Tracing a Narrative of Muslim Self after 9/11

by

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To, you, my father Mohamed Ahmed Hilal,
I dedicate this work
Your spirit is always with me
May God have mercy on your soul

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Table of Contents

Introduction

"No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind."[1]

Perhaps few events in modern times have brought the question of identity—the composition of elements that influence how an individual or group view themselves—to the forefront with such force for the United States as the attacks of September 11th, 2001. The attacks against the United States represented not only a serious failure of intelligence but also brought into sharp relief the problematic demarcations between people that result in an "us" and "them" categorization. The result of the attacks on a rhetorical level, in addition to the political and military levels, made discussions focused on identity and belonging in a world with people so intertwined overly simplified in the post-9/11 world. This shift, which was initiated in the United States, has directly affected the Muslim citizens there and among western nations elsewhere. While certainly not the beginning of this process, 9/11 functioned as a critical turning point in terms of its repercussions and widespread implications. After the attacks, the inauguration of an open-ended "War on Terror," and the increased nationalism in the United States, there was a noticeable rise in exclusionary statements of what it meant to belong to U.S. society. Often that meant targeting Muslim populations through policies that specifically demanded integration within certain rigid boundaries of what it means to be a U.S. citizen or resident. The label of "Muslim" was racialized with attempts to identify *visually* who is a Muslim. But, a religious group is, of course, not a "race." Nor is religious membership visually ascertainable. Yet, the mechanisms that were instituted depended on problematic constructs of Muslims, such that a singular image of what a Muslim should look like came to define a highly

[1] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 336.

heterogeneous group and to visually include countless non-Muslims as well. Individuals who were *perceived* as Muslims based on their appearance also were targeted by racially motivated discourse and the treatment that stemmed from that discourse. This process was mirrored in other Western countries in relation to their own Muslim populations. It is worth noting that while a similar process can be traced in different countries, each context is defined by its specific history of immigration and engagement with Islam and Muslims. The United States has a particular history of dealing with the diversity of its population that at many points has been tumultuous; historical processes like slavery and immigration impact the configuration of American belonging. Nikhil Pal Singh in *Black is a Country* poses two questions that set the stage to address this idea of the American national story and what it excludes. He writes on the American story of exceptionality and universality:

> But what if this story itself is symptomatic of an equally longstanding failure in U.S. political culture, a failure to apprehend and interpret the enduring, invidious power of racial domination? What if there is a recurring oscillation between the universalizing abstractions of liberal-democracy, in which individuals are considered equal with respect to nationality, and a persistent regression in which the actual individuals and communities who benefit from national belonging are implicitly or explicitly constituted in white supremacist terms?[2]

While Singh's study focuses on the struggle of African Americans, it also highlights the tension and instability underlying the U.S. national story and the way in which it is constantly reformulated to exclude groups that cannot be "constituted in white supremacist terms." One can extend his argument to include groups such as Arab Americans, many of whom are not Muslim and come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and Muslim Americans, a diverse religious group,

[2] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) 19-20.

and those *perceived* to belong to those groups, who are systematically excluded from the American narrative.

Mae M. Ngai's argument in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, underscores how the immigration policy in the United States is indicative of a desire to reproduce a specific idea of nation. "Immigration policy is constitutive of Americans' understanding of national membership and citizenship, drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion that articulate a desired composition—imagined if not necessarily realized—of the nation.[3]" Arab Americans, Muslim and non-Muslim, and Muslim Americans, many of whom are either immigrants or children of immigrants, are imagined outside of any notion of an American identity and their place in the American historical narratives marginalized.

While not the beginning of this process, 9/11 functioned as a turning point in terms of the intensity of the exclusionary nationalist discourse that emerged in the aftermath and its repercussions in other Western nations. After the attacks, the War on Terror, and the increased patriotism in the United States, governments in countries like France and Britain began to actively engage in renewed debates around what it meant to belong to their societies, which many times meant targeting their Muslim populations through policies of integration and exclusionary definitions of what it means to be a citizen. Security threats became the platform for instituting more policies that targeted these populations. The image of the terrorist played a significant role in regulating these communities and determining their loyalty to their countries.

While details of the contexts of the three countries differ, they share national narratives that espouse egalitarian principles which supposedly separate them from the world which the

[3] Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 5.

immigrants leave behind. For those narratives, 'successful' immigrants must be recast in keeping with those superior ideals. Ironically, after 9/11, Muslim Americans and Muslim Europeans found their citizenship and belonging called into question by their compatriots along the lines of religion, even if it meant compromising the Enlightenment ideals these nations espoused. It was no longer sufficient to identify oneself as an American or British or French Muslim. Rather, these groups were now forced to prove their loyalty to their nation, which was often determined by their "willingness" to integrate by abandoning religious and cultural markers and aligning their political views to those of the larger society. They are asked to choose between their religious identity and their national identity, a process that Tariq Ramadan, the Muslim Swiss scholar famously analyzes and contests. According to Ramadan, this choice is fundamentally problematic because it "opposes two identities and affiliations that do not belong to the same realm…Depending on the realm or the field of activity, the individual therefore puts forward one identity or another, and that is not contradictory."[4]

An additional dimension to the question of Muslim identity in western states relates to the internal dynamic within Muslim communities. There are attempts within Muslim communities to define Islam within a narrow framework, specifically an Arab Sunni orthodox version, thereby excluding individuals and groups who are not perceived as belonging even when they identify themselves as Muslims. These configurations of Islam specify boundaries of who is a Muslim and what "true Islam" is, oftentimes not reflecting personal experiences of the faith and ignoring the diversity of Muslim communities. This intra-community dynamic takes on particular configurations in western nations. It furthers an image of a Muslim that does not reflect the diversity of the Muslim communities by regulating belonging to adherence to a singular

[4] Tariq Ramadan, *What I Believe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 36-37.

conceptualization of Islam. This intra-community discourse is no doubt inextricably linked to the challenges that Arabs and Muslims face in their respective western countries. It has become another force of exclusion in and for Muslim communities and is, I argue, closely connected to the exclusionary national narratives. Both negate the multiplicity of experiences of being Muslim in the West. This creates a profound challenge of negotiating a space between configurations of Islam that do not account for diverse lived experiences of religious commitment and exclusionary national narratives that question their belonging to the larger society and to the political entity of the state. It becomes necessary, therefore, to engage these hegemonic narratives, national and religious, in order to uncover the multiplicities which they suppress and to examine the processes that maintain and reproduce them, processes that become more conspicuous in times of crisis.

My dissertation, therefore, focuses on literary narratives of Muslim identity in Western nations after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, drawing on novels published after September 11th, 2001, from the U.S., Britain, and France. The central texts for the chapter on the United States are Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)[5] and Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007)[6]. For the chapter on Britain, the focus is on Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel *The Road from Damascus* (2009)[7] and Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005)[8]. Faïza Guène's novels *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* (2004, trans. 2006)[9] and *Dreams from the Endz* (2006, trans. 2008)[10] are the focus of the chapter on France. Each of these novels demonstrate the

[5] Mohja Kahf, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (New York: Caroll & Graf Publishers, 2006).
[6] Laila Halaby, *Once in a Promised Land* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).
[7] Robin Yassin-Kassab, *The Road from Damascus* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).
[8] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (New York: Black Cat, 2005).
[9] Faïza Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, trans. Sarah Adams (Orlando: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books, 2006).
[10] Faïza Guène, *Dreams from the Endz*, trans. Sarah Ardizzone (London: Chatto & Windus, 2008).

way in which multiple aspects of identities are negotiated, especially within a context of conflict and historical encounters that impact the configurations of these identities. I argue that identity must be conceptualized as a continual process of constitution through interaction with and recognition of the Other. This process constitutes what I will refer to as a 'narrative of self.' Moreover, these novels underscore the constellation of relationships that are at play in the configuration of both individual and collective narratives of self.

Tracing narratives of Muslim self in these three contexts—the U.S., Britain, and France—suggests the need to re-examine and reconfigure exclusivist narratives of American, French, and British society. Across the different landscapes, one can trace how identity is considered, complicated, dismantled, and reshaped to include the multiple influences, experiences and cultural landscapes that all contribute to understandings of self. In each of the novels examined here, the question of language, ethnicity, gender, faith and how they interconnect and overlap within the context of Western nations is fundamental. I find that, in tracing the configuration a narrative of Muslim self, the configuration of narratives of a Western self is equally implicated.

The organizing question of what follows is the ways in which these novels examine narratives of Muslim self and dismantle exclusionary narratives to then reformulate them to include the lived experiences of Muslims in the United States, Britain, and France. These novels problematize frameworks that exclude the experiences of Arabs or Muslims, and those perceived to belong to those groups, and offer a vehicle for alternative accounts of self. [11] They all illustrate the multiplicity underlying all narratives of self and the way that attempts at configuring a

[11] This formulation comes from Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

singular representative narrative are repeatedly challenged by the diverse realities within communities. The stories that emerge in these novels also highlight a distinction between citizens' rights and their assimilation to a cultural framework. The Muslims figured in these novels are citizens or legal residents of the countries in which they reside. Yet, they face a conflict between their rights and as exclusionary narratives that question their membership in society.

Exclusionary national narratives are constructed around readily accessible images which stem from a history of Western representations of the East, in which anyone with Arab ethnic origin or anyone who is an adherent of Islam is racialized in terms associated with images of primitivism, savagery, exoticism, and now terrorism. Historically, Europeans viewed the Orient through a lens that was defined by a repertoire of such images. Through film and media, these images transformed to include more groups and circulated, playing a role in how the images of the groups are reproduced and consolidated in the American imagination and beyond. Jack Shaheen in *Reel Bad Arabs* explores this situation. Shaheen surveyed over 900 Hollywood films released between 1896 and 2001 and found that the overwhelming majority of images of the Arab and Muslim are negative. These negative images have permeated the mainstream American thought so that they can be employed in a time of crisis to justify practices that may not have received support in different circumstances, like racial profiling and waging war. Shaheen argues that these stereotypes are self-perpetuating, fueled by what appears in print and broadcast.

> Not only do these violent news images of extremists reinforce and exacerbate already prevalent stereotypes, but they serve as both a source and excuse for continued Arab-bashing by those filmmakers eager to exploit the issue. In particular, the news programs are used by some producers and directors to deny they are actually engaged in

> stereotyping. 'We're not stereotyping,' they object. 'Just look at your television set. Those are real Arabs.'[12]

The simplistic justification for the reproduction and perpetuation of these stereotypes is that, because the 9/11 hijackers were Muslim, they represent the reality of all Arabs and Muslims. Of course this homogenization of such a diverse group has serious repercussions that include exclusion and discrimination, to the point of raising questions around the citizenship and loyalty of Arab and Muslim Americans and Muslim Europeans[13] and allowing the perpetuation of a singular and homogenized national narrative to further particular attitudes and policies. My dissertation, therefore, analyzes novels to reveal the consequences and contradiction of exclusionary narratives and to point to alternative ways of imagining that are more inclusive.

The experience of Arab and Muslim Americans, like their European counterparts, is shaped by the historical realities of the United States. The racially charged rhetoric that emerged after the 9/11 attacks is anchored in the history of race and immigration in the United States. Steven Salaita in *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA* argues that, in fact, that post-9/11 racism is part of the larger history of racism in the United States. He argues that this racism is clear not only from the images of Arabs and Muslims that have circulated in American media and pop culture but from the American national narrative of exceptionalism itself. Anti-Arab racism, according to Salaita, has become so prevalent and acceptable that some right-wing neoconservatives could deny any racism against these groups after 9/11 even though it was widely documented. He cites, as an example, a column written by John O'Sullivan in the *Chicago Sun-Times* in which O'Sullivan argues that the backlash against Arab and Muslim Americans after 9/11, like the Israeli massacre in Jenin in 2002 and the Black Church burnings in 1996, was created by the

[12] Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001) 29.
[13] Leti Volpp,"The Citizen and the Terrorist," *Ucla Law Review* 49 (2001): 1575-1600.

"liberal media" and is simply a myth.[14] Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish, and Ryan D. King in "Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes Against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America" cite numerous examples of discrimination and acts of violence against Arab and Muslim Americans as well as those perceived to belong to those groups. They mention, for example, that in the 2002 F.B.I. report hate crimes against these groups increased by sixteen hundred percent (1,600%).[15] Moreover, Hilal Elver in "Racializing Islam Before and After 9/11: From Melting Pot to Islamophobia" argues that US government policies against Arabs and Muslims residing in the US have played a significant role in the racial profiling: "While the government "explicitly rejected Muslim/Arab 'ethnic profiling,' it was also clear that this was the targeted group that would be most affected by the government's domestic antiterrorism strategy." [16]

A central aspect of my dissertation is the role of such images in the configuration of narratives of self in the novels on which I focus. Each of the novels that I examine destabilizes the apparently 'natural' alignment of Arabs or Muslims with that of the terrorist and the perceived threat that they represent. Since the 9/11 attacks, the image of the terrorist no longer implies only an Arab, but more often a Muslim. The commitment and rights of Muslims as citizens are questioned because of a presumed threat should they display particular characteristics of commitment to their faith. I draw from Cyra Akila Choudhury's article in which she discusses the construction of the image of the terrorist and the way it functions as a

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[14] Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where it Comes from and What it Means for Politics Today* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006) 30-31.
[15]Ilir Disha, James C. Cavendish, and Ryan D. King, "Historical Events and Spaces of Hate: Hate Crimes Against Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 America," *Social Problems* 58.1 (February 2011): 21-22.
[16] Hilal Elver, "Racializing Islam Before and After 9/11: From Melting Pot to Islamophobia," *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems* 21:119 (Spring 2012): 144.

means for the state to regulate the Muslim population, in the United States specifically. The image of the terrorist, she argues, stems from the image of the Arab terrorist from the 1970s and 1980s but has been expanded to include anyone "who displays outward markers of his or her religion and who is non-white."[17] Moreover, Choudhury argues that after the onset of the unending "war on terror," this term is used to describe diverse ideological movements in which the majority of members are Muslims. Regardless of the political motivations, various groups are subsumed under one construct: "Now, every country with a resistant, subordinate Muslim population or a criminal gang that happens to be comprised of Muslims has found this most convenient signifier that provides an advantageous global political alignment with the most powerful nation in the world."[18]

Choudhury details in her article the ways in which the construct of the terrorist functions alongside two other constructs: that of the believer and of the moderate. Together, the three constructs are utilized to delineate the boundaries for Muslim belonging. The believer, Choudhury maintains, is the construct that internally regulates who belongs to the Muslim community. Adherence to this image determines an individual's inclusion in the community and their visibility as a representative of that community. The believer, she asserts, displays religious characteristics from Arab Sunni version of Islam. However, by insisting on conformance to a particular version of the faith, the construct of the believer negates the diverse lived experiences and facilitates a racialized notion of Muslims. In other words, this construct perpetuates the idea that Muslims can be visually identified. The moderate is used by the state to differentiate between Muslims who because they refuse to discard religious markers are considered to be

[17] Cyra Akila Choudhury, "Terrorists & Muslims: The Construction, Performance and Regulation of Muslim Identities in the Post-9/11 United States," *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion* 11 (2008): 22.
[18] Choudhury 18.

"unassimilable" and terrorists. The moderate represents a good Muslim who assimilates and supports the state's policies: "the Moderate persona has emerged to present an alternative for those Muslims who do not wish to be categorized as 'bad' Muslims, that is, as Terrorists or even unassimilable Believers who remain more 'them' than 'us'."[19] Choudhury's argument is useful because it offers a way to think about the workings of such constructs, especially as they relate to regulation of a community externally and internally.

In addition to the historical and sociological works mentioned above, Margaret R. Somer's essay "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach" and Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* significantly inform the theoretical framework of my analysis. Somer's concept of the "constellation of relationships" that constitute identity demonstrate the interconnectivity of individual and collective identities. Judith Butler's discussion of a response to the demand for an account of self and the ethics that are associated with that encounter and demand is equally central to my theoretical framework here.

To understand the historical and social dimensions of the European context, the work of Meyda Yeğenoğlu as well as of David Theo Goldberg offers important groundwork. And the work of Iftikhar H. Malik offers further analysis of the British context. Both Yeğenoğlu's discussion of the role of the immigrant in the construction of European identity is immensely useful. She argues that historically in Europe there has been a fear of the Other, which stems from numerous historical encounters. Immigrants generate anxiety in the European context because they are a continuous reminder of that history. This anxiety is demonstrated in discriminatory policies that aim to regulate particular groups. Immigrants also represent a breach in an imagined sovereignty and purity. Yeğenoğlu asserts that a secularism that denies its

[19] Choudhury 14.

Christian underpinnings is utilized to consign Muslim immigrants to a permanent state of Others. Goldberg addresses the challenges for European Muslims to demand legal redress for grievances because racism is often legally limited to the Holocaust and anti-semitism that targets fellow Europeans. While the history of European colonialism and its effect on race relations is not acknowledged to the same extent because it happened to others elsewhere. As a result, he suggests that there is a disavowal of colonial history and its racist undertones, which has led to a general refusal to acknowledge any type of institutionalized racism against immigrant citizens and residents.

In relation to the British context, Malik maintains that there have been numerous historical encounters that have contributed to the situation of British Muslims. In times of crisis, the loyalty of Muslim citizens has been called into question. He traces this troubled relationship to Britain's colonial history, which, he argues, produced"unevenness" in the relation between the British of the metropole and immigrants from former colonies, many of whom are Muslims. The unevenness, according to Malik, is made manifest in recent policies directed towards citizens and immigrants from former colonies, allowing for institutionalized racism.

Similarly in the French context, the situation of French Muslims, many of whom are immigrants or their descendants, must be understood in relation to the French colonial enterprise, especially its policy of assimilation. Laurent Dubois's argument provided a useful foundation to understand the consequences of the policy of assimilation in formulating the French national identity. The force of assimilation in the French cultural context continues to be relevant because it underlies the policy of *laïcité*. Mohammad Mazher Idriss's essay on *laïcité* and its implications for French Muslims, especially in politically charged cases like *l'Affaire du Foulard* or the *hijab*

affair, traces the link between historical encounters, the definition of citizenship, and the challenges of French Muslims. Trica Danielle Keaton describes the *banlieues*, the projects in the suburbs of French cities and the impact their housing conditions have on French Muslims and their sense of belonging to the nation. She argues they feel that they live in a parallel society. All of these texts contribute to the social and historical context to trace how these six novels address the issues that I have laid out in each national context.

My dissertation is divided into three major chapters. In Chapter one, "Making Space: Arab, Muslim and Racialized Americans", explores Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land.* *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* tells the story of Khadra Shamy, a young Muslim American woman, the daughter of Syrian immigrants, as well the story of a Muslim American community of the 1970s. Khadra's underlying challenge is locating a narrative of self that includes her experience as a Muslim, American, first generation, and young woman. Khadra's struggle is mirrored in the Muslim community, which is negotiating its place within American society and what it means to be a Muslim in the U.S. In this dual focus, the novel demonstrates the way in which intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics influence individual and collective narratives.

The novel offers an alternative view of the Muslim American experience: one that looks from the inside out rather than from the outside in. By reversing the direction of the gaze, the novel is able to disrupt the prevailing notion that one construction of Islam defines every Muslim and that one can talk about one conceptualization of an American. Rather, the novel reveals the heterogeneity, multiplicity and change that exists and lies at the heart of Muslim American

communities. The poet and literary critic Lisa Suhair Majaj identifies this as a strategy utilized by many Arab American writers.

> Writing as an Arab American becomes defined in their work as an accountability to location and an engagement with difference; these authors interrogate the grounds of their cultural location, their relationship to intersecting contexts, and the ways in which the process of transiting boundaries yields possibilities for agency and activism.[20]

Kahf's novel firmly locates Arab and Muslim American experience on multiple landscapes and exemplifies the way in which thinking narratives of Muslim self leads to thinking more inclusive narratives of American self.

In the same chapter, Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* tells the story of a Jordanian couple living in the United States, Jassim and Salwa Haddad, whose relatively calm existence is radically transformed after the September 11th attacks. Unlike the characters in Kahf's novel, for both Jassim and Salwa, it is tradition rather than religion that features more prominently in their lives. But after 9/11, their Arab identity is transformed into a religious identity in the eyes of the Americans around them while their commitment to the United States is called into question. The novel offers more than simply insight into the struggles of Arab and Muslim Americans after the 9/11 attacks. It demonstrates the way in which the image of the terrorist and Muslim are collapsed into one seemingly unambiguous construct and employed to target Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived to belong to those groups. Thus, Jassim, a water engineer, is perceived by some of his co-workers as a possible terrorist suspect, and more dangerous because of his access to the city's water supply, even though all his work and behavior demonstrates otherwise. Salwa, unlike Jassim, is born in the United States and has a

[20] Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab American Literature and Politics of Memory," *Memory and Cultural Politics: New Approaches to American Ethnic Literatures*, eds. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1996) 280.

yearning to return to her birthplace. She is troubled by the heightened patriotism that disputes the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims to be treated as citizens. Jassim and Salwa's choices inevitably cause them to reconsider their lives in America and what it really it means to belong to the country, especially as Arab and Muslim Americans.

Unlike Kahf's novel, *Once in a Promised Land* textually registers 9/11 and examines its consequences on how these two groups are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves in a new atmosphere of heightened exclusivist patriotism. The American narrative and patriotism that destabilized Jassim and Salwa's life is constantly reformulated to espouse inclusion but is built on exclusion. Khadra and her family in the 1970's also faced an earlier and arguably less virulent form of one of its manifestations.

Chapter two, "British Encounters: the Making of British Muslim Identities," focuses on Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. Both novels examine the experiences of Muslims and how the different configurations of Islam function with and against each other in the British context. *The Road from Damascus* tells the story of Sami Traifi, a second-generation Muslim Syrian British graduate student. The novel follows Sami's journey as he seeks an understanding for his life, his decisions, his relationships with the others in his life, and his relationship to his faith. *The Road from Damascus* addresses ways of belonging on the British cultural, religious, and linguistic landscape and negotiations of multiple identifying markers in the construction of a narrative of self.

In addition to the negotiations of these constructs, there is also a negotiation with Muslim religious discourse that aims to define who "truly" adheres to the faith and who is outside the fold. As with the problematic images in Western discourse of Muslims and Islam, this type of

religious discourse makes use of a similar process of one-dimensional images. Through the characters and their engagement with faith, in general, and Islam, specifically, Yassin-Kassab does two things: first, he rejects the narrow vision of a singular construct of Islam and second, he exemplifies the complexity associated with religious identification.

The second novel of British Muslim experience, *Minaret* tells the story of Najwa, the daughter of a prominent Sudanese politician who, following a coup, becomes a political refugee in Britain with her mother and brother Omar when her father is charged with corruption and executed. The novel alternates between the past and the present to demonstrate that events and relationships with others inform how a narrative of self is also constructed and reformulated throughout time. Najwa's narrative changes throughout the course of the novel and illustrates a fluidity of identity and how different notions of belonging emerge over time (with and) as a result of relationships with others. Rather than illustrating identity as a static and unchanging entity, *Minaret* underscores the impossibility of repetition and how change is at the core of a narrative of self. All the events and relationships in the novel suggest faith as a central aspect of belonging. The novel locates religious commitment in the space of the mosque, implicitly challenging the idea that it is a "breeding ground" for terrorism. The novel underscores the relationships between individuals that are formed in that space, especially for women, and the role that they play in configuring narratives of Muslim self within the mosque and outside as members of British society.

Both *Minaret* and *The Road from Damascus* explore Muslim experience within the British contexts and its complexities. In both novels, there is a clear sense of a fluid narrative of self that changes through time according to major surrounding events and to personal

relationships. While *Minaret* does not specifically mark 9/11, it is clear throughout the novel that Aboulela is considering the challenges that British Muslims face in relation to the larger British society but also within the Muslim community in Britain. Both relations are considered in tandem since they inform and influence both individual and collective narratives of self. *The Road from Damascus*, on the other hand, does specifically mark the attacks and examines the various responses to the events. But that novel underscores how, with an event of such magnitude, it is important, to move away from images that fix people in categories preventing them from relating their own stories. Both Aboulela's and Yassin-Kassab's novels explore how narratives of being a Muslim British citizen are generated on the British landscape that itself is defined by diversity and heterogeneity.

The third chapter, "Locating Space: What does it mean to be Muslim and French?," focuses on Faïza Guène's novels *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* and *Dreams from the Endz*.[21] Both novels examine belonging in the French—specifically Parisian—landscape and how other identities can be read alongside and in juxtaposition to French identity. While Islam is not an explicit focus of either novel, nor is 9/11 explicitly named, one can argue that within the post-9/11 context, it acts as the umbrella narrative under which other narratives are constructed. This is especially true in the French context where the current debates around what constitutes a "true" French citizen inevitably return to the question of religion, specifically Islam, and its place in French society dominated by the concept and legal and social practices of *laïcité*. In that context, other identities—Algerian, North African, or African—are all enveloped within a Muslim identity. In other words, Islam is used as the narrative through which all other identities are being effaced. Yet underlying this construction of an all-enveloping Islam is a diversity of

[21] I referred to the English translations of the novels.

lived experience in which the various identities of French, Arab, and Muslim emerge and are manifest in differing degrees. However, one of the most conspicuous consequences of the post-9/11 era is the use of abstract constructions of Islam in reference to anyone who is defined as different in order to question all aspects of their identities. Lived experience is enveloped by these constructions and lost. These two novels offer a fictional space where characters tell their own narratives of experience beyond these constructions and the novels respond to the exclusionary national narratives by suggesting a more inclusive model.

Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow is the first-person story of Doria, a 15 year old French Moroccan girl born to immigrant parents and living in the projects outside of Paris. With biting sarcasm mixed with humor, Doria's diary entries express her frustrations with the difficult life that she and her mother have to lead since "The Beard," Doria's father, left to Morocco to marry a woman who would bear him a son. With her husband's departure, Doria's mother, Yasmina, must shoulder the responsibility of taking care of Doria and herself. Without adequate education, Yasmina is forced to take menial jobs. Furthermore, both Doria and her mother endure continuous visits from social workers who not only do not understand their situation but patronize them with their questions. Doria must come to terms with the *bled*—France—that she is simultaneously a part of and excluded from and the *bled*—Morocco—that also defines her. Central to this novel is the problem of being reduced to a construct, a label by the French policies that see her as an Other and a problem and by an Arab culture represented by her father.

Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow depicts the situation of French immigrants and their children who cannot escape the poverty of the ghettos that both physically and psychologically separate them from the rest of French society. The rest of French society sees only the riots and demonstrations

without recognizing or addressing the discriminatory policies that produce them. In response, the French state, rather than addressing the grievances of these members of the society, sets out on a campaign to define an even more exclusive French identity. Thus, the immigrants who left their countries to find a life in France, and their children who have only known France, are faced with the difficult predicament of not belonging completely to their country of origin or to France. Their rights as French citizens and residents are challenged by attempts to exclude them.

Guène's *Dreams from the Endz*, is set in the same context—the ghettos on the outskirts of Paris. Ahlème, an immigrant to France from Algeria, is faced with the challenge of taking care of her injured father and her younger brother, Foued. Her mother was killed in Algeria as a result of the civil unrest in the 1990s. This novel, like *Kiffe Kiffe tomorrow*, explores the concept of belonging through the use of the term *bled*. But unlike Doria, Ahlème has the additional challenge of not being a legal citizen of France on the one hand and on the other hand not being able to return to Algeria. At one point in the novel, Ahlème says after coming from Algeria,

> I quickly realised that I had to assert myself, so that's what I did. I've come a long way since then. As the powers-that-be would say, I've become a perfect example of integration. Almost French. The only thing missing is the stupid bit of laminated sky-blue paper stamped with love and good taste, the famous *French touch*…I'm fed up of being a foreigner.[22]

Ahlème is aware that she is not included in the French national narrative. However, by telling her own story, Ahlème leaves open the possibility of changing the narrative because now her voice is heard. (It is not for nothing that her name in Arabic means "dreams".)

Guène's novels depict a context in which the situation of immigrants and their descendants are defined by an Otherness that results from racial, religious, and class distinctions. While the novels do not place Islam in the forefront, it is part of the underlying narrative. The

[22] Guène, *Dreams from the Endz* 40-41.

emphasis on secularism in the French public sphere interestingly makes it easier to argue that Muslim immigrants can never integrate because they will identify with something that will conflict with the French ideal of *laïcité*. In the post-9/11 context, religious commitment and refusal to adhere to a particular model of French citizenship impacts the experience of French Muslims.

In all of the works, taken up here a narrative of self is used to relate an experience that is outside exclusionary configurations, whether they are national or religious. Each novel offers an articulation of identity conceived as a fluid narrative that is dialogically constituted through interaction and recognition and includes the notion of difference and the way that the Other is implied in the self. These six novels underscore the intimate connection between individual and collective identities, such that one cannot be thought of without addressing the other. Thus, an important part of my dissertation has been to demonstrate that in the very process of tracing narratives of Muslim self in western nations, narratives of American, British, and French self are also addressed. So too, the internal dynamics of the Muslim communities that can lead to exclusionary regulation of its own, is a process which needs to be contested because it, too, suggests a singular narrative of Muslim self. Moreover, these novels draw attention to the multiplicity and diversity of narratives of self, at the communal and national level. American, British, French, Muslim, Islam are all configurations whose boundaries are—or at least can be—fluid and mutable in practice. Any attempt to fix or simplify them becomes a hegemonic action that must be challenged, as each of these texts do. No one, as Said reminds us, is just one thing, and Islam is not and has never been a monolith.

Chapter 1: "Making Space: Arab, Muslim and Racialized Americans"

In discussions of identity, there is often a tendency to use rigid and fixed constructs to describe a highly fluid and continuously changing process. Whether the focus is on individual identity or collective identity, the question is not one of categorization within constructs, but one of relationships and lived experience. Margaret R. Somers, in the essay "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," suggests that the way to avoid the danger of fixing identity within rigid categories is to utilize narrative as a means to express the lived experience(s) of the individual and/or group. Somers argues that: "If identities are fixed there can be no room to accommodate changing power relations – or history itself – as they are constituted and reconstituted over time."[23] In Somers's framework, individual and collective identity is constructed through various narratives (social, historical, and cultural). Through the concept of *narrative identity*, Somers maintains that narrative is a useful tool to approach the question of identity because it reflects "…constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and* space, constituted by *causal* emplotment."[24] In other words, identities are not configured through binary oppositions, but depend on the dynamic between various relationships. By approaching identity through the lens of narrative, specifically *narrative identity*, one can follow and trace the sinuous movements of a person's identity that is formulated and reformulated across time and space. Narrative, as a constellation of relationships, provides an insightful theoretical concept to engage the two novels in this chapter: *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Once in a Promised Land.* Both of these novels engage the concept of a changing identity, which not only has multifaceted dimensions but also is affected by the

[23] Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach," *Theory and Society* 23.5 (Oct. 1994) 611.
[24] Somers 616.

continuous encounter with others outside itself. The concept of narrative identity provides a medium through which this concept can be explored.

In the introduction to the book *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler lays out the foundation for her argument on the formation of an "I" that is both ethically and morally responsible. She argues that an I is formed in a relational context. That is, a person's account of themselves is always given to another. There are social norms that condition this account that also affect the narrative that is given, a narrative that is continuously changing. However, there is an ethics to narrative and how and when it given. According to Butler, the question of ethics

> emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, at it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received.[25]

Butler's assertion that there is an ethics underlying subject formation is important when considering the contexts that a narrative of self would be given, who is demanding it, and the role of an Other in the constitution of the narrative. In both of these novels, there are characters who in their interactions with others must continuously revisit the idea of a narrative of self and who is demanding this account and what social contexts already form it.

In Butler's framework, giving an account of oneself will always be incomplete because the narrative is unable to fully capture the body's "formative history that remains irrecoverable by reflection"; thus, any demand for an account that is completely coherent and answers the question "who are you?" with a singular response is already a failure and a form of ethical violence. This is true because first an account cannot be given from the beginning of the subject's life story since awareness comes only later and even then it is only partial; so there the

[25] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 21.

story must be constructed: "…my narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible in language. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know…The narrative 'I' effectively adds to the story every time it tries to speak."[26] Second, and more importantly, a narrative that seeks to give an account of a self cannot be given without recognizing the place of others external to the self in that account. Butler writes, "And if I tell the story to a 'you,' that other is implied not only as an internal feature of the narrative but also as an irreducibly exterior condition and trajectory of the mode of address."[27] In other words, a person's narrative will be faced with an interruption because the other is always present. So, to demand what cannot be done—giving a complete, coherent, and static account—is a form of ethical violence because no one is able to provide it. The partiality and opacity of the account, for Butler, is precisely how it describes a lived experience. In other words, real recognition is awareness of our limits as individuals and as an Other.

If one is unable to give a comprehensive narrative of self, then how can one recognize and be recognized? According to Butler, recognition is achieved by accepting that the narrative will always be partial, changing, fluid—that in fact—is how the self comes to know itself. It is by accepting that there are limits of acknowledgement; by doing so, the individual demanding the recognition and the one giving it will display humility and generosity: "This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others,

[26] Butler 39.
[27] Butler 38.

who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves."[28] For Butler, the attributes of humility and generosity factor into what she refers to as the scene of address where this account is demanded and must be ethical. Therefore, any demand of the other to provide a narrative must be done with not only the knowledge that the one giving the account must fail to provide a complete narrative but they must also display these characteristics of generosity and humility in order for it to be ethical.

Underlying both Somers and Butler's framework, is the concept of dialogue. For the purposes here, dialogue is not limited to a speech act, but rather is the act of exchange. The exchange can be of ideas, experiences, and emotions. It can also be conscious or unconscious, immediate or delayed; that is, the impact of dialogue on how a narrative of self is formulated is not always immediately obvious. Dialogue, as an act of exchange, can be one instance or comprised of multiple instances. By assuming the possibility of continuity and fluidity in the process of dialogue, it becomes a useful theoretical tool to trace the narratives of self that emerge in both novels. For both, none of the characters is able to provide a narrative of self (or a collective) in isolation; it must always be done within the context of an encounter. Somers refers to encounter through the concepts of relationships and relationality—integrating other narratives within a narrative of self as well as locating oneself within other narratives. In other words, dialogue occurs between various levels of narratives. On the other hand, Butler maintains that a narrative can only be given within a scene of address—a dialogue, an exchange. It is for this reason that dialogue functions as a framing concept when considering the two novels.

Before beginning a discussion of the two novels, it is important to consider the context that surrounds the writers, Mohja Kahf and Laila Halaby. With the reality of the 9/11 attacks in

[28] Butler 42.

mind, Muslims, in the United States and abroad, in a real sense have had to give accounts of themselves. That day forced one group, made of numerous groups, to redefine itself against a backdrop of intensified racial profiling and religious discrimination that took the familiar form in the United States so Muslims were the subjects of heightened visibility, and thus were faced with the challenge to give an account of themselves in the context of resurgent exclusive patriotism. It is not that they did have their own narratives or ideas of belonging before 9/11. They did. However, after the attacks, those narratives transformed and really began to address what it meant to not only belong to a diverse ethnic group--like Arab American--but what it meant to belong to a religious group, and sometimes subsuming the former as a separate but connected thread. While it is true that being Arab in a pre-9/11 world was a liability, after the attacks, the stereotype that Arab equals Muslim was fixed and morphed into a much broader equation where "Muslim" as a category began to include more groups, whether they chose it as a defining label or not. Thus, writers have taken up that thread and begun to explore the contours and workings of this label. By focusing on Muslim American belongings, writers exposed the intricacies and variances of that narrative in order to produce many stories within a larger story. Islam has now become a framing story out of which emerged a multiplicity of narratives, especially in the context of countries in which Muslims are a minority.

The problem, however, is that these accounts are already affected by the contexts in which they are being asked to provide these narratives: they must prove that they are not the same as the 9/11 attackers, that they are not responsible for that specific act of violence, and more importantly that their faith, which for many guides how they live their everyday lives, is not a violent creed. They are faced with the need to provide a narrative of self to an Other who

demands it. This Other demands a coherent narrative that answers the problematic question, "Who are you?" and embeds within it the disconcerting assumption "you are and will always be different than me." Moreover, individuals are faced with the always impossible task of speaking for the collective experience. In addition, they are forced to speak about their lived experience of a faith within specific configurations of Islam. These configurations are generated within multiple contexts and yet, the demand continues to be for a singular response. Despite this demand that that does not display either the humility or generosity that Butler calls for, Muslims have responded to these accusations and constructs in numerous ways.

The focus, for our purposes, is on the genre of the novel. In this medium, the writer, who as a subject is also formed within a social encounter, is able to control the context and imagine how these exchanges occur in a realm beyond the real. Whether or not 9/11 is marked in the novel is not relevant. Kahf's novel is set in the 1970's while Halaby's novel is set in the time period leading up to and after the 9/11 attacks. What is relevant, however, is that both novels were written after 9/11 and examine similar issues: how a Muslim American narrative of self is formulated within a context of conflict and with and against particular configurations of Islam, Muslim, America, and American. Both novels explore the dynamics of this process where these configurations are in constant interplay and do not exist in isolation. The novels suggest that narratives of self have the traces of the other imprinted on them because they were always part of their stories.

Despite the perception post-9/11, that Islam and Muslims are something foreign and recent to America, Muslims have been a part of the American historical, social, religious, and linguistic landscape from its inception. During the era of slavery, among the fifteen million

slaves brought to North America, African Muslims—that is, individuals who professed Islam or belonged to Muslim families and/or heritage—constituted a sizable group. Sylviane A. Diouf, in her writing on the presence of African Muslim slaves, has proposed that about 10-20% of slaves were Muslim, which is about 2.25-3 million African Muslims if we proceed with the larger estimate of a total of 15 million slaves.[29] In fact, some of these African Muslim slaves wrote texts in Arabic describing not only their experience of enslavement but also their commitment to Islam. Umar ibn Said, for example, left an autobiography in Arabic where he demonstrated how he was able to speak for himself and to account for the realities in his new context. His autobiography, written in 1831, is significant because in it Said demonstrates both his continued commitment to Islam even after 25 years of enslavement (1807-1864) and how his situation forced him to continually negotiate his own narrative of self. Thus, not only were Muslims present on the American landscape, they were engaging it. While Islam was not preserved by the slaves because of the mechanisms of slavery that aimed at destroying any links to a past or to a collective, its place on the American landscape was continued by Muslim immigrants through much of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

There are an estimated five to six million Muslims in the United States,[30] some place the number between six to ten million.[31] It is difficult to have an exact number because the U.S. Census does not collect information on religious identification; however, the number continues to grow. The Muslim American community is diverse and includes adherents from numerous

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[29] Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 48.
[30] Lori Peek, "Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity," *Sociology of Religion* 66:3 (2005): 216.
[31] Aminah Beverly McCloud, "Islam in America: The Mosiac," *Religion and immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim experiences in the United States*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and John L. Esposito, (AltaMira Press, 2003) 159.

ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are African Americans and first, second, and third generation Muslims from South Asian and Arab descent. However, there is a growing number of Caucasian and Latino and Native American converts.[32] In addition to the ethnic diversity, the Muslim American community is comprised of different denominations. Muslims have been immigrating to the United States since the mid- to late 19th century.[33] The first Muslim immigrants came from the Levant and most planned to return to their countries of origin after working for several years. While Muslims continued to immigrate to the United States throughout the 19th and early 20th century, a Muslim American community did not begin to form clearly until the 1960s.[34] Unlike earlier Muslim immigrants, this new community differed in its sense of identity, according to Edward E. Curtis IV:

> In the last three decades of the twentieth century, newly arrived immigrants would play an important role in sparking various religious awakenings among Muslim Americans…Whereas many Muslim American immigrants had stressed their ethnic and national origins as a primary source of identity in the first half of the twentieth century, during the era of the Cold War and the conflicts in Vietnam, they increasingly turned to religion to define their identity.[35]

It is during this period that many Muslim organizations were established and a nascent Muslim American community begins to take form.[36]

While seriously impacted by the 9/11 attacks and the US led War on Terror, the Arab and Muslim American communities faced challenges as a minority group prior to the event. Earlier moments like the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Lebanon hostage crisis in 1982, and the First Gulf

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[32] Peek 216.
[33] McCloud 160.
[34] McCloud 161-162.
[35] Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 68-69.
[36] McCloud 162.

War in 1991 had implications for this community, which was perceived with suspicion.[37] Ming H. Chen argues that the United States has a history of scapegoating an internal community for external events:

> As a nation comprised of high percentages of immigrants from unusually wide array of national origins, the United States is particularly prone to displacing its foreign policy conflicts on the members of its community who are perceived to be affiliated with, or responsible for, the external threat by virtue of their transnational identities. The United States has long internalized its threats whilst engaged in international conflicts.[38]

The distrust by fellow American was made evident in clear terms during the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombings, when the media immediately associated the Muslim community with the attacks. According to Hilal Elver, even when it emerged that Timothy McVeigh was responsible for the attacks, there remained a cloud of suspicion around the Arab and Muslim American communities: "It is rather shocking that American media and public opinion readily accepted that regardless of the actual sources of terrorism, Muslims should be blamed and condemned."[39]

After the 9/11 attacks, Arab and Muslim Americans, as well as those who were perceived to belong to those groups, were targeted on multiple levels. In addition to an increase in religiously motivated hate crimes,[40] Muslims have become the focus of numerous government policies, which include detaining and questioning many immigrants from Muslim majority countries and allowing racial profiling to be utilized as means to identify potential terrorists.[41] Government policies include the USA Patriot Act, the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System ("NSEERS"), and FBI's use of Muslim informants to detect and stop terrorist activity. The USA

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[37] Hilal Elver, "Racializing Islam Before and After 9/11: From Melting Pot to Islamophobia," *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems* 21:119 (Spring 2012): 136.
[38] Ming H. Chen, "Alienated: A Reworking of the Racialization Thesis After September 11," *American Journal of Gender, Social Policy and Law*18.3 (2010): 421.
[39] Elver 137.
[40] Chen 425.
[41] Volpp 1578.

Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001) was signed into law October 26, 2001 by President George W. Bush. It was renewed into law in July 2005. On May 26, 20011, President Barack Obama signed the PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act of 2011, which permitted the continued use of wiretapping, searching business records, and surveillance of "lone wolf" suspects. According to Louise Cainkar, the USA Patriot Act:

> expands the power of the U.S. government to use surveillance and wiretapping without showing probable cause, permits secret searches and access to private records by government agents without oversight, authorizes the detention of immigrants on alleged suspicions, denies admission to the United States because of a person's speech, and expands the concept of guilt by association, among other erosions of basic civil rights.[42]

The USA Patriot Act was utilized to target Arabs, Muslims, and those that are perceived to those groups and shifted the burden of proof onto the defendant.[43] Cassady Pitt argues that there are problematic aspects of the Patriot Act:

> the U.S. Patriot Act gives certain immigration policies the power to regulate which nationalities are admitted into the United States…This policy allows laws to be made in violation of First Amendment rights of Muslims to practice free exercise of religion…Second, the expansion of searches noted in the Patriot Act refers to allowance for seizure of property even if only suspected terrorist related rather than a "reasonable probable cause" as stated in the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution. This could include personal items like home computers or cell phones and business items.[44]

Moreover, Pitt underscores that while the Patriot Act is applicable to all Americans and its language prohibits racial profiling, that Arabs and Muslims were most affected.[45] In the months after 9/11, 1,200 Arab and South Asian males were detained; many were brought in for visa

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[42] Louise Cainkar, "Targeting Arab/Muslim/South Asian Americans: Criminalization and Cultural Citizenship," *Amerasia Journal* 31.3 (2005): 6.
[43] Cainkar, "No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion After 9/11," *Middle East Report* (2002): 24.
[44] Cassady Pitt, "U.S. Patriot Act and Racial Profiling: Are There Consequences of Discrimination?" *Michigan Sociological Review* 25 (Fall 2011): 56.
[45] Pitt 56.

violations and later deported.[46] In addition to the USA Patriot Act, the NSEERS program was established on September 11, 2002. This program required male immigrants from Muslim majority countries to register with immigration. Although there were government statements that the program included all immigrants, until it was phased out in May 2003, it focused mainly on males over the age of sixteen from twenty-three Muslim majority countries.[47] The NSEERS program resulted in over 100,000 individuals registering, but of the domestic call-in registrants, 13,434 faced deportation for visa violations even though none of them was charged with terrorism or with suspected terrorist links.[48] Thus, Arabs and Muslims were racially profiled by the immigration service and many faced deportation. Finally, the FBI has utilized Muslim informants to infiltrate Muslim American communities. Informants receive payments or in some cases, if they refuse to cooperate, they are threatened with deportation or financial consequences.[49] The presumption underlying the informant program according to Hatem Bazian is that:

> every American Muslim is a suspect until proven otherwise. The FBI and other security agencies have deemed American Muslim communities "enemies of the state" and no resource should be spared in targeting them and "disrupting" their potential operations. From the outset, it appears that the FBI and the security agencies have not distinguished between "the terrorists" who carried out the operations on 9/11 and the American Muslim community who, along with the rest of this country's citizenry, was a victim of the attacks, and instead a dragnet security approach seems to be the preferred method.[50]

Here Bazian underscores that the Muslim American community was presumed guilty until otherwise proven. The result of which has been the conflation of the image of the terrorist with

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[46]Cainkar, "Targeting Arab/Muslim/South Asian Americans: Criminalization and Cultural Citizenship" 7.
[47]Cainkar, "Post 9/11 Domestic Policies Affecting US Arabs and Muslims: A Brief Review," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.1 (2004): 246.
[48] Cainkar, "Post 9/11 Domestic Policies Affecting US Arabs and Muslims: A Brief Review" 246.
[49] Hatem Bazian, "Muslims–Enemies of the State: The New Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)," *ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL* 1.1 (2012): 167.
[50] Bazian 168.

the Muslim American citizen, whose loyalty is then questioned. Leti Volpp argues that racial profiling of Arabs, Muslims, and perceived Middle Easterners has positioned these groups for exclusion in order to determine a nationalist ideology. Volpp writes,

> Through positing an identity dimension of citizenship as a process of interpellation, I want to emphasize how certain individuals and communities are positioned as objects of exclusion ("Hey, you non-citizen!" (or foreigner, or enemy alien, or terrorist)). This process of interpellation of those who appear "Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim" is taking place through the racial profiling by both government officials and the U.S. public. As the individual is hailed in this manner and recognizes the hail, he or she is transformed into a subject of ideology—here, the subject of nationalist ideology that patrols borders through exclusions…one may formally be a U.S. citizen and formally entitled to various legal guarantees, but one will stand outside of the membership of kinship/solidarity that structures the U.S. nation.[51]

The most conspicuous consequence of this heightened nationalism has been the erosion of Arab and Muslim Americans' civil liberties and the perception that they are not a part of a narrative of American self. This is the context that *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Once in a Promised Land* were published.

The first novel that will be explored in this chapter is *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), by Mohja Kahf. This novel tells the story of Khadra Shamy, a Muslim American girl who is the daughter of Syrian immigrants to the United States. Khadra's underlying challenge is locating a space that she feels reflects her narrative of self that includes the Muslim, American, first generation immigrant and female experience. Her story is replete with challenges and as a result she undergoes a series of transformations as she interacts with those around her: from a young girl entirely encapsulated by an image of Islam set by her parents and her community to a young woman cognizant of the complexities in her narrative of self that includes her experiences of being a Muslim and American woman. Kahf develops the narrative through Khadra's

[51] Volpp 1593-1594.

relationship to certain images, ideas, and people. The *hijab* (head scarf), for example, acts as a central image and as Khadra changes so does her relationship with it. She begins by covering extensively and moves to a point where she wears it depending on whether she feels it necessary at that moment. The most significant aspect of this final transformation is the color she loves to wear: tangerine, which encapsulates Khadra locating the space that reflects her experience as a Muslim American and not the experience of her parents and their interpretation of Islam, as it contrasts with the tan, navy blue and black dress of her mother. The issues of ethnicity and race are also raised at different points of the novel. Khadra realizes that there is a disconnect between the ideals espoused by her parents and her community. Through this acknowledgement, Khadra is able to reconcile that disjuncture for herself.

The novel raises a number of key issues. First, there is a continuous thread throughout the novel of how individual and collective narratives interact with and against each other. Khadra as an individual Muslim girl must think about her narrative in tandem with the collective narrative of the Muslims and other non-Muslim Americans around her and how they influence and shape how she gives her own account. At points in the novel, Khadra becomes acutely aware of not only how other individuals impact her personal narrative of self but also how the collective narratives of "Muslim," "American," "Arab" affect who she is at different points of the story. The second set of issues relate to configurations. How do configurations of "Muslim" and "American" not only emerge but are constantly reformulated, especially in times of crises? What are the mechanisms that are employed to determine belonging? As the novel unfolds, Khadra realizes that there is Islam as a lived faith, defined by a multiplicity of lived experiences, and Islam(s) as an institution utilized and manipulated to include and exclude individuals within the

group and to further specific agendas. Similarly, she recognizes that there are processes of inclusion and exclusion at work that initially prevent her from engaging her American experience. These processes, much like those involved with Islam as an institutional configuration, work to produce an exclusive notion of belonging that does not reflect the lived experience of being both Muslim and American. Khadra learns to negotiate and renegotiate the contours of her narrative of self to reflect her attempts—not to be seen as failures—to give an account of her lived experience.

The structure of the novel exemplifies Somers' argument in relation to the concept of a constellation of relationships and Butler's discussion on answering the question "Who are you?" There are a number of structural devices that are employed to construct a response to the context after 9/11. The most prominent device is the use of quotes at the beginning of each chapter. From the outset, it is clear that the structure of the novel is based on intertextuality, which is a form of dialogue between texts. The use of intertextualiy in a way illustrates how dialogue as an act of encounter, engagement, and exchange functions as prominent theoretical framework. Each chapter begins with an epigraph that provides an aporia through which to approach the chapter. Furthermore, the continuous interruption of these epigraphs emphasizes on a structural level Butler's argument of the impossibility of a completely coherent narrative that is not interrupted by the presence of the other. While the characters in the narrative are not aware of the organizational use of these epigraphs, it clear that each quote is woven into the text and has a function in the structure of the novel. The epigraphs come from diverse genres, which include religious scriptures, historical narratives, mystical texts, philosophical texts, poetry, fiction, songs, and proverbs. The intertexuality created by the diverse quotes woven into the novel are

part of the ethical response. Similar to Khadra's story, the novel cannot produce a coherent and consistent response that does not reflect multiplicity. As a response to the context of Muslim Americans in a post 9/11 world, the novel reminds the reader that no group can answer the question "Who are you?" with a singular response that could represent the complexity of their histories and their narratives of self. It is not by virtue of the Muslim American community's internal diversity alone that this is true, but also as a result of their part in the larger American narrative. The quotes help to relay that point structurally.

The various epigraphs address some of the core issues of not only each chapter that they introduce but also the novel as a whole. For example, one of the main topics is the immigrant experience, more specifically, the question of home and belonging. Underlining both these questions is the fear of not locating a place of belonging which entails recognition and stability. The chapter that discusses the Shamy family's life in the Rocky Mountains before relocating to Indiana, begins with a quote from Psalm 137: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"[52] Here, Khadra describes her parents' challenges and fears of being first generation Muslim Arab immigrants trying to maintain their lifestyle within a context that they see as foreign. Their experience is mirrored in the experiences of other immigrant families living in the same apartment complex. By referencing this Psalm that gets at the heart of the conflict faced by Khadra's parents, the novel demonstrates how her parents' sentiments have parallels in other cultural contexts. The Other is already implied in the narrative of the self. Their struggle is not unique in the American setting, since many have immigrated to the United States and faced these challenges, nor is it unique in the human sense since migration always carries with it both nostalgia and fear.

[52] Kahf 8.

The epigraph in the following chapter is a verse from the Qur'an. The juxtaposition of the two scriptures, both addressing the Shamy family's immigrant experience, within the same text illustrates the multiplicity that contributes to the overall structure of the novel. The quote is verse 41 from chapter 9: "Go forth lightly and heavily and strive with your wealth and your selves in the path of God, that is best for you, if you but knew."[53] This short chapter explains why the Shamy family relocates to Indiana. There is a new coordinator position at the Dawah Center and Khadra's parents consider it their "noble jihad" to establish the Muslim community in America and to go wherever this struggle leads them. Thus, in the previous chapter the focus is on their fear of locating a home and a sense of belonging while in this chapter they find a purpose to their decision to stay. Similar to other immigrant groups throughout the history of America, the Shamy family had to have a motivation for leaving their country and stay in a country where they were an Other. Moreover, like other groups, they find a way to establish themselves on their American landscape.

While the two above examples address different aspects of the immigrant experience, the following example focuses on the consequences of refusing recognition to another group. A quote from James H. Madison's *The Indiana Way* appears at the beginning of a chapter where Zuhura, the young Kenyan American Muslim woman, who is a prominent and outspoken member of the Muslim community, is found raped and murdered. He writes: "More so than perhaps any other state, Indiana's population was native born, white, and Protestant…This population['s] homogeneity was…so significant that it is perhaps best to seek an understanding of it…by considering the people…that partly contradicted the images of sameness."[54] Reading

[53] Kahf 14.
[54] Kahf 89.

the quote as a framework, it becomes clear that this sameness is already disrupted by the presence of the Muslims; however, there are dangerous repercussions for this challenge when there is no recognition of their belonging. Despite the fact that the quote describes Indiana, it in fact relates to the United States as a whole. The projection of a homogeneous image of America denies the multiplicity of experiences that define this landscape. This exclusion can and has resulted in serious consequences throughout America's history. In the specific case of Zuhura, the refusal to recognize her results in her violent death. For Muslim Americans in post-9/11 America, it has meant increased suspicion, restriction of civil rights, denial of their place in American history, and challenges to their claim of being Americans. By juxtaposing Madison's quote, along with other citations from texts on Indiana's history, with a narrative that disrupts the homogeneity that emerges from the quotes, the novel responds to the claims that there is one clear notion of who belongs to America and reminds the reader of the dangers of unidirectional recognition.

A portrait of the Muslim American community as being diverse emerges clearly in the novel. A citation from Hoda Barakat's novel *The Tiller of Waters* introduces the chapter in which Khadra attends the national Islamic conference, raising the question of origin and its role in a narrative of self:

> Before the garment industry emerged, introducing its readymade sizes—clothes that do not know a body, do not acknowledge each body's distinctiveness…we in the East…were making fabrics that were increasing in beauty…refining [our] expression of the unique relationship between the cloth and the body…who, these days, sees in a length of cloth its origin, its place of birth, the caravans' voyages?[55]

The immigrant experience, central to the American national narrative, exemplifies this question because immigrants are defined both by the American space that they live in and their country of

[55] Kahf 53.

origin. Barakat's quote underscores the fact that on the surface a person's origins, experiences, and personal journeys--physical and metaphorical--are not apparent. Therefore, one cannot ask the singular question "Who are you?" to understand the complexity of another's narrative. The quote also emphasizes the beauty in clothing that is not homogeneous each with its own distinctiveness. In the context of the novel, the quote addresses this aspect of the Muslim American community. The diversity of the characters in this chapter is indicated by their many types of cover and clothing, which include escharpes, khimars, jilbabs, thobes, and depattas. The various expressions of covering reflect the internal diversity of this community, making it as a whole a distinctive minority. At the same time, there are elements at that this conference that underscore this community's American identity as well, such as the entertainment section of the conference. The performers' names represent the hybridity of the younger generation of Muslim Americans who draw from their parents' culture and American culture: "Hijab Hip-Hop by Nia Group!" and "Special Performance by Clash of Civilizations!" The Islamic references are obvious, but the names indicate more. The second group's name is worth highlighting because the novel's structural design as well as thematic focus opposes Samuel Huntington's concept of the "Clash of Civilizations", where Islam and the West are on a collision course. The group's name is a reappropriation of this concept, in which a clash is replaced with a fusion of civilizations. The intertextuality created by the use of the epigraphs reflects this transformation.

In addition to the use of quotes, language is another structural device to convey an ethical response. Throughout the novel, the main narrative is in English; however, Arabic and French are woven into the text. The presence of these two languages further illustrates the complexity that is inherent to any narrative. When Arabic or French are utilized, they are not translated in all

cases, but they are italicized to create a visual indicator for the reader. While translation is not provided, the presence of the two languages does not disrupt the narrative to the point of incomprehensibility; rather, they add another layer. The layering created by the three languages reflects the multiplicity of experiences that define the novel itself as well as the individual narratives of self of each character. Arabic, especially, occupies an interesting position in the way it is deployed to reflect intergenerational use of the language. Arabic terms are merged with English grammatical structures, for example, "*salaam'd*"[56] and "*Kursis.*"[57] The first example combines the Arabic word for prayer with the English past tense marker. In the second example, the Arabic word *kursi*, which means chair in general, refers in this context, to the Throne verse in the Qur'an. The Arabic term is then combined with the English plural marker. Many of the instances where Arabic appears in the novel are religious references. For example, in the chapter on Khadra's experience at a weekend Islamic school, several Arabic words and phrases are woven into the text that describe prayer. Terms like *masallah* (prayer space), *ruku* (bow position in prayer), and *nia* (intent) are all followed by their definitions. However, formulas that are recited in prayer are not translated, for example, *sami allahu li man hamida* (God hears who thanks him). The translated and untranslated Arabic does not disrupt the English; rather, the juxtaposition of the languages mirrors the American context that is characterized by multiplicity. The novel firmly locates Arabic on the American landscape.

The final structural device utilized in the novel is the migration of the characters. The movement of the characters between different locales adds to the complexity of their personal narratives of self as well as the collective narrative of this community. Moving from one locale

[56] Kahf 34.
[57] Kahf 84.

to another entails encountering others and having to renegotiate their sense of belonging. When characters journey to another space they carry within them the place they have left and are impacted by the new space. On a structural level, therefore, the movement of characters and the resulting changes from the physical journey parallels the transformations in the characters' personal narratives. In the novel, the various characters make multiple movements from the Middle East to America and back, as well as within America. Khadra's parents move from Syria to the United States and do not return. In America, they move from the Rocky Mountains to Simonville, Indiana to South Bend, Indiana. In between, they travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj. As they journey from one location to another, they undergo changes.

The story takes place in Simmonsville, Indiana in the 1970s. Khadra, the protagonist, is the daughter of Wajdy Shamy and Ebtehaj Qadry-Agha, Syrians who immigrated to the United States to escape persecution. As first generation immigrants, they feared that their children would lose their identities as Muslims, so they instilled a heightened sense of a Muslim identity. Khadra and her two brothers, Eyad and Jihad, are repeatedly told how they were different from the Americans around them; that being Muslim was the only thing that defined them; and to constantly be on guard against the dangers in the society that surrounded them. In other words, Khadra's parents delineated the boundaries for how they and their children would engage with Americans. Moreover, her parents emphasized their particular interpretation of Islam, which also served to separate themselves from the other Muslims who do not adhere to their version of the faith. As a result, it is clear early on in the novel that Khadra is unable to fully engage difference even within the Muslim community, and instead often becomes judgmental. Khadra's

assumption, based on her parents' initiative, that belonging and identity could clearly be demarcated is illustrated in her interactions with both Muslims and non-Muslims.

There are other characters who figure prominently into the story of the novel and demonstrate the workings of a constellation of relationships. For example, one of the families that lived in the same complex with Khadra's family was the African American al-Deen family. Khadra was friends with their children Hanifa and Hakim. Hanifa and Hakim's parents, Khadija and Jamal, were not born Muslim but joined the Nation of Islam, then became Bilalian,[58] and then became Sunni Muslims. As mentioned earlier, the epigraphs beginning each chapter function as a framework. Here the quote is from Marvin X's *In the Crazy House called America*: "…the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's teaching…is part of Islamic tradition, not an isolated, unique invention of half-baked negro theology…Arabs have no monopoly on Islam."[59] This quote foreshadows that the chapter will relate to one of the many configurations of Islam that the novel addresses and dismantles. By arguing that "Arabs have no monopoly," Marvin X underlines an issue that Khadra eventually internalizes; there are multiple manifestations of being Muslim. Cyra Akila Choudhury argues that Muslim American communities regulate belonging to the community through the image of the "Believer," which represents an Arab-Muslim identity.[60] The problem with this image, she maintains, is that it is not representative of

[58] According to Lawrence H. Mamiya, after Elijah Muhammad's death, the leader of the Nation of Islam, his son Wallace Muhammad succeeded him and began introducing changes to the organization. In addition to allowing white membership, he changed the name of the Black Muslims to Bilalian. Bilal Ibn Rabah was an Ethiopian slave who became an early follower of the Prophet Muhammad and was chosen by the Prophet to be the first *muezzin*, the one who calls Muslims to prayer. Mamiya writes, "The significance and prominence of an African in the first Muslim community has not been lost by Wallace. Bilal is not only an important black hero but he is also relevant to the quest for identity among Bilalian people in America." Lawrence H. Mamiya,"From Black Muslim to Bilalian: The Evolution of a Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1982): 139.
[59] Kahf 23.
[60] Choudhury 6.

the diverse Muslim American experiences.[61] Thus, African American Muslim Islam, in whatever forms it takes, cannot be dismissed as inauthentic. For Khadra, Khadija and Jamal represent something foreign that do not fit into her perception of Islam, which is illustrated in her conversation with Khadija:

> 'Was that when you finally became a real Muslim?'…Khadra asked… 'Or were you still that Elijah thing? The fake Muslims where its only for black people?.. 'What is a real Muslim, Khadra?' Aunt Khadija said finally. 'When you do the Five Pillars,' Khadra shrugged, 'you know and follow the Quran and the Prophet and wear *hijab* and follow the Islamic way of life and—' Aunt Khadija said gently, 'Shahada. That's all. Belief that God is One. When that enters your heart and you surrender to it, you are Muslim.' Khadra felt alarm. It wasn't that simple. Her parents said so. You have to *practice* Islam to be a real Muslim.[62]

Khadra's categorization of what constitutes a Muslim is so narrowly defined that she is "alarmed" when someone's experience does not "fit". Khadra's demand for a complete narrative of self from Khadija disregards the myriad interpretations of the faith and the multiple paths to religious commitment. Central to Khadija and Jamal's narratives of self is the symbolic movement from one religious worldview to another that is reflected even in their names: "Aunt Khadija's name used to be Kacey. Kacey Thompson, then she changed it to Kacey X, then Khadija X, then Khadija Kareem when she became a Bilalian, then Khadija Al-Deen when she married Uncle Jamal."[63] For Khadra, these shifts do not represent a true Muslim, but the novel suggests all are experiences of faith.

Khadra eventually comes to terms with the complexity of her lived experience that already defines her own narrative of self and the impossibility of demanding of others what she cannot do. However, before she reaches that point, Khadra develops strategies to reconcile these

[61] Choudury 34.
[62] Kahf 23-24.
[63] Kahf 23.

"deviations" with the static configuration of Muslims and Islam that she has adapted from her parents. In the case of Khadija, the fact that she is now a part of "real" Islam is sufficient. Wajdy emphasizes this for Khadra: "Khadra's father said all that Elijah Mohammad business was nonsense. He said it was a good thing Black Muslims like Aunt Khadija and Uncle Jamal converted to real Islam or they would be wandering astray."[64] While initially rejecting Aunt Khadija and Uncle Jamal's religious path, later, Khadra acknowledges the need to deconstruct problematic configurations of Islam that exclude members of the community.

In this same community, Khadra's family meets a white American convert to Islam. The Thoreau family adds another layer to the dynamic of the Fallen Timbers apartment complex where the Shamy family lives. Joe Thoreau, the father, is married to Ayesha, a strong Kenyan woman. Joe and Ayesha have one daughter together, Tayiba, and Ayesha has another daughter, Zuhura from a previous marriage. Initially, the Thoreau family is viewed with some reservation within Khadra's small community. The Thoreau family is suspect because Joe is a convert. Immediately, members of the community question his intention: "Who ever heard of such a thing: a white American man, Muslim? 'CIA plant?' some of the grown-ups whispered. 'FBI?'"[65] Joe represents a dilemma for those in the Muslim community, like Khadra's parents, who emphasize a difference between themselves and mainstream Americans. Now, with Joe, there is someone among them who destabilizes their demarcations of belonging. Interestingly, the Shamy family does not recognize the way that there are parallels between how they view Joe with distrust and question his religious belonging and how other non-Muslim Americans look at them as foreigners through exclusive nationalist configurations of being American, thereby

[64] Kahf 24.
[65] Kahf 27.

questioning their national belonging. Despite the initial suspicion, the Thoreau family is eventually accepted in the community because they observe the particular dictates of these Muslims: "After a while, Tayiba's dad changed his name from Joe to Yusuf. Then he grew a beard. And sent the dog away, to his brother in Chicago. He started to fit in at the Center much better."[66] As Choudhury suggests, adherence to the image of the "Believer" leads to acceptance in the community.

From the Thoreau family, Zuhura, Ayesha's older daughter, emerges as a symbolic figure for Khadra as she struggles to relate her own narrative of self. Before her murder, Zuhura appears to be the perfect example of a Muslim girl raised in America. The younger girls in the community view her as a role model. She is outspoken on religious causes and wears the *hijab*. In the period that Zuhura is missing and the police begin the investigation, questions emerge that destabilize the narrative surrounding her. It is not clear where she was the night that she is killed or who she was with. Community members' reactions are both fearful and judgmental; one member says, "Even if she is found alive now, she is ruined.[67] Within the community, there is already a presumption of guilt. Thus, the girl who was held up as the representative of "good" Muslim girl who fit neatly within the boundaries that the community had delineated, suddenly falls out of grace without the possibility to defend herself. By saying that she is already "ruined," the community pushes her outside of their interpretation of what identifies a "true" Muslim girl—it is as if she is already dead. Interestingly, however, Zuhura continues to function for the community as a symbol of their struggle as a religious minority in America. In response to the motivations behind her murder, the Dawah community quickly responds that it is "religious

[66] Kahf 29.
[67] Kahf 92.

bigotry"[68] and strongly rejects the suggestions that she was dishonorable. Their argument for anti-Muslim motivation of the crime is further supported by the actions of the police and immigration officers who arrest Luqman, her fiancé—without ever charging him of any crime—and deporting him to Egypt on a minor visa violation. With Luqman's arrest, the novel is commenting on recent policies targeting Muslims' civil liberties. It also drawing parallel examples in the manner in which the Muslim community remove Zuhura from the community's fold and how the murderers, if motivated by anti-Muslim and racist sentiments, reject her as an American.

Alongside the particular construct of Islam that Khadra's parents and community project onto her is the construct of America(n). These two signifiers "America" and "American" are dismantled and reformulated throughout the novel. When Khadra is young, American functions as the Other, to form a Muslim identity against. An American is everything that a Muslim is not in this particular narrative. Thus, there is always a fear and distrust of what an American represents. At one point in the novel, Khadra, Eyad, Hanifa, and Hakim wander out into a forest and when they return to find their worried parents, the question of who and what is an American is posed and answered:

> Who were the Americans? The Americans were the white people who surrounded them, a crashing sea of unbelief in which the Dawah Center bobbed, a brave boat. (There were black people who were Americans, but that was different.) You had your nice Americans and your nasty Americans. And then there was the majority of Americans; the best that could be said about them was that they were ignorant…Generally speaking, Americans cussed, smoke, and drank, and the Shamys had it on good authority that a fair number of them used drugs. Americans dated and fornicated and committed adultery. They had broken families and lots of divorces. Americans were not generous or hospitable like Uncle Abdulla and Aunt Fatma…Americans believed the individual was more important than the family, and money was more important than anything. Khadra's dad said Americans threw out their sons and daughters when they turned eighteen unless they

[68] Kahf 95.

> could pay rent…All in all, Americans led shallow, wasteful, materialistic lives, Islam could solve many of their social ills, if they but knew.[69]

This lengthy description of Americans is based on a series of definitive statements built on stereotypical images. Americans are everything that the Shamys, specifically, and other Muslims in the community to a certain extent, are not. The first statement is worth examining further because race factors into prominently. The Shamy family internalizes the notion that an American is something very specific; an American equals white. This idea is not just part of their narrative; it reflects an awareness of the social context where race continues to play a role. The Shamy family does not perceive themselves as American not only because they do not engage in the same behaviors but because they accept this racialized categorization. There is something about their identity that excludes them from this category and makes them not American.

Upon returning home, the four children are faced with a series of highly contentious questions: "Do you think we are Americans? Do you think we have no limits? Do you think we leave our children wandering in the streets? Is that what you think we are? Is it?"… "We are not Americans!" she sobbed, her face twisted in grief. "We are not Americans!"[70] Reminiscent once again of Butler's discussion on the demand for an account, here Ebtehaj, interestingly, plays the role of both a self and an Other who is demanding an answer but then answers it. This scene demonstrates the impossibility of an already completed narrative of self where the other is clearly demarcated. For Ebtehaj to raises these questions and answer them for the four children, she prevents them from expressing their own lived experience. It is worth underlining that while Ebtehaj is posing the question to the four children, the form of the questions and the responses implies her and Wajdy as if she is addressing the imaginary American who they form their

[69] Kahf 67-68.
[70] Kahf 66.

Muslim identity against by using the pronoun "we". In other words, here she is clearly projecting her own experience, interpretation, narrative onto Khadra and her brothers and assuming that it represents their own narratives. This interaction and how American is conceptualized is problematized numerous times in the novel, and some points it cannot be reconciled.

There are three events that bring the question of Khadra's American identity, in fact the Shamy family's American identity, to the fore. The first is when Wajdy decides that the family is going to apply for American citizenship. The American citizenship generates a shift in Khadra's parents' narrative. How they relate to America is reformulated as well as their notion of Islam. Like Khadra, Wajdy and Ebtehaj are affected by the changing circumstances. Up until this point, Khadra's parents viewed their stay in America as temporary; but like Khadra, their narrative is shaped by their context and more specifically the need to belong to a nation, especially when they can longer return to Syria. Belonging, as emphasized in this scene, is influenced not only by the relationships with others but also the social and political realities that surround the individuals. This is a point that Somers underscores in her discussion of how narrative identities are constructed:

> Narrative identities are constituted by a person's temporally and spatially variable *place* in culturally constructed stories composed of (breakable) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple plots of family, nation, or economic life. Most importantly, however, narratives are not incorporated into the self in any direct way; rather they are mediated through the enormous spectrum of social and political institutions and practices that constitute our social world.[71]

As Somers states, identities are constructed and exist within a world of encounters that mediate the shape that identities take. These narrative identities constantly face the possibility of modification and negotiation because the context shifts and the reaction to the various markers

[71] Somers 625.

changes. Thus, America as a configuration that represents difference and separation for the Shamy family transforms into a place where Muslims can locate themselves. Wajdy reflects this change when after becoming a citizen he begins to give Friday sermons on the role of Muslims and Islam in America:

> 'In many ways, my brothers, America is more Islamic than the countries of the Muslim world…' It was Wajdy's turn to give the khutba at the Dawah Center's small juma service… 'Brothers do not for a minute think we will stop protesting against the immoral and unfair policies of America outside, in the Muslim world. May my tongue be cut off if I forget Jerusalem. But let's face it: here *inside* America, there are many good qualities…America,' he concluded, 'is like Islam without Muslims. And our sick and corrupt Muslim home countries—they are Muslims without Islam'[72]

In this sermon, Wajdy who earlier was not able to imagine himself as a part of America now is able to locate a place in the American narrative. He and his family are part of an America that they belong to and one that can be thought in juxtaposition to a Muslim identity. Moreover, he finds a way to reconcile his previous position with the current shift through the terms "outside" and "inside" in relation to America. Despite his new belonging in his narrative, he reformulates the configuration of America, in order to demonstrate his continued commitment to the larger Muslim world—a tension that is felt by many immigrants. The sense of belonging to multiple spaces, although in different manners, is employed as a means to establish Muslims' lack of loyalty. Even though her father reaches this point of reconciliation between these various aspects his narrative of self, Khadra is unable to accept this juxtaposition until later in the novel; other events must occur that force her to imagine this possibility as she reformulates her narrative of self.

Khadra's Muslim and American identity comes to the forefront also during two trips: the family's trip to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage and Khadra's trip to Syria after her divorce.

[72] Kahf 143-144.

What becomes evident, however, is that a tension emerges for Khadra around the notion of home and belonging. Initially, she perceives Saudi Arabia as "someplace where we really belong. It's the land of the Prophet. The land of all Muslims."[73] However, by the time they return, Khadra begins to think of America as home. In Saudi Arabia, while with Afaf, the daughter of a family friend, Khadra meets a group of young men, who assume that because Khadra is American that she will accept their advances. This scene is significant because of the way different signifiers are projected onto Khadra and how she responds by accepting or rejecting them. When Afaf first introduces Khadra to the young men, she introduces her as "My American cousin." Here, both the gaze and the one who is directing it are important. In this situation, Afaf determines how the young men will view Khadra, which then engenders a series of responses from the young men and Khadra. One of the men is surprised that Khadra is American yet speaks Arabic without an accent. Khadra's response to both Afaf and the young man's comment is "No. I'm not really American. I'm an Arab, like you."[74] Khadra is definitively separating herself from her American identity and emphasizing her Arab identity. Within the same scene, Khadra's compartmentalized notion of identity if further disrupted because she questions her ideal image of Saudi Arabia, which reflects a singular interpretation of Islam: "And even though she was in a Muslim country at this moment, and not just any Muslim country but *the* Muslim country, where Islam started, but had never felt so far from home."[75] Faced with an altered perception of Saudi Arabia, Khadra breaks down the barriers that have prevented her from seeing that she can be Arab, Muslim, and American. At the end of the trip, Khadra's attitude about what home means is transformed.

[73] Kahf 159.
[74] Kahf 174.
[75] Kahf 177.

Khadra's marriage to Juma al-Tashkenti, a graduate student from Kuwait, and divorce compels her to travel to Syria. This trip contributes as well to her concept of belonging and her narrative of self. The real issue that destabilizes Khadra's marital relationship is her decision to have an abortion. Juma and her family do not understand Khadra's fears about pregnancy. It is not only the lack of support from those closest to her that disturbs Khadra but the fact that her decision to have an abortion raises questions about Islam as an unchanging and rigid institution. More specifically, Khadra finds support for her decision to end her pregnancy in the writings of Imam Ghazali, an Islamic scholar, but when she presents this to her parents they refuse to address this opinion. It is at this point that Khadra sees the contradictions and the problems with the Islam of her parents:

> It turned out that nothing she'd read described the real Muslim gut reaction to the question of abortion…Khadra's father said, "My mother died having me….A woman who dies in childbirth is considered a martyr—goes straight to heaven.'… 'Well, I am *not* your mother,' Khadra shot back. 'I don't want to be your mother.' 'I didn't raise you to speak to me in that tone,' he snapped, as he rarely did. Yeah, you did, Khadra thought sullenly. You raised me to go out and learn, but deep down you still want me to be just like your mother. So where did you think all these contradictions would lead me if not to this frustration, this tone of voice? But I am not going to kill myself to fit into the life you have all mapped out for me.[76]

Khadra recognizes not only how her parents have projected their own ideas and narratives on her but that they no longer represent her reality. The abortion raises questions in her mind about her narrative of self up until this point and whose voice it reflects. While religion as her parents have portrayed it has prevented Khadra from locating her own voice, at this point in the novel, religion—not as a rigid construct but as a lived experience—becomes the medium through which she locates herself. Thus, Khadra must confront her own self and begin to configure her own narrative:

[76] Kahf 245-246.

> Where was it, this will of hers, this misshapen self? She needed to know it. *Hello, self. Can we meet at last?* It was not vainglorious to have a self. It was not the same as selfish individualism, no. You have to have a self to even start a journey to God. To cultivate your *nafs* whom God invites to enter the Garden at the end of *Surat al-Fajr.* She had not taken even a baby step in that direction. Her self was a meager thing, scuttling behind a toilet, what she hadn't given over of it to Mama, to Juma. Too much, she has given away too much. She will not give the last inches of her body, will not let them fill her up with a life she does not want. Feral, it was a word, but a spasm, the snarl of a fanged thing gnawing at a trap: no. No, no, no, no, no, *no.*[77]

There is a shift in Khadra's perception of herself in relation to the others around her, but more importantly to God. Her way to God, she realizes, is not through the religious interpretation of others and searching for an "authentic" Islam; rather, she is now humbled and recognizes that her relationship with God, as is the case with others around her, is a journey and not a fixed and unchanging paradigm.

The trip to Syria leads Khadra to realize the fluidity of her personal narrative of self. It also compels Khadra to reconsider the way in which she engages those around her, in accordance with Somers' concept that narrative identity emerges from a constellation of relationships. Thus, for Khadra to conceive of her identity and others around her as rigid and unchanging is problematic and it is at this juncture that she begins to recognize intricacies of her relationships and how they affect the way she views herself. Moreover, Khadra no longer demands complete and all encompassing narratives of self because she cannot provide her own, speaking to Butler's argument for an ethics in constructing and demanding an account from another. In other words, through this journey to Syria, she attains a sense of humility.

In Syria, Khadra's confronts the nuances that underline any narrative, individual or collective. One moment in her trip that emphasizes this fluidity of any story occurs when Khadra discovers that Ebtehaj was raped on a school trip to France. Knowing this information about her

[77] Kahf 248.

mother offers her insight into her mother's story and furthers the idea that narratives of self are constructed over time, despite attempts to suggest that they are complete at any moment. They are influenced continuously by changing events in one's life. In addition to the new knowledge about her mother, an encounter with a Syrian rabbi completely alters Khadra's notions about national belonging:

> He spoke with the deepest Damascene accent Khadra had ever heard… 'Yes, of course, he speaks like a Damascene, darling—he *is* a Damascene,' Teta said, as they emerged, and Khadra felt ashamed from not getting it….Why should she be like the Marion County librarian who once gushed. 'Oh, you can speak the English language! And your accent is so American!' But this was different, wasn't it? It's just that—all the time, she'd thought of them as *Them*, these people over *There*, not all the same of course, she knew that, but still not part of *Us*. Never. And when she grew out of that primitive notion of 'There's-us-and-then-there's-them,' she grew by accepting, albeit reluctantly, the claims of some of her professors that certain things crosscut religion…It sent her whirling in mad agony. This incidental skin, this name she wore like a badge…Had it changed? Was it always changing? Who was she?...They all came to her, all the people she had once held at bay…Now the barrier was removed, and they all rushed into her heart, and it hurt…Droves of people, strangers and neighbors. *We are your kin, we are part of you.* [78]

This quote illustrates a number of key issues that occur throughout the novel. First, it raises the question of what defines belonging. Khadra initially assumes that she can answer clearly the question "Who are you?," which implies on some level the question "Where do you belong?". Although Khadra's sense of belonging fluctuates during the course of the novel, it is at this point that she comprehends the dynamics involved in belonging. Determination of belonging depends on encounters between the individual and others. A sense of belonging also develops as an individual forms connections with others around them that are then woven into their constellation of relationships. The rabbi is just as Damascene as her grandmother not only through the connection of language, but the connection of history. There are components that continue to figure prominently but are constantly in flux, reflecting the shifting dynamics in the

[78] Kahf 305-307.

relationships. During her trip to Damascus, Khadra recognizes this dynamic. When she hears the rabbi's deep Damascene accent, she is forced to examine all the barriers that prevented her from engaging those around her outside of preconceived narratives. Furthermore, Khadra realizes that she too thought in an exclusionary manner and employed constructs, not unlike the characters around her who questioned her belonging to the American landscape. Thus, the meeting with the rabbi challenged Khadra to think beyond intransigent configurations of America, Islam, Syrian, Arab, Damascene that had been central to her narrative that had failed her.

The city of Damascus, itself, mirrors Khadra's story in its complexity. Damascus with its rich history that defies a singular narrative represents Khadra's struggle. It is for this reason that when Khadra needs to escape she is called back to Damascus:

> Damascus demanded that you see all religions as architectural layers of each other, gave you the tangible sense, real as the crumbling citadel steps beneath your feet, that it all came together somehow in a way that made sense. All the religions spokes on the same wheel. All connected to the hub. All taking their turn in the wheeling of the great azure heavens.[79]

The multilayered nature of Damascus acts as a symbol for Khadra's realization that her narrative of self is her own, not built on fixed configurations. The description of the various faiths and their relationship to the city embodies a sense of belonging that transcends any one marker: a constellation. They all belong to the city and are a part of its narrative. Damascus in turn becomes a part of her narrative of self.

As she returns to America, Khadra's sense of home is anchored. She realizes that her sense of belonging will only occur in America but that it is shaped by other connections:

> She knew by the time she crossed the Atlantic that she was headed home, if there was any home in the world of worlds. She loved the country of her origin, and found that something in the soil there…answered a basic need in her, and corresponded to the deep

[79] Kahf 297.

> structure of her taxonomy…But she knew at last that it was in the American crucible where her character had been forged, for good or ill…It was too late, it was done, no going back now, no phoning home. She was on her shariah to America. Toto, we're not in Damascus anymore, Khadra whispered, as the wheels hit the ground. Homeland America, *bismillah.*[80]

Khadra does not say that there is one home for her. Rather, her concept of home is complex. Khadra is tied to Syria because it constitutes a vital part of her narrative of self; however, it is in America that a deeper sense of belonging emerges. It is interesting that she uses the term "shariah" when describing her return to America and her new sense of home(s). The term in Arabic means "*pathway, path to be followed,* or *clear way to be followed,* and has come to mean *the path upon which the believer has to trend.* In its original usage Shari'ah meant the *road to the watering place or path leading to the water*, i.e., the way to the source of life."[81] Shariah is one of the most problematic terms associated with Islam. The term that is often defined as Islamic law carries a negative connotation because it is minimized to a series of punishments and not understood within its larger context. The original definition captures the essence of the term, namely, path to the Divine will, i.e. the source of life in the Islamic worldview. In the above quote, shariah is not being employed in the specific and narrow sense of Islamic law; rather, it has the second meaning. While Syria functions as a bridge, a transformational space, it is in America that Khadra locates her sense of belonging. This idea is further underscored by the invocation to God "*bismillah*" (In the Name of God) that ends the quote, by juxtaposing, the Arabic term with the phrase "Homeland America." This idea emerged during Khadra's pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia and reemerges again after Khadra leaves Syria to return to the United States.

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[80] Kahf 313.

[81] Irshad Abdal-Haqq, "Islamic Law: An Overview of Its Origin and Elements," *Understanding Islamic Law: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Hisham M. Ramadan (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006) 4.

In the last part of the novel, the dynamics of Khadra's narrative of self as a fluid process becomes clear. After returning from Syria, Khadra moves to Philadelphia, which as all of the locations in the novel, symbolizes a formative point in Khadra's narrative of self. It is in Philadelphia that Khadra actively reflects on her narrative and the role of all her current and previous encounters in how she answers the question "Who are you?" Moreover, Butler's assertion that the question of ethics emerges precisely at the point when the ability to continue a conversation is jeopardized by the inability to find common ground frames Khadra's experience in Philadelphia. Khadra's relationships in Philadelphia bring to the fore this question as she is faced with the inability to locate enough common ground to continuously maintain a dialogue in fixed and unchanging terms. Khadra is very conscious of the process at work, the open-endedness of the narrative that is produced, and its possibilities. It is also in this section that the novel addresses key historical events and grievances for Muslims. While the novel does not mark the 9/11 attacks, it does reference the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the 1989 Salman Rushdie affair, and the 1991 Gulf War and traces the significance of these conflicts and events for the Muslim American community through Khadra's interactions with other characters.

The first character that Khadra develops a relationship with in Philadelphia is Blu (short for Bluma) Froehlig, a Jewish American student studying at the same photography school as Khadra. Blu and Khadra bond over their common experience of an orthodox upbringing. Moreover, they understand one another's struggles as a minority group in America and recognize the parallels in their faiths: "So it was a relief not to have to explain every little thing about that [importance of laws and rituals in Islam] to a friend who was an American. Cool to find an

American who was not even a Muslim but *got* it."[82] However, their growing relationship is repeatedly challenged with a point of disagreement: Israel. On the surface this may appear to be a political disagreement, but for both Khadra and Blu this particular conflict is embodied in the impact it has had on both of their grandmothers and their communities. Blu's grandmother was killed in the Holocaust. Téta's husband, Khadra's grandmother, was killed in 1948 and the Palestinian members of Khadra's community lost their land. The demand of recognition at a point of conflict, which Butler raises in relation to ethics, emerges in this disagreement. "All the generosity with which they regarded each other's point of view evaporated when the conversation turned to this issue. Gentleness disappeared and the claws came out. At one point, they made a pact not to bring up Palestine or Israel. But it came up anyway, again and again."[83] Although it seems that Khadra and Blu are unable to move forward on this topic and unwilling to acknowledge each other's personal connections to the conflict, they locate a space where their overlapping experiences circumvent this particular obstacle:

> 'You know, you really need to go out and get other Arab friends besides me, girl.' 'Yeah, honey, and you need to get other Jewish friends besides me.' 'Yeah, I can't be your only Arab.' 'Me neither, your only Jew.' 'Yeah. Puts too much pressure on us.' 'Yeah. Sugar?' 'Yeah. Two lumps.' 'Yeah." There was a clink of spoons. They stirred and stirred and sipped.[84]

Khadra and Blu find this space of common experience, illustrating how a narrative of self is comprised of one's interactions with another. It is the encounters with others and the negotiations required with recognition that form the thread of a narrative of self. Of course, Khadra is not Jewish nor is Blu Arab, but it is their ability to glimpse in the other something of their self; while

[82] Kahf 316.
[83] Kahf 321.
[84] Kahf 322.

they are different, in some ways their narratives mirror each other. This is the possibility that a narrative of self as a process produces.

In Philadelphia, Khadra also meets other Muslims, who share her religious affiliation but differ from her in how they manifest it. Through these characters' diverse approaches to Islam, the novel underscores the multiplicity of experiences of the faith. The first character, in Philadelphia, who presents a challenge to Khadra's sense of religious belonging is Seemi Dost, a Pakistani immigrant who works as a therapist for autistic children. They meet at a bookstore looking at Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. Seemi defines herself as agnostic and is antagonistic towards those she identifies as fundamentalists. Through Seemi's character, Khadra encounters a different type of extremism. For example, when Khadra refuses to attend a public reading by Salman Rushdie because of his depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, Seemi reacts vehemently and sets up a dichotomy where Khadra either supports Rushdie or is a fundamentalist: "'That's bogus!' Seemi snapped. 'And it doesn't even make *sense*. You can't have it both ways. You either come out and support him, or you're one of *them.* There's no room here for any other position!'"[85] Khadra articulates clearly that she does not condone the fatwa on Rushdie's life but that she feels uncomfortable with the novel. Khadra's position reflects her more nuanced approach at this point of the novel and her recognition, unlike Seemi, of the unethical demand set up by a dichotomy, where one person or group determines the boundaries of belonging. The dichotomy of "us" and "them" is destabilized by the constant presence of an in-between position and the impossibility of a complete and coherent account at any one point. Khadra, now, represents that in-between status.

[85] Kahf 333.

Chrif Benzid is another character who illustrates this problematic. He is a Berber from Tunisia whom Khadra meets at photography school and with whom she forms a romantic relationship. The First Gulf War in 1991 brings Khadra and Chrif together. They are both troubled by the war and the reactions of their fellow Americans: "They watched these images…seeing the fiery glow dropping from the dark sky into dark city. Some guys at a booth shouted 'Whoo! Nuke 'em!'…Khadra covered her face when the screen showed shots of Baghdad street in rubble."[86] While both Khadra and Chrif are saddened by the war, they approach the conflicts in the Middle East differently, stemming from their religious commitment. Chrif identifies himself as a secular Muslim as opposed to those he refers to as "religious Muslims":

> A family of Muslims, the classically observant sort with the beards and hijabs, was praying under a tall cottonwood tree. 'Why do these people have to make a spectacle of themselves all the time? Chrif said. 'These people? Which people?' she said… 'Muslims.' 'Uh, you're a Muslim yourself.' 'Not like that, man. I'm a secular Muslim. These religious Muslims, they always have to embarrass themselves, on some level. All I know is, they give us a bad name. Like, let's make sure the entire world knows we're religious nuts. Look at them, praying in the middle of the park with their rear-ends in the air.'[87]

While a different dichotomy than the one Seemi formulates, it is still unstable because Chrif does not recognize the diverse experiences in-between and in that way commits an act of ethical violence. In this scene, Chrif determines that simply because of the act of prayer this family should be categorized as "religious nuts." Interestingly, while he identifies himself as a type of Muslim, he subscribes to the rhetoric that portrays practicing Muslims, especially if they engage in visual acts of devotion, as people to be feared. His position parallels Orvil Hubbard's position earlier in the novel. Orvil is a native to Simmonsville who protests the purchase of a building for

[86] Kahf 338.
[87] Kahf 337.

the Dawah Center. At a city council meeting, Orvil maintains that the Muslims will "destroy the character of our town."[88] Akin to Chrif's position, Orvil suggests that Muslims are people to be feared and thus must be prevented from practicing their faith openly. For Chrif, adherence to Islam simply means corporeal punishment like "cutting off hands and stoning and shit."[89] He rejects the idea that Islam as a faith evolves and that there are different types of Muslims and levels of adherence. Ironically, Chrif's position parallels Ebtehaj and Wajdy's position because it aims to depict a complex faith and diverse community in a monolithic framework:

> She [Khadra] wanted to make him [Chrif] admit that being Muslim wasn't such a straitjacket. It was the same argument she had with her mother. She didn't expect Chrif to be arguing for the same thing as her mother, that Islam was rigid and homogenous. It's like, they both *wanted* Islam to be this monolith, only for her mother it was good, for him bad. She knew it wasn't that simple.[90]

Having attained a level of humility, Khadra is cognizant of the dangers of a construct which does not reveal the intricacies of lived experiences. A monolith, Islam, American, *etcetera*, denies the complexities inherent to individual and collective narratives of self.

Multiple perspectives on events, terms, and individual and collective narratives are traced throughout the novel. It underscores the danger of narrow points of reference. This can result in serious consequences, where individual and collective experiences are not accounted for, as it does in the case of Bitsy Hudnut, Khadra's Iranian new roommate. The interaction between Khadra and Bitsy is troubled from the outset. Bitsy harbors a hatred for Arabs, which she articulates in notes for Khadra. The common thread in all the notes relates to Arabs spreading Islam to the Persian Empire in the 7th century. Initially, Khadra assumes that Bitsy's animosity stems from a sense of superiority and denial of heritage; however, during the course of an

[88] Kahf 42.
[89] Kahf 344.
[90] Kahf 344.

encounter with Bitsy, she realizes that Bitsy's sentiments are the result of fear. Khadra becomes aware of Bitsy's sentiments when she addresses her by Fatma-Zahra Gordafarid, her legal name, while wearing hijab. Bitsy's reaction is terror. She informs Khadra that both her parents were killed in the Revolution by Muslims dressed in the same attire. The Iranian Revolution that earlier in the novel Khadra celebrated because it represented the emergence of an Islamic power symbolized a moment of terror for Bitsy. Through this one encounter, the novel stresses the necessity of acknowledging multiple vantage points, so that particular perceptions are not excluded. This applies to various historical encounters in the novel and speaks to the context of the novel itself.

As mentioned earlier, Zuhura's story is defined by ambiguity. Not only does her death remain a mystery, but questions emerge around Zuhura's narrative of self that are never resolved. Zuhura and the inability to determine with certainty who she was functions as a symbol for Khadra's struggle to formulate her own narrative of self. Khadra identifies later with Zuhura, while she is in Philadelphia, specifically the challenge to reconcile lived experience with the community's construct of Islam and the exclusivist configuration of an American, represented by individuals like Orvil Hubbard.

> Khadra wanted her photographs to find the truth of their subject, to see beyond first appearances. To discern. But what truth can a photo get? How do you see something true and real about a person, any person? Out of all those surfaces like the thousand sides of the eye of a fly? Who had Zuhura been? You thought you knew her, but then as you grew up you figured, well maybe you had seen only a part of her in your limited vision as a little girl, the part you wanted to see. 'This seems to be it.' Wasn't that—in the Quran—what the Queen of Sheba had been careful to say when faced with an enigma? Not, 'I am certain I know,' not the overweening claim, but the more modest, more tentative, 'It *seems* to be so.' Who had Zuhura been, really? A martyr?...But what if she'd been just a regular Muslim girl trying to make her way through the obstacle course—through the impossible, contradictory hopes the Muslim community had for her, and the infuriating,

> confining assumptions the Americans put on her? A girl looking for a way to be, just *be*, outside that tug-of-war?[91]

This quote raises a number of important points in relation to the struggle of formulating a narrative of self, especially when one must navigate between various configurations. In the second half of the novel, photography becomes an aporia through which to explore how Butler's argument functions in the story. Khadra finds that the camera provides her with a different lens to view others. In some situations, the camera allows her to enter into spaces where others are not privy, for example, when she photographs segregated Muslim weddings. Here, Khadra reflects on what a photograph means in relation to the person. What does a photograph capture about a person? Can one know another from a singular image captured at a moment of time? Similar to a photograph, the narrative of self can only provide an account at a particular point in time and does not relay the entirety of lived experience. The photograph, like a narrative of self, only seems to answer the question "Who are you?". The reference to the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'an further emphasizes the disjunction between appearance and the depth of lived experience. In the Qur'anic narrative, the Queen of Sheba's throne is taken from her to Solomon and disguised. When she is asked "Is your throne like this?," she responds by saying, "It seems to be the same."[92] Even though the Queen of Sheba is being asked to identify a throne, not a person, she cannot speak with absolute certainty; in other words, there are limits to absolute recognition. Similarly, Khadra, along with the other characters in the novel, cannot say with certainty that they knew who Zuhura was, but only who she seemed to be. Over the course of the novel, Khadra and the other characters realize that there is a place of uncertainty and flux that is in between the various configurations and that part of recognition is, as Butler maintains, humility.

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[91] Kahf 357-358.
[92] Qur'an, Chapter 27, Verses 41-42.

Like *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* addresses the problematic nature of the question "Who are you?" and the context in which this question with a demand for a singular response is often posed. While situated at different points in the history of the United States, both novels deconstruct the problematic images of Islam and their effect on the Muslim American community. *Once in a Promised Land* tells the story of Jassim, a Jordanian hydrologist, and his wife Salwa, a Palestinian Jordanian, in the early days and months after the September 11th attack. The novel depicts the struggles of Muslims and Arabs after the attacks and the way in which a heightened patriotism combined with fear led to a destructive paranoia, which had consequences for anyone perceived to be an "Other".

Although *Once in a Promised Land* marks the intensified fear of Arabs and Muslims that emerged after the 9/11 attacks, the negative perception of these groups has a long history in the United States. Edward Said in *Covering Islam* maintains that the creation of "Islam" as a construct that embodies evil, destruction, and an entity to be feared has been utilized in the American mainstream from at least the Iranian Revolution. According to Said, Islam, as an abstraction and not the multiple manifestations of a lived faith, has occupied a contentious position in the United States. This position, he argues, has been employed to construct an image of Islam that can be utilized in service of political aims. He writes: "The result has been a gross simplification of 'Islam,' so that numerous manipulative aims can be realized, from the stirring up of a new Cold War, to the instigation of racial antipathy, to mobilization for a possible invasion, to the continued denigration of Muslims and Arabs."[93] Here, Said underscores the two important points. First, the term "Islam", as it has been employed in the West as well as some

[93] Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) lviii.

Muslims with specific political agendas, must be deconstructed because it does not reflect its multiple manifestations. In fact, Said insists that a singular Islam does not exist because every instance of Islam must be read as an interpretation of the faith and not an objective entity that does not reflect historical change or shifting political realities. He writes: "This is to say that the media's Islam, the Western scholar's Islam, the Western reporter's Islam, and the Muslim's Islam are all acts of will and interpretation that take place in history, and can only be dealt with in history as acts of will and interpretation."[94] Second, these constructs are reproduced in times of crises and often involve maligning all Arabs and Muslims in the West. This is possible because of a repertoire of readily accessible distorted images. Said writes: "…there is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized limitlessly by means of a handful of recklessly general and repeatedly deployed clichés. And always it is supposed that the 'Islam' being talked about is some real and stable object out there where 'our' oil supplies happen to be found."[95] Thus, the explanations for the backlash against Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived to belong to either group as stemming from the intense emotions after the attacks should be queried.

Steven Salaita in *Anti-Arab Racism* argues that the reaction in the days after the attacks was with fueled by a negative image of Arabs and Muslims that was already part of the American narrative. Salaita contends that the reactions to 9/11 should be analyzed within a historical framework. He argues that racism is a fundamental aspect of the American narrative, and that Arabs and Muslims are the most recent targets of this racism. For Salaita, the problematic images and rhetoric regarding Arab and Muslim Americans deployed after the

[94] Said, *Covering Islam* 45.
[95] Said, *Covering Islam* li.

attacks were firmly established in the national culture. The process of targeting these groups after 9/11 is part of a larger framework of exclusion that Salaita maintains is a fundamental aspect of the American national narrative. Salaita identifies the politics of exclusion directed at Arab and Muslim Americans as a facet of the racism that he asserts is part of an American racism that dates back to the begins of the United States. In the case of Arab and Muslim Americans, the racism is further complicated by the United States' involvement and interest in the Middle East. Thus, for Salaita, the backlash after 9/11 was simply another manifestation of what he refers to as the anti-Arab racism that has been an aspect of the American narrative. It is worth citing Salaita's definition of "anti-Arab racism":

> I use it generally to mean acts of physical violence against Arabs based not on chance but largely (or exclusively) on the ethnicity of the victim; moments of ethnic discrimination in schools, civil institutions, and the workplace; the Othering of Arabs based on essentialized or biologically determined ideology; the totalization and dehumanization of Arabs by continually referring to them as terrorists; the marginalization of Arabs as it is informed by exclusionary conceptions of Americanness; the taunting of Arabs with epithets such as *sand nigger*, *dune coon*, *camel jockey*, *towelhead*, and *raghead*; the profiling of Arabs based on name, religion, or country of origin; and the elimination of civil liberties based on distrust of the entire group rather than on the individuals within the group rather than on the individuals within the group who may merit suspicion. In short, the redirection of classic American racism at a non-White ethnic group whose origins lie in an area of the world marked for colonization by the United States and whose residents are therefore dehumanized for the sake of political expediency.[96]

This detailed description of anti-Arab racism offers a useful framework to examine Halaby's fictional depiction of the reality that Arab and Muslim Americans encountered in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Halaby's novel maps out the configurations of anti-Arab racism and demonstrates its precarious consequences through the story of Jassim and Salwa. The anti-Arab and Muslim rhetoric that Jassim and Salwa encounter after the attacks reflects the process that Said and Salaita describe in their work. Anti-Arab and Muslim rhetoric quickly formed the

[96] Salaita 12-13.

foundation of a heightened patriotism because it drew from a familiar repertoire of images of these groups. Halaby utilizes fairy tale to structure the novel and to illustrate the American dream as a fiction. Furthermore, the novel problematizes the idea that the American dream is equally accessible to all members of the society. It questions what it means to be an American and what constitutes a sense of home.

Once in a Promised Land is divided into six parts. The first and the last part are named "Before" and "After." The remaining four sections are simply numbered. This sectioning functions as an important structural device for the story. In the first and last part, Halaby utilizes the concept of fairy tale to frame the novel. Both parts open with transliteration of the Arabic phrase "*kan ya ma kan fee qadeem az-zamaan"* ("There was and there wasn't in olden times") which begins fairy tales in the Arabic oral tradition. "Before" introduces the reader to Jassim and Salwa and establishes the time frame for the novel as immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Moreover, it indicates that Jassim and Salwa, like the vast majority of Muslims, are permanently altered by the events because they are Arab and Muslim. The hardcover edition of the novel contains a section that was later omitted in the paperback edition.

After this initial introduction, the hardback edition continues with an exchange between what is presumably a security officer at an airport and the narrator, who represents Arabs and Muslims. The questions posed to the character are now standard in security checks and include "Were you the only one person to pack your luggage?" and "Has your luggage been out of your possession at any time?" The narrator goes through security and is chosen for further screening. The narrator responds to the security officer's questions by laying a box out and directs the reader to put all their stereotypes and preconceptions about Arabs and Muslims into the box in

order to hear the story. These stereotypes, the narrator insists, could be deeply etched into the reader's psyche and thus maintains that he or she will wait for the reader to remove any negative notions that include violence, submissive women, and militant men. The narrator also asks that derogatory names like "Sand Nigger, Rag Head, and Camel Jockey" be put in the box, insisting that they will get in the way of the story. This exchange was removed in the paperback edition a year later. The presence of this exchange indicates to the reader that the following story will confront the problematic consequences of stereotypes. Moreover, it makes demands on the reader as to how they should approach this story. Without this exchange, there is still an indication that the novel will focus on the impact of the 9/11 attacks on Jassim and Salwa, as Arabs and Muslims; however, the reader is not compelled to reflect on his or her perceptions of Arabs and Muslims at the outset. In other words, the absence of this exchange demonstrates that the demands for Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 to explain themselves as communities and to address the perceptions of others about them is not made of other groups. By demanding that the reader reflect on the stereotypes on Arabs and Muslims that they might have, the narrator is asking that the reader look inward and consider how they perceive themselves.

The last section of the novel titled "After" begins in the same way as the first section, utilizing the fairy tale formula "*kan ya ma kan fee qadeem az-zamaan*." This functions to frame the story of Jassim and Salwa's experiences and perceptions of America as part of a fairy tale. In this final section, neither Salwa nor Jassim are specifically named, but both are implied in the fairy tale of Nus Nsays, which is mentioned earlier in the novel. The story of Nus Nsays revolves around a young man who is born small (literally, half of a half) but is able to achieve great things. When the fairy tale is related in the novel, Nus Nsays sets off to hunt with the Neighbor's

son. They lose their way and are found by the ghula, a creature who deceives the Neighbor's son and tempts him to go to her home. She plans to eat both of them once they fall asleep. Nus Nsays, realizing her plan, is able to wear out the ghula until she falls asleep and save his friend. Later, he is able to capture the ghula for his village. Salwa recalls also that she would query her grandmother about the fairytale. Her grandmother maintains that the tale of Nus Nsays is an allegory for the Palestinian struggle against oppression. However, she is unable to provide Salwa with an answer for what the ghula represents. In the "Afterword," the idea of America as a "promised land" is problematized by this framing. Like the first section, the last section ends with a conversation between two unnamed characters: the narrator and the reader. Although Salwa and Jassim are not specifically mentioned in this last section, it is clear to the reader that their story has collapsed into the fairy tale of Nus Nusays. Salwa takes the place of the Neighbor's son as the one who is deceived by the ghula. In the context of this version of the tale, Jassim represents the nightingale, who initially tries to warn the young girl (Salwa) about the true nature of ghula. However, the nightingale, deceived as well by the ghula, perceives her to be simply an old lady, ceases to warn the girl. The nightingale does not remain in this state for long and tries to warn the girl once again when the ghula attempts to eat her. Hassan—another character— is the hero who tries to save the young girl from the ghula; while attempting to kill the ghula, though, he inadvertently stabs the girl, breaking the spell and causing her to realize the deceptiveness of her surroundings. It becomes clear to the reader that the young girl is Salwa, the nightingale is Jassim, and the ghula is America. Like her place of birth, the ghula stiches threads that connect Salwa to her and to draw her in. Moreover, America/ghula is not what it appears and Salwa is misled by the way that America/ghula portrays itself. The Jassim/nightingale cannot

save Salwa/young girl but attempts to rectify the situation by returning the damaged girl home, implying that America was not her home. The story and the novel end with: "*There's no 'they lived happily ever after'*? 'Happily ever after' happens only in American fairy tales. *Wasn't this an American fairy tale?* It was and it wasn't."[97] This quote, and the framing of the novel within the tale of Nus Nsays, underscores both the idea that America does not represent home for everyone and that the American narrative that anyone can achieve a sense of belonging is a fairy tale.

The rest of the novel is divided into parts and then further divided into chapters. Part one, the shortest section comprised of only one chapter, describes Jassim's morning routine before he goes for his daily swim: "he got up, washed his face, brushed his teeth, and relived himself, the beginning of a morning ritual as close to prayer as could allow."[98] For Jassim, religion does not play a significant role in his life. However, swimming exemplifies balance and fills the role of religion for Jassim as indicated in the quote. When this balance is disrupted by the 9/11 attacks that occur in this first part of the novel, it leads to a dismantling of Jassim's experience of the "American dream." In addition to Jassim, the reader is introduced to Jack Franks, Salwa, and Hassan. Jack Franks is an ex-Marine. His daughter marries a Jordanian exchange student and moves with him to Jordan. Jack attempts to "save" his daughter but finds that she is comfortable in her new life in Jordan and considers it to be her home. Jack's explanation for the change in her daughter is that "'She converted. She's an Arab now.'"[99] Jack typifies some of the stereotypes and images of Arabs and Muslim mentioned in the first section of the novel. This is not only illustrated in his description of his daughter's decision but is also

[97] Halaby 335.
[98] Halaby 3.
[99] Halaby 6.

indicated in the exchange between him and Jassim. First, Jack assumes that Jassim's wife is American, presumably a marriage for citizenship. Second, he presumes that if Jassim's wife is Jordanian that she must be veiled. Finally, Jack takes the liberty of asking if Jassim's wife is beautiful, knowing that it is not acceptable to pose that kind of question. Moreover, it signifies the way in which Jack objectifies Arab and Muslim women and removes their agency so that men determine how they will appear. "This question went too far, and Jack Franks seemed to sense it. 'No offense intended. I'm just amazed by the beauty of the women there. Incredible. The hair, the eyes. No wonder you fellas cover them up."[100] For Jack, Arab and Muslim women are limited to their physical attributes, which must be why Arab and Muslim men cover them up; the women in Jack's assessment do not make that choice for themselves. The interaction between Jack and Jassim reflects the problematic nature of querying someone perceived as an Other and demanding that they answer those questions regardless of how intrusive they are.

Unlike Jassim, Salwa does not have a sense of balance in her life. Salwa decides that she wants to have a child (despite the agreement between her and Jassim to the contrary) and stops her birth control. This decision and the ensuing miscarriage transforms the direction of Salwa and Jassim's marriage. The 9/11 attacks compound the problems, causing their lives to unravel more quickly. Salwa, perhaps more than any other character, develops a strong sense of disillusionment when she is confronted with the heightened American patriotism after the attacks. In contrast to Jassim who comes to the United States as an adult, Salwa's connection to the United States precedes her marriage to Jassim and her life in Jordan. Born in the United States, Salwa grows up with restlessness and a desire to return to her land of her birth. Salwa's sense of home is complicated by the fact that she is a Palestinian Jordanian American. In other

[100] Halaby 7.

words, her search for home is perpetual and in a constant state of flux. At the outset of the novel, however, Salwa perceives home to be in the land of her birth and this is marked by the symbol of silk pajamas. Her love for silk pajamas, which for her family signifies luxury and therefore foreignness, generates a feeling of desire for life in the United States. However, her perception of the United States is based on the images of consumerism in the American narrative that is exported to other parts of the world and not a lived experience:

> Unfortunately, Salwa was neither acrobat nor pals with a clever surgeon, and as a result, America pulled and yanked on her from a very young age, forever trying to reel her in. Only the America that pulled at her not the America of her birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood and the Marlboro man, and therefore impossible to find. Once in America, Salwa still searched and tripped and bought smaller and sexier pajamas in the hope that she would one day wake up in that Promised Land.[101]

The idea of a Promised Land is itself problematic and is dismantled in the novel. Conflating America with the Promised Land is not specific to Salwa. In fact many immigrants may view America through this lens. The promise of success and freedom creates this narrative about the United States. Of course, the novel deconstructs the notion that America represents a promised land for all its inhabitants. This phrase is further complicated by the fact that Palestine represents an aspect of Salwa's narrative of self and that in this quote specifically, and in the novel as a whole, it comes to embody the Promised Land that is always beyond reach. In other words, the United States does not represent the Promised Land because Salwa and Jassim's experience (and the experience of other immigrants, especially Arab and Muslim immigrants) challenges this possibility; rather, the Promised Land denotes a space of complete belonging, which, the United States does not represent for these two characters.

[101] Halaby 49.

Over the course of the novel, there is a clear transformation in the way that Salwa and Jassim view their surroundings and their narrative of self in a post-9/11 America. Each comes to the United States for different reasons. Jassim comes initially for a Master's degree but planned to return to Jordan. However, bureaucracy and lack of opportunity in Jordan causes Jassim to pursue a Ph.D. and then remain in the United States. Jassim's connection to the United States and Jordan is complicated by the role each space plays in his narrative: "His Ph.D. and experience were very impressive, but America, once tasted, is hard to spit out, with its shiny tools and machinery. Jordan pumps through the blood, but America stays in the mouth."[102] This quote underscores the fact that while both places have influenced Jassim, his connection to America is more artificial and based on the financial opportunities and comforts it offers him, while his connection to Jordan is deep-rooted. Throughout the novel, Jassim appears to be settled in his life in United States, but it becomes evident that even though he does not express his concern, he reflects on the ensuing events around him. When Salwa expresses her concern about a possible backlash and the impact it may have on Jassim and other Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived to belong to those groups, Jassim believes that his fellow Americans will not retaliate on the Arab and Muslim populations: "'People are not so ignorant as to take revenge on a Lebanese family for the act of a few extremist Saudis who destroyed those buildings."[103] Immediately, Jassim is proven wrong when a Sikh man is shot and killed because he was mistaken as a Muslim. This account in the novel is based on an incident that actually occurred in the early days after the attacks, when Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man, was shot and killed,

[102] Halaby 64.
[103] Halaby 21.

becoming one of the first victims of a backlash.[104] Even though he does not openly voice his concern about the increased patriotism and anxiety after 9/11 like Salwa, Jassim is aware that the events have created a hostile atmosphere. The difference in Salwa and Jassim's reactions to the events is illustrated in one scene in the novel. While shopping for a gift for the daughter of family friend, one of the security guards follows Jassim. When Salwa confronts the security guard, she is told that someone in the store felt uncomfortable with Jassim's presence. Jassim does not want to pursue the issue, but Salwa insists on understanding the reason why Jassim is considered a threat and demands an apology.

While Jassim does not react in the same manner as Salwa, he is still disconcerted by the actions of some of the other characters; for example, after swimming one day, he reflects on the actions of some of his co-workers and how their demeanor towards him had changed: "Jassim felt a vague prickle as he reviewed his comments at the meeting, as he analyzed the dropped gazes of several of the staff members, the less than warm reception he had received from some of the city's engineers, a group that usually welcomed him with doughnuts and laugher."[105] Although Jassim is disturbed by the changes he notices at work, he does not believe that it is a result of the attacks and concern about his connection to the hijackers. The events of 9/11, while not generating an immediate external reaction or concern about a backlash, occupy Jassim internally to the point that the images of destruction continually play in his mind. Even when he swims, and usually finds balance and reprieve, he cannot escape from the images of that day:

> Jassim got out of bed and went to the bathroom, hoping that movement would force the repeating images from his mind. His actions were automatic, but his brain seized on picture after picture, humans leaping from impossible heights, plumes of smoke filling the air and then charging down the narrow streets. He wondered what it smelled like.

[104] Elver 151.
[105] Halaby 26.

> Ash? Dust? Burning steel? Were the smells of people drowned by the deaths of those two buildings? The buildings didn't actually die, though did they? No, they were not living creatures. He doubted he would ever find out about the smell, nor would he see the images again of the people jumping, as it was considered too gruesome for the American public. Details rated X. Or was X only for pornographic images?[106]

Jassim's reaction to the event and the images that were repeatedly played in his mind after the attacks indicate an individual who is struggling to comprehend the immensity and heinousness of the violence on a human level. In other words, he thinks about the events in terms of an intensely corporeal experience that reflected a human loss, not an American, Arab, or Muslim loss. For this reason, he has recognized that some of the heightened fear would in fact lead to dangerous presumptions about numerous communities and a backlash against many individuals who did not have any connection to the hijackers. Jassim's reaction to the 9/11 attacks does not change until he becomes the victim of an FBI witch hunt. It is only at that point that Jassim realizes that his assessment of the American Dream and comforts of American life are not entirely free of misconception.

Jassim's realization is generated by a number of events that subsequently lead to the FBI investigation, namely Salwa's miscarriage and Evan's death. Part of Salwa's struggle early on the novel is her desire to have a child despite Jassim's unwillingness. Jassim is unaware of Salwa's desire for children or her pregnancy. However, one morning after having to return from the gym early, Jassim finds Salwa crying. At that point, Salwa discloses to Jassim that she was pregnant and that she miscarried. Jassim is already troubled by the disruption to his morning routine because it affected his sense of balance. After going for a swim later in the day, Jack Franks initiates another conversation with Jassim about Salwa, further unsettling him. While driving home, Jassim accidently hits and kills Evan Parker, a teenage boy. This accident sets in

[106] Halaby 19.

motion a series of events that lead to an FBI investigation and an unraveling of Salwa and Jassim's life together. All of this occurs within an atmosphere of exclusionary patriotism that exacerbates the situation. Eventually, the narrative of an American Dream that prompted Jassim to remain in the United States and Salwa to marry Jassim is destabilized. Even though Jassim and Salwa are the main focus of the novel, the American Dream as a narrative is problematized in regards to a number of characters, if not all of them. This will be explored further over the course of the discussion.

As a result of the accident and the miscarriage, Jassim and Salwa drift apart. Jassim and Salwa are both mourning a loss and are unable to help the other address the trauma that they have endured. As a result, their behaviors also change, leading both to engage in actions they would not normally do. Both are unable to restore a sense of balance or peace in their lives. The trauma of the accident and the inability to come to terms with killing another human being—obviously distinguishing him from the hijackers—causes Jassim to stop swimming, his main source of balance, to consider having an affair, and to lose concentration at work. His disorientation, within the context of the patriotism that concerns Salwa so much, draws the attention of Jack Franks and Bella, a secretary at his office, who then report the "information" that they gathered to the FBI. However, it is worth noting that both Jack Franks and Bella's interest in Jassim stems from the hostile atmosphere in the days after the attacks. While Jassim's behavior alters after the accident, Jack Franks and Bella's actions are illustrative of the dangerous consequences of the exclusionary patriotism; neither one of them knew Jassim with any depth, yet they determined that the change in his behavior can only be explained by his heritage and religion. Not only have they posed the question "Who are you?," they have

answered it with their own response. Even more problematic than demanding a singular answer to a question that requires complexity and multiplicity, their actions to determine the answer for another without the possibility for defense clearly demonstrates an aggression.

Jassim's disorientation stems from his preoccupation with the loss of a life and with the idea that he must meet Evan's mother and offer his condolences, as well any assistance, in order to restore balance in his life. The meeting between Jassim and Mary Parker, Evan's mother, brings to light a number of issues that have consequences later in the novel. The first of which is that Mary, when finding out that Jassim is an Arab, is shocked and reveals to Jassim that Evan was affected by the attacks and developed a hatred for Arabs and a desire to kill them:

> She was laughing, almost guffawing. 'I'm sorry but that is so fucked up. See, when 9/11 happened, Evan was freaked out, totally freaked out…[he] ranted and raved about how Arabic people should all be kicked out of this country, rounded, herded up, and thrown out. I ignored it for a while, thought he was just scared. We were all scared those people were going to blow up all up. Then he started talking about how he wished he could kill an Arab—my own son talking about killing someone! I sat him down and told him two wrongs don't make a right, that most Arabic people don't have anything to do with this. He wouldn't listen—refused to. Talked like a bigot, and I was so mad at him. I think he got it from his dad, who is a racist prick. That's why I say that God is one fucked-up bastard, to have Evan die under the wheels of an Arabic person's car.[107]

This ironic twist of fate has dangerous consequences for Jassim once the FBI investigation begins. Mary and Evan Parker's attitudes towards Arabs after the 9/11 reflect the way different reactions to the fear and patriotism that spread across the country. Even after meeting an Arab, Mary's sentiments towards Jassim stem from the loss of her son and not from hatred of Arabs. Her reaction reflects a possible response to the attacks: Mary like other Americans was afraid, however, recognized that Arab and Muslim Americans are not the terrorists and should not be punished for the acts of individuals who share nothing more than a heritage.

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[107] Halaby 200-201.

Evan's reaction, on the other hand, reflects the dangers of stereotypes and a patriotism that excludes other citizens. Earlier in the novel, when the reader is initially introduced to Evan, after buying drugs, he is waiting for the bus and a fellow passenger notices the sticker on Evan's skateboard saying, "Terrorist Hunting License." Despite Evan's comment that he has the right to hunt a terrorist and what he will do if he identifies one, when Evan poses the question to the fellow passenger what he would do if he saw a terrorist, the passenger responds: "'Son, there's so much more to it than that…Isn't it crazy what's happening to this world?"[108] The passenger deconstructs Evan's claim and reflects a more complicated analysis of the situation in the post 9/11 context. The passenger, who is African American, recognizes the problematic identity politics that are at play in Evan's position. Other minority groups, African Americans especially, are cognizant of the implications of employing race and ethnicity to determine belonging to the nation. Evan's belief that one's appearance answers the highly contentious question "Who are you?" definitively is deconstructed by this man's response to his question. The reaction that Evan displays through that simple—yet dangerous— sticker results in the disintegration of Jassim and Salwa's life. The consequences of Evan's sticker for Jassim are even more pronounced because the FBI suggest that Jassim was aware of Evan's anti-Arab sentiments and thus intended to kill him. Evan's beliefs on Arabs and the fact that he can no longer be questioned on those beliefs but Jassim can, puts Jassim in the critical position of having to defend himself against the questioners—the FBI agents—who find him (and Arab and Muslim Americans in general) to be a readily available target in the atmosphere of fear that arose after the attacks. Through the image of the sticker, Halaby depicts the precarious situation that many Arab and Muslim Americans have endured as a result of the reaction of their compatriots who

[108] Halaby76.

posed and answered the question "Who are you?" without demonstrating humility and generosity as Butler argues. Rather than a dialogic exchange, the interaction, expressed through the singular image of the sticker, is unidirectional and refuses to acknowledge the experiences of Arab and Muslim Americans and their construction of their own narratives.

Evan is not the only character who develops animosity and feelings of hatred toward Arab and Muslim Americans. However, unlike Jack Franks and Bella who instigated the FBI investigation and do not make a distinction between Arabs and Muslims as a collective and individuals, Penny, a waitress at Denny's, demonstrates another dimension of the negative response after the attacks. She occupies an ambivalent role in the novel. On the one hand, Penny assists Jassim to overcome his intense emotions in relation to Evan's death. In this sense, she acknowledges Jassim on a human level and offers him a space to voice his concerns and struggles in regards to this loss. On the other hand, however, Penny harbors similar sentiments as Evan towards Arabs and Muslims in general. She watches the news intently and views the American invasion after 9/11 to be justified and internalizes the rhetoric of the war that depicts Arabs and Muslims as terrorists and thus the clear enemy:

> Nightly Penny watched the late news as well as the evening news; she had become obsessed by it ever since the Twin Towers had been destroyed. Each time the president spoke about the war on Terror she was outraged, sickened that there were people so sinister that they would want to harm innocent Americans. When he talked about all the American men and women who served for freedom, freedom all around the world, she felt unspeakable pride. If she had money, she would have sent it to him; if she had been younger, she would have enlisted, showed all those terrorists what Americans were made of.[109]

Penny's disposition towards the war and the rhetoric of "us vs. them" is complicated by her empathy towards Jassim. When pressed by her roommate about the apparent contradiction

[109] Halaby 280.

between her attitude towards the war and Arabs and Muslims (terrorists in her assessment) and Penny's attraction to Jassim, she rationalizes her feelings towards Jassim by asserting that he is "nothing like those people."[110] Penny perceives Jassim as being an "acceptable" Arab because he is "a scientist, and he's been here awhile, and you can tell he's a good person."[111] That is to say that by virtue of his apparent acculturation and/or assimilation to American norms he is therefore different from those Arabs and Muslims outside of the United States who still display traits that require the civilizing intervention of the United States "[to bring] democracy to places that knew only tyranny and terror."[112] Penny's attitude represents the notion that immigrants must assimilate and not display any markers that would instantly identify them as an Other. Jassim is perceived by Penny to be a model minority: he is successful and does not show any sign of a commitment to Islam or an Arab identity. Of course, Halaby is problematizing this concept that one can know another individual by simply looking at them or projecting stereotypes. This is made clear when Evan believes that he will know a terrorist when he sees one and Penny who believes that she can distinguish between a good Arab and all other Arabs, who are terrorists.

Through the various characters and the plot of the novel, Halaby highlights the disconcerting consequences of an exclusive patriotism that draws from a repertoire of stereotypical images. Each of the characters represents a dimension of the problematic configuration where individuals and collectives are perceived to be a dangerous "other" and are faced with the threatening question "Who are you?" The culmination of this configuration occurs in the FBI interrogation when Jassim is faced with the reality that he has already been judged and deemed to be everything he is not. Despite the fact that the FBI agents claim that they simply

[110] Halaby 281.
[111] Halaby 281.
[112] Halaby 281.

have a few questions for Jassim, it becomes apparent at the outset that this meeting is an interrogation and that he is already guilty. The questions that are addressed to Jassim reflect the interrogatory nature of the "meeting": he is asked about Evan's death and whether it is a coincidence that Evan had a sticker indicating anti-Arab sentiments, Jassim's reaction to the 9/11 attacks, Salwa's reaction to the attacks, money that Salwa sent to Jordan on September 12th, and whether he knew the hijackers personally. When Jassim replies to their problematic queries, it is the first time that he acknowledges the backlash against Arab and Muslims. This recognition coincides with his disillusionment towards the narrative of the American Dream:

> Jassim couldn't help himself. 'Means is one thing, motive is another. I am a scientist. I work to make water safe and available. I am a normal citizen who happens to be an Arab. Yes, I have access to the city's water supply, but I have no desire to abuse it. The mere fact that I am an Arab should not add suspicion to the matter'…'I have spent my entire life trying to find ways to make water safe and accessible for everyone. Just because I am an Arab, because I was raised a Muslim, you want to believe that I am capable of doing evil…Jassim had done nothing wrong and this was America and there should be proof of negligence on his part for his job to be affected…Yes, finally he saw what had been sitting at the back of his consciousness for some time in a not-so-whispered voice: *with or against*. But was he not *with? I understand American society*, he wanted to scream. *I speak your language. I pay taxes to your government. I play your game. I have a right to be here*.[113]

Here Jassim questions the assumption that his ethnicity, heritage, and religion are sufficient to determine who he is. Jassim utilizes and subsequently reverses the rhetoric of the American narrative. He emphasizes the proposition that if an immigrant adheres to the law and contributes to the society, then that individual has earned the right to remain in the United States. Moreover, he highlights the primary premise of American law that there should be sufficient evidence to accuse and convict an individual of a crime. At this point in the novel, Jassim recognizes that the American narrative of the welcoming land of immigrant is an equivocation. Moreover, the

[113] Halaby 232-234.

seemingly clear demarcation of "us" versus "them" is obscured by the reality that narratives of self are defined by multiple markers and fluidity. After this meeting, Jassim's dreams, and his vision of the United States and the American narrative unravels.

While the attacks provided the impetus for a heightened patriotism, it was not the first time in the history of the United States that an exclusive national consciousness evolved in reaction to crisis. At moments of crises, immigrants have been brought to the fore in the national consciousness. The history of the United States in relation to immigrants has been contradictory. According to Ali Behdad, the image of the immigrant has fluctuated between that of a model citizen and a threatening alien. The use of both aspects of the figure of the immigrant have been employed throughout the history of the United States when there have been economic and social crises. Thus, the narrative that the United States is the land of immigrants, Behdad asserts, obscures the tension that has been and continues to be a foundational aspect of the national culture. Behdad argues that constructing an American national narrative requires a process of disavowal where the violent beginnings of the United States and the economic motivations of immigration are suppressed in order to construct a mythical narrative of history. In this narrative, the immigrant is employed to allow for a continual process of what Behdad refers to as "a national project of self-renewal."[114] This tension, which is fundamental to this process of disavowal, emerges in Halaby's novel through the plot and the various characters. The image of the United States as the Promised Land, according Behdad, represents only one aspect of the narrative, which has shifted in response to economic motivations and attempts to construct an national identity. In Halaby's novel, Jassim and Salwa represent this tension. On the one hand

[114] Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005) 7.

they are held up as examples of model citizens. They function to illustrate the aspect of the narrative where the United States is labeled the land of immigrants and thus exceptional. Once the attacks occur, they are transformed into a threatening Other, which enables a politics of exclusion. The result is a homogenous national narrative that omits the very presence of immigrants. Halaby's novel traces this process through Jassim and Salwa's experience at a moment of a national crisis. Furthermore, throughout the course of the story, it becomes clear that Halaby problematizes the notion that the American dream is equally accessible to all members of the society. The narrative of the United States being the land of immigrants and an exceptional nation because of the American Dream is dismantled by the end of novel. This is made clear when Salwa goes to inform Jake, with whom she had a brief affair that she is returning by to Jordan. Outside his apartment, she notices Guatemalan gardeners who are immigrants like her. She realizes that the story of the American Dream is not what it seems and that it a fairy tale, like Nus Nsays, for immigrants and in fact anyone perceived to be an Other:

> [S]he imagined the miles of desert they must have crossed for the opportunity to trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the American Dream. 'It's all a lie!' she wanted to shout. 'A huge lie.' A lie her parents believed in enough that they paved her future with the hope of glass slippers and fancy balls, not understanding that her beginning was not humble enough, nor was her heart pure enough, for her to be the princess in any of these stories. That she did not come from a culture of happy endings. That she would have been much better off munching on fava beans from her ceiling basket. She looked at those dark men looking at her and from a distance she could see their sacrifices, the partial loss of self that they must have agreed to in coming to America, the signing over of the soul.[115]

The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf and *Once in a Promised Land* depict the challenges of Arab and Muslim immigrants and citizens to develop a sense of belonging and to be recognized as part of the American landscape. The two novels reveal the limitations of exclusionary narratives and the

[115] Halaby 316-317.

need to display humility and generosity. By tracing different narratives of Muslim self, the two novels inevitably demonstrate multiple narratives of an American self, where Arab and Muslims, as well as other excluded groups, are included.

Chapter 2: "British Encounters: the Making of British Muslim Identities"

The 9/11 attacks had a rippling affect across the globe and furthered anti-Muslim sentiment in other Western countries in addition to the United States. Similar stereotypes of Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, were employed to further a discourse that made Muslims others in the countries that they worked and lived. The European context, however, is distinctly marked by the violent historical encounter of imperial conquest and colonization. This history impacts the role of immigrants in the European socio-political context. Islam is the second largest religion in Europe[116] and European Muslims have become more visible by making demands for recognition and equal opportunities. The exclusionary national rhetoric that emerged with force after the 9/11 attacks as well as the increasing visibility of European Muslims contextualizes any discussion on Muslim identity on the European landscape. The focus of the next chapters is the British and French context specifically. Both countries, specifically, have an extensive colonial history and many of the immigrants to these countries have come from former colonies. In the last century, immigrants have faced challenges in their host countries, stemming from discriminatory practices directed towards them as individuals and collectives as well as national policies that have made claims for grievances difficult. This history has played a definitive role in how these immigrants have been perceived and how Britishness and Frenchness have been configured.

This process of defining belonging did not begin with the 9/11 attacks; however, as it has been shown in the previous chapter, this event and the reactions that emanated from it reproduced an exclusive patriotic discourse in the United States, and will be argued, in Britain

[116] Iftikhar H. Malik, *Islam and Modernity: Muslims in Europe and the United States* (London: Pluto Press, 2004) 91.

and France. This discourse draws from the historical encounters between various groups and the problematic stereotypical images of Arabs, Muslims and those who are perceived to be Others, After 9/11, Muslim citizens in Europe were also seen as the "enemy within."[117] The context after the attacks produced this discourse on a larger scale, so that a parallel process can be traced in more than one country. Thus, Muslims in all three countries are faced with the challenge of defining their belonging to the nation in which they live and work and within the religious community to which they are bound. Chapter two examines the British contexts and the way in which Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel *The Road from Damascus* and Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* address the issue of Muslim identities in a post-9/11 British context.

There are between 1.5 million to 2 million Muslims in Britain.[118] The majority of British Muslims are immigrants (or children of immigrants) from Pakistan and Bangladesh. There are also African, Arab, Turkish, Bosnian, Afghan, West Indian, and East Asian Muslims.[119] A significant number of immigrants came to Britain from former colonies after World War II because there was a labor shortage. Until the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962, any citizen of British commonwealth countries could migrate and settle in Britain.[120] From the 1970s to the 1980s, more restrictions on immigration were introduced and the number of immigrants decreased. These restrictions resulted from an exclusionary definition of Britishness, in which immigrants represented a threat, a point that Ifikhar H. Malik in *Islam and Modernity* underscores: "The traditional monocultural and colour-based definition of British nationalism hyped up an exclusionary patriotism in which economic refugees were increasingly seen as a

[117] Lorraine P. Sheridan, "Islamophobia Pre– and Post–September 11th, 2001," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 21.3 (March 2006): 319.
[118] Malik. 85.
[119] Malik 85.
[120] Malik 87.

cultural and economic threat instead of being viewed as an asset."[121] Any population increase in that period resulted from family reunions and British-born children.[122] Interestingly, these attitudes that Malik ascribes to an earlier period than the one examined here are mirrored in the post 9/11 British context. Despite the restrictions and the anti-immigrant stance, since the 1970s, British Muslims started to establish religious and cultural institutions to support their community needs. However, they tend to live within their own enclaves. While they have made significant strides, British Muslims still face challenges to mediate between the various aspects of their identities. This situation stems from Britain's history with immigration and racism and has been further exacerbated by external events.

According to Malik, in order to understand the Muslim reality in the British context, it is necessary to trace long-held images of Arabs and Muslims to colonialism, the slave trade, and Orientalism. Malik maintains, "Politico-economic domination and long-held images on both sides, especially following Western evangelical activities and a continuum of cultural, intellectual, military and economic hegemony, have collectively given weight to the British factor relative to its Muslim counterpart."[123] The historical dimension cannot be overemphasized. These encounters between Europeans and Muslims were largely framed by violence and political hegemony and played a significant role in the formation of European identity. The recent attempts to define European identity stem from an earlier process where the contemporary image of the Muslim who is unable to integrate claims to draw from a historical configuration where the Muslim was defined in negative terms and represented everything that a European was not.

[121] Malik 88.
[122] Malik 88.
[123] Malik 60.

Highly problematic depictions of the Other, Muslims and non-Muslims, continued to emerge as Europeans expanded beyond their borders and engaged in slavery and later in colonization. The hegemony of the Europeans, especially of colonizing powers like Britain, produced an unevenness in the power dynamic and put into place a framework in which Muslims were continuously othered to maintain this structure. This power dynamic, Malik asserts, has influenced the relations between Britain, for example, and formerly colonized people:

> Thus, the Europeanisation of the world…justified in the name of culture, religion, politics, and economy, created a perpetual unevenness in the North-South relationship which, despite recent rhetoric of a more globalized world, remains ascendant. To a great extent, the Muslim world-in both the Muslim heartland and the diaspora-has been on the receiving end of this unequal relations for quite some time. Its socioeconomic problems, psychological dislocations, various forms of intra-Muslim conflicts especially of the interstate kind, and continued economic underdevelopment aggravated by political suffocation are the manifestations of imbalances incurred during the colonial-national encounters.[124]

The British context, therefore, is framed by this history of conflict and hegemony. At periods of crises, the consequences of this history emerge and a fear of disrupting "a national sense of belonging rooted in whiteness and Christianity" results.[125]

One dimension of configuration of a narrative of a European self, in this context a British self, is the role of secularism and the anxieties towards specifically the Muslim immigrant and fellow citizen. In the European context, the narrative of secularism has resulted in hostility towards Muslims for their perceived excessive religiosity in the public sphere. Their visibility, according to Meyda Yeğenoğlu, generates anxiety because it reminds Europeans of the continual consequence of their colonial history, represented by the figure of the immigrant. Moreover, the immigrant indicates a breach in a perceived sovereignty and purity of the European identity and

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[124] Malik 70.

[125] Deborah Phillips,"Parallel lives? Challenging discourses of British Muslim self-segregation," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24 (2006): 27.

brings into question their preferred self image. Yeğenoğlu challenges the narrative of secularism. She argues that while Christianity is not readily visible in the public sphere, it underlies many of the cultural symbols of each nation and is one of the central mechanisms to separate European Muslims from other Europeans:

> This can be taken as the complex intermingling of secularism and Christian cultural identity among European people. For this reason, it is highly important that we question whether the privileged position Christianity enjoys as a unifying discursive element in the construction of European identity has decisively ended…The Christian values and the heritage of Europe are either implicitly and/or, in many cases, explicitly, evoked to proclaim the externality of European Muslims to Europe. The evocation of religious belonging that delimits the borders of Europe functions as a means of delineating the ones who are not to be included in the European cultural identity.[126]

Yeğenoğlu argues that the role of Christianity in the configuration of a European narrative of self is most conspicuous in the resistance to Turkey's acceptance into the European Union. Implicit to this resistance is the fact that Turkey is a Muslim majority country, and thus disrupts the attempts to produce a "pure" European identity based on a Christian religious identity.[127] In other words, she asserts that religious difference is relegated to the cultural realm so that Muslim practices, especially the visible acts, are utilized to illustrate the impossibility of integration. Rather than address the continued role of Christianity in configuring a narrative of European self, a "pure" secularism is emphasized so that Islam is always an Other. Islam is doubly othered, according to Yeğenoğlu: "In a context where the secularist narrative relegates religiosity to otherness, Muslim immigrant groups' attempt to articulate their identity through various public representations results in their double othering. By making their religious identity visible, they make not only religiosity but also a *non-Christian* and *non-European* religion present in public

[126] Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Islam, Migrancy, and Hospitality in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 124.
[127] Yeğenoğlu 101.

life."[128] Specifically, she argues that there is "the desire to purify the European public sphere from the trace of otherness."[129] Here, Yeğenoğlu raises another important dimension to the discussion on religion in the European context, which relates back to the role of history. Muslims bring to light this fundamental conflict in the European narrative of secularism and the relegation of religion to the private sphere.

Secularism, however, is not the only issue that impacts the position of European Muslims and their sense of belonging. Racism has been and continues to affect the dynamics between various groups. In his essay "Racial Europeanization," David Theo Goldberg traces the role of race in Europe and suggests that there are attempts to erase its impact in European self-conception. He writes,

> For Europeans, race is not, or really is no longer. European racial denial concerns wanting race in the wake of World War II categorically to implode, to erase itself…A desire at once frustrated and displaced, racist implications always lingering and diffuse, silenced but assumed, always already returned and haunting, buried but alive. Race in Europe has left odourless traces but ones suffocating in the wake of their once denied resinous stench.[130]

Goldberg argues that racism is not addressed thoroughly outside of the Holocaust. By framing the discussion of race within the confines of that event, Europeans are able to distance themselves from the question of race and their colonial history. Goldberg writes, "For Europe, the Holocaust is the defining event, the mark par excellence, of race and racially inscribed histories…But in making the Holocaust the referent point for race, in the racial erasure thus enacted in the European theatre another evaporation is enacted. Europe's colonial history and

[128] Yeğenoğlu 121.
[129] Yeğenoğlu, 145.
[130] David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Europeanization," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29.2 (March 2006): 334.

legacy dissipate if not disappear."[131] Moreover, Goldberg maintains that there is a denial of the impact of this colonial history on the configuration of European identity because it is perceived to take place elsewhere, outside of Europe, to other people, not Europeans, unlike the Holocaust that took place on the European landscape and to individuals who were Europeans.[132]

The refusal to acknowledge the role of race does not erase its affects. Moreover, since the relevance of race is disavowed—it is considered to be an American problem[133]—there needs to be a reformulation of the tension between European Muslims and fellow Europeans. This is done using the language of religion: "Religious distinction is a European concern, or more precisely the tension a growing Christian secularism on the one hand and surging Islamicism on the part of the newcomers with their politically radicalizing islamist networks on the other. Racism, so the dominant claim goes, is not."[134] Goldberg underscores, however, that with the former colonized, especially Muslims, coming to the metropoles that this disavowal of race has become increasingly difficult to maintain. The Muslim figure, therefore, must be constantly reformulated to represent a threat to the European self. This has consequences for European Muslims. They are not able to express grievances along the lines of race and they are never accepted as belonging. This is a point Goldberg underscores in relation to the configuration of European identity: "Europe has long nurtured the civic drive to identify the foreign, to uphold the possibility of keeping the foreign foreign, of permanently foreignizing the '(racially) non-European'. The reproductive logic of Euro-racism ensures that those 'racially non-European' are

[131] Goldberg 336.
[132] Goldberg 336.
[133] Goldberg 343.
[134] Goldberg 343.

never nor can ever *be* European."[135] Thus, Muslims are faced with the challenge that they are not able to receive redress for racism, but they are racialized as a group despite their diverse constitution in order to exclude them from any constitution of a European self. What is required is a narrative of European self that acknowledges its own history and the multiple intersections it has produced, doing so with the humility and generosity that Judith Butler calls for *Giving an Account of Oneself*.[136]

The discussion thus far has focused on European identity more generally. The remainder of the chapter will address the British context. Preceding the 9/11 attacks and the 2005 London bombing, there were earlier events in which British Muslims were perceived as a problem. The first event was the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989, revolving around his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Muslims around the world, including those in Britain, were angered by the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in the novel, which led to numerous protests. While British Muslims largely rejected the idea of the *fatwa* against Rushdie, their reaction was a protest to the social and political inequities they faced. Malik writes:

> It was not merely Rushdie who was the object of this grudge, it was a newer generation of British Muslims, who, in fact, were assuming the vanguard role by replacing first-generation immigrants who, to them, always appeared law-abiding and rather introvert and submissive. These new-generation Muslims were articulating their identity with reference to racial discrimination and fewer job opportunities.[137]

Along with the Rushdie affair, the race riots in the summer of 2001 illustrated the tension underlying the interaction between British Muslims and their compatriots. In reaction to statements by the British National Party (BNP), British Muslim youth, who were frustrated by institutionalized racism, engaged in large protests. Rather than addressing the issues that these

[135] Goldberg 354.
[136] Butler 42.
[137] Malik 110.

youth raised, Muslim leaders were criticized for not controlling the youth.[138] The refusal to alleviate the problems highlighted by these protests furthered the frustration of the youth. Moreover, the Muslim youth were depicted as alien Others, without any real recognition that those who were involved in the riots "were all English-speaking, and in several cases, well-educated British citizens." [139] In line with a general disavowal of the problems plaguing these groups, British Home Secretary David Blunkett did not suggest ways to remediate the situation, instead he proposed policies like an oath of allegiance and tests for English proficiency that were aimed at immigrants.[140] These moments of tension bring to the surface the contentious relationship between British Muslims and their fellow British citizens, which must be read within the framework of a violent history of engagement and racial tensions.

For British Muslims, their representation within the state is contextualized within a history of racism and discourse around minorities. It has transitioned from a focus on color to race to ethnicity and now to religion.[141] Malik asserts that racism in the European context has traditionally been formulated in anti-Black and anti-Semitic is now directed against immigrants, many of whom are Muslims.[142] The policies that have emerged to counter this racism initially addressed racial and ethnic discrimination, but did not offer a framework for religious discrimination until 2003.[143] Other religious communities, like Jews and Sikhs, were categorized as ethnic groups and therefore were able to seek redress for discrimination. According to

[138] Malik 82.
[139] Malik 96.
[140] Scott Poynting and Victoria Mason, "The Resistible Rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001," *Journal of Sociology* 43.1 (2007): 75.
[141] Ceri Peach, "Britain's Muslim Population: An Overview," *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*, ed. Tahir Abbas (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2005) 18
[142] Malik 8.
[143] Tariq Madood and Fauzia Ahmed, "British Muslim Perspective on Multiculturalism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.2 (2007) 189.

Deborah Phillips, despite legislation like the three Race Relations Act passed in 1965, 1968, and 1976, institutional racism continued to impact sectors in the society creating unequal experiences: "institutional racism in both the public and the private housing markets, and in other spheres of resource allocation, together with popular racist sentiments, expressed through racist harassment, continued to reinforce existing patterns of minority ethnic segregation."[144]

In addition the racist sentiments and institutional racism that is directed towards minorities in general, British Muslims have been affected by sentiments that focus specifically on their religious identity. In fact, the term of Islamophobia emerged in the 1990s in Britain as a result of a report issued in response to an increase in anti-Muslim sentiment after the Rushdie affair and the first Gulf War (1990-91).[145] The Runnymede Trust, a think tank that focuses on ethnic and racial diversity, wrote *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* in 1997. According to the report, these historical events alienated British Muslims, and set out to challenge what it referred to as "an unfounded hostility towards Islam" so that these citizens were able to have a sense of national belonging, which was destabilized by the consequences of this hostility. The report asserted that Islamophobia resulted in tangible consequences for Muslims: "the practical consequences of such hostility is unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and…the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs."[146] This anti-Muslim sentiment did not begin with 9/11 but has new resonance in its aftermath and has increased according to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.[147]

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[144] Phillips 27.
[145] Andrew Shryock, ed. *Islamophobia Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010). 4.
[146] Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1997) 4.
[147] Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, "Refutations of Racism in the 'Muslim Question'," *Patterns of Prejudice* 43.3-4 (2009): 342.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States and the backlash against Muslim Americans resulted in the emergence of similar sentiments in Britain against its Muslim citizens: "The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, moved the UK authorities into a more aggressive attitude."[148] This "aggressive attitude" manifested itself in not only joining the United States in the "War on Terror", but also in the institution of policies that targeted British Muslims that included:

> easier procedures to deport persons 'fostering hatred' and 'advocating violence'…granting the police authority to detain terrorist suspects for a longer period (up to three months) before raising charges, granting the foreign secretary the right to issue so-called control orders restricting the liberty of terrorist suspects, and the compilation of an international database of persons engaging in 'unacceptable behavior' to be denied entry into the UK.[149]

While British Muslims can now seek recourse for religious discrimination, for example in employment, they are the target of counterterrorism legislation which has problematic consequences for these communities, a point that Gabe Mythen et. al underscore: "the British state has sanctioned and implemented disproportionate forms of regulation that have had grim ramifications for Muslim minority groups. In particular, the inequitable application of these modes of regulation have contributed to the wider process through which British Muslims are labelled as dangerous, risky 'others' that threaten the security of the nation."[150]

Over the last decade the following counterterrorism legislation has been introduced: 2000 Terrorism Act, 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act,

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[148] Jorgen S. Nielsen,"Religion, Muslims, and the State in Britain and France," *Muslims in Western Politics*. ed. Abdulkader H. Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 62.

[149] Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "Counterterrorism and the Civil Rights of Muslim Minorities in the European Union," *Muslims in Western Politics*. ed. Abdulkader H. Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 245.

[150] Gabe Mythen, Sadra Walklate, and Fatima Khan, "'I'm a Muslim, but I'm Not a Terrorist': Victimization, Risky Identities and the Performance of Safety," *The British Journal of Criminology* 49.6 (2009): 738.

2006 Terrorism Act, and 2008 Counter-Terrorism Act.[151] Under these legislations, Muslims have been the primary targets. Thus, the civil liberties of British Muslims are particularly challenged by these counterterrorism measures, which allow, for example, police to stop and search anyone without reason if they invoke Section 44 of counterterrorism legislation and "determine that the suspect is in an area that may be a potential terrorist threat rather than suspecting the person of having committed a crime or preparing to do so."[152] The number of Muslims stopped and searched under this legislation increased 400 percent after the 9/11 attacks.[153] This number strongly suggests that British Muslims are profiled for these types of searches by visual markers of religious commitment and/or physical characteristics. Without actually committing an act of terrorism, Muslims are determined by the image of the terrorist, a point that Cyra Choudhury underlines: "the dramatis persona of the Terrorist exists without the necessity of an act of terrorism *per se*. The State can regulate anyone it designates as a 'Terrorist' because it is his/her potential to act or his or her simulation of action that is taken in lieu of the 'real'."[154] As a result, British Muslims' rights as citizens have been further destabilized under legislation in which they are the primary focus. Thus, colonial history, along with the anxiety about the Other, has produced and reproduced a context in which Muslim citizens are the focus of anti-terrorist discourse and policies.

This is the context that Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Aboulela situate their novels *The Road from Damascus* (2009) and *Minaret* (2005), respectively. Robin Yassin-Kassab was born in Britain to a Syrian father and a British mother. Yassin-Kassab is a journalist who has lived and

[151] Mythen, et. al 737.
[152] Mythen, et. al 739.
[153] Mythen, et. al 738.
[154] Choudury 32.

worked in Britain and the Middle East. Leila Aboulela was born in Cairo but grew up in Khartoum. Her father is Sudanese and her mother Egyptian. In addition to *Minaret,* Aboulela is the author of the novel *The Translator* (1999) and a collection of stories titled *Coloured Lights* (2001). Both Yassin-Kassab and Aboulela's writing is influenced by their family backgrounds and their life experiences.

The Road from Damascus and *Minaret* examine the British context and the challenges of Muslim immigrants and British Muslims, who like their American counterparts, find their national and religious identities questioned in the post 9/11 context. The two novels highlight multiple manifestations of narratives of a Muslim self that emerge on the British landscape. Each engage the question (and in many cases demand) "Who are you?" and the way in which the response is articulated by the various characters and the novel itself in the post 9/11 context. Underlying this question and the response are intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics. The characters must configure their narratives of self against the backdrop of an exclusivist national narrative and a religious collective narrative that may or may not reflect the personal lived experience of Islam. What emerges through the novels are multiple narratives of Muslim selves that destabilize any singular configuration of belonging. Each narrative revolves around a constellation of relationships which renegotiates the boundaries of belonging and illustrates the dynamic process at work. Not only is a narrative of a British Muslim self examined, but the process of configuring any narrative of self.

The Road from Damascus tells the story of Sami Traifi, a second-generation Muslim Syrian British graduate student who finds his life in turmoil. He is struggling with his marriage and doctoral work. Sami is at a crossroads and must navigate the numerous claims of belonging.

The question of belonging is often raised when there has been a crisis, whether on an individual or collective level or both. The novel follows Sami's journey as he seeks to understand his own narrative of self, the impact of others on his identity, and the role of faith in this process. It also explores what it means to belong on the British cultural, religious, and linguistic landscape and how one can negotiate multiple identifying markers to construct a narrative of self and a narrative of community, which is thoroughly marked by the historical and social context. The changes that occur in Sami's narrative of self and the complexities it reveals reflect a continuous process rather than a fixed and static construct. Sami's journey (physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual) and his realizations concerning his own narrative of self is the framing device of the novel. However, Sami engages other characters as well and their changing narratives as he forms his own. Multiple constellations of relationships, drawing from Somers' discussion, [155] emerge where the individual and collective narratives are interwoven. For example, one aspect of Sami's narrative involves accepting Muntaha's, his wife, increasing religiosity. Her decision, as well, to wear hijab perturbs Sami and eventually forces him to negotiate his own relationship with Islam. It also drives him to discover the truth of his parents' troubled marriage. The novel depicts an individual narrative of Muslim self, which is complex and fluid, through Sami, and it underscores the need to reflect on narratives of collectives in this process.

The novel begins in Syria. Sami travels to his parents' natal home to "reconnect with his roots: remember who he was."[156] This journey sets in motion Sami's own renegotiation of his narrative of self that was overly determined by his father. Like Khadra in *The Girl in the*

[155] Somers 616.
[156] Yassin-Kassab 1.

Tangerine Scarf, Sami's relationship to the various aspects of identity is largely affected by his parent's, specifically his father's, interpretation, rather than his own. Thus, he must undertake his own journey that reflects his experience as an individual and as part of multiple collectives. The physical journey to and from and Syria and the process that results from that movement mirrors the immigrant's journey. Encounter and movement are central to not only Sami's reflection but also underlies the same process for other characters. This is significant in the context of Britain because it has been movement across its borders that produced the colonial enterprise and that brought the formerly colonized to its shores. Sami, like Khadra, must take a physical journey back to his parents' homeland to begin to configure his own narrative, which is influenced by both the Syrian and British space. Throughout the course of the novel, Sami's narrative shifts repeatedly in response to his experiences and the way he perceives himself and story in relation to the other individuals around him. Through the multiple configurations of belonging that emerge through Sami's story as well as those of the other characters, the novel illustrates that a narrative of British Muslim self or any narrative of self is a dynamic process that is about the self as well as the Other. The various characters' stories are thoroughly marked by the traces of the individuals, communities, and context in which they are configured.

The novel illustrates the workings a constellation of relationships and its consequence on configuring individual and collective narratives. One of the central dimensions of the constellation of relationships that emerges is the impact of those closest to the individual, for example their family. It is not an understatement to argue that family members, whose own narratives carry the traces of others as well, play a formative role in individual narratives of self. Sami's father, Mustafa, for example is a prominent figure in the novel despite his death early on

in Sami's life. His presence in the novel has a haunting quality. Sami must address the role that his father's views and legacy has in own personal narrative. He is not simply a mirror image of his father.

Mustafa is a pan-Arab nationalist and a staunch atheist. Mustafa's perception of religious belonging as backward and incompatible with modernity shapes much of Sami's own thinking regarding religion and his connection to not only to his religious identity but to his mother, Nur, who represents the opposite side of the spectrum. For Mustafa, Islam is the main culprit in the demise of the Arab world: "He [Mustafa] used to say the Arabs had no need of religion to make them great. He saw the Islamic period as falling from previous glory… 'What,' asked Mustafa rhetorically, 'has kept us backward for a thousand years?'…His academic work focused on the ancient and contemporary Arabs, cutting out the fourteen hundred years in between."[157] While stemming from different interests, Mustafa's approach to Islam in his construction of history mirrors in some ways the European attempts to negate the influences of the Islamic Empire on European history and world history. It rejects the interconnectedness of events and peoples, so that it becomes impossible to negate an entire period. Moreover, his animosity to religion leads him to contradict the ideals of modernity by supporting regimes, specifically the Syrian Ba'ath party that violently suppressed any opposition groups, including religiously based groups. Mustafa's support has personal consequences when he reports his brother-in-law, Faris, to the Syrian *mukhaabraat* (intelligence) telling them that he is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. As a result, Faris is arrested and is missing for years. When he returns, he is a shadow of himself,

[157] Yassin-Kassab 51-52.

so much so that his brother does not recognize him: "He didn't recognize him. He remembered a man, not a ghost."[158]

Mustafa's actions cause a rift in the marriage that is reflected in their different approaches to religion. Sami recalls hearing two mythologies: "Sami heard different mythology from his mother. When Mustafa was out of the house they curled up together and she told him the adventures of God's messengers. Of Khidr and the Green Man. The tales of the Rightly Guided caliphs…Sami learnt early on to separate these two narratives."[159] While Sami was exposed to both, Mustafa's response to Nur's religious commitment is aggressive and misogynistic. He would mock her by reciting Nizar Qabbani's poem "Stupid Woman" and interfere with her practice of rituals in their home:

> It was an entirely different matter when the mosque invaded his home. When his mother had visitors and dared to roll out her prayer mat with them. Mustafa slammed doors and played Egyptian dance music as loud as the stereo would allow, screamed for God's Sake!—in English, so that it wasn't an invocation of the supernatural but an entirely realist expression of bad humour.[160]

Mustafa's aggressive behavior leads to the breakdown of his marriage as well as Sami's relationship with his mother.

Through Mustafa and Nur's characters and their widely differing views on religion, the novel addresses the British context and the place of religion. It suggests that belonging to any group and attempting to force other people to adhere to its line of thinking within narrow boundaries can become dangerous and result in serious consequences. In Faris's case, it led to the loss of years in his life. For Sami, it led him to view his narrative of self through his father's lens, which reduced the world to clear cut demarcations and to associate religion with the

[158] Yassin-Kassab 8.
[159] Yassin-Kassab 53.
[160] Yassin-Kassab 58.

immigrants' world from which he later tries to distance himself "Belief X cancels belief Y. Leaving zero belief. Religion can't last much longer. It had developed in deserts and villages. Here it's an immigrant thing. It can't survive the cosmopolitan city."[161] Sami associates religion with immigrants as a point of cultural differentiation that cannot survive in multicultural space. Islam, in particular for Sami, represents an archaic religion that has no place in the British context: "And Islam taking its time to die, oozing like blood in a geriatric's veins, sluggishly, soporifically, dripping and dropping away from an unseen wound."[162] The novel, however, emphasizes that difference has become part of the British context:

> And there were people, he [Marwan, Muntaha's father] gradually understood, who belonged in the city more than accidentally but as part of its fabric…Of every colour and class arriving from everywhere, for every reason and non, and staying when they came in the shadows until they moved invisibly into death, and even the shadows were fixed, and the air hanging between the buildings, the exhalation of lungs and engines, the cloud and the metal sky in permanent residence, fixed in situ for ever and ever and ever.[163]

Though Muslims are not specifically identified here, they are part of the complex fabric of British society, which should then be reflected in the any narrative of British self. As this quote illustrates, difference is fundamentally woven into the British context and attempts to homogenize this reality will always be haunted by the diversity of experiences that have become a part of that space.

While Mustafa and Nur appear to have opposing views on religion for Sami as a child, as an adult and through his journey, Sami realizes that there are multiple dimensions to belief and non-belief. Sami grows up defining himself in relation to the image he carries of Mustafa. It is important to him to underscore that image. Mustafa dies when Sami is a child. Sami's perception

[161] Yassin-Kassab 57.
[162] Yassin-Kassab 57-58.
[163] Yassin-Kassab 74.

of his father is based on a fixed image that is not problematized until Sami reaches adulthood when he is not able to follow in Mustafa's academic footsteps and meets his uncle Faris: "So nothing wrong in the father-son relationship. Not until now. Bubbles were rising – marsh gas, deadly methane – from the trowelled-up earth of Sami's brain. What could it mean?"[164] Sami realizes that his perception of his father was inconsistent with the living figure. Mustafa was never the singular image that Sami imagined. Moreover, his views, which seemed to be so clearly defined, are problematized by Sami's life experience: "It wasn't as he'd thought as a boy, that all these religions cancel each other out. Instead they existed in bubbles. As bubble hit bubble more bubbles were formed. It was clear to him now that secular humanism was a late nineteenth-century hiccup, an antiquated European gentlemen's daydream. And Mustafa's daydream too, of course." [165] It becomes increasingly clear to Sami that different beliefs form a constellation of relationships, where one does not necessarily negate the presence of another. This recognition allows Sami to configure a narrative of self that has the traces of others but also represents his own lived experience.

It is worth highlighting the meanings of his parents' names because they further illustrate the impossibility of clear boundaries. Mustafa means "the chosen one" and is one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, the character's position on religion more generally, and Islam more specifically, destabilizes any singular image of a Muslim and the idea of determining an individual's belonging by their name or a physical perception. Nur means "light" and can be understood in Islamic contexts as the light of God that will guide out of the darkness. Despite Sami's refusal to recognize his mother's role in his narrative throughout the novel, he turns to

[164] Yassin-Kassab 10.
[165] Yassin-Kassab 245.

her when he is arrested for being perceived as an extremist. When Sami resumes his relationship with Nur and understands Nur's grievance against Mustafa, he is able to move forward with other aspects in his life. Nur demonstrates to Sami the necessity to question perceptions and view others through a complex prism that allows for fluidity and multiple modes of belonging. She offers light.

An important thread throughout the novel is the deconstruction of homogenizing images. The central image that the novel counters is that there is a singular image of a British Muslim. The most obvious way that the novel achieves this is through the depiction of ethnic diversity when it describes groups of Muslims praying together: "The white convert in Pakistani gear. The two subcontinentals dressed like Arabs, in white gellabiyas. The Arabs and the Somali (Sami guessed) in tracksuits."[166] This quote underscores the diversity between and within communities. Even in the unity of prayer, there is diversity in expression, which can be extended to the larger British context. In addition to diverse background, the novel portrays different levels of religious commitment and ways of expressing that commitment through its characters. Thus, Muslims become more than a limited set of identifying markers and issues: foreigners, violent, unable to integrate and thus people who will never belong. This idea emerges through the reaction of the various characters to the other people around them. Sami, on the one hand, at the outset, views the Muslims in Britain with animosity, which is representative of this negative image:

> In Britain Muslims meant Pakis, which meant crumbling mills and corner shops. Which meant anoraks and miserable accents and curry houses. Dismal northern towns where day never truly dawned. They had a proletarian role in the economy, and a bourgeois conservatism. Neither sexy nor strong. Badly dressed and poorly educated. Islam's cobwebs in their eyelashes and its mould on their tongues.[167]

[166] Yassin-Kassab 222.
[167] Yassin-Kassab 61.

This quote highlights the poor housing conditions of areas that are populated by immigrants. Sami's perception of British Muslims is reduced to images that suggest that they are backward, dirty, unable to integrate, and closed-minded. The problem for him is their commitment to Islam, which has made them stagnant and rigid. He does not recognize the challenges they experience living in dismal circumstances, which affect their sense of belonging. Thus, this quote draws attention to the fact the struggles of immigrants are viewed through the lens of religion because many are Muslim, but that does not address the reality that immigrants, their descendants, and those who are perceived to racially belong to those groups are not afforded the same opportunities as their compatriots.

Sami's approach to his coreligionist initially lacks nuance. He does not appreciate the racial dimension of the issue of immigrant and British Muslim belonging. Sami is not identified as a "foreigner" unless he displays ethnic markers like the *kuffiyeh*, a traditional Arab headdress, or religious markers like a beard. However, race plays a role in regards to Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims, for example, who are perceived as foreigners because of their ethnicity and/or race. Thus, Sami does not seem to recognize the workings of British society in which perception of belonging to particular groups has implications for the type of treatment they receive. Sami's problematic view is further demonstrated in his comparison of Jews and Muslims in Britain. Rather than acknowledge a different historical trajectory (both filled with violence) that has affected the way these groups are perceived, Sami suggests that unlike Muslims Jews have contributed to European history and culture and that in some ways they have become more successful in being accepted:

> [T]he idea of the Jews was attractive. They had almost single-handedly invented everything that made the West and not the Middle East. Modernism, Psychology,

> Marxism, atomic bombs. They owned the culture as much as the English did. They were neither insiders nor outsiders. Unless they dressed the part you could scarcely tell them apart from the natives…They understood London, and Europe, from within, looking out with conquering European eyes. But they'd never feel comfortable. They'd never nod off.[168]

Of course, Sami views European history through the same skewed lens as his father, disavowing the contributions of Islamic scholars. He also does not address the Holocaust and the role that it plays in how European Jews are viewed. Through the examples of the various groups, the novel emphasizes the effect of perception of belonging, whether or not there are visible traces.

Appearance and perception are two ideas that are consistently engaged in the novel. Specifically, the way in which visible marks of belonging determine how individuals and collectives are perceived and will perceive each other. While Sami rejects the visibility of Muslims' religious commitment, he does utilize his Arab appearance to manipulate how others, especially women perceive him. His visually different appearance becomes the avenue through which he attracts British girls. He is aware of the images that they are projecting on to him and rather than reject these constructs he uses them.[169]

> He'd had previous girlfriends, if girlfriend is the word. Perhaps 'willing victim' is more suitable. Not that he was fierce. It was mutual victimizing, and as innocent as looking in a mirror: he was prey too of the grainy sensation-hungry English girls he found…drawn so easily, by their own momentum, into his careful net of difference…He observed his image in the (frequently dilated) eyes of women. The girls too saw in reflection what they wanted to see of themselves. The image he saw in his conquests' eyes was a definite, deliberated image, constructed of solid elements.[170]

He appropriates these images and reverses them. In this quote, despite its seemingly mutual nature, neither Sami nor the women have relationships that move past imaginary constructs.

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[168] Yassin-Kassab 61.

[169] This is reminiscent of Mustafa Sa'eed's character in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann, 1969).

[170] Yassin-Kassab 12-13.

Sami and these women only engage each through the lens of perception and thus they are unable to form a connection and to comprehend how they impact each other. There is no real recognition of the Other, which these encounters suggests is necessary to configuring a meaningful narrative of self. The novel illustrates the impossibility of images representing how an individual views themselves or their lived experience: "Everybody migrates. Everybody changes and disperses. And life is too complex, too large, to encapsulate. Nothing can be summed up, least of all a human spirit."[171] Even his view of the Arab world is based on problematic constructs that do not mirror the multiplicity of experience: "Sami's allegiance, in memory of his father, in homage to himself, was to a sexy version of the Arab world."[172] As Sami reacts and adjusts to the changes brought on by his experiences, he acquires a more meaningful understanding of his own narrative. Following Sami's journey, the novel causes the reader to reflect on the danger of depending on perception and appearance, both of which obscure diversity of lived experiences and sense of belonging.

Interestingly, the problematic images that Sami projects on to others, including his fellow Muslims, are projected back on to him later in the novel. After Sami's return from Syria, he is arrested for possession of drugs. Sami is arrested once again after 9/11 outside of a mosque for having a beard and for standing "in a suspicious manner."[173] That is, Sami is perceived to be a terrorist, regardless of his actions. Initially, the officers maintain that Sami is not who he says he is and that the real Sami Traifi was completely different. In this highly charged atmosphere, it seems that the officers find it more acceptable for Sami to be in possession of drugs than to display a visual marker of belonging: "Why was Sami in this situation? The burden of the beard,

[171] Yassin-Kassab 235.
[172] Yassin-Kassab 13.
[173] Yassin-Kassab 335.

he supposed. The burden of belonging."[174] The interrogation scene depicts the anti-Muslim rhetoric that emerged with force after 9/11 not only in the United States, but in European countries like Britain:

> Sami considered what was coming now, after the planes, after the towers. The New York events were big. Not as big as the media thought, not in comparison with Beirut or Baghdad, but big. Big for the First World. The events were historically big, and the response would be too. In Britain he expected a two-pronged attack of, on the one hand, co-optation and Working Together rhetoric – nice cop – and the other some heavy security work by the cerebrally challenged, like these two, clearly unable to distinguish Wahhabi nihilists from the plain dull religious, or even from the vaguely, perhaps, spiritual, like Sami. And there'd be a predictable political attempt to paint everything Muslim and oppositional in the same bloody colour.[175]

The impact of the United States led retaliation for the 9/11 attacks on the rest of the world and the precarious situation that created for Muslims living in Western countries is made explicit here. Their citizenship is called into question as a result of their belonging to Islam, particularly if their commitment is visually markers. There is also an intracommunity aspect to a Muslim's narrative in Western countries. Within Muslim communities, there are attempts to define an exclusivist notion of belonging. As Choudhury asserts, the image of the believer in Muslim communities functions as a means of internally regulating and policing the borders of these communities. Once the officers "establish" Sami's identity they ask him to utilize his "Muslim" appearance to infiltrate the Muslim community to provide them with information. For these officers, Sami's appearance, which was earlier suspicious, becomes a tool: "'Work with us. We need the help, I don't mind admitting. We're not prepared for the new scenario. Lack of resources, lack of legislated powers…We don't have many contacts in your community'…

[174] Yassin-Kassab 333.
[175] Yassin-Kassab 334.

'Whereas you, Mr Traifi, you could infiltrate. You look the part.'"[176] In order to prove loyalty to the nation, Sami is asked to betray his community.

The interrogation scene in the novel is reminiscent of a similar meeting between Jassim and FBI agents in *Once in a Promised Land*. The demand to answer the question "Who are you?" with a singular preconceived answer already assumed is present in both novels. Neither Sami nor Jassim are asked this question with the generosity and humility Butler calls for and in both situations the civil liberties and security of Muslims are secondary. The two characters are perceived within a particular framework in which Muslims' personal narratives that reflect lived experience of the faith are considered irrelevant in this highly charged atmosphere.

Sami's own narrow vision of belonging, which is based on visible markers, underlies many of his problems. The most conspicuous example is his reaction to his wife's, Muntaha, decision to wear the hijab—a visible marker of her commitment to Islam. Sami views her choice as a betrayal to their (in fact his) vision of the world. Muntaha rejects this accusation and explains that is her conscious choice to demonstrate her belief and her belonging to a community:

> Her hijab upset him most of all. Who'd have thought a headscarf would cause so much fuss? It was the catalyst. She couldn't understand what it represented for him. Like the world, she had become more religious. She realized she fitted into a community, that she wanted to belong to this Muslim community. That there are things you shouldn't be embarrassed by, things you should be proud of.[177]

Muntaha's decision to wear a visual marker of Islam contradicts assertions that hijab is not a matter of choice. Moreover, similar to Sami's parents, it is the male figure who is interfering with his wife's belief. Sami's narrow view of religion, colored by that of his long dead father,

[176] Yassin-Kassab 336.
[177] Yassin-Kassab 92.

represents an aggressive secularism that challenges religious commitment. Muntaha's view of religion, in contrast, is much more accepting of differences of opinion and demonstrates a more inclusive approach to the question of belief or non-belief.

While Muntaha is not outwardly religious earlier in her life, she becomes increasingly so in the novel. Her interpretation of Islam emphasizes diversity of opinion, mercy, and empathy for others. This is clear in the Qur'anic verses, hadith, and quotes that she cites in response to Sami's aggressive secularism and also to her brother, Ammar's, increasingly aggressive interpretation of Islam. For example, when Muntaha discusses Sami's trip to Syria and his new dissertation topic, she cites Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, and the highly contentious term *jihad*: "'Control yourself. Remember jihad against the nafs, struggle against the self. Cool down. Imam Ali said the strongest man is he who fights against himself.' 'Jihad? You sound like Ammar.' 'No, I don't his jihad means something different as you know, Sami.'"[178] This quote is emblematic of Muntaha's approach to faith. Later in the novel, after finding out about the 9/11 attacks, she argues with Ammar about his binary view of the world:

> Ammar texting and speaking. "It serves them right. It's payback time." Muntaha said, "What about 'My mercy is greater than My wrath'?...Ammar speaking into his mobile: "That's right! As many kuffar killed as brothers and sisters martyred in the Intifada!" Muntaha, from her chair. "What's this kuffar? Kuffar means the ungrateful and arrogant. How do you know who they are?'… 'Them?" Muntaha pointing at the screen. "They aren't killing us."[179]

Muntaha's interpretation of Islam is based on textual evidence as well as an awareness of the constellation of relationships that connect different groups. Her perception of the world is more complex than that of Sami or Ammar. She does not coerce others around her to embrace her vision of faith, but she is committed to it, as well as to her British identity.

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[178] Yassin-Kassab 47.
[179] Yassin-Kassab 317-319.

Unlike Muntaha, Ammar does not display her stability or her complexity towards the others in his life. Ammar and Sami, despite being seemingly on opposite ends of the religious spectrum at the end of the novel, as characters mirror one another. Both spend a substantial part of the novel struggling to develop a sense of belonging to a community. Moreover, their names are significant in regards to their journeys. 'Sami' comes from the same root as 'sky' and 'heavens' in Arabic and also mean to make high, lofty, elevated. 'Ammar' comes from the root to build and means the 'one who builds'. Both Sami and Ammar formulate their narratives of self along different lines of belonging. However, at one point, after Sami reaches a low point in his life, it is Ammar's encouragement to begin attending a mosque that allows Sami to consider the various relationships that have formed his narrative of self. Sami, though, does not follow Ammar in his path towards a much more exclusive sense of religious belonging. Ammar's newfound religious fervor, which is couched in binary oppositions, in fact reflects his own sense of loss and a need to belong to a group that does not question his loyalty and excludes him: "For someone [Ammar] whose world-vision is predicated on humiliation, on personal powerlessness extended to an imagined community, the planes were redemptive, miraculous. They didn't fit the mundane narrative. They were mysteries. For Ammar, a real sign, at last. Something concrete. Something you didn't have to try hard to make significant."[180] At different points of the novel, they each represent the problematic consequences of exclusivist narratives that do not recognize the place of the constellation of relationships that Somers raises. In Sami's case, this stems from his father's overbearing and exclusivist view, which stems from a sense of defeatism in regards to the Arab world. Ammar is faced with the challenges of being the child of an immigrant and being an immigrant himself and trying to configure his own narrative in this new context. The

[180] Yassin-Kassab 322.

9/11 context created an additional obstacle for Sami and Ammar because they are determined by the problematic perception of British Muslims, where they are seen as the "enemy within" and are the targets of counterterrorism measures and an atmosphere of suspicion.

In addition to the Muslim characters, there are non-Muslim characters who reflect different dimensions of the challenge facing Muslims in Europe. One character in particular represents the Orientalist approach to Arabs and Muslims, specifically in how he views Muntaha. While Mustafa and Sami, representing one stereotypical vision of Islam, perceive *hijab* on Muslim women as being oppressive, Gabor Vronk, Muntaha's fellow teacher, sees her as strange and exotic and he uses her connection with her faith to get closer to her—to try to possess her. Gabor's perception of Muntaha represents another dimension: the Arab and Muslim woman as something that is forbidden and thus even more desirous to possess.

To get closer to Muntaha, Gabor engages her in discussions of the Qur'an, memorizes verses from the sacred text, and paints a picture of the Ka'ba for her in order to try to gain entrance into her world. Gabor's interest in Muntaha is motivated by his own narrative in which his parents' distaste for difference made him rebel and seek it out. Gabor is of Hungarian and Russian descent, but he chooses to identify with the Russian side more because "Russia is the most distant from his mundane environment. Because Russia is most other to himself."[181] Both of his parents refused to identify with anything in their heritage that would indicate difference: "His mother was anxious to scrub away the central European grime of her own name…His father was calmer and less ambitious. Richard was just scared of difference."[182] His mother's negative experience as an immigrant growing up in London and his father's experience as the child of

[181] Yassin-Kassab 185.
[182] Yassin-Kassab 185-186.

immigrants impact how they viewed themselves and others. Their assimilation required an erasure of parts of their narrative and disdain for other groups that continued to remain different. In response to his parents' desire to "assimilate", Gabor rebelled and sought out difference. However, he did so in such a way that difference is not something to embrace and reflect on, but rather it is something to control and possess. There is a mark of gender in Gabor's interest in control of difference, which becomes clear in his response to Muntaha. For Gabor, the encounter with the Other is not based on reciprocity and engagement; it is distorted by the lens that continually makes of the other something foreign and alien. This is clear in his painting of Muntaha in which he exaggerates her features because to him Arabs are themselves strange:

> Her strangeness was erotic, and it was terrible. Gabor spoke honestly to himself. The thing about Arabs – they're freakish. More like us than Africans are, or Chinese, so like us sometimes they're almost interchangeable – but the thing an Arab face must have to distinguish it from a European is at least one element of freakishness, of disproportion. They're like aliens wearing human masks…And Muntaha – she's rich in freakishness, her nose, mouth, in particular her eyes, big like baby eyes, and bigger top to bottom than side to side. A Disney dream of eyes. And her eyebrows like fur, like things borrowed from a black cat's back. And the shape of her face not what we normally call heart-like but like an exaggerated sketch of a heart, cartoon again. If Gabor has exaggerated, it's her Arab face that has made him do so.[183]

In the novel, the image of the Arab and Muslim woman as something to possess as here for Gabor exists alongside the image of the Arab and Muslim man as terrorist, represented by Ammar and eventually Sami. Gabor's character underscores the problem in encounters when generosity and humility do not form the framework. While Gabor does not display outward animosity, even seeming to be understanding, towards Muntaha, his desire to possess her indicates a desire for control. Rather than mutual recognition, through a character, like Gabor, the novel demonstrates another aspect of the problematic framework that is projected on to

[183] Yassin-Kassab 291.

Muslims, in which they continue to be perceived as others. This framework draws from the orientalist tradition as well as the anti-terrorist rhetoric that has emerged with force after 9/11.

While the 9/11 attacks are marked in the novel and function as one catalyst internal to the novel for the question of belonging, they do not appear until Chapter 30 titled "Historical Events," indicating it is not the only historically relevant moment for Muslims. The novel as a structure, though, responds to the historical context after the attacks specifically, addressing the political demand made of the British Muslim community to answer the question "Who are you?" in a similar fashion as Muslim Americans after the 9/11. Through its characters and structural design, the novel destabilizes the possibility of a singular response to that query.

The first structural device is the title of the novel. *The Road from Damascus* recalls the story of Paul the Apostle's conversion. Paul was initially a strong opponent of Christianity and set out from Jerusalem to Damascus to capture Christians. On the way, he had what has been described as an encounter with the divine and as a result converted to Christianity and became one of its staunchest supporters. Akin to Paul, Sami sets out to Damascus with a different focus than when he returns. He travels to Damascus with the intention to reaffirm his father's vision for his life, where religion was absent. When Sami returns, however, his life experiences lead him to develop a new connection with Islam as a faith and not a rigid configuration. The novel draws on this reference and from the outset destabilizes the possibility of a singular response to as the title weaves in another tradition as it traces the narratives of British Muslims. Thus, the novel highlights the multiple experiences of faith, which do not adhere to a fixed conceptualization of religion. Faith, the novel emphasizes, is fluid and fluctuates throughout an individual's life. This reference also underscores that the story of British Muslims, like that of

Islam as a faith, is connected to the stories of other British citizens and other religious traditions and cannot be examined in isolation.

In terms of the structure, the novel opens with two quotes, one by Ahmad Yasavi, a Turkish Sufi from the 12th century, and the other by Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher and mathematician from the 17th century, address the role of belief and non-belief. Yasavi is quoted as saying, "It is only when you know the Higher Factor that you will know the true situation of the present religions and of unbelief itself. And unbelief itself is a religion with its own form of belief." Pascal is quoted from *Pensée*, his defense of Christianity as saying, "Atheism indicates strength of mind, but only up to a certain point." From the outset, the novel sets the stage for a discussion of faith and belief in the British context. These quotes underscore that there are multiple manifestations of belief as well as unbelief in any society; all are part of its fabric. Thus, it is clear that part of the novel's response to the post 9/11 context is to emphasize that belief and unbelief are ways of establishing a sense of belonging. Neither quote names a specific religion because the focus of the novel is to demonstrate the way different systems of belief mirror each other and that all depend on a notion of faith.

In addition to the title and the opening quotes, the use of particular religious references functions to prevent the singularity of a narrative in response to the demand "Who are you?" One aspect of the novel's design is the use of religious references to destabilize any configuration of Islam that suggests a singular image of a Muslim. For example whenever Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, his name is preceded by the title *imam*. This title for Ali is always used by Shi'a and acceptable for Sunnis; however, when it is used by Shi'a it recalls a different historical trajectory than for Sunnis. The denomination of the character

citing him remains ambiguous. By preventing a clear identification, the novel prevents the reader from attributing to the character a particular narrative. It also highlights the impossibility of a singular response. Choudhury underline that Muslim communities perpetuate a particular image of a 'Believer', adhering to an Arab Sunni version of Islam. The novel destabilizes this image.

The novel utilizes, as well, the dialogue between the characters in order to relay the intracommunity dynamics that form an important framework for narratives of Muslim self. The dialogues about religious issues are especially pertinent because they offer insight into the conversations that occur within a community and the role of gender. Many of these religiously oriented dialogues occur between Muntaha, a strong female character, and other male characters. What emerges through these discussions is a feminine view of religious commitment. This view appreciates the ritual conformity of Islam but challenges the rigid of the version expressed by the male characters. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, Muntaha and Ammar have vastly different reactions. Ammar celebrates the attacks and sees them as retribution. He views the attacks as a *jihad*, and therefore justified. Muntaha rejects Ammar's reading of the event and his understanding of the faith, and examines the issue with more nuance and sensitivity. This dialogue illustrates this dynamic and thus will be cited at length:

> Ammar texting and speaking. "It serves them right. It's payback time." Muntaha said, "What about 'My mercy is greater than My wrath'?" Ammar said, "What about fight them wherever you find them?"… "Ya cyan stand in the way of jihad." "Jihad?" Muntaha rose, half straight, twisting her body towards him, not giving up her chair. "Islamic rules say you can't kill women or children. You can't kill civilians. You have to fight on the battlefield, not in the middle of the city." Ammar made his hands into scales, explanatory. "They attack our cities. We attack theirs." "So call it politics, then. Or straightforward war. Don't call it jihad." She sat down, addressed the screen again…Ammar speaking into his mobile: That's right! As many kuffar killed as brothers and sisters martyred in the Intifada!" Muntaha, rose from her chair. "What's this kuffar? Kuffar means the ungrateful and arrogant. How do you know who they are?" "The unbelievers, sister." "Christians and Jews aren't kuffar. They're People of the Book.

> Maybe even Hindus aren't kuffar. There weren't any in Arabia, so the Prophet didn't talk about them. You can't call just anyone you want a kafir. The kuffar are the pagan Arabs who rejected the Prophet." "Shit, keep it simple. Kuffar is kuffar is kuffar."[184]

This dialogue as a structural device raises key issues that relate to the overall focus of the novel. Intracommunity dynamics are part of any discussion on Muslim identity in western countries because they contribute as well to the configuration of Islam as a means to include or exclude members. Here Muntaha's nuanced approach to Islam is juxtaposed with Ammar's rigid and literal version. She deconstructs Ammar's use of contentious terms like *jihad* and *kafir/kuffar* and offers a view that is more inclusive of other groups. This nuanced approach to the Islamic tradition is emphasized in another dialogue between Muntaha and Gabor about interpretation of the Qur'an:

> Gabor nodded, eyebrows raised. "That opens it up to interpretation. A different book to what the media presents." "Not just the media. The Muslims too. The first word Muhammad heard was 'read'. The Muslims should read better. They should be less literal about everything….It [verse in the Qur'an] warns us not to take ourselves too seriously when we interpret. We only have images for what's incomprehensible."[185]

Through dialogues like the two mentioned here, the novel draws attention to the intracommunal discussions and how they relate to belonging. It also challenges the patriarchal leanings of interpretation and instead presents a view of faith through the lens of a woman.

In addition to dialogue, the novel employs the third person narrative voice. This narrative structure allows the reader to follow the life experiences of all the characters and to trace how their individual stories intersect with collective narratives. It is clear through this structural design the constellation of relationships at work and the way that personal and historical movement influences each character as individuals and as part of collectives. The complexity of

[184] Yassin-Kassab 317-319.
[185] Yassin-Kassab 145-146.

the British landscape emerges through this structure. The configuration of these constellations alters across the novel as characters move through time and space, therefore, contesting any notion of a static and rigid identity. Instead, this structure depicts the unfolding process through which narratives of self are constituted on the individual and collective levels. Through this narrative voice, the novel illustrates the diversity of British Muslims, but more importantly it demonstrates how a homogenous narrative of British self is destabilized by the presence of multiple British experiences.

Finally, the novel, like *Once in a Promised Land*, raises the issue of Palestine. Palestine is referenced to address the question of homeland and related political grievances. The novel uses Palestine as a symbol for loss and the constant search for home. For example, the Palestinian loss is mentioned in the section when Sami leaves his home after an act of infidelity: "Lost land dwindling behind barbed wire. Sami, carried away by cattle truck, saw his home shrink to nothing. The Palestinians took housekeys. Sami's souvenir – her air, her odour – escaped slowly from his lungs."[186] This reference underscores the immense loss facing Sami. It also raises the question of Sami, like other British Muslims, ever developing a sense of home. At another point, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish is cited:

> Record! I am an Arab
> And my identity card is number fifty thousand…
> I have a name without a title
> Patient in a country
> Where people are enraged…
> Beware…
> Of my hunger
> And my anger![187]

[186] Yassin-Kassab 201-202.
[187] Yassin-Kassab 14.

Again, the question of identity, home, and grievances are addressed by Darwish's verses. They pose the question: can there be a sense of home if there is no recognition? The novel's reference to Palestine, in addition to the first Gulf War, elucidates political grievances that play an important role in British Muslims' narratives. There is a sense of connection to countries in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent sociologically and historically. Thus, British Muslims, like Muslim Americans, are affected by events that take place in Britain as well as elsewhere.

This novel insists on a complex picture. None of the characters remain untouched by their life experience and all face the similar challenge of locating themselves within the multiple narratives that inform their narratives of self. All of these stories are contextualized within a tumultuous history of encounters, many of which were violent. What emerges is a rejection of the process to fix these markers, so there is a clear possibility of a British Muslim who does not fit the negative image projected on to them. So too there is a clear possibility for a more inclusive narrative of a diverse British society that recognizes the shared historical and social contexts of various groups.

In addition to engagement of the novel and its characters with British and European notions of self and other, the novel challenges a religious discourse that engages in a similar process. This discourse aims to define who "truly" adheres to the faith and who is outside the fold. Akin to problematic European images of Muslims and Islam, this type of religious discourse makes use of a similar process and results in one-dimensional images of a Muslim. Through the characters and their engagement with faith, in general, and Islam, specifically, *The Road from Damascus* rejects the narrow vision of a singular configuration of Islam that disavows the complexity and diversity of experiences of the faith by both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Faith, as an experience and belief beyond the limits of rational thought, becomes the medium through which the characters respond to their life circumstances and form relationships. The novel illustrates the possibility that there are multiple dimensions to belief and non-belief. When adherents attempt to force people to accept only their line of thinking within narrow boundaries, belief becomes dangerous. The novel suggests a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of belief (or non-belief) where boundaries can be fluid and adherence changes over time to reflect lived experience. The implication is clearly that any religion or type of belonging that depends on fixity and narrowness is dangerously unproductive. Instead, the novel depicts a configuration of religious and non-religious belonging that fits within a constantly developing narrative of self and of community.

Minaret, by Leila Aboulela (2005) also explores the question of narratives of Muslim self in the British context. This novel tells the story of Najwa, the daughter of a Sudanese politician, who is exiled to London with her mother and brother when there is a coup. As the novel unfolds, various narratives of Muslim self emerge and illustrate the dimensions of intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics. Framing Najwa's journey and those of the other characters is the concept of belonging and the connections between individual and collective identities. Each character's sense of belonging to different collectives changes as they engage others around them and face changing circumstances. The novel destabilizes any narrative that constructs rigid categories and instead presents an alternative in which there is a multiplicity of stories that are continually renegotiated as circumstances are reconfigured: a constellation of relationships. Singular identities, empty of lived experience, are dismantled over the course of the novel and in

their place are complex narratives that reflect the diversity of lived experience and trace the multiple threads of belonging on the individual and collective level.

Islam is woven throughout the novel; however, the focus is on the experience of faith and not on the configuration that appears in anti-Muslim discourse or in more extreme representations of the Islam. Rather, the experience of faith is highly personal and disrupts the idea of a static and rigid construct. This theme is made apparent from the outset. The novel opens with the *basmalah,*[188] an Islamic phrase that begins every chapter in the Qur'an except one and is invoked in many instances in daily life. In the phrase, two attributes of God are mentioned: the Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful, both challenging any configuration of Islam that does not display compassion and mercy. The phrase, which is transliterated from the Arabic script, however, is not translated into English. By beginning with an un-translated phrase, the novel disrupts any presuppositions that a reader might bring to the text about what type of story is told in a novel. It announces that a novel can tell the story of an Other and that the presence of another language does not interrupt the flow of the narrative; rather, it adds another layer of complexity to the story. This mirrors the British context in which many groups' lives and histories are interwoven; and that diversity of experience, exemplified here in language, does not necessarily pose a threat. The *basmalah* is not the only Arabic phrases employed in the novel; other common phrases like *as-salaamu alaykum* (peace be unto you), a greeting used mainly by Muslims, *Alhamdulillah* (praise be to God), and *inshaaAllah* (if God wills). In addition, the novel insists on the use of *Allah,* the Arabic word for God. By employing these phrases, and especially the word *Allah,* the reader engages another language and another experience of faith and as a result its apparent "foreignness" is challenged. This opening section ends with a

[188] *Bism illaahi ar-Rahmaan ar-Rahiim.* In the name of God the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

paragraph on Allah's mercy, which further emphasizes the centrality of mercy as a framing concept for the story: "*The mercy of Allah is an ocean. Our sins are a lump of clay clenched between the beak of a pigeon. The pigeon is perched on the branch of a tree at the edge of that ocean. It only has to open its beak."*[189]

Najwa's story illustrates the necessity of engagement and acknowledgment of the intersection of individual and collective paths, as well as histories. This occurs on the individual level, in Najwa's story for example, and on the collective level, within the Muslim community and British society. As Najwa moves through her own experience, she is aware of the influence of others in the way she configures her sense of self. The result of this process is the necessity of mutual recognition and the impossibility of clear demarcations. This is achieved through the characters' stories and the movement between time periods and geographical spaces. On the national level, the novel suggests that British society acknowledge the historical circumstances that have made it a multicultural landscape and reconfigure the narrative of a British self to include diverse Muslim experiences as well. All the characters have some connection to a space that was formerly colonized by Britain or where there has been European presence. The humility that Najwa displays in her encounters with others as she moves through her journey is suggested by the novel as a model for British society in regards to the national narrative.

The novel is divided into six parts, each of which are dated. It begins in Khartoum from 1984-1985, when Najwa's father is a politician and her mother belongs to the aristocracy. Her brother Omar, her twin, is in the university with her and appreciates the lifestyle that his parents' position affords him. Najwa, on the other hand, while enjoying her comfortable life, feels in certain situations that there is a void in her life. She is also more conscious of others around her

[189] Aboulela 4.

who lead different lives. For example, while looking at an old *Time* magazine about the Iranian Revolution, unlike Randa, her friend, she does not react negatively to the women who are veiled; rather, this encounter seems to produce a sense of longing in Najwa:

> "Totally retarded," she [Randa] said looking at the picture and handing me a spoon. "We're supposed to go forward, not go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything?... "They're crazy," Randa said. "Islam doesn't say you should do that." "What do we know? We don't even pray." Sometimes I [Najwa] was struck with guilt. I looked down at the picture and thought of all the girls in university who wore hijab and all the ones who wore tobes… "Would you ever wear a tobe?" I [Najwa] asked her. "Yes but a tobe is different than *this*." She jabbed the *Time* magazine.[190]

Najwa, from early on in the novel, displays humility towards others who make different choices than she does. She does not wear a *hijab*, but she does not display Randa's antagonism. Her complex response to different people's choices prevents Najwa from harboring any kind of rigidity or animosity while dealing with others. The ability to recognize the life experience of others, embodied in Najwa's character, is an important theme in the novel because it problematizes rigid images that do not acknowledge the role of the Other in the configuration of a narrative of self. Najwa's humility is not weakness, but reflects an individual incorporating the presence of others in her own story.

The reaction to *hijab* is not the only example of Najwa's humility. Despite her family's powerful position, Najwa is aware of the personal experiences of the servants who work for the household. For example, after coming home from a party, Najwa hears the *azan*, the call to prayer. She notices the servants performing ablution in order to pray; they are not invisible to Najwa: "The servants stirred and, from the back of the house, I heard the sound of gushing water, someone spitting, a sneeze, the shuffle of slippers on the cement floor of their quarters. A light

[190] Aboulela 29-30.

bulb came on. They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't."[191] These individuals are invisible in the life of the families they work for. However, Najwa is cognizant of them and their experiences and remembers them as she too becomes one of those invisible figures. Unlike Najwa, the families that Najwa works for only see her as a servant and nothing more. They do not display the humility Najwa displayed towards the servants in her family's home in Sudan. Through Najwa's character, the novel offers a complex response to the demand "Who are you?," one informed by humility and mercy as embodied in the character of Najwa.

In Part One of the novel, the external image of Najwa's family is one of comfort and power; however, their life is completely altered when a coup removes the president and those who worked for him, among them Najwa's father. Najwa's seemingly perfect life is destabilized initially by her encounter with Anwar, a fellow student who belongs to the Democratic Front. Anwar and Najwa are attracted to each other, but their relationship is troubled from the outset by Anwar's accusations towards Najwa's father. For Anwar, Najwa's father represents the postcolonial regime with its connection to the British that must be removed. In one scene, Najwa is proudly watching Anwar speak until he directs his comments to her family: "He did not once look at me. I was invisible but that was my name in the direct accusation of my father. That was my name that made everyone laugh. I was an aristocrat, yet, from my mother's side with a long history of acres of land and support for the British and hotels in the capital and bank accounts abroad. And if all that wasn't enough, my father stood accused of corruption."[192] When the first coup occurs, Najwa's family flees Sudan to London. Five years later, another coup takes place,

[191] Aboulela 31-32.
[192] Aboulela 37-38.

and the Democratic Front is removed so Anwar also seeks asylum in London. Thus, they represent the continued repercussions of colonialism and the movement from the former colonies to the mainland. It is in her family's exile that Najwa reconfigures her narrative of self, bringing to the forefront a developing religious commitment.

In Part Two, set in London and dated 2003, Najwa's life has completely changed and so has she. At this point, Najwa has lost her father, who was executed for corruption under the new regime, her mother, who dies of cancer, and her brother Omar, who is in prison for possession of drugs. Moreover, in order to survive financially, Najwa has become a servant and a nanny for a family in which the father is Sudanese but who have spent most of their life in Oman. Najwa has endured loss in all aspects of her life described in the novel in language that suggests her living in a type of prison: "I have come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move."[193] This loss occurs in a place that was earlier in her life a vacation site. For Najwa, now living in Britain, the communal aspect of Islam offers her the sense of belonging that she struggles to find after multiple losses. The Islam that emerges in her experience of faith is based on mercy and humility. Thus, through Najwa's story, the novel challenges these images by depicting another possibility for the experience of the faith that goes beyond rigid constructs.

Parts three, four, five, and six all are set in London at different periods: 1989-90, 2003-4, 1991, and 2004. These dates indicate that the novel bypasses the 9/11 attacks and does not addresses the event directly, but it does explicitly encompass the first Gulf War, Palestine, and as discussed earlier the novel mentions the 1979 Iranian Revolution. In response to the 9/11 atmosphere, the novel does not define Muslim experience in Britain by that event. Rather, it

[193] Aboulela 1.

suggests alternate historical moments that have significance for Muslim communities in western countries. This has relevance in terms of intercommunity dynamics, in which Muslims are often perceived as being too political for making demands for their community and for expressing political grievances of the Arab and Muslim communities worldwide, for example Palestine. For intracommunity dynamics, political activism is utilized in some situations as means to determine religious commitment. The intracommunity dimension is illustrated when Tamer, the brother of Najwa's employer and the man with whom she begins to develop a relationship, expresses frustration towards his own religious community: "'What bugs me,' he says, 'is that unless you're political, people think you're not a strong Muslim.'"[194] The novel does not avoid politics; it is in itself written in the atmosphere after the 9/11 attacks. But it presents a more nuanced approach in which politics is read within the context of practices of faith and of lived experiences.

It is not only through Najwa's character that diverse experiences are depicted. The constellation of relationships in the novel presents the dynamics at play between the individual and collective experiences of faith. Characters like Randa and Anwar display clear rejection of more visible markers of religious commitment. In a conversation with Najwa about her studies in Britain, Randa continues to reject the presence of *hijab*, viewing it entirely within the framework of the problematic images that have defined the Muslim experience:

> We talked about her social life. Yes, there were some Sudanese in Edinburgh University – quite a number of families – bored wives, she said, with screaming children. They invited her for dinner; she always declined. 'Why?' I asked. 'So many of them are Islamists. You know the type, the wife in the hijab having one baby after the other.' 'Aren't there women students too?' 'Yes, unfortunately. The sight of them wearing hijab on campus irritates me.'[195]

[194] Aboulela 117.
[195] Aboulela 134.

Randa's assumption of these women based on their hijab is that they are backward, uneducated, and only engaged in procreating—all images in that have been projected on Muslims in exclusivist rhetoric, in which they continue to be foreigners. Randa refuses to see these women as individuals. They simply belong to a collective that is defined by problematic images.

Anwar also harbors negative sentiments towards religion. He views it through the lens of constructs and ignores the complexity of faith and the role it plays in intercommunity and intracommunity dynamics. Anwar's views become apparent at two different points. The first occurs after he is exiled in London and he begins to have a physical relationship with Najwa. When Najwa realizes that it is Ramadan and she is not fasting, Anwar criticizes her frustration:

> I looked at Anwar and he was calm, normal as if nothing unnatural had happened. 'Why didn't you tell me?' 'Why should I?' said Anwar… 'What do you mean why? It's important. It's Ramadan. I should know about it. It shouldn't happen without me knowing. If we were in Khartoum we would have known our daily routine would have changed.'… 'But we are in London now,' Kamal [Anwar's roommate] said. 'People in London don't fast.' 'We've always fasted.'… 'In Khartoum all my family used to fast.'… He looked at me. 'Shouldn't you question these things, though?[196]

He does not recognize that the communal act of fasting functions as a means of belonging for Najwa who now finds herself disconnected from family and any type of community. Anwar's friend, Kamal, asserts the problematic view that there is no place for religious rituals, like fasting, in London because "'People in London don't fast.'"[197] For Najwa, Anwar's view of religion not only does not recognize complexity of belonging, which cannot be manifested in only one way, but does not offer any consolation for her sense of loss. The second point in which Anwar's views on religion become apparent occurs after Najwa decides to begin attending a mosque. When Wafaa, the woman who washed and shrouded her mother's body, picks her up

[196] Aboulela 230-231.
[197] Aboulela 231.

with her husband Ali, a convert to Islam, Najwa reflects on what Anwar's reaction would be towards Ali:

> I knew Anwar well enough to guess what his reaction would be to what I was hearing and seeing around me. His views on religion were definite and hated fundamentalists. He believed it was backward to have faith in anything supernatural; angels, djinn, Heaven, Hell, resurrection. He wanted rationale, reason, and he could not help but despise those who needed God, needed Paradise and the fear of Hell. He regarded it as a weakness and on top of that it was not benign, he would argue, it was not harmless. Look at what happened in Sudan, look at human rights, look at freedom of speech and look terrorism.[198]

While some of Anwar's critiques are valid and can be directed towards problematic interpretations of any religion, they can be leveled at any type of belonging that depends on exclusivist definitions. Nationalism, for example, can and has been employed in a similar fashion as some extremist interpretations of faith. For Najwa, this last point is particularly relevant because it was the Democratic Front, Anwar's party, which was responsible for her father's death and the subsequent dissolution of her family: "It wasn't fundamentalists who killed my father, it wasn't fundamentalists who gave my brother drugs. But I could never stand up to Anwar…These men Anwar condemned as narrow-minded and bigoted, men like Ali, were tender and protective with their wives. Anwar was clever but he would never be tender and protective."[199] Here the novel addresses the image of the fundamentalist as being a Muslim man, aggressive, backward, and unable to live with difference. Ali counters this image by being British and choosing to become a Muslim. He represents another narrative of Muslim self, one that does not conform to the images articulated by Anwar. Religious experience is not limited to the image of the fundamentalist and fundamentalism is not only expressed in religious terms.

[198] Aboulela 241.
[199] Aboulela 242.

Tamer also challenges this notion of the Muslim man as a fundamentalist. His religious commitment at some points seems to be focused on details like growing a beard and missing class for a week to go into seclusion for Ramadan, but he is simply a young man trying to configure a narrative of self that reflects multiple experiences and religious belonging offers him a space to do that. In a conversation with Najwa about how he views himself he says, "'My mother is Egyptian. I've lived everywhere except Sudan: in Oman, Cairo, here. My education is Western and that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So I guess, no, I don't feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity.'"[200] Unlike the one-dimensional image of a Muslim man, Tamer's description illustrates the fluid nature of identity and the multiple influences that are woven into a narrative, which in his case includes a sense of loss that accompanies elite mobility. Najwa sees in Ali and Tamer what she cannot locate in Anwar: consolation and a possibility for belonging.

The two central characters in the novel, Najwa and Tamer, have siblings, who act as their opposites. Omar, Najwa's twin, and Lamya, Tamer's sister, have chosen different paths than their siblings. Their routes are parallel and seem to depict what Najwa and Tamer would be if they did not find their belonging in religion or somewhere. Omar is imprisoned, physically and the novel implies spiritually, and cannot move beyond the loss of status and money caused by his father's death. He is not interested in moving forward, despite Najwa's attempts to help him. Lamya, while a successful PhD student, has a troubled marriage and does not seem interested in rectifying her situation. She is highly critical of her brother's choices and attributes, what she sees as failings, to his increased religiosity. Religion for Lamya is functional. She goes to the

[200] Aboulela 110.

mosque to find a servant, Najwa. Through Omar and Lamya, the novel illustrates paths where religious belonging is absent and there is nothing else to create a community of belonging.

There are other figures, primarily women, around Najwa who play an in important role in her sense of belonging. Wafaa, the woman who shrouded Najwa's mother, facilitates Najwa's entry into the British Muslim community in London. With kind persistence, Wafaa invites Najwa to the mosque and even offers to take her there. Wafaa, unlike Anwar for example, seems to be cognizant of Najwa's struggle and reaches out to her to offer a sense of belonging. Although they do not become close friends, Wafaa acts as a guide for Najwa as she reconfigures her narrative in London under different circumstances. Shahinaz, Najwa's friend from the mosque, is a source of support for her. While Shahinaz does not always agree with Najwa, for example when Najwa tells her about her relationship with Tamer she does not think it will lead to marriage, she functions as a family for Najwa. The women in the mosque, regardless of whether Najwa has a close relationship with them or not, show her how an individual can be devout, belong to a group, and maintain their own personal identity in a context where one aspect of their identity is challenged. Najwa observes these qualities the most in the Muslim girls who were born in Britain and negotiate between the various narratives, national, religious, to configure their own individual narratives:

> 'Cool,' says the girl next to me. She has rosy cheeks, dreamy eyes. I like the way she wears her hijab, confident that she has the kind of allure worth covering. Usually the young Muslim girls who have been born and brought up in Britain puzzle me though I admire them. I always find myself trying to understand them. They strike me as being very British, very much at home in London. Some of them wear hijab, some don't. They have individuality and an outspokenness that I didn't have when I was their age, but they lack the preciousness and glamour we girls in Khartoum had.[201]

[201] Aboulela 77.

These young women confront the negative image of Muslim women with strength and commitment to their faith as well as to their nation. They demonstrate the possibility of being Muslim, British, and individuals. These women with different manifestations of religious commitment disrupt exclusivist definitions of who is a "true" Muslim; therefore, Najwa feels safe in this space of diversity with her personal experience of faith. In depicting these diverse expressions of faith, the novel refuses to respond to the demand "Who are you?" with a singular response.

The primary focus of the novel is on the experiences of Islamic faith in the British context. Islam, as depicted in the novel, is grounded in ideas and practices of mercy and recognition. There are a number of signposts that the novel uses to describe the rooted nature of the British Muslim presence. There are mosques, halal restaurants, and the structures in place to perform sacred rituals like praying, fasting, and preparing a body for burial. These are all indicative of a community that views itself as belonging to that space. The most visible signpost in the context of the novel is the minaret of the mosque. The minaret acts as a guide and the mosque as a space which offers belonging. For Najwa, the minaret of the Regent's Park Mosque is her compass towards a family, a community: "We [Najwa and Tamer] never get lost because we can see the minaret of the mosque and head home towards it."[202] This architectural structure in the British context is symbolic; its presence reminds the believer to come to pray, to face the spiritual center. Along with the focus on mercy, the novel rejects the rigid, and many times, violent depictions of faith. The minaret is a positive symbol.[203] In the novel, the minaret is

[202] Aboulela 208.
[203] As opposed to the images that appeared, for example, in the 2009 Swiss ban on the building of minarets. The ban stemmed from an anxiety about the increasingly visible Muslim presence. Minarets were depicted as symbols of violence and oppression.

symbolic of collective belonging (e.g. Muslim, Arab, Pakistani, British, *etc.*) based on mutual recognition and mercy. It is in the space of the mosque that Najwa finds solace and community and where Tamer finds some recognition.

While not an explicit focus of the novel, *Minaret* does gesture towards some of the challenges of the British Muslim community. Similar to Muslim Americans, perception can determine the interaction between Muslims and their compatriots. There are three instances in which this is underlined. The first occurs when Najwa and Tamer take Mai, Tamer's niece, to the park. Najwa becomes uneasy when she thinks how others view Tamer: "I sense the slight unease he inspires in the people around us. I turn and look at him through their eyes. Tall, young, Arab-looking, dark eyes and the beard, just like a terrorist."[204] This quote sheds light on the problematic image of the terrorist. Tamer, who is not a terrorist, is bound by an image that prevents others from seeing him as an individual by virtue of physical features. The image is destabilized by the constant possibility of an individual "fitting" the image visually but not acting the part.[205]

The second instance also occurs at the park. Najwa, looking at Tamer, reflects on their acceptance in British society: "Tamer looks up at the sky. He seems more relaxed than the other day when we met in the street. He might not know it is safe for us in playgrounds, safe among children. There are other places in London that aren't safe, where our very presence irks people.

[204] Aboulela 100.

[205] According to Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown in *Racism* (2004), racism is an ideology that has two defining characteristics: "The distinguishing content of racism as an ideology is, first, its signification of some biological and/or somatic characteristic(s) as the criterion by which populations are identified. In this way, these populations are represented as having a natural, unchanging origin and status, and therefore as being inherently different. In other words, this process of racialisation conceives of a plurality of 'races'. Second, one or more of the groups so identified must be attributed with additional (negatively evaluated) characteristics and/or must be represented as inducing negative consequences for (an)other group(s). Those characteristics or consequences may be either biological or cultural." (103-104)

Maybe his university is such a place and that is why he is lonely."[206] Oftentimes, exclusive patriotism employs fear of Muslims to further a specific notion of belonging, but in this quote it is the Muslims who experience fear. They are most safe among children because children are not able to judge based on perceptions and have not yet had engrained a fear of others. They cannot make the demand "Who are you?"

The final instance in the novel in which the precarious situation of Muslims in Britain is described occurs when Najwa is riding the bus home from the mosque. Three young men try to throw a drink at her. When they miss, one of them gets up and pours a drink directly on Najwa's head and calls her "Muslim scum."[207] This atmosphere and behavior became much more prevalent after the 9/11 attacks.[208] Despite the anxiety that has been expressed towards Muslims, many times it is the Muslims who experience fear.

Although Najwa and Tamer's relationship ends, both characters are able to continue to find belonging in their religious commitment. With the money Doctora Zeinab, Tamer's mother, gives Najwa to leave her son, she decides to go on the hajj to Mecca. Najwa's desire to perform the pilgrimage is mentioned throughout the novel. The Kaaba at the heart of the Masjid Al-Haram, the Grand Mosque, is the spiritual center. As the minaret on the mosque in London guides her, the Kaaba calls her. Moreover, it is on the hajj that the diversity is most visible, a point that Malcolm X underscored in a letter to his family during his pilgrimage in 1964. Tamer's parents finally recognize his wish for a degree in Islamic Studies. Through Tamer's and the interdisciplinary nature of his program, the novel underscores the multifaceted approach that is needed when configuring a narrative of self, Muslim, British, or American.

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[206] Aboulela 111.
[207] Aboulela 81.
[208] Sheridan 318-320, 330.

Like *The Road from Damascus*, *Minaret* functions as response to the context after 9/11 in which British Muslims are challenged by questions over their loyalty as citizens and their religious belonging. In addition to the thematic aspect of the novel, there are structural devices that are employed to address this context. As indicated earlier, the novel uses Arabic transliteration in a story that partially takes place on the British landscape. By weaving this apparently "foreign" language throughout the story, the novel contests a homogenized image of a British self by relaying the multilingual reality of Britain. Also, the first person narrative voice, as opposed to the third person voice used in *The Road from Damascus*, provides a personal account of Islamic faith. This structural design allows the reader to trace the development of Najwa's experience of faith. Through this narrative voice, which depicts an individual and personal account, the novel destabilizes the idea of Islamic religious conformity and of Islamic religious commitment as being immutable. What emerges is a fluid experience of faith that is connected to a religious community but not entirely determined by it. Finally, the nonlinear temporal structure further underscores the personal aspect of the story by mimicking memory. While 9/11 has become a critical historical memory on a global scale, it may not have the same resonance on the personal level. By bypassing that particular date and moving back and forth through time, the novel resists the idea that Muslim experience is defined by that moment. The 9/11 attacks did impact Muslims in western countries in terms of civil liberties. The novel suggests, however, that it did not define experiences of faith.

Minaret explores the question of Muslim religious faith in the British context. The novel depicts the diversity of experiences that draws from numerous historical and personal circumstances, the result of which is that a singular narrative of a Muslim self is impossible. In

each of the characters, the intersection of multiple narratives can be traced. Individual and collective identities are interconnected and produce narratives that are complex and diverse. The novel itself with its insistence on the concept of mercy and humility strongly rejects the attempts to frame the Muslim experience in Britain entirely within violence and terrorism. As a response to the query "who are you?" made on Muslims in Britain, like their American counterparts, after 9/11, the novel demands generosity and humility, as Butler[209] calls for, from its audience and will not answer that question with a singular and static response.

Both *The Road from Damascus* and *Minaret* suggest an alternate approach to the British Muslim experience. Rather than the problematic images and narratives that depend on exclusive definitions, they tell stories of shared histories and recognition of diverse communities that are now firmly rooted on the British landscape. This history, despite attempts at disavowal, cannot be erased. Najwa emphasizes this when she talks about the difference between Muslims and Europeans: "'One of the Muslim scholars or maybe even the Khalifa Omar, I'm not sure, said that the Rum, the Europeans, are better than us in that when they fall down in battle they get up, dust themselves and fight again. I try to forget the past, to move on but I'm not good at it. I'm not European.'"[210] In Najwa's assessment, Europeans are better because they can forget. Of course, the irony is that history cannot be forgotten and with the presence of immigrants like Najwa, Britain is face to face with its past. In order to move forward, the novel emphasizes these histories must be addressed. These two novels deconstruct rigid narratives and demonstrate the need for dialogue and mutual recognition. British Muslims, like Muslim Americans, have multiple narratives of self that emphasize the possibility and reality of being more than one thing.

[209] Butler 42.
[210] Aboulela 118

Chapter 3: "Locating Space: What does it mean to be Muslim and French?"

The French context shares many aspects with the British context. France, like Britain, has a colonial history that continues to haunt its current situation. This history affects the dynamic between French Muslim and non-Muslims. The effect of this history is not limited to the colonial period, but included the period of decolonization and the Algerian civil War. There are differences, however, between the two contexts that alter the way in which French Muslims, immigrants and their children form a sense of belonging. The French policy focused on active erasure of the cultural reality of the country. Under the French's conceptualization of the "civilizing mission" the colonized could be incorporated into French society if they assimilated into the culture. Assimilation entailed active erasure of anything that did not conform to a narrow definition of French-ness. This, however, was not always sufficient, as citizenship was not easily attained and in some French colonies, like Algeria, and was contingent on renouncing other affiliations.[211] Thus, the imperial French polity, according to Frederick Coooper, made citizenship "a category in theory attainable but in practice withheld."[212] The ambiguity in the concept of citizenship continued to influence the discourse around immigration.

The vast majority of French Muslims are of Algerian descent, with the remainder mainly coming from other French colonies (Morocco, Tunisia, and Senegal). There are an estimated 6 million Muslims in France.[213] After World War II, there was a labor shortage that resulted in increased demand for immigrants. Immigrants continued to arrive until 1974 when more strict

[211] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 174.
[212] Cooper 175.
[213] Barbara Franz, "Europe's Muslim Youth: An Inquiry into the Politics of Discrimination, Relative Deprivation, and Identity Formation," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18:1 (2007): 99.

restrictions were introduced.[214] After the 1970s, increase in immigrant numbers in France resulted primarily from family unification policy. All immigrants face the challenge of configuring their narratives of self in a context in which they must negotiate multiple aspects of their identity. In other words, their sense of belonging as French is determined not only by their lived experience as French citizens but by the way in which the narrative of French self is configured by a highly exclusive nationalism. It is within this context that Faïza Guène's two novels *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* and *Dreams from the Endz* take place. Both novels not only offer narratives of French Muslim self, but also problematize narratives of French self that continue to exclude the experiences of immigrants, the majority of which are Muslims from former colonies.[215]

The history of the colonial enterprise and the resulting period of decolonization continue to haunt the French context. In times of tension, the specter of this history becomes more visible and the antagonisms between Muslim and non-Muslim French citizens are heightened, a point that Paul Silverstein underscores: "I want to argue that these tensions are embedded within French postcoloniality, within a set of unresolved and enduring struggles over French national belonging that derive from the colonization of North Africa and, more particularly, from the bitter war of decolonization that literally tore the French Republic asunder."[216] These struggles surfaced again after the September 11th attacks. Thus, while the 9/11 attacks occurred in the United States, there were repercussions in the French context. Legislation that focused on terrorism was already in place in France from the 1990s during the Algerian Civil War. For

[214] Paul Silverstein, "The Context of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in France," *Patterns of Prejudice* 42:1 (2008): 10.
[215] Milton Viorst, "The Muslims of France," *Foreign Affairs* 75.5 (Sept. –October 1996): 78.
[216] Silverstein 3.

example, the Vigipirate anti-terrorist plan provided a platform for increased public vigilance against terrorism: "the plan operates according to a logic of armed deterrence, mobilizing the military to guard schools, transportation hubs, government buildings and centres of tourism."[217] The 9/11 attacks provided the French state the impetus to apply this legislation more forcefully and to further policies based on security claims and fear of an internal Muslim "enemy".[218] Moreover, these policies draw from a readily available repertoire of images which depend on the concept of French superiority over any other group. These images, while transformed and revised in the contemporary context, stem from the history of colonialism. Cultural superiority was embodied in various French colonial policies, which in many ways continue to underscore the attitudes towards immigrants and their descendants.

A case example of French colonialism is Algeria. The story of the colonization of Algeria began on July 14th, 1830 when the French military forces landed in Sidi Ferruch; however, July 5th, 1830 marks the official beginning of the French occupation, which was to last about 132 years, with the capture of Algiers. The French, like the British, were driven by a set of justifications for their imperial projects. The idea of a "civilizing mission" *mission civilisatrice* was the framework that guided all other justifications.[219] The superiority of French culture and traditions over Algerian; the superiority of the French language over Arabic and Berber; and the superiority of Christianity over Islam were all ideas that were propagated by the French civilizing mission. These binaries were the source of a number of French policies that sought to make the Algerians "French". In other words, the French carried the "burden" of superiority and

[217] Silverstein 18.
[218] Silverstein 18.
[219] Ena C. Vulor, *Colonial and Anti-Colonial Discourses: Albert Camus and Algeria, An Intertextual Dialogue with Mouloud Mammeri, Mouloud Feraoun, and Mohaammed Dib* (Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 2000) 3.

therefore sought to "civilize" the Algerians, which would support colonial policies, a point highlighted by Ena C. Vulor: "By imposing new patterns of life and outlook that tore at existing mental structures, there is the claim, explicit or implicit that the new impositions are of a greater value than the existing life-style of the indigenous population."[220] This ideology was central to the French colonialism.

Among the major policies of the French colonial project was assimilation. The aim of assimilation was to realize the civilizing mission of the French by producing Algerians who were Algerians externally but French in their culture, religion, and language basically a "cultural asphyxia"[221]. This process precluded the idea of any Algerian cultural reality and sought to efface any trace of it through various venues. The destruction and trauma brought about by the policy of assimilation occurred in several ways, the most tangible was the imposition of the French language at the expense of Arabic and Berber in governance and schools, emphasized by Vulor in regards to the educational system: "The French educational system, however, only served to submerge the Arab-Muslim identity."[222]

Along with policies that aimed at effacing any trace of "Algerian-ness," the French, like all imperial powers, had to paint a specific picture for others and themselves that would justify their mission; thus, narrating events in the past in a specific version of "history" became a necessity. In other words, to achieve their objective, colonial powers first had to create the history that they wanted related. The accounts that emerged out of this desire took on a theatrical quality. Paul Carter, writing on the exploration and process of naming in Australia, argues that

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[220] Vulor 4.
[221] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem,* trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) xviii.
[222] Vulor 7.

these colonized spaces become simply part of the setting for the theatrical and inevitable production of colonization, which is full of illusions. He states,

> History is the playwright, coordinating facts into a coherent sequence…In a theatre of its own design, history's drama unfolds…such a history is a fabric of self-reinforcing illusion. But, above all, one illusion sustains it. This is the illusion of the theatre and, more exactly, the unquestioned convention of the all-seeing spectator.[223]

From Carter's comments, it is clear that history emerges as a purposeful and intentional process, where illusions are created to maintain the structure and notions of the power behind it.

The colonial history of France has implications for the present challenges faced by immigrants, but it is not the only historical period that frames the discussion of French Muslims. The period of decolonization through Algeria's Civil War in the 1990s is a defining point for many French Muslims as well. Algeria's War of Independence from 1954-1962 had repercussions for Muslims in the French context, many of whom had immigrated from Algeria. Despite their geographical distance from the war, they were considered suspect by the French state: "The war fought in Algeria had repercussions in France…During the war these immigrants were subject to heavy surveillance, the criminalization of their associations and organizations, and occasional instances of police repression."[224] A particularly violent example of this tension occurred on October 17, 1961, in which, hundreds of Algerians were killed by the police during a rally. The bodies of the protestors were thrown into the Seine River.[225] According to Yeğenoğlu, this event continues to haunt the French context: "I would add that the memory of this violence, though buried deep, has remained in the national collective psyche and continues to haunt the postcolonial Europe/France. The event, that is, the violence that the colonial other

[223] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) xiv-xv.
[224] Silverstein 9.
[225] Yeğenoğlu 217.

was subjected to is still present in its absence…the 1961 event is nevertheless imprinted into the national and individual memories and the unconscious."[226] During the 1960s and 1970s, French Muslims were reminders of this bitter war and thus faced additional challenges in the French context. The following generations, therefore, were impacted by both the ambivalent and suspect position they occupied in French society. Silverstein describes the violence carried out by vigilante groups targeting French Muslims that occurred during this tumultuous time: "In sport-like fashion…a group of white *beaufs* (short for *beaux-frères*, or brothers-in-law, the French equivalent of 'good ol'boys') would set upon the *raton* (rat), beat him up, destroy his identity papers or pay-slips (thus making his stay in France illegitimate), and leave him for dead."[227] He goes on to argue that the target of the attacks shifted from immigrants to their children. Physical and psychological attacks, symbolized by the destruction of identity papers, defined the context of French Muslims during this period. John R. Bowen argues that the 1989 Headscarf affair emerged from the sentiment of subsequent generations being unable to fully identify as French because of the expressed animosity directed at them. Bowen writes,

> Muslim immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s not only revived that war's bitter memories but also brought up a new generation of boys and girls who saw themselves as belonging neither to the old country (whether that be Algeria or elsewhere) nor to France. They had no 'nation' even though they were citizens of the French 'state'. By the late 1980s some of them had found the one identity left to them, that of 'Muslim'. They began to demand their right to publicly practice, celebrate and wear their religion, and in 1989 three girls tried to enter their middle school wearing headscarves.[228]

[226] Yeğenoğlu 217.
[227] Silverstein 11.
[228] John R. Bowen, "Recognising Islam in France after 9/11," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35:3 (2009): 442.

Immigrants and their descendants, especially Muslims, continued to pose a problem to the French state into the 1990s during Algeria's Civil War. It is during that period, in which Islam began to be viewed as a security threat.

The Algerian Civil War resulted when generals refused to recognize the victory of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) in the elections in 1992. Supporters of the FIS formed the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA). A cycle of violence began between the army and the GIA, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Algerians. France became involved when 5 French citizens were killed in 1994. Consequently, the French government imposed security crackdowns in neighborhoods with large Muslim populations.[229] Thus, Muslim citizens were perceived as security threats and needed to be policed. The fear around domestic dangers resulted in the Vigipirate anti-terrorist plan, instituted in 1995, and focused on the *banlieues*, the suburbs. While policies like the Vigipirate anti-terrorist plan was in place before 9/11, the attacks provided a pretext for the French government to apply more measures to not only police the French Muslim community but also to control the configuration of Islam in France:

> [I]n 2003, the then law-and-order interior minister Nicholas Sarkozy further increased the regiments of *cité* security forces and gave them new powers to search homes and vehicles…and effectively completing the militarization of the French *cités.* In effort to destroy clandestine mosques and Islamic associations, he likewise criminalized assembly in the entries, basements and garages of public housing projects…the French war on terror has involved the official recognition *qua* containment of Islam in France. In particular, the French government has sought to determine the parameters of Islamic practice in France…Sarkozy become determined to replace the *Islam des caves* ('Islam of garages and cellars') with a more controllable 'Islam of the mosques'.[230]

Thus, the 9/11 attacks renewed the tension in the French context in relation to its immigrant population in general, but the French Muslim community specifically, and provided the French

[229] Bowen 443.
[230] Silverstein 18.

government with the impetus to implement policies that focused on controlling Islam in France, rather than address their grievances.

France continues to disavow this troubling history, which influences to a large extent the dynamics and social realities on the ground. Many French Muslims and immigrants live in projects in the outlying suburbs of the major cities. *Banlieues* are often run-down and in need of extensive repairs, creating a difficult environment for all who live in these projects. Moreover, residents, especially the children and youth, are further disadvantaged by the lower-grade schools in these areas. Trica Danielle Keaton in *Muslim Girls and the Other France* describes the difficulties that the youth in the *banlieues* face as a result of poor housing:

> When I visited the homes of my participants, they often immediately pointed out graffiti on the walls and the need for paint and repairs in their buildings. The playground equipment, now broken (some replaced), recalled another time. One student was extremely apologetic about the fact that we had to walk up several flights of stairs to get to her apartment because the elevator in the building was broken…the living conditions of these and other disadvantaged urban youths in effect circumscribe their options, which are constrained even further by a poor education in a society that venerates degrees and credentials. All of these collectively work against them. Yet these young people are expected to abstract these differences, pass the same national examinations, and become un-angry, model "*citoyens*" like children in more advantaged situations. Again, no one I spoke to could contest the existence of this silent violence.[231]

Keaton goes on to discuss the contradictory demands made on the youth in the *banlieues* who are asked to conform to a narrow definition of citizenship and belonging but are not afforded the same opportunities, including housing and education. The residents of the *banlieues*, specifically the youth, are implicitly asked to accept the superiority of French culture over the cultures in their homes, which is reminiscent of French colonial policy. Thus, these youth of the *banlieues*

[231] Trica Danielle Keaton, *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, & Social Exclusion*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) 83-84.

are demanded to prove their loyalty to the French state that has already excluded them economically and socially.

In many ways, French Muslims and immigrants are marginalized because they pose a threat to the French national narrative, which refuses to recognize their experiences. The presence of these young people, therefore, highlights the contradictory foundations of the French narrative which asserts universalism but in fact depends on ethnic distinctions: "these youths expose fundamental contradictions between that highly abstracted notion of universalism and the lived reality of ethnic distinction and racialized discrimination against people of non-European origins and of color."[232] Thus, the presence of French Muslims and immigrants and their claims of belonging to French society demonstrate the need to reformulate both the French state policies that target these groups as well the narrative of a French self, which excludes large sections of the population.

A central aspect of the French national narrative is the concept of *laïcité,* the principle of secularism, which stems from a long history beginning with the French Revolution in 1792. Over time, the boundaries of religion were determined within an increasingly secularizing state. In 1905, a law was passed that officially separated Church from State and established the concept of *laïcité*. According to Mohammad Mazher Idriss, the Conseil d'Ètat (Counsel of the State) describes *laïcité* "as the state's refusal to be governed by the policies of religious clerics, and as such, implies the neutrality of the state with respect to the church."[233] Thus, the state does not provide financial assistance to any religious institutions. It also relegates religious practice to the private sphere. The school system is the central place where secularism is instilled alongside

[232] Keaton 4.
[233] Mohammad Mazher Idriss, "*Laïcité* and the banning of the 'hijab' in France," Legal Studies 25 (2005): 262.

other values that are fundamental to the French national narrative. Therefore, within the space of the school, *laïcité* is most noticeably enforced and the process of assimilation policed.

In addition to the demand for assimilation, the school curriculum disavows significant aspects of French history that impact the youth in the *banlieues*, specifically France's colonial and postcolonial history. The history of French colonialism and decolonization is presented within the idea of the "civilizing mission". The destructiveness of colonialism is not addressed, neither, its impact on the historical encounters it produced:

> As it stands, the war, and indeed the whole era of colonization and decolonization, are often reduced to chronological blips on a timeline of European history, a history in which women and Africans appear obsequious, secondary, or altogether invisible, despite historical facts to the contrary. The entire process works to colonize the mind and constitute the collective memory of those to whom this history is presented as truth, namely the young.[234]

The attempts to disavow this history are continually destabilized by the presence of these youth who are reminders of the French colonial past as well as the injustices of the French state in the present. By doing so, the French school system refuses to acknowledge a fundamental aspect of the youths' narratives in order to further a concept of universalism, which in fact depends on negation of their differences.

The French model is framed by a specific notion of national unity. This unity is based on ideas that were a part of the colonial enterprise. Unlike the British model of colonialism, there was the potential for French colonial subjects to become citizens; however, it was not always attainable for all. The French polity maintained two categories of inclusion: subjecthood (where an individual had the French nationality but was not a citizen) and citizenship (the individual had

[234] Keaton 119.

the right to participate in the polity) that continued to be negotiated.[235] According to Laurent Dubois in "*La République Métissée:* Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History," the deferral of complete citizenship has created a tension which continues to haunt the French context and to define the dynamics between the various groups in France:

> So, citizenship, while possible for some among the elite, was for the most part deferred, a goal which justified the violence of colonialism through its promise. This complex of inclusion and exclusion, and of the deferral of the application of universal ideas, is the very 'Republican racism' which continues to haunt the contemporary discussion around immigration in France. [236]

Thus, in order to understand the French context it is necessary to consider how its colonial history impacts the way in which the discourse on rights and citizenship is formulated. It also plays a role in how French Muslims can make claims to rights and/or articulate grievances against a system that demands that they negate important aspects of their narratives of self in the name of universal ideals.

The demand for assimilation is a real challenge for immigrants and their descendants who find contradictions between the claims to universal ideals and the rights they are actually accorded. The aggressive nature of French assimilation is underscored by Idriss when he discusses the expectation of immigrants in their host country:

> The French model of assimilation requires all immigrants to undergo a personal transformation and assumes that immigrants are willing to undergo this process…With regards to migration, the concern is that members of the ethnic minority may be unable to integrate if they preserve their religious or customary traditions and by encouraging distinct ethnic cultures, the French government believes that this will create divisiveness, "communitarianism" and hinder any chance of national unity. Assimilation requires a republican identity to take precedence over and above other aspects of an individual's persona.[237]

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[235] Cooper 174- 175.
[236] Laurent Dubois, "*La République Métissée:* Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History," *Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2000): 27.
[237] Idriss 267.

Under this system, the egalitarian principles of freedom, individuality, and equality are destabilized. Individual choice and articulation of personal narratives of self that draw from numerous influences are silenced by the demand for assimilation. Thus, Idriss argues that while *laïcité* appears to make the state neutral in religious affairs that some interpretations allow for a more aggressive secularism in which the values of the state, like religious neutrality, are defended even if it means circumscribing religious freedom.[238] This is where the issue of the hijab ban and the rights of French Muslims emerges.

The descendants of immigrants who view themselves as French are often typecast according to stereotypes that emphasize their otherness. The image of the immigrant as a continuous Other who can never be a part of the nation has become more central to exclusive nationalist definitions. The *hijab* has become the most conspicuous target of this exclusionary discourse and reflects the underlying tensions in a narrative of French self that refuses to recognize French Muslims and immigrants as part and parcel of this narrative. As mentioned above, the space of the school has become the fighting ground for an aggressive secularism because it is here that an exclusive nationalism is transmitted. *L'Affaire du Foulard* or the *hijab* affair has become a symbol of the incongruent messages that the students are given. On the one hand, they are expected to become "true" citizens and to conform to a specific narrative. But on the other hand, there is always an underlying message of the impossibility of them truly belonging because the national narrative already excludes them.

The conflict over the *hijab* began in 1989 when three girls—Samira Saidani and Leila and Fatima Achaboun—in Creil were prevented from attending class with their head covers. The

[238] Idriss 261-262.

girls' refusal to discard their *hijab* in school led to a national crisis around the question of individual rights, the place of religion, and *laïcité*. Moreover, Idriss argues that the right-wing politicians suggested in media reports that the issue over the *hijab* was suggestive of Islamic fundamentalism in the *banlieues*[239] and that these young women were trying to undermine French values.[240] Feminism was also employed as a rationale for preventing Muslim girls from donning the *hijab* because "no sane woman could ever wear a hijab"[241] and thus it was the responsibility of the state to intervene and safeguard these girls from their families' oppressive tradition.

Initially, the *hijab* in school was not banned outright. In fact the Conseil d'Ètat first concluded that the *hijab* in itself did not violate the principle of *laïcité*. Expression of religious beliefs was permitted as long as the rights of other students are respected, the students did not interfere with activities in school, and the students attended class. Most importantly, the religious symbol could not be "ostentatious" and could not be used to proselytize. This decision was ambiguous and led to subjective application in different schools. In 1994, Francis Bayrou, the Minister of Education issued a ban in all schools on "ostentatious symbols" because he maintained that they interfered with the process of integration at work in schools. However, his focus was on the *hijab* because he permitted small crosses and yarmulkes.[242] Bayrou's decision was not the end of the turmoil around the issue of the *hijab*. There were several more cases that emerged until the French Senate approved the bill that banned the wearing of "ostentatious religious symbols in French public schools" and while suggesting equal application to all

[239] Idriss 271.
[240] Idriss 272.
[241] Idriss 272.
[242] Idriss 274.

religious symbols it seemed to target the *hijab* specifically.[243] This sense that this bill was driven by anti-Muslim sentiment was furthered by the later ban on the *niqab,* the face veil, in 2011, which prevents Muslim women from wearing the face veil in public spaces. The number of women who choose to wear the *niqab* is around two thousand, a very small proportion of the French Muslim community.

The *hijab,* the *niqab,* and a particular configuration of Islam and a Muslim identity, have become symbols for both French Muslims and their compatriots. These religious markers have been employed by French politicians to suggest that these two symbols are a front for Islamic fundamentalism, which they assert is trying to take over the French system.[244] Thus, *hijab*-clad girls and women are projected as nothing more than victims of a male oppression and the tools to further an Islamic agenda. Their choice to don these symbols and to inscribe them with their own individual meanings is negated. In this narrative, Muslim men are also typecast as violent and oppressive. Moreover, their individual experience of faith is already framed in the French mainstream as extremist and insincere.

The negative depiction of Muslim men was further emphasized during the 2005 riots that spread throughout France. The youth from the *banlieues* were protesting discriminatory practices directed towards them, a school system that was not invested in their future, and high unemployment. Like the young women who chose to wear the *hijab* were depicted as simply the victims of oppression and thus incapable of individual choice, the young men who went to the streets were described by then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy as *racaille* or "scum". In other

[243] Idriss 278.
[244] Idriss 275.

words, stereotypical depictions of French Muslims are readily accessible in times of crisis because of an underlying racial tension in the French national narrative.

In terms of the French Muslim perspective, Seyla Benhabib asserts that the *hijab* affair is emblematic of the challenges facing French Muslims: "'L'affaire du foulard' eventually came to stand for all dilemmas of French national identity in the age of globalization and multiculturalism."[245] Thus, for French Muslims, the focus on Islamic symbols and the turbulence it created in the French mainstream along with the social inequities that they continue to face reveals the problems with a state that does not recognize their rights as citizens. The stance of the French state towards this particular community has a long history; but after 9/11, anti-Muslim sentiment that spread from the United States allowed for more aggressive gestures towards French Muslims in the name of security and safeguarding French national identity from the Islamic threat. Ironically, the anti-Muslim rhetoric in France has led French Muslims to employ religion as a means to make claims for the community, a point that Michael E. Samers highlights in his discussion of the regulation of Islam in France: "Islam became a means of registering a collective identity, a beacon for social relations and individual behavior, especially for those who felt 'excluded' and 'devalued' by French society…As a consequence, religious leaders of associations struggled to form an Islam compatible with a hybrid European, French and Islamic citizenship in the context of French multiculturalism and secularism."[246]

This is the context that Faïza Guène, a French Muslim of Algerian descent, engages in her novels. Born and raised in France, Guène lived in the *banlieues* in Courtillières estate. She is

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[245] Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens*, Vol. 5. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004) 55.

[246] Michael E.Samers, "Diaspora Unbound: Muslim Identity and the Erratic Regulation of Islam in France," *International Journal of Population Geography* 9 (2003): 360-361.

familiar with the *banlieues* and the challenges that immigrants and their descendants face within the French state system. To date, she has published three novels, all of which have been well received. The focus in this chapter is on her first two novels *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, first published in French 2004, and *Dreams from the Endz*, published in French in 2006.[247] Both novels explore the experience of French Muslims both those French born and those who are first generation immigrants. The main character of *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, Doria, is French-born and knows only France as her home while Ahlème in *Dreams from the Endz* grew up in Algeria and immigrated to France as a teenager. Guène's novels, together, offer a useful lens to view the diverse experiences of French Muslims. Her work not only offers a narrative of French Muslim self, but suggests the need for the reformulation of narratives of a French self to include this group who are a part of French society.

The two novels were originally written in French, but Guène employs terms from *verlan*, the backslang utilized in the *banlieues,*[248] and Arabic terms. The use of *verlan* highlights the diversity of the French context, with there are multiple varieties of the language that are not recognized as mainstream French. Arabic terms, too, are used in both novels. Specifically, the term *bled*, which means country, is used in both novels in reference to multiple spaces. In some instances, the referent is France and in other instances the term refers to the country of origin, Morocco and Algeria, respectively. The multiple referents demonstrate the way language, like a narrative of self, can incorporate numerous perspectives and transformations depending on the context. Moreover, by weaving together French, *verlan*, and Arabic, and juxtaposing multiple languages, cultures, and religions, Guène offers a picture of an inclusive narrative of French self

[247] The English translations of both texts will be utilized in the discussion and will be referenced in following footnotes.
[248] Translator's Note. *Dreams From the Endz*. 169.

where all these experiences are reflected and the French Muslim experience is no longer a threat. The novels thus become a representation of the way that an inclusive narrative of French self can be formulated.

Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow tells the story of Doria, a fifteen-year old girl who is the daughter of Moroccan immigrants to France. Her father, to whom she refers as the Beard, abandons Doria and her mother Yasmina to marry a woman in Morocco and to try to have a son. Doria and Yasmina are left to fend for themselves in a system that views them as "Others". Yasmina, initially, is illiterate and after her husband's departure works menial jobs to support her family. Doria is French born but is frustrated and angered by a social system that does not ameliorate the challenges that both she and her mother experience as French Muslims, but demands that they assimilate. Doria and Yasmina's stories depict the struggles of Muslim women in France who are faced with the challenges of an internal patriarchy as well as the patriarchy of the French state. Their stories destabilize the French national narrative that does not recognize the experiences and frustrations of immigrants and their descendants in the *banlieues.* It also challenges any configuration of Islam within the Muslim community that is employed against women to determine how they define their Muslim identity.

Throughout the novel, Doria displays frustration at her life circumstances. Not only has her father abandoned her and her mother, but poverty makes it more difficult for any kind of social advancement. Poverty is depicted in the novel through the description of her family's housing. The poor conditions of the *banlieues* contribute to the struggles of individuals like Doria and her mother. Ironically, the building where Doria lives with her mother is called Paradise Estate. However, Doria describes the conditions of the Estate in stark terms:

> You could say the super of our developments doesn't give a shit about our towers. Luckily Carla, the Portuguese cleaning lady, gives them a quick once-over from time to time. But when she doesn't come, they stay disgusting for weeks on end, and that's how they've been lately. There's been piss and globs of spit in the elevator. It stank, but we were all just happy it was working. It's lucky we know which buttons are for which floors, because the display panel's all scratched and melted.[249]

Throughout the novel, the *banlieues* emerge as an economically depressed parallel society in the outskirts of Paris. The residents of these projects are economically, psychologically, and physically separated from the rest of French society. It is not simply the physical structure of the Estate that leads to a sense of desperation, but rather it is what they symbolize. For Doria, the Estate represents social barriers: lack of opportunity and belonging.

At one point in the novel, the physical divide is illustrated when Doria describes the wire fencing and stone wall that separates Paradise Estate from the Rousseau housing development, where "full-blooded native French families"[250] lived:

> Massive wire fencing that stinks of rust it's so old and a stone wall that runs the whole length of the divide. Worse than the Maginot Line or the Berlin Wall. On the project side, the divider is covered in tags, drawings and concert posters for different eastern-themed events, graffiti praising Saddam Hussein or Che Guevara, patriotic signs, VIVA TUNISIA, SENEGAL REPRESENT, even rap lyrics…what I like best on the wall is an old drawing…It's an angel in handcuffs with a red cross over its mouth.[251]

It is interesting that Doria compares the stone wall to two physical historical divides that were built around circumstances of war, the Maginot Line along the French-German border and the Berlin Wall in Germany; as if to suggest that the divider between these two housing projects occurred within a war zone. More significantly, the divide is a visual signpost of the attempt to keep unwanted people out, a point Brigitte Piquard underscores:

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[249] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 29-30.
[250] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 81.
[251] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 82.

> Creating walls, segregation, borders is creating physical and symbolic facts 'on the ground' in order to differentiate spaces in which identities and otherness can be grounded… Linking spaces and identities brings directly to the dialectical notion of otherness. Marking a space, delimitating the place to belong to, determines the perception of the otherness – those others beyond the line, those behind Walls. In a conflict and in a turbulent environment, borders and walls may be created as a means for protection against invaders, against the "unwanted others".[252]

The graffiti that Doria describes and Piquard underscores is a form of resistance on these types of barriers. In addition to the Berlin Wall, the use of graffiti for resistance can also be seen on the Israeli wall dividing the West Bank. It is clear that the wire fence and stone wall are perceived by residents in the Paradise Estate as representative of an attempt to keep them out. This physical divide is further emphasized by the fact that residents of the *banlieues*, like Doria's mother, are so close to Paris but have not seen the major sites: "It was actually the first time she'd [Yasmina] seen the Eiffel Tower even though she's been living half an hour from it for almost twenty years."[253]

The multiple levels of separation create a paradoxical situation for the youth like Doria, who feel that they are French by virtue of language and culture, but face political and social strategies that exclude them. Doria's connection to France through the language, especially, is emphasized when her mother begins literacy classes: "They're going to teach her [Yasmina] to read and write in the language of my country, this country."[254] Even though Doria's feels a connection to France through the language, her equal position in French society is not recognized despite the message of "liberty, equality, fraternity" emphasized in the school curriculum. As Keaton argues, the schools in many of these *banlieues* are underfunded and students do not

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[252] Brigitte Piquard, "Gated Populations; Walled Territories. Impacts on the Notion of Space and on Coping Mechanisms in the case of the West Bank Wall," *Cities and Crises* (2009): 65.
[253] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 116.
[254] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 72.

receive adequate attention.[255] Doria describes her experience in school where teachers either write highly negative comments on her report cards or see her as a sympathy case.

> If there's one thing that bugs me, it's teachers who get all competitive about who writes the most original report-card comments…The worst I ever saw was Nadine Benbarchiche, who our physics and chemistry teacher, who wrote: 'Exasperating, hopeless, the kind of student who makes you want to resign or commit suicide.'…the kind of comments I keep getting, the ones I call skip-repeat comments, are stuff like: 'seems lost' or 'seems somewhere else,' or, worse.[256]

School becomes a space where her ambivalence and sometimes anger towards to her life situation is accentuated. The name of the teacher here suggests North African origins. Although, she may share a background with Doria, she represents the French education system that disadvantages students who are economically and socially challenged and does not provide the necessary skills for them to advance as citizens.

Doria also has teachers who do not disguise their clear disdain for 'immigrant' youth and blame them for perceived social problems. She mentions her French teacher, Madame Jacques' comment to her class when she mispronounced the name "Job": "She shouted at me because when it was my turn to read…And that crazy old bag of a Mme Jacques accused me of 'sullying our beautiful language' and other stuff just as stupid… 'It's the faaaaulttt of people like yooouu that our Frrrench herrrritttage is in a coma!'"[257] Although she does not explicitly mention that the people she is referring to are French Muslims and immigrants, there is clearly an "us" and "them" dichotomy underlying the comment, where Madame Jacques represents the 'true' French who do not corrupt the language and culture while the poor French Muslims and immigrants are perceived as a threat to the French language and culture.

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[256] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 36-37.
[257] Guène. *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 142-43.

Not all the teachers are as conspicuously threatened by their students' presence. Some teachers view these students as charity cases. For example, Doria feels that her civics teacher Monsieur Werbert is nice but that his motivations stem from his privileged position in relation to these students:

> He's an OK teacher and he's nice, but I don't really like him talking to me too much, because I get the idea he feels sorry for me or something and I hate that…He makes out that he's some kind of prophet of the people. He keeps telling me I can have a meeting with him, if I ever need one…But it's just so he can feel good about himself and tell his friends in some hip Paris bar how hard it is teaching at-risk youth in the ghetto suburbs. Yuck.[258]

Here, the novel underscores the psychological (and physical) distance between different sectors of French society. The juxtaposition of "hip Paris bar" and the "ghetto suburbs" along with Monsieur Werbert's attitude towards his students draws attention to the fact that the experiences of residents of the *banlieues* are distinct from other French citizens. He can separate himself from that space. The immigrants and their children exist on the margins of French society, literally and psychologically.

The novel addresses this marginalization through Doria and Yasmina's experience with the numerous social workers who view them through a narrow lens of belonging and emphasize their poverty and treat them as foreigners. There are various interactions between Doria, her mother and social workers that illustrate that hierarchal dynamic at play. For example, when one of the social workers goes on maternity leave, she tells Doria and her mother that she will resume with them after her baby is born. In response to this, Doria thinks: "It annoyed me when she said that, because it sounded like: 'No matter what, in a year you'll still be poor, you'll still need

[258] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 17-18.

me.'"[259] The class hierarchy is depicted in this example. The social worker's changing life is juxtaposed with Doria and her mother's static life, stemming from poverty.

Their economic position is not the only aspect that influences how Doria and Yasmina are viewed. The social workers also continue to perceive them and their customs as foreign. For example, one social worker upon seeing that Doria is the only child, makes a comment on Arabs: "Once, he [the social worker], told my mom that in ten years on this job, this was the first time he'd seen 'people like you with only one child.' He was thinking 'Arabs,' but he didn't say so. Coming to our place was like an exotic experience for him. He kept giving weird looks to all the knick-knacks around the house, the ones my mom brought over from Morocco after she got married."[260] The reference to the exoticism of the apartment as well as the idea that Arabs have too many children underscores this sense of hierarchy that is reminiscent of the colonial "civilizing mission."

The impact of poverty on her life experiences is not only demonstrated by the interaction with the social workers, it is also described in numerous examples in the novel. Poverty shapes the way Doria perceives her experiences and how she is perceived by others. For example, Doria's description of the dolls she had as a child illustrates the connection between her experience of poverty and the opportunities she is afforded:

> When I was little, I used to cut the hair off Barbie dolls because they were blond, and I chopped off their boobs too because I didn't have any. And they weren't even real Barbie dolls. They were like poor people's dolls, the kind my mom bought me at that cheapo discount store Giga. Crappy dolls. You played with them for two days and they looked like land-mine victims. Even their first name was total shit: Françoise. Not exactly the kind of name that little girls' dreams are made of! Françoise—that's the name of a doll for little girls who don't even dare to dream.[261]

[259] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 105.
[260] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 8.
[261] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 33.

For Doria, the dolls and their poor quality, represent her life in France. She able to survive but does not have the ability to dream. Doria's frustration with poverty is not only because of limited opportunities, but is affected by the way she is perceived by others because of her circumstances. This is illustrated when Doria and her mother go to a rummage sale and two girls mock them:

> We were walking in the aisles between the stands when I heard these girls behind us: 'Check out that girl, dressed even worse than her old lady…It's like when they were rummaging for stuff to sell they found her too!' 'Yeah, right. For them a rummage sale is like the Galeries Lafayette…They lost it laughing…I felt tears welling up in my eyes and my nose stinging. I really wanted to cry, but I was trying to keep my cool…At times like that, I would like to be stronger, to have a protective shell to keep me safe all my life. Then nothing could ever hurt me.[262]

Poverty, therefore, results in negative encounters that further emphasize a social hierarchy in which Doria and her mother are excluded twice: by their poverty and their ethnic backgrounds.

Doria is more sensitive than her mother to the interactions with the social workers and the system of welfare on which her small family depends. The novel addresses Doria's resentment and frustration towards the French system that excludes her and youth who share her circumstances, disavows their grievances, and does not provide them with opportunities to succeed like their fellow citizens. This is illustrated through examples that depict disproportionate police attention on Hamoudi, Doria's friend who acts like an older brother to her, and Youssef, the son of Aunt Zohra, Yasmina's friend. Both of these young men have encounters with the law. Hamoudi is a young man, who is interested in poetry, involved in drug dealing but is trying to reform himself. Despite his attempts to change his life, he continues to face challenges because of class distinctions that result in fewer employment opportunities. He also has repeated problems with police officers: "when I see the police patting Hamoudi down near our lobby, when I hear them calling him stuff like 'little bastard,' or 'piece of trash,' I tell

[262] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 103-104.

myself that these guys, they don't know shit about poetry."[263] Doria is frustrated by the fact that to the police officers Hamoudi is just another French Arab living in the ghettos; they do not know that he often recites the poetry of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud. Later in the novel, Hamoudi loses a job because property is missing and he was assumed to be the thief because of his background: "He pointed to himself, eyes wide open…Hamoudi, he's got really dark brown hair, clear enough skin, and big hazel eyes…A real Mediterranean man. He says that's why they unfairly accused him. I don't know if he's paranoid but, in any case, they had no right to accuse him without proof. That's no good."[264] Thus, various stereotypical notions are projected on to Hamoudi because his appearance indicates an Arab background. But, in fact, Doria's description of Hamoudi does not suggest violence or criminal behavior; it is simply a picture of an individual young man's face.

In addition to Hamoudi, Youssef, another young man, faces challenges in the French system, which the novel suggests is more unforgiving to young men from immigrant backgrounds. He is the son of a family friend who is accused of being involved in drug dealing and stealing cars. It is not clear if he is actually guilty; but, the police use excessive force with Youssef, either presuming his guilt or abusing powers to search homes in the *banlieues*: "It was Aunt Zohra in a panic because the police showed up at her place at six in the morning to arrest Youssef. They broke the door down, kicked him out of bed, turned the whole house upside down, and took him to the station…I guess right now Youssef's being interrogated in a stuffy gray office. Me, I know that Youssef's one of the good guys. It's not fair."[265] Later on in the novel, Doria makes a comment regarding Youssef's possible sentencing and how her

[263] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 20.
[264] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 112-113.
[265] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 61.

understanding of justice would be affected: "I hope Youssef will be free quickly. He doesn't deserve all this crap that's happening to him…If Youssef goes to prison, I understand nothing about justice."[266] Through Hamoudi and Youssef's case, two important issues are raised. First, the possibility that these young men are presumed guilty based on stereotypical ideas because they live in the *banlieues* and are associated with poverty and violence. Therefore, they are often the targets of the police. Second, the refusal to recognize that Hamoudi and Youssef are disadvantaged through the French system because they are relegated to the margins and thus are not afforded the same opportunities as French men who are not Muslim or immigrants and the children of immigrants.

Many immigrants are unaware before arriving of the impossibility of completely belonging. There is a disjuncture between their idealized conceptualization of their new country and their actual experience. The disappointment with the reality of France for immigrant characters is highlighted in the novel. The first example relates to Yasmina's disappointment:

> My mom always dreamed France was like in those black-and-white films from the sixties…So when she and my dad arrived in Livry-Gargan [a commune in these suburbs of Paris], just north of Paris, in February 1984, she thought they must have taken the wrong boat and ended up in the wrong country. She told me that when she walked into this tiny two-room apartment the first thing she did was throw up. I'm not sure if it was seasickness or a sixth sense warning her about her future in this *bled*.[267]

The disappointment of immigrants is furthered by their experiences in France. They are not able to acquire a real sense of belonging because their opportunities for employment are limited and their living conditions are below their expectations, but they are not in a legal position to make claims for grievances. Thus, their focus continues to be on their country of origin for a feeling of

[266] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 77.
[267] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 12-13.

belonging, even though most do not return. Doria talks about the summer plans of the Alis family in the Paradise Estate, who return every year to Morocco:

> If you ask me, the fact that they built a house back in the *bled*…it means they're planning on staying there. Bet it didn't even cross the kids' minds. But the parents, they must have been thinking about it ever since the first day they arrived in France. Ever since the day they made the mistake of setting foot in this crappy country they thought would become theirs. Some people spend their whole lives hoping they'll make it back home. But a lot of them only go back once, in a coffin, shipped by plane like they're an export product or something. Apparently, they find home soil again, but it's definitely not the way they were expecting.[268]

For immigrants who desire to make France their country and others who dream of eventually returning to their countries of origin, neither possibility is afforded them. The question of home is complicated by their migration and by the fact that they have children who know no other home except France, but are not accepted as well. Therefore, immigrants and their children face the dilemma of being torn between two spaces and this is illustrated by the characters who travel back and forth between France and their countries of origins.

Doria and Yasmina, however, do not have the option of returning to Morocco because of the situation with the Beard. Thus, after Doria's father leaves them, Yasmina is limited to menial work because initially she is not literate in French. So she cleans rooms at the Formula I Motel. Doria is not only perturbed by her mother's occupation, but by the treatment Yasmina receives from her boss, who treats her harshly and views all the women who work there as foreigners. Yasmina, however, as immigrant, does not have the same avenue to express her grievance. Monsieur Winner, her boss, does not demonstrate any of the generosity or humility Butlers calls for; rather, he enjoys the hierarchal dynamic that his position affords him:

> Sometimes, when she gets home late at night, she cries. She says it's from feeling so tired. She struggles even harder during Ramadan, because when it's time to break the

[268] Guène. *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 98.

> fast, around 5:30, she's still at work. So if she wants to eat, she has to hide some dates in her smock….because if her boss saw her he'd be totally pissed. Everyone calls her 'Fatma'…They shout at her all the time, and they keep a close watch on her to make sure she doesn't steal anything from the rooms. Of course, Mom's name isn't Fatma, it's Yasmina. It must give Monsieur Winner a charge to call all the Arabs 'Fatma,' all the blacks 'Mamadou,' and the Chinese 'Ping Pong.' Pretty freaking lame.[269]

The novel describes here the challenging situation of an immigrant who is forced to work in an unsupportive environment out of the need to support her family. Yasmina, however, finds a way to circumvent her boss and thus practice her faith, even if it is privately. Although the *hijab* affair is not addressed explicitly in the novel, it does engage the question of religious practice. In this quote, it is clear that Yasmina feels that her job will be threatened even if she breaks to eat a date during Ramadan. Here, the discrimination is racially and religiously motivated. This is indicated by the names that Monsieur Winner uses with his employees, indicating a general disdain for immigrants regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. The novel is challenging the notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity that are fundamental to the French national narrative by illustrating the struggle of members of the society who are not allowed the same rights because of their cultural and religious background. The employees at the Formula I Motel are simply reduced to stereotypical depictions. It is worth noting that by responding in this way the novel also contests the claims that the concerns around the *hijab* stem from concern about the rights of women, when many times French Muslim women encounter discriminatory practices at the hands of other French citizens who do not recognize their rights as individuals.

The novel not only explores the intercommunity dynamics between French Muslims and non-Muslim French, it also addresses intracommunity dynamics. Throughout the novel, there is a critique of the patriarchal aspect of the Arab culture in the *banlieues.* It is represented by several

[269] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 5.

male figures in the novel: Doria's father, only known as the Beard, Aunt Zohra's husband, and the father and brother of Samra, a girl who lives in the same building with Doria. Each of the men displays aggressive or negligent behavior that the novel critiques. Doria's father not only abandoned his family without any notice in order to have a son, but he is described in other instances in the novel as controlling and a negative presence in Doria and Yasmina's life. Doria recalls, for example, that he would not allow her and her mother to participate in the annual neighborhood fair that everyone attended. His behavior is described as being inconsistent when he tears down a poster of a male celebrity in Doria's room and refers to him as Satan, but forces Doria to take out his beer bottles to the trash during Ramadan, calling attention to the fact that he drank alcohol. He employs religion and culture in order to further a patriarchal system in his household. Aunt Zohra's husband, like the Beard, has a second wife but he spends half his time in France and the other half in Algeria, a division of time that Aunt Zohra appreciates. While he has not completely abandoned his family like the Beard, he is abusive to his wife and when he finds out that his son, Youssef was imprisoned:

> Speaking of Aunt Zohra, she found the courage to tell her old crazy husband the whole story. Things got violent between them when he found out and the old wacko hit Aunt Zohra. He stopped after a minute because he'd had enough, his arms hurt too much, and he had heart palpitations. So he sat down and asked her for a glass of water to calm him. She went to get him his drink and that's how the whole thing ended…Every day she prays to God for her husband to go back to where he came from.[270]

The novel critiques the abusive and patriarchal behaviors that would make Aunt Zohra responsible for the fate of her son, despite the fact that her husband is absent for a large portion of their life.

[270] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 106-107.

The situation of Samra, a girl in the Paradise Estate, with her brother and father is another example of the internal critique. Samra is a nineteen-year old girl who lives in the same building as Doria. It is known through the building that her brother and father mistreat her but no one interferes. In a reference to Samra, Doria associates Samra's struggle with her family to the challenges of being a girl in a certain part of Arab culture:

> Her brother follows her everywhere. He stops her from going out and when she gets back from school a bit later than normal, he grabs her by the hair, then the dad finishes the job. Once, I even heard Samra screaming because they'd locked her in the apartment. In their family, the men are kings. They do serious close surveillance on Samra, and her mom can't say anything, can't do anything. So it's truly bad luck to be a girl.[271]

Doria can identify with Samra in terms of her negative experience with the close male figures in her family. She refuses patriarchal abuses of power, whether it is internal to or external to the Muslim community. The novel suggests an alternative for young Muslim women that begins with self-empowerment and political involvement.

Despite Doria's frustration throughout the novel, there are indications of positive changes in her and Yasmina's life. Yasmina is able to formulate her narrative of self where she is independent of her husband and is able to define her own story, in line still with her religion and culture. This movement begins when she leaves Formula I after the other maids go on strike and her boss does not appreciate that she continues to work. It is then completed when she enrolls in literacy classes. In these classes, Yasmina meets other women and is exposed to different backgrounds. Learning French provides Yasmina with more opportunities and she eventually acquires new employment. As a result of these classes, relationships are formed and a space is created for stereotypical depictions to be dismantled. For example, Jacqueline, Yasmina's teacher who becomes her friend, asks her questions of Islam and Moroccan culture: "She asks

[271] Guène. *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 83.

Mom questions about religion, Moroccan culture, and lots of other things like that… 'It's so I know if what they're saying on the TV is true…you know…'"[272] The absence of the Beard empowers Doria and Yasmina. What emerges through their experiences is a narrative of self that is female, French, and Muslim and rejects all forms of patriarchy.

Doria's own attitude alters throughout the course of the novel. Even though she is lost in the school system, after they tell her there is no place for her to repeat the year, Doria has clear opinions on the importance of political participation as a means of empowerment for French Muslims and immigrants. This is illustrated at two points in the novel. The first instance occurs when she discusses her civics assignment with Nabil, a young man who tutors her and with whom she forms a relationship. The assignment revolves around the question: "Why Don't People Vote?" Nabil argues that with all the struggles that residents of the *banlieues* encounter, they have little reason to vote. Doria disagrees and maintains that voting is representation and for their situation to improve everyone has to participate:

> [H]e says that a guy from the Paradise projects… 'Why would he give a shit about voting?' Nabil's right. The guy already has to fight daily just to survive, so you can forget about his duties as a citizen…If his situation improved a little, maybe he would want to get out and vote. Still, I can't really see who'd make him feel represented…I wonder if this is why these housing developments are left to decay, because so few people around here vote. You have no political usefulness if you don't vote. Me, when I'm eighteen, I'll go vote. Here, a person never gets a chance to be heard. So when we get the chance, we have to take it.[273]

Thus, Doria wants to bring change for her community by making a claim on the French promise of "liberty, equality, fraternity."

Also, her hopes for the future emerge as she watches her mother's situation improve. The second instance where Doria expresses political interest as a means to facilitate change occurs at

[272] Guène. *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 142.
[273] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 88-89.

the end of the novel when she sees improvement in her mother's conditions and she describes the type of uprising she would lead. Interestingly, Doria cites Napoleon, "All conquered people need a revolution" as the foundation for her own revolution:

> Me, I'll lead the uprising in the Paradise Estate. The headlines will say: DORIA LIGHTS UP THE TOWERS or maybe THE PASSIONATE HEROINE OF THE PROJECTS IGNITES THE POWDER KEGS. But it won't be a violent revolt, like in that film *Hate* that doesn't exactly end happily ever after. It will be an intelligent revolution, with no violence, where every person stands up to be heard. It's not just rap and soccer in life. Like Rimbaud said, we will carry in us 'the sobs of the Infamous…the clamor of the Damned.'[274]

Interestingly, the novel references the 1995 film *La Haine* or *Hate*, which examines the life in the *banlieues*. The film depicts the dismal realities of the projects, where inhabitants are economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged. Unlike the bleak future portrayed in the film for the future of race relations in France, Doria remains hopeful to change the status quo so that all groups are represented and receive their rights. Doria's uprising also offers the French Muslim youth more avenues for success beyond rap and soccer, as was the case with the well-known French Muslim soccer player Zinedine Zidane, for example.[275] As Yasmina's narrative of self changes and she develops a sense of belonging in France, Doria's connection to France is made stronger.

As a response to the French context after 9/11, the novel underscores the fluidity of individual and collective narratives of selves and insists on the reformulation of the narrative of French self, which incorporates all the experiences of those who are part of France's past, present, and future. This shift is emphasized by the change in Doria's favorite expression, which transitions from the use of the Arabic phrase *kif-kif* meaning "its all the same" to the use of the

[274] Guène, *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* 179.
[275] Silverstein, "Sporting Faith: Islam, Soccer, and the French Nation-State," *Social Text* 18.4 (Winter 2000): 40.

French verb *kiffer* meaning "to really be crazy about something." Rather than saying "*kif-kif* tomorrow" (its all the same tomorrow)," the novel ends with Doria saying "*kiffe kiffe* tomorrow" (to really like tomorrow).

Guène's second novel *Dreams from the Endz*, published in French in 2006, explores French Muslim and immigrant narratives of self through the experience of the main character Ahlème, an Algerian immigrant to France, and her family. Unlike Doria who is born and raised in France, Ahlème immigrated when she was around ten years old with her brother Foued after her mother is killed in Algeria during the Algerian Civil War. Her father, Moustafa Galbi, referred to as the Boss, was working in France in construction and sending them money until they were united with him. Like *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, the story takes place in the *banlieues*. Their building is called the Uprising Estate. It is worth noting, in reference to this name, that this novel was published after the 2005 riots in France, which the novel gestures to: "The days are over when running water and electricity were enough to camouflage the injustices, and the shanty towns are far away…What's happened in our endz these past few weeks has stirred up the world press…What can the carcasses of burnt-out cars do to change anything, when an army of fanatics is trying to silence us?"[276] This quote highlights the novel's response to the French reaction to the riots, in which the youth who participated were depicted simply as criminals. The novel demonstrates how the riots stemmed from frustration with the socioeconomic reality of these youth.

As is the case in *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, the *banlieues* are depicted as unmaintained and low quality housing. Electricity power is often interrupted and there are insect infestations. The apartment keys are the most illustrative indication of the age of these projects and lack of any

[276] Guène, *Dreams from the Endz* 23.

maintenance or renovations: "So here I am doing one of my least favourite things: opening our front door without making any noise, which is no mean feat, given the keys we've got – *sans soucis*, it's stamped on them, *no worries*. They're ENORMOUS, thirty centimetres long, eight wide, and they weigh in at fourteen kilos, they're dungeon keys from the Roman Empire."[277] While Ahlème exaggerates the size of the keys, the description signifies the difficulties of living in these projects.

In addition to the physical deterioration of the *banlieues*, the lack of opportunity furthers the frustration that many of the residents, especially the youth, like Ahlème and Foued, experience. The social problems in these projects that were mentioned in *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* are more thoroughly explored in this novel. Ahlème struggles to prevent her brother Foued from becoming involved in illegal activity. It is difficult for Ahlème because there is a general sense of desperation in the projects because the schools are of a lower quality in the *banlieues* and subsequently the youth are unable to acquire adequate employment. In Ahlème's perception, the resulting situation is the consequence of the decision of French politicians who do not recognize the rights of these youth to the ideals of the French system and position them for failure. Block 30, in the projects, where illegal activity occurs, is an expression of this failure:

> Didier [Ahlème's acquaintance] isn't a complete piece of shit. He's done some shitty things, for sure, but pieces of shit don't hang out in the lobby of Block 30. No, the real bastards, in their comfy armchairs, decide *who's* going to hang out in the lobby of Block 30. They're the ones who decide to kick a guy like Foued out of France for one screw-up too many. Even Didier can understand that. He used to have desires, dreams, stuff like that.[278]

For Ahlème, residents of the Estate are already disadvantaged by a system that strips them of their dreams.

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[277] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 33.
[278] Guène, *Dreams from the Endz* 106-107.

In this novel as well, characters from the *banlieues* are targeted by the French police and are stopped randomly to show their identification and/or arrested. Even when the character cooperates, they are mistreated. For example, when Ahlème forgets to buy a ticket on the subway, she is stopped by the police and asked for documentation. She gives them her Algerian passport. The police officer automatically asks her for documentation in French, without opening the passport. Ahlème responds by saying, "'Why don't you start by opening it? You'll see it's bilingual, it's got your language inside too.'"[279] This comment is significant because it gestures to France's continued disavowal of its colonial past. The presence of the French language in the Algerian passport is a tangible trace of French colonialism.

Another example of the problematic dynamic between police officers and French Muslims and immigrants occurs with Papa Demba. Papa Demba and his wife Aunt Mariatou, a mother figure for Ahlème, are from Senegal and live in the projects as well. At one point, Papa Demba returns home angry after an encounter with the police. He looks for a dictionary because after being stopped randomly and asked for identification the police officers refer to him as a "gibbon."[280] He is unfamiliar with the term and wants to understand their use of that word. Through these two examples, the characters that are French Muslims, immigrants, or perceived to belong to either group face challenges with another aspect of the French system. Law enforcement, along with the immigration system, and its stereotypically motivated interactions with French Muslims and immigrants is representative of a system that considers them to be foreigners who need to be managed and/or removed from French society.

[279] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 54.
[280] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 81.

Immigrant and French-born youth living in the Uprising Estate are also disadvantaged by the educational system. This is the case with Foued who sells products illegally and has physical altercations because the system has already excluded him. Like Doria's teachers, Foued's teachers discourage him from following his aspirations. They already view him as a failure because of his background. This emerges when Foued is excluded from college and Ahlème becomes aware of the guidance of his teachers:

> Here are the facts: during his end-of-year interview with the teachers and careers adviser, Foued explained he'd like to do sports studies, specialising in football, because that's been his passion since forever…And here's the guidance the careers counsellor thought fit to give him: 'There's no point dreaming, you're not being realistic. I won't take responsibility for sending you to some sports academy, not everybody can become a Zidane. You should train as an electrician or a mechanic instead. I think that's what would suit you best.'[281]

The youth are prevented from dreaming or aspiring to escape from the projects, but, the educators underestimate the potential of the students in certain areas of France because of their background, which then interferes with their sense of belonging.

In the French context, Muslims many times are disadvantaged because they are perceived as unwilling to assimilate and they are associated with the *banlieues,* which carry the stigma of poverty.[282] Poor immigrants and their descendants, therefore, pose a problem because they must either be integrated to the system or removed. The novel suggests that rather than providing a path for immigrants and their descendants to become a flourishing part of French national society, the focus has been on excluding them. As a result, immigrants are highly conscious of their precarious state where they can be deported arbitrarily. This fear is exacerbated by French immigration policies that concentrate on ridding the country of unwanted immigrants, regardless

[281] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 131.
[282] Franz 102.

of their contribution to the nation through work. The issue of immigration is not specific to France; however, the French context differs from the American context because its immigrants stem from its colonial history and differs from the British context because it does not have a multiculturalist model and demands assimilation. Ahlème narrates frightening tales of other immigrants who went to the immigration office believing they were finally acquiring their papers and instead were immediately deported:

> Since the decree of February 2006 and its aim of expelling 25,000 people a year, it's like there's a smell of gas in the queue in front of the immigration office. You hear worrying rumours about ambushes as if there's a war going on, including this grim story a woman told me…Her cousin had been summoned to the immigration office. He was very happy about it, because he'd been waiting for months. He thought he'd be able to legalise his situation at last, but it was a trap. They took him to a detention centre and now he's back in Bamako. He didn't have time to say goodbye in his nearest and dearest or to pick up his belongings.[283]

The instability immigrants feel is palpable in this quote. Since Ahlème handles the family's immigration papers, she is sensitive to the difference in status between those who have French passports and those like her who must renew their papers every few months, even though her father has been working in France since the 1960s. Her frustration with her ambiguous status is illustrated, for example, through her experience of waiting in the immigration line. She reflects on the difference the French passport would make for her: "Almost French. The only thing missing is the stupid bit of laminated sky-blue paper stamped with love and good taste, the famous *French touch*. That tiny scrap would give me my rights and release me from getting up at three o'clock in the morning in the every three months to go and join the queue in front of the immigration office, in the cold, to renew my stay for the umpteenth time."[284] Despite her father's extensive work history and Ahlème's attempts to integrate, she continues to be excluded from

[283] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 43.
[284] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 40-41.

the French system and narrative. The novel, however, contests the position of immigrants and their children like Ahlème, Foued, and Ahlème's father who perceive themselves as a part of the French context through work, history, language, or culture. For example, after her brother is arrested for participating in a fight, Ahlème reflects on her father's position in France, his gratitude to the country, and how after his contribution to the host country they still do not belong:

> It amazes me, this funny gratitude the Boss and the other men of his age feel towards their host country. You walk in the shadows, you pay your rent on time, clean police record, not five minutes of unemployment in forty years of jobbing it, and after that, you take off your hat, you smile and say: '*Merci la France!'* I've often wondered how a man like the Boss, who considers pride to be a vital organ, was able to keep his down all those years before losing it.[285]

The question of home and where and how someone belongs are central themes throughout the novel. Ahlème's frustration is directed towards France and the inability of Ahlème's family to locate a stable sense of home in the French context. There is a constant unfulfilled longing, emphasized by her name, which means 'dreams' in Arabic, and her struggle to be recognized in the French narrative.

Like in *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow*, the characters who are immigrants continue to have a connection with their homeland or to the country of origin. Ahlème and her family, for example, are emotionally and psychologically invested in both spaces, but not entirely belonging in either. Thus, near the end of the novel, Ahlème decides to take Foued and her father to visit their family in Algeria. Her concern, however, is that she will feel out of place in Algeria after all the years in France: "I was so scared of not having anything in common with my relatives any more, I was afraid of France having stamped its mark on me so I'd feel even more of a foreigner over

[285] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 63.

there."[286] As the trip continues, Ahlème realizes that she is marked by both contexts and thus both play a role in her unfolding narrative of self. This process occurs on both the individual and collective level and involves multiple traces of belonging. A narrative of French or Algerian self should be reformulated to include not only the colonial encounter but also the experience of immigrants like Ahlème who are bound to both spaces.

The novel also addresses how France is viewed by Algerians who have not immigrated. Like the American Dream, accessibility to French belonging is limited to certain groups, even though individuals like Ahlème and her family strive for a sense of belonging in the French context. In Algeria, it becomes clear to Ahlème that Algerians view France through discolored lens because of the images on French television and stories that Algerian immigrants narrate about their experiences:

> The 'cousins', the ones who live in France and only come back to the *bled* for the holidays, don't talk about anything except their new country. It's like they're talking about this new girlfriend: sometimes she holds out her arms to them, sometimes she kicks them away. They tell these stories…They never let on to their families that they're working on the black, washing up in rank restaurants and sleeping in tiny grimy maids' rooms. They make it sound rosy, because they're ashamed…I'd like to tell them that over there, in France, it's not what they think, and they'll never get the truth through that distorting window people call television. They hack into French channels…but *they* don't show reality.[287]

These distorted images of France encourage Algerians to immigrate and more importantly to believe that there is an opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and home in the host country. The novel, therefore, highlights the incongruence between these images and the experiences of immigrants. It does this in order to draw attention to the struggles of French Muslims and immigrants, who believed that there is a possibility of being represented in the French national

[286] Guène, *Dreams from the Endz* 145.
[287] Guène. *Dreams from the Endz* 149.

narrative but continue to be treated as Others within the country that they live and work. These images do not reflect the sense of threat that immigrants represent to the French national identity and the numerous attempts to exclude them. This can be seen throughout the colonial period, but it is after 9/11 that the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rhetoric became more conspicuous in Western nations like the United States and France, thus providing a platform for more aggressive measures targeting French Muslims.

Dreams from the Endz also addresses the issue of patriarchy. Akin to Doria, Ahlème is a strong female character. She emerges as the matriarch after her mother's death and her father, the Boss, injured at work, is no longer able to provide for their family. She is also Foued's guardian and often regulates his decisions. When she discovers that Foued is engaging in illegal activity, Ahlème finds a gang leader and demands that he no longer include Foued in any other activities. Thus, Ahlème is in a position of authority within her household, reversing the patriarchal system. Also, Aunt Mariatou is a strong female character that challenges any patriarchal dynamic.

The structure of these novels is important to highlight in the discussion. Both novels use first person narrative voice. This narrative voice relays a highly personal story. It offers an aporia to examine critical issues, like poverty, exclusion, and patriarchy, through the experience of the protagonists, who tell their own stories. The protagonists determine the aspects of their experience that are essential. In this way, they are in control of their own narratives. Through the first person voice, the novel conveys how the protagonists view the connections between their individual narratives and their communities' narratives. *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow,* in addition, is structured more like a diary, which allows the reader to appreciate the emotional dimension of Doria's story. Thus, the particular choice of narrative voice and the diary format, allows the

reader to interpret the information provided by the narrator, who may not perceive all the complexities in their stories, and it prevents the generalization of their stories to an entire group. The focus on individuals, rather than a group, personalizes the French Muslim experience where the community is constituted of individuals who have their own stories instead of an undifferentiated group.

Both *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* and *Dreams from the Endz* critique the intercommunity and intracommunity configurations of Islam that do not reflect lived experiences of the faith. Within the Muslim communities, the novels reject patriarchal notions that are buttressed by religious language but result in the exclusion of Muslim women from the narrative. Rather, the novels provide a space to imagine different narratives of a female Muslim self, where the individual rejects the patriarchal interpretations of the faith and the images of Muslim women that are projected on them in the French national narrative. The central theme is the choice to define religious commitment. In other words, the young women in both novels are not reduced to the image of a Muslim woman within their community or to the image that French politicians have employed in issues like the *hijab* and *niqab,* where they are also stripped of choice.

In addition to the focus on intracommunity dynamics, both novels contest the French national narrative that refuses to recognize the experience of French Muslims and immigrants whose stories are a part of the French landscape. The novels shed light on the contrast between the images of these groups and their lived realities. By doing so, both *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* and *Dreams From the Endz* impel the reader to revisit how a narrative of self is constructed on an individual level, but also on a collective level. It does this by deconstructing the national

narrative that disavows a history, negates diversity of experience, and imagines homogeneity of culture, language, and religion.

Conclusion

The experiences of Muslims in Western countries has taken on new dimensions since the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the U.S. Earlier historical moments affected the way Muslim communities were viewed by their fellow compatriots. Oftentimes, political events in the U.S. have led to Arabs and Muslims being viewed with suspicion. The 9/11 attacks, however, became a turning point in the repercussions that it generated: aggressive national policies that targeted various groups, the US-led "war on terror," and violent backlashes against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims. After the attacks, a demand was made of Muslim communities for a singular and complete response to the question "Who are you?" This accusatory question represents a form of ethical violence, according to Judith Butler, because the response demanded by the interrogator is not possible. There are multiple avenues to explore the extent of the impact of 9/11 on Muslim communities. Most of the work that has been done on this issue has come from the fields of sociology and political science. The focus in this dissertation has been on literature, specifically the novel, and the way that it offers a different vantage point to consider Muslim identities.

The six novels examined in this dissertation from the United States, Britain, and France trace multiple configurations of narratives of Muslim self after the 9/11 attacks. The novels illustrate the challenges of configuring individual and collective identities against distorted stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims. Two parallel forces function to regulate and exclude. The first force is external; the loyalty of Muslims in these countries is questioned, as is their belonging to the national narrative. Problematic images of the terrorist have overshadowed Muslim communities as well as non-Muslims who are perceived as being Muslim. The second

force is internal in attempts to regulate belonging in the Muslim community. A particular image of a Muslim determines if adherents are accepted as members of the community. Underlying this aspect of the discussion are the personal experiences of faith versus Islam as an institution. Muslims in Western countries, therefore, must negotiate narratives that demonstrate their sense of national belonging as well as their diverse lived experiences of faith.

The novels in each chapter illustrate the dynamics of configuring a narrative of Muslim self that encompasses the national and religious dimensions, especially in a context of national crisis in which both are called into question. While 9/11 was not marked in each novel, it is unequivocally the context in which the novels were written. All of the novels, regardless of the time frame of the story, depict the complex realities facing Arab and Muslim communities in Western countries who are faced with task of proving their commitment to the nation and claiming their right to define their own religious belonging. Even though these are fictional accounts, the novels highlight the necessity to avoid singular representations that delineate problematic boundaries for belonging that do not reflect the mutable and variable nuances that underlie each configuration.

This dissertation has intended to demonstrate how the novels portray this dynamic and the multiple narratives that emerge as a result of shifting constellations of relationships, drawing on Margaret R. Somers' work, at the individual and collective levels. The story of the characters shows the workings of relationships and how they relate to complex narratives that weave together diverse experiences. In all of the novels, the interaction between the characters provided a useful framework to trace the changing dimensions of belonging. By the end of the novels, exclusivist national and religious narratives are problematized and reformulated to include

groups that were marginalized. In addition to the character development, the structural design of the novels further emphasized the concept of the constellation of relationships. Intertextuality and multiple languages, for example, counter any account that depends on homogeneity and singularity and add layers of depth. American, British, French, Muslim, and Islam as rigid configurations are deconstructed. What emerges instead are alternative narratives that depend on diversity of experience and belonging where English, French, and Arabic, for example, are juxtaposed to relay individual and collective stories.

A significant aspect of the dissertation has been the connection between tracing narratives of Muslim self and narratives of American, British, and French self. There are similar processes at work in configuring religious and national narratives. Both depend on delineating boundaries of belonging as these boundaries shift across time and in response to events. Throughout the novels, the image of a Muslim is complicated repeatedly. The novels depict different ways of expressing religious commitment. None of the characters represent a singular image of a Muslim or religious belonging; rather, within each novel, the boundaries of the Muslim community are dismantled and replaced by a conceptualization of community that is inclusive of those who were previously marginalized. In these novels, the process of challenging narrow configurations of religious belonging was inextricably linked to the process of constructing a national narrative. The novels demonstrate that while there are attempts to formulate national narratives around a specific type of citizen, numerous groups are already implied in the narratives because of a shared history. In the chapter on the American context, for example, both novels underscored that the presence of immigrants, African Americans, Latinos, *etcetera* and their connection to the American landscape cannot be disavowed. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Once in a*

Promised Land Muslim Americans challenge this disavowal by presenting a narrative that is multifaceted and inclusive of all experiences. In the British and French contexts, despite differences in the historical and social realities, a similar process was prominent in the novels in Chapter Two and Three. Like the American landscape, Britain and France are multicultural spaces in which Muslims are immigrants and citizens. In these contexts, there are incongruities between the principles espoused by the nation and the realities faced by marginalized groups. The novels in both chapters demonstrate how the stories of the Muslim communities in these countries are interwoven into the national narratives.

This dissertation has sought to expand not only how Muslim identities are explored but also to consider how national narratives are constructed. The precarious role of Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived as belonging to those groups in Western countries since the 9/11 attacks has highlighted the need to counter distorted images that aim to define entire groups. These images carry serious consequences that have resulted in questioning the loyalty and place of Muslim, and some non-Muslim, citizens in the nation and creating policies that target them. The intracommunal dynamic has made acceptance or exclusion within the Muslim community another dimension of the dilemma facing individual Muslims. *Tracing Narratives of Muslim Self after 9/11* provides a foundation to complicate any singular image of Muslims that is deployed outside of the community or within it to regulate belonging by tracing the diverse narratives of Muslim and national self that emerge through the analyzed novels.

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