feelings of shame and guilt she carries within her concerning her 'crime' of having conceived outside wedlock and then given up her child soon after her birth. The anguished connection she still feels toward her daughter serves to accentuate the self that will always remain embedded within her native Bedouin culture.

As readers we are never sure which aspect of Salma will predominate, or whether, like the disconnected segments of her narrative, her acquired identities will continue to form separate deposits of psycho-cultural sediment overtopping the bedrock of an irreducible Bedouin base. The multi-layered composite-self Faqir constructs for her Anglo-Arab immigrant is not so much a hybrid as a set of juxtaposed parts that do not mix though their boundary lines may meet.

> migrants shed their selves to become acculturated to their North American milieu, and the 'very essence of [their experience] resides in the concept of endless possibility' (Bose: 1993, p.58). This seems to mirror Mukherjee's own apparently uncomplicated stance: 'I left India by choice to settle in the U.S. I have adopted this country as my home. I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island', Alison B. Carb, 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee', quoted in Bose, p.59.

Changes in Salma develop in conjunction and in accordance with the respective codes of the discrete cultures she engages with – Bedouin Arab and British/Western. These, not unexpectedly, are juxtaposed within the novel as existing typically in a condition of chiasmic separation and mutual incongruence. Geographically they are separated in Salma's mind according to zones of safety/danger. These stretch laterally from the site of her 'offence' the Bedouin village. The first stage of removal, the prison, though affording her an immediate refuge, is located far too near to the offence's epicentre to provide anything more than a circumscribed local protection. Once outside its walls Salma is in imminent danger of 'simply [getting] shot'. Movement to the next stage is facilitated by a visitor to the prison, a Lebanese Christian nun impressed by Salma's dressmaking talent who has Salma spirited away by car under cover of darkness. But even the Lebanese mountains can provide no secure shelter from the outreach of the summary justice of the male members of her family. For Salma the boundary of safety is drawn where the Middle East gives way to the Mediterranean (the Islamic world to the Christian). In Cyprus she embarks for Britain in the safekeeping of a British missionary woman. From then onwards she imagines the Greek Mediterranean as the space closest to her birthplace in terms of safety (far enough away not to get shot) and, with its food and plentiful supply of pasture for goats, in its way of life. Though in physical terms Britain becomes the zone of safety, conflict still remains, a product of the clash of cultures, while through process of internalisation the original danger zone returns in the form of recurrent fits of panic and hallucination ('men with rifles' in pursuit) which when Salma presents are incomprehensible to British medicine.

Faqir's decision to invest Salma with a full stock of handicaps and vulnerabilities, compounded by the removal of all but the basic elements of choice, foregrounds her migrant alienation – caught between two worlds – and, consequentially, deepens her sense of rejection by both. Believing everyone in England knows about 'her shameful past', in her mind she acts up to the stereotype of 'the black tart', even though in practice this means no more than dressing for the public house. As a Bedouin woman and also as a migrant desirous of assimilation to British culture, Salma is certain that she fails both

cultures' tests of belonging. Seeing herself as 'a convict, an immigrant, trash', her one night stand with a middle-aged Englishman – a cross-cultural encounter confirmed by a bizarre shared interest in herbs – measures for Salma the distant she has travelled from the 'tribal protection' afforded a woman of honour by sleeping with a stranger 'without a marriage contract'. The erasure of taboos brings no freedom or sense of release. She judges herself by the strict, non-negotiable standards of her Bedouin upbringing, 'Allah punish me. Burn in hell'. Still holding to the values that condemn her she remains incapable of adjustment to the laxity of her adopted culture. 'This country was right in resisting me […] something in me was resisting it.' Thinking herself into the mind of her Open University tutor, who later becomes her husband, she opines: 'I came from dark countries with blood feuds and hostages. If I were him I wouldn't teach me'.

Salma's sense of self iterates the negative, inferior aspects attributed to females in Bedouin society: their ritual impurity, ties to sexuality, and duty to wear black.[10] But although the Bedouin codes are seen to have impacted so harshly on Salma, her primary attachment to Bedouin ways also resonates within a poetic language redolent of *Pillars of Salt*. Salma's narrative is often lyrical, invoking repetitive, descriptive formulas that are transpositions into English of Arabic patterns and which replicate the love/hate relationship she has with her homeland and native culture. Ironically, her name invokes the opposite of guilt, for as her mother tells her: 'I called you Salma because you are healthy, pure and clean', only to qualify this by the warning: 'Your tuft of wool is red' – a colour associated by Bedouins with reproduction and fertility – 'you are impulsive'. But her grandmother – who had married for love into a hostile tribe – gave Salma contrary advice: 'follow your heart always'. Salma's Bedouin patronymic is also a source of pride, but in England no one calls her Salma Ibrahim al-Musa. Still, she cannot cancel out her Arab habits: 'I offered coffee to everyone, immigrants, officers, policemen, the milkman, the postman, sales girls'. And when she sniffs the aroma of falafel emanating from a mobile vending van owned by Moroccans,

10 See Abu-Lughod, chap.4, 'Modesty, Gender, and Sexuality.'

> Wrapped up tight in my Bedouin mother's black shawl in the middle of Exeter. I flew over lands, rivers and seas to dry bleak mountains, a handful of goats and ripe olive weighing down the silver-green boughs. I soared high above my homeland.

But the hostile reality facing the migrant soon returns in the abuse of skinheads: '"Hey alien! You freak! Why don't you go back to the jungle? Go climb some coconut trees! Fuck off! Go home!" I did not deserve to be here, I did not deserve to be alive'. This demonstrates how Faqir employs language that is sometimes brutally reductive to suggest the migrant's schizophrenia: 'alcohol had never passed my lips ever. I was a goddamn Muslim'; 'Muslim is fucking complicated'. Such mixing of language codes, switching from flowery oriental idioms to the base language that mimics her negative reception as an immigrant, not only underlines Salma's double alienation, but also sets up a dialogic interplay that serves to crush the positive images she entertains of home, be that place the Bedouin village or her adopted British sanctuary. Sometimes self-loathing and guilt are culturally doubled: knowing its impossibility, Salma can't deny an insistent desire to acquire the whiteness of the host culture. Her urge to have her dark nipples surgically removed is both a response to the aesthetic of the beautiful blond woman stereotype, and self-punishment for never having suckled her child. Recalling Maha and her mother's carpet, Salma is engaged in continual stitching and sewing as a means of spiritual sustention; the dress she makes for her absent daughter re-establishes ties sundered by patriarchal oppression and the migrant's cruel separation from hearth and home.

Desire is negated by absence of choice; all that happens is predicated by the lapse of a teenage Bedouin girl. Rightly speaking, the novel insinuates, Salma's life was forfeit and should have ended at the moment of her disgrace. A dreadful determinism undermines every step she makes toward integration in the land of migration, toward setting a distance between her new self/selves and the cultural site of her offence. This determinism finds its terrible culmination at the end of the novel when, in spite of having married an Englishman and borne him a baby son, Salma is drawn back to her village after fateful telepathic communication with her daughter. Undertaken in the

disguise of a Western tourist – against the imprecations of all with an interest in her welfare and survival – Salma's return, above all in its worst scenario outcome, only confirms the apparent magnitude of the chasm separating traditional Bedouin and 'advanced' British culture. The latter proves febrile and ineffective in comparison with the atavistic violence of the former. Her worst fears turn out to be justified: Mahmoud has only recently murdered the girl. The replication of Salma's tragedy in the criminal killing of her daughter completes the circle of 'offence' and 'punishment'. Salma's own murder leaves us wondering how long it will take, and by what means, before the 'dark countries with blood feuds' slough off their darkness, and the global culture sired by the West transforms itself so as to humanely receive their casualties.[11]

Fadia Faqir's representation of the Anglo-Arab encounter is distinctive for its treatment of conditions ranging from colonial interface to the global, and for lending such situations an individual, Arab feminist encoding. Her choice of expression in turn challenges Anglo-American readerships by adopting 'foreignisation' strategies to translate her dark pictures of modern Arab women's predicaments. In the process she invests her Arab women characters with a dignity and piquancy that invests the project of Arabs writing in English with a resonance others might care to emulate.

11 In an email to the author (6/9/2006) Fadia Faqir wrote:
Whenever there is violation of human rights in one place in the world it is a matter of time for it to spread to other parts. It is extremely important to point out that the novel is even handed and does not spare British society for its treatment of immigrants. It suffers from post-empire depression and delusions of grandeur and as a result perceives foreigners as servants or second class citizens. This is not an Orientalist piece of work. Both countries of origin and adoption are criticised evenly.

Chapter 5
Leila Aboulela: Islam and globalisation

Leila Aboulela was born in 1964 and grew up in Khartoum where she attended two English-medium schools, an American primary and The Sisters' School, run by Catholics. She studied Economics at the University of Khartoum, afterwards moving to Britain in 1990, where she obtained a M.Sc. in Statistics from the London School of Economics. She then went on to tutor the subject briefly at the University of Aberdeen. The author of two novels and a collection of short stories, it wasn't until Aboulela came to Britain that she discovered a vocation as a writer. But her early exposure to English in her native Sudan and her later stay in Scotland are keys to her choice of which language to write in, and what subjects to write about:

> throughout school and university, I read English fiction, looking up all the difficult words in the dictionary, discovering for myself which was quality writing and which was pulp. It was books I read as a child in the Khartoum American School, that made me first love reading: *Little House on the Prairie*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, *Harriet the Spy*, *Little Women*. And it was American books that helped me when I started to write: Natalie Goldberg's *Wild Mind*, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and the classic *Becoming a Writer* by Dorothea Brande (Aboulela: 2002, pp.203-4).

The list is revealing: that the books are all by women is probably not a surprise; however, they imply an interesting absorption of a specific substratum of American culture: feminine (in Showalter's usage) and wholesome. Juxtaposed alongside what Aboulela would readily accept as the key shaping factor of her writing – her Muslim faith – they set the seal on a combination that is not so much remarkable as a symptomatic feature of the age of globalisation. Aboulela's residence in Britain provided her with a subject matter: a terrain against which she could not only set her Sudanese heritage, but which she could employ to encapsulate a new identity: that of the Muslim Arab/African woman

in exile. In 'Travel is Part of Faith', a piece whose title tellingly expresses the sublimation of global mobility within a religious frame, Aboulela produces a taxonomy of late twentieth century migration from South to North: foregrounding physical displacement – 'I should not have come to Scotland. It's too cold' – and psychological disequilibria arising out of awareness of racial difference and cultural contestation (this was written during the 1990–1991 Gulf Crisis). 'How exposed a baby is in a pushchair, not in my arms […] in a pushchair which could be swiped at, yanked away' (Aboulela: 2000b, pp.41–2). Against that major thematic of lonely isolation, the religious frame supplies not merely a terms of reference or consolation, it shapes an emerging awareness of difference and helps articulate an alternative to Western modernity that is nevertheless inscribed from within its conditions of possibility.

Aboulela's writing is in fact culturally sensitive in the extreme, and bespeaks more than a superficial conversance with postcolonial issues. But the intersection of Western codes and forms and her choice of an unswerving Islamic point of reference locate her work in a terrain quite different to Faqir's.[1] Tradition and ethnicity are by no means excluded, but they are subsumed into a pietistic faith which is at once unapologetic and universal in its address, and radical and specific in its argument with Western modernity. The migrant experience – in particular the deracination and loneliness it brings, and the unmediated assault on the immigrant's values and identity it sets up – is in Aboulela's fiction made the spur for the construction of a quietist but none the less assertive religious frame of mind that functions as an antidote to hegemonic materialism and existential emptiness. Yet while the Anglo-Arab/African encounter thus articulated results in a wholesale refusal of Western standards and practices, it hinges, as already suggested, on the writer's acculturation to Western forms and codes supplied by the age of globalisation.

The Translator is Aboulela's first novel. Set in Aberdeen, and published initially by a Scottish publisher with the aid of a Scottish

1 In aesthetic terms, the difference – which is most clearly seen in their respective portrayals of migrant characters – might be located in Faqir's preference for the performative as opposed to Aboulela's for the pedagogic.

Arts Council grant, the text first engages the reader's attention as a migrant's narrative through its effective deployment of techniques of de-familiarisation. Sammar, a Sudanese widow in her mid-thirties, translates Arabic documents for Rae, a middle-aged Scottish academic, and lives alone in the cocoon of her single room, mourning the death of her husband and cousin, Tarig. In the opening, Sammar attempts escape from the rain, fog and snow of the intemperate north by going to the city's Winter Gardens, a sealed environment that absurdly mimics the warmth of her native south where 'cacti [grew] like rows of aliens in shades of green […] surrounded by sand for the room was meant to give the impression of a desert' (Aboulela: 2000a, p.4). The early chapters continue to de-familiarise the Western landscape and render the émigré's deracination by vividly juxtaposing the flavour of Africa against a Western setting:

> Outside, Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balanced just for her. She saw the sky cloudless with too many stars, imagined the night warm, warmer than indoors. She smelled dust and heard the barking of stray dogs among the street's rubble and pot-holes. A bicycle tinkled, frogs croaked, the *muezzin* coughed into the microphone and began the *azan* for the *Isha* prayer. But this was Scotland and reality left her dulled, unsure of herself (p. 21).

Aboulela works through many of the usual exile's routines, beginning with self-censorship and the need to be invisible. However, by adopting an updated *Jane Eyre* scenario, she escapes the fatalism of the emigrant novel by having Sammar fall in love with her boss.[2] Sammar tests her lover by asking him to convert, and when he fails her, leaves him and goes back to Sudan. But this time the man returns to the woman. In fact, Rae embraces Islam first then comes to Khartoum to the home of her aunt to ask for Sammar's hand.

Religious consciousness is at the heart of the novel. By the use of free indirect style, Aboulela writes through Sammar's thoughts, insou-

2 From a comparative perspective, *The Translator* draws from its intertext an optimism which is the antonym of the most celebrated postcolonial rewriting of Bronte's novel, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which the cross-cultural love affair between Rochester and Antoinette is a spectacular disaster.

ciantly asserting identity and re-appropriating loaded Islamicisms from the lexicon of Western intolerance:

> She covered her hair with Italian silk, her arms with tropical colours. She wanted to look as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerising as the Afghan princess she had once seen on TV wearing *hijab*, the daughter of an exiled leader of the *mujahideen* (p.9).

Rae's conversion and the refusal of a tragic ending can be read as a subtle exercise in counter-acculturation. Rae is presented as a modern Orientalist for whom Islam is not a threat. An uncle – the object of family opprobrium – had deserted from the British army after the Second World War and settled in Egypt to marry an Egyptian woman and produce unseen hybrid cousins. His example inspired the young Rae to write a school essay entitled 'Islam is better than Christianity'. As a member of the hippy generation, Rae travelled in Morocco, where his dark features camouflaged him among the locals and attracted him to a European girl with whom he had a brief, painful marriage. 'A pattern was set […] In years to come every arrival to Africa was similarly accompanied by loss or pain […] As if for him the continent demanded a forfeit, a repayment of debts from the ghosts of the past' (p.55). As a mature academic, Rae has accomplished a reversal of the Orientalism of the imperial past; he even receives abusive phone calls for his media comments on the Gulf War. Sammar's inquiry as to why he studied Islam is a loaded question since the fulfilment of her desire for marriage turns on his conversion. Rae's reply is:

> I wanted to understand the Middle East. No one writing in the fifties and sixties predicted that Islam would play such a significant part in the politics of the area. Even Fanon, who I have always admired, had no insight into the religious feelings of the North Africans he wrote about. He never made the link between Islam and anti-colonialism (p.109).

In attributing the discourse of postcolonial polemics to the Scotsman, and to Sammar's strident British Asian colleague, Yasmin, Aboulela frees up a supra-political space for Sammar. The Sudanese woman's attachment to Africa and to Islam, she is saying, operates at a deeper

level. It is the winning over of Rae to this inner Islamic core that constitutes the challenge of the novel.

Sammar's own religious consciousness undergoes a struggle over this issue: should she be tempted to settle for a perfunctory formulaic sign of conversion on Rae's part in order to accomplish the desire for marriage framed by her African and Islamic nurturing? Back in Sudan, with increasing assurance Sammar comes to occupy a space of detachment, negotiating power cuts, rationing, government corruption, and her aunt's criticism of her for giving up Western riches. She draws strength from her homeland and resolves that Rae will find her centre, and come to share it with her:

> When she stood her shoulders brushed against women at each side of her, straight lines, then bending down together but not precisely at the same time, not slick, not synchronised, but rippled and the rustle of clothes under until their foreheads rested on the mats. Under the sky, the grass underneath, it was a different feeling from praying in doors, a different glow. She remembered having to hide in Aberdeen, being alone. She remembered wanting him to pray like she prayed, hoping for it. The memory made her say*, Lord, keep sadness away from me* (p.163).

Sammar's victory, like Jane's, is on her own terms. Rae's eventual return, his having learned to pray like herself, is a statement that he has passed across the terrains of postcolonial polemics and settled in Sammar's own territory, where political resistance is subsumed by the deeper strength of religious assurance. By its assertion of depth, Aboulela's text refutes deconstructionist dogmas of absence, and challenges and ultimately draws Western emptiness into a rooted Islamic-African core. At the same time the novel quietly deconstructs nativist male patriarchy. In a reversal of Tayib Saleh's *Season of Migration to the North* in which Mustafa Sa'eed's widow had been married unwillingly to Wad Rayyes, the old lecher of the village, Sammar is saved by her aunt from throwing herself away on an old man who is a family acquaintance. '"*An educated girl like you, you know English* […] *you can support yourself and your son*"[…] "He's religious," Sammar choked the words, "he feels a duty towards widows […]" "*He can take his religiousness and build a mosque but*

keep away from us. In the past, widows needed protection, life is different now"' (p. 13; italics in text).[3]

On the other hand, there is no eschewing how constructed and selective is this vision of religious completion. John Stotesbury locates *The Translator* within the genre of women's romance, but sees it as symptomatic of a process in which women writers of Muslim faith adapt an archetypal Western fictional form: 'their narratives at once adhere to their metropolitan Anglophone forebears and contemporaries while, in terms of their own trans-national frameworks, the romantic "ethos" of their fictions tends powerfully to conflict with that of their Western counterparts' (Stotesbury: 2004: p.70). In *The Translator*, the nexus for romantic accomplishment is Rae. Sammar's relationship with Rae is in fact a means for her acculturation to the West, in which her fear is overcome without her needing to yield an iota of her own religious identity. Initially he is fashioned as an intermediary, whose Arab predilections and dissident political-cultural position facilitates Sammar's emergence from the numbing alienation of the migrant. His own troubled encounter with North Africa as a student mimics Sammar's with Scotland, but for some unexplained reason it demands a forfeit on his part, as if he is vicariously (a very Christian idea) paying a debt for his own culture's arrogance. It is after she and Yasmin have left Rae's flat having spent hours discussing his Islam-friendly past that Sammar is momentarily gripped by the hallucination that 'home had come here'. Fresh in her mind is the notion that Rae was 'different […] sort of familiar, like people from back home' (p.21). Almost immediately she articulates a proposition that for her follows naturally from this. She asks Yasmin: 'Do you think he could one day convert?' (p.22). Rae is now set up as a

3 Part Two of Aboulela's novel begins with a quotation from the opening pages of *Season of Migration* referring to Mustafa S'aeed's village in Sudan. Part One is prefaced by these lines from an Arab/Persian poet of the early Islamic period, Abu Nawas: 'But I saw what comes to me/From my inner thoughts/Denying my eyes'. Both quotations imply romantic readings of the respective translated Arabic texts. The Salih quote appears to endorse the first narrator's unproblematic nostalgia for his native Sudanese home; while a Sufi-like understanding is attributed to Abu Nawas, a poet who loved drink and is normally associated with 'poems of revelry' (Kritzeck: 1964, p. 84).

figure ripe for absorption into Sammar's feminised version of Islam. When he falls sick she prepares a soup for him that must contain the exact ingredients otherwise it 'would not taste right, would not be complete' (p.97). As with Rochester and Jane, all that is required is for the male lover to discard his limiting masculinities – in Rae's case the objectivity with which he insists on viewing Muslim culture and belief. Postcolonial contexts are incorporated in their Middle Eastern dimensions into Rae's professional expertise; largely political they constitute a masculine space that is eventually left behind. Rae's fascination with theory, seen in his discussion of Islamic culture with Sammar, must pass into the realm of practice – performance of the *salat* or Islamic prayer – in order for the obstacles to romance to be overcome and the dynamics of the genre satisfied.

Aboulela does not structure her women's experience into explicit forms of feminist resistance such as might be found in al-Sa'dawi or Faqir. Like Soueif, in her fiction she rewrites the competing ideologies of Western culture and Islamic nationalism by resituating the usual areas of conflict into a feminised space of her own choosing. By designating this feminised space I do not mean to suggest that Aboulela and Soueif adopt the same positioning. Indeed, Soueif's writing largely remains inimical to dialogue with contemporary Islamic thinking while in contrast Aboulela's evidently starts out from a specifically Islamic terrain. This means they are at variance in the ways they address postcolonial and postmodern predicaments of East and West. Soueif mediates the conflicting divide in the name of a humanising awareness of the value and space of women in a story like 'I Think of You'. But while this is inclusive in its treatment of traditional and modern Arab women, 'The Water-Heater' draws clear lines of separation between Soueif's feminism and fundamentalist Islamism. In contrast, apart from her reference to Wad Rayyes style patriarchy, Aboulela's discourse is never stridently feminist nor does it set out to condemn male Muslim practice per se. Instead it comprehends the existence of 'bad' believers whose faith is nominal and who, often highly westernised, demonstrate individual behaviour that is at variance with accepted Muslim norms. Interestingly, such individuals are rarely marked in gender terms, and Aboulela never takes on committed forms of Muslim religiosity. Several of the pieces in

Coloured Lights are indeed as engaged as 'The Water-Heater', but the object of their disapproval could hardly be less antithetical.

Set in London, 'Make Your Own Way Home' concerns two childhood friends, Tracy and Nadia, who have grown into adolescence together. Nadia, however, comes from a close-knit family that cares for her, while Tracy's mother has divorced and having 'crossed to another world, [she] entered a dimension that was neither adult nor child. Tracy's code became that of magazines, the parameters of her new world boyfriends, dates, parties and first kisses' (Aboulela: 2001, p.89). Tracy is left to undergo her abortion unsupported, except for her friend. Her boyfriend has told her to make her own way home. The lack of guidance given to young English girls like Tracy (nominally free to 'make [their] own way home' but in reality left to their own devices) appears to lead to an inevitable set of consequences: unwanted pregnancy, the lightly taken option of abortion, and personal isolation. Nadia's parents still adhere to accepted Egyptian values, and though she lies to them about accompanying Tracy to the abortion clinic, the story moves toward confirmation of these values in Nadia's mind and eventual separation from her English friend. Tracey is made to embody an aspect of Western culture that is as metonymic of its deeper, fundamental moral chasm as the brother's fanatical misogyny is of a form of Middle-Eastern religiosity in 'The Water-Heater'. But just as Soueif allows no quarter to the young man, Aboulela seems determined to empty Tracy of depth in order to score points against an empty West:

> Try and feel pity for Tracy. Perhaps her tears are the tears of remorse, the tears of regret [...] To continue is easier than to repent. Tracy is like the imprisoned thief whose only regret is that he was caught […] Why doubt what the magazines encourage? She was just unlucky that's all. Here, right in front of them as the train pulls away, there is a poster of two handsome people, happy in the sunshine […] 'Be Safe this Summer with Durex' is the command. That ad with its clean sea and sand must be the truth then, not the vacuum that roared and sucked and gobbled [Tracy's foetus away] (pp.96–7).

Soueif's fiction can be considered equally didactic as we have seen, and in its Orientalist feminism parasitic upon Western codes. Aboulela's writing has been afforded the cachet of being Islamicly *halal*;

but we might discern in the facility with which she constructs her moral messages a debt to her reading in nineteenth-century American female fiction, indeed to her education in a Catholic institution. In her encoding of 'Islamic' messages within her fiction Aboulela is no less beholden to Western discourse than Soueif. Her fiction represents not so much a species of Islamic 'writing back' to Western society, as an exercise in acculturation to globalisation conducted from within the territory of the dominant discourse(s) since the language of encoding is English.

At this point I would like to call the French sociologist Olivier Roy to my aid. Key to his description of the conditions many twenty-first century Muslims find themselves in is his conceptualisation of a globalised Islam, in which the movement of Islam outside its traditional borders 'blurs the connection between a religion, a specific society, and a territory'. To understand this is to challenge the notion of a traditional religious culture engaged in a 'clash of civilisation' with the West. Instead of representing a backlash against westernisation, Roy argues, the Islamic revival should be seen as a consequence of westernisation, in particular globalisation and the deterritorialisation of large numbers of Muslims who find themselves in the West. 'The deterritorialisation of Islam is also a result of globalisation and has nothing to do with Islam as such, even if it concerns millions of Muslims [...] a third of the world's Muslims are living in societies that are not Muslim: a third of the world's Muslims now live as members of a minority' (Roy: 2004, p.18).[4]

In her most recent novel, *Minaret*, Aboulela explores the relationship between Islam, migration, and Western society. Representing the experience of a young Sudanese migrant disconnected from her traditional Muslim culture, *Minaret* is a novel framed by a

4 Noga Hartmann (2006) agrees that Roy's analysis 'implies that Islam, as a religion, no longer depends only on the Muslims' traditional territories or culture, or even the Arabic language […] it has split from traditional roots. Deterritorialized and globalized, […] Islam is being reshaped and heavily influenced by western languages, cultures, and ways of life' (p.102). The Islam represented in Aboulela's fiction is characterised by these very factors, which should probably come as no surprise given that the language of representation is English.

dialogue between Islam and Western secularisation. It is about her rediscovery of Islam, or using Roy's term, her *re-Islamisation*, or the effort of Westernised Muslims to assert their identity in a non-Muslim context (Roy, p.23). Najwa rediscovers Islam as an immigrant in London. She has grown up in an Islamic country but remembers Islam as a traditional part of Sudanese culture from which she was cut off during her period in Sudan owing to her family's elite status. Experiencing westernisation from an early age in the form of Western popular music, dress and so on, Najwa is detached from the Islamic roots of the land in which she was born and grew up. Later, her rediscovery of Islam after the execution of her father and the break up of her family is a result of her new life as an exile in London and is part of a deterritorialisation process. The Islam she adopts is no longer linked to an ethnic culture. Najwa finds in the multi-ethnic Muslim community centred on the Regents Park Mosque in London a 'community of spiritual affinity' (Roy, p. 211). Through contact with the community, especially by attending its classes and finding in it individual role models and exemplars, Najwa becomes a born-again Muslim. The fact that this occurs in a Western capital to a young woman from a traditional Muslim society who has nevertheless been immersed in a Western lifestyle confirms the new set of conditions.

> Re-Islamisation means that Muslim identity, self-evident so long as it belonged to an inherited cultural legacy, has to express itself explicitly in a non-Muslim or Western context. The construction of a 'deculturalised' Islam is a means of experiencing a religious identity that is not linked to a given culture and can therefore fit with every culture, or, more precisely, could be defined beyond the very notion of culture (Roy, pp. 23–24).

Minaret might be categorised as a migrant novel set in Britain and narrated in English by a non-native narrator, in which barely one significant English character features. Instead each one is either Muslim by birth and/or born-again Muslim, either student, long-term migrant, or both. The inclusion of a predominantly Muslim cast of characters in a mainly British setting has a noteworthy precedent in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. *Minaret* also bears a superficial resemblance to Hanan al-Shaykh's most recent novel, *Only in London*, in that it represents characters of Arab origin negotiating a marginal existence in the

capital. There the parallel ends: while al-Shaykh's characters explore London's demi-monde and remain for the most part tourists or transitory visitors, Aboulela's chief protagonists, Najwa and her born-again Muslim boyfriend, Tamer, engage with an established Muslim community consisting of individualised Muslims who possess a strong sense of identity even if the largely unrepresented host nation would considered them marginal.

We meet Najwa as a woman in her mid-thirties who has seen better times, happy to obtain a job as a nanny for a middle class professional Egyptian-Sudanese family living close to the Regents Park Mosque. Her task is to look after the child of Lamya, 'a certain type of Arab woman – rich student, late twenties, making the most of the West' (Aboulela: 2005, p.2). Lamya is married to an absentee husband working in Oman, and the family also includes her younger brother Tamer, and sometimes her mother, Doctora Zeinab, who flies over periodically from Cairo. Aboulela uses broken chronology to enable us to understand her character's religio-cultural formation. From the start we are presented with two Najwas. The first, daughter of a government minister, studies at Khartoum University, wears tight denim skirts slit at the back, has her hair uncovered, and is attracted to Anwar, a Leftist student opponent of the regime. We are intrigued to know the conditions and explanatory factors behind Najwa's transformation into a pious, educated, conservatively dressed Muslim woman careful to cover all traces of her affluent past, working as a deferential maid.

The two halves of Najwa's story unfold and eventually merge, rather than materialise through violent disjunction; nevertheless, they articulate a contrast and encode a didactic meaning. This is a novel of religious witness, and the fact that it is, indicates in Roy's phrasing, that 'one can use a Western syntax with an Islamic morphology' (Roy, p.33). Najwa replaces a westernised lifestyle with a personal Muslim faith which, rather than representing a return to traditional religion puts self at the centre of a religiosity disconnected from ethnicity and culture – 'The self and hence the individual is at the core of religiosity. Faith is personal, faith is the truth. Faith is not religion' (Roy, p.31). Najwa's history is indicative of a modern globalised environment in that she makes an individual choice in becoming a born-again

Muslim. In the process not only does she reject the secular values of a westernised world that stretches from London to Khartoum, she adopts a position that is a conscious riposte to these. Following her father's execution for political corruption in Sudan, her drug-dealing brother Omar is jailed for stabbing a policeman, her mother grows ill and dies in a London hospital, the family's wealth is used up, and Najwa is forced to support herself. But she uses this experience in London to embrace a religiosity that emphasises personal behaviour over culture or politics (communist or Islamist). That this is expressed in a Western, non-Muslim context highlights the specificities of Najwa's choice and exemplifies a range of factors that Roy argues are constitutive of new migrant Muslim identity:

> The relevant dimension is that of religiosity – how believers experience and formulate their relationship to religion. Such an individualisation of Islam is pervasive and parallels the phenomenon in Christianity: the stress on faith and values, the quest for a universal community going beyond culture and nations, the importance of local congregations as a basis of socialisation, and alienation from a society seen as materialist and vain (Roy, p.149).

This individualisation of religion, Roy states, can lead to various forms of religiosity – emotional pietism, moral conservatism, or humanistic social propagandism. In Najwa's case the turning point is her eventual rejection of her longstanding relationship with Anwar, who after Khartoum she meets again in London, and with whom, against her traditional qualms, she enters into a sexual relationship. Things come to a head at the beginning of the Ramadan fast which Najwa, non-practising Muslim though she is at this point, guiltily learns she has missed. This crystallises the distinction between the old Najwa who is 'Westernized, detached from Sudanese traditions' (Aboulela: 2005, p.230) but who always fasted out of cultural habit, and the new Najwa who fasts because her religiosity tells her to do so. The incident is crucial because it emphasises the non-Muslim context of Najwa's transformation. Though she is breaking tradition in missing the Ramadan fast and having unmarried sexual relations with Anwar, the novel sets these up initially as 'communal' transgressions that crystallise in Najwa's mind as something deeper. They do matter, even though Anwar's friend says 'People in London don't fast', and

Anwar says, 'who's seeing us in London? Who's got time to criticize our relationship?' (p.231, p.233)

Najwa's transition to born-again Muslim does not happen suddenly. But it occurs through her awareness of wanting to be like other committed Muslims, who can recite the Qur'an, dress in an Islamic way (albeit not only traditionally but also in neo-Islamic style 'in jeans and headscraves' (p.237)) and might even be converts from Christianity. In particular, Najwa responds to a presentation of Islam that, while it reconnects her with the faith she had seen practised publicly as *salat* at Khartoum University and personally by the pious family gardener, she now hears in straightforward, direct *English* 'serious and simple, vigorous but *never clever, never witty*' (pp.242–43; my italics). Although she adopts the outward forms, wearing the hijab and modest clothes, Najwa's attachment to Islam is individualised, internalised, and stresses repentance.

> Sometimes the tears ran down my face. I sweated and felt a burning along my skin, in my chest. This was the scrub I needed. Exfoliation, clarifying, deep-pore cleanse – words I knew from the beauty pages of magazines and the counters of Selfridges. Now they were for my soul not my skin (Aboulela, p.247).

If the metaphors are Western (almost meretriciously so), so is the religious syntax. 'The stress on the individual subject (*I, mine*) and the internalisation of religion under the category of faith are typical of new forms of religiosity. Anxiety about the strength or the weakness of one's own faith, which has been a typical Christian attitude, is now widespread among Muslims' (Roy, p.185). Roy quotes a Muslim scholar who encourages believers to 'establish Islam first in your heart' (Roy, p.176). Najwa's faith stresses personal salvation and the day of judgement, values and ethics above legalistic approaches. It is sustained against a rationalism that dismisses supernatural agency, and a political outlook that cannot break free of the circle of violence.

> Look at what happened in Sudan, look at human rights, look at freedom of speech and look at terrorism. But that was exactly where I got lost. I did not want to look at these big things because they overwhelmed me […] Now I

> wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence. I yearned to go back to being safe with God (pp.241–42).[5]

Living in an alien, non-Muslim environment where the shar'ia cannot be implemented – or imposed by society – it is the individual conscience which determines whether a Muslim should fast, pray, maintain Islamic standards of dress, and obey religious precepts. Thus despite their mutual attraction, Najwa and Tamer are morally scrupulous about any form of intimacy that would contravene the religious law. (Tamer tells Najwa: 'It is not very Islamic for a man and a woman to be friends' (p.211)). Najwa – like Sammar – is nevertheless not entirely modernist in her ideas about marriage and can envisage living with Tamer in a polygamous marriage (as Sammar did not rule out marrying the old family friend) so long as he was able to enjoy and produce progeny from a younger wife. Whereas the younger woman (Sammar) had no qualms about marrying the older man (Rae), discrepancy in age between herself and Tamer is for Najwa the main obstacle to their union. This failure to reverse the equation established in *The Translator* betokens the traces of traditionalism that still adhere to Aboulela's representation of Muslim women. Even so, the critical turning point in the novel reiterates the message of re-Islamisation already outlined.

This occurs when Lamya holds a party for her Arab female friends, each of whom are fashionably dressed in the Western style, with the exception of a latecomer who turns up late dressed in exactly the same costume as Najwa wears when she goes out. For a moment Najwa thinks she is someone from the mosque but all the Arab guests are laughing and the girl starts to remove her clothing in a theatrical way. Lamya turns to the two English guests and tells them: 'We don't make fun of our religion, but just today, just once today' (p.223). Instinctively, Najwa turns away to inform Tamer, who is studying in his room. She says: 'Would you believe it, for them the hijab is a

5 In the following sentence, which I have omitted from the quotation in order to foreground Najwa's individualised faith, Aboulela supplies her heroine with a (for the author) rare defence of Islamism against the Sudanese secular parties: 'It wasn't fundamentalists who killed father, it wasn't fundamentalists who gave my brother drugs'.

fancy dress!' But Tamer doesn't reciprocate her attempts to laugh the matter off, instead construing it as an insult on Najwa herself. Enwrapped by an emotion centring on their feelings toward one another and shared faith, the two lovers kiss only for Lamya to enter the room and strike Najwa across the face. The incident closes with Najwa's consciousness of Tamer's rage against his sister's behaviour.

From this event a number of consequences follow: in plot terms it results in Najwa having to leave her position and resume her life of isolation. This time there is to be no happy ending. Najwa allows herself to be bought off by Doctora Zeinab, but there is clear indication that she has renounced love, allowing Tamer to live for the future. The denouement works within the terms of realism that the outer surface of the novel maintains throughout: Middle Eastern culture is reasserted, wealth and class are allowed their precedence. Nevertheless, the agenda of re-Islamisation is sustained through these apparent worldly reverses. The love affair has won for Tamer the opportunity to drop Business Studies and take up a course on Islamic culture and civilisation. Even though the cost is relinquishment of his love for Najwa, Tamer has succeeded in rejecting the westernised values of his family in order to pursue deeper things. Najwa puts the money she has realistically acquired to the spiritual purpose of performing the hajj. She has resisted the temptations of earthly happiness and fulfilment but in the process deepened her faith. The incident at the party has lead to both a mutual demonstration of love and a strengthening of Najwa's and Tamer's sense of religious identity that underscored its voluntarist character. The novel closes with Najwa's dream of her family's past life and all it stood for:

> It is a natural decay and I accept it. Carpets threadbare and curtains torn. Valuables squashed and stamped with filth. Things that must not be seen, shameful things, are exposed. The ceiling has caved in, the floor is gutted and the crumbling walls are smeared with guilt (p.276).

The passage is a synecdoche for a westernised Middle-Eastern materialism that is fit only for the fire and which through her faith Najwa has transcended.

Aboulela's fiction centres on this kind of choice being presented to its central female protagonists. Sammar and Najwa appear non-assertive and inward, but it is through exploration of their religion that they are able to construct selves within a neo-Muslim mould and resist the alien Western milieu in which they find themselves. Both discover the need to fuse the traditional Islam of their native land with a late twentieth-century globalised Islam. This produces a faith that is articulated with an awareness of cultural roots which, however, do not inhibit the new entity. In so far as it privileges individualism and voluntarism above tradition and ethnicity, this new belief has been transposed with the aid of Western codes. The result is an assertion of an Islamic identity in the face of (and also in conjunction with) global modernity. Outwardly, Sammar and Najwa's choices (which are very similar) both involve refusal of the West and (on the surface) eschew a hybridity that would imply compromise with alien values. Both use their faith to fight off the anonymity of being a migrant in Britain, and the threat of native hostility which their Muslim identity funnels. Sammar returns home but succeeds in acculturating Rae to Islam. Her religious experience is still linked to cultural roots in her native Sudan, but has started to be reformulated by the migrant experience. Rae, an apologist for Islamic resistance, is through her agency converted to a 'soft' internal, feminised Islam. Najwa's path is a slight variation on Sammar's; she comes to London estranged from traditional Islam. In a post 9/11 Western capital-city, she reformulates her Muslim identity by embracing an emergent neo-Islam that is itself a riposte to western-ising globalisation. She finds in the multi-ethnic, English-speaking Muslim community centred on the Regent's Park mosque a strong bastion against a dominant culture which, in the case of the west-ernised Arabs, has taken away their religion and identity. Tamer, like Rae, is a kindred soul for Aboulela's heroine, but the author alters the pattern and makes Najwa's permanent renunciation of her lover the test of her religious conviction. It is probably inapposite to ask if this ending is any more believable than *The Translator*'s. We might judge *Minaret* less satisfactory from a generic point of view because it does not mesh as successfully as its predecessor with the codes of the Western female novel of romance. Sammar gets her man and holds her faith in tact; Najwa's pay-off is solely spiritual: a pilgrimage to

Mecca. The pedagogic discourse that underlies all of Aboulela's fiction is here perhaps too nakedly exposed: even the characters in *Coloured Lights* usually achieve positive results on the material as well as the spiritual plane. The quality of Aboulela's prose more often than not sustains her writing above this pedagogic shaping, but it is this tension between poetics and the pedagogic that frames her work.[6]

6 The pedagogic impulse of Aboulela's fiction reaches its apogee in the last two stories of *Coloured Lights*, where a futuristic utopian frame is joined to a Sufi style discourse, which also features in the dialogue between the lovers that forms an epilogue to *The Translator*.

Chapter 6
Arab Women's autobiography and memoir in English

> Migration has provided hundreds of […] Arabs with the opportunity to reinvent themselves, to exercise their minds and to practise their creativity away from the familial, social and confessional constraints of the homeland (Clark: 1998).

Emphasising the popularity of Arabic autobiography in her introduction to *In the House of Silence*, a collection of autobiographical essays by thirteen prominent Middle Eastern and North African women writers, Fadia Faqir foregrounds the difficulties presented to women practitioners of the genre in Arabic. Often lacking 'self-confidence and a sense of empowerment', Arab women are nevertheless increasingly stimulated to try to 'define their position in history' by locating themselves '*vis-à-vis* the male master narrative' as well as formulating their own 'separate individual identity' (Faqir: 1998, p.8). In her articulation of the conditions pertaining to her own personal site of production, Faqir adopts the persona of Shahrazad in order to allegorise the predicament facing contemporary Arab women writers. In 'Baghdad' (i.e. the Middle East) she had 'no social, religious or political freedom – she was in bondage. Returning to the house of obedience before sunset prayers, she was forced to wear the veil and could not criticize the regime' (p.52). However, the decision to go into exile and adopt English as the language of composition places the issue of Arab women's autobiography on a wholly new footing. From having to write from a position delimited and circumscribed by their gender, Arab women writers are in certain respect privileged in their attempts to produce autobiographies in English.

In this chapter I shall try to demonstrate the specificities of Arab women's autobiography in English by, first of all, starting with the different conditions pertaining to its inscription as compared to women's autobiographies written in Arabic. The discussion will then

proceed on a similar terrain and be concerned with similar language and cultural issues to those already touched upon with respect to Arab writers' Anglophone fiction. To begin with, the autobiographies date from the same period as the fiction: Laila Abou Saif's *A Bridge through Time* appeared in 1985, only two years after Soueif's *Aisha*. The other autobiographies I shall be discussing all appeared in the following two decades. They are: Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage – from Cairo to Harvard – A Woman's Journey* (1999); Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima* (2002), and Jean Said Makdisi's, *Teta, Mother and Me, An Arab Woman's Memoir* (2005). The conditions of possibility behind this Anglophone literary production, fictional and non-fictional, are much the same. Arab women's English autobiographies are especially linked to the opportunities thrown up by migration and cross-cultural interaction encapsulated in Peter Clark's remark above. Writing through the medium of English becomes a sign of liberation from traditional values and restrictions, and simultaneously a means of problematising and challenging colonialist attitudes and codes within metropolitan discourses.

The autobiographies themselves are produced at a moment of receptivity: they answer to and engage with a Western fascination with the exotic other. Oriental women, particularly Muslim ones, are spoken for in a popular literature that dilates on their oppression, exploitation and sexual 'slavery' behind the veil in terms derived from traditional Orientalism. In particular, Jean Sasson's series of 'exposés' on the lives of women within royal households of the Arabian peninsula set the precedent for an apparently never ending stream of books – both fictional and non-fictional in genre – invariably packaged with the familiar icon of a veiled oriental woman on the cover. An area of discourse recycled from the recent past thus enables a Western audience to engage with Arab and Muslim practices with regard to women that foreground the cultural and social limitations of traditional, patriarchal societies from which Western women have supposedly been long liberated. Tropes of escape and the gaining of independence from harsh traditional social backgrounds and specific male dominance are integral to the expected fare in such writings. These are in turn given intellectual respectability by the polemical writings of well-known

Arab feminists like Nawal al-Sa'dawi and Fatima Mernissi which are often tinged by autobiography.[1]

For Arab women (very often living in Arab countries) it has been proportionally much harder to write their autobiographies in Arabic than for those who construct theirs in a Western metropolitan language or are translated like al-Sa'dawi. Nadja Odeh ascribes these difficulties to restrictions on Arab women that can begin with basic practicalities such as mobility outside the house and donning of the veil in public:

> Clear self-presentation of women in public was not desired. Therefore the genre of autobiography, the most extreme form of literary self-representation, was not acknowledged at all for women, and a woman who took pride in her inaccessibility, whose ideal state was being cloistered, would hardly have been interested in an undertaking such as revealing her private life (Odeh, 1998, 264).

Among the most celebrated of Arabic women's autobiographies, Egyptian feminist Hoda Sha'rawi's was dictated in Arabic to a male amanuensis (since she was unable to write in Arabic) and published posthumously; later it appeared in a substantially edited and re-arranged format under the English title, *Harem Years*.[2] Cultural re-

1 Much of al-Sa'dawi's writing is either fictionalised or overt autobiography; her *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, falls into the former category, *Daughter of Isis* into the latter. In spite of its ostensible autobiographical format, Mernissi has claimed *The Harem Within, Tales of a Moroccan Girlhood* contains fictional material and is not necessarily her own story. Anne Donadey (2000) points out that this book (published in Britain with the title *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*) 'takes up in more personal form issues that Mernissi's sociological books analysed at length such as veiling, seclusion, and women's status under Islamic law' (p.85).

2 According to Nawar al-Hassan Golley, the editor of *Harem Years*, Margot Badran, excised or demoted the material in the Arabic original which was intended by Sha'rawi as a defence of her father's reputation. In this way the English version of the autobiography ignored 'one of the main reasons why she recorded her memoirs at all' (Golley: 2003, p.38). Furthermore, Sha'rawi, Golley contends, constructs her narrative in such a way as to make it 'more a testimony to her achievement [as a nationalist campaigner and advocate of women's rights] than an act of self-formation or self-creating […] her narrative does not reflect upon her life or reveal hidden areas of herself' (p.127).

strictions of a physical kind and complexities of recension are also to be found in the autobiography of the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan. *Rihla Jabaliyya, Rihla Sa'ba*, which was translated into English under the title, *A Mountainous Journey*, records a life of seclusion well into womanhood, from which the author escaped only after the death of her father. Nevertheless, the reader cannot fail to note a persisting reticence in the manner in which Tuqan's tells her life story. As she states early on:

> I have not completely removed the lid from my life's treasure chest. We are not obliged to dig out all our private affairs. We feel it is best to keep certain matters, precious to us alone, concealed in some corner of our inner being away from probing eyes (Tuqan: 1990, p.12).[3]

In recent years interest in women's autobiography may have grown in areas of the Arabic-speaking world.[4] However, in her study of Arab women's autobiographies, Nawar al-Hassan Golley (2003) foregrounds the editorial control involved in the production of 1980s anthologies of women's stories told at first in oral dialects then transposed into Arabic and then into final English versions. This appears to suggest that opportunities to narrate their own stories in an unmediated form remain, for ordinary Arab women at least, parlous and few.

The gender restrictions placed on women writing autobiographies in Arabic as compared with the privileging of those composed by Arab women in English, should not, however, lead us to dichotomise these too rigidly. The English autobiographies discussed below can operate within some of the same terrains as the Arabic ones. Moreover, the sense of liberation achieved through adoption of the freedoms provided by Western culture are often to be offset by a deeper complex of emotions in which feelings of loneliness, loss and

3 Despite this reticence, according to Golley, 'by being reflectively retrospective, analytical, and critical of the conditions of her life, [Tuqan] reveals the unknown side of herself' (p.128).

4 For example, the Moroccan writer, Leila Abouzeid, noted that while in 1962 her first article appeared anonymously because 'women in my culture do not speak in public', by the time she published her memoir, *Return to Childhood* (ruju 'ila tufula) in 1993, both her family and some male critics were supportive and appreciative (Abouzeid: 1998, pp.iv-v).

guilt arise alongside and in conjunction with experiences of racial and cultural prejudice and rejection at the hands of the host society. We shall also see how, whereas for Fadia Faqir writing in English came with the conscious decision to embrace exile and live in the West, for the women of Arab ethnicity who have lived and worked outside the Arab world for most of their lives use of English comes naturally as the first language of their education. Nevertheless, despite the greater scope for expression afforded by the English medium and the interest provided by a Western readership, constraining factors remain for women writing in that language as well. Female practitioners of autobiography in the West, feminist scholars argue, have also had the problem of finding for themselves a new space in the traditional, male-dominated canon. Compared with those faced by women writers of Arabic autobiography, these obstacles may be less extreme but they are no less germane to the writers' identities as women.[5] For example, Dinah Manisty argues that women's autobiography (by implication whether in Arabic or English) for so long confined to the peripheries as lacking 'the supposed cohesiveness and coherence of male autobiography', in fact 'challenges the concept of a coherent self' which is itself a false sign (Manistry: 1998, pp.272–73). That (utopian?) male Western ideal, 'the autonomous, free, rational, unified individual or "self"' is equally problematic to Sidonie Smith (Smith: 1998, p.38). How, she argues, should those she calls 'de/colonizing subjects', among whom we may include Arab women writers in English, approach that '"I" of bourgeois individualism [that] has dominated the autobiographical landscape of modernity'? (*ibid*) Surveying the theoretical positions on autobiography of the likes of Paul de Man, Sidonie Smith and Estelle Jelinek, Golley endorses the view that women's autobiography must involve an act of self-construction, but goes further in criticising the notion of self in Western autobiography as a whole as well as underlining a specific lack of theorising about Arab women's contribution to this form. A potentially more positive space is opened up by Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wilds, who contend that the traditional view of autobiography as 'quest for self-

5 See Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck's introduction to *Life/Lines, Theorizing Women's Autobiography*.

knowledge' can be extended 'to encompass groups, cultures and whole communities' (Ostle et al: 1998, p.23). In echoing this view Smith writes of 'the wresting of an individual narrative […] as a necessary point of departure for liberatory practices' and then develops the notion that individual autobiography stands for hitherto excluded groups and communities: 'Assembling an experiential history can function as counter-memory, a means to re-narrativize the past and to break the silences of official history' (Smith, p.39). Golley appears to endorse a similar position when she argues that

> Creating new, and indeed more authentic, images comes neither from completely dissolving the individual nor from within the individualist isolated self but from merging it with a collective group identity' (p.73).

It might be expected that the complexity of these various, often conflicting factors would bring fractures and disjunctions to the discourse in which the Anglophone autobiographies are written. While postmodern and poststructuralist criticism inculcates a methodology which is engaged precisely with the teasing out of these inconsistencies, I wish to point out the kind of insights produced by postcolonial and feminist theory in which both women's and postcolonial writing can often be construed as operating against the grain of canonical, 'public' writing and therefore being less concerned with the creation of stable, confident, unified subjects.

> A woman cannot experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined by the dominant male culture […] This alienation from her cultural representation is what motivates her writing (Manisty, p.273).

These women's autobiographies, I shall contend, are less inclined to smooth out instability and more likely to represent Arab and women's insights 'against the grain of "public" or hegemonic history, […] locating the silences and the struggle to assert knowledge which is outside the parameters of the dominant' (Mohanty: 1991, pp.38–39).

Arab women's Anglophone autobiographies: an overview

At this point it will be useful to address the following issues. We might ask: what factors distinguish Arab women's Anglophone autobiographies from Arabic ones; to what extent do writers of the former constitute a discrete group, and how, if at all, do they relate to their counterparts writing in Arabic? A preliminary response to these questions might stress the following:

1. The authors of the Anglophone autobiographies are Arab women who have received an extensive (or intensive advanced-level) English-language medium education.
2. Born in the Arab world they all come from professional or business middle-class backgrounds.
3. They remain connected to their Arab heritage through family ties and their own childhood memories of having lived in their Arab homelands.
4. These connections – in particular their links with the female members of their own families (especially of earlier generations) – attune them to gender issues similar to those engaged with in women's Arabic autobiographies. Given these considerations, and the remarks already made concerning the cultural conditions under which the English autobiographies are produced, we might expect them to adhere to considerably different codes to those of women's Arabic autobiographies. Such divergence can be especially observed in the trajectories of the women's lives as recounted in their autobiographies. Modern Arabic autobiographies by either men or women are likely to describe relatively homogenous Arab backgrounds at least as far as their subjects' childhoods and youths are concerned, whereas a defining feature of the Anglophone autobiographies is the way they record an intersection of cultures – predominantly Arab and British, but also Arab and American – that usually starts from early childhood, either through English being spoken along with Arabic in the family home, or as a result of the subject attending an English-medium school. The implication that such homes endorsed at least some aspects of Western modernity is confirmed by the freedom they proffered their young

women to proceed with their education and eventually (and this is true in all cases) to continue higher studies in Britain or America.

While it is true that male writers in Arabic such as Taha Husayn and Tayeb Salih went abroad to study and married European women, and Fadwa Tuqan also spent a period in England during which she developed at least one intimate love relationship, these experiences are probably not as formative as the East-West engagements we find inscribed in the Arab women's Anglophone autobiographies.[6] What up to now I have discussed under the rubric of 'the Anglo-Arab Encounter' must be considered integral to these autobiographies and crucial in demarcating them from women's Arabic autobiography. In the English texts a tension is built up as a result of the subject's attraction to Western culture and the urge to identify with it and to assimilate its codes. The borders of national cultures are thereby transgressed, but in traversing such boundaries the subject experiences profound cultural disorientation, in part due to the obstacles presented to her assimilation by the host culture, and in part to the pull exerted by her residual Arab identity. The predicament in which these Arab women find themselves in such circumstances is that of belonging to neither camp, or, on reflection, of recognising themselves as composed of hybrid or mixed identities. This condition is encapsulated by Ghada Karmi when she records how as a young woman, 'I truly believed myself to be a "dark-skinned English girl"', only to become the object of racial discrimination. Feeling the need to return to the Arab world to recover her roots, she then found: 'I looked and sounded Arab, but in myself I was not' (Karmi: 2002, p.317, p.414). Behind this alienation from Arab culture lie the years spent away in the West, the early experience of having lived as a female in an Arab country and being raised in an Arab family, and perspectives imbibed by a critical Western education. Here the temptation to represent Arab culture – especially in its gender practices – according to colonialist discourse is indicative of the subject's hybridity. Immersed in her native culture, as for example Fadwa Tuqan is, the mono-cultural Arab female subject can be acutely aware of her socially constructed

6 For a comprehensive discussion of the topic of East-West encounter in Arabic fiction, see Rasheed El-Enany (2006).

disabilities. But most likely she will lack the critically hostile apparatus a Western education brings to their anatomisation.[7] By development through a Western education and living in Britain or America and undergoing the disabling experience of being a non-Westerner and the object of racist and hegemonic attitudes, a further complexity is added to the cultural thinking of the Anglophone Arab women writer.

Incidents from the personal lives of diasporic Arab women writers also acquire a politico-cultural significance that crystallises into crucial aspects of their individual formation. Leila Ahmed's later development as a feminist academic specialising in the reconstruction of Muslim women's lives is affected by two incidents in her childhood. The first, a childish game when she was eight or nine in which an older boy tried to sexually assault her, demonstrates a severe reaction on the part of her parents, particularly her mother. The second illustrates a similarly violent response: a female Palestinian teacher striking her across the face because of her lack of interest in Arabic. Both incidents are construed by the author as imbricated in markers of Arab society, the former with respect to Arab sexual politics, in particular the premium placed on female chastity as a sign of family honour; the later as a fault-line in Arab nationalist politics around which cohered notions of Arabness with which Ahmed found it difficult to identify. In both cases, writing in English supplies for the author freedom and space to discuss areas of cultural experience it would have been much more problematic to address in Arabic.

However, while adoption of English means the women's lives are not related in a traditional manner, as the incidents from Ahmed's autobiography underscore, this does not automatically imply a vast discrepancy in subject matter between the English and Arabic autobiographies. On the contrary, in spite of the interposition of the cross-

7 Golley praises Tuqan's autobiography for raising 'the issue of how far women can actually define a female identity within a tradition that suppresses it'; she also credits her understanding of this predicament as having 'affinities with Marxist thinking *whether she is aware of it or not*' (p.121; my italics). This nevertheless underlines my point concerning the remit of Arab women's autobiographies in Arabic compared with those written in English.

cultural interface, and the larger possibilities this opens up, bedrock issues arising from the native background surface in the English as they do in the Arabic autobiographical renditions. There are, for instance, clear congruences between the early lives of Fadwa Tuqan and Leila Ahmed. To begin with, neither of the mothers wanted their daughters and attempted to abort them. 'Both acts of entry into the world become problematic events' and there ensues a 'conflictual relationship between mother and daughter' (Malti-Douglas: 1990, p.3; 1991, p.166).[8] In Ahmed's case this, like the punishment she received for being the victim of the boy, presents a spur for her later work on the constitutive factors behind Arab women's lives, particularly the heritage of the harem. Indeed, at least some of the perspectives she brings from her study of the harem are built into her autobiography, where the word 'harem' appears in the subtitle, as well as in two chapter headings. It is important to emphasise, however, that neither Ahmed, nor any of the other three women writers in English who I discuss, fail to find models in their own Arab family histories of women worthy of celebration. But the point I wish to make here is that, despite the importation of a scholarly framework acquired from her position in the Western academy, Ahmed's childhood experience is rooted in a similar cultural formation to Tuqan's, and is inscribed within her autobiography in such a way as to confirm an 'instability of the subject' (Malti-Douglas: 1991, p.164) which is also a feature not only of *Mountainous Journey*, but arguably of women's autobiography across many cultures.

Class is also a crucial factor to be taken into consideration. Laila Abou Saif and Leila Ahmed, for example, come from similar upper middle-class backgrounds. The Abou Saif and Ahmed families both became estranged from the politics of Nasserite Egypt, while both the fathers conspicuously established themselves in innovative professional areas gaining enemies in the process. Because of the encouragement they received from their fathers, both daughters empathised with

8 Malti-Douglas refers here to the parallel between Tuqan's autobiography and the beginning of Nawal al-Sa'dawi's autobiographical novel, *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*. What Malti-Douglas calls 'aborted abortion' (1991, p.165) of females may have been a common feature in Egyptian society.

them rather than their mothers, who they saw as mired in tradition and therefore having made little out of their lives. In addition, both identified with their father's career struggles and the political isolation this brought. In the process the daughters incorporate aspects of this struggle into their own outlook and as a result become situated in positions of ambivalence vis-à-vis the postcolonial issues that separate many intellectuals of Arab origin from the West. Nevertheless, each of the women single out crises in recent Middle East history as the litmus against which their identification with Western norms proved fragile, and their awareness of their Arabness came to the fore, often against their expectation. Each of them writes about the Six Day War of 1967 as a watershed in their identity awareness; as Jean Makdisi puts it:

> I know of no Arab in America at that time who did not feel the same way, that the crushing defeat was made more intolerable by the virulently anti-Arab, pro-Israeli sentiment that so bewildered and angered us' (Makdisi: 2005, p.126).

Laila Abou Saif: *A Bridge through Time*

Laila Abou Saif was born into a Coptic Egyptian family during the Second World War. Her autobiography, *A Bridge through Time*, published in 1985, concentrates almost entirely on her adult life, including her years of study in the United States in the 1960s, and her decade as a theatre director in Egypt from the early 1970s to the early 1980s. Encompassing a period of great changes in Egyptian political and social life, which saw the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the Camp David agreement, President Sadat's assassination in 1983 and the emergence of Islamism, the work foregrounds the author's ardent feminist principles and their praxis as seen in her commitment to improving the lives of poor Egyptian women and her challenging of entrenched social and political shibboleths.

Abou Saif reconstructs her life into early womanhood as a battle against traditionalism and patriarchy, in which her father was her only ally. (She also finds in her maternal grandmother – a widow who in-

sisted on raising her children and administering their property without male 'protection'– a figure among her female ancestry who becomes a talisman for her own struggles.) In the early parts of Abou Saif's autobiography the leitmotif is the urge to escape traditional culture, as she claims: 'The road to freedom is long and hazardous'. Her father points out the direction when he advises her 'education is your best friend', and she recognises this is the only aspect of her life over which she could retain any control (Abou Saif: 1985, p.9, p.17). Laila's mother is the principal influence behind the arranged marriage her daughter contracts with a young man from a rich property-owning family that however loses much of its wealth as a result of Nasser's land confiscation programme. Though by going to America to do a Master's degree in English Literature she prolongs the engagement in the hope of its eventual annulment, Laila is eventually pressured into the marriage, which takes place in Washington D.C. Invoking the polemic of her 70s Western feminist counterparts, Abou Saif presents the marriage ceremony as a travesty of patriarchal chauvinism by quoting the priest's concluding remarks:

> You are now her master […] He is your husband now, forget your people, obey him, for he is your master (p.26).

In spite of the peremptoriness of her initial response – 'there was nothing to look forward to now that I was married' (p.27) – this change in her status is soon shown to be only a setback. In fact the author ensures that the terrain of marriage becomes a battleground from which she is bound to emerge the victor

The polemical thrust of *A Bridge through Time* might well have proved too shocking for the book to have been encoded in Arabic. It projects an unaccommodating feminist persona and towards the end justifies her choices by the claim, 'I have become a person, whereas before I was a lump of flesh' (p.266). Abou Saif admits her husband was not an obnoxious brute – quite the contrary: he came from the same class as herself, was nearly her age, handsome, and at moments capable of displaying sensitivity. The problem is simply that she hadn't chosen him of her own freewill, and was bored by the middle-class institution of marriage and its social obligations. Despite living

with an American during a further period of escape in the United States where she gains her doctorate, Laila cannot commit herself to him either: 'Marriage – there is such finality in that word' (p.73). Just as she had temporised over getting married, she pushes against the boundaries of convention by failing to conceive, eventually agreeing to a withdrawal of contraception only on the unvoiced proviso that she would refuse to bear a child. This makes the abortion that ensues doubly shocking. Having submitted to her husband's wishes she unilaterally cancels their product, graphically setting down her feelings on the matter: 'I loathed this biological self which men invaded with their penises and their surgical instruments' (p.46). One by one the planks that uphold the traditional Arab dispensations of living are removed; each time a space is opened up that proclaims an ever greater provocation to Egyptian social norms. Lovers are acquired, and potential ones put off without them knowing 'that I was being honourable for myself and not for my absent husband' (p.39). No Western feminist voice could have been clearer: 'my body was my last stronghold and only I had a right to control its destiny' (p.41). The subject sacrifices her baby for the sake of *her own* 'inner life, which was struggling to be born' (p.48).

By obtaining a post in an American university and choosing on her own account a man to live with, Laila would seem to have fulfilled her dreams. But the young Egyptian woman remained restless. Having started a career as an academic in the United States, she decided to return home and pursue her professional life there. 'My life in America was unreal. A career, independence, what nonsense' (p.61). That Abou Saif aligns this dissatisfaction with a personal argument with America crystallised by the 1967 June War, and situations in which she felt she was penalised for being 'too Egyptian', is significant. The implication is that unconventionality in private matters does not prevent the feminist's recuperation into patriotism: 'my life would always be linked with Egypt' (p.55). In addition to its uncompromising presentation of its subject's private life, *A Bridge through Time* produces an account of Abou Saif's career in the theatre that is a further snub to tradition. In Egypt, she explains, female actors were considered little better than prostitutes, and while she hadn't envisaged this opprobrium being extended to herself – a stage director –

she soon finds certain men in the profession, and others outside it, deem it a declaration of availability for seduction. As a postgraduate student in America she feared poverty and the bearing of children back home, and in the first years of her marriage bitterly resented having to live in the narrow corridors of her husband's family apartment in Cairo. Now her family (and their wealth) come to her aid. They set their daughter up in her own apartment, and she drives her own car. As a divorced woman living alone in style, she is the 'object of scandal' and people's envy, but cannot be touched (p.88).

The reality is that, in addition to her upper-class background, urban living and the new westernising freedoms of the Sadat period help protect the rebellious feminist from a traditionalist backlash. As a Copt she was also delivered from the full brunt of resurgent Islamist codes waiting to bear down upon Egyptian Muslim women. Welcoming what she admits to be only marginal improvements in women's positions instigated during this period (notably Jehan Sadat's amendment of Egyptian family law) Abou Saif was not afraid to lend support to the Sadat regime. However, in extending this endorsement to the Camp David agreements and in staging a play by a Jewish Egyptian playwright in the Wekala theatre located in the traditional quarter of old Cairo, she was placing herself in an embattled position vis-à-vis the strong Arab nationalist and Islamist currents of Egyptian society. This is exemplified by her journey to Tehran as part of an international delegation of feminists seeking an audience with the Ayatollah Khomeini and further emphasised by her last minute withdrawal because she refused the stipulation to cover her head. Abou Saif's unrepentant feminist position runs the danger of being tagged pro-Western and anti-Islamist. She conceives of her 'Western side', however, as freedom to live a private life – such as when she forms a liaison with an Austrian-American journalist not specifically sympathetic with an Arab point of view. She seems to be trying to maintain a separation between her public attempts to widen the horizons of her compatriots through her work in the theatre, and her satisfaction of her 'Western side' in her private life. But her commitment to improving the lives of poor Egyptian women by making a film on female circumcision underscores a disdain that drove her own admittedly privileged escape from traditionalism.

Abou Saif's autobiography inscribes a conscious riposte to traditional Middle East norms that rides on Western nostrums of individual freedom, especially women's right to enjoy the same freedoms as men. Her deliberately constructed, astringent feminist persona owes not a little to Western models, and she does not fall shy of presenting an unproblematic engagement with causes Western feminists would unhesitatingly endorse. Her intent is clearly to project a feminist individualism in the face of the negative political/cultural polarisation ('the West v the Rest') that began in the late seventies and continued through the eighties and nineties. However, it would not be entirely fair to accuse Abou Saif of adopting a colonial feminist discourse for the reason that – in spite of her privileged position – she is never tempted to detach herself from her fellow Egyptian women by making objects of them, or incorporating them into her own projects for self advancement. Sometimes her promotion of liberal causes like freedom of speech appears almost Quixotic in an Egyptian context, until one remembers that there is always the option of escape again to the United States. Nevertheless, for all its purposeful avoidance of the antimonies attendant on simultaneous embrace of Western and Eastern identities, and through its uncompromising engagement with the gender issues faced by many Arab women, *A Bridge through Time* sets down a marker for later Arab women's Anglophone autobiographies. Abou Saif's subject-position confirms Manisty's proposition concerning the obstacles that pertain to a woman's presentation of herself as a unique individual; the motivation behind the writing is to project an 'I' that serves as a counter-statement to the cultural representation of females demanded by the dominant male culture of Egypt.

Leila Ahmed *A Border Passage*

Leila Ahmed was born and lived in Cairo during broadly the same period as Laila Abou Saif. Prevented from leaving the country because of her father's political disgrace, in the mid 1960s to 1970s

she spent two periods in Cambridge, England, where she wrote her doctoral dissertation on the Orientalist, Edward Lane. This was followed by a period at the University of Bahrain. In 1981 she moved to Amherst and in 1992 became director of the Women's Studies and Near Eastern Studies programmes at the University of Massachusetts. In 1999, she became Professor of Women's Studies in the Harvard Divinity School.

A Border Passage is a text that personalises Arab women's issues by elucidating the journey of one woman – its subject. It begins with her escape from the restrictions of her native culture via unconscious assimilation into that of the coloniser. Later feelings of guilt, especially with respect to relationships with family, friends, and former servants, assail her. Finally, the narrative elucidates her desire to return/recover her roots in the homeland. Compared to Abou Saif, Ahmed brings a further dimension to Egyptian women's experience through her mixed ancestry. While her father was a native Egyptian, through her mother she was related to the Turco-Circassian aristocracy that ruled Egypt for many centuries. The harem-world that once secluded women of this upper class elite helped provide a stimulus for her academic work of recovering the histories of Muslim women, as well as exercising her analytical and descriptive powers in her autobiography. As in Abou Saif's case, during the period of her growing up Ahmed was faintly ashamed of her mother's traditional attitudes.[9] Again like Abou Saif, it was her father who proved the chief supporter of his daughter's 'flight' to the West (Ahmed: 1999, pp.20–21). His opposition to the building of the Aswan dam – and the quarrel with Gamal Abdel Nasser which ensued – resulting in his daughter's prolonged confinement in Egypt. This in turn fed her distaste for the postcolonial politics of her country.

Early in *A Border Passage*, Leila Ahmed forthrightly states:

9 On the particular background to troubled mother-daughter relations within past middle and upper class Muslim societies, see Ahmed's comments on Hoda Sha'rawi's relationship with her mother (Ahmed: 1988).

> I grew up in the last days of the British Empire. My childhood fell in that era when the words 'imperialism' and 'the West' had not yet acquired the connotations they have today – […] mere synonyms for 'racism,' 'oppression,' and 'exploitation.' (p.5)

For the Ahmed family, as for her childhood acquaintances the Saids (who in the 1930s and 40s divided their time between Palestine and Egypt) as well as the Abou Saifs, identification with the West was constituted out of a perception of the need to absorb the values of a superior culture in order to accomplish material and professional advancement. Ahmed's upper middle-class, professional and pro-Western parents were unaware or would have disavowed any suggestion of having bifurcated from their own national culture. Indeed, conceiving of her family's relationship with the European colonial power, Ahmed utilises the not infrequently invoked designation of their having belonged to a class that acted as 'brokers' between their native Eastern culture and that of the West (p.152). Yet her memoir does not seek to gloss over which influence – Arab/Egyptian, or British/Western – seemed to her the more valuable growing up. English was spoken at home among the children and, given that the adults did not know it or knew it only imperfectly, English became 'from the start a language of subversion […] a way of […] baffling the adults' (p.23). In contrast, Arabic 'became implicitly marked as inferior (and presumably marked as *native* and inferior)' (pp.23–24). This judgement was of course supplied and confirmed by the Western-style education Ahmed's parents had chosen for their children, which determined the children's preference for English/American culture. A major concomitant of such an upbringing was Ahmed's deficiency in formal Arabic. Though 'completely fluent in spoken Arabic' she lacked facility 'in the written language' (p.23). The fact that she was unable to decipher her father's Arabic handwritten papers after his death stands as a sign of a loss of patrimony. Ultimately responsibility for Ahmed not knowing formal Arabic lay with her father for he had not assiduously fostered her knowledge of her own culture. He had 'internalised' colonialism and so, Ahmed opines, the roots of colonialism were internalised in herself through her childhood, though only later did she realise this.

Ahmed, then, does not deny that colonial attitudes were imposed on her during her schooling; her riposte is to problematise standard postcolonial descriptions by accenting the manner in which the coloniser-colonised polarity is complicated by crosscurrents within the native society. She rehearses several incidents involving a South African headmaster, and a Palestinian female teacher of Arabic. The former was sceptical of Leila's prowess in English – believing the work she turned in to be someone else's – then marked her lower than Jean Said, confiding in Jean that he was sorry to see her friend ahead of her in anything because 'she was a Christian and I only a Muslim' (p.145). Nevertheless, Ahmed places Mr. Price's negative effect on herself below the lasting impression left by an action of a Miss Nabih when she struck Leila across the face for her poor performance in Arabic. Ahmed concludes:

> I have always thought that those moments between me and Miss Nabih were in large part responsible for the feelings of confusion, anger, and guilt that I've felt all my life in connection with the issues of Arabness, identity, the Arabic language, and the like (p.148).

Ahmed construes this incident according to class and historical contexts, noting a momentary ignoring of the plight of the Palestinians by a specific (upper class) Egyptian mentality. Certainly the incident crystallised a complexity in her sense of identity that included ambivalence toward Western culture, Classical Arabic culture and political Arabism, and later became imbricated in feminist notions of escape. Ahmed's class background and her parents' alienation from Nasser accounted for much of this. The Suez debacle which occurred around this time also highlighted her ambivalence: 1) by exposing the British colonialists whose culture she so admired, and 2) facilitating Nasser's 'rhetoric of rage' against imperialism (p.152) which her parents had taught her to despise, and signalling, she felt, an end to Egyptian democracy (pp.164–65). But though she received the British action as a personal betrayal, Ahmed still recognises in herself that desire of her heroine, the Egyptian feminist Dora Shafik, 'always to escape, [to] flee this place, this native place, this inferior realm of the native' (p.154).

Such a complex of feelings and attitudes permeates *A Border Passage*. It resurfaces later on when Ahmed discusses Pan-Arabism, the politics with which Nasser's regime was particularly associated, connecting it to Said's *Orientalism*: 'The book […] echoed, too closely to me, the overly simple binary view of Arab nationalism, which represented imperialism as uniformly and comprehensively negative' (p.240). The struggle with Arab identity continues, from the prejudice imbibed from her childhood – 'I was Egyptian and not Arab, definitely not Arab' (p.246) – through a discussion that raises taboos (from a nationalist point of view) of early Egyptian support for Zionism, and the sinister input of British imperialism into the so-called 'Arab awakening'. In facing head on the struggle between the coloniser and the colonised over the issue of culture, Ahmed is inclined to soften or even dissolve such axioms of postcolonial analysis as the frequently rehearsed temptation of the colonised to become absorbed into the coloniser's culture, with a resulting devaluation of his/her own culture. Her intuition, while not discountenancing the divisive realities of colonial education or the flawed 'project of western civilization', is to reject the binary, confrontational, monolithic entities that are encoded in the signs of 'colonialism', 'imperialism', 'anti-imperialism' and 'liberation' (p.5, p.152, p.157). 'Imperialism', after all, had opened opportunities for women like herself, which her mother and aunt had patently lacked. It had facilitated her 'escape' to the West, made possible her academic career, and provided the space in which she could probe the benefits and shortcomings of her own culture's gender codes and practices. In Britain and America she would encounter the evils of racial superiority and cultural chauvinism, but she would not be prevented from exploring and writing about the gender restrictions she had herself experienced in childhood.

A Border Passage grapples with the process of transformation of women's social roles and destinies in Arab-Muslim societies. In addition, the autobiography suggests insights into the processes whereby Ahmed established herself as a noted feminist academic. Already celebrated for *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), a study of women's position in Islamic societies through history, Ahmed delineates the way she came to apply jointly the tools of Western

academic culture and memories of her own Arab/Egyptian background to recover and partial reconstruct positive aspects of Muslim women's oral cultural practice. Ahmed shows how she is able to reformulate her judgements of these women, beginning with her mother, through reconstructing their stories and histories. In this way the problematic, unstable 'individual I' of the author that had emerged in the interstices between nativism and imperialism is empowered by the opportunity to unite with, or at the very least situate itself in relation to, the collectivity of her female forebears. Autobiography is also extended into memoir, which has been defined as a broadening of the concerns of self out into the wider community.[10] In particular, Ahmed recreates harem life from memories of her mother's family home ('Thinking about my mother's life, reading the memoirs of women of her era' (p.95).) She reconstructs the separate worlds of men and women in her grandfather's house in Zatoun with both affection and detachment. Women, she argues, never thought of themselves as inferior to men, though the men probably did. 'The two sexes inhabited different if sometimes overlapping cultures, a man's and a woman's, each sex seeing and understanding and representing the world to itself quite differently.' It was a world in which she believes her mother was 'completely at home', a 'place palpably apart, imbued with some unnamably different order and way of being' (pp.100–101, p.99). As in Hoda Sha'rawi's paternal Turco-Circassian household, there was a connection with slavery, but this was only present in Ahmed's grandfather's house 'as distant facts […] instances of the strange things they did back in olden times' (p.100).

Ahmed's rewriting of the harem world is extended in her memoir to her excavation of the practice of her own forebears, thus increasing the scope of an argument that has proved controversial.[11] Critics of various religious and political standpoints dislike the manner in which she carries her descriptions of discrete male/female worlds so far as to celebrate women's own separate spaces. Arab nationalists and

10 While autobiography is primarily concerned with the individual, according to Tetz Rooke (1997) memoirs 'concentrate on communal history' (p.27).

11 Ahmed's ideas have succeeded in attracting the ire of secular Arab feminists as well as Muslim and nationalist critics. See Ghoussoub (1987) and Attar (2003).

Muslims especially disapprove of her dichotomising of a strict 'official' male religious culture of the text, and a softer, more interior, orally transmitted female Muslim faith. Ahmed deems the former oppressive, while the latter is praised for its humanity (although it was silent about the gender bias/injustices of the male-constructed system). She discerns evidence for her point of view both from the past and from her own experience amongst Arab women in Abu Dhabi in the 1970s. Ahmed also uses *Border Passage* as a forum in which to raise the dangers of Western cultural stereotyping when discussing the topic of women in Arab/Islamic societies. In particular, the academic points she had first broached in *Women and Gender in Islam* on colonial discourse and 'feminist colonial discourse', which she argues frequently reduces Eastern women's predicament to the matter of the veil and the Islamic religion, are revisited in *Border Passage*. Towards the end of her memoir she also repeats her criticism of white feminism, in particular for what she considers its denigration of Blacks and Arabs, through what she terms 'a refusal of our invisibility' (p.237). It might be argued that English allows Ahmed the opportunity to address all of these aspects of Arab/Muslim women's experience in a less charged medium than Arabic.

Ahmed underwent a spiritual crisis during her period in Cambridge in the 1970s that was at least in part due to confusion with respect to her identity. The experience provides evidence to support the proposition that a non-Western subject's interface with Western people on Western territory is transforming but at the same time troubling with regard to a sense of self. Certainly Ahmed's writing is less binary and more nuanced than Abou Saif's. In relation to the self that is constructed within and through *Border Passage*, we might say that the text neither announces nor chronicles the 'victory' of the influence of Western culture over a traditional Islamic one. There is criticism of key aspects of Western society, at least of the 1960s and 1970s, such as male chauvinism, cultural chauvinism and racism, as well as promotion of the harem as a positive example of Eastern women's cultural production. Nevertheless, I do not believe there is enough material in *Border Passage* to link it with 'autobiographical discourses about the non-West [that] are being used to undermine the authority of the West and its dominant modes of cultural self-

representation' (Moore-Gilbert: 2006, p.15).[12] Like other similarly situated Arab women of her generation who write in English, Ahmed inscribes her destination as one of isolation and even partial disillusionment; it is certainly one in which (at least for cultural Muslims like herself and Ghada Karmi) neither westernisation nor re-Islamisation present complete or satisfactory options. Instead, as its title suggests, Ahmed's narrative is constructed as a journey through a clash of cultures, Eastern and Western, which concludes with an affirmation of transmigration as a desirable condition in itself. To justify this position she foregrounds the lacks inherent in both Egyptian and Anglo-American societies, appealing to a traditional Sufi trope of the spiritual journey as a vehicle for inner growth. At the same time, Ahmed's autobiography displays characteristics we might expect to find in women's autobiography in general, representing a self at once less 'completed' than in male autobiography, and more diffuse and less inclined to endorse monolithic positions and polarisations. In *Border Passage* then, we see a female subject engaged in negotiating the contrary currents of twentieth-century modernity, encountering a series of intersections in her life and inscribing her sense of self as process; one in which she is neither one thing nor another and no finality is achieved because the self is never fixed, but always subject to change.

Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima*

Ghada Karmi was born in Palestine in 1939 and lived there until her family were forced to leave by the events of 1948. Trained as a medical doctor she later obtained a doctorate in Islamic medieval

12 As the title of his article suggests, it should be pointed out that Moore-Gilbert is primarily writing about Western autobiography and its relationship with colonial discourse, in this case ranging from Augustine to Barthes. He is concerned that postcolonial theory and the genre of autobiography have thus far only been conjoined 'fairly fitful[y]' (p.9).

medicine from London University and has lived and worked in Britain either as a medical practitioner or an academic for most of her adult life.

As its subtitle implies, *In Search of Fatima, A Palestinian Story*, conflates the genres of memoir and autobiography on the premise that the author's individual life was indelibly marked by the fate of her national community. In terms of its form, it is as different as could be imagined from her fellow Palestinian Isaak Diq's piece of autobiographical fiction, *A Bedouin Childhood*; this, not only because its author came from a sophisticated urban environment, but owing to its complete imbrication in Western modes of narration. Arriving in London in 1949, the Karmi family set down tenuous roots in Golders Green, the parents continuing to live in the isolated 'sterile and fossilised world' of émigrés who refused to integrate into British society (Karmi: 2002, p.207, p.311). As a consequence, Ghada, her older sister Siham, and her brother Ziyad, experienced the classic migrants' predicament of living in two different worlds: home and outside. Only, since they were Palestinians, there was no hope of return to their country of origin. Ghada, in particular, feels the loss of being entirely cut off from her Arab/Palestinian culture. Her formal schooling in Arabic having stopped at the age of ten, English becomes the language of her mature cultural formation, and living for the most part in England from then onward, the inevitable language in which to encode her autobiography. Like Leila Ahmed, Karmi's approach to her subject leads her to engage in a quest for self-knowledge that is linked to the history of a community; but in her case this is undifferentiated in gender terms representing as it does a whole people. In inscribing her own narrative she represents a particle of the excluded community of Palestine and validates Mohanty's claim that experiential autobiography can function as a counter-memory to officialdom and as a means of re-narrativising the past in the name of a silenced history.

Considerable space is therefore given to the nine or so years of Karmi's life in Palestine. Roughly a third of the volume, this constitutes the subject to which the remaining two thirds are related as development and coda. Like Jean Said Makdisi, Karmi constructs a group memoir from her own childhood memories and those of other members of her family – in this case her father, siblings, and cousins.

The product amounts to a chronicle of daily life in 1930s and 40s Jerusalem interpolated with political and social occurrences which taken in their ensemble focus on the events leading up to the appropriation of Karmi's homeland. The narrative of the child's interrupted personal stream of days, followed by her temporary relocation in her relatives' house in Damascus, is sutured to her much longer life of exile in England by the trope of sudden separation from Fatima, the family's maid who they had to leave behind in Jerusalem. In essence the trope encodes simultaneously mourning for the loss of childhood and the land of Palestine and in this respect is not dissimilar from other renditions of Palestinian loss in Arabic.[13] The self that Karmi is therefore able to represent through the medium of her autobiography is contingent, diffuse, and far from coherent. Over the many inconclusive experiences of her youth and young adulthood in England is spread a cover entirely closing off her Palestinian past: 'No one spoke about the circumstances which had prompted our departure from our home, or explained the history or the politics of it' (p.209). The Karmi siblings 'were forced to feel our way forward uncertainly, trying to make sense of these contradictions and resolving them in our own different ways' (p.208)

The submerged Palestinian past, and with it her relinquished Arab and Muslim identities, are ghosts at the feast of Ghada's assumed Britishness and (ironically) her school-time acquaintance and friendships with girls from the North London Jewish community. Compared to her skirmishes with her parents' traditional notions of gender – 'I knew without asking that for me [but not her brother], as a girl, sex and men were taboo subjects' (p.266) – the experience of being the object of discrimination and rejection outside the home is far harder to bear. Ghada's secondary education in London and university medical training in Bristol are presented as discrete periods, but each is characterised by a desire for assimilation which is underscored by her parents' abnegation – as she sees it – of the responsibility for nurturing within their children an awareness of Arab culture and

13 It is also generically appropriate since, as Rooke points out, mourning is 'especially crucial in Arab women's life-stories' (p.108); see also Malti-Douglas (1991).

nostrums. The experience of rejection by the host country is all the more galling because she had consciously absorbed 'westernising influences […] inwardly [growing] ever closer to the society around me' (p.219). She even found herself adopting 'the pervasive English resentment against immigrants […] [writing] a piece about what I termed "the Arab mind", which was replete with colonialist ideas and phraseology' (p.227). Armed with her 'Anglophile sentiments', and faced with what she considers her parents' irrational religio-cultural intolerance over marriage with non-Muslims, Ghada declares 'I am nothing to do with these people' (p.237).

The author's probing of the processes that governed her development as a young person does not imply acquisition of a whole, recuperated self. Ghada's mortification at being referred to as 'a filthy foreigner' in the school dinner queue shatters her illusion of assimilation and is 'the first stage in a painful process of realisation and discovery which would continue for the rest of my life' (p.247). The alienation is doubled by her sister's swapping of discrimination in Britain for 'Syria's narrow, conservative society' in an attempt to regain her Arab identity: 'I had a sense of emotional, but also intellectual, betrayal of the western acculturation that we had both experienced' (pp.310–311). Karmi's questions, 'Was I Arab or English or a hybrid, and was there such a thing?' (p.294) should be taken as neither genuinely interrogative, nor rhetorical. They can be read as statements that disrupt issues of 'authenticity or inauthenticity' demonstrating that: 'Autobiographical practices can be taken up as occasions to critique dominant discourses of identity and truth-telling by rendering the "I" unstable, shifting, provisional, troubled by and in its identifications' (Smith, p.40). In their apparent confusion such practices challenge the stable cultural norms of 'official' narrative and instate in their place strands of a silenced history. Ghada's discovery of her Palestinian roots is a painful and lonely process triggered in the main by incidents of racism and a polarisation created by events in the Middle East. Like Leila Ahmed, her awakening to a sense of her difference was further embittered by failed cross-cultural personal relationships - such as when her husband, who she had married for his family's quintessential Englishness, sided with the Israelis during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Having previously had 'no awareness of myself as

Palestinian' the occupation of the Old City of Jerusalem brought memories of where she had played as a child:

> I felt a dull ache, as if an ancient wound, which was thought to be long healed, had just been re-opened. I had a sense of deep perturbation and the first stirrings of anger at what had befallen us (p.370).

For Karmi, the Six Day War emphasised her isolation at the same time as it stimulated a desire to engage with her buried past. That in turn meant adopting a political stance which in fact provided a context for her life up until then. The 'cause of Palestine' became 'an inspiration, an identity, a reason for living' (p.399). She helped start a Palestine action group based in London, threw herself into activism on its behalf, met Yasa Arafat in Beirut in 1976 and visited a refugee camp in South Lebanon. There followed a period from 1978 to 1980 when she returned to the Arab world moved by the 'sentimental idea' that she might 'find herself among my fellow Arabs and settle down with them happily' (p.414). But it was not to be. In what in a sense was a reversal of the gender experience of the Arab women who had grown up with, and to varying degrees come up against, traditional Arab norms, Karmi discovered herself to be too westernised to be able to negotiate what were for her alien modes. She was seen by Arab men as a woman of 'questionable morals and potentially loose behaviour', and some tried to exploit her in a way they might non-Arab, Western women (p.416).

The coda to Karmi's deeply affecting and utterly consistent narrative of loss of homeland, identity, failed assimilation and foreignness even amongst her 'own kind' is summed up by her statement that at the time 'no one understood the human effects of exile and displacement'. She was left 'dislocated in both mind and body, straddling two cultures and unable to belong to either' (p.414, p.422). The narrative ends with an account of her return to her homeland, now comprehended into the state of Israel. Eventually finding her childhood home occupied by strangers from the people who occupied her land, she realises her feeling of disconnection will remain a permanent one. Hearing the *adhan* or Muslim call to prayer in Jerusalem she locates in it a hope for the continued existence of her people, though

not for herself. She had no such hope, only a 'different exile' (p.451). For Ghada Karmi, as for Leila Ahmed, constructing a self within her memoir is a highly contingent activity, and one that can assume no final completion. For Karmi return to her childhood home is unsubstantiated by any sense of belonging, only the continuation of a journey beyond the site of her origins. Her narrative nevertheless has validity over and above inscription of meanings individual to its subject. *In Search of Fatima* connects Karmi's voice to the larger entity of Palestine, and thereby succeeds in reinstating an aspect of her nation's silenced history of exile and persecution. In writing her narrative in English about experiences many of which occurred on British soil, she asserts a diasporic Palestinian presence at the metropolitan heart of the British Empire, and re-instates a missing episode from Britain's colonial history. Running very much against the grain of dominant public discourse, Karmi's account of her lifelong displacement is exemplary for its demonstration of the power that can be exercised by postcolonial women's autobiography. In this case, the individual subject's experiences are not indeed dissolved in but are authentically connected to a larger collectivity, deriving their force from this, while they are embodied in a discourse that significantly undermines the authority of the West.

Jean Said Makdisi, *Teta, Mother and Me*

An exact contemporary and school-friend of Leila Ahmed, Jean Makdisi, née Said, was born in Jerusalem in 1940 but as a child grew up largely in Cairo. Like Laila Abou Saif, she later pursued postgraduate studies in the United States. As a prominent member of the Palestinian diaspora (who nevertheless considered himself a US citizen), her father, William 'Wadie' Said, engaged his family in 'endless travelling to and from Palestine which continued until 1947' (Gindi: 2000, p.201). Where the Karmis had relatives in Damascus, the Said children had connections with Lebanon through their maternal grand-

mother, the family regularly holidaying in the small Lebanese town of Dhour al-Shwair. In Jean's case the links with Lebanon were strengthened by her marriage into a prominent Lebanese family. Although belonging to the same class as the Ahmeds, the Saids were sympathetic, at least initially, to the Egyptian revolution. But as rich Palestinian Christians they were eventually required to quit Egypt in the early 1960s and move to Lebanon, while Jean's sisters and brother, Edward, eventually settled in America.

As its title indicates, *Teta Mother and Me* is a work which, in addition to dealing with the life of Jean Makdisi herself, contains biographical material on two more women – her grandmother (Teta) Munira, and her mother Hilda. The former was born into an Arab Christian family in Homs (now in modern Syria) in 1880, her father being a Protestant pastor, and she married another clerical figure, Shukri Musa from Safad in Palestine, who became a Baptist minister in Nazareth. Teta remained in Nazareth until the *nakba* of 1948, thereafter spending the rest of her life as a refugee in the West Bank, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon; she died in 1973. Makdisi's mother was born in Nazareth in 1914 and died in Washington in 1990. Her maturity too was framed by a 'never-ending series of dramas which […] sent her packing so many times' (Makdisi: 2005, p.20). Both Jean and Hilda lived in Beirut throughout the civil war, a period Makdisi has written about in an earlier memoir, *Beirut Fragments*.

In *Tea, Mother and Me* – subtitled *An Arab Woman's Memoir* – Makdisi lays out as chief among her aims the recovery of the lives and backgrounds of her mother and grandmother from the injustice of her own imperfect recollection, and the peril of their erasure by the relentless social and political metamorphoses of the twentieth century. Like Ghada Karmi, she draws upon family reminiscences, extending the scope of her inquiry beyond the immediate lives of three successive generations of Arab Christian women to foreground, with the aid of additional research, aspects of the communities from which they came, particularly as these related to issues of gender, and the women's connection with the wider history of their times. Though her subjects would normally be considered marginal to that history, Makdisi asserts their significance:

> As I sorted out the details of Teta's and Mother's lives, tracing my consciousness through theirs, I discovered that we women had made history as much as it had made us, that our lives and our very being were intertwined with it, knotted up in its tangled web (Makdisi, p.23; my emphasis).

Though she does not use the term, her subjects acquire the status of representative women, as significant in their own realm as the representative men who are normative for the male autobiographical canon. That their sphere of action had been almost entirely confined to the domestic does not detract from Makdisi's argument. On the contrary, her memoir sets out precisely to challenge chauvinist as well as 1970s-style feminist disregard for such women's lives. Makdisi's project of interrogating established nostrums does not stop at her affirmation of the social validity of her forebears' lives in spite of their apparent submergence in domesticity; it extends to notions of modernity, at the same time as it argues for an intersection of Arab (Christian) malleability and an imported modernity through the vehicle of the 'puritanical British and American Protestant missionaries' (p.20). Makdisi's recovery of her grandmother and mother's lives is articulated in the context of the Arab Christian communities of the old *bilad al-sham* (modern Syria, Palestine and Lebanon), and of what she argues were shifting versions of modernity received from the West. Far from living 'traditional' lives, Teta and mother were the recipients of earlier versions of modernity that severed their connection to traditional Arab roots. This leads Makdisi to pose the questions: 'What was "tradition", then? What does it mean to be "traditional"?' (p.399) In a continuation of the strand of daughters' criticism of mothers, inflected by cultural axioms derived from the West, Makdisi admits she had herself once adopted what we might term a 'white feminist' position. Feeling herself 'overwhelmed and oppressed by my domestic duties', she had once feared falling into the mould of her grandmother and mother's lives, which she dismissed as 'unperturbably domestic […] unrelated to the outside world' (p.10). But though she says she once looked down upon her grandmother's traditional life, her feelings of superiority dissolved when she researched it and realised that in her times Teta engaged with an earlier version of modernity.

In fact Teta had imbibed the first phase of modernity through her education at British mission schools and her marriage to an American-style Baptist minister. But the new way of living was a part of that seismic political transformation which consisted of the Ottoman Near East being carved up into smaller states by the British and French after the First World War. In social terms, one of the key effects of this was the break up of extended family/clan-centred patterns, in practice to be replaced by modern nuclear families, a process that accelerated under the British mandate. As an Arab Christian, Teta had been in the vanguard of the generation that absorbed the new modern values as they related to the family, shedding in the process her connections with the old communal groupings for the privatised, individualistic family structure. She in turn transmitted these values to her daughter Hilda, who passed them on to her granddaughter Jean. According to Makdisi, this creation of a Middle Eastern version of the 'modern woman' (soon to be the ideal of the secular postcolonial Arab states)[14] was partly responsible for the loneliness experienced in later life by both Teta and Hilda. They both exchanged the fulfilment of the custom-led way of living for 'an increasingly isolated domestic life' (p.400). With no vocation outside their families, as these split as a result of the loss of Palestine, war in Lebanon, and the forces of globalisation, the women struggled to find roles and meaning in their lives (except in the brief period in Beirut in 1972 when Hilda acted as connection to the past for her grand- children).

Although Makdisi's analysis would seem to critique the narrowness of the values adopted by her mother and grandmother, her conclusions are otherwise.[15] In fact she discerns a complexity in the manner in which these female sustainers of isolated, nuclear Arab

14 On the issue of the development of Arab nationalist and Islamist discourses concerning women and modernity, see Hatem (1993).

15 Jean's memoir is more sympathetic and forgiving toward their mother than her brother, Edward's. In *Out of Place* he is critical of his parents' narrowness, especially its apolitical aspect, but unlike his sister, does not attempt to provide explanations for it. Said, of course, blamed his colonial education and sheltered upbringing for his ignorance of Arab and Palestinian concerns pre-1967, and adopts a far more strident critique of Western imperialism than either his sister or Leila Ahmed.

families interacted with Middle East events. The loss of Palestine brought Hilda to an ambivalent but 'high level of political awareness', while remaining enthralled by her domestic duties that 'must have created a barrier between her and the outside world' (p.33). But although domesticity provided a positive focus in times of political upheaval this had to be offset by the reality such events brought literally into the home. 1948 caused 'the heart of the [extended] family [to be] torn out' (p.35); there followed a succession of calamities which induced Hilda to perform her role 'with a touch of bitterness, even despair' (p.21). There was, too, the matter of a nascent career as a brilliant student in Beirut which Hilda relinquished when she got married in the early 1930s; and in Jean's own case, the frustration she felt in the 1970s when she had to make a similar sacrifice. On the other hand, when 1970s Western women experienced the 'new pleasure [of] female' association, weren't they enjoying (an argument advanced earlier by Leila Ahmed in her notion of 'harem') what had long been Arab women's 'traditional' way of life, albeit the kind taken away from mother and grandmother by their induction into Western modernity? (p.400) Weighing her successful raising of her children and her own career as Teta, which she balanced with her teaching at Beirut University College, Makdisi looks back with nostalgia on 'a world that no longer exists, a world of kindness and family and cooking' (p.380). The strong inference, born out over the length of her memoir, is that whatever they lacked in their own lives, Teta and mother had produced something of great value: their balanced and public-spirited children and grandchildren.

In spite of the obvious differences, Makdisi's recovery and affirmation of these Arab women's lives resembles Leila Ahmed's similar achievement for her female forebears. Alongside this Makdisi directs her memoir to another task adopted by Ahmed: correcting the simplistic claim of colonialism (and colonial feminism) of saving Middle Eastern natives, especially women, from native 'tradition'. She also joins Ahmed in her attempt to challenge and re-site postcolonial readings of Middle Eastern history, especially as they relate to women. Here she enacts a refinement of Leila Ahmed's problematising of postcolonial polarities in order to find a space for herself as an Egyptian Muslim woman. Makdisi's insight is to propose the instrumental-

ity of 'natives', particularly her grandmother and her forebears, in shaping their own lives. The peoples of greater Syria had not lacked the foresight to interact with the missionaries to produce their times.

> My great-grandparents were part of a new and dynamic movement […] they were among the pioneers who helped draw [a new cultural] map. Indeed it was often the 'natives who suggested the next bend in the road […] without them the missionaries could have accomplished nothing (p.152)

Over the issue of language there had been a 'mutual hostility between local and missionary cultures' in which she felt her grandmother had participated (p.158). The fact that Teta had a good command of English but maintained her Arabic, employing it colloquially and in her religious devotions, and knowing its poetry, demonstrated her successful resistance to total takeover by the coloniser.

When it comes to politics, Makdisi does not operate from exactly the same ground as her childhood contemporary. In the first place, as a Palestinian and a daughter of the Said family, she was not formed in the same atmosphere of ambivalence toward the Egyptian revolution, with its Pan-Arab and anti-Israeli orientations, as Ahmed was. If as a child Jean stood closer to Miss Nabih by virtue of their common Palestinian origins, as a mature woman she clings, not unnaturally, to her remote childhood memories of Jerusalem. To do so is to make a contribution, however 'infinitesimal', to the national cause (p.32). Nevertheless, Makdisi finds herself arguing in a similar manner to Ahmed when she rejects the postcolonial position that condemns in binary terms the effects of colonial/missionary education on the lives of Middle Eastern women. She concedes that her education at the same Cairo school as Ahmed resulted in her immersion in English cultural values, the assumption being that the school would provide the same education for British children (for whom it primarily catered) as they would have received in Britain (p.73). Had she not been given private Arabic lessons at home and imbibed a Palestinian consciousness from her grandmother and great aunts, Makdisi acknowledges, she would have been entirely ignorant of her own culture (as was Ghada Karmi in exile in London). However, like Ahmed, she does not feel the need to condemn her education, or the even more puritanical

and divisive one provided by the mission schools her mother and grandmother had attended. On class grounds it would have been impossible for her to attend an Egyptian state school. Moreover, the cosmopolitan circles in which her parents moved decreed that Jean's upbringing should be imbued with the flavour of multiculturalism, counting as she did among her close associates and friends Muslims, Christians, Jews, and many other nationalities. Before it was destroyed in front of her eyes by the Egyptian revolution, the elite cosmopolitanism of the last days of empire in which Ahmed and Makdisi grew up enriched their cultural experience and enlarged their minds in certain ways. Arguably, this formation enabled their mature reflection and has helped them to distance themselves from the binaries of the nativist/ imperialist culture clash. Having lived through Suez and the repercussions it had on her subsequent schooling – when the British fled her school was re-branded with a more Arab image – for Makdisi 'the word "imperialism" was never abstract or polemical: it was as real as real life, and real experience' (p.106).

Overall, Makdisi's memoir hardly departs from her brother's in representing the Saids as a privileged family, whose wealth sheltered them from the catastrophic political realities that impacted on the lives of their fellow Arabs and Palestinians. Such privilege no doubt structures the nuanced and moderate positions Jean Makdisi and Leila Ahmed adopt, though they neither display ignorance concerning the divisive impact Western penetration of their countries had upon the region as a whole. Makdisi, for instance, points out how the break-up of Ottoman-run Syria was expedited by the mission schools, and how these schools left pupils in a state of ignorance concerning their own interests, above all maintaining hold on Palestine. Nevertheless, Ahmed's and Makdisi's memoirs leave the reader with the impression that cultural politics is often too complex to be adjudicated on from partisan positions, and when all has been written, individual lives – particularly their own and those of their families – owe most to the integrity of family life, in which the females played the major roles.

My reading of *Teta, Mother and Me* has emphasised characteristics that link it with the other autobiographies I have been reviewing. Indeed it forms an apposite conclusion to the series (albeit, one hopes, a provisional one) both on account of the sophistication of its argu-

mentation and the emphasis of its conclusions. The set of factors Makdisi lays out as constitutive of her identity might also have impacted decisively on those of Abou Saif, Ahmed, and Karmi as well: 'The modern, the traditional; the Western, the Eastern; the Christian, the Muslim' (p.24) While not as encumbered in her attitude toward her mother or tradition as Abou Saif and Ahmed, or as disoriented with respect to her race and nationality as Karmi, Makdisi's memoir still struggles with these issues, albeit to a lesser degree. She embraces a feminism that is comparable to Abou Saif and Ahmed's, and a consciousness of her Palestinian origins not greatly dissimilar to Karmi's. Like them all, having passed through an Anglo-American education and felt the alienation of being an Arab in the West during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Makdisi's writing essays a reconciliation between competing Western and Arab political and cultural positions and agendas. Out of these different elements, to which the issue of language might also be added, Makdisi constructs a thoughtful synthesis, stressing the instability which she discerns in her grandmother and mother's lives, but choosing in the end to foreground above all else their achievement as Arab women.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to discuss the specificities of Arab women's English language autobiographies. In so doing I have tried to illustrate the complexity of the cross-cultural encounters they inscribe as they relate to individual lives and periods of fundamental social transformation. While not exclusively their provenance, these English texts represent Arab women using opportunities of education and life in the West to escape the social and cultural limitations of their own societies. Women's narratives in Arabic, as we have seen, cover a similar terrain and also relate Arab women's urge to escape from traditional backgrounds, in which subservient mothers reinforce in their daughters the customary restrictions placed by society on their sex,

and dominant fathers rule. However, we also saw in the English narratives key divergences: fathers favour and facilitate their daughters' emancipation, while the hindsight provided by education abroad and the space to reinvent themselves, provides the writers with a more sympathetic understanding of their mothers and the struggles they were forced to undergo. Sifting the backgrounds of female forebears these writers find exemplars who, far from showing Eastern women to be all hopelessly enslaved, demonstrated prodigious strength and independence of character. Initially enthusiastic about and desirous of assimilation to Western culture, the subjects of these cross-cultural narratives grow to experience rejection as a result of the racist, hegemonic and sometimes male chauvinist elements of that same culture. Often there follows within the writers feelings of loss and guilt for aspects of the native culture that are buried within themselves but which they might feel they have abandoned or disowned. At times critical of Western triumphalism and the aggression and distortion of colonial and neo-colonial politics, the subjects emerge into a state of 'in-betweenness' in which they simultaneously embrace and reject aspects of Western-led modernity, and also attempt to produce a dual Arab and feminist identity that is constructed out of women's cultural practice recuperated from their own Arab past. The political crises and events against and out of which such autobiographies are written, it should not be forgotten, often led in the world outside to statements and counter-statements of cross-cultural contestation, in which the 'female issue' is not infrequently invoked. The writings I have been discussing may be unavoidably caught up in this *kulturkampf*, however much their authors might wish to avoid it. But setting up crude binaries like the West v the Arabs/Muslims/Third World, or Western feminism v traditional patriarchy, hardly does justice to the experimental, diffuse, individual voices developed within this writing.

As texts, the Anglo-Arab women's autobiographies and memoirs discussed might well repay further study in the context of the confluence of autobiography and postcolonial theory. It can be argued that they provide to varying degrees evidence to support the proposition that non-Western exercises in this genre challenge Western ones, particularly when they are written by women and excavate female experiences of colonialism. Alternatively, it could be said they also

call for revision of the polarities of postcolonial analysis, asserting in the process the agency of Eastern women in spite of Western political and native patriarchal domination. I would wish to argue that the discourse of the texts presented constitutes a field from which inferences can be drawn. These include the tendency to write against the construction of a fixed and stable self, and movement beyond the individual to connect with women's testimonies within wider Arab communities. In addition I would like to finish by affirming that the cross-cultural material incorporated into these English autobiographies holds an importance within the growing corpus of Anglo-Arab writing that is equal to the fiction. This is especially evident in the autobiographies' delineation and demystification of the lives of (admittedly privileged) Arab women. In this respect, at the very least, they deserve prominence as an antidote to the stereotypical representations of Arab women I discussed at the beginning.

Conclusion
Translation and the Exotic

In my introduction (and elsewhere above) I proposed that Anglo-Arab writing might be looked at as a form of translation, and that Arab writers who write in English are faced with similar issues as translators. One strand of translation studies theorists 'use translation as a metaphor to explain processes of colonization and decolonization'; they credit translation with being 'both at the service of imperialism and a site of resistance' (Malena: 2001, p.439). Maghrebian Francophone writing has been accorded the status of resistance literature because, in the words of Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'the relationship to the inherited past and its cultural legacy has been rendered problematic by the violent interference of colonial and imperial history'. When the Maghrebian writer uses French, Khatibi explains, s/he has 'to take his [or her] own distance on the language by inverting it, destroying it and presenting new structures to the point where the French reader would feel a stranger in his own language' (quoted in Harlow: 1987, p.23). In her excellent essay, 'Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text' Samia Mehrez states:

> By drawing on more than one culture, more than one language, more than one world experience, within the confines of the same text, postcolonial anglophone and francophone literature very often defies our notions of an 'original' work and its translation. Hence, in many ways these postcolonial plurilingual texts in their own right resist and ultimately exclude the monolingual and demand of their readers to be like themselves: 'in between,' at once capable of reading and translating, where translation becomes an integral part of the reading experience (Mehrez: 1992, p.122).

Mehrez attempts to demonstrate how writings by Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi 'forg[e] a new language which defies the very notion of a "foreign" text that can be readily translatable into another language' (p.121). These writers use their

bilingualism to contest domination within the coloniser's language and culture and also at the same within their own national/traditional one, building into their writing 'culturo-linguistic layering' which leads to depths of meaning which cannot be satisfactorily decoded by the monolingual Francophone reader. As I suggested at the beginning of my study, the connection Maghrebian writers have to French is a much more intense and ambivalent one than that between Arab writers and English, and the attitude of the latter toward their readership may be commensurably less radical and less challenging. They do not, for example, excite the same criticism from Arab national quarters – 'those who conceive of national and cultural identity in linguistic terms' (McNeese: 1995, p.32) – as do for instance Ben Jelloun, Djebar or Driss Chräibi. (It is also most likely the case that no Anglo-Arab writer has an equivalent profile either in the Arab world or the West). And when it comes to Mehrez's claim that the Maghrebian writers bring their readership to the '"threshold of the untranslatable", where the reading experience itself can be no other but a perpetual translation' (p.122) it is doubtful whether the same can typically be said for Anglo-Arab writers.[1]

Is it then correct to say that Anglophone Arab writing presents no examples of that postcolonial buzzword *resistance*? In Fadia Faqir's case bilingualism can be said to challenge both the English and Arabic literary traditions, that she uses these languages to 'continuously re-work and rewrite each other', as well as to confront forms of exclusion within both her own native culture and host culture (Mehrez, p.123). It might also be argued that a similar layering is to be found in the novels of Tony Hanania. Writing from a condition of hybridity, Hanania creates a language 'in between' which 'therefore come[s] to occupy a space "in between"' (Mehrez, p.121). In chapter three I

1 This 'threshold of the untranslatable' is exemplified in Assia Djebar's memoir, *Algerian White* (Le blanc de l'Algérie). A deeply painful exposition of the aporia of the 'linguistic triangle' she believes plagues Algerian literature (and which lay behind the traumas of Algerian social disintegration and terrorism of the 1990s), the text concludes: 'In the brilliance of this desert, in the safe harbour of writing in quest of a language beyond languages, by trying fiercely to obliterate all the furies of the collective self-devouring in oneself, finding "the word within" again, that, alone, remains our fertile homeland'.

argued that Hanania's work succeeds in deterritorialising the English language, delivering the reader into a playful postmodern space as McNeese claims is the case with Ben Jelloun. There is in Hanania a comparable

> use of such devices as shifting registers, polyphonic and elaborate mirroring effects [which] appear to mimic the literary symptoms of Western society's cultural crisis involving the collapse of absolute structures and the daily confrontation with radically different traditions (McNeese, p.34).

However, in its representations of upper middle-class expatriate self-indulgence and its progressive personal narcissism, Hanania's writing retains little or none of the metaphor, allegory and parable that McNeese believes connects Ben Jelloun with traditional Moroccan culture and which lends to his fiction the quality 'to effect transformations of the consciousness' (p.36). In the case of Ahdaf Soueif's work, after an experimental beginning with cultural translation and in spite of building Egyptian themes and 'translated' idioms into her writing, Western codes of representation have almost entirely taken over. Excellent writers though they are, Leila Aboulela and Jamal Mahjoub also tread unexceptional paths in their choice of genre and narrative discourse, though they have both incorporated into these innovative and adventurous cross-cultural thematic material.

So far I seem to be suggesting that, in comparison with certain North African Francophone writing, Anglophone Arab writing lacks a contestation of the values of the coloniser's language; that it is perhaps too easily recuperated into the dominant culture the English language encodes. Anglophone Arab writing of the last twenty years is different to North African Francophone writing because it was not forged in the furnace of cultural and political resistance to a coloniser. Far from emerging from the harsh material conditions of the decolonisation struggle, Anglo-Arab writers are better categorised as products of late twentieth century globalisation. Perhaps the postcolonialism that pertains to this period is imbricated less in notions of resistance to a specific colonial situation, and more to the market conditions in which earlier writers from the notional 'Third World' have already

established a taste among metropolitan audiences for literature and criticism 'from the margins'. According to Graham Huggan there is:

> a postcolonial literary/critical industry centred on, and largely catering to, the West. English is, almost exclusively, the language of this critical industry, reinforcing the view that postcolonialism is a discourse of *translation* [original emphasis], rerouting cultural products regarded as emanating from the periphery toward audiences who see themselves as coming from the centre' (Huggan: 2001, p.4).

In his suggestively entitled study, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Huggan relates postcolonialism to translation of the exotic by connecting what he terms 'the postcolonial exotic' with the commodification of postcolonialism both with respect to the marketing of texts and the creation of a field of academic specialisation. Implicit in both is the 'commodification of cultural difference' which acquires 'an aesthetic value […] often measured explicitly or implicitly in terms of the exotic' (pp.12–13). Both the postcolonial writer and the postcolonial critic are stuck in a double bind whereby their work is accorded recognition and valued on account of its exotic qualities, at the same time as they sustain 'a critique of exoticism in their work' (p.xi).[2] Huggan tests his assumptions by looking at the writings of such visible (and assimilated) postcolonial writers as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, and Hanif Kureishi, and interrogating marketing and literary canonisation procedures as seen for example in the Booker Prize. A propos of such writers and the canonisation industry that surrounds them he poses what he admits may be the 'unduly cynical' question:

2 To be fair, Huggan does, however, attempt to contain both commodification and resistance to commodification within his understanding of the term 'postcolonial exotic'. He argues while it may be true that 'the terms in which many postcolonial debates are currently being conducted – "resistance", "authenticity", "marginality" and so on – circulate as reified objects in a late-capitalist currency of exchange' (p.29), it is also the case that 'postcolonial literatures in English […] are read by many different people in many different places', in short, that there is no 'monumentalisation of a metropolitan readership […] for postcolonial texts' and therefore, by implication, it is possible 'to promote the cultural margins without ministering to the mainstream' (pp.30–31).

> Could it be that Third World texts are tailored to please their (mostly) First World audience, or that the Third World is marketable only so far as it can be translated?

If such is the case, he goes on to argue:

> This holds true for Third World texts that are written in languages other than English and are then translated for the benefit of a monolingual readership; but it also seems valid for texts that were written originally in the English language but that emanate, or are perceived as emanating, from cultures considered to be different, strange, 'exotic'.
> In the latter case, the issue seems to be primarily one of cultural representation. Are postcolonial writers persuaded to represent their respective culture, and to translate those cultures for an unfamiliar metropolitan readership? To what extent does the value ascribed to them and attributed to their writing depend on their capacity to operate, not just as *representers* of culture but as bona fide cultural *representatives*? And is this representativeness a function of their inscription in the margins, of the mainstream demand for an 'authentic', but readily translatable, marginal voice? (pp.25–26; original emphasis).

The issues raised here are as germane to Anglo-Arab writing as they are to what we might consider more mainstream postcolonial writing such as that produced by the writers Huggan scrutinises. The present study has also been concerned with the extent to which Anglophone Arab writers accommodate their writing to metropolitan codes in order to achieve success, and at times questioned the representative quality of their work in terms of the 'authenticity' of its address as writing that purports to present the Middle Eastern/Arab 'margins' as well as the Arab migrant experience within the metropolis. Although the term 'exotic' has not come into focus thus far, it can be said to be implicit in much I have written concerning the positioning of Anglo-Arab writing and writers. One way of defining Anglo-Arab writing would be to see it as a body of translation from a postcolonial perspective from Arabic culture into the English language for an Anglo-American audience. In line with Huggan's situating of the postcolonial, this writing becomes part of 'an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar' (p.ix). The authors of *In the Eye of the Sun*, *Minaret*, and *A Border Passage* each achieve their impact by translating Arab

women's lives on terms acceptable to an English-speaking readership; they make their work 'available, but also palatable, for their target consumer public' (p.ix). This implies banking on representations being received as 'authentic', as well as being recognised as operating from a condition of marginality, and to varying degrees demonstrating 'resistance' (to native societies that 'punish' Arab women, but also to Westernising norms that threaten exotic authenticity). For instance, Huggan makes much the same point about the marketing of 'ethnic' autobiography as has been made above in chapter six. The politics of the exotic is seen, he says, in jacket designs, blurbs, editorial comments and notes. 'Why', he asks, 'has authenticity become such a popular marketing strategy in autobiographies by *women* [original emphasis] writers, particularly from minority cultures?' Such texts are 'so often marketed as unmediated expressions of the lived authenticity of ethnic experience' (p.xiv). My argument has been that such a critique is more appropriate for translations of Arab feminist narratives and popular Arab/Muslim women's 'escape to freedom stories', whereas Anglophone Arab women's autobiography is more complex and ambivalent.

However, as far as some Anglo-Arab women's fiction is concerned, Huggan's remarks on the exotic and 'authentic' might well be considered applicable. For instance, Aboulela's female characters - set apart by their Muslim faith and dismissive as they appear to be of Western norms – might also be said to fit into the category of the exotic. Articulate with elegant headscarf accessory, they are marketed on covers and dustjackets as 'authentic' representations of modern Muslim women, fulfilling at one and the same time 'a self-validating indentitary category and […] a consumer-oriented strategy to consolidate Western power by alleviating white-liberal guilt' (Huggan, p.xiv). Even Faqir, despite her challenging, foreignising strategy of translation (evident especially in *Pillars of Salt*), has moved into territory with her latest novel where she might be seen as producing writing 'from the margins' that satisfies market fascination with Muslim societies' oppression of native women. Produced in part as an aspect of the West's fascination with the Arab Orient, a fascination that becomes daily more politicised as Islamic culture(s) come under intensified battery as the putative source of global 'terror', Anglo-

Arab writing may be endangered by recuperation into the dominant culture, coming to serve only a temporary function as another 'minor' literature that is 'seconded to the mainstream as a means of rein-vigorating mainstream culture' (Huggan, p.20).

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