**At Home in the Diaspora: Displacement and Diasporic Consciousness in Anglophone-Arab and Contemporary Arabic Literature**

By

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines a new form of belonging I call "diasporic consciousness" by juxtaposing the views of immigrant Arab writers in the U.K. and the U.S. with the transnational visions of Arab authors writing diasporic narratives in their Middle Eastern homeland. I argue that contemporary Anglophone-Arab and modern Arab literature presents a diasporic experience that is no longer defined by territorial displacement and migration across national boundaries. The views of Arabs enduring conditions of diaspora in their homelands (Yemen and Tunisia) parallel the diasporic visions of first-generation and second-generation Arab immigrants in the United States and Britain. By exploring diasporic narratives written inside and outside the Middle-Eastern homeland, I claim that contemporary Arab writers redefine postcolonial subjectivity and present us with a new vocabulary for the study of diasporic writing in the 21st century. The new generations of immigrant and diasporic writers I examine in this project destabilize national boundaries by forging a deterritorialized conception of home that is different from the nation-state homeland. Drawing on postcolonial criticism and diaspora studies, I trace this form of diasporic consciousness in four novels: two written by Anglophone-Arab writers from the United States and Britain (Arab American, Randa Jarrar and British Sudanese, Jamal Mahjoub), and two by contemporary Arab novelists writing in Arabic, ᶜAlī al-Muqrī from Yemen and Kamāl al- Riyāḥī from Tunisia. Throughout *At Home in the Diaspora*, I demonstrate how "diasporic consciousness" subverts the authenticity of the nation-state and the designation of one place or one culture as roots and origins. This neglected diasporic sentiment contributes to an understanding of the recent upheavals in the Arab world and the politics of dislocation in the region. This project advances the conceptual and textual boundaries of postcolonial criticism and diaspora studies by showing how contemporary Anglophone-Arab and Arabic literature

enunciates a new trajectory of diaspora that develops inside the homeland and generates transnational links between Arab immigrants in the United States and Britain, and diasporic communities inside the homeland.

## Introduction: A Deterritorialized Diasporic Consciousness

> At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey. Yet not every journey can be understood as diaspora. Diasporas are clearly not the same as causal travel. Nor do they normatively refer to temporary sojourns. Paradoxically, diasporic journeys are essentially about settling down, about putting roots 'elsewhere'. These journeys must be historicized if the concept of diaspora is to serve as a useful heuristic device. The question is not simply about *who travels*, but *when, how and under what circumstances*? What socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions mark the trajectories of these journeys? What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?
>
> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*

This project examines a new form of belonging that I call "diasporic consciousness" by comparing the views of immigrant Arab writers in the United Kingdom and the United States with the transnational visions of Arab authors writing diasporic narratives in their Middle Eastern homelands. In the twenty-first century, Arab diasporic writing invites questions about home and belonging not only for Arabs living in Europe and America, but also for Arabs enduring conditions of diaspora inside the homeland. Post - 1990 Arab writing inside and outside the Middle East and North Africa presents a new conception of home that challenges the national and territorial demarcations of Arab identity advanced by Nasser's pan-Arabism and Arab nation-states. Unlike the older generations of Arab authors writing in the sixties and late seventies who were mainly concerned with the "Anglo-Arab encounter" and the preservation of Arab and Muslim heritage against the backdrops of Western colonization, contemporary Arab writers are transforming this nationalist and anticolonial sentiment to a new conception of identity that is diasporic and transnational in nature.

In this dissertation, I argue that contemporary Anglophone-Arab and modern Arabic literature discloses how forced and voluntary movement of Arabs in the homeland and across

transnational borders has forged a *diasporic consciousness*: namely, a *deterritorialized* form of belonging that doesn't depend on border-crossing of nation-states or geographic movement to the West. Contemporary Arab authors writing inside the homeland share a similar diasporic experience with Arab writers living abroad. The enunciation of diasporic consciousness in contemporary Arab writing destabilizes the binaries of home/abroad, dwelling/displacement and native/traveler in the study of immigrant and transnational literature. By examining diasporic narratives written inside and outside the homeland, I claim that contemporary Arab literature written in English and Arabic offers a new vocabulary for the study of diasporic formations in the twenty-first century.

I use the concept of deterritorialization to chart a new way of thinking about diaspora as a sense of exile from home undefined by territoriality or border-crossing of nation-states. The new generation of Arab writers I study in this project challenges the geographical and geopolitical boundaries of Arab nation-states by forging a deterritorialized conception of *home*. The word deterritorialized thus signifies an imaginary *home* rather than a physical space or a literal *homeland*. This deterritorialization, I contend, grants Arab writers the ability to disrupt the logic of geographic topographies and to generate a diasporic home that is not the nation-state homeland.

As a place of origin, the homeland is no longer the main constituent of the experience of diaspora in the twenty-first century. This new form of diasporic belonging that I explore in this project challenges the representation of the homeland as a center of culture and roots. The OED definition of the English word *diaspora* indicates dispersal or scattering from a center of origin often implied by the homeland. In Arabic, however, the word *diaspora* / شَتَاتٌ doesn't imply

dispersion and displacement away from the homeland as it is the case in English.[1]The conventional definition, mostly used to refer to the Jewish Diaspora, doesn't represent the diasporic formations Arab writers forge within the regional and national boundaries of the Middle East and North Africa. Contemporary Arab writing presents a decentralized conception of diasporic belonging that encompasses a network of cultural, historical and religious intermediaries undefined by the homeland.

The writers I examine in this dissertation demonstrate a longing for home that is not expressed in spatial terms or through the plight of geographic dislocation, but rather through an unrecoverable loss between a human being and an experience of belonging that is fluid and extraterritorial. I propose the idea of *diasporic consciousness* as a sentiment of exile that is neither defined by spatial displacement from the homeland nor simply informed by the experience of migration across national borders. Put differently, "diasporic consciousness" is a process of identity-formation that rejects national cohesion and territorial restrictedness. Through the sentiments of diasporic consciousness one can generate a plurality of vision that forges a transnational sensibility for the diasporic subject. By exploring different manifestations of "diasporic consciousness" in various cultural contexts, my objective is to elucidate how this deterritorialized diasporic sentiment challenges fixed conceptions of home and belonging.

Focusing on the diasporic views of second-generation Arab immigrants in the U.S., the first chapter examines the work of Randa Jarrar and the borderless conception of home she presents. Although many Arab immigrant communities in the U.S. have established "new homes" in Michigan, Chicago and New York, they also maintain strong ties with their Arab homelands. As a second-generation Arab-American, Jarrar illustrates the imaginative

[1] For example, the OED defines diaspora as 'the dispersal of Jews from the homeland.' The difference between the Arabic and English definitions of the term diaspora is central to my argument in this project.

geographies of home young Arab-Americans strive to formulate across the national borders of the Arab world and North America. In *A Map of Home* (2008), Jarrar creates a map of transnational connections that destabilizes fixed and conventional categories of home that previous generations of Palestinians still uphold. Yet, Jarrar shows how the statelessness of Palestinians fosters a "diasporic consciousness" mostly expressed through the art of writing and story-telling from one generation to another. Unlike the first wave of Arab migrants in the U.S. who upheld a pan-Arabist view of nationalism, Jarrar presents home as a free site of existence that is multi-religious, transnational, and borderless.

Unlike Arab immigrants in America, second-generation Arab- British and British-born Arabs construct a different view of the homeland. In the second chapter, I examine the work of the British Sudanese writer Jamal Mahjoub to illustrate how second-generation Arab immigrants in Britain foster a migratory understanding of belonging in which neither cultural roots nor assimilation inform the migrant's search for identity. In his novel *Travelling with Djinns* (2003), Mahjoub dismantles the binary relationship between home and homelessness by introducing diasporic consciousness as a "contact zone" between East and West that existed centuries before colonialism and the first arrival of Arab immigrants to Europe. Mahjoub memorializes a marginal, yet rooted history of religious, philosophical and transcultural contacts between East and West, a prospect that challenges binary and essentialist identity-formation for Arabs in Europe.

While Anglophone-Arab writing in English presents home as a free and unmarked space of belonging, modern Arabic literature challenges the assumption that diaspora only involves material displacement and travel away from the homeland. Writing from Yemen and Tunisia presents a different form of "diaspora" that is no longer defined by border-crossing of nation-

states or migration to the West. Exploring the prospect of diaspora beyond material movement and geographic mobility from East to West, I demonstrate how the conceptual framework used in diaspora studies does not fully account for the deterritorialized forms of diaspora experienced within the national borders of the Middle East and North Africa. In the last two chapters, I examine two Arabic novels (Ali Al Muqri's *Black Taste…Black Smell* and KamālAl-Riahi's *Al Gorilla*) to further show how race configurations, state policies and ethnic marginalization in the Middle East have created conditions of diaspora for Arabs in their homelands.

**New Visions of Belonging in 20th century Arab Writing**

Twentieth-century Arab writing is transforming the nationalist ideology of pan-Arabism to a form of belonging that is transnational, borderless and diasporic in nature. In contemporary Anglophone Arab and modern Arabic literature Arabism is reformed in complex ways to highlight how the conditions of Arabs inside and outside the Arab world are impacted by internal as well as external movement of ideas and people between homes and abroad. The anticolonial predicaments that once characterized Arab writing in the last two decades has focused more on questions of exile, migration, and transnationalism. With the coming of second-generation Arabs writing after the 1990s one sees a thematic shift in literary productivity by Arab authors in the West mainly geared towards the formation of diasporic communities and transnational networks guided by the religious values of Islam.

Anglophone Arab writings are generally classified into three major trends: the Mahjar literature comprised of the twentieth- century émigrés in the U.S. from 1900-1940; second-generation westernized immigrants from the mid-1950s to late 1980s; and finally the more hybrid, culturally mixed, exilic and diasporic writers of the past two decades, from the 1990s to

the present. I am particularly interested in this third group whose writing began after the 1990s to include both second-generation Arab immigrants in the U.S. and Britain and contemporary Arab writers whose writings establish a lively imaginary homeland as both a site of scrutiny and cultural inspiration.

Unlike first-generation immigrant Anglophone-Arab and Arab writers of the early 1970s and late 1980s, who were mainly concerned with national independence and the legacy of Western colonization, second-generation and third-generation immigrant-Arabs and Arab writers at home writing after 1990s are more eager to create networks of diaspora while also exposing the cultural and historical predicaments of Arab nation-states. By examining diasporic narratives written after1990 by Arab-American, Arab-British and Arab writers, this project demonstrates how diasporic consciousness creates trans-regional forms of Arab identity, and how Arab authors writing from home share the diasporic views of Arab writers living abroad.

Moreover, Arab writing after the Gulf War in 1990 constitutes a significant time period for this project for two reasons. First, 1990 represents an important historical disjuncture which witnessed a noticeable overflow of foreign labor in the Arab Gulf right after the end of the Gulf war in 1990. Second, this time period involved border disputes between Arab countries and also included the impact of modernization on traditional societies. Right after the Arab Gulf War in 1990, a massive movement of Arabs took place within the Arab world resulting in extensive flows of foreign labor, capital investment, and transnational human resources. The expulsion of Yemeni and Palestinian workers in the Gulf States –initiated by their governments' support of Sadam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990—increased the demand for foreign labor from South and Southeast Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This process has displaced many Arab workers inside the Arab world who could

only return to their countries to live under autocratic and corrupted regimes or to immigrate to Europe or the U.S. for better civic and economic conditions.

**Islam and the Formation of the Arab Diaspora**

In the twenty-first century Islam has become a central form of identity-formation for various ethnic, immigrant and diasporic communities inside and outside the Muslim world. The writers I examine in this dissertation present a polylithic conception of Islam that expands and redefines the historical and religious legacy of Islam on a global scale. The invocation of heterogeneous and diverse views of Islamic values is transforming the theological rootedness and religious commonalities of the faith amongst various segments of the 'Muslim Umma' to a new discourse of affiliation that reflects the contemporary needs of Muslims in various cultural and political contexts. In the last three decades the growing number of Muslims and immigrants moving from Islamic cultures to establish new homes in the heart of Europe and the Americas has made Islam the second-largest religion after Christianity in the Western hemisphere. Forced and voluntary migration movements of Muslims from various Islamic contexts has greatly contributed to the making of a diversified conception of Islam as a faith of minorities and marginalized communities outside the Muslim world.

The visible presence of differences and variations amongst Islamic populations and immigrant communities living far away from Muslim lands, Islamic ideals and specifically the 'Muslim diaspora' functions as the backbone of political reformation and change inside the homeland. In many aspects, Islam has become a "travelling culture" for Muslims inside and outside Muslim homelands. Migration and the formation of diasporic communities have constructed a deterritorialized conception of Muslim identity that is no longer defined by the

geography of faith and religious roots. In other words, diaspora has become an empowering incentive for Muslims to expand the boundaries of their religious beliefs while also envisioning a better socio-political condition in the homeland. Nonetheless, this diasporic incentive is not only limited to immigrants in the West or for Muslims have left their homelands. Rather, the invocation of diaspora in the writings and political visions of contemporary Muslim writers and activists living in their homeland is a clear manifestation of how Islam is reimagined as a medium of political reformation.

The current re-emergence of Islamic thought in Arab countries ruled by secular and autocratic regimes projects an unconventional mechanism of popular religiousness across Arab national borders. Today, social media and the use of technology play an important role in the way young Muslims view Islam as an empowering form of political agency. This new ideological trend is vividly expressed in cultural productions of various activists and intellectuals in the Arab world. In modern Arabic literature Islam occupies a central role not only as a type of faith, but also as a political vision and more importantly as a collective identity unbound by the strictures of nation-states and cultural hierarchies. Tracing this religious trend in modern Arabic fiction, Muhsin Al-Musawi asserts that post-1967 marks a dramatic shift in the way Arab intellectuals have engaged with the question of religion in their writing. The demise of Arab nationalism and the gradual failure of secular leftist ideology in the Muslim world enunciated a new "structure of feeling" critical of the politics of the nation-state. Al-Musawi notes,

> Especially after 1967 and with a whole series of narrative journeys to the hearts of empires and in the scandalous exposure of colonial atrocity and heavy handedness that had been depicted in the Algerian novel, no Arab elite could any longer claim to need any kind of cultural dependency on the colonial power. Indeed the

> subsequent disillusionment with the concept of the nation-state, its ideological apparatus and its claims and promises, has drawn writers more closely, not only to the postcolonial question as dissected in Fanon's works, but also to a mode of distrust in the nation-state. Its claims of resistance to foreign powers are exposed as no more than a camouflage to bureaucracy, absolutism, repression, and coercion. (xviii)

As Al-Musawi illustrates in the above-mentioned lines, the failure of Arab nation-states and Arab leftist intellectualism, which was mainly elitist in its formation and far from the pulse of the street, paved the way for Islam to work as an ideology of resistance to state sovereignty. Put differently, Islam became a collective voice for people of different backgrounds and further succeeded to function as a mechanism of revolt against secularism and European materialist thinking. Al-Musawi's argument here is mainly centered on works of literature and intellectual Arab writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and more importantly his critical insights are also relevant to readers of popular culture and the way Islam had been contested and disseminated in secular circles of literary scholarship. The travelling of people, ideas and cultural commodities between East and West and within regional and transnational borders has revolutionized the dissemination of religious values on a global scale and the way Islam is defined and practiced in various political contexts.

Moreover, the formation of Muslim diasporic communities in Western capitals has established a cosmopolitan form of collective religiousness among Muslims worldwide. The current visions of young Muslims shows how Islamic identity has evolved in tandem with the technological and political forces of globalization, mass migration movements, and diaspora. The invocation of Islamic ideals in literary terms and in the writing of young Arab writers

demonstrates a socio-religious vision that aims to live Islam and present its values in more practical and enticing popular forms. Arab literature in English and Arabic demonstrates new formations of Islamic identity that are mainly constructed through the use of social media and other popularized platforms of religious activism in the Arab world and North Africa. Unlike the early seventies and late eighties in which religion was a marginal concern in the public sphere, today Islam occupies a central role in the formation of transnational identities under the banner of global Islam and Muslim belonging.

By examining diasporic novels written in English and Arabic, I present a comparative study of contemporary Arab diasporic writing to ask the following questions: What exactly informs the conditions of diaspora for people migrating to the West as well as for displaced and indigenized ethnic groups inside the homeland? How do religious values and the invocation of Islam impact the formation of diasporic consciousness transregionally? Why does contemporary Arab writing imagine a renewed emphasis on transnational Muslim identity for both secular as well as practicing Muslims? How is the idea of "home" and "belonging" defined across national borders? What do race relations, ethnic marginalization, and discriminatory state apparatuses disclose about the formation of diaspora communities inside the Arab world? How does the deterritorialization of diaspora and Arab diasporic writing inside the homeland advance the frameworks of diaspora criticism and postcolonial studies?

**New Postcolonialisms and Diaspora Studies**

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, postcolonial writers and critics of diaspora studies examined the connections between migration movements from former colonies in Asia and African on one hand, and the formation of diasporic communities in the Western

metropolis, on the other. The conceptual links between diasporic formations and postcolonial subjectivity introduce new articulations of migrancy and transnationalism that complicate simplified assumptions about race, ethnicity and national belonging. The transnational and diasporic visions expressed in the work of contemporary Arab writers demonstrate a new understanding of postcoloniality that goes beyond the cultural, historical and ideological confines of the nation-state. Questions about transnationalism, liminality and hybridity demonstrate how diasporic and transnational immigrant writing is advancing the theoretical focus of postcolonial literary studies. In *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, David Scott elucidates the growing demand in postcolonial criticism to address new concerns beyond the empire/nation-state nexus. Although Scott offers a critical assessment on the state of postcolonial scholarship in relation to Jamaica and Sri Lanka, his insights about the importance of theoretical reformulations in postcolonial criticism are quite revealing:

> In short, there is now a fundamental crisis in the Third World in which the very coherence of the secular-modern project—with its assurance of progressive social-economic development, with its dependence upon the organizational form of the nation-state, with its sense of the privilege of representative democracy and competitive elections, and so on—can no longer be taken for granted. This crisis ushers in a new problem-space and produces a new demand on postcolonial criticism. (14-15)

Scott suggests that the politics of imperial knowledge and the focus on the nation-state do not capture the "new paradigms" and "new horizon of possibilities" of the postcolonial present. For Scott, the focus on colonialist representation in what was first theorized as the knowledge/power nexus, and then the decolonization of Western representationality has limited the theoretical

applicability of postcoloniality to the themes of colonial rationality, cultural agency and socio-economic modernity. Scott illustrates how postcoloniality operates by deferring the question of politics, and therefore he calls for the need to think "fundamentally against the normalization of the epistemological and institutional forms of our political modernity" (20). Postcolonial criticism, as Scott observes, needs to restructure its focus by examining the marginal histories of colonial encounters in relation to the contemporary political visions of natives as well as immigrant communities. Commenting on the intersectionality between diaspora discourse and postcolonial theory, Khachig Tölölyan, the chief editor of *Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Studies*, contends that the designation 'postcolonial' is "an even more capacious and heterogeneous term and category at the moment than 'diasporic,' and the two are not synonymous" (34). Postcolonial formulations, as Tölölyan notes, encompass a wide range of theoretical and practical intersectionalities in the study of diaspora in the twenty-first century.

In an attempt to advance this conversation, this dissertation draws on the conceptual framework of diaspora and postcolonial studies to demonstrate how contemporary Arab writing introduces a deterritorialized form of diaspora that forges transnational links between Arab immigrants in the Western metropolis and Arabs living in local peripheries. The theoretical insights of James Clifford, Avtar Brah, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai and Stuart Hall, to name a few, called attention to the complex relationship between postcolonial migrancy and the formation of diaspora communities in various cultural contexts. This dissertation follows the work of these critics and yet extends their thinking to explore the extraterritorial and transnational aspects of Arab diaspora. Specifically, I turn to the work of James Clifford and Avtar Brah who have significantly extended how the concept of diaspora inhabits spatial, social and transnational aspects of belonging.

**Re-conceptualizing "Dwelling-in-Displacement"**

James Clifford's notion of "dwelling in displacement" provides a useful framework for the study of diasporic writing by immigrant Arab authors living in the United States and Britain. However, Clifford's emphasis on displacement and physical mobility does not account for diasporic visions that do not involve spatial displacement or border-crossing. The Arabic texts I examine in this dissertation demonstrate a longing for home within the national borders of the homeland. I complicate Clifford's understanding of "dwelling in displacement" by showing how Arab diasporic writing ventures a deterritorialized conception of diaspora undefined by physical dislocation and border-crossing of nation-states. Put simply, one doesn't have to leave the homeland or migrate across nation-states to feel displaced and diasporic. Ethnic writing from the Arab Gulf and North Africa challenges the presumption that diaspora is only possible through material displacement and travel away from the homeland. The artistic visions of Arab authors writing inside and outside their homelands project diasporic consciousness – a form of diaspora that is no longer defined by geographic movement and border-crossing to the Western metropolis.

The discourse of diaspora presupposes a process of distancing between a place of origin or rootedness (the homeland) and sites of displacement—an opposition that overlooks the regional and extraterritorial formulations of contemporary diasporic visions within and across the Arab world and North Africa. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, James Clifford discusses the need for a decentralized diaspora discourse that can examine the specificities of "emergent postcolonialism" beyond the emphasis on colonial/neocolonial relationships and the "teleology of origin/return" as an essential feature of

diasporic articulations.[2] For Clifford, diaspora "articulates, or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference" (251). Clifford takes up Paul Gilroy's notion of "community consciousness" to draw our attention to how diaspora as a social practice can also be a political vision that redefines roots and political allegiances. The recent political changes in the Arab world call attention to the complex relationship between revolutions and diaspora as predicaments of political struggle induced by different contexts of displacement, external as well as internal.

Yet, Clifford goes further to clarify how "community consciousness" transcends the framework of nationalism by illustrating how "contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to the epiphenomena of the nation-state or global capitalism" (244). Although some diasporic formations are informed by the dynamics of nation-states and global capitalist systems, they also tend to subvert these discourses by generating global and transnational networks of belonging. The legacy of colonial rule, labor migration and the increasing growth of networks of immigrant communities across national borders makes diaspora, as Clifford notes, "a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement but of political struggles to define the local, as distinctive community in historical contexts of displacement"(252).

In this dissertation, I am particularly interested in the construction of diasporic identities in specific cultural contexts and the way "diasporic subjects" embody a post-national

[2] In "Diasporas," James Clifford argues that the emphasis on the "teleology of return" has limited the framework used by diaspora critics. He provides a detailed discussion how "Safran's prefiguration of a comparative field—especially in his 'centered' diaspora model, oriented by continuous cultural connections to a source and by a 'teleology of return'—African American / Caribbean / British cultures do not qualify. These histories of displacement fall into a category of quasi-diasporas, showing only some diasporic features or moments" (249).

consciousness formed at the intersectionality of race, ethnicity and religion. The experience of displacement and border-crossing between nation-states, which has characterized old diaspora formations in Europe and America, can't explain the complex nature of Arab diasporic formations. Today, the discourse of Arab nationalism is transformed in complex ways to show how the conditions of Arabs have been impacted by the internal and external movement of people and ideas within and across national borders. For example, anti-colonialism in the Arab world developed by incorporating the discourse of Arab nationalism as early as the 1950s, when Jamal Abdul Nasser's Pan-Arabism became a nationalist ideology against Western interest in the region.

Today, however, Arab writers in the homeland are not only appropriating this nationalist discourse to a new form of belonging that is multinational and culturally diverse, but are also redefining what Arab-ness means in the present. The voluntary and forcible movement of peoples from and to the Arab world in the last three decades reveals an important aspect of the region's diasporic formations. Since the imposition of European colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the subsequent emergence of independent post-colonial states, the Arab world has continued to witness important permanent and temporary waves of migration, dispersion and resettlement within its geopolitical boundaries.

**The De-territorialization of Diaspora**

The notion of diaspora I propose in this dissertation features a *deterritorialized* conception of belonging. I illustrate how Arab diasporic consciousness is defined by the sentiments of transnational visions rather than the cultural and territorial barriers of Arab nation-states. In Anglophone-Arab and modern Arabic literature nationalist thought is expressed

through the enunciation of a "structure of feeling," to use Raymond Williams's term, that challenges the cultural, racial and political borderlines of Pan-Arabism. In examining this new body of literature, I introduce deterritorialization as a critical lens that renders material movement and the crossing of national borders a dispensable aspect of diaspora in the twenty-first century.

I deploy my main concept of diasporic consciousness in order to highlight the complex relationship between transnational belonging and deterritorialization. Diasporic consciousness takes for granted a recent trend in both transnational migration and postcolonial studies to decenter the binary relationship between the local and the global on one hand, and dwelling and travelling on the other. Diaspora critics often examine migratory movements from the perspective of social scientists by defining migration as a kind of geographical displacement across national borders. This approach falls short to examine the complex nature of Arab diasporic articulation at home and abroad.

As an important driving force of globalization, deterritorialization weakens the ties between culture and place and allows for the movement of subjects across time and space creating what Gil-Manuel Hernàndez i Martí calls "social forms of contact and involvement which go beyond the limits of specific territory, a kind of 'weighing of anchors' of social relations (Giddens 1990), which takes us to a closer involvement with the external which generates closeness in distance to a relative distancing from what is close"(92-93).[3] Gil-Manuel Hernàndez i Martí describes the dissemination of heritage in local settings in the age of global consumption as a form of "cultural deterritorialization" that uproots and transforms local

[3] For more, see Gil-Manuel Hernàndez i Martí, "The Deterritorialization of Cultural Heritage in a Globalized Modernity." The author gives a thoughtful account of how deterritorialization introduces a transformation in "cultural heritage in the transition from first modernity to globalized modernity" (91).

conditions to transnational concerns that open up opportunities for international intervention to address local disparities from a global perspective.[4]

In this dissertation, I focus on the social and psychological aspects of *diasporic consciousness* and how it functions as an experience of belonging that redefines postcolonial identity-formation. The postcolonial sentiment that has once characterized the initial displacement of Arabs and Muslims as a result of colonial occupation in Third World countries is transformed into a transnational Arab vision. In the Arab world nationalism developed in a complex process to contest colonial histories at the expense of excluding ethnic minorities, including Arabs of African descent, and caste groups. European colonial rule and the formation of third world nationalisms have contributed to what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as "the universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community"(41). As Chakrabarty explains, this universalization projected the nation-state's political vision as a neocolonial cultural totality for groups and communities with diverse and multicultural interests.

By focusing on the experiential aspects of diaspora, rather than the search for a 'typology of diaspora,'[5] I examine the cultural and psychosocial experiences of diasporic consciousness inside and outside the homeland. Diaspora creates an unconventional understanding of identity-formation in which essentialist notions of nationalism and state sovereignty are dismantled and reimagined in new ways. In *Modernity At Large*, Arjun Appadurai shows how the nation-state is challenged by the unprecedented expansion of cultural and geographical boundaries:

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[4] Throughout this article, the author elucidates how the *deterritorialization* of cultural heritage is propagated by global mass media, which he notes, "transforms the relation between the places where we live and our cultural activities, experiences and identities" (93).

[5] One can easily identify a trend in diaspora studies that aims to essentialize and categorize the concept of diaspora by finding ideal types or *typologies*. See the work of major diaspora critics such as William Safran, Robin Cohen and Gabriel Sheffer. It's my contention that the search for typological forms of diaspora, especially in the social sciences, has overlooked the transnationally fluid and unequivocal aspects of contemporary diasporic formations.

> The nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs …. this system (even when seen as a system of differences) appears poorly equipped to deal with the interlinked diasporas of people and images that mark the here and now. Nation-states, as units in a complex interactive system, are not very likely to be the long-term arbiters of the relationship between globality and modernity . . . Diasporic public spheres, diverse among themselves, are the crucibles of a postnational political order. (19, 22-23)

Appadurai describes an important aspect of diaspora formations: the way migration movements challenge the logic of the nation-state not only in terms of border-crossing, but also in relation to the social, cultural and political practices that create complex networks of relations. The transnational movement of people, labor, capital and information disrupt the nation-state's homogenous structure of domination and thus produces multiple and fluid sites of belonging. The dissolution of social, cultural and geographic demarcations of the nation-state generates new vestiges of identity. Arab diasporic writing inside and outside the Arab world has not only restructured the dynamics of political agency, but also reinvented a new realm of cultural polity formed at the convergence and divergence of home and its diasporic manifestations. Stuart Hall has convincingly argued that "diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235). As Hall notes, identity formation is a process that is never complete and therefore is always redefined and reconstituted. The rise of globalization, free trade and increased capital flows, and most importantly the dissemination of new technologies of communication, and travel have accelerated the movement of people, ideas, and information across the world. The transnational mobility of people as a result of forced or voluntary

migration, exile or ethnic expulsion within regional peripheries introduces a new conception of diasporic belonging.

**Home versus Homeland**

Recent concerns about global terror in the aftermath of 9/11, the rise of the Islamic State, and homeland security delineate new geopolitical and imaginary invocations of the keywords home and homeland. The notion of home produces a diasporic sentiment that is different from return to the nation-state homeland. Distinguishing between home and homeland is an important aspect of Arab diasporic writing in the twenty-first century. Madan Sarup notes that the concept of home is tied to the notion of place because places are "socially constructed, and that this construction is about power. Capital moves about the globe and creates a hierarchy of places" (96). Sarup accentuates the fluidity and applicability of the notion of home to both physical and metaphysical implications of border-crossing when "boundaries are constitutively crossed or transgressed" (98).

In this dissertation, I use the term *home* to refer to an extraterritorial form of belonging that transcends spatial demarcations and the emphasis on diasporic articulations in a specific physical space. My objective is to demonstrate how the notion of home features a complex vision of belonging that traverses feelings of nostalgia towards the homeland as a territorial entity. One of the defining features of the ideal type of diaspora is the 'teleology of return' through which diaspora critics emphasize the importance of the homeland to any diasporic formation.[6]

[6] William Safran, for example, puts lots of emphasis on the homeland in his definition of diaspora.

It is against the backdrop of this view that I deploy the concept of *home*. In *Cartographies of Diaspora,* Avtar Brah contends that new migration movements are forging new forms of diasporic identity. She examines how diaspora creates what she calls a "homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a homeland" (180). Distinguishing between homes and homelands is an important aspect of this project. As a keyword, *home* is more indicative of a metaphysical sense of affiliation for groups alienated in their locality as well as for migrants living abroad. Brah explores the idea of home not simply as a place that migrants return to, but as a concept that is "intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging.' As Gilroy (1993) suggest, it is simultaneously about roots and routes" (192). Brah illustrates how home as an experience of belonging invites questions about social marginalization and indigenization across national borders, a significant rupture in diaspora discourse that highlights the relationship between diasporic consciousness and questions about race and ethnicity.

This project not only examines the different aspects of diasporic consciousness inside and outside the homeland, but also demonstrates how race, ethnicity, gender and autocracy can advance our understanding of Arab diaspora in relation to the political situation of the Middle East and North Africa. I contend that Arab diasporic writing has prefigured the wave of civic revolts and uprisings that have caused chaos and unrest in many Arab capitals. I introduce the idea of diasporic consciousness as a defining factor for the experience of immigrants who had gone through the rift of dislocation from the homeland as well as for disadvantaged groups who did not migrate and yet feel diasporic inside the homeland. The enunciation of diasporic

consciousness generates a deterritorialized form of belonging that redefines spatial movement and the emphasis on transnational migration.

**The Novel Post 1990 in English and Arabic**

This dissertation focuses on the novel as a literary genre that constitutes a significant aspect of Arab literary creativity in the last three decades. Not only has the novel developed to become a dominant literary form in the Arab world since the *Nahḍa* movement (or Arab renaissance) as early as the 1950s especially after colonial independence, but it has always been used as a literary medium for expressing social and political change. Ameen Rihani's *Book of Khalid*, the first novel written in English by an Arab immigrant in New York in 1911, has noticeably preceded the production of Arabic novels in the Arab world. Although written in English, Rihani's work gave rise to an Arabic literary tradition in English that has heavily relied on Arabic literary forms when compared to the first novel written in Arabic.[7] In the last three decades the Arab novel in English has expanded its thematic focus to include subjects ranging from anticolonial nationalist ideology, civil wars and modernization to concerns about migration movements, assimilation and integration into the mainstream culture of the host-land. Contemporary Arab novelists writing in English traverse the emphasis on the "Anglo-Arab encounter" that defined the thematic scope of Anglophone-Arab literature in the past.[8]

[7] Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's novel Zaynab, written in Egypt in 1913, is often considered as the first Arabic novel. The full title in Arabic is زينب: مناظر واخلاق ريفية / *Zaynab: Country Scenes and Morals*. The book depicts life in the Egyptian countryside and delves into the traditional romantic and marital relationships between men and women and the interactions between the laboring cotton worker and plantation owner classes. The novel is a seminal event in Egyptian literature, since it was the first to feature a fully described, contemporary Egyptian setting and the first to feature dialogue in the Egyptian vernacular rather than formal standard written Arabic.

[8] The term "Anglo-Arab encounter" has been used as critical lenses for the study of Arab writing in English. Edward Said used this phrase as a title to one of his articles ("The Anglo-Arab Encounter"). Geoffrey Nash describes Said's use of the term an attempt to illustrate how the "new crop of Arab writers in English engages with

Similarly, the development of Arabic fiction demonstrates a dedicated interest in using the novel as a political genre in a critical period of time that witnessed the growth of Arab nationalist sentiments against colonial rule and Western technological advancement. The emergence of the Arabic novel during the nineteenth century was mainly influenced by the hierarchy of genres in the Arabic literary tradition. The first Arab novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have reformed the norms of the European novel by introducing literary techniques borrowed from the rich traditions of Arabic poetry and prose. For example, the Palestinian writer Khaleel Baidas (1875–1925) translated many European classical texts and short stories, "redefining the plot by adding lines of Arabic poetry from the pre-Islamic, Umayyad and ᶜAbbāsid eras. In translating the works of say Tolstoy, or Pushkin, or Turgenev, he hinders the flow of the narrative by inserting lines of Arabic poetry."[9] The structural appropriation that was introduced into the work of early Arab novelists such as Khaleel Baidas, and Ahmad Faris Shidyaq contributed to making the novel a familiar literary form for Arab readership.[10]

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the West – primarily England – and in the process discrete identities, both Arab and English, are blurred, even hybridized" (12). For more, see Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*.

[9] See Fakhri Saleh, "Rethinking World Literature: The Arabic Novel in Non-Western Eyes," 1.

[10] Ahmād Fāris Shidyāq (1804–1887) is a Lebanese writer "who lived in Damascus, Paris, London, Istanbul, Cairo and Tunis and translated the Bible into Arabic. Born to a Maronite family, Shidyaq became a Protestant and later converted to Islam. His travels, fleeing from his country under the threats of the governors of Mount Lebanon during the Ottoman rule of the Arab world, and his prolific career as a journalist, poet, critic, linguist, lexicographer, translator and educator, enriched his literary works. Arab literary critics and historians now consider them cornerstones of modern Arabic literature. Shidyaq published his widely known and acclaimed *al-Sāq ᶜala al-Sāq fīmā huwā al-firyāq* during his stay in Paris in 1855. Some consider this book the first Arabic novel. It was compared to the works of Rabelais; it displays the capacities of Arabic language through writing a kind of autobiography in the third person, a novel of education and a travel narrative. For more, see "Rethinking World Literature: The Arabic Novel in Non-Western Eyes."

By juxtaposing contemporary Arab writing in English, or what is called today Anglophone-Arab literature, with contemporary Arabic literature written in modern standard Arabic and the vernacular, this dissertation sheds light on the way in which the Arab diaspora has become a *heteroglossic* narrative that challenges the authenticity and homogeneity of standardized forms of Arab writing.[11] The complexity of Arab diasporic writing reflects a dearth of literary and linguistic linkages that are rarely examined in tandem with each other. These linkages call for a close examination of the way Arab diaspora is transforming conventional conceptions of home and belonging.

The varieties of language use in both Anglophone-Arab and Arabic texts in this dissertation compete against each other to establish a particular reality of belonging that is dialogic and centrifugal in character. The invocation of Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical language here is relevant in this context given the way Arab diasporic writing is producing a discourse of diaspora that is neither defined by the centrality of belonging (home) nor informed by monolingual rootedness or homogenous cultures and traditions. Contemporary Arab diasporic literature presents a decentralized and polyphonic use of Arab language and culture that reflects the transregional visions of Arabs inside the homeland. By examining the nuances of Arab diasporic formulations in both English and Arabic texts, this dissertation demonstrates different manifestations of diaspora in relation to the political, racial and economic disparities of Arabs at home and abroad.

[11] In "Discourse in the Novel" Mikhail Bakhtin argues that the power of the novel lies in the coexistence of different voices and points of view that are conflicting with one another and different from the views of the main narrator or author. He defines *heteroglossia* as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way." In other words, *heteroglossia* is the existence of two or more voices within a text, conflicting discourses within a linguistic activity as between the narrative voice and the characters in a novel.

**Diasporic Consciousness in Anglophone Arab and Modern Arabic Literature**

In this dissertation, I examine different articulations of "diasporic consciousness" in the United States, Britain, Yemen and Tunisia. The literary texts I discuss in this project show the different migratory visions and diasporic interconnections Arab writing has produced in the last two decades. However, each of the authors I examine demonstrates how the formation of diasporic consciousness is influenced by religion, race, ethnicity and the cultural values of the homeland. In the four cultural contexts I examine in this project diaspora is shaped by social, historical and cultural factors that complicate our understanding of diasporic formations. The changing and unstable conditions of migration movements between East and West and within national boundaries have produced variant and unequal diaspora experiences for people.

Even though all of the authors I discuss share a similar understating of diaspora, each author shows a unique experience of diasporic consciousness. For Randa Jarrar, home is presented as a free space of existence that is multi-religious, transnational, and borderless. The author uses deterritorialization as a way to trace an understudied geography of transnational belonging where Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Muslims all lived together. Jarrar is interested in showing how second-generation and American-born Arabs (like Nidali) have a different understanding of home and cultural roots than their parents. Nidali's borderless maps and transcultural family upbringing enables her to construct an imaginary homeland inhabited by people from various cultural and religious backgrounds that advances the struggle of American-born-Arabs to foreground similarities and assemblage between the Arab world and North America. The Arab-American text presents diasporic consciousness as a powerful aesthetic that enables young Arab-Americans to deconstruct the fixated demarcations of home, culture and identity through the advent of imagination.

Unlike Jarrar, the Arab-British author, Jamal Mahjoub, uproots a history of traveling and dwelling by Arabs in the heart of the Empire. By utilizing the trope of transnational migration and travel to critique the discourses of purity and nationalism, Mahjoub explores what home is for second-generation and third-generation Arab migrants in Britain and how migrants "dwell-in-displacement" looking for contact zones between different cultures and religious traditions. Mahjoub's novel presents a transnational understanding of belonging in which European-ness is a transient and transnational cultural identity informed by the religious and philosophical ideals of Eastern cultures and philosophical visions. Mahjoub employs the trope of travel to deconstruct home boundaries and establish historical, cultural and religious intermediaries between East and West.

While Jarrar and Mahjoub present a similar critique of pan-Arab nationalism for second-generation and third-generation immigrants in Europe and America, ethnic writing from Yemen presents a revolutionized form of diaspora that is no longer defined by border-crossing to the West. The Yemeni context illustrates an understudied relationship between race configurations and the formation of diasporic communities inside the homeland. The work of the Yemeni author ᶜAlī al-Muqrī writing about the conditions of Arabs of African descent inside their homelands posits a revolutionized form of diasporic consciousness often ascribed to writers migrating to the West. In the novel, al-Muqrī demonstrates how the case of *Akhdām* projects an understudied aspect of diaspora that develops inside and within the national terrains of the homeland. In other words, the Yemeni novel makes a case for a form of diaspora that is mainly informed by racial and ethnic subjugation rather than material movement to the West. Racial stigmatization enunciates an unconventional form of *diasporic consciousness* that traverses the spatial designation of homelands and cultural roots. Al-Muqrī enriches the concept of *diasporic*

*consciousness* by demonstrating how race configurations impact the formation of diasporic communities inside the homeland and the way regional displacement create diasporic networks on a global scale.

The Tunisian author Kamāl al- Riyāḥī depicts how territorial, racial and institutional policies have formed an internal revolt for the marginal in North Africa. work shows us how diasporic consciousness is used as an empowering political aesthetic to challenge the social and economic inequities imposed by autocratic regimes, and how diasporic visions enunciate trans-regional vestiges of Arab identity on a global scale. Put differently, diasporic consciousness constitutes a significant force of the sweeping wave of uprisings that started in Tunisia against the former Tunisian president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and his autocratic state. The Tunisian novel pinpoints an overlooked connection between the formation of diasporas in local settings and political revolutions. Regional displacement and the politics of spatial demarcations in Tunisia reveal how diasporic communities are formed against the backdrops of state territorialization and marginalization inside the homeland.

**Chapters Outline**

Chapter one, "Cartographies of Belonging: Arab-Americans and Diaspora in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home,"* examines how the writing of second-generation and third-generation Arab writers in the U.S. is more oriented towards questions of exile, diaspora and transnational belonging in comparison to the thematic choices of the earlier generation of Arab immigrants to America. While many of these migrant communities have constructed 'new homes' in Michigan and New York, they have also established good ties with their countries of origin. Even prior to the tragic events of 9/11, Arab communities in America have used the image of the homeland as

a form of cultural and political inspiration. *A Map of Home* demonstrates the imaginative geographies of home young Arab-Americans aim to create. By creating a map of transnational intermediaries for Arabs living in the U.S., Nidali destabilizes fixed and rooted categories of home and belonging. In her novel, Jarrar delineates a terrain of geographical homelessness that erases national borderlines and opens up unconventional spaces of agency for Arab immigrants displaced between the homeland and the host-land they settled in. As a second-generation, Arab author writing in the diaspora, Jarrar unravels the imaginative geographies of home young Arab-Americans strive to formulate across the national borders of the Arab world and North America.

Chapter two, "Arab-British Identity: The Search for Arab Transnationalism in Jamal Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinns*," demonstrates how the work of the British- Sudanese writer, Jamal Mahjoub presents the homeland as a stateless diasporic sentiment that can no longer be defined by spatial distance from the homeland. Mahjoub's diaspora is based on an undoing of homeland through the medium of transnational connectivity, mobility, and travel. In, *Travelling with Djinns,* Mahjoub dismantles the binary relationship between home and homelessness, East and West, and rather introduces diasporic consciousness as an empowering form of stateless belonging for Arab migrants throughout Europe. Mahjoub's novel presents an Arab-British vision that generates complex articulations of home and identity, especially with concern for the migrant's relationship to cultural roots. For young Arab-British writers home is an imaginary diasporic space that reverses the appellation of place and cultural essentialisms. Mahjoub employs the trope of travel and transnational diaspora to show how Europe's identity has been shaped by the global migration of ideas and cultural-religious practices. Mahjoub's novel complicates not only simplified conceptions of diaspora as a form of spatial fixity, but also questions essentialist discourses of nationalism and belonging. The search for home beyond the

national borders of the homeland ventures a new understanding of belonging in which Arab and European identities are in constant flux with each other. Mahjoub's representation of Arab-British immigrant identity challenges literary critics to re-conceptualize the new articulations of transnational and stateless diaspora expressed in the work of contemporary Anglophone-Arab literature.

Chapter three, "Dwellers-in-Displacement: Black Yemenis and Diaspora's Racial Predicaments in ᶜAlī al-Muqrī's رائحة سوداء... طعم اسود / *Black Taste…Black Smell,"* examines the diasporic views of the community of Akhdām (Arabs of African descent) in Yemen enduring conditions of diaspora and racial exile inside their homelands. Al-Muqrī explores the migratory experience of ethnic minorities and how the social conditions of Yemen's community of Akhdām project a new manifestation of "diasporic consciousness" that develops inside the homeland. Al-Muqrī's work challenges diaspora critics to rethink how race configurations impact the formation of diasporic communities inside homelands and the way regional displacement and East-to-East migration project a different understanding of diasporic consciousness from the one the Anglophone-Arab writers present. In my reading of al-Muqrī's work, I argue that diaspora inside the homeland is a significant driving force of the sweeping wave of uprisings that have stirred the Arab world since 2011. Al-Muqrī's novel traces the forced and exilic movement of a group of Yemenis of African descent enduring conditions of exile and alienation inside their homeland, Yemen. The novel uproots a marginal history of interracial and cultural contacts between Arabs and Africans that dates back to 600 B.C. when the Kingdom of Abyssinia in Ethiopia invaded many Arab countries and ruled them for over two centuries. The Yemeni novel makes a case for what I call 'diaspora at home,' a social condition

that renders racial minorities in Yemen outsiders due to state policies, a rooted history of racialization and ethno-cultural marginalization in the Arab Gulf.

Chapter four, "The Exclusionary Tunisian State and the Politics of Racial Estrangement in Kamāl al- Riyāḥī *الغوريلا/ Al Gorilla"* explores the politics of ethno-racial marginalization of North- African Arab minorities in Tunisia and the way racialization creates sentiments of rootlessness that render North Africans strangers in their homeland. The main focus of the chapter is the work of the Tunisian novelist Kamāl al- Riyāḥī and his critique of poverty, governmental corruption, and racial discrimination against North African Arab communities living in rural areas. As a young Arab writer, al- Riyāḥī is conspicuously interested in the social, economic, and cultural conditions that have sparked the explosion of the Tunisian revolution in 2011. In his literary work, al- Riyāḥī depicts the various forms of hardships young Tunisians face on a daily basis due to dehumanizing state policies and lack of employment. The chapter illustrates how living under the grip of authoritarian regimes, the Arab youth (such as the self-immolated Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi) is no different from the diasporic emigrants, refugees, and exilic expatriates who strive to have dignity and economic stability in the metropolis. By examining the dynamics of internal exile and alienation in Tunisia, this chapter will demonstrate how contemporary Arabic literature presents diaspora as an empowering political aesthetic not only for the Arab migrant overseas but also for disadvantaged Arabs at home.

## Cartographies of Belonging: Arab-Americans and Diaspora in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*

> Diasporas are a consequential presence in Europe and America. But what explains the difference in their reception and their response?
>
> Milton Esman, *Diasporas in the Contemporary World*

> If a literature's life and energy are determined by the activity surrounding it, then Arab-American literature is experiencing a renaissance.
>
> American Arab Forum, *Children of Al-Mahjar: Arab American Literature Spans a Century*

Arab-Americans are among the many ethnic groups that make up the population of the United States. With an estimated population of 4.2 million, Arab-Americans live in almost every state of the union, in both small towns and large cities, with many concentrated communities in large metropolitan cities such as Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York. The literary and artistic creativity of these immigrant communities can be traced back to the early years of the 20th century. Nonetheless, the descendants of early Arab immigrants today maintain a nuanced connection to the heritage of their parents while retaining their American-ness. Contemporary Arab-American literature unravels the migratory experiences that have informed the views of first-generation and second-generation Arabs living in America since the nineteenth century. This experience is clearly expressed in the inspirations of young Arab-American writers and their attempt to redefine their Arabic roots while also celebrating the new cultural and ideological values of America.

This chapter examines the diasporic views American-born Arab immigrants have formed about home and belonging. I will argue that contemporary Arab-American writers view home as a deterritorialized and diasporic form of belonging rather than a symbol of roots and origins. As a contemporary Arab-American writer, Randa Jarrar expresses the diasporic articulations of

identity that second-generation Arab-Americans strive to forge today. In her novel, *A Map of Home* (2008) Jarrar unravels the imaginative geographies of home young Arab-Americans strive to formulate across the national borders of the Arab world and North America. This chapter claims that Jarrar's novel presents a "map of home" that is transnational and borderless in comparison to the earlier generations of Arab authors in America.

The growth and rapid development of Arab-American literature in the last two decades clearly illustrates the collective voice that Arab-Americans have formed as an ethnic minority in the United States. While many of these migrant communities have constructed 'new homes' in Michigan and New York, they have also established good ties with their countries of origin. Even prior to the tragic events of 9/11, Arab communities in America have used the image of the homeland as a form of cultural and political inspiration. Jarrar creates a map of transnational intermediaries that complicate fixed and conventional categories of home and belonging. Born to a Palestinian father and a Greek-Egyptian mother in Chicago in 1978 and raised in Kuwait, Egypt and New York, Jarrar presents a complex conception of the homeland.

In *A Map of Home*, Jarrar unravels the story of Nidali, an Arab-American girl looking for her roots between America and the Middle East. After her birth in Boston to an Egyptian-Greek mother and a Palestinian father studying in Egypt, Nidali—whose name means "my struggle"—soon moves to Kuwait with her family. In Kuwait, the family finds a better economic situation through the father's contract with a construction company until the Iraqi invasion forces them to flee Kuwait through Iraq and Jordan and from where they fly back to Egypt. Before the father finds a job in Texas, the family visits the West bank, where Nidali gets to meet her illiterate grandmother and learns about the importance of story-telling. The family's travel and migratory movement within the national borders of the Arab world—from Egypt to Kuwait and the visit to

Jordan and the Palestinian territories before arriving in the United States—presents a challenge to static and conventional definitions of belonging. Jarrar's novel depicts the imaginative geographies of home and belonging that young Arab migrants strive to formulate today in relation to the conventional views of their parents and how they construct the idea of home. Unlike their parents and first wave Arab migrants in the U.S. who uphold a purely pan-Arabist view of nationalism, American-born- Arabs project 'home' as a free site of existence that is multi-religious, transnational, and borderless.

In focusing critical attention to a body of immigrant literature that has received little attention in comparison to other Anglophone writing from East Asia and Africa, I situate my argument in this chapter within the context of American culture and literature, and more specifically in relation to Arab-American studies as an emerging field in the U.S. academy. In the last two decades Arab-American literature has developed purposefully to transform the marginalization of ethnic and postcolonial writing to mainstream literary productions that are persistently American and yet transnational in character. The constant growth and expansion of writing by immigrant and diasporic writers in the United States ventures a new critical vocabulary that traverses and in some ways reformulates the conventional critical insights critics have ascribed to American literature. Contemporary Arab-American literature does not only reinvent these traditional values culturally and geographically, but also enunciates a map of transnational intermediaries that complicate fixed and conventional categories of belonging and identification.

By situating contemporary Arab-American literature within the context of U.S. ethnic and diasporic writing, I aim to further explore how contemporary Arab-American writing projects a transnational view of belonging that expands the conception of home and cultural

roots. How do generational differences generate different forms of identity and transnationalism? What is the relationship between migration movements in the Arab world and the crossing of borders by Arabs to find new homes in the United States? Why are the views and visions of second-generation Arab-American immigrants more concerned with the creation of transcultural and transregional networks of diaspora than forming a discreet critique of Orientalism?

**Generational Differences and Assimilation to Mainstream America**

Contemporary Arab-American literature reveals a generational difference in the way early waves of Arab immigrants and Arabs born in America view assimilation and cultural identity. Unlike the first wave of Arab immigration to America which was mainly driven by a self-consciously Arab nationalist vision in the nineteenth century, 21st century Arab-American writing shows a growing interest in assimilation into mainstream American culture. This generational shift in the view of old and young immigrant Arabs in America helps us understand how Jarrar's work presents home as a transregional diasporic consciousness unbound by the tenets of Arab nationalist ideology or border-crossing of nation-states. Arab migration to North America started in the late 1800s. The arrival of Syrian immigrants from Mount Lebanon[12]especially after the American Civil War in 1861 constituted the first wave of Arab immigration, which was followed by the formation of Arab immigrant communities coming from various parts of the Arab world. The first wave (1880-1924) of immigrants mainly included Greek Orthodox, Maronite, and Melchite Christians from Mount Lebanon and the surrounding Syrian and Palestinian territories. For the first several years, immigration documents identified

[12] Many accounts refer to Mount Lebanon as home for many Christian Arabs who migrated to the U.S. as early as the 19th century. For more, see Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab-American Woman in the United States*.

these Christians as "Turks"[13] because they were subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Due to the repressive nature of the Ottoman Empire, these early immigrants preferred to identify themselves as Syrians rather than Arabs or Lebanese.[14]The majority of these early migrations came from Lebanon, an Arab country that maintained strong ties with the West during the reign of Ottoman Empire through the active presence of Christian missionaries.

Most of the early historical accounts of the presence of Arab communities in the United States show that by the second half of the nineteenth century the numbers of Arab immigrants increased drastically to draw the attention of immigration officers to find out how to classify these immigrant groups. Before the 1930 U.S. census, Arabs did not have a separate national category and were classified "along with Armenians, Greeks and Turks under the heading 'Turkey in Asia,' and because some who entered illegally from other countries were of course not included in the definition and form of reporting from one decennial census to another" (Ayad Al Qazzaz 16). In his study of the early waves of Arab immigrants in America, Ayad Al Qazzaz also asserts that one should distinguish between early immigrant and recent immigrant by using World War II as a dividing line between the two groups:

> Most of the early immigrants were Christians. Christian immigrants belonged to many sects and denominations but the Maronites made up the majority. The Maronites are a Roman Catholic religious community with their own canon law and their own patriarch. Their origins lie in an ecclesiastical grouping of Christians who, in the first half of the fifth century, assembled around the hermit,

[13] Many Arab historians use the terms "Turks" and "Asians" to refer to how Arabs were first identified in the U.S.

[14] See Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*. Naff and other cultural historians contend that most early immigrants (including Palestinians) described themselves as Syrians until Syria and Lebanon became independent after World War II. The author asserts that terms such as "Syrian" and "Arab" did not represent a nationalistic ideology, rather they denoted some type of cultural resonance.

> Maron. Moslem interest in emigrating to America came much later because they feared losing their religion in a country dominated by Christians. The following story, reported by Elkholy, underlines the point we are making. "In 1885," says an elderly Moslem woman, "my father planned to accompany some Christian friends to America. He bought the ticket and boarded the boat. Shortly before sailing he asked the captain whether America had mosques. Told that it had none, he feared that America was *bilad kufr*—a land of unbelief. He immediately got off the boat. (qtd. in Al Qazzaz 19) [15]

Today Christians in the Arab world represent about 12% of the total population of around 340 million. However, unlike Muslims at that time, most of these Christians had strong ties with the Catholic Church in Europe. The activities of European and American missionaries in the 18th and 19th century had failed to find followers among Muslim and Jewish communities in the Arab world. Religious affiliation constituted a significant aspect of the first wave of Arab migration to the United States and Europe.

Another aspect of migration that distinguishes between 19th century 20th century immigrants is education. Most of the first immigrants were uneducated and unskilled and therefore had to find work as peddlers, grocery store owners, and blue collar workers. Peddling was one of the most common occupations that attracted early Arab immigrants as it required no special skills or large capital. Al Qazzaz asserts that although peddling was often viewed in America as the "the occupation of the poor and destitute," the peddler "was a friend who brought needed goods as well as news from the strange exotic world of the Orient" (20). As an occupation that was practiced by the first wave of Arab immigrants in America, peddling

[15] For a complete account of this story see, Abdo Elkholy, *The Arab Moslem in the United States*.

introduced Arabs to mainstream American society. It is also worth noting that the arrival of the early wave of Syrian immigrants in America was impacted by the condition of the homeland and political wars in the Middle East and North Africa. The formation of the Arab-nation state had a direct impact on the flow of Syrian migration to the United States. However, this dynamic has changed due to the challenge of assimilation and marginalization in the hostland. Tanyss Ludescher asserts that early Syrian immigrants were exposed to stringent immigration laws that have limited the ability of Arab immigrants to be trace the changing conditions of the homeland, she observes,

> Immigration from Greater Syria came to a halt during World War I, when famine and war ravaged the homeland. Although immigration resumed after the war, it came to a virtual standstill when harsh quotas were imposed on Syrians and other unwelcome ethnic groups in 1924. With immigration slowed to a trickle of approximately one hundred people a year, the population of the once vibrant, scattered community was not replenished. Despite the publication in the United States of numerous Arabic-language newspapers, the Syrians were increasingly cut off from events in their country of origin. As Alixa Naff notes, many Syrian Americans were largely unconscious of the nationalist aspirations in their homeland that led to the formation of the new Lebanese state in 1947. (94)

As Ludescher illustrates here, the political and economic conditions of the homeland had a direct impact on the migratory movement of Syrians in the West. The question of how to respond to national pressures while also maintaining Arab identity in America was a matter of great importance to the early immigrant community. Many newspapers and journals published debates about how to preserve Arab identity, especially for the American-born Arabs who easily

assimilated to Christian and American cultural values. The process of assimilation brought about racial definitions of American identity which threatened to exclude Arabs on the basis of color difference. The Naturalization Act of 1790 had granted the right of citizenship to what it termed "free white persons." But in the early 1900s what was meant by "white" became a subject of intense debate. Arab immigrants, among other ethnic groups, became caught up in naturalization laws basing eligibility for citizenship on non-Asiatic identity.

In *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora,* Sarah Gualtieri claims that "Syrians were not the only non-European immigrants to litigate their racial status in federal courts in order to gain American citizenship. Between 1878 and 1944, Chinese, Burmese, Armenian, Japanese, South Asian, Hawaiian, Mexican, Filipino applicants all had their racial eligibility to naturalize challenged in the courts" (2). The case of Costa George Najour, a twenty-three year old Syrian immigrant, appearing in Atlanta's civic courts to petition for American citizenship after fulfilling the five-year residency and English-proficiency requirement shows how racial categorization was central to the formation of early Arab communities in America. After being denied American citizenship on the basis of color, as he was neither a "free white person" nor of "African nativity or descent," Najour was able to prove to the judge that Syrians were Caucasian and therefore should have the privileges of being white. Gualtieri presents Najour's case as the first immigrant of all ethnic and minority groups in the United States to demand citizenship rights.

Unlike the first wave which was predominantly Christian, the second wave of immigration began in the decade following World War II and contained a significant number of Muslims from various parts of the Arab world. This second wave of immigrants consisted of educated and skilled professionals, who were more likely familiar with the nationalist Arab

ideologies of Jamal Abdul Nasser that permeated the Arab world at that time. Unlike the Syrian Christians, this group identified itself as Arab following the formation of Arab nationalist leagues in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Yemen. Various historical accounts show that this change in the way these immigrants identified themselves was through their organizational activities and the way they wanted to be presented in relation to other immigrant groups. Included in this group were also a number of Palestinian refugees, who had become stateless as a result of the Arab-Israeli War in 1948.

With the third wave of immigration, which began in 1967 and continues to this day, new immigration laws were introduced, especially in in the post-World War II immigration period. As a result, large numbers of West Bank Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims from Southern Lebanon fled to America after the 1967 war with Israel and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. The Lebanese Civil War in the 1970s and 1980s produced a further flood of refugees. Imbued with anti-colonial sentiment and Arab nationalist ideas, this new group was highly politicized. For the first time, Arab-American organizations were formed to defend the Arab point of view and to combat negative stereotypes of Arabs in the popular press. Newly sensitized to their ethnic identity by worldwide political events, the descendants of first- and second-wave immigrants joined their newly arrived countrymen in support of Arab concerns. The Palestinian cause became the central rallying cry of many Arab-Americans, regardless of background. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Gulf War, and the 1987 Palestinian uprising against Israel (the First Intifada) and the Gulf war of 1990 have all contributed to the politicized status of the Arab-American community.

**The Two Phases of Arab-American Literature**

The three waves of Arab migration movement discussed above have generated two distinctive groups of Arab-American writers. The first *Mahjar* group generally refers to the work of diasporic writers in North and South America during the early part of the twentieth century. The term *Mahjar* is used here and mainly in historical accounts to refer to the lands of diaspora of Arabs around the globe. While the term has no geographical boundaries, it was initially ascribed to the diasporic Arab writers residing in the United States. The North American branch of the *Mahjar* group was centered in New York and developed due to the brilliant artistic inspiration of writers such as Khalil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy. Influenced by ideals of Romanticism and American transcendentalism, these early writers challenged Arab cultural norms in unconventional ways. Ameen Rihani, for example, was the author of the first Arab-American poetry collection, *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905), the first American play, Wajdah (1909) and the first Arab-American novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911). Rihani's English and Arabic literary works, Wail Hassan argues, were mainly written to "reinterpret the 'East' and the 'West' to each other and bring about a civilizational synthesis, coupled with Rihani's tireless pursuit of Arab independence—first from the Ottoman Empire then from European colonialism—and of political unity" (39). Al- Riyāḥī's position as an expatriate in the United States enabled him to introduce an active part of the *Nahḍa* project that was widely disseminated amongst academic circles in many of the Arab world. Part of this *nahda* movement was to highlight the importance of the Arabic literary tradition abroad.

Both Gibran and Rihani contributed to the development of the *nahda* movement and in projecting Arabic literary writing as an essential part in the formation of Arab nationalism. In the United States, Gibran and Rihani established a number of Arabic-language newspapers and

were clearly outspoken in their criticism of Ottoman rule and the socio-economic conditions in the Arab world. These concerns were recurrent themes in their work and in the political visions of many Arab immigrants. Some of these themes addressed the importance of missionary school education in the homeland, the desire to overcome sectarian religious conflict amongst immigrants, and "a desire for reform in the Arab world; acute concern about international politics and the political survival of the homeland; an obsessive interest in East/ West relations; and a desire to play the role of cultural intermediary" (Ludescher 97). Put differently, the first group of the *Mahjar* writers viewed themselves as cultural negotiators reconciling the great divide between East and West. They wanted to promote cultural, social, and political reform in the East, based on the Western model, and to encourage a spiritual awakening in the West, based on the Eastern model.

According to Evelyn Shakir, an Arab-American academic who has emerged as the main critic of the second generation of Arab-American writers, by the end of World War II the Arab-American community was virtually indistinguishable from the larger American community, a process that was facilitated by their shared Christian faith and the fact that they did not exhibit easily discernable racial or ethnic features that distinguished them from the general population. By the time the second generation of Arab-American writers came of age, most did not speak Arabic and many had only a superficial understanding of their Arab heritage. Shakir describes the different levels of assimilation between the first and second wave of Arab migrants in the following words:

> The first generation of Arab-American writers (as might be expected of immigrants of an age of rampant xenophobia) dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or

> man of letters. They could not hide their foreignness, but they could make it respectable. Their American born children—those who came of age in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s— costumed themselves as "regular Americans" and hoped to pass, which may be why they produced so little literature. (6)[16]

As Shakir explains above, American-born Arabs saw themselves as mainstream writers and didn't really approve of "Arab-American" as a signifier of cultural difference. On the few occasions when they did address the issue of their ethnic identity, they were hard pressed to know how to deal with it because they were bereft of ethnic literary models to draw upon. In "Arab-American Literature," Shakir discusses the different strategies adopted by second-generation Arab-American authors to deal with the issue of Arab-American identity. In the first Arab-American novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911), Ameen Rihani' presents the main character of the novel as a dweller-in-displacement with no fixed conception of home: "I am a citizen of two worlds—a citizen of the Universe; I owe allegiance to two kingdoms" (236). Rihani began his work by highlighting this dash (rift in identity) that characterizes the immigrant's movement from one home to another. Belonging and identity-formation are questions that haunt immigrant and ethnic writing and with a particular intensity under the pressures of empire and colonial rule in the Middle East and North Africa.

The growth of Arab-American literature can be explained in terms of generational differences, but also how the homeland impacts Arab migrants' sense of belonging in the twenty-first century. Today, Arab-Americans face the challenge of retaining their Arab origin while

[16] Evelyn Shakir is regarded as one of the pioneering critics of Arab-American literature. In 1997, Shakir published *Bint Arab*, for which she interviewed Arab-American women and added to their experiences the histories of her mother and grandmothers. Shakir's work is very important as it genuinely chronicles the gradual shift among children of Arab immigrants coming from Lebanon and Palestine. She pays close attention to the way these generations moved from trying to erase their heritage through assimilation to adding the word Arab when describing themselves as American.

celebrating their American values. In the writings of contemporary Arab-American writers such Mohja Kahf, Diana Abu Jaber, and Randa Jarrar, one finds a provocative engagement with questions of gender, identity, ethnicity and diaspora as they disclose the politics of multiculturalism and marginalization in America.

**Randa Jarrar and the Dialectics of Homelessness**

Like other Arab-American women writers, Randa Jarrar offers a gendered critique of home as a spatial-cultural restriction and further constructs a new form of belonging that is transnational, borderless and deterritorialized. In *A Map of Home*, Jarrar maps out a terrain of cultural, political and geographical homelessness that traverses national borderlines and opens up unconventional spaces of agency for Arab immigrants caught between the original homeland and the hostland in which they settled in. For Jarrar this terrain of displacement projects personal and familial issues pertaining to gender and female subjectivity that accompany the experience of exile and migration. By tracing Nidali's struggle to understand her identity as a Palestinian-Egyptian-Greek immigrant from the Arab world to America, Jarrar highlights not only the transnational aspects of Nidali's search for home and her ability to retain agency within restrictive gender expectations, but also how homelessness disrupts domestic and cultural home-spaces that dictate the vision of Arab and Arab-American women. Through her portrayal of Nidali's convoluted identity, Jarrar shows how the conditions of dislocation complicate issues of gender and ethnicity in various social contexts. The family strives to find a real home while in the Arab world and this struggle continues to grow after relocating to Texas.

In *A Map of Home,* homelessness is a central theme that underlies the visions of the parents and the identity of their children. In Jarrar's novel, home is presented as a consequence

of restrictive social, geographical and gender roles – mainly imposed by the father's cultural values—and as a form of agency that enables Arab-American women to deconstruct the fixated demarcations of home, culture and identity. For Jarrar, home is not simply geographical, cultural or national, but rather an amalgamation of antithetical and divergent experiences that represent the different facets of the immigrant's sense of belonging. For Nidali, home is not located in a specific place, Palestine or the U.S.; nor is it found in the new cultural values of America, but rather in the unique stories that mark the movement of people and where they chose to belong. At the end of the novel, Nidali utilizes homelessness as a space-less form of identity that can open up a world of possibilities unbound by one culture or national ethnicity.

*A Map of Home* begins with a story of origin encapsulated in the notion of gender naming as a prediction of the protagonist's fate and identity. In the novel's opening, the birth and naming story of Nidali, Jarrar sheds light on the complexity of gender under the predicaments of homelessness. Born in Boston to a Greek- Egyptian mother, Fairuza, and a Palestinian father, Waheed, the novel's protagonist is assumed to be a boy by the father even before her birth and while in the mother's uterus. Upon the child's birth the father rushes to fill out a birth certificate, giving the baby a male name, "Nidal" or struggle[17]. But soon the father discovers that he is mistaken about the child's gender and he will no longer carry the responsibility to pass along his father's name to the new born child. Upon finding that the child is female, the father snatches a pen and adds to the male name Nidal "a heavy, reflexive, feminizing, possessive, cursive, cursing 'I'" (5). This incident of name changing captures the narrative of Nidali, an Arabic name that later foretells the protagonist's own struggle and search for identity.

[17] The Arabic word niḍāl means struggle and niḍālī means my struggle.

From the opening scene, Jarrar portrays how exile and displacement impacts the views of immigrants and the fate of their subsequent generations. When the mother , Fairuza, disapproves of the name Waheed gives to his daughter, he tells her that Arabs arrived in Boston in the 1800s and called themselves Syrians, but "the immigration officers would change the Arabs' names, so the Milhems would become the Williams, the Dawuds the Daywoods, the Jarrars the Gerards, and so on"(6). Although Waheed's historical account of early immigration is based on a nationalistic view of Arab identity, his comment on name changing by immigration officers alludes to the cultural struggles that had accompanied the displacement of Arabs to America. Jarrar skillfully depicts how this struggle continues to exist not only in terms of national history and cultural identity, but also through the feelings of alienation and homelessness that inform issues of gender and social status. When Nidali fantasizes about growing up in Boston, she envisions how national origin and social status would explain her look and presence among the Bostonians:

> Only four years old, I'd come home from day care and pour myself a bowl of cereal. It could have been like the Bill Withers song, "*just…the…two of us*": poor and Arab. People would have assumed that Mama, who has kinky Black hair, brown skin, dark green eyes, and wears a lot of gold, was a Latina, and that I, a cracker-looking girl, was her daughter from a union with a gringo, and that would have been that. (8)

Fantasizing how she would have grown up in Boston, Nidali creates a reflective image of the Arab immigrant's presence especially in terms of gender and ethnicity. Nidali only includes herself and her mother with no reference to the father and how he would have been perceived. The terms "poor" and "Arab" signal a class designation that marks how the physical

characteristics of Nidali's mother makes her simply "a Latina" with no further examination of the family's complex cultural heritage. From the first few pages of the novel, Jarrar critiques essentialist representations of immigrant women and the way hybrid identities are conceived in relation to other ethnic immigrant groups. By presuming the mother to be a Latina, and Nidali a "cracker-looking girl…. from a union with a gringo," Jarrar illustrates how cultural and racial difference impact the expectations and understanding of gender for immigrant communities in America. In addition to the mother's African-Egyptian traits –her "Black hair" and "brown skin" – it is also the grandmother's Greek cultural roots that made Nidali "look sort of like a cracker" (8). To challenge such essentialist views of gender and racial hybridity, Jarrar presents Nidali as a complex manifestation of displaced gendered identity that refuses to be defined in terms of binary constructs or spatial-cultural borderlines. Nidali's struggle—as implied in her name— is centered on drawing a new map of belonging unconfined by specific geographical borderlines or certain cultural values. From her childhood days in Egypt, Nidali has always imagined her identity as more complex than simple dualism between two different cultures. The way she used to play with the Russian dolls her Greek grandmother left to her mother reveals how Nidali wanted to live in the world:

> I pretended to be the smallest Russian doll, the empty-bellied one that goes in her mama, the mama that gets cradled in her mama and so on. I knew that the biggest doll, the biggest mama on the outside, was a Greek but that I was not a Greek. I noticed that all the dolls were split in half except me, even though I was split in half: I was Egyptian and Palestinian. I was Greek and American. (8-9)

By refusing to be defined through the lens of cultural essentialism and simple cultural hybridization, Nidali strives to create a transnational identity that crosses the rigidity of cultural

and geographical demarcations of home and bi-nationalisms. She espouses neither the homogeneity of cultural roots as indicated by her grandmother's Greek roots and the father's Palestinian heritage nor the heterogeneity of more than one cultural origin, but the ability to embrace various forms of belonging freely and independently. Unlike the Russian dolls, which were clearly split in half, Nidali's split and ruptured identity is complex and produces a feeling of displacement and empowerment at the same time. The genealogical movement of the grandparents starting with the grandmother's family from Greece to Alexandria, and Waheed from Palestine to Egypt and Kuwait, and then back again to Egypt and from there to America, shows how displacement and migration have informed Nidali's conviction that she is Egyptian, Palestinian, Greek, and American.

The multiple histories of belonging that Nidali came to learn during her family's exilic movement from one place to another enabled her to see the world differently and to project a planetary understanding of identity. Although Nidali's passport certifies that she is American, she thinks that this fixed form of identification makes her "feel all alone and different" (9). This feeling prompts Nidali to think that the whole world aims to divide her family and to push her to draw closer to them. By having more than one cultural link to the scattered and migratory identity of her family, Nidali aims to construct a worldly vision of belonging that would enable her to break free from the confines of gender expectations and thus reintegrate the contradictory and uncompromising values of home.

Movement and displacement constitute a significant aspect of this freedom for Nidali, and her search for home. Nidali's father, an architect who had to give up his love for poetry to provide for his family, used to explain to his daughter that "moving was part of being Palestinian" (9). The bedtime story the father used to repeat to his daughter at ages three and four

aimed to instill an imaginary and spaceless understanding of belonging by asserting that "Our people carry the homeland in their souls. . . . You can go wherever you want, but you will always have it in your heart" (9). The father's proposition about the homeland unravels a complex relationship between home and homelessness. Although homelessness has become part of being Palestinian, the people of Palestine "carry the homeland in their souls," a difficult responsibility that inspires Nidali to think about the burden of finding home. For Nidali, this homelessness later constitutes where she belongs in the world and how she should envision her migratory identity as a migrant Arab in America.

**A Map of Borderless Belonging**

Map-drawing and the erasure of territorial borderlines is an important aspect of identity-formation that Jarrar presents in her novel to illustrate Nidali's understanding of home beyond the spatial borders of Arab nation-states. Jarrar demonstrates Nidali's attempt to reconstruct a new conception of home that is neither based on colonial history nor defined by the territorial demarcations of the Palestinian homeland that the father envisions early on in the novel. To illustrate the complexity of belonging for Nidali and her father, Jarrar traces the changing views the father forges about the stateless condition of Palestinians inside and outside the Arab world.

Jarrar encapsulates a complex understanding of Palestinian identity that moves beyond the emphasis on territorial understanding of the homeland. When the father tells Nidali that he lost his home, he also states that "But good things can come of it too" (106). The father believes that leaving his family in the West Bank to study in Egypt gave him a feeling of freedom through which he "gained an education . . . which later became my home" (106). First, he defines the homeland by focusing on one's "connection to the homeland" and how wars and colonial

occupation caused an eternal loss of the homeland as a physical space. The father keeps referring to how colonial history can explain the fate of Palestinians and how occupation and colonial domination had caused the internal displacement of many Palestinians inside the Arab world. First, the father states that it is all about "our connection to the land. How we fought all along, first by the side of Salahiddin, when he liberated Jerusalem from the Crusaders, against the Turks, then with the Turks against the British …"(109-11). Waheed's initial statement about home embodies a conventional narrative of Palestinian exile that Jarrar complicates in order to disclose the transnational visions of Palestinian exiles. The father initially believes that geographical movement away from the homeland constitutes a sense of loss that is unrecoverable. But this attitude changes as he starts to explain to Nidali how home is no longer limited to a specific place with territorial boundaries "there is no telling where home starts and where it ends" (193). By reforming his initial understanding of home, the father illustrates how home is no longer a physical entity but a sentiment that "you can go wherever you want, but you will always have it in your heart" (9).

Through her portrayal of the father's changing views about the homeland, Jarrar forges an extraterritorial Palestinian identity. The father's changing views about the homeland enables Nidali to construct a free and unmapped vision of belonging. Before the family departs to Texas, Nidali and her family cross the borders from Kuwait into Iraq and then to Jordan to fly to Egypt. In the journey, Nidali creates an imaginary homeland that once included people from various cultural and religious backgrounds:

> In Northern Kuwait I kept waiting for the border to come . . . . Someone once told me that a straight line on a map isn't straight in reality. The closer you get to the straight line the more expansive it is. And Kuwait kept going and going, even

> after the road signs had ended. Nothing would mark our entry into Iraq. I never knew when it was that we were officially there. The geography stayed the same; it could have all been the same country—it had been before. It was a people's tribe that grouped them together; the Shiites, the Sunnis, and the Kurds, and in the past the Zoroastrians, the Jews and the Christians: all of different sides of mountains, valleys and fields all there. (147)

The deterritorialized map that Nidali constructs in her imagination aims to recreate the cosmopolitan world that the Arab Gulf (specifically Iraq and Kuwait) had once embraced. Jarrar refers to a history of cultural contacts that existed prior to nation-state boundaries introduced in the aftermath of World War I. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the presence of colonial rule in the Muslim world contributed to the establishment of new nations and tribal divisions amongst various religious and cultural groups in the Arab world. The presence of British troops and protectorates in Egypt, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and the Belfour declaration initiated major divisions and political disputes amongst Arab governments. In the novel, Jarrar shows how the physical landscape of this geography (borders between Iraq and Kuwait) has never changed, but it was tribal affiliations, cultural purity and religious intolerance that imposed borderlines and spatial demarcations. The interreligious and transregional contacts that Nidali is able to fathom in her imagination about the birthplace of her family enable her to generate a borderless understanding of where she belongs.

After moving to Texas, the father tells Nidali to draw a map of Palestine from memory. Nidali struggles to draw demarcations and borders lines on the map. When she asks her father to help, he tells her that maps looked different from time to time. The British had their own topographic accounts of the land and they were never accurate. Nidali decides to draw her own

map of Palestine by writing against the science of map-making in an attempt to prove to her father that home is not a territory or a space marked by spatial demarcations:

> I took the map I drew to my room, flipped my pencil and brought the eraser's tip to the page. I erased the Western border, the northern border. I erased the southern and eastern border. I surveyed what remained: a blank page, save for the Galilee. I stared at the whiteness of the paper's edge for a long, long time. The whiteness of the page blended with the whiteness of my sheets. "You are here," I thought as I looked at the page and all around me. And oddly, I felt free. (193)

The blank page Nidali constructs in the map is a borderless demarcation of belonging implied by the white (and unmarked space) that she is able to imagine. By staring at the whiteness of the page, Nidali is able to reflect on her roots and cross-fertilize (or as she says blend) her roots with the rudimentary nature of the new home (America) where she is now. This process of transnational crossing and the erasure of borders grants her freedom and enables her to leave her mark on an unmapped territory.

In Jarrar's novel, diasporic consciousness is presented as a form of agency that enables Arab-American women to deconstruct the fixated demarcations of home, culture and identity. While attending the New English School in Kuwait, Nidali is also confronted with the dilemma of displacement caused by the war between two neighboring countries, Iraq and Iran. This war turned Palestinian immigrants in the Arab Gulf to victims of war and displacement. In Kuwait, Nidali comes to understand that the construction of water towers in the Gulf has caused the process of forced migration throughout the region. When Nidali and her family visit a shop by the beach, the mother tells Nidali that "those water towers were the reasons Baba wanted to move to Kuwait" (18). Waheed's company won the Agha Khan prize for its architectural project

in the Gulf. Upon seeing these water towers, Nidali realizes that these were signs of socio-technological improvement:

> It was a clear day, and the dust uprising stayed close to the ground so that we could see giant gray mountains across the Gulf water: we could see Iran. In the closer distance stood the water towers; there were three of them. The first was a spear with a ball in the middle, the second was just a spear, and the third was a spear with two spheres on top of each other. They looked like someone scooped ice cream onto the wrong end of an ice cream cone. (17)

The eccentric description that Nidali gives for the three towers reflects an internal diasporic movement mainly driven by how these towers stood for modernization in the Gulf. In 1965, the government of Kuwait commissioned a Swedish engineering company to develop a plan for a modern water supply system[18]. After their construction in 1979, these towers were renovated many times due to damages caused by wars and foreign invasion. The mushroom-shaped towers were icons of urban modernization and architectural development in the Gulf mobilized by the oil boom in the 1960s and 1970s. Through Nidali's satiric description of the three towers, Jarrar alludes to this petro development in the natural landscape of Kuwait as an unfitting consequence for Kuwait as an Arab country and for the fate of immigrant Arabs in the Gulf. At the barber shop Sherif complains to Waheed that he is robbed and exploited by the local people: "they think I am a millionaire" (21). The rent the barber pays for the shop has gone up, and he thinks that the landlord rapes him due to his foreign status. In response, Waheed tells the barber that today it's all about "Business, money, money, money, mon-ney," a song that Waheed learnt in America. The disparate economic and social conditions of Arab migrants is clearly disclosed in Jarrar's

[18] For more see, Kultermann, Udo, *Contemporary Architecture in the Arab States: Renaissance of a Region.*

work. As an expatriate Palestinian-Egyptian-Greek family, Nidali and her parents strive to define their migratory identity inside the Arab world and in America beyond national demarcations. This struggle becomes more visible in Nidali as she grows up and starts to develop her sense of personality and belonging.

**Oral Folklore and Writing as Forms of Transnational Belonging**

For Arab-American writers, oral storytelling and writing embody a feeling of transnational belonging that complicates the migrant's understanding of home. In *A Map of Home*, Jarrar illustrates how writing has become an important aspect of identity-development for Arab migrants and their subsequent generations. Nidali's love for the craft of writing and storytelling represents an attempt to amalgamate both Western and Eastern forms of knowledge-production. The idea of home and identity informs much of Nidali's search for identity and her resistance to draw boundaries of the homeland in time and space. As a first-generation Arab born in America, Nidali struggles to define her identity by referring to her Arab roots.

The encounter with the illiterate grandmother during the family's visit to the West Bank enables Nidali to understand the significance of oral traditions, specifically Palestinian folklore. The stories the illiterate grandmother (Sitto) shares with Nidali reveals an important aspect of Palestinian identity and further shows how story-telling is preserved from one generation to another. Nidali states that illiteracy was not an obstacle for Palestinians or retain their sense of identity and cultural roots, "Sitto didn't care if she couldn't write: she told tales and winked and made cheese" (103). Cooking and storytelling are two interrelated traits that Nidali finds inspirational about her Palestinian grandmother. When Sitto is in the Kitchen preparing "cabbage leaves with rice and meat and cumin and salt inside," she tells Nidali about the story of a poor

woman who used to make cabbage and offer it to the mayor, "but while she's serving it she farts" (102). The story has a fantastical element to it so that the listener can imagine how this poor woman was able to challenge social boundaries and find her place under the earth. What is most important about this story is the way Sitto ends the tale by telling Nidali in Arabic "*W-hay ihkayti haket-ha, w'aleki ramet-ha* – And that's my tale, girl, I've told it, and to you, girl, I've thrown it" (103). The main purpose of story-telling for the grandmother is the ability to re-narrate that same story in a way that is more creative and enticing for the listener. The grandmother's use of the Arabic phrase, "*w'aleki ramet-ha* / and to you, girl, I've thrown it," implies a process of re-narration that the listener is supposed to undertake as part of story-telling.

The local history of the village is collectively constructed through the continuity of narration from one individual to another. On the forty-day funeral of her Palestinian grandfather, Nidali observes how Sitto and her women in the village "sat in a circle and told stories about Sido, once in a while slapping their cheeks and rending their dresses" (103). By collecting various stories about the grandfather (Sido) from women in the village, Jarrar shed lights on the way collective memory in used here to generate a unified sentiment about the loss of the grandfather and the history of Palestinians at large

The encounter with the illiterate grandmother shows Nidali how to preserve Palestinian roots while also adding new details that reflect the narrator's creative vision and imagination. Nidali becomes attached to her illiterate grandmother because of the powerful folklore tales that the grandmother is able to pass on to her grandchildren. But the stories the illiterate grandmother narrates to Nidali reflect a complex understanding of belonging that is not limited to homogenous cultural roots. The illiterate grandmother states that "half-and-half" Palestinian kids are stronger than pure ones:

> I liked sneaking over to Sitto so she could tell me more stories. The day before we left, she told me about the half-and-half boy who was half a human because his father ate half the pomegranate he was supposed to give to his infertile wife to help her carry his child. I wondered if she told me this because I was a half girl since I'm only half Palestinian. But Sitto told me that the boy in the story was stronger and better than the kids that came from the whole pomegranate, and that when she called me "a half-and-half one," that's what she thought of me. (104)

Nidali finds in Sitto's story about the "half-and-half boy" an inspiring social reality that depicts the struggles of hybrid Palestinians representing diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Born to a Greek-Egyptian mother and a Palestinian father, Nidali considers herself a "half-Palestinian", a mixed identity that she assumes would make her impure and weak. The grandmother's story challenges this view by showing how the boy that came from the "half pomegranate" was stronger than the kids that were considered pure because they "came from the whole pomegranate" (104). The grandmother urges Nidali to think how being "half Palestinian" nourishes a strong social-cultural characteristic that pure Palestinians do not have. The grandmother intentionally calls Nidali "a half-and-half one" to emphasize how hybridity generates a rich heritage of identity that disrupts the cultural purity of Palestinians. By invoking these folklore stories through the character of the illiterate grandmother, Jarrar shows how Palestinian identity is imaginative, transnational and extraterritorial. Through the grandmother's story-telling and re-narration, Nidali learns how to present a complex account of her identity in writing.

In A *Map of Home*, writing is also presented as an essential aspect of belonging that transforms the immigrant's experience to a deterritorialized form of cultural identity. Jarrar introduces the practice of writing as a contested means of identity-formation for both the parents and their subsequent generations. Although Waheed had won poetry competitions at Alexandria University, he initially refused to accept Nidali's plan to become a doctor of words. After he is convinced that his daughter can become a good writer, he later wishes that Nidali would "write a Memoir" (109) to represent the family history and the suffering of Palestinians in general. Before his marriage, the father wanted to be a poet and had an idea in mind; however his continual migratory movement from one place to another made it impossible for this memoir to be written. Nidali assumes that this memoir will be about the father's "great family" including Sido and Sitto, but Waheed goes beyond the family history and further elucidates why writing this memoir is important:

> And the people before them. Yes, it's about how you come from warriors, and our connection to the land. How we fought all along, first by the side of Salahiddin, when he liberated Jerusalem from the Crusades, against the Turks, then with the Turks, against the British, but never…" and his face came really close to mine, and he continued in a whisper, "never with the British. You know, they offered your grandfather a post to be a 'mayor' of the village, and he told them to eat the fucking post, eat it!" I swallowed a whole date. It felt stuck in my heart. "Then we fought before' 48 and we lost. It ends there." (109-10)

In this passage, Jarrar chronicles the history of Palestine's occupation and the legacy of this colonial mission on the subsequent generation of Palestinians who were impacted by the

Palestinian exodus in 1948.[19] By invoking Palestine's history of encounters with others and Salahiddin's liberation of Jerusalem from the Crusades, Jarrar invites her readers to reconsider the political and historical factors that have influenced the fate of many immigrant Arab families in the United States. Both Nidali and her father believe that writing can heal the plight of Palestinian exile and the migrant's sense of loss.

By writing letters to her mother, school friends, and family members, Nidali employs writing as an imaginary space of transnational enunciation that has no fixed borders or limitations. Through the act of writing, Nidali is able to show how her sense of belonging is centered on the writer's ability to envision a world of new possibilities unmarked by cultural normativity or gender roles. In her letters to her Greek grandmother, Nidali expresses how composition and letter-writing enable her to cross rigid lines of culture and social norms more freely. Not only was she able to reveal through her writing the struggles of second-generation Arabs in America, but also why her parents and by extension early Arabs immigrants didn't want to give up their Arab values. Jarrar demonstrates how story-telling and writing enabled Nidali to construct a transnational understanding of belonging.

**Colonialism and Cultural Hybridity in the Arab World**

One of the important factors that influence migration and cultural hybridity is the historical linkage between imperial powers and their former colonies. Such patterns of cultural hybridization can be found in the immigration patterns of Britain and France, where large groups of ethnic minorities have come from South Asia, Africa and the Middle East to formulate new

[19] Known in Arabic as the *Nakba* /catastrophe and it refers to the 1948 Palestine War during which an estimated 700,000 Palestinians were expelled, and hundreds of Palestinian villages were depopulated and destroyed following Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948.

forms of ethnic and racial purity. In the last three decades Arab-American writers have portrayed how the legacy of colonial rule in the Middle East as one of the driving forces of migration movements to the West. Jarrar's invocation of colonial history aims to illustrate how colonial relations have created hybrid generations in many parts of the Arab world. In the English School in Kuwait, Nidali rejected the idea of writing an essay on French history and decided to write on the French invasion of Egypt in 1798:

> I chose to write a short tale about how in 1798, when Napoleon's army invaded Egypt, a soldier entered a small village with his brigade and saw a woman washing her clothes by the river. After she wrung them dry, she piled them into a pot, which she then balanced on her head, and once she neared a small adobe hut, the soldier abandoned his brigade, raped her atop all the wet clothes that now fell out of her head, and caused her to conceive a blue-eyed child, who was most probably my friend Sandy's great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, because Sandy is Egyptian yet has blue eyes. (115)

By revisiting the French and British invasion of Egypt in 1798, Jarrar calls attention to the intercultural progeny that was created due to the presence of colonial rule in Egypt. Nidali's story can be read as a parable for the fate of inevitable conditions of immigrants in the aftermath of colonialism. Nidali's search for a family past and where she belongs as an Arab immigrant unravels how colonialism has created mixed racial and cultural backgrounds of people. Instead of writing about French history, she chose to show how the French invasion of Egypt brought about an intercultural progeny in the Arab world. Nidali's story scrutinizes how the formulation of such cultural hybrids are misrepresented and misconceived in the Middle East. Even though the story highlights how colonial rule has exploited the economic and cultural conditions of Arab

women, it also sheds light on the intercultural interrelations it has generated between Arabs and others. By tracing the genealogy of such cultural intermixing to Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798, Jarrar aims to illustrate the inevitable nature of cultural encounters between Arabs and other nations as early as the 18th century. While Nidali and some of her class mates are aware of such historical facts, the English school system considers this historical fact a threat to school conduct and how students should behave. The French teacher decides to send Nidali to "detention" after reading about her recounting of colonial occupation of Egypt. While in detention, Nidali comes to the realization that "all –foreign born, half & half were always in detention," a school penalty that brings about her meeting with another student who also challenged the French teacher's views about cultural purity and hybridization. When Nidali first saw this student, she thought that he was Egyptian and Chinese; however in his letter to her he reveals a hybrid mix that disrupts the autonomy of nationalist identity in the following letter:

> *Dear bitch "whom" always bothers me,*
>
> *I write letters to Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon, Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun. Do you know who these people are? And no, I'm not Chinese, I'm part Japanese, because my grandfather was based as an ambassador to Japan and cheated on his wife with a Japanese woman who had my father, who was then raised by my grandmother (the Egyptian one) as her own. It's supposed to be a big secret, so try to spread it around. The pride of the religion is really Japanese. You're cute but you're part Falasteezi – Palestiniass, and so you're probably insane. I heard you were born in America. Are you a liar like me? Because I'm not really Japanese. (117)*

In this letter Fakher el-Din challenges simplified views about belonging and national origin. By referencing names such as Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Ibn Battuta and ibn Khaldun, Jarrar illustrates how hybridization and intercultural interconnections in music, philosophy and political activism creates a transnational view of belonging. Fakher el-Din intentionally asks Nidali if she knows these historical figures in European music and Islamic history to highlight the significance of intercultural contacts between East and West at the present and as early as the 12th century. The first two names that Fakher el-Din mentions in his letter give an unconventional example of mixed cultural heritage. Both Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon were influential musicians and songwriters whose work had revolutionized rock music in the fifties and sixties and generated a wide public appeal across national borders in Europe and America. Jimin Hendrix was an American musician with a mixed genealogy that included African-American, Irish and Cherokee ancestors that enabled him to employ music as a transnational form of human aspiration. Like Hendrix, John Lennon was a musician known for his political activism against wars and discrimination. In 1973, Lennon and his partner announced the formation of the state of Nutopia, a place with no cultural or geospatial boundaries.

Another aspect of identity-formation that complicates Nidali's view of herself as a young Arab immigrant is embodied in the cultural values to which her father wants her to adhere. Despite her father's rejection of the treatment of Arab women—as implied in his critique of how his married sisters live in the West Bank—he also strives to preserve the cultural values of Palestinian families inside the Arab world. Prior to the invasion of Kuwait by Sadam Hussain's army on August 2nd 1990, there were about 400,000 Palestinian residents living in Kuwait. The presence of large –scale Palestinian communities in Kuwait has had a great impact on the commercial development of major Kuwaiti cities. Nonetheless the main political vision of

Palestinians in Kuwait had focused on "assisting Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories and in Lebanon, and they maintained a pragmatic and low-profile relationship with the Kuwaiti authorities and the public" (Lesch 42). Even though many Palestinians were born in Kuwait and had long-established business relations with the Kuwaiti state, they were still considered temporary residents and didn't have citizenship rights. Kuwait's immigration laws and the status of guest-workers in the Arab Gulf compelled Palestinian families to maintain strong ties with their homeland and to remain loyal to the cultural and nationalistic aspects of their roots.

In *A Map of Home*, Jarrar illustrates how Nidali's constant displacement inside the Arab world and later to the United States poses a challenge to cultural homogeneity and the way territorial boundaries produce a restricted conception of belonging. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait unraveled how Nidali's family conceived of home as a specific spatio-cultural entity. While the father wanted to go to Palestine and be part of the Palestinian Intifada against Israeli occupation, the mother saw in Egypt a unique cultural connection to her Greek roots. Unlike their parents, Nidali and her brother Gamal envisaged a broader idea of home and belonging. Each of the parents wanted to retain the particularity of their culture and viewed travel and dislocation as a challenge to belonging and cultural authenticity. The father didn't want his children to become Palestinian refugees; nor did he envision how displacement and border-crossing can present a new form of cross-cultural belonging for his children. For Nidali, this new form of belonging is clearly manifested in her ability as an immigrant Arab woman to resist patriarchal cultural values and cross rigid lines of authenticity. By leaving her parents' house in Texas, Nidali does not only enunciate a feeling of independence and empowerment, but also generates a new conception of belonging. For Nidali the experience of leaving home is in itself a feeling of cross -cultural empowerment and heterogeneity:

> I saw us running barefoot, the skin of our feet collecting sand and rocks and cactus and seeds and grass until we had shoes, shoes made of everything we'd picked up as we ran. When we had the shoes, the shoes the earth gave us, we stopped running, and maybe then we settled down somewhere we'd never have to run away from again. The thought comforted me, even though it was more of a fantasy that a thought. (139)

Upon reaching the northern borders of Kuwait heading to Iraq, Nidali thanks her father for this "exodus" and further envisions herself as the famous Arab singer Umm Kalthum: "I wanted to be free and forever unmarried like Umm Kalthum was, and someday have my money and my own home so I wouldn't have to answer to anyone" (123). Umm Kulthum was a popular Egyptian singer and songwriter from the 1930s to the 1970s. She was known as *Kawkab al-Sharq* كوكب الشرق / Star of the East in Arabic. More than three decades after her death in 1975, she is still widely regarded as the greatest Arabic female singer in history. By comparing herself to the famous singer Umm Kulthum, Nidali aims to project an unconventional image of Arab women that is undefined by marital status or social restrictive roles. Like Umm Kulthum, Nidali wants to attain a level of success that crosses the cultural expectations of her family in which women become financially dependent on their husbands. On her travel from Kuwait to Egypt, Nidali reconstructs her mixed family history in an attempt to highlight the nature of her transnational identity:

> I wondered how many planes I'd been on. I thought of my ancestors going from country to country, and a little silent film played in my head, all sped up with crazy music playing loudly as a sound-track: A Turkish woman gets in a carriage and goes to Palestine. She marries an Arab and the have little Turko-Arab babies

> and their babies have babies and one of those babies grows up and begets my father. A Greek woman with a Black shawl and massive boobs gets on a ship in Crete, goes to Alexandria, Egypt, gives birth to a girl who falls in love with an Egyptian and they beget my mother. My father gets on a ship from Jordan to Egypt and finds my mother and they marry. They get on a plane and go to America and beget me. We all get on a plane and go to Kuwait. My child someday will tell this entire story and tack on in the end that I got in a car and fled Kuwait and then boarded a plane to Egypt. I didn't know where my story would end or how many planes, carriages, cars, or ships my offspring and the offspring they beget would go on, only that I hoped in the future travel would be more comfortable. . . . (159 -60)

As this passage illustrates, Nidali's search for identity embodies an experience of homelessness that is gendered, racialized and deterritorialized. What homelessness means, for Nidali, has to do with personal freedom, mobility and border-crossing. By highlighting Nidali's struggles at various stages in the novel, Jarrar aims to illustrate how exile and displacement carry the immigrant's burden to represent his/her cultural roots while also inventing an unconventional space of belonging. Nidali's travel constitutes a provisional escape from roots and origins, but gender roles and the burden of representation renders her immobile in time and space. Nidali's struggle arises mainly from the contradictions of home, gender roles and the immigrant's ability to represent her dual sense of belonging.

**Crossing the Color Line and Arab-American Writing**

Racial subjugation is an influential aspect of migration and displacement for Arabs inside and outside the Middle East and North Africa. In the United States, Arabs have a complex relationship to race. Since the arrival of early Arabs in the early 19th century race was a determining factor of assimilation and acceptance into mainstream America. Early Syrian immigrants to the United States succeeded in claiming a biological linkage to Caucasians and therefore were considered in Helen Samhan's words "white, but not quite."[20] Although U.S. migration policies and citizenship laws classified Arab-Americans as "white," cultural and popular discourses have represented "Arabs" as anomalous and inferior to normative forms of whiteness.

In "Thinking Outside the Box: Arabs and Race in the United States," Louise Cainkar contends that the racialization of Arabs in America was informed by conceptions of ethnicity, a schematization process of racism that described Arabs as "white ethnics." [21] This marginal racial status has changed to an inferior position similar to the experience of communities of color especially after the terrifying events of 9/11. Today Arab-Americans, Middle Eastern people and Muslims are racialized in American politics, law and popular media by reviving orientalist misconceptions about Islam, Arab culture and religious fundamentalism. Extrapolating this view, Minoo Moallem asserts that "[t]he representation of Islamic fundamentalism in the West is deeply influenced by the general racialization of Muslims in a neo-racist idiom, which has its roots in cultural essentialism and a conventional Eurocentric notion of 'people without history'"

[20] For more information about this term, see Samhan, Helen. "Politics and Exclusion: The Arab American Experience."

[21] Louise Cainkar argues that the experience of early Arabs (mainly Syrians) is "similar to that of white ethnics as measured by structural rights, such as land ownership, employment, voting, and naturalization . . . . . and social patterns, such as freedom of movement and residential and marital commingling among whites . . . ." (46).

(298). As Moallem observes, prejudice and discrimination against Arab-Americans are mainly promoted by a racialized mechanism of 'othering' that aimed to denigrate Arabs and Muslims as people of color with irrational religious views. The public paranoia caused by 9/11 has drastically transformed the marginal positions of Arabs from "invisible citizens" to "visible subjects"[22]and established intercultural linkages between various Muslim migrant groups in America.

In *A Map of Home*, Jarrar skillfully reveals how racialization complicates the migrant's search for home and belonging. Racism does not only disrupt the immigrant's ability to assimilate, but also how the immigrant defines his/her national origin. In Kuwait, Nidali's father strives to retain his Palestinian identity and further explains to his children the significance of understanding the history of Palestine. Unlike the mother, who is half Greek half Egyptian, Waheed believes that interracial marriage generates a challenging context for subsequent generations. In various contexts in the novel, Waheed informs Nidali that his parents were pure natives of Palestine and didn't accept, as he did, interracial mingling with Greeks or Egyptians. Waheed's recollections about Palestine and the family history lay a lot of emphasis on racial purity implied by one's loyalty to the land of his birth. When the father talks about the impact of colonial rule in the Arab world, he clearly scrutinizes hybrid and racially-impure progeny. Unlike his wife, Waheed sees racial difference as an inferior aspect of identity.

Jarrar presents not only a generational gap in the way race is perceived by the parents and their children, but also shows how Nidali's mother challenges Arab racial prejudice. In scrutinizing Waheed's views, Nidali's mother becomes more open to cultural difference and the idea of racial impurity. When Nidali visits her friend Rama in Kuwait, the mother finds solace in

[22] See Kien Lee, "Building Intergroup Relations after September 11" for a detailed account of the way Arab-Americans become visible through the discourses of diversity and multiculturalism.

sharing her concerns and talking to "Rama's mother – a tall Black woman with a beautiful nose ring" (141). Unlike Waheed who always looks for cultural purity, Nidali's mother sees herself as a bridge between two different worlds, the Greek heritage of her mother, and the Egyptian identity of her father. The mother's mixed heritage inspires Nidali to scrutinize how her father's "Jordanian pity-passport" represented the desperate conditions of Palestinians "born after the 1948 partition but before the 1967 war" (148) and the racial attitudes neighboring Arab countries have against Palestinians in the Gulf. Throughout their movement in the Arab world Jarrar highlights how the politics of Arab nationalism played a significant role in creating exclusive immigration policies towards Arabs of mixed ancestry. Even though Nidali's mother is Egyptian with a Greek mother, she would "need to stand in a different line at airports yet" (9).

Racial difference is one of the social constraints that made it difficult for Nidali's family to assimilate to American cultural values. This attitude is expressed not only by the parents, but also reveals a history of racial discrimination against people of color dating back to the sixties when Nidali's Egyptian grandfather travelled to America with a delegation of Egyptian officials and were told upon entering a restaurant in D.C. that "Colors sit over there' … 'No colors here'" (189). The grandfather shares this story with Nidali to demonstrate how Arabs were inspired by the civil rights movement and the ideals presented by Black intellectuals. Upon arriving in America, Nidali finds that crossing racial lines is one of the social and psychological hardships that displacement brings about. By establishing a strong relationship with Aisha, a Black Muslim girl in Texas, Nidali envisions an interracial platform that sheds light on the struggles of immigrants of color and further initiates a comparative framework for understanding racism in America.

In A *Map of Home*, Jarrar illustrates how race configures the notion of belonging and the formation of racial intermediaries between various immigrant groups. The dynamic critical lenses through which Arab-Americans have been chronicled and institutionalized in the United States after and prior to September 11th enunciates a fruitful dialogue between the study of race and Arab-American studies and more significantly how Arab-Americans position themselves in relation to other anti-racial activism. The intercultural and diasporic intermediaries Arab-Americans have established with African-Americans and other communities of color compel us to ask: How does "race" help us explore the relationship between marginalized Arabs in America and Arabs exiled in their homeland? What new frameworks of scholarship and critical inquiry can Arab-American studies enunciate in conversation with race theory and ethnic studies in the United States?

**Conclusion**

Arab-American literature presents home as a diasporic consciousness that transcends the designation of one place or one culture as roots and origins. In *A Map of Home*, Randa Jarrar reveals the diasporic articulations of identity that young Arab-Americans forge today. Nidali's story delineates a terrain of spatial and cultural displacement that generates a borderless map of belonging in which home becomes deterritorialized and transregional. Through this terrain of displacement from the Arab world, Jarrar unfolds the Arab immigrant's provisional and unconventional understanding of gender roles, racial difference and transcultural belonging. Jarrar's work challenges literary critics to formulate a new terrain of diaspora writing that is neither geographical nor cultural in perspective, but rather mobile, transcultural and transformative in the way it evolves through time and space.

Jarrar's work demonstrates how young Arabs in the United States initiate a deterritorialized and borderless understanding of home. These younger generations construct a transformative and ahistorical conception of identity mobilized by gender, cultural and racial configuration inside and outside the hostland. Today one of the most important issues facing the Arab-American writers and critics has to do with the question of how Arab-American literature intersects with other U.S. ethnic and immigrant writing. Arab-Americans are part of an extremely diverse group, which includes first-generation, second-generation and third-generation Americans with both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers. The work of young Arab-Americans authors writing in English and envisioning new trajectories in the field of Anglophone literary studies urge diaspora scholars to ask: what is different about Anglophone Arab writing in comparison to the writing of other Anglophone diasporic writers? Should literary critics focus on the American side of the immigrant's experience or more importantly on its Arabic roots and origins? How do different generations of Arab-American writers project the homeland in light of constant wars, revolts and internal displacement in the homeland? What new directions and genres of diasporic writing do Arab-Americans envision as dwellers of displacement and travel? For Jarrar, being Arab and American entails a process of social liberation unrestricted by the essentialism of cultural differences or geographical proximity. It is neither space nor temporality that constitutes the immigrant's sense of belonging.

## Arab-British Identity: The Search for Arab Transnationalism in Jamal Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinns*

> Diasporic identities are at once local and global. They are networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities.
>
> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*

> And then you begin to give up the very idea of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this belonging, it seems like some long, dirty lie. . . . And I begin to believe that birthplaces are accidents, that everything is an accident. But if you believe that, where do you go? What do you do? What does anything matter?
>
> Zadie Smith, *White Teeth*

Contemporary Anglophone literature addresses the entangled relationship between European colonialism and the formation of immigrant communities in the United Kingdom, while posing a challenge to postcolonial subjectivity.[23] Today, second-generation Arab-British writers foster a migratory understanding of belonging in which the homeland is no longer a spatial-cultural fixity marked in time and space, but a diasporic consciousness that evolves with travel and mobility across regional and transnational borders. Arab migration to Britain started as early as the 19th century; it developed under particular sociopolitical conditions that produced unacknowledged forms of immigrant Arab identity in the United Kingdom. The early wave of Arab immigrants to British seaports in the early 1920s and late 1950s was mainly concerned with the Anglo-Arab encounter and the impact of British colonialism on Arabs and Muslims at large. On the one hand, these early groups of Arab immigrants strove to assimilate to the hostile social environment of the hostlands they inhabited. British-born Arab immigrants, on the other hand,

[23] Unlike the first wave of postcolonial writers who emigrated from former British colonies, British born immigrant writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali and Diran Adebayo are more concerned about the postcolonial subject's search for home and identity, and the impact of migration and displacement on younger generations. For more, see Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*.

attempt to cross national borders by forging networks through transnational intermediaries. Moreover, the migrant's search for identity has initiated an intra-generational difference between the parents of Arab immigrants in Britain and their subsequent generations. This generational gap is clearly articulated in the dichotomy between the parents' nationalist views and their children's multicultural and diasporic identity as British immigrant citizens.

This chapter demonstrates how the work of the British- Sudanese writer, Jamal Mahjoub, problematizes the boundaries of postcolonial subjectivity. Mahjoub presents home as a diasporic experience that can no longer be defined by spatial and temporal demarcations. Mahjoub's sense of diaspora is based on an undoing of homeland as a territorial space by forging transnational intermediaries through historical connectivity, mobility, and travel. In his novel *Travelling with Djinns*, Mahjoub dismantles the binary relationship between home and homelessness and introduces diasporic consciousness as an empowering form of belonging for Arab migrants throughout Europe.

Mahjoub's work presents an Arab-British vision that generates complex articulations of home and identity, especially the migrant's relationship to cultural roots. For young Arab-British writers home is a diasporic vision that transcends territorial homelands and homogenized cultural roots. The transnational visions of contemporary Arab-British writers situate new articulations of home for the 21st century. Diasporic consciousness presents the power of imagination as a form of border-crossing beyond the nation-state's spatial boundaries. The discourse of national belonging for contemporary British- Arabs is more invested in disrupting the homogeneity of nationalism and the dominance of cultural ethnocentrism

**Early 20th- century Arab Migration to Britain**

The early migration of Africans to Britain since the 18th century laid the foundation for other migratory movements from Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, and influenced the formation of British immigration policies in the first half of the 20th century. Britain has gone through various stages of government and state-policies which contributed to the development of its Asian and African migrant communities[24]. The establishment of various immigration policies in Britain in the aftermath of the Second World War had a direct impact on the flow of Commonwealth immigrants from different parts of the world. The British National Act of 1948 and the Commonwealth Immigrant Act of 1981 have both shaped the formation and later development of Muslim and Arab immigrant communities in the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the legislation of the British Nationality Act in 1948 redefined Britain's political basis for nationality and reformed other immigration policies, including the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and its later provisions which had restricted the entry of Arabic speaking seamen into British seaports. In *British Immigration Policy since 1939: The Making of Multiracial Britain,* Ian Spencer traces how the Second World War constituted a significant historical conjecture for the political development of Asian and African migration to Britain. As Spencer illustrates, the restrictions introduced by the provisions of the Aliens Order Act of 1920, which denied "permission to land to 'Arab seamen' who arrived as passengers without proof of British nationality" (10), were revised to accommodate the uncontrollable flow of Asian and

[24] See for example, Peter Fryer's account of Africans in Britain since the Romans's imperial presence in AD 43. In *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, Fryers argues that it is impossible to write an account of Britain's national history and the rise of British capitalism with no reference to the presence of Black people in the construction of Empire and colonial plantations.

African immigrants from Britain's former colonies and protectorates prior to 1948.[25] The British National Act of 1948, Spencer explains, gave both nationals and citizens of the monarch "the right to enter Britain, vote, stand for Parliament and join the armed forces" (53). Spencer also contends that the nationality act of 1948 confirmed some of the prior acts that aimed to present equal rights to all British subjects regardless of race and cultural origin:

> The Aliens Act of 1905 introduced the first set of peacetime British immigration controls and made the distinction between those who did not owe allegiance to the monarch—aliens (who became subject to control)—and those who did, who collectively remained free to enter Britain as and when they chose. . . . The declaration of 1937 that the British Government made no distinction by race to the right of entry and settlement in the United Kingdom was loudly re-affirmed. (53-54)

The independence of Commonwealth countries such as India, Pakistan and Ceylon urged the British to define the basis of their citizenship and under what conditions to grant citizenship to immigrants from the territories of the Empire. The British National Act of 1948 created what was known as "Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies," (54) which encompassed immigrants who could not prove allegiance to any Commonwealth country. This significant immigration policy introduced the legal foundation of Britain's transformation into a multiethnic society.[26]

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[25] Ian Spencer contends that even prior to the National Act of 1948 the British government passed various provisions to its immigration policies from 1905 to 1939, including the Aliens Order of 1925, which had failed to control the overflow of Arabs seeking jobs in British seaports.

[26] For a detailed discussion on how the British National Act of 1948 has transformed the nature of British politics and national economy, see Randall Hansen, "The Politics of Citizenship in 1940s Britain: The British Nationality Act." Hansen asserts that the legislation of BNA (British National Act) "created a legal status—Citizenship of the

Arab and Muslim migration to Britain started as early as the 1900s. First, it was the arrival of undocumented Yemeni sailors in the 19th century forming small-scale Arab communities in Cardiff, Tyneside, and South Shields. And second, the flow of Arab migrants in the 1940s and 1950s which included families from Arab and Arabic-speaking countries to reside in central and East London.[27] Most of these immigrant groups came to Britain as tradesmen looking for better economic conditions or as political refugees fleeing the autocracy of their home countries. The concentration of small-scale Arab immigrant communities in urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s reveals two significant factors that distinguish the formation of Arab immigrant communities from other immigrant communities in Britain. First, most of the Arabs who came to Britain from the 1940s to the 1980s worked in English steel mills and contributed to the development of the iron industry in many English cities, including Manchester, Liverpool, and Cardiff. Second, these immigrant-worker communities remained in close proximity with each other and formed communal ties of cultural and religious background.[28]

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UK and Colonies—that included Britons and 'colonial' British subjects under a single definition of British citizenship, and entrenched their right to enter the UK. Between 1948 and 1962, some 500,000 non-white British subjects entered under the legislation, despite documented evidence of elite suspicion of non-white Commonwealth migration" (67).

[27] See Abbas Shiblak, *Arabs in Britain: Concerns and Prospects*. Shiblak states that by the end of 1980s there were about half a million immigrants living in Britain who came from Arab countries. Also, according to a study mentioned in *The Economist*, "the 500,000 odd Arabs in Britain represented about 10 per cent of all foreigners resident in Britain" (quoted in *Arabs in Exile* by Fred Halliday, 155). Also, see *The Arab British Center*'s selected papers presented at their first conference on Arab communities in Britain which was held in London in 1991. The publisher of the conference proceedings commented that this was the first gathering of scholars and academics interested in the affairs of Arab communities in Britain.

[28] See *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*. In this study, Fred Halliday contends that by living in concentrated urban areas and working in similar work conditions (mostly in factories and steel mills) Arab immigrants in Britain were noticeably successful in creating what he calls "communal organizations"(2). The author gives the example of the political and cultural ties between Arab and Yemeni communities in Cardiff, South Shields and Liverpool.

In a recent study conducted in 2004 about the inclusion of "Arab" as an ethnic category in the British census, Ismail Al Jalili argues that it is impossible to trace Arab migration in Britain without linking the development of British industry and sea trade to the increased presence of Arab immigrants in Sheffield, Birmingham and Manchester.[29] Al Jalili's study depicts how the skills of Lebanese and Syrian immigrants in the sectors of textile and clothes manufacture constructed a "Cottonpolis" area in Manchester from which other cotton and textile industries developed in other parts of Britain. London, as Al Jalili states, became "the main centre for British Arabs, with an estimated 300,000 in the capital followed by other major cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow and Cardiff"(1). It is note-worthy that the manifest increase of Arab migration to London and major British cities since the 1940s was also a result of internal political movements in the Arab world. By the mid-nineteenth century, London became the new home for refugees and political exiles from all over the world, and for Arab migrants in particular, especially in the aftermath of wars and social revolts in Egypt, Iraq and Yemen.[30]

Fred Halliday ascribes this noticeable increase of Arab immigration throughout the United Kingdom to two historical factors: internal Arab emigration and immigration from former colonies in Asia and Africa to Europe (3). For Halliday, Arab emigration started as early as the seventh century, which resulted in the creation of emigration routes of trade and displacement for

[29] In *Arab Population in the UK: An Ethnic Profile*. Ismail Al Jalili examines the political and historical consequences that have excluded the term "Arab" as an ethic category in Britain, and further urges the British parliament to include Arabs as a separate ethnic group in the 2011 census. Al Jalili also provides a statistical account of Arab-British contributions in terms of industry, sea trade and cultural diversity.

[30] In his introduction to *Arabs in Exile*, Fred Halliday asserts that the political conditions of many Arab countries (including Iraq and Egypt) inspired Egyptian nationalists and other Arab migrants to become active politicians calling for the independence of their home countries while living in Britain.

Arabs inside and outside their homeland. Halliday gives the example of Palestinians who had to immigrate to different parts of the Arab world due to the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, the Lebanese who crossed the Atlantic Ocean to North and South America, and merchants from South Yemen trading and creating diasporic communities throughout the Indian Ocean rim. The oil boom in the region since the 1970s has also attracted over 350,000 laborers from Yemen to emigrate to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. Also, the migration of Arabs from former French colonies in North Africa from countries like Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia has resulted in a massive internal movement of Arabs within and across the national borders of the Arab world. The various waves of internal Arab emigration that Halliday identifies in his work have had a direct impact on the immigration of Arabs to Britain in general, and the formation of Arab-British identity in particular.

**Arab Migration and the British National Act of 1948**

In the early 21st century, the United Kingdom incorporates multi-cultural and diverse immigrant communities that were formed as a result of political and economic migrations and as a consequence of Britain's imperial pursuits in Africa and Asia. The early presence of small and large scale postcolonial immigrant communities since the early 1940s has formulated inter-racial and inter-ethnic ties between British and Arab communities, and made the idea of identity a complex phenomenon for Arab migrants and younger Arab-British citizens. Britain's colonial past has not only complicated how one defines "British-ness" but also enunciated what the cultural critic Robert Young calls "an identity crisis"[31] for the English people to know how and where their national history has occurred. As Young explains, the rhetoric of Englishness that the

[31] See Robert Young, "Ethnicity As Otherness in British Identity Politics."

empire employed in its imperial pursuits in Asia and Africa has been transformed to be understood "in a range of models, not only in class terms but also as a result of the increasing emphasis on the national and ethnic diversities contained within the not very United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" (154). This cultural transformation has not affected the English alone but also people who live in Britain as subjects or British-born citizens. For Young, the purity of Englishness has been replaced by other forms of belonging and identity-formation. What used to be non-English and thus foreign became a celebratory slogan for present day Britain, especially for British people who could trace Anglo-Indian roots or Irish blood in their lines of ancestry.

The emergence of nationalist movements after 1948 in the British Isles and Northern Ireland has also given rise to a heterogeneous understanding of British cultural identity.[32] The presence of immigrant communities from South Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa has intensified the need for a new form of identity politics that transcends *class consciousness* and reveals the new cultural and racial differences present in English society. The turn from class-based identity politics to minority politics enunciated a biased understanding of ethnicity that has informed the discourse of racial difference in Britain.[33] In other words, racial difference and racialization has

[32] To illustrate how Englishness has lost its value as a cultural and political attribute of the empire, Young discusses how "English literature" has been divided to different canons based on the specificities of regions and cultural traditions rather than English writing produced by a distinctive class of British authors. The expansion of the English literary tradition in the last two decades is an indication of the multiple forms of cultural authenticity that challenges the discipline of English as a purely Western subject of study.

[33] See, Paul Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*. The author demonstrates the changing attitudes that British thought on race and racial differences in the latter phases of empire from the 1890s to the early 1960s. Rich focuses on the role of racial ideas in British politics and examines more closely the decline of Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy in the Victorian period. What distinguishes Rich's account of race politics from other sociological studies is his emphasis on the impact of anthropology and scientific racism on race theory studies in British ruling class circles to a more objective study of ethnic and cultural groups by the 1930s and 1940s. The arrival of commonwealth migration introduced, liberal ideas on race relations that have helped shape the post-war rise of identity politics in Britain.

undermined the idea of ethnicity as a new model of difference in British identity politics. The enunciation of ethnicity as a form of identity proved that racial categorization was both biological and cultural, and ethnicity as a form of racial categorization was redefined against the prospect of complete otherness. Robert Young explains this ideological transformation stating: "Today, however, otherness is, in a sense, no longer an absolute otherness, for its otherness is bound up with the condition of also being part of the same" (158). The transformation from racial difference to the category of ethnicity, Young contends, "rewrites" the other's accessibility to universals and political rights, but it also erases their unique histories as Blacks, Africans, and Asians. To eradicate the binary oppositions in racial categories between whiteness and Blackness, Europeans versus others, ethnicity incorporated both the discourses of difference and sameness as a mechanism of inclusion for excluded and marginalized groups.

This mixed formation of ethnic identities destabilizes the projection of the 'other' as an opposition to dominant forms of identity and rather presented itself as a manifestation of difference. The dialogic interplay between racialization and ethnic categorization in British identity politics since the nineteenth century introduced different social dynamics when compared to the United States, an asymmetrical political environment that explains the distinctive conditions of Black and other immigrants in Britain.[34] In the United States, African-Americans have employed race as an empowering aspect of their history and cultural heritage. Negritude and Civil Rights movements treated Blackness as a cultural value for African-Americans and Blacks on a global scale. In Britain on the other hand, ethnicity was introduced as

[34] See "Ethnicity As Otherness in British Identity Politics." Young illustrates how unlike ethnicity in Britain race in the United States was given a cultural and biological value that has inspired Black nationalism and the formation of distinctive Black culture in America. African-Americans have used their race as a signifier of distinctiveness and empowerment to combat racial segregation and disenfranchisement.

a substitute for race, which has indirectly subdued the histories and cultural values of ethnic minorities, and presented ethnicity as a social totality for various and heterogeneous immigrant communities. While the discourse of ethnicity succeeded in introducing the notion of sameness between Europeans and other non-European nations in British politics, it has also emphasized racial difference as a determining factor for the cultural and intellectual production of others.

In "New Ethnicities," Stuart Hall has asserted that Black cultural politics in Britain has been influenced by two historical factors: anti-racism, and the experience of Black immigrants in post-war Britain. Hall postulates that anti-racialization was employed by various immigrant groups as a form of unified dilemma creating a common ground between African and Black immigrants and other ethnic groups who were not necessarily classified as racial others: " 'The Black experience', as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural differences between the different communities, became 'hegemonic' over other ethnic/ racial identities—though the latter did not, of course, disappear."[35] As Hall explains here, 'the Black experience' was not only imposed on other ethnic groups, but has also essentialized 'Blackness' as a unifying and stereotypical racial category for asymmetrical and dissimilar Black experiences in Britain. In the case of Arabs, the essentialzing nature of British racial politics has excluded the visible presence of Arabs in race relations and presented Arab-ness as an irrelevant category in the political discourses on diversity and cultural difference.[36]

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[35] For a detailed discussion on Hall's explication on the evolution of racial categorization in non-Black immigrant communities in Britain, see "What is this 'Black' in Black popular culture?" & "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chan" in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies.*

[36] Many historical accounts discuss the political role of Arab communities in Britain assert that Arabness was excluded from the race system debate until 1991 when various Arab activists appealed the inclusion of Arab ethnicity in the British census.

Unlike other Asian and African immigrants who had a Commonwealth connection with Britain and a legitimate right to British citizenship, Arabs maintained a short-lived relationship with the British Empire. Most British colonies and protectorates in the Arab world failed to establish colonial treaties with Britain's migration system. Although Britain dominated many parts of the Arab world from the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century and ruled some of its protectorates, former British colonies in the Arab world were not considered part of the Commonwealth countries that were granted Britain's national and citizenship rights[37]. It was rather through skilled worker immigration and mercantile relations that made it possible for Arab students and exiles to attain British citizenship rights. Despite the increasing presence of Arab immigrants in Britain, Arab-ness still remains an unidentified category of Otherness, a marginalized minority that is rarely presented in the social and cultural heritage of Britain when compared to other Commonwealth migrant communities from Asia and Africa.

Today images of exotic and fanatic Arabs and Muslims dominate British culture and popular media, and continue to overlook how second-generation Arab migrants have transformed Britain's literary and cultural heritage in the last three decades. Unlike first-generation Arab migrants who were mainly distanced from British culture due to restrictive migration policies and social disintegration, second-generation Arab migrants have a complex relationship to Britishness and the way they negotiate their identity as both Arab and British. Arab migrants in Britain present a deterritorialized vision of belonging that traces its cultural heritage across the national borders of Europe. Contemporary Arab-British authors such as Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Leila Abulela and Jamal Mahjoub raise challenging questions about Englishness and

[37] See Caroline Nagel, "Hidden minorities and the politics of 'race': The case of British Arab activists in London."

Arabness as exclusive forms of identity-formation, and further urge us to examine the new diasporic articulations and intermediaries their work presents.

**Early and Contemporary Anglophone-Arab Literature in Britain**

In contemporary Anglophone-Arab literature questions of home and belonging do not simply re-conceptualize what postcolonial writers have already said about *liminal space* and hybrid cultural formations, but rather propose a transnational understanding of belonging in which space is no longer a defining factor of identity.[38] The culturally mixed, exilic and diasporic writings of the past two decades in Anglophone Arab literature, from the 1990s to the present, establish a lively imaginary homeland as both a site of scrutiny and cultural inspiration. From 1990s to the present, Anglophone Arab authors in Britain have used the English novel as a crucial literary genre to reveal the social, historical, and personal experiences of Arabs inside and outside the Arab world. The works of Anglophone-Arab writers such as Jamal Mahjoub, Leila Abulela, Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Zeina Ghandour and Ghada Karmi all illustrate how the novel form has been appropriated to disclose the diasporic visions of Arab immigrants in the United Kingdom. These Arab-British novelists represent a transregional and deterritorialized understanding of diaspora and its impact on the formation of Arab identity on a global scale.

Furthermore, what distinguishes Anglophone-Arab literature from other Arab immigrant writing is the visibility of its feminist agenda and intercultural diasporic preoccupations. The contributions of female writers have outnumbered the marginal presence of male authors with the exception that both female and male Arab-British authors share the same concerns about home and belonging. Some of these writers migrated to Britain under involuntary economic and

[38] See Homi Bhabha's use of the term "liminal space" and how postcolonial theorists have used the idea as a form of interstitial agency for postcolonial nations.

political conditions, while others traveled for higher education and decided to reside there. Living away from home has enabled these writers to become more thoughtful about their own visions and aspirations as displaced and distanced writers.

In "Reflections of Exile," Edward Said has pointed out that the state of exile forges a different view of the world. For Said, the exilic position of immigrants not only grants them an original vision of the world around them, but also gives "rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that to borrow a phrase from music-- is contrapuntal" (186). Displacement and distance from the homeland creates what Said calls "a plurality of vision" in which old and new forms of culture exit simultaneously.[39] For British Arab immigrants this contrapuntal existence manifested itself in what Layla Al Maleh describes as "a site of absolute freedom, a free political and intellectual community that could accommodate the non-conformity of their views" (14). In other words, diaspora furnished Anglophone-Arab writers with a significant medium to voice their political concerns and literary visions about the homeland, and how they belong in the world. Diasporic writing empowered Arab immigrants to become active politicians and social reformers tackling critical issues reflective of the disparities of the homeland and oppressive cultural practices. For example, in the work of prominent Arab-British authors such Ahdaf Soueif, Leila Abulela, and Fadia Faqir questions of gender, religion and culture are thoughtfully interrelated to show how ideas travel from one social context to another. For some time gender inequality and lack of freedom seemed to inform these writers' voiced

[39] Said contends that the condition of exile reinforces open-ness, and creates a "plurality of vision" in which different views and perspectives can coexist simultaneously. Said uses 'contrapuntal' as a metaphor from music that help us explain how exiles view the world.

critique of the homeland, but today the diasporic visions of these authors also project the harsh and challenging realities of immigration and settlement in Britain.

The thematic choices of first-generation Arab immigrant writers in Britain demonstrate the different political and historical conditions that have informed the artistic views of Anglophone-Arab literature in the 1970s and 80s. If we compare the thematic choices of Arab British writers from the late 1970s and 80s with the concerns of contemporary Arab British authors, it becomes clear how generational differences and migration policies have formed different literary landscapes in which politics, history and culture play a significant role in the formation of diaspora and belonging. The impact of migration policies and English cultural values in the 1970s and 80s are ostensibly contested in the literary aspirations of early Arab migrants in Britain.

The national visions of first-generation Arab migrants in Britain reflect the religious and political views these early immigrants aimed to implement as a foundation for Arab nationalism. For example, in the works of Lebanese-British and Palestinian-British intellectuals such as Edward Attiah, Musa Alami, Albert Hourani and George Antonius, one finds the basis of a secular understanding of Arab nationalism as opposed to the religious unity informed by the notion of Islamic nation or *Ummah*. During their education and residence in Britain, early Arab migrants supported the idea of nationalism based on a Western understanding of national belonging in which a secular nation-state would unite Muslims, Christians and atheists together.[40] This conception of Arab nationalism became fully developed in the work of George Antonius, a Lebanese-Egyptian author and historian who settled in Palestine in 1920 and served

[40] See Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay*, which is considered the first of its kind to propose a secular version of Arab nationalism by an Arab migrant in the West. Hourani was born in Manchester, England to Christian Lebanese parents in 1915, and he attended Oxford to study philosophy, politics and economics.

in the British Mandate of Palestine. For many historians and cultural critics Antonius is considered to be one of the founding fathers of modern Arab nationalist history. Antonius's influential work *The Arab Awakening, The Story of the Arab National Movement* (1938) sparked an ongoing debate over the origins of Arab nationalism, the Arab Revolt movement in 1916, and the aftermath of British colonial rule in the Middle East as a whole.[41] Like Hourani and other early Arab-British writers, Antonius aimed to project a secular version of Arab nationalism mainly dominated by ideals of Christian Arab elites and a small minority of western-educated Arab intellectuals. While the main argument of *The Arab Awakening* was the revival of Arab nationalism far beyond the domain of religion and religious thought, Antonius's nationalistic aspirations were informed by his father's Greek Orthodox and Syrian Protestant ideology which was mainly elitist in perspective and had utterly failed to account for mainstream and popular sectors of Christian Arabs and Muslims.[42] The exclusive nature of Antonius's Arab nationalist ideology has paved the way for the emergence of Muslim Brotherhood, an oppositional religious movement that has rejected the secular idealism later developed in Nasser's nationalist views.

Moreover, Antonius's work has formed a successful mediation between British and Arab politics especially his proposition that Britain should not object to Arab unity and the teleological purpose of Arab awakening as "a bridge between two different cultures and an agent in the interpretation of one to the other" (Nash, *The Arab Writer in English*, 82). However, Antonius's later views on the status of exiled Palestinians in Britain and the future of Palestine as a British

[41] According to the Middle Eastern historian Martin Kramer "*The Arab Awakening* by George Antonius eventually became the preferred textbook for successive generations of British and American historians and their students" (111).

[42] See Geoffrey Nash's essay "The Politics of Anglo-Arab Discourse."

mandate jeopardized his diplomatic position in the British government and created a political disjunction in Anglo-Arab relations.[43] The intellectual and literary productions of Arab-British writers in the 1950s and 60s depict the political and historical constituencies that have inscribed the imagination of Arab authors writing in English. The writings of Edward Atiyah, a Lebanese who studied at Victoria College in Alexandria and later worked for the British government in Sudan, depict the discontent of early Arab-British writers towards British colonial rule in the Arab region and the dubious conditions of Arab migrant communities in Britain. Atiyah's first autobiographical account, *An Arab Tells His Story-- A Study in Loyalties*, was published in 1946 right after his retirement from government service in the Sudan to illustrate the atrocities of British imperial rule in North Africa. Atiyah's three novels –*The Thin Line* (1951), *Black Vanguard* (1952) and *Lebanon Paradise* (1953) – all undermine an anti-colonial nationalist ideology informed by the ideals of postcolonial Arab dependence in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. However, the literary aspirations of Atiyah and his literary peers in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate the formation of a literary tradition reflective not only of the postcolonial condition of Arabs in general, but also of an Arab national identity that transcends anticolonial sentiments. Atiyah's artistic vision represents a new phase of Arab writing that aimed to redefine national independence in the Arab world.

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[43] In *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language, 1908-1958* Geoffrey Nash uses the term "Anglo-Arab Disjunctions" to refer to Antonius's failed Anglo-Arab solution to the problematics of Arab nationalism, and to the methodological and historical inaccuracies adapted in Antonius's reading of Arab history. Nash asserts that Antonius has articulated Arab nationalism through the discourse of British colonial historiography, and therefore has paid little attention to the hidden histories and complexities of Britain's mandated colonies in the Arab world. Nash contends that Antonius's work can be better described, as Edward Said has argued, a form of political writing that "belongs to the category of grand narratives of emancipatory nationalism"(84) mainly written for the British reader to illustrate how British politics offers a liberationist solution to Arabs' religious and political failures.

In the works of early Arab-British writers, Arab nationalism was a driving force for the predicaments of anti-colonialism and national liberation. What distinguishes this phase of writing in the works of Arab-British authors is the antithetical tone in their views about Arab identity, and the invocation of the East-West encounter widely referenced in Anglophone-Arab scholarship. The discourse of decolonization and anti-westernization was one of the most contentious themes for the first wave of Arab students who received education in former British colonies like Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, and Jordan and who were able to travel to Britain to continue their higher education and to serve in the British government.

**Jamal Mahjoub and the Diaspora of Belonging**

The work of the Sudanese-British novelist, Jamal Mahjoub, presents a new conception of diasporic belonging in which the homeland is no longer a fixed spatial entity demarcated in time and space. Born in London in 1960 to an English mother and a Sudanese father, Mahjoub was educated in Khartoum and Oxford and later lived in Spain, France and Denmark. In his writings, Mahjoub attempts to understand how different zones of dwelling (England, Sudan and other European cities) construct a diasporic view of the homeland as an unrecoverable loss. In all of his novels, the author utilizes the trope of transnational migration and travel to critique the discourses of purity and nationalism. Mahjoub's recent novel *Travelling with Djinns* (2003) explores what home is for second-generation and third-generation Arab migrants in Britain and how migrants "dwell-in-displacement"[44] looking for contact zones between different cultures and religious traditions. Mahjoub's work depicts the Arab migrant's search for identity beyond the

[44] See James Clifford's essay *Diasporas*. Clifford uses the term "dwelling-in-displacement" to refer to migratory communities who find solace and rootedness in displacement.

terrains of home and cultural roots. The main character of the novel, Yasin, believes that he can only have an identity by crossing borders between different cultures and rigid borderlines. Mahjoub's novel shows us how Arab-Britishness grants the Arab migrant the ability to move across national borders and how Arab diaspora is constructed at the intersectionality of transnational migration, diaspora and homelessness.

Written in 2003, Mahjoub's fifth novel, *Travelling with Djinns*, presents a paradigmatic shift in the author's understanding of belonging and how generational differences create various vestiges of identity far removed from the East-West dichotomy and the Anglo-Arab encounter that has characterized Anglophone-Arab literature and Arab diasporic writings in the last two decades. Unlike Mahjoub's early novels, *Travelling with Djinns* introduces a new articulation of diaspora in which third-generation Arab immigrants in Europe envision the homeland as a deterritorialized diasporic consciousness induced by the experience of travel and mobility across national borders. In his early novels such as *The Carrier*, *Wings of Dust*, and *In the Hour of Signs* Mahjoub examines questions of exile and migration through the lenses of existentialist difference between Eastern and Western cultures and how young immigrant Arabs in Europe have to negotiate their identity between these cultural dichotomies. Mahjoub's latest novel *Travelling with Djinns* presents a different treatment of diaspora and belonging in which both Eastern and Europeans forms of identity are impure, transient, and historically entangled. Mahjoub's novel presents a transnational understanding of belonging in which European-ness is a transient and transnational cultural identity informed by the religious and philosophical ideals of Eastern travelers and exilic figures from various European contexts.

*Travelling with Djinns* captures the hopes and visions of Yasin, a second-generation Sudanese-British immigrant, who struggles to fit in the world and find a 'center of gravity' that,

can enable him to understand his dual sense of belonging. Born to an English mother and a Sudanese father, Yasin grew up in Britain and got married to Ellen, a half English/half Danish colleague at Oxford. After Ellen learns about Yasin's affair with one of her friends, they both decide to end their fractured life due to the different cultural and religious values, and *djinns* with which each travels. Before the divorce is announced, Yasin decides to take his seven year old son, Leo, on a journey through Europe in hopes of teaching him how to belong in the world. In the journey, Yasin narrates the history of his family's migration to Britain, and further discovers how travel and mobility nourish him with a unique understanding of his transnational identity as a migrant Arab searching for his roots in the heart of Europe. By the end of the journey, Yasin finds his home in the experience of travel, and by exploring how European cities encompass transnational histories and diasporic links between East and West, and home and homelessness.

Mahjoub's novel begins by highlighting an incident that explains the personal and socio-political reasons that have forced Yasin's family to immigrate to Britain. Yasin's father, Zahir, "was hit by a golf ball when he was nine years old"(1), a crucial fact that discloses the family's postcolonial destiny and its migratory movement from the suburbs of Sudan's capital to the suburbs of London. The flying golf ball initiated the family's dislocation in the inevitable presence of the English and cultural practices in the Sudan. The father's job as "the native caddy" carrying the clubs for the English gentlemen underlies the family's migratory movement and the fate of its future generations in Britain. Yasin, the protagonist of the novel, starts the narrative by reflecting on the consequences of this incident and by asking the reader to speculate what the golf ball had meant for his father at that time and if it was "a message being carried to him by an angel sent to whisper incantations and mystical spells in his ear"(1).

After entering the English military hospital in Khartoum due to the golf ball accident, Yasin's father falls into a state of unpredictable change in which no visible damage can be seen, but "something inside him had been shifted, permanently dislodged from its intended orbit"(4). Mahjoub provocatively presents the incident of the golf ball as a catalyst for colonial legacy in the Sudan to highlight how this incident affected the family's migration to the West and the complex form of displacement that will inform the lives of the next generation. Yasin, a man who holds two passports and speaks more than two languages, thinks that the golf ball makes up the convoluted nature of his identity and where he belongs in the world today. Born in Khartoum to a Sudanese father, and an English mother, Yasin struggles to unravel the complexity of his origins and his sense of place as a first-generation Arab immigrant in Britain. Yasin wishes to pass on his origins and sense of identity to his British-born son, Leo. The novel's prologue sets the tone for Yasin's decision to take his son, Leo, on a journey across Europe searching for his Arab roots and trying to explain to his son what it means to have two homelands, speak more than one language and know more than one history. In the prologue Mahjoub highlights the protagonist's search for roots between home and Europe and more significantly how the immigrant's vision of belonging is an essential aspect of identity:

> I sometimes think I envy those people who know where they belong; writers who have a language and a history that is granted them with no catches, no hooks . . . I belong to that nomad tribe, the great unwashed, those people born in the joins between continental shelves, in the unclaimed interstices between time zones, strung across latitudes. A tribe of no fixed locus, the homeless, the stateless. I have two passports and quite a variety of other documents to identity me, all of which tell the

> world where I have been, but not who I am, nor where I am going to. My language is a bastard of tongue of necessity, improvisation, bad grammar and continual misunderstandings. I am a stranger wherever I go. (5)

From the outset, Yasin informs us that his migratory identity makes him a constant traveler, a member of "that nomad tribe" who happens to exist on the borderlines of "continental shelves" with no fixated understanding of time and space. In other words, it is the condition of perpetual homelessness and temporal statelessness that defines Yasin's identity and where he belongs in the world. Displaced between the absurd idealism of his father's Afro-Arabic roots and the hostility of his mother's imperial British-ness, Yasin opts to transcend common views about his identity as a postcolonial hybrid and chooses to find a free form of orientation unbound by the duality of his citizenship or informed by simple syncretization of origins to generate hybrid categories of identity.[45] For Yasin, it is neither hybridity nor ambivalence that can truly reveal who he is and what passages or routes he intends to travel. It is rather the state of travel that characterizes Yasin's belonging far beyond spatial demarcations and cultural roots. Yasin's travel presents a nomadic and deterritorialized form of identity.

Furthermore, Yasin's travel avails him a feeling of nomadic belonging that crosses the rigidity of bi-nationalism and the dichotomous nature of socio-cultural differences between Eastern and Western forms of national affiliation. The decentralized exilic position that Yasin inhabits in relation to his dual citizenship enables him to become a "specular border intellectual" to use Abdul JanMohammed's term in describing Edward Said as an exile who is never at home within one culture or another. For JanMohammed, Said's intellectual position as an exilic Palestinian in America informs his critical views of the two different cultures to which he

[45] For further reading on how Bhabha defined the formation of hybrid identities, see Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" and "Signs Taken for Wonder" in *The Location of Culture*.

belongs. Unlike "syncretic border intellectuals," who exquisitely combine two cultural forms to create new cultural entities, the "specular intellectual subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them; he utilizes his or her interstitial cultural space as a vantage point from which to define, implicitly or explicitly, other, utopian possibilities of group formation" (JanMohammed 97).

In *Travelling with Djinns*, Mahjoub presents Yasin as an Arab-British migrant who cannot feel at home in the Sudan nor in the hostland of his parents, Britain. When Yasin defines his nation, he asserts that it "is a random list of places on the map that I have passed through, upon which I have no claim" (5). Like the "specular border intellectual" Yasin sees his two homelands (the Sudan and Britain) as provisional places that one passes through to understand the world more introspectively and to redefine his/her identity without falling into abstract theoretical presuppositions about the need to assimilate or to be fully integrated to combat social alienation. From the beginning of his narrative, Yasin expresses his disapproval of abstract and sweeping theoretical pronouncements about the current social status of contemporary immigrant communities in Britain. Academics and scholars are mistaken, Yasin notes, if they assume that he has been assimilated, or "alienated and ought to be better integrated by now, but that would be to miss the point" (5). Mahjoub starts off Yasin's narrative by highlighting some of the prevailing drawbacks of scholarship produced in the Western academy about postcolonial Arab migration and diasporic Muslim communities in Europe. In his attempt to explain his cultural roots in the first few pages of the novel, Yasin openly scrutinizes how the heritage of his ancestors has been appropriated by colonial scholarship and how his "history is not given, but has to be taken, reclaimed, piece by solitary piece, snatched from among the pillars of centuries, the shelves of ivory scholarship" (5).

The novel's prologue unravels what it means to be diasporic in the contemporary world. Yasin claims that he is descended from a nomad tribe with "no fixed locus," and he sees his identity as that of the homeless and stateless, a socio-spatial condition that renders him undefined by one cultural heritage or another. For Yasin, passports and nationalities are spatial forms of identification that can show where people have been, but fail to really reveal what people are, and where they wish to go. In the prologue Mahjoub skillfully explores how the national identity of Arab migrants in Europe cannot be spatially fixed, or historically essentialized by a specific view dictated by Western forms of knowledge. Mahjoub skillfully questions postcolonial scholarship's attempt to theorize the condition of homeless and diasporic communities. It is neither alienation nor assimilation that can reflect Yasin's identity, but more precisely the fact that the immigrant's status has been confined to his/her provisional condition. Mahjoub alludes to the problematics of examining what makes an immigrant and what influences this type of critical interpretation.

Yasin's trip across Europe is an attempt to explain to his son Leo what constitutes the migrant's identity beyond essential abstraction. Born to an English-Danish mother (Ellen) and a British-Sudanese father (Yasin), Leo is presented as the dilemma of cultural clashes between Yasin and Ellen, each representing a different set of values. At Leo's birth, Yasin wished to call his son Hamdi, a typical Arabic name, but "the English mother, her parents, his schoolmates and teachers all called him Leo" (6). The father tried to use the son's Arabic name (Hamdi), but after a while he realizes that the English name Leo has already inscribed an identity given how the son strives to look like a proper English boy by combing his hair in a specific direction. However, as soon as the water on Leo's hair dries, "little curls pop up like coiled springs ruining the effect" (6). Despite Leo's attempt to look like a typical English schoolboy, his racial identity cannot be

hidden in the way he looks. His Arab-African blood is visibly present in his appearance, and sometimes it resists any form of interracial assimilation. Concerned about the convoluted identity of his son, Yasin decides to take Leo on a journey across Europe searching for his identity and what it means to be Arab and British at the same time. The father asserts that "Leo is the real reason for this trip, this flight, this *hijra*, if you like" (6), and he wants his son, Leo, to find out who is and to know where he belongs. By using the Arabic term *hijra*[46] to describe Yasin's search journey across Western Europe, Mahjoub disrupts the emphasis on East to West migration and further illustrates the internal displacement of Arabs within regional boundaries. In other words, Yasin sees this *heijra* / migration as a directionless journey to the *self* in which his British-born son can find out how he can belong as a person. For Yasin, this *heijra* entails a travelling identity beyond nationalism, a search for home beyond the terrains of the homeland:

> So I am driving by instinct alone. I hardly have a destination in mind. The vast undulating sheet of time tends to shift suddenly and without warning whole worlds disappear. I am at the center of a great divide, a line that cuts through the earth like a plough, or a tectonic feature, a deep-seated fissure which has the potential to shake continents, disturb centuries of order and uproot entire nations. I seem to be traversing this line without being entirely sure why. (7)

Through this journey Yasin and his son aspire to discover their identity through the experience of displacement across time and space, a traveling experience that makes the father feel diasporic about his sense of place. Yasin believes that this journey will take him away from the center of gravity so that he can see things more introspectively. He decides to use an old Peugot 504,

[46] The Arabic term hijra (هِجْرَة) refers to the migration of the Prophet (SAW) from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE and also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

because he thinks that "new cars deliver smooth, immaculate inexplicable traction. It is the illusion of a perfect world which I object to" (9). He chooses this "Third world car. . . . a relic of another age" because it is a symbol of the past and is widely considered "a legend anywhere in Africa, or the Middle East"(9), and it makes him feel that there is something hard and solid he can hold onto. The car's ability to traverse time and space initiates an aura of constant mobility that Yasin aspires to experience during this journey. However, after crossing the German border Yasin realizes that even the Schengen agreement between European countries does not really traverse borders freely. He had to pull over and give his name to be checked "against the names of internationally known suspects" (10). After passing through the northern lowlands in Germany, Yasin envisions his journey as an enactment of Sufi wandering expressed in the work of famous Eastern travelers:

> For a moment I envisage this journey in the tradition of all the great journeys of literature; in the romantic tradition of reeling Taoists, wandering Buddhist monks searching for enlightenment. Basho's *Records of a Travel Worn Satchel* or *Narrow Road on the Deep North*. Like the Sufis condemned to forever tramp the roads of the world. Ibn Arabi's restless search for the *kashf*, discovery. Both Taoism and Sufism contain the idea of dualism, of opposites being in constant interaction with one another: being and non-being, the spirit and the body. The hidden and the revealed; the veiled and the unveiled—*the mahjoub and the zahir*. This idea of being between two such opposites seems to make sense to me at this point in time. (11)

By remembering the old journeys of various non-Western traditions, Yasin intends to enact the experience of significant Eastern travelers including Taoists, Buddhists, and Sufis. For these

Eastern travelers, binaries between East and West, the physical and the metaphysical dissolve. Mahjoub thoughtfully scrutinizes the exclusive nature of binarism and further shows how travel generates a transnational form of identity. Displaced between his Arab-African roots and the homeland of his English wife and son, Yasin strives to transform how one can belong between opposites and most significantly how one can transform the rigidity of national boundaries. By refusing to define his identity through binaries, Yasin rather seeks to discover the intermediary and interconnected interrelations between Eastern and Western values. The three different religious traditions Yasin explores in his journey across Europe share a common philosophical view of the individual's awakening in which travel is an ultimate goal for spiritual and religious development.[47] By mentioning the work of the 16th century Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō, Mahjoub highlights the significance of travel as a way of reinventing one's identity through close exploration of the natural landscape. In *Records of a Travel Worn Satchel* and *Narrow Road on the Deep North*, Basho provides a typical haiku example of travel sketches that enunciate the effect of inspiration, and self-discovery through the medium of road journeys.[48] Like Basho's travel throughout Asia, Yasin's journey across Europe is an attempt to re-orient himself through the experience of displacement and travel.

Moreover, Yasin's urge to teach his son the history of the world through this travel experience erupts from the father's fear that Leo may grow up not knowing how to find his place

[47] Taoism, Buddism and Sufism all have a similar understanding of how individuals develop a spiritual consciousness. The three religious traditions aim to create a universal conception of human awareness and spiritual awakening. For further reading on the relationship between Sufism, and other Eastern traditions in the west, see Jamal Malik and John Hinnells' *Sufism in the West.*

[48] For further reading on Basho's travel writing and its impact on the development of haiku poetry see *Basho, Matsuo, The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*.

in the world. Unlike Yasin, who was raised in the Sudan and later brought up in Britain, Leo was born in Britain, and his father wants him to know how to find his roots even if they happen to be in Europe. Feeling displaced and disoriented as an Arab migrant in Britain, Yasin admittedly states that "I wander about with the mental framework of a transient, an outsider, not seeing myself anywhere. He [Leo] belongs. He has a place, inasmuch as any of us have a place in the world. He needs to know the history in order to see beyond the glass towers and the steel and concrete" (22-23). By exploring the history of Europe in relation to other non-Western cultures and traditions, Mahjoub accentuates how the making of Europe depended on the presence of other cultural traditions and histories which are often underrepresented in the study of Western cultures today. Europe, Yasin believes, still encompasses the legacy of Arab and Islamic civilization, and as a wanderer, he finds himself a distanced observer (an outsider) striving to penetrate Europe's modern civilization. For Yasin, Europe is not an antithesis of the East, but rather an extension of Arabo-Islamic civilization that has impacted the development of European cultures hundreds of years ago. Through this journey, Yasin reconstructs his European identity by locating the transnational and transcultural aspects of his Arabness across the continent and in the heart of Europe's cultural heritage.

**Travel and Homelessness as Home**

In *Travelling with Djinns*, Mahjoub utilizes the trope of transnational travel and the sentiment of homelessness to critique the discourses of nationalism and cultural purity. Mahjoub's novel demonstrates how homelessness and exilic migration informs the construction of transnational diaspora for Arabs and Muslims in Europe. Yasin's journey across Europe unravels the transnational and intercultural links between Eastern and European forms of exile

and how Eastern and European thinkers share a common view of the homeland as an experience of displacement and homelessness. During the journey through the landscape of Jutland peninsula, Yasin finds solace in seeing and learning about places where exilic figures such as Bertolt Brecht and Lao Tzu have composed their writings. By exploring how these writers have produced their ideas in the traveling contexts, Yasin became more confident that he is also going through the experience of exile in Europe:

> A windy place of blue sky, grassy meadows and creaky pines. Bertolt Brecht wrote of his best plays looking at this landscape: *Mother Courage*, *The Life of Galileo*. He took refuge from Hitler and Stalin at Svendborg, an hour away from where we were, and only left when the war broke out in 1939. He also wrote some of his best poetry, including 'The Legend of the Origin of the Book Tao Te Ching during Lao Tzu's journey into Exile.' I draw confidence from this thought as we drive into the unknown. (30)

For Yasin, the works of Bertolt Brecht and Lao Tzu present one of the most significant experiences of exilic inspiration, and anti-war activism. The conditions of exile inspired Brecht to produce one of the most influential plays in the 20th century. Brecht composed *Mother Courage* and *The Life of Galileo* in 1939 as an attempt to question the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, and to scrutinize the devastating effects of war on people and social structures.[49] Brecht's work made use of epic theater to introduce the idea of *Verfremdungseffekt*

[49] For more, see University of Wisconsin, Digital Collections, *Brecht's Works in English: A Bibliography*, online database, http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/BrechtGuide/.

or the "estrangement effect" in the production of art and political activism.[50] Throughout the journey, Yasin is keen on experiencing the unknown, and the process of estranging himself through the discovery of the unknown to better understand what directions to take. By showing Yasins's admiration for the works and inspirational travel of Eastern and Westernexiles in Europe and elsewhere, Mahjoub emphasizes how the Arab migrant in Europe becomes a worldly citizen finding in exile and displacement a provisional homecoming.

Moreover, during their visit to Brecht's old farmhouse in the forests of Rhineland, Yasin remembered that he has "read about a fourteenth century church nearby which had a frieze of interspliced arches supposedly inspired by Arab architecture, but this, too, seemed a little pallid" (52-53). Upon reaching the forests and conversing about people worshiping trees, Yasin becomes nostalgic for his homeland and asserts that "there is a connection between the neem trees of my childhood and the forests of ancient Europe" (57). By establishing a connection between the trees of his birthplace in the Sudan and the natural forests of Europe as a site of immigration , Yasin constructs a space-less conception of home in which his visions about roots and origins transcend one cultural site or another. For Yasin, the Sudan of his childhood is only a temporal condition that inspires him to connect freely to the world and trace his homelessness in various social and cultural contexts. Europe, Yasin believes, is not only a site of materialistic obsession, but also a place of "mystics and visionaries"(57) that people rarely think about or even want to explore in the history of ancient European thinkers and writers.

In the Rhineland, Yasin opens a guidebook to read the story of Hildegard von Bingen, a 12th century nun who had visions at Leo's age. Yasin tries to find if Hildegard von Bingen is

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[50] Knapp, Gerhard P. "Estrangement Effect [Verfremdungseffekt]". The Literary Encyclopedia. First published 18 December 2006. [http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=355, accessed 01 August 2012.]

included in the guidebook under the subheading visions, but the note reads "'she was locked into a room in a convent for thirty years'" (57). Neither the guidebook nor the biographical notes and photographs of Hildgard von Bingen mention the visionary capacity of this nun in 12th century Europe. Yasin believes that the spiritual devotion and mystical visions that Hildegard von Bingen possessed as a European nun are not so different from the Sufi practice of *Ihsan* (perfection of worship) that make people devote themselves to God regardless of where they come from and what languages they speak. Yasin is amazed to find out that like Sufis, Hildegard von Bingen was "devoted to music as well, and composed a fair number of spiritual chants" (58). As a religious person searching for solemnity and humanity, Hildegard von Bingen rejected the religious wars that occurred between Christians against the Saracens, known as the Crusades. The religious and humanistic parallels that Yasin discovers between East and West, between the religious views of his birthplace, the Sudan, and the mystical visions of European men and women inspire him to think that birthplaces are illusionary sites for one's view of the world. When Yasin and Leo drive through the thick and dark forests of the Rhineland, Yasin realizes that he has no clear idea what direction to follow in this journey, and no home to run back to. Neither the Sudan nor Britain grants him a feeling of home or belonging. This feeling urges Yasin to contrast himself to the protagonist in Saul Bellow's novel *Henderson the Rain King* (1959): "Unlike Henderson, the character in Bellow's novel, I don't have an Africa to run away to when my life turns sour" (59).

As an Arab immigrant who can neither go back to the homeland of his family, the Sudan, nor feel at home in Europe, Yasin feels diasporic about his identity as a homeless and displaced individual. He wants to hold onto his roots, but his Western education and immigrant identity renders him an outsider in the land of his ancestors. He takes on this journey through Europe to

construct a travelling conception of home across national borders. The estrangement and disorientation that develops through this journey urge Yasin to postulate that "Europe is my dark continent and I a searching for the heart of it" (59). To counter common views about the homeland as a homogenous cultural space, Yasin highlights how he sees his national identity across national borders. He locates his roots not only in Africa but also in "the heart of Europe," which is both a foreign and familiar landscape for him. It is not spatial demarcations, but the feeling that emerges through the practice of travel and the sentiment of homelessness that makes Yasin at home. Mahjoub skillfully shows how diasporic consciousness creates a new understanding of belonging in which homelands are not spatial entities, but rather a traveling experience that produces a de-centralized understanding of identity.

**Arab-British Writing and the Search for Arab Transnationalism**

In *Travelling with Djinns*, Mahjoub indirectly writes back to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and by extension to Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* to demonstrate how Kurtz's journey to Africa and Mustafa Saeed's journey to England were attempts to discover things about themselves that their home cultures would have never revealed. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad epitomizes this process of self-discovery in Marlow's search for Kurtz and how the wilderness represented a physical as well as an ontological challenge to Europeans in the tropics. At the end of the journey, Marlow understands why Kurtz has gone native by stating that "the wilderness had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude--and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating" (95). Yasin's journey to the heart of Europe presents a different manifestation of self-discovery than the ones expressed in Conrad and Salih's work. Unlike

Kurtz and Mustafa Saeed, Yasin doesn't represent one country or another but a conjectural point between two opposing nations and cultural forces: "I was born between dueling histories: The history that forged the empire and the counter-history that defied it" (60). Throughout the narrative Yasin describes his father, Zahir, as a committed Sudanese nationalist who wanted to change the Arab world through anti-colonial independence and at the same time to explore the new world. Yasin's father admired the works of Shakespeare, Ruskin, Yeats and Dickens, and his "errant wanderings," as Yasin describes them, inspired him to be a journalist and write about the corruption of local authorities in Khartoum.

When Yasin asked his grandmother why his father decided to go to England, she insisted that her son never had an answer except that "We had stories, but we didn't really have museums or books to put them in" (62). The grandmother indirectly informs Yasin that in the 1950s and 1960s people were not sure how to explain and or even preserve their national history. This lack of historical agency confined the visions and inspirations of Arab nationalists and created an idealistic form of national identity. Yasin's father wanted to represent the voice of the Sudanese nationalist party to the world, and for this reason "England was an enigma for him" (61). After living and studying in England, the father "only believed in one real god, journalism" and "in the sacred value of Truth and not in any mystical sense either" (87). The father's office was full not only of books, newspapers and national maps, but also "photographs of African statesmen on the walls—Nkrumah, Kaunda, and Nasser. All spoke of a purpose. The fate of the country gave his life meaning – the absurd conviction that curious collection of ethnicities, races, and creeds fenced in together by colonial rule could be turned into a cohesive nation"(90-91).

The father's Afro-centric views about Arab nationalism and national liberation generated a restrictive understanding of belonging for first-generation Arab immigrants in Britain. The

father was noticeably influenced by Nasser's pan-Arabism, but he also wanted to present a modern understanding of national independence. Through Yasin's critical view of his father's absurd understanding of postcolonial independence, Mahjoub presents a solid critique of pan-Arabism and Nasserism of the 1960s and 1970s, which was based on the formation of the nation-state. Mahjoub questions how this form of nationalism has limited the visions of Arab migrants outside the Arab world. Unlike his father, who only thinks in terms of nationalist agenda, Yasin hopes to construct a disjointed and impure version of belonging in which opposites are intertwined and entangled with each other.

**The Problematics of Arab Nationalism for Yasin and His Father**

In *Travelling with Djinns*, Mahjoub exposes how the project of Arab nationalism suppressed the various ethnic and racial differences of Arabs in Britain. Yasin's father represents this view when he scrutinizes the way he had to assimilate to the Black community in Britain. To speed the processing of his political asylum, the father had to write letters to the queen informing her that he had worked like an *abed*, a slave, for the English in the Sudan and had to compromise his Arabic heritage to join other Blacks in Britain. In his journalistic writing, the father used to reference leaders of pan-Africanism and the civil rights movement. The father's appreciation for African-American music was also one of the signs that he wanted legal rights as a member of a larger immigrant Black community in Britain. The father's marriage to a British woman was an attempt to have agency over the colonizer's identity. Yasin attributes his father's convoluted relationship to the British as an unpredictable consequence of the golf ball: "He hated them, he loved them. Why, he even, married one of them, although this might have been defended as a means of usurping their superiority" (104). The father arrived in Britain in 1955, a period of time

in which London "was awash with Africans feeling the constrictions of suits and ties" (104). Mahjoub shows how the first wave of Arab and African immigrants educated in the West were considered as national elites that could replace British administrators in the colonies to propagate the highs and lows of British culture. Yasin traces how the word *mulatto* has entered the English dictionary through Spanish, and becomes skeptical about the advents of race theory in the late 1960s and 1970s. After Yasin talks to Leo about James Baldwin's response to D.W. Griffith's film, *Birth of a Nation*, Yasin realizes that "Race is the last great taboo, the myth of sacred unity that unites Klansmen and the Nation of Islam in unholy alliance" (77). Although the nationalist movement aimed to bring about a social change in the Sudan, it had lacked a clear understanding of what it needed to achieve. While studying in British colonial schools in the Sudan, Yasin was taught that the history of the Sudanese people "was never to be a straightforward, linear narrative, but rather a series of contortions, disjointed incidents, haphazard circumstances that eventually led down to us, a group of noisy kids with unsavoury habits" (63). History was not a priority for the Sudanese nationalists, because they wanted freedom and blindly fell into the trap of development with no idea who they were and what future they wanted to have. The aura of modernization made the study of history and the humanities a useless subject for a developing country like the Sudan, and the impact of media and TV influenced the hopes and visions of people before migrating to the West. Yasin states that "cinema became his mother's church in the Sudan, and the Technicolor as the dream instilled in the minds of old and young people." After joining the BBC to work as a journalist, Yasin finds out that the Sudan, has become "a metaphor for human suffering on an unimaginable scale" (134).

The political development in the Sudan since national independence has done nothing but aggravate the social and economic conditions of the people. The father asserts that "We were

witnessing the final death throes of the bizarre dance with democracy. For half a century the country had struggled to make coherent sense of its post-colonial heritage . . . . It was a sham: political pluralism, multi-ethnic representation, religious and racial equality, none of it worked" (134). Yasin's father tried to write about corruption, imprisonment and genocide using pseudonyms in a Sudanese newspaper; however, after a couple of months the government imprisoned him and banned his journalistic writings. The father's migration to England was induced by his attempt to combat civil injustices which in part inspired him to spend his life scrutinizing the greed of local people, and advocating the messages of great anticolonial activists such as Fanon and Nasser. In the Sudan, the father wanted to fight corruption in the name of national independence and freedom, but with time, Yasin starts to understand how this generational vision embodied in his father's activism has utterly failed to keep its promise. He states:

> The great age of national independence had proved to be nothing more than a neocolonial image. It was easy to see why he took it so personally, when the ideals he had founded his adult life on, from the dark pre-independence days, to those Labour rallies on foggy days in London town, stamping his feet against the cold—all of it was gone, defunct, old hat. And so, in a manner of speaking, was he. The pluralists and the secularists, the ones who preached Pan-African unity and a nation of equals, regardless of race or creed, or who your father was and how many franchises he owned, were now just a gang of toothless old grumps who mumbled nostalgically about things nobody remembered. (137-38)

By scrutinizing his father's pan-Arabism, Yasin shows how the new generations of Arab migrants refuse to uphold the political views of their parents. Both Yasin and his brother, Muk,

question their father's idealistic view of nationalism and his endorsement of the Civil Rights movement. For Yasin's generation, the demise of their father's views represents the rebirth of their identity. Yasmina, Yasin's sister, aspires to be a "Muslim feminist of the late 20th century; emancipated and devout in one breath" (138), and Yasin's brother, Muk wants to live as a borderless philanthropist offering help to displaced and dispossessed communities in Africa. In the novel, Mahjoub shows how the new generations of Arab migrants in Britain are more concerned about the transcultural and interconnected diasporic conditions than a longing for a territorial homeland or homogenous cultural roots. In the midst of his journey, Yasin comes to the resolution that "Europe is my dark continent, and I am searching for the heart of it" (59). Yasin sees Europe as a passage of migration that has connected various histories and cultural diasporic traditions including: "The Romans, the Visigoths, the Jews, Bosnians, Albanians, Kosovans, the blind, the sick, the old, the crippled. There are the people upon whose sacrifice the history of written, and our collective destiny is written in the course of those migrations" (173).

The main purpose of Yasin's journey is to show his son Leo how to connect with the world beyond the terrains of national borders. Throughout the journey from Britain, to Denmark, and then to Germany, France and Spain, Yasin aspires to reach the effect of Sufi wandering in which the metaphysical world becomes a transient landscape for a free realm of existence. When Yasin and Leo reach Paris, Yasin starts to recall the work of the Sufi wanderer *Ibn Arabi*, which inspired him to transcend physical boundaries to be able to understand the world:

> Life is a dream, said Ibn Arabi, the archetype of the eternal Sufi wanderer, who devoted much of his life to travelling the world in search of knowledge. From Murcia in Spain where he was born in the twelfth century, to Damascus where he passed away. He maintained that the true world was too vast for any cartographer

> to map: 'The earth is not the true form of being, but something illusory.' The world we live in is a 'realm of signs' in which spirits, angels, and djinns are made flesh. In dreams we pass beyond this physical realm into the real world, which otherwise cannot be seen. Ibn Arabi set off around the world hoping to awaken himself, to 'die' in a metaphorical sense so as to be able to see. (86)

In the novel, travel and displacement are the embodiments of a mystical search for the self. From the beginning of his journey, Yasin strives to reorient himself to be able to find answers about his identity, and what roots and convictions he should uphold in his life. The visionary capacity that Sufism nourished in individuals created an inner development of self-discovery. The work of *Ibn Arabi* has initiated a tradition of enlightenment through the practice of movement and contemplative travel. By touring many parts of the world, Ibn Arabi was able to reach a state of awakening that enabled him to see and connect with the world beyond the terrains of his homeland. After Yasin and Leo reached Paris, where they decided to visit French museums, Yasin discovers that Europe has become a unified cosmopolitan space amalgamated by the experience of travel and mass culture: "The cities of Europe have begun to fuse into one unbroken metropolitan space, divided no longer by distance but into vertical strata according to the access your wealth will buy you" (106). In the novel, Mahjoub illustrates how European cities have become sites of diasporic belonging for Arabs and Muslims in Europe. When Yasin decides to take a quick look in a mosque in Paris, he feels at home and he further gives a detailed description of what he experienced:

> Instantly, I feel a sublime sense of contentment and harmony washing over me, almost a kind of relief, of being in the protective embrace of something much larger than myself, something that recognizes me. The interior decoration seems

> at first glance at odds with the building. The brickwork of arches, which not so many years ago housed a clothing sweatshop and hummed to the sound of sewing machines and steam presses, now lends itself rather to the industry of prayer. Along the walls between the old steam pipes a series of Black silk banners have been hung. These are embroidered in gold with passages from the Koran in Arabic calligraphy. . . . This sense of belonging catches me off balance. (111)

The "sense of belonging" that Yasin discovers inside the mosque enables him to envision a larger scheme of identity that is unbound by cultural roots or geographical boundaries of Islam. As a Muslim living in Europe, Yasin views Islam as a heterogeneous experience with no regional, cultural and national restrictions. In other words, Yasin experiences in the mosque a sense of belonging that can bridge the gap between East and West. The author shows how Islam presents a deterritorialized and more encompassing "sense of belonging" not only for practicing Muslims, but also for various segments of the *Ummah*.

Through the mosque scene, Mahjoub demonstrates how the various ethnic, cultural and diasporic experiences of Muslims has forged a polylithic conception of Islam. Due to Yasin's hesitancy to offer the prayer, the Mosque guardians mistake him for a tourist, and they ask him to leave. Unlike the mosque guardians who seem to understand Islam as a form of religious practice, Yasin discovers a different sense of identity in Islam that is no longer based on an essentialist binary between the spiritual and the material. This unrestricted form of religiousness enables Yasin to see Islam as a borderless home. The mosque experience inspires Yasin to discover a new "sense of belonging" unbound by spatial and socio-cultural ideals. The architects of the mosque provided him with a sublime sense of identity that mingles European advancement with Eastern spirituality "the sound of sewing machines and steam presses now lends itself to the

industry of prayer…." (111). Through Yasin's Sufi wandering and search for the legacy of the Islamic tradition in Europe, Mahjoub shows how Islam ventures a transnational understanding of belonging for various stratifications of Muslims across the globe.

In his conversations with Ellen's father about Dervish wandering, Yasin was pleased to know that Goethe was fascinated by the mystical power in Eastern literature and "he [Goethe] adored the Persian poet, Hafiz" (175). Goethe's journey to Italy in 1786 was a discovery tour not only of the Alps, but also of the poet's ability to travel imaginatively through time and space. Claus also tells Yasin that Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt was not a physical conquest, but a search for the East's mysteries. Bonaparte came to Egypt with, Claus notes,

> an army of *savants*, scholars to catalogue precisely the mysteries of the East: botanists, biologists, chemists, physicians, astronomers, mathematicians, linguists. He didn't just want to see the Pyramids and Sphinx, he was driven by the mystical belief that the secrets of the universe had been known to the ancient civilizations that had built them. He didn't care about the present occupants. He vowed to re-write the Koran if that was what it took to conquer them. (177-78)

Claus believes that Bonaparte didn't invade Egypt for wealth or for the land, but for reasons that had to do with the mysteries of the East; this is why Bonaparte's army to Egypt was composed of scientists and scholars of humanities who had to take note of the Egyptians' way of life and belief in metaphysics. For Goethe, Claus asserts, the work of Sufi poets such as Hafiz and others provided inspiration for the materiality of Western intellectuals and lack of deep spiritual devotion. As an archeologist Claus believes that "'Travel is also a way of evading the world'" (179), and according to a Danish proverb "troubles go with you wherever you travel. Something called a nisse, which is an imp-like creature'" (179). Claus describes these troubles as *Djinns*

from which one can never escape. For Yasin, these djinns are traveling spirits that one needs to understand in order to know how and where one belongs in the world. The title of Mahjoub's novel, *Traveling with Djinns,* invokes how these djinns are central to Yasin's understanding of the world around him.

The end of Mahjoub's novel captures the immigrant's will not to be confined to one cultural identity or another. When Yasin and Leo reach Spain and start searching for his brother Muk, Yasin recalls the journeys of Arthur Rimbaud in Europe and the fact that "he [Rimbaud] didn't belong to reason, nation or state, and yet the only way out from the shadow of Catholic France was through poetry and when that failed him he turned his back on it and departed, bound for Aden and Ethiopia" (303). For Yasin, Rimbaud presents an example of a European in diaspora, a wanderer around the world with no limitations or spatial boundaries. At the end, Yasin stands in the road and gets hit by a truck, and Ellen comes back and tells him to make a new start. But Yasin concurs that he cannot disconnect from the past as he wants to be Arab, African, and English. At the departing station, Yasin observes that his journey was like "a celebration of motion, of travel, of human endeavor of the aching need to be in two places at once; one for the heart, one for the head" (343). At Leo's birthday in Spain, Yasin, his brother Muk, and Muk's wife Ines all sing "Happy Birthday" in three different languages, English, Arabic and Spanish and then let Leo blow out the birthday candle. The trilingual celebration of Leo's birthday at the end implies the transnational conditions that Leo is going to inhabit as a second-generation British-born Arab in Europe.

**Conclusion**

As a contemporary travel narrative *Travelling with Djinns* depicts the underpinnings of diasporic consciousness in the twenty-first century. Mahjoub employs the trope of travel to

show how Europe's identity has been shaped by the global migration of ideas and cultural-religious practices. As a first-generation Arab immigrant in Britain, Yasin is only able to find his home by exploring transnational links between East and West, and the new forms of diasporic belonging these intermediary relations forge. Travel and mobility have become essential aspects of postcolonial diaspora for Arab migrants in Europe. Throughout the journey of Yasin's family from the Sudan to Britain, the author interweaves the human conditions of migrant communities in various social contexts.

Mahjoub's novel complicates not only simplified conceptions of diaspora as a form of fixed dwelling, but also questions essentialist discourses of nationalism and belonging. Yasin's search for home beyond the national borders of home necessitates a new understanding of diasporic belonging in which Arab and European identities are always in constant flux with each other. Mahjoub's representation of Arab-British immigrant identity challenges literary critics to re-conceptualize the new articulations of transnationalism expressed in the work of contemporary Anglophone-Arab writers residing in Britain.

**Dwellers-in-Displacement: Black Yemenis and Diaspora's Racial Predicaments in ᶜAlī al-Muqrī's *طعم أسود ... رائحة سوداء / Black Taste…Black Smell***

> I am Black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos -- and the white man, however intelligent he may be, is incapable of understanding Louis Armstrong or songs from the Congo. I am Black, not because of a curse, but because my skin has been able to capture all the cosmic effluvia. I am truly a drop of sun under the earth.
>
> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Links between Arabs and Africans date back to at least six hundred B.C.E. and after the rise of Islam, commerce routes and the spread of slave trade. Regional migration movements and trade between Arab and African territories established a rich Black heritage that is often marginalized and understudied in relation to Arab literary productions. In the last twenty years the Middle East has witnessed internal migration movements of people as a result of racial, political and sectarian conflicts in the region. Migration movements within the Arab world have resulted in an extensive flow of foreign labor, capital investment, and transnational human resources. Since the presence of European colonial rule in the nineteenth century and the subsequent emergence of independent postcolonial states, the Arab world has continued to witness permanent and temporary waves of migration, displacement and resettlement from, into, and within its geopolitical boundaries. The Arab world is the global leader in the category of migrant states. Seven of the top ten states with the highest populations of foreign born are located in the Arab world. Qatar ranks first with 87% of foreign-born population; the United Arab Emirates, with 70%; Kuwait, with 69%; and fourth and fifth on the list, Jordan and the Palestinian territories followed by Oman and Saudi Arabia. According to a recent study conducted by the *League of Arab States,* there are an estimated 13 million migrants in the Arab

Gulf mainly in the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and UAE.[51] The majority of these migrants are not Arabs. In fact, by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s Arabs formed 30 % of the foreign-born in the Gulf States, but today the number has dropped to 10%. This unprecedented increase of foreign labor in the Arab Gulf informed the development of cultural revolt against the policies of exclusive nation-states and more significantly the monopoly of valued natural resources by closed, if not sealed, circles of ownership. The presence of foreign labor was not initiated because there is a shortage of Arabs seeking work, but more precisely because of the modern nation-state's marginalizing policies towards Arab minorities and Arabs of African descent. Put differently, the exclusive nature of the modern Arab states urges us to rethink not only the politics of internal displacements within the region, but also how race configurations impact migration movements and the regional dislocation of disadvantaged communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

Today over 500,000 Black Yemenis face hurdles of inequality and social exclusion. These marginalized groups are known as "Akhdām," Arabic for servants who are usually distinguished by their darker skin.[52] Many historical accounts assert that Black Yemenis are descended from the Ethiopian conquerors who invaded Yemen as early as the 6th century.[53]

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[51] See Abbas Mehdi's "Globalization, Migration and the Arab World," in *Arab Migration in a Globalized World*.

[52] The Arabic word أخدام / Akhdām is a derogatory term that literally means "servants," but also conveys a deep cultural condemnation that legitimizes ethnic and social persecution through a caste system often informed by racial difference. The word is usually used to describe a person with Black skin, African roots or hybrid and impure roots of Arab-ness.

[53] Various historical accounts contend that the 6th century invasion of Yemen by Ethiopians was supported by the Romans to protect Yemeni Christians from the ruler Najran, a convert to Judaism. The Yemenis opposed Ethiopian rule and sought the Sassanid Persians for assistance. The result was that the Persians took over about 570 CE. The Persians appear to have been in Hadhramaut, but the only clear evidence of their presence is at Husn al Urr, a fort between Tarim and Qabr Hud. See for example, Anna Hestler and Jo-Ann Spilling, *Yemen: Cultures of the World* or Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen.*

Although the Akhdām are Arabic-speaking and practicing Muslims, they are stigmatized as non-Arabs, who are economically, morally and religiously inferior to others. In Yemeni society, the Akhdām are regarded as the "untouchable caste," often times described as lowly, immoral, and naturally inferior. Today, writings by Arabs of African descent disclose the long history of interracial relations that existed between Arabs and various African tribes as well as the legacy of this transcultural contact in the 21st century. By examining ethnic and immigrant writing in the Arab world in tandem with the question of racialization inside the homeland, I aim to explore how racial difference impacts the formation of diasporic networks inside homelands and across national borders. What is the relationship between ethnicity, displacement and the formation of racialized communities inside the Yemeni context? How do Yemeni authors represent the marginal visions of Black Yemeni communities and their oral forms of political activism? In what ways do Black-Yemenis and Arabs of African descent define their sense of belonging in the 21st century?

**ᶜAlī al-Muqrī and the Akhdām Community in Yemen**

This chapter illustrates an unconventional aspect of diasporic writing by examining the shifting meanings of home and belonging in the work of the Yemeni novelist, ᶜAlī al-Muqrī writing about the ethnic community of Akhdām in Yemen. Al-Muqrī is considered one of Yemen's distinguished novelists. Through his writings, al-Muqrī has introduced the Yemeni novel to new readerships beyond Arab national boundaries. Three of al-Muqrī's novels were short-listed for the Arabic Booker prize in the last four years including *Black Taste… Black Smell* (2008) and recently *The Handsome Jew* (2013), which was translated into French and Italian. In his work, al-Muqrī focuses on the condition of marginal and indigenized populations

in the Middle East. His writings address the status of Jews in Yemen, women in a patriarchal society and Arabs of African descent. Belonging, national identity, liberation and the territorial boundaries of the homeland are some of the central themes in al-Muqrī's work. The question of the homeland, al-Muqrī asserts, has become a human dilemma in which individuals feel displaced and disenfranchised in their home countries.

Although al-Muqrī is not a member of the Akhdām in Yemen, his research on the social, cultural and ethnic heritage of Black Yemenis enables him to speak about the social and racial disparities of the Akhdām community in Yemen. Al-Muqrī was introduced to the community of Akhdām at an early age in his life in the city of Taiz, where most of Yemen's Black communities live today. Although al-Muqrī is considered a white Yemeni, his views about the Akhdām show an in-depth understanding of this ethnic group and their cultural traditions. In an interview in which al-Muqrī was asked about his experience writing about Black Yemenis in *Black Smell…Black Taste,* al-Muqrī responded by saying: نعم انا خادم. حين كتبتُ الرواية كانت مهمتي ان اترجم شعورالاخدام / "yes, I am a khadim[54] when I wrote the novel, it was my intention to translate the feelings and sentiments of Akhdām…" (Mareb Press 1). After reviewing al-Muqrī's novel, one of the leaders of Akhdām community told the author that اشعر انك واحد منا / "I feel that you are one of us." (Mareb Press 1). Through his immersed knowledge of the Akhdām's social and cultural history, al-Muqrī gives his readers an insider's view of this ethno-cultural group in Yemen.

Growing up in a political environment mainly influenced by the ideals of socialist parties in Yemen in the 1970s and 1980s, al-Muqrī demonstrates secular yet moderate and liberal Islamic views in his writings. As a novelist and literary scholar, al-Muqrī rejects cultural essentialist views of race, religion and nationality. By focusing on traits of humanity in people

[54] khadim is the singular form of Akhdām in Arabic.

regardless of race, culture or religious affiliation, al-Muqrī endorses a cosmopolitan understanding of belonging and identity across national differences and political affiliations. All of al- Muqrī's novels were written in Arabic and published in Beirut due to the controversial issues the author discusses in his writing about Yemeni people, the ruling parties, and the thorny question of racism in the Arab Gulf.

In *Black Taste … Black Smell* (2008) al-Muqrī takes his readers into the Black slums of Yemen where poverty, racial bias, and injustice define the life of African ethnic minorities. Basing his novel on historical and sociological research, al-Muqrī explores the atrocious conditions in which the Akhdām class, the outcasts of Yemeni society, live by seeing themselves as strangers in their homeland. I aim to illustrate how racial stigmatization enunciates an unconventional form of diasporic consciousness that transcends the spatial designation of homelands and cultural roots.

The writing of Arab ethnic authors brings forth an unconventional conception of diaspora that posits a conceptual challenge to the prevailing assumptions of diaspora studies. Al-Muqrī's *Black Taste… Black Smell* about the way Arabs of African descent endure conditions of diaspora inside their homelands posits a revolutionized form of diasporic consciousness often ascribed to writers migrating to the West through the experience of cultural alienation and geographic mobility. *Black Taste … Black Smell* exposes not only the politics of racial discrimination inside the Arab Gulf and North Africa, but also the internal migratory movement of Black Arabs in the face of increased foreign labor from South Asia and closed ownership of natural resources. Al Muqrī's work challenges diaspora critics to rethink how race configurations impact the formation of diasporic communities inside homelands and the way regional displacement and East-to- East migration offers new conceptualizations of diaspora.

**Emigration and Diaspora in Yemeni Literature**

Contemporary Arabic literature and Middle Eastern writing present a new vocabulary for the study of diaspora within regional borders and inside the homeland. The rise of the novel in Yemen has a direct relationship to the migration of Yemenis to South Asia, Africa, and Europe. The realist motifs that had defined Yemeni literary productions in the last two decades have taken on a different approach to the representation of social reality. Even before the rise of the novel in the aftermath of World War II, questions of migration and displacement were central themes of major Yemeni poets. The strategic location of Yemen and its proximity to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean made it a desired location for the control of trade between East and West. The country's natural resources, dams and historic sites turned it into an attractive target for colonial invaders from Ethiopia, Greece, Turkey and Britain. The frequent presence of colonial invasions and the lack of political stability has greatly impacted the development of the Yemeni novel. In their historical account of the rise of the novel in Yemen, Mohammed Al-Jumly and J. Rollins contend that it was only after the withdrawal of the British from the South in 1966 and the end of the Imam's rule in the North in 1962 that the novel started to become a significant social form.[55] Poor economic conditions, tribal conflicts, and the exploitation of trade routes and resources by the colonial administration were some of the incentives for many Yemenis to leave their homeland. Mohammed Al-Jumly and J. Rollins note,

> Perhaps the most important social effect of the seemingly innumerable nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yemeni wars was the emigration of legions of Yemenis to

[55] In 1839, the British East India Company forces controlled the port of Aden in Southern Yemen and provided a coaling station for ships en route to India. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Aden, known as the Protectorate of Aden, became an important colonial "acquisition" for Britain and its colonial rule in the Arabian Peninsula. See, Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in Yeman 1962-67.*

> other parts of the world. Thousands were forced from their homeland by the poverty and political fragmentation which resulted from conflict with the Turks and the British. Thousands more left in consequence of the high taxation and other repressive policies of the imams and sultans. Recurrent drought brought yet more emigration when farmers were unable to harvest enough to provide for their families after paying taxes to the rulers and rent to the land owners. An especially powerful push factor for Yemeni capital and labor was the economic attraction of Aden during British colonization. Aden also became the main exit port to the outside world for Yemenis who went to sea, eventually reaching India, Southeast Asia, France, Britain, and America. (40)

In addition to the transnational crossing of borders by many Yemeni workers, there were also internal movements in the region to East African countries such as Eretria, Ethiopia, and the Sudan. Most of these immigrants aimed to improve the economic condition of the homeland by sending money to their families and further supporting liberation movement inside the homeland. By the 1990s, as Al-Jumly and Rollins show, almost all Yemeni novels dealt with "some aspect of emigration, and nearly all do so with relatively heavy-handed didacticism" (46). To illustrate their historical perspective about the rise of the novel in Yemen, Al-Jumly and J. Rollins focus on the works of three Yemeni writers: Hussein Salim Basideeg, Mohammed Honaybir and Mohammed Abdul-Wali. They believe that the work of these novelists laid the foundation of Yemeni fiction, especially the question of emigration in the work of Mohammed Abdul Wali in his novel, *They Die Strangers*.[56] Although the work of these writers has mainly focused on the

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[56] Mohammed Al-Jumly and J. Rollins assert that "Perhaps the best example of a Yemeni fictionist who devoted himself to the emigration theme is the late Mohammed Abdul-Wali. Among the writers of the 'seventies

experience of migration and political oppression in the homeland, their work reflects the political condition of the 1970s and late 1980s. The emphasis on the experience of migration through spatial displacement and the critique of local government have restricted the views of these writers to the realm of politics and economic stability. Social and cultural and ethnic prejudices are rarely raised and expressed in these literary works.

Moreover, the vast difference between internal migratory movements and the political conditions of Arab countries from the 1970s to the early 1990s has introduced new forms of national consciousness. The oil boom in the Arab Gulf and the increased demand for labor migration in the Gulf Cooperation Council have reinforced the internal networks between various Arab states and more importantly the growth of ethnic minorities from Africa and Asia seeking better economic and social conditions in the region. Unlike the 1970s and mid-1980s, the Arab world today represents a diverse number of populations and ethnic groups due to the economic growth of the region since the oil boom and the establishment of the Arab nation-state. The influx of foreign labor from South Asia and the forced migratory movement that took place as a result of the Gulf war in 1990 had a great impact on the national and geopolitical implications of Arab nationalism and most significantly on the national boundaries of identity in the face of globalization and transnational exchange of resources and ideas. The expulsion of

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generation,' Abdul-Wali is generally accepted by the Yemeni literary establishment as the most accomplished. It is often said in Yemen that Abdul-Wali is one of the most masterful fiction writers not only of Yemen but of the Arab world, particularly among those whose works focus on the flight from their motherland of the persecuted and economically disadvantaged. Born of Yemeni immigrants in Ethiopia in 1940, Abdul-Wali was raised and educated away from his family's homeland. Not merely a close observer of Yemeni expatriate life, Abdul-Wali was a full participant in it. His novel, *They Die Strangers*, often considered by Yemenis to be the greatest work of fiction yet produced by one of their countrymen, brings this experience to literature by developing three main themes connected to emigration and the alienation and dispossession it produces: first, the pain of life in Yemen before the revolution and how most Yemenis accepted misery as their lot in life and refused to fight for liberation from their oppressive rulers; second, emigration as a way to escape misfortune and attain personal goals; and third, the intolerable situation of half-breed children" (41).

Yemenis and Palestinians from the Gulf States due to their government's support of Sadam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait complicated the distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders" in the region and the way political complacency and loyalty to the nation-state have greatly contributed to this divide inside and within the national borders of Arab homelands. This geopolitical and demographic change brought about new vestiges of national and regional belonging in the work of Yemeni writers in the last two decades. The Yemeni novelist presents a vivid example of this new trend of transregional nationalist Arab writing in the way he examines the social and economic conditions of ethnic groups in the homeland and how the experience of diaspora is no longer defined by geographic distancing or material detachment from cultural roots and origins. Al-Muqrī is interested not only in the transnational manifestations of belonging in the 21st century, but the way homes can also be alienating sites of dwelling mainly defined by the politics of racial difference and ethnic marginalization.

In *Black Taste … Black Smell* al-Muqrī explores the migratory experience of ethnic minorities and how the social conditions of Yemen's community of Akhdām project a new manifestation of diasporic consciousness that develops inside the homeland. The emergence of ethnic diasporic writing inside the homeland urges diaspora critics to rethink how race configurations impact the formation of diasporic communities inside homelands and the way regional displacement and East-to- East migration project a different understanding of diasporic consciousness from the one we see in the work of immigrants living abroad.

Al-Muqrī's work traces the forced and exilic movement of a group of Yemenis of African descent enduring day-to-day conditions of displacement and alienation within the national borders of Yemen. The author uncovers a marginal history of interracial and cultural contacts between Arabs and African that dates back to 600 B.C. when the Kingdom of Abyssinia in

Ethiopia invaded many Arab countries and ruled them for over two centuries.[57] Throughout the narrative, al-Muqrī demonstrates how racial persecution and discriminatory policies practiced in the homeland produce a diasporic sentiment similar to the conditions of immigrants residing overseas. Why are the Akhdām degraded and deprived of the civil rights other non-black Yemenis have? How does the evolution of diaspora inside the homeland delineate a clear distinction between 'exiles at home' and 'exiles abroad'? Al-Muqrī dramatizes his response to these questions by depicting the life of Akhdām and the way they have become "dwellers-in-displacement" in their own country.

**Black Taste…Black Smell**

Published in 2008, *Black Taste…Black Smell*, represents a premonition of the revolutionary movement that led to the ousting of the former Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh in January 2012. In the novel, the author illustrates how the racial persecution of Akhdām community and the implementation of exclusionary civil rights by the Yemeni government has sown the seeds of the revolutionary movement that that started in Yemen and other Arab countries. Put differently, the Yemeni novel prefigures the activism of Black Yemenis in light of the recent upheavals that shook the Arab world and North Africa. Al-Muqrī is also interested in showing how the struggles of ethnic and diasporic communities have had a great impact on the recent Yemeni revolution.

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[57] The kingdom of Abyssinia is also known as the Ethiopian Empire, spanning a geographical area from present-day Eritrea to the northern half of Ethiopia. After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Ethiopia and Liberia were the only two African countries that remained independent during the Scramble for Africa by the European imperial powers in the late 19th century. See, Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974.*

In the novel, we are introduced to Rabbash, a khadim prisoner who is believed to be a threat to the racial purity of white Yemeni girls. The story employs the tone of slave narratives, but al-Muqrī transforms the story to an intellectual debate between a white Yemeni (Abdulrahman, also known as the Amboo) who falls in love with a Black girl and a Black prisoner (Suroor) who later resides in the slums of northern Yemen. In their deliberations about history, slavery and racial subjugation the white Yemeni discovers the understudied and misrepresented reality of the community of the Akhdām and how the majority of Yemenis have misconceived stereotypes about this ethnic group. The story begins with the repercussions of the narrator recalling the history of persecution of Akhdām community in Yemen since 1975 and how their resistance to racialization and exclusionary state policies against Arabs of African descent led to the increasing presence of bulldozers demolishing their slums and leaving them strangers in their homeland.

The first few pages of the novel give a detailed account of the court trial in which Rabbash, a member of Akhdām, is unlawfully persecuted for being a Black threat to white Yemeni families. Rabbash's trial and the judge's final statement about the psychic disequilibrium of Rabbash exposes how the Yemeni legal system has sustained the persecution of this ethno-cultural community on the basis of racial difference. Al-Muqrī reveals the hidden world of Akhdām through the mouthpiece of Abdulrahman, a member of the major Yemeni community, who falls in love with a Black servant (Jameela) and runs away from his home after having sex with Jameela and the court issues a verdict to stone Jameela to death. The court issues the death penalty against Jameela, not because she has sex with a white man, but because she has a sexual relationship with someone of higher social status than her own. The violent and unjust

stoning of Jameela compels Abdulrahman to abandon his family and question the values of his people and the racial incentives that legitimize the persecution and marginalization of Black-skinned people and mixed-race Yemenis. During the escape, Abdulrahman meets with Al Dagloo (Jameela's sister) and further challenges the mythological misconceptions the majority of Yemenis have formed about Arabs of African descent. Abdulrahman recalls his mother's bedtime stories about Black contamination and what happens when a pure Yemeni marries or engages in sex with a Black woman. In the village, the community of Akhdām is considered to be an "untouchable caste," due to their African and ethnic traditions which make them less human and therefore descendants of Jinn.

This mythical belief has degraded the social status of Akhdām and portrayed them as a taboo in the Yemeni society. Abdulrahman's fascination with the unknown world of Akhdām and his love for Al Dagloo (Jameela's sister) urges him to go somewhere else where no one will recognize them. After a tiring journey, they find themselves in the slums of Akhdām where boundaries and limits don't exit, and the sexual desires of this ethnic group are openly discussed. In the slums, Abdulrahman meets with a former Black prisoner (Suroor) who discourses about Black activism in the South, the limitations of genealogical research on Afro-Arabs and the need for Akhdām community to be integrated into mainstream Yemeni society.

At the end of the novel, Abulrahman and Suroor debate what really makes the difference between home and diaspora given the miserable conditions of alienation and displacement the Akhdām have to endure in their country. When will the next generation of Akhdām have equal civil rights like other Yemenis? How will their history of persecution and their unique values and strange traditions be part of the country's national heritage? Can the Akhdām as an ethnic community be integrated into mainstream Yemeni society while retaining their *black taste*…

*black smell*? These questions constitute the general outline of the novel and al-Muqrī's objectives in exploring this understudied ethnic group and the way they have become a significant facet of Yemen's socio-cultural composition. I contextualize my reading of the novel in relation to race studies and the African diaspora. Contrary to the overtly emphasized return to mother Africa (or African roots) in current scholarship on transatlantic Black writing, the Yemeni case shows a different understanding of African-ness and the emphasis on genealogical research.[58] In *Black Taste … Black Smell* al-Muqrī depicts the adversities of Yemen's Black communities and the culture of exile and alienation caused by their displaced dwelling inside and between the borders of Yemen and the Arab Gulf. The author insightfully portrays how race configurations across peripheries in the Arab Gulf impact the formation of diaspora inside the homeland and further generate a transnational re-routing of roots.

**Arab Regional Migration and Black Yemenis**

Al-Muqrī employs protest and social upheavals as driving mechanisms for the racial subjugation and marginalization of Yemenis of African descent in the Arab Gulf and North

[58] Genealogical research has long informed critical and ethnographic studies on the work of African-American and African writers. Today one finds two significant strands in the study of African diaspora. The first strand is the application of discoveries in the science of genetics, which mainly focuses on finding African roots and where specifically in Africa the ancestors of particular Africans have come from. The second strand is the way this historical inquiry is employed by African-American figures in popular media. These two developments have legitimized the industry of DNA testing companies mainly targeted at African Americans by helping them trace their roots. In addition to scholarly publications, there are also popular video series explaining the DNA testing process and tracing the genealogies of popular African Americans personalities for education and entertainment. A prominent example here is the Takeaway Media Production's famous *Motherland* series (*Motherland: A Genetic Journey* and *Motherland: Moving On*) broadcasted by the BBC in 2003. The series was purposefully employed as a promotion by a testing company named, *without irony, Roots For Real: Your Ancestry Discovered*. Its website, listing costs both of film and tests, earnestly advises visitors to "[c]hoose the BBC film for a pioneering example of our DNA service." But perhaps the most well-known series is *African American Lives,* made by the Harvard professor of African American Studies, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and first broadcast by PBS in 2006; a sequel followed in 2008 by his NBC show "Finding Your Roots" in which he interviews celebrities and asks them, "Who do you think you are? Gates also recently launched a *Washington Post*-supported online magazine, theroot.com, linked to a genetic testing company, *www. AfricanDna.com*.

Africa. Throughout the novel, al-Muqrī shows us how Black Yemenis have been perceived and stereotyped in civic and legal contexts. The opening scene of the novel captures this attitude by sarcastically demonstrating how the Black Prisoner (Suroor) presents a reversal of this legal trial by questioning how the Arabic word treason is used in the courtroom. Unlike other Black prisoners who may not contest any charges issued against them, *Rabbash* informs the judge and all the attendees in the courtroom that:

> كلنا خونة ، يا حضرة القاضي. الإنسان كائن خائن. لكنه يفقد ذاته ، وصفته في اللحظة التي يتم فيها إثبات خيانته. عندما يبدأ بممارسة خيانة جديدة يسترجع وجوده وصفته في الحال.
>
> We are all traitors, your honor. Every human being is a traitor, but one may lose his identity and character the moment he is charged with treason. And when he begins to commit a new act of treason he would once restore his existence and identity . (5)

Rabbash utters these words to draw attention to his reasoning about the way Black Yemenis are oppressed and persecuted by law. Al-Muqrī opens his novel with this court scene to emphasize how the question of racial subjugation has existed since 1980 and still continues to impact the conditions of ethnic minorities in Yemen. Contrary to what other Black Yemeni prisoners have done in the past, Rabbash is the first Black prisoner who had praised the notion of treason and openly criticized how such negative allegations have been an integral part of the Yemeni society as a whole. This unexpected form of self-defense reveals an important aspect about Rabbash's revolt against the Yemeni authorities and the way the legal system discriminates against Arabs of African descent. As a Black servant Rabbash had been charged in 1970 with treason and rape of a noble Yemeni family. The judge reads out the charges and refuses to mention the family name after explaining a new court law that allows some of the political prisoners to be released if they

are able to appeal alleged criminal convictions. This new release policy was administrated as a result of the unification agreement between the divided parts of Yemen represented by the Republic of Yemen in the North and the People's Democratic Republic in the South in an attempt to forgive political prisoners on both sides. When Rabbash is given permission to appeal his criminal convictions in the court, he stands up and explains to the judge and the persecutors why everyone is betraying loyalty to the homeland:

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حضرة القاضي، جرموني قبل أكثر من عشر سنوات بخيانة الوطن بسبب عضويتي في الحزب، وخيانة الأسرة التي عملت عندها لأنني أحببت ابنتهم. الآن تقولون خيانة فقط. ولا تذكرون خيانة مَن واغتصاب مَن، وكيف...

- كلنا نمارس خيانة الوطن بشكل من الأشكال، مادام يسمى وطناً، كما هو يقوم بخايتنا. الوطن هو الخيانة. كل وطن خيانة. فكرة الوطن خيانة. الحدود الوطنية خيانة. التربية الوطنية خيانة. العلم الوطني خيانة. المصلحة الوطنية خيانة. الأحزاب الوطنية خيانة. الوطنيون خَونة. المجتمع خيانة. الطبقة خيانة. العائلة خيانة. الزواج خيانة. الدين خيانة. القوانين خيانة. التقاليد خيانة حضرة القاضي.

> Your honor, more than ten years ago they accused me of disloyalty to the homeland due to my membership in the (communist) party and betrayal of a family because I fell in love with their daughter. Now you say disloyalty only without mentioning who is betrayed and raped and how . . . .
> We all practice disloyalty to our country in one way or another, since belonging can also betray us. Homeland is disloyalty, every homeland is a betrayal. The idea of homeland is betrayal. The national flag is betrayal. National interest is a form of betrayal. Nationalist parties are betrayal. The nationalists are betrayers. Society is a betrayal. Class difference is a form of betrayal. Family is betrayal. Marriage is betrayal. Religion is betrayal. Law is a form of betrayal. Tradition is a betrayal. (8)

The opening scene of the novel sets the tone not only for the minute depiction of the struggles of Black Yemenis, but also how racial prejudice has obscured the social and psychological conditions of this ethno-racial minority in the Arab world. The main narrator of the story unravels Rabbash's unconventional self-defense in the court as a prologue for the story of other Blacks and the way the Yemeni legal system handles criminal charges against the Akhdām. The court's trial of Rabbash is described as an attempt to re-examine the appeal of prisoners who have shown good conduct in the first half of their sentence. However, the case of Rabbash also encapsulates a political conflict between the governments of South and North Yemen and a recent treaty that attempts to unify both governments by releasing political prisoners from both sides. In the court, the Black servant Rabbash reveals to the judge that racial discrimination is an integral mechanism of the nationalist ideology which fueled the separation between South and North and the way nationalism has been employed to do injustice to Yemenis at large.

Al-Muqrī uses this important political disjuncture in the history of Yemen to illustrate how race configurations have had a direct impact on Yemen's political structure and the formation of diasporic communities inside the homeland. In the first few lines of the novel, the author clearly illustrates how race relations intersect with political struggles and the subjugation of ethnic minorities in Yemen. Rabbash begins his oral defense in the court by explaining to the judge how his political affiliation with Yemen's Socialist Party has labelled him a traitor by the Yemeni authorities in the North.[59] This political conflict between South and North Yemen has

[59] Yemeni Socialist Party was the major political entity in South Yemen before unification in 1990, and due to its Marxist orientation it was in complete opposition to Muslim ruling parties in North Yemen. The party was formed in the 1940s and 1950s with the first and second wave of Yemeni students in the USSR. The YSP evolved through several stages of struggle to liberate, unify and transform Yemeni society. Its inauguration in 1978 by Abdul Fattah Ismail, its first leader, came as a result of the progressive unification process of a number of Yemeni revolutionary groups in both South and North Yemen. Inspired by socialist communism, the leaders of the party aimed to form a coalition of anti-feudal systems in Arab countries including Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Egypt. From the 1930s to the 1960s the Arab Socialist Movement / حركة الاشتراكيين العرب developed as a political ideology based on an amalgamation of Pan-Arabism and socialism. The term "Arab socialism" was coined by Michel Aflaq, the principal

also justified racial and social prejudice against Yemenis of African descent. Rabbash was accused of betrayal because he fell in love with the daughter of the Yemeni family he worked for in the North. By revealing the underpinnings of his imprisonment, Rabbash blatantly questions the judge to look more closely at the court's use of the notion of betrayal and find out who is truly betrayed and how. Despite the judge's request that the defense stay focused and concise, Rabbash insists on showing everyone in the courtroom why the charge of betrayal filed against him is a driving mechanism used in various aspects of life in Yemen including nationalism, borderlines, education, marriage, class difference, societal and religious doctrines as well as rules and traditions. Rabbash's intentional repetition of the term betrayal / خيانة as a defining feature of national belonging and socio-religious strictures problematizes how the idea of homeland can legitimize the subjugation and enfranchisement of people in the name of religion, tradition and national interests. Furthermore, by challenging the court's logic of betrayal, Rabbash also aims to demonstrate how the Akhdām's intellectual capabilities and political activism are often described as a kind of hysteria against local authorities. After hearing Rabbash's oral defense, the jurors ask the judge to order the execution of this Black servant given his betrayal of the religious values and traditions of the homeland. But the judge impulsively diagnoses Rabbash as a lunatic unware of what he does or says, and for this reason the court decides to release him after spending half of his sentence by surveilling his personal conduct.

Al-Muqrī opens the narrative with this court scene to illustrate the complex history of racial subjugation in the political disputes between North and South Yemen and more importantly to shed light on the stateless and transnational visions of Black Yemenis in the

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founder of Ba'athism and the Arab Ba'ath Party, in order to distinguish his version of socialist ideology from the international socialist movement.

homeland. This introductory section of the novel reveals the story of Abdulrahman, a white Yemeni who falls in love with a Black woman and runs away with her to a Black slum outside Taiz, a city in northern Yemen where the majority of Black Yemenis live today. Upon attending Rabbash's trial and hearing how this Black servant talked about betrayal and nationalism, Abdulrahman (later named Amboo) becomes more curious to understand the world of Black Yemenis and discover the distinctive values and political visions they represent. Rabbash's eloquent self-defense in the court and his outspoken criticism of the Yemeni legal system poses a challenge to Amboo's stigmatized and stereotypical views about Black Yemenis. In the courtroom, Amboo learns that Black Yemenis are not allowed to attend trials or even enter courtrooms except as janitors to clean up the dirt and filth coming off the shoes of white attendees. Even though the Yemeni judicial system grants all Yemenis equal civil rights, Akhdām are an exception to this rule given the exclusionary and inhumane conditions they are subjected to in Yemen. As an ethno-racial minority, Akhdām are treated as second-class citizens and "are consigned to society's most marginal region as a caste of 'untouchables' who are condemned to carry out the degrading task of manually handling human waste." [60] Often times Akhdām are ascribed the status of نقص / naqaṣ *or* degradation in the Yemeni society.[61] In the novel, al-Muqrī critiques this dominant social prejudice by demonstrating how the discourse of

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[60] See Huda A. Seif, "The Accursed Minority: The Ethno-Cultural Persecution of 'Al Akhdam' in the Republic of Yemen." Seif contends that there is a historically-grounded misconception about people of African descent in Yemen. The labelling of "Al Akhdam" informed by colonial and racial ethnographic demarcations has confined this group to "a dependent and therefore non-autonomous social position within a society that otherwise values autonomy, their economic role as the handlers of human waste fortifies the perception that they are members of an "untouchable" caste" (7).

[61] naqaṣ is an Arabic word that implies a lesser and degraded social status. Sometimes the word is also used to describe people with lower forms of labor and social servitudes, such as barbers, butchers and waste cleaners.

uncleanliness and racial impurity is employed as a mechanism of social subjugation against the Akhdām. However, a close examination of the Akhdām's cultural history and their struggle in their homeland reveals a more complex image of this ethno-cultural minority. By including the views of a white narrator deliberating the genesis and legitimacy of racial prejudice in Yemen and through his daily interactions with Akhdām, the author sheds light on the prevailing misconceptions about Arabs of African descent. Throughout the narrative, both Amboo and other Black characters question the mythological beliefs about the degraded nature of Black Yemenis. Amboo's encounter with the life of Black servants and his escape to the Black ghettos of the city with his beloved (Al Dagloo) enables him to uncover such mythical misconceptions widely circulated by his people against Black Arabs and Arabs of mixed origins. In the first few days of his arrival at the Black slum with Al Dagloo, Amboo remembers a mythical tale that his mother used to narrate repeatedly at bedtime. In this tale, Amboo learns from his mother that if a man loves and marries a Black woman she can transform him to a worm. When Amboo asks his mother to explain why this man is transformed into a worm, the mother simply replies by stating:

لأنه جامعها. هي ناقصة. ما تساويش مقامه

إذا تزوج إنسان عادي ابنة مزين ، شتحول دود؟

أيوه. يابني المزينيين ناقصين على جميع الخلق

من شتزوج بناتهن ، إذا كان الله خلقهن ناقصات ؟

يتزوجن من مزينيين مثلهن، أو يتزوجن الجن![62]

Because he slept with her, she is lacking and does not befit his status.

If a normal man marries the daughter of a degraded man, he will be transformed to worm

[62] This is a widely-circulated narrative amongst white Yemenis titled "The story of King Shamsaan and the Barber." In the story King Shamsaan falls in love with the daughter of a barber and the moment he marries her the king becomes a worm. This mythological tale ascribes to Akhdām the status of "untouchability" and represent them as a fallen and cursed ethnic group that fails to adhere to the moral codes and values of other Yemenis.

Yes, my son. Barbers are lesser in morality and ethics in comparison to others.

Who will marry their daughters if God has created them incomplete?

They should marry from their own caste, or marry the Jinn. ! (14)

In the process of recollecting his mother's story about lesser and degraded humans, Amboo becomes more critical of the fear and supernatural elements that accompanied social and cultural discrimination against ethnic minorities and workers of socially-degraded professions in Yemen. The story rationalizes the exclusionary practices against Akhdām and further illustrates how mythical stories have justified the dehumanization and exploitation of this minority group by the dominant majority. The mother tells Amboo that marriage to a lesser woman (and daughters of Akhdām caste) is detrimental to one's life and biological purity. Not only does one become a worm and lose his human essence, but he also enters a world of immorality. The mother uses the Arabic words *naqaṣ* and *maqam* (lacking and status) to emphasize how interracial marriage makes white Arabs degraded and impure. Because of this prevailing social attitude, Akhdām are often described as people with unclean bodies who are covered with a polluting substance and *najasah*[63] (impurity), thus rendering them incapable of becoming moral and pious. For Amboo's mother, marriage to a Black woman entails a process of ethical degradation that leads to the loss of morality and faithfulness. This view is clearly expressed in the mother's proposition that these lesser women can only marry from their own caste or marry from Jinn.[64] Furthermore, by

[63] The Arabic word *Najasah* is generally used to refer to impurities in physical as well as spiritual or psychological forms. In everyday usage the word is usually associated with the impurities that render the human body or clothes unclean.

[64] Jinn or djinn are supernatural creatures in Arabic as well as pre-Islamic Indian mythology. They are mentioned frequently in the Quran (the 72nd surah is titled Sūrat al-Jinn) and other Islamic texts and inhabit an unseen world in dimensions beyond the visible universe of humans. The Quran states that the jinn are made of a smokeless and "scorching fire", but are also physical in nature, and may interfere physically with people and objects. Even though the Quranic references distinguish between good and bad Jinns, in Arabic cultural contexts the Jinn are usually used in negative terms to imply evil, darkness and invisibility.

invoking the question of interracial marriage and the way Akhdām are portrayed as supernatural creatures lacking normative human qualities, al-Muqrī exposes a controversial relationship between this ethnic group and the Yemeni society as a whole. The assignment of negative characteristics of impurity, immorality and contamination to the Akhdām community also serves the purpose of rationalizing the exploitation of this group for the benefit of dominant groups in the Yemeni context. The author illustrates one aspect of this controversy by scrutinizing the way Black women are objectified as sexual entities for white men. Not only are Black women portrayed as whores and prostitutes, but the normalcy of sexual desires and behaviors legitimatizes a collective punishment on this group. Amboo's love and admiration for Black women in the novel posits a challenge to his family's perceived notions about racial purity and the stereotype that all Black women are prostitutes.

Moreover, before moving to the Black slums, Amboo meets Jamala, a Black servant working in his family's house, and establishes a sexual relationship with her. In the course of this relationship, Jamala shares with Amboo a counter-narrative about Jinns and humans. In the story Jamala informs Amboo that love between people transcends the limits of skin color, social class and cultural traditions. The intimate love that once existed between a Jinni (a superhuman being) and a human has dismantled the traditions and sacred views of both Jinns and humans and created a new homeland no one knows. For Jamala this new homeland is the progeny of free love and interracial marriage between people of various background. Jamala envisions this new homeland by fulfilling her sexual desire with Amboo. However, once the family learns about Jamala's pregnancy, she is immediately labelled as a sexual predator in the white household. Amboo's mother rushes to the court to show the young age of her son and to prove that Jamala

has committed adultery. After various trials, the judge ordered the stoning of Jamala due to the fact that she had broken the social and cultural codes of love outside her caste system.

Furthermore, through the story of Jamala and the way her skin color has impacted the penalty to which she was subjected, al-Muqrī reveals how the discourse of religion has been employed in the subjugation and oppression of Akhdām in Yemen. The novel clearly scrutinizes how religious rulings were used as a form of discipline and punishment for the different views and values of this ethnic group. As a Black woman, Jamala was exposed to an unjust punishment that was mainly informed by racial prejudice and cultural incentives. The court's ruling against Jamala shows how culture and tradition intervenes in religious discourse and the way some religious values have become ostensibly cultural in perspective. Despite the variation of opinions amongst Muslim scholars about the punishment of adultery, the court adapts an extreme penalty with no consideration to the specifics and conditions of this ruling. The judge had no interest in hearing from Jamala and his ruling was rather informed by the request presented by Amboo's family expressed in the mother words: "إكرام الميت دفنه، وإكرام الزانية قتلها / to honor the dead is to bury him/her and to honor the adulteress is to kill her" (21).[65] In Islamic law, the penalty for adultery is granted under certain conditions, and a pregnant woman can't be persecuted until she delivers the baby and raises him to the age of three or four. Amboo's mother advocated the killing of Jamala and her unconceived baby so that the baby will not bear the biological features of her son, Amboo. After seeing the death penalty of Jamala, Amboo starts to question the persecution of Akhdām in the city of Taiz and decides to escape to the Black slums and find Jamala's sister, Al Dagloo.

[65] This saying has no religious foundation and rather presents a conservative cultural view mainly driven by chauvinistic views towards women.

During his escape from the city of Taiz, Amboo becomes emotionally attached to Al Dagloo and they both decide to get married. However, Al Dagloo becomes wary that if she marries Amboo her destiny will be the same as her stoned sister, Jamala. For this reason, both Amboo and Al Dagloo decide to migrate to a new land where no one can find out their cultural roots and where they come from. Before making his decision to migrate to another city, Amboo tries to find an excuse in the fantastical stories he has read in "*The One Thousand and One Night*s, his mother's bedtime tales and the biography of *Sayf ibn Dhī-Yazan*[66] and the *Fiqh*[67] books he read," but none was enough to convince him not to escape (30). Recalling the last scene of Jamala's stoning with rocks cracking her head and people shouting "God's great, God's great" was a strong incentive for Amboo to find another place where he can live with his Black beloved away from the dehumanization and racial subjugation practiced in the homeland.

Upon reaching another city in Northern Yemen, Amboo and Al Dagloo discover that being Black in Yemen entails a continual process of dislocation and temporary residence. The new town Amboo and Al Dagloo arrive at during their escape resembles the dwellings of Black people in the villages where they grew up. However, the intensity of this ethnic territorialization compels Amboo to describe this village as a site of displaced dwelling inside the homeland in the following manner:

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[66] Sayf ibn Dhī-Yazan (in Arabic: سيف بن ذي يزن) was a Himyarite King of Yemen who lived between 516 and 574 CE, and was known for ending the Aksumite rule in Southern Arabia with the help of the Sassanid Empire. Sayf became a well-known figure in Arabic folklore by means of his widely-read biography "سيرة سيف بن ذي يزن " /*Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī-Yazan*, (*The Biography of Sayf ibn Dhī-Yazan*) where much myth, including claiming his mother to be a jinni, has been blended with historical facts. One can read the stories in this biography as a classical form of magical realism.

[67] *Fiqh* is the science of Islamic Jurisprudence and it deals with the observance of rituals, morals and social legislation in Islam.

قبل أن نقترب أكثر ، أو نحاول المرور أمام هذه العشش، تفحصت عيوننا مكوناتها المتداخلة من مخلفات صفائح الزنك وأعواد الأشجار النحيلة، في شكل غرف صغيرة، تسندها أعمدة خشبية مهترية في الأركان و الباب. لا تختلف عن عشش الأخدام في قريتنا، إلا من حيث إستخدامها بكثرة لمخلفات الصفائح. هناك يستخدمون الخشب و الأعواد، وما عدا ذلك فإن روائح تعفن بقايا الأشياء و تراكم تاريخ قذر بالجوار، علامة على تشابه المحويين هنا وهناك. لا يطلق الأخدام على عششهم صفة السكن أو المساكن، والتي تعني الإستقرار و أمان العيش الدائم و الساكن. يعتبرون تجمع عششهم (محوى) موقتاً، و يصفون أنفسهم بالمحويين العابرين.

Before we approach or pass by their huts, our eyes were examining the entangled components of their homes which included remnants of zinc sheets and trunks of trees forming small rooms supported by old wooden sticks placed by the doors and corners. These huts are not different from the ones in our village except in their excessive use of the remnants of zinc sheets. There they use wood and sticks and other than that the stinky odor of rotten items and the collocation of a dirty history nearby signifies a clear resemblance between the slums here and there. The Akhdām do not describe their slums as homes for living, which usually implies stability, safety and continual livelihood. Rather they see their places (slum) as temporary sites of dwelling and identify themselves as passing-by dwellers of slums. (36)

Amboo's detailed description of the slum's construction demonstrates not only the wretched and undignified conditions of Akhdām, but also the way this ethnic minority envisions belonging against the backdrop of racial discrimination and exilic alienation inside the homeland. The impermanent and fragile nature of their slums being made of scrap and waste materials mirrors the unstable and vulnerable condition of Akhdām's

understanding of home. Amboo closely examines the difference between the Black slums of his village and the way slums on the outskirts of the city are developed and temporarily inhabited. While the difference is marked by the excessive use of disposable scrap materials in the case of urban slums, the unavoidable emanation of foul odor and a cumulative history of filth constitute a major sign of resemblance between slums in rural as well as urban areas.

By presenting a thorough examination of the slum as a physical space, al-Muqrī is interested in delineating the temporal as well as the psychological demarcations of belonging for Akhdām. The naming of space named and how it is described by Akhdām themselves illustrates a psychic sentiment that defines Akhdām's understanding of belonging. Rather than describing their slums as homes and sites of permanent residence, Akhdām finds it more appropriate to use the Arabic word (محوى) to emphasize the temporary and transmigratory nature of their belonging.[68] Put simply, the use of the Arabic word (محوى) registers a deterritorialized understanding of the homeland in which neither space nor territorial demarcations represented by slum dwelling can explain Akhdām's sense of home. It's rather the experience of temporal nomadic dwelling and transmigration induced by racial displacement that inform Akhdām's view of the homeland. Despite the physical presence of their huts and scrap-made homes, Akhdām mark their difference in the Yemeni society by describing themselves as "passing-by dwellers of slums" (36). The temporality and travelling nature of their dwelling between cities and inside slums in the homeland implies a

[68] The total population of Yemen is 25 million and there are about one million Akhdām in Yemen. The majority live in slum neighborhoods known as *mahwas* / slums that ring the outskirts of major cities such as Sanaa, Taiz, Hodeida and Aden.

sedentary form of diaspora that goes beyond border-crossing and transnational migration. In the novel, al-Muqrī illuminates how the case of Akhdām projects an understudied aspect of diaspora that develops inside and within the national terrains of the homeland. Through the experience of internal migratory movement and temporal dwelling one finds an unconventional trajectory of diaspora experience that is both exterritorial and sedentary at the same time.

Developing a diasporic consciousness inside the homeland often involves socio-cultural, psychic and economic complexities that are sometimes overlooked in the discourse of diaspora and migration studies. In the novel, the enunciation of diasporic consciousness inside the homeland develops as a result of intersecting forms of marginalization and racial prejudice that are also affected by economic status and social stereotyping. Amboo's detailed description of Akhdām's slums and their economic conditions reveals the way this ethnic group views the boundaries of the homeland. The poor and miserable conditions of their huts and homes have a direct influence on the unstable and territorial understanding of home Akhdām have envisioned in their country of origin. Al-Muqrī shows how the women of the slum challenge the diasporic conditions through their sexual deviance and ability to seduce white rich men. Upon asking about the new slum Amboo and Al Dagloo are told that the name of the slum is given the title of a Black prostitute named Zain, thus making the place محوى زين or Zain's slum (38). However, the popularity of this name urges Amboo and Al Dagloo to further find out who is this Black woman and why children in the slum keep repeating her name while playing and singing:

(( ماهو كُسْ زين...من هو زين؟))

(( كُسْ زين ... فَرْج زين.. و زين مَرَة و لا مثلها مَرَةْ. لما كانت تعيش. كان أم أخدام (1) يشبعْو من أم جوع بفضل كُسّها. يسموها أم قمر أسود. و قد ركع أمام كُسّها كم من عاصِرْ شَنَبُه (2) من اللّيْ ينخطو(3) علينا و يتكلّموْ من نُخرهم. أمْبّوْ. كانوْ يركعوْ. يخضعوْ لنا أوّل ما يدخلوْ محوى زين. ماتت و عمرها ثلاثين سنة. ياحسرة و ما عد أحد جا من امبو إلاّ ما ندر))

((What's Zain's cunt ? . . .Who is Zain?))

((Zain's cunt … Zain's vagina … Zain is a woman incomparable to other women. When she was alive all the Akhdaam used to satisfy/fulfill their hunger and eat well because of her vagina. They used to describe her as the Black moon being the most beautiful Black woman. And many men have bowed in front of her including those despots and oppressors arrogantly abusing us; the Amboos (the white Yemenis). They used to bow. And surrender to our wills and wishes the moment they enter the slum of Zain. But she died at the age of thirty. Alas, since that time no one came from the Amboo except on rare occasions)) (38).

Although viewed as a sexualized object in the eyes of white Yemenis, Akhdām see Zain as a challenge to racial subjugation through sexual agency and the indulgence in impermissible acts. Zain's irresistible beauty is projected as a sexual deviance that enabled Akhdām to control the physical desires of the oppressing group. The Amboos (white Yemenis) not only used to bow in front of Zain's sexual temptations, but also surrender to the allegedly inhuman and uncivil practices of Akhdām once they entered the slum. Zain's ability to seduce white men with her objectified sexuality marks her as a source of empowerment for the Black community and for the emancipation of Black people in Yemen. Sexuality functions in al-Muqrī's text as a medium of discursive appropriation of the very social norms and values that have legitimized the oppression

of this ethnic group in the Yemeni society. The author is interested in revealing how economically coerced prostitution functions in tandem with racial subjugation and the erasure of ethno-cultural difference by the majority of white Yemenis.

Furthermore, al-Murqī critiques how racial attitudes towards Akhdām have also overlooked the diverse and rich heritage of Afro-Arabs and the values and practices they inherited from other African cultures and traditions. This ethno-cultural heritage is manifested in every aspect of Akhdām's life, particularly in their folklore, social life, wedding celebrations and dancing. Amboo's encounter with this rich ethnic heritage is first discovered in the way children play with simple tools to express complex ideas about their identity and how to learn perseverance and determination. The rock game young children of Akhdām play on a daily basis is a clear evidence that this ethno-cultural group has a genuine heritage that is often stigmatized and disregarded in the Arab world. The author dedicates three pages in the novel to describe the rules of this ethnic game, and the children of Akhdām apply these game rules to their situation as outcasts in their own country. With a tiny stick, the children draw on the sandy pathways creating a complicated imagery of hardships they need to overcome in order to win. Even though the game is simple and it is drawn on the sand, it requires lots of attention and the player needs to keep moving from one rectangle to another. The various levels of the game ends with the fifth step in which the player throws a rock into the fifth rectangle and jumps with only one foot from the third to the fifth rectangle and from there to the first one without losing balance. After watching the children play the final steps in the game, Amboo and Al Dagloo come to a realization that the game is not simply a form of entertainment, but also an allegory of racial empowerment:

ظهرلنا أن اللاعب إذا قام بكل الخطوات الخمس، دون تنكيس رجله اليسرى المرفوعة، باستثناء لحظة التوقّف لبرهة بين مرحلة و أخرى لالتقاط الحجر، وإذا لم يتجاوز الحجر مساحة المستطيل المستهدف الى آخر أو إلى خارجه ، أو حتى إلى فوق خطوطه، يكون قد نجا من صفة أمبو التي يطلقها عليه زملاؤه إذافشل في إكمال اللعبة.

It has become clear to us that if the player reached the fifth step without lowering the folded left leg – except for a short second or two to pick up the rock—and if the rock doesn't go beyond the territory of the targeted rectangle, its edges, outside, or even above the lines of the rectangle, then the player has been saved from the traits of Amboo-ness (whiteness) which other players would ascribe to the loser and anyone unable to complete the game. (40)

The varying levels of complexity in the game and the measure of success or failure in executing all the required steps are an embodiment of the Black Yemeni's ability to retain his/her African-ness against the drop of racial hierarchy in a country that condemns Black cultural roots and mixed biological traits. In every step the player needs to stand firm and not to be destabilized or shaken by the white borderlines of the rectangles. The player's ability to cross these rigid lines from rectangle one to five with only one leg signals a form of biological strength defined against whiteness. In the game, the children view physical strength as a sign of Black heritage that is not to be weakened or contaminated by the traits of the Amboos, in other words white Yemenis. Not only the loser is negatively described as an Amboo, but he/she also remains silent and defenseless for a period of time. By closely observing how the children play this game purposefully to empower their Black heritage, Amboo starts to question his race wishing that the children would allow him to play the game one day and get rid of his whiteness (Amboo heritage) by tossing it the way the rock is eternally thrown outside the five rectangular steps in

the children's game. By giving a detailed account of the game, al-Muqrī not only elucidates an understudied aspect of Black folklore in Yemen, but also shows how Akhdām genuinely oppose racial prejudice by asserting the diversity and uniqueness of their own heritage. After a whole week of close examination of Akhdām and their daily practices and ways of life, Amboo discovers that becoming a khadim / Black Yemeni is not simply a matter of skin color or biological inheritance, but also a social attitude that may be attributed due to profession, caste and geographical essentialization:

> الأخدام يسمّون المدينة أمبو ، لكنني اكتشفت أن لا أحد من سكّانها يتداول هذا الاسم. تَعِز، هو الاسم المتداول عند السكان الذين هم يمنيون أو تعزّيون. أما أمبو فهو اسمها واسم سكانها عند أخدام محوى زين. يعرف الأخدام موقعهم عند أمبو، فيما هؤلإ اقتصر نظرهم على انفسهم ، ولم يخطر ببالهم، كما بدا لي ، أن هناك من ينظر إليهم نظرة مختلفة، عن تلك التي يرون بها أنفسهم ، و يطمئنّون إليها.

> The Akhdām call the city Amboo, but I discovered that none of its dwellers use this name. Taiz is the commonly used name amongst the inhabitants who are either Yemenis or Taizans. For the Akhdām of Zain's slum Amboo is the name of the city and its inhabitants. The Akhdām are quite aware of their status among the Amboo, whereas the latter have maintained a restricted self-image, but it never occurred to them, as it occurred to me, there are also people who view them in a way different from the way they see themselves and feel comfortable. (45)

By presenting a counterview to the way white Yemenis see themselves in relation to Black Arabs and Yemeni of African descent, the novel opposes the spectacle of racialization often used by Yemenis in forming their attitudes towards people of color. Al-Muqrī encapsulates a Black perspective on the Amboos (white Yemenis) in a way that exposes their restricted understanding of their genealogical roots and how this perceptual limitation has justified their racial

stigmatization of others. None of the white characters in the novel is aware of the fact that community of Akhdaam views whiteness as a trait of physical weakness and psychological insecurity. This view grants Akhdām the ability to challenge the exclusive nature of racialization by the Amboos practice and the way Blacks portray the white cultural heritage. By masquerading as a Black person and living in the Black slums of his country Abdulrahman sheds lights on the racial taboos and cultural atrocities widely circulated against people of color.

**Black Contamination and the Myths of Impurity**

Race and color of skin also dictate and define one's profession and expected social status. In Yemen Blacks and people of African descent are expected to work in degraded professions at a low pay rates. Another aspect of racial stigmatization that the novel presents is the fear of contamination and racial impurity that are mainly induced by mythical fallacies about Black people in the Arab Gulf. The author presents this view through a purely cultural stigmatization of Black contagion and the reason why only certain professions fit the nature of Akhdām. When Abdulrahman tries to find a job, Aisha tells him that due to his fair color skin it is going to be easy for him to find a job because Black Yemenis are only allowed to work in certain occupations that are believed to fit the degraded and impure nature of Akhdām caste in Yemen. Upon asking why Akhdām can't work and serve in restaurants and cafes, Aisha answers:

بالنسبة لك الأمر سهل، الخادم لا يمكن يشتغل في مقهى أو مطعم.

لماذا؟

يعتبرونه قذراً. نجساً ، لا يليق بأمبو السماح له بمسك أواني طعامه و شرابه.

حتى إذا تنظّف؟

حتى إذا تنظّف. يقولون أن الواحد منهم إذا أكل مع خادم سرعان ما يجد الدود في الطعام لأنه يتناثر من أصابع الخادم. وإنّه إذا لمس مادّة غذائية لا تمرّساعات حتّى تظهر فيها الدود.

Finding a job for you is easy. But a Khadim can't work in a café or restaurant. Why?

A Khadim is considered filthy and contagious, and it is unfitting for Amboos to have their plates and drinks to be touched by him.

Even after he is got cleaned up?

Even after he is cleaned up. They say that if someone eats with a Khadim worms will soon emanate from the food because it comes off of the Khadim's fingers. And if a Khadim touches food, in just a few hours worms will come on it. (46)

The mythological beliefs that inform this view have been used to substantiate racial and ethno-cultural prejudice against the caste of Akhdām. Throughout the novel, the author illuminates some of these deeply-rooted misconceptions towards ethnic minorities from Africa and the way these misconceptions have been culturally normalized in the Yemeni society. The passage above questions the legitimacy of such negative views and furthers reveals the Amboo's racial and mythological fallacy towards Akhdām. The author encapsulates this critique in the novel through the mouthpiece of Abdulrahman who is also considered part of the oppressing group. However, through his deliberations with Aisha about the Amboo's fear of Black contagion and lack of cleanliness, Abdulraham asks the reader to reconsider how social attitudes were mainly circulated to legitimize racial subjugation. The uncleanliness that the majority of Yemenis ascribe to the group of Akhdām is not physical as much as it as symbolically corporeal and genealogical in nature. Even if a Khadim is cleaned and sanitized, as Aisha explains above, there

is a rudimentary impurity and filth that can't be eradicated from Al Khadim's body. For al-Muqrī, this filth is imprinted in the cultural codes of white Yemenis and how they view other ethnic groups.

Cultural and moral codes are mainly employed in legal and religious contexts to rationalize the dehumanization of this ethnic minority by the dominant majority in Yemen. In other words, the practice of exclusion and marginalization is often legitimized through the discourse of cultural practices and biases. Islam denounces racial differences and the Quran clearly states that all humans are equal in the eyes of God. [69] In the novel, al-Muqrī sheds light on how religious values are appropriated for purposes of racial and ethno-cultural persecution. One example of such cultural subordination is the widely circulated Yemeni proverb stating that "sanitize your plate if touched by a dog but dispose of it if it comes into contact with a member of Akhdām."[70] This proverb echoes the mythological incentives that make it impossible for Aisha and members of Akhdām to work in good restaurants and cafes, a social attitude that renders Akhdām a degraded and disgraced group in Yemen. In "The Accursed Minority: The Ethno-Cultural Persecution of Akhdām in the Republic of Yemen," Huda Seif illustrates how this attitude has permeated the low status of this group and projected them as an anomaly to the socio-cultural codes of Yemen. For Seif, the mythological nature of such false misconception has perpetuated a public attitude against Akhdām and further rationalized social persecution by the majority of Yemenis:

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[69] See, the Holy Quran chapter IV, (Sura 49/ Ayaa 13). The Quranic reference states that there is no difference between an Arab and non-Arab except in piety. All humans are to be treated equally, and piety is the only criterion of difference between humans.

[70] The Arabic version of the proverb is: إغسل بعد الكلب و إكسر بعد الخادم / "Iqsil ba`d al-kalb wa iksir ba`d al-khadem." The term Khadem /khadim (خادم) is a singular form of "Al Akhdam".

> the assignment of objectionable characteristics such as dependency, immorality, and uncleanness to the " Akhdām" community serves the social purpose of rationalizing the exploitation of this group for the clear benefit of dominant groups in Yemeni culture. Condemnation of the " Akhdām" as a "fallen community" whose members are unable to adhere to society's moral codes, provides a comfortable justification for the relegation of this entire group to the lowly and humiliating (though useful) role as the despised handlers of human filth (7).

In the Yemeni context, the subordination and dehumanization of Akhdām is often presented in the name of cultural and religious legitimacy. Because of these mythical mistreatments, the group of Akhdām face a form of socio-cultural exile inside their homeland. Having no civic rights to own property and purchase land from the Yemeni government, most of the slums where Akhdām dwell are scattered in the suburbs of major Yemeni cities. During his stay in the slum of Zain, Abdulrahman comes to experience a sense of alienation from the rest of city where Akhdām usually work as waste collectors.

**Islam and the Formation of Diasporic Consciousness**

In *Black Taste … Black Smell*, al-Muqrī demonstrates how ethnic minorities use Islam as a form of diasporic consciousness to challenge the oppressive nature of Arab nationalism and secular nation-states. Members of the Akhdām community know pretty well that Islam denounces racial prejudice or discrimination based on skin color, breed, or national origin. The Quran clearly states: "O Mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily, the most honored of

you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you" (Quran 49:13). In Islam, righteousness is the only thing that makes someone special and virtuous in the sight of Allah, not race or skin color or lineage or country. During his farewell sermon, Prophet Mohammed denounces racism and any act of racism, emphasizing how important he believed it was to the message of Islam. Despite Islam's concept of equal treatment of all humans regardless of their color, gender or social status, Arabs have changed this religious teaching by redefining the question of race through their cultural values. Al-Muqrī exposes a culturist version of Islam in which non-Black Yemenis are appropriating the teachings of Islam as a justification for the oppression of Black Yemenis. The author openly scrutinizes this form of "culturalist Islam"[71] as it is practiced against people of color and ethnic minorities in the Muslim world. The novel demonstrates how in the Yemeni context Islamic values are appropriated and redefined through racial cultural conservative ideology towards Arabs of African descent. Education and knowledge about the fundamentals of Islam are the first steps toward emancipation that members of Akhdām use to counter the values of "culturalist Islam." By learning how to read the Quran at an early age, Suroor becomes aware of the fundamental teachings of the religion and the way these teachings were later changed to advocate cultural prejudice against Blacks. His imprisonment was also a kind of self-education that enabled him to read the books of other political prisoners and study Islamic theological thought in depth. His time in prison was mostly spent in reading the literary and intellectual masterpieces in socio-political orientations such as Marxism, Ba'atheeism, Nasserism, and the Muslim Brotherhood. After his release from prison, Suroor decides to enter one of the local mosques and pray like other Muslims. Before offering

[71] In Islamic Studies, the term "cultural Muslim" is generally used to describe Muslim identity as a form of national or ethnic affiliation, rather than religious practices and adherence to the teaching of religion.. For more, see Mei-Po Kwan, Peter Hopkins, and Cara Aitchison, *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender and Belonging.*

the prayer, Suroor notices that there was no Imam, and therefore he moves forward to lead a congregation of Muslims. The moment he starts the prayer and recites from the Quran someone pulls him from the back yelling:

> " أعوذ باللّه. آخر الزمان يؤمّ بنا خادم" فانتبه إليه بقيّة المصلّين، و راحوا يدفعونه إلى باب المسجد ، و هو يصيح: "أين المساواة .. أين قول النبي لا فضل لعربي على عجمي ، ولا عجمي على عربي، و لا أحمر على أسود، و لا أسود على أحمر، إلاّ بالتقوى. أين. أين؟"
>
> God Forbid, what is this, a Black man leads us in prayer. The congregation stood by the side of the frustrated man and started pushing Suroor out of the Mosque while he was shouting: 'Where is equality? What are the teachings of Prophet Muhammed saying that "there is no favoritism of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, and neither red skin over Black skin, nor Black skin over red skin, except through righteousness? Where..? Where..?'" (70)

By sharing this story, Suroor aims to demonstrate how non-Black Yemenis employ religious discourse to persecute the Akhdām in Yemen. The mosque incident reflects an invisible aspect about the way Islam is practiced through means of cultural and social values rather than religious ones. Al-Muqrī discloses this culturalist form of religious devotion by showing how religious authority in the village, the sheikh that has sympathized with Suroor, is also part of this social negative attitude towards Akhdām. Suroor openly scrutinizes how the sheikh has misrepresented the true teachings of Islam by engaging in the selling of alcohol and in having illegitimate sexual relations. The novel indirectly exposes how Islam has been appropriated to serve the individual needs and desires of people, including the state and its religious representations.

**Revolt and Black Activism**

Activism and social mobilization against the discriminatory nature of the Yemeni government is one of the underlying themes in *Black Taste…Black Smell*. In the novel, al-Muqrī includes three Black activist figures with political visions that challenge the controversial and racialized discourse of emancipation used by Arabs of African descent. Through the character of Suroor, Al-Muqrī represents an oppressed aspect of Black activism in the Republic of Yemen. In prison, Suroor became attached to radio and political activism, especially the corrective movement initiated by the former Yemeni president, Ibrahim Al Hamdi.[72] Even though Al Hamdi has supported the case of Akhdām during his rule, the ideological movement he enunciated has failed to address the needs and conditions of Black Yemeni prisoners. The movement has adapted an emancipatory slogan and paid little attention to the legal and civic practices that legitimize the persecution of Akhdām in Yemen. The atrocity of this legal system is expressed in Suroor's vivid description of how Black prisoners were convicted and persecuted in Yemeni courts. In his deliberations with Amboo about the plight of Akhdām in Yemeni prisons, Suroor narrates the stories of prisoners to illustrate how criminal law is practiced as a form of racial penalty against Black Yemenis:

> في كل ليلة هناك مجموعة من الحكايات عن المتهمين بممارسة سِحر الزآر و الشذوذ واللواط والقتل و السرقة والتهاون في الخدمة.

[72] Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim al-Hamdi / إبراهيم الحمدي (1943 - 1977) was the leader of a military *coup d'etat* in Yemen Arab Republic that overthrew the regime of President Abdul Rahman al-Iryani on June 13, 1974. After the revolt, he was President of the Military Command Council that governed the country. During his rule, he established the central government's control over the country, planned on ending tribal loyalty, and Yemen's medieval social classes by proclaiming all Yemenis as equal regards of skin color or religious differences.

مقابل هذه الاتهامات ، قال سرور: (( تتلقّى إدارة السجون توجيهات بسجنهم بدون أحكام قانونية، أو قتلهم بدون محاكمة. ويكون هذا بعد أن يتم هدم مساكنهم و تشريدهم، و جلدهم، و اغتصابهم. وكذا اختطاف بناتهم و زوجاتهم واغتصابهنّ)).

Every night there are a number of stories about members of Akhdām charged with the use of magic, homosexuality, murder, theft and negligence in servitude.

'In response to these false charges the bureau of Yemeni prisons persecute them and sometimes kill them without lawful trials in courts. This happens after the slums of these people are demolished, they are whipped and tortured by local authorities, and their wives and daughters kidnapped and raped.' (55)

By exposing the violence that the Yemeni state practices against this ethno-cultural group, the novel discloses a social dilemma in the homeland through which al-Muqrī invites his readers to ask how the majority of Yemenis interact with this ethnic group and where their civil rights are. In light of these unbearable conditions for the Akhdām, Suroor sees death as a better option than the degradation and alienation his people have to endure in their homelands. In his deliberations about the sufferings of Akhdām inside and outside Yemeni prisons, Suroor notes:

الموت طبيعي في ظل حياة قذرة كهذه : ننام مع أوساخنا بلا حمّام . نتبرّز و نبول في الأماكن نفسها التي نأكل فيها و يلعب فيها الأطفال. ملابسنا لا نغيّرها إلاّ حين تبلى من الأوساخ و تتقطع و تسقط عن أجسادنا من ذات نفسها. وإذا لم نجد بديلاً منها نبقى عراة ، لاشيء يسترنا. حتّى إننا لو مشينا شبه عراة في المدينة فلا أحد يأبه لنا و يكسونا. يقولون إنّ هذا أمر طبيعي بالنسبة إلينا كأخدام.

Death is better than being in such a dirty life: we sleep with filth without having bathrooms. We defecate and urinate in the same places where we eat and where our children play. We don't change our clothes until they fall off our bodies and if we don't find other clothes we become naked. Nothing covers us when we clean streets and

> filthy places and no one really cares. But they are happy to say that this is normal for Akhdām to live and look like this. (74)

The formation of diasporic consciousness in the homeland is embedded in the way racial configurations have marginalized the historical constituency of Black Yemenis and the rich cultural heritage they retain today. Throughout the novel, the author revisits various political movements in the history of Yemen and the Arab region in an attempt to reveal how the Black community views this history in relation to the present. By reading history against the backdrop of racial subjugation, al-Muqrī demonstrates how the suffering of Akhdām community is inseparable from the political transitions that have transformed the social and economic conditions of Yemenis from 1976 to the present. The novel reads this history by highlighting an oppressed aspect of Yemen's political transformations. Through Suroor's knowledge about Black prisoners, we are introduced to a historical narration of political activism mainly induced by the wretched condition of Akhdām and how they envision their future.

Suroor's commitment to listening to radio news in prison after his release reveals significant political events for the community of Akhdām in Yemen. The most significant aspect of this news is the new civic legislation and social values mandated by the former Yemeni president Ibrahim Al Hamdi in the 1970s. Al Hamdi's corrective movement of June 13 was widely supported by Akhdām, but the movement didn't develop a legitimate reason to address legal and civic inconsistencies in the Yemeni legal system. In their first meeting after his release from prison, Suroor reveals to Abdulrahman a number of legal cases that illustrate how Akhdām are persecuted and alienated in their own homeland. These stories demonstrate a clear picture of how the state executes violence against the Akhdām in Yemen. The first of these cases is the dilemma of sponsorship and lack of complete citizenry rights in the homeland. Even though the

Yemeni constitution guarantees rights of equal protection for all Yemenis, the government practices an unjustified persecution of Akhdām through forced and restricted venues of employment and labor as sanitation workers. This governmental policy ascribes to Akhdām a minority position inside the homeland and further perpetuates the view that dark-skinned Yemenis can only be employed as "waste collectors" or "low-wage workers." Through the implementation of this policy, the Yemeni government participates heavily in the ethno-cultural subjugation of this group, both socially and economically. No civic opportunities can be granted to a member of Akhdām without the sponsorship of a non-Black merchant or the approval of the government. The first story of suppression Suroor reveals to Abdulrahman demonstrates how the lack of civil opportunities and the oppressive misuse of the sponsorship rule has turned Akhdām into outcastes in their homeland:

أوّلهم القيرعي: "لم يجد أيّ تاجر يضمنه ، و يكفله لكي لا يعود للمشاغبة مع زملائه عند كنس ساحة السوق المركزي. جالس أربع سنوات في السجن ينتظر الضمين". أضاف: " لا أحد من التجّار يكفلهم، و لا يوجد أيّ تاجر من الأخدام".

بعد صمت:

" تصور علّوس الخادم دخل السجن بتهمة السرقة و عمره عشر سنوات، و قد تجاوز مكوثه الآن ستّ سنوات لأنّه لم يستطع دفع الحق الخاصّ و قيمته ألف ريال فقط.

The first of these prisoners is Al Qairaee: "He didn't find a sponsor so that he goes to work and play with his friends while cleaning the big hall of the central market. He remained in prison for four years awaiting a sponsor. Suroor also added: "Yemeni merchants don't want to sponsor Akhdām, and there are no merchants amongst us." After some silence, he continued:

> "Imagine, Aloous the Black servant was put in jail and accused of theft at the age of ten. He has now spent six years in jail because he could not pay back that money which was only a thousand Yemeni Rial."(54)

The prison stories that Suroor shares with Abdulrahman highlight the way constitutional policies in Yemen have normalized cultural and racial attitudes towards Black Yemenis. In fact, by prohibiting Akhdām from occupying other civil opportunities, the Yemeni government is in clear violation of its constitution, which clearly "guarantees all Yemenis equality and the right to choose dignified work and to participate freely in the economic life of the country."[73] In the novel, al-Muqrī uses Suroor's first-hand experience of the suffering of Black Yemenis in prison as a testimony to the way the state has denied members of Akhdām work opportunities outside sanitation work and how this unconstitutional policy has exploited the economic status of Akhdām by furnishing them with unfair wages for the degrading work they had to do. Suroor's testimony to such persecutions inside prisons and in the Yemeni public sphere exposes the extent to which dignity and freedom of choice and speech have been unfulfilled rights for this ethnic minority in Yemen. Members of Akhdām who have tried to protest and challenge the outright illegality of such racial practices and policies inside the homeland are routinely labelled as violators of law and dissidents of the ruling government. Throughout the novel, the author demonstrates how racial configurations and the state's exclusionary policies have turned Yemen,

[73] See Article 29 of the Yemeni constitution printed in English in 1994. The article clearly states that "work is a right, an honour, and a necessity for society's progress. Every citizen has the right to choose the appropriate work for himself within the law. No citizen can be compelled to do any work except within the law, and in which case it is to serve the common interest and be in return for a fair wage. The law shall regulate union activities and professional work, and the relationship between workers and employers." Similar rights are also included in articles (40) and (41) of the same constitution and can be found on http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/gov/con94.htm.

Akhdām's birth place, to a hostland that imposes its own rules of migration and social settlement.

**Race and National Identity**

Writing from the Arab world and North Africa presents an understanding of the African diaspora that changes the spatial boundaries of research on the Black Atlantic.[74] In *Black Taste... Black Smell*, the author uncovers a marginal history of interracial and cultural contacts between Arabs and Africans that dates back to 600 B.C. when the Kingdom of Abyssinia in Ethiopia invaded many Arab countries and ruled them for over two centuries. Throughout the narrative, Suroor asks his readers why the Akhdām (Arabs of African descent) are degraded and deprived of the civil rights other Yemenis have. Why are they strangers in their homelands? When Suroor and his white Yemeni friend (Abdulrahman) debate when and where Black people came from, Suroor convincingly shows how historical details used by the Yemeni government never give an accurate account; in fact these historical representations were mainly used to justify the degradation of Blacks in the Arab Gulf. The narrator explains this contested history in the following lines:

ففي جانب أصول الأخدام و تاريخهم تعدّدت الآراء حدّ التناقض. فمن قائل إنّ أصولهم
أفريقية ، وأنهم جاءوا إلى اليمن مع مجيء الأحباش الأثيوبيين لليمن عام 525 م، و قائل
بأن أصولهم يمنية ، و أنهم يُعتبرون من أحفاد الحِمْيرَيّين القدماء. وانفرد الفرنسي ت.
أرنود بالقول إنّ الأخدام من أصول هندية ، و ذلك في مقال نشر له عام 1850.

[74] By the Black Atlantic, I refer to a concept in African diaspora studies first proposed by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* in which he argues that the Black Atlantic culture was formed as a result of a relationship between African, American, Caribbean and British experiences that produce a new trajectory of modernity in the 21st century. Gilroy's emphasis on the Anglophone aspects of the Black Atlantic overlooks other ethnic forms of African diaspora writing beyond the transnational formations of the Atlantic.

هناك من ظنّ أن أصولهم تعود إلى خليط من الأثيوبيّين و الأريتريين والهنود والعرب.

> There is a conspiracy in history about the true origins of Akhdām. The first opinion states that they are Africans and they came to Yemen in 525 with the Ethiopian army and remained here. Another opinion states that they are Yemenis and are the grandsons of the ancient tribe of Hamyaar in Yemen. However, the French ethnographer T. Arnold contends that the Akhdām are descended from Indians in an article he published in 1850.
>
> There is also a proposition that Akhdām are in fact a mixed-ethnicity made up of Ethiopians, Eritreans, Indians and Arabs. (80)

By revisiting the contested origin that most Yemeni researchers have adapted in their study about Akhdām, al-Muqrī reveals how the question of social integration into Yemeni society is dependent on the search for historical legitimacy. Suroor scrutinizes the historians' attempt to define the biological and cultural genealogy of Akhdām by referring to their own version of history. Racial stereotypes, persecution and mythical misconceptions have created an intellectual gap between the complex reality of this group and ethnographic essentialization of their traditions and social history in the Arab world.

Furthermore, by questioning the validity of these historical accounts Suroor challenges the logic of historiography in understanding the socio-ethnic development of Black people in Yemen. The novel encapsulates not only a critique of racial hierarchy in the Arab world, but also genealogical research that simply overlooks the transregional and multiracial roots of Black Yemenis. Al-Muqrī's novel rejects the logic of genealogical and ethnographic study of Afro-Arabism and rather presents Black Arabs as dwellers of unfixed African-ness across national and

transnational borders. Suroor laments this ethno-genealogical pursuit to trace hybridized forms of Africans to specific ethnic or cultural roots:

" هذا كلام امبوا ... هم يقولون هذا.. يختلفوا إذا كنّا من أصول أفريقية أو يمنية. هل نحن من الإنس أم من الجنّ.. خلقنا الله أم الشيطان .. ليقولوا ما يقولوا .. ليقولوا إننا خلقنا أو جئنا حتى من جُحْر الحمار. هذا لايهمّ. لانهتمّ إذا كنا من أصل الذهب أم أصل الخرى. " (83)

'Shut up . . . . this is what the Amboo (white Yemenis) say . . . . They are always disputing if we are truly Africans or maybe Yemenis with rooted Blackness . . . . Are we humans or Djinns? Was it Allah (God) that created us or the Devil? . . . . Let them say whatever they want . . . . Even if they say that we are created or were summoned from the asses of donkeys . . . . It doesn't matter . . . . We don't care if we are descended from pure gold or if we were made out of shit.' (83)

Through Suroor's words, al-Muqrī posits a new discourse of Black emancipation undefined by national and postcolonial liberation movements in the Arab world. By the end of the story, Suroor decides to question any attempt to liberate Akhdām by use of nationalist ideology. Although Akhdām are considered Yemeni citizens, they are not given all the constitutional rights mainly due to cultural prejudice and misconceptions. Al-Muqrī demonstrates how the Yemen's nationalist discourse subverts the unique cultural and regional racial history Akhdām represent today. The author encapsulates this view through Suroor's questions: "Why can't we become free with the Black names and traits we have? Why do we have to adapt their slogans of freedom when we think of liberating ourselves? Don't we have the right to choose the color and taste of our liberation? (89). In these words, Suroor critiques the nationalist discourse that has predefined a Black liberation movement in the Arab world and North Africa. In his statements,

he always refers to the slogans of Bahja, a Black woman activist who lived in the South, and was an inspiration for all Black Yemenis since the 1970s. Bahja believed that the only way for the Akhdām to be free is by retaining their way of life, their traditions and social values: نشتي مَنْ يحترمنا كما نحن. يحترم ثقافتنا. يحترم لوننا. طعمنا الأسود . رائحتنا السوداء. / "We want someone to respect us the way we are, to value our culture and heritage, our color; the way we *taste Black and smell Black*" (88). Bahja's emancipatory call to the Yemeni government, echoed in the title of the novel, is the ultimate message the community of Akhdām intends to convey to the Yemeni society.

In *Black Taste …Black Smell* al-Muqrī depicts the adversities of Yemen's Black communities and the culture of exile and alienation caused by their dwelling-in-displacement inside the homeland. Al-Muqrī contends that the Akhdām community represents a rich and long-standing aspect of Yemen's national history, and therefore it should be given full social and constitutional rights. The author insightfully portrays how race configurations across peripheries in the Arab Gulf impact the formation of diaspora inside the homeland and further generate a trans-national re-routing of roots.

**Conclusion**

Diasporic writing from Yemen posits a revolutionized form of diaspora that is no longer defined by geographic mobility and border-crossing to the West. Enduring conditions of diaspora inside the homeland, the Akhdām community uses diasporic consciousness as an interventionist discourse against racial discrimination, forced labor migration and exclusive tribal affiliations. In *Black Taste … Black Smell*, al-Muqrī depicts the culture of racialization and migratory dwelling experienced by Yemen's Black others forcibly displaced between political prisons and miserable slums in their country. The racial attitudes of government officials, the persecution of Arabs of

African descent and the enclosed ownership of natural resources in the Arab Gulf turns the homeland into a fractured site of belonging. By employing the trope of "diasporic writing at home" as a political aesthetic in their writings, Yemeni writers traverse the strictures of Arab nation-states forging a stateless form of citizenship informed by the rerouting of roots and the formation of diasporic intermediaries across national borders. The emergence of Yemeni diasporic writing challenges literary critics in Arabic cultural studies to rethink the intersectionality between race and the formation of diaspora communities inside the homeland, and the way Black activism has become a significant aspect of the Middle East's contemporary literary revolutions.

Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate how the formation of diasporic consciousness is not necessarily bound by material movement and the crossing of borders from Third World countries to the Western metropolis. Racial configurations and internal displacement inside and within the national boundaries of Arab homelands also initiate a condition of diaspora that produces feelings of exile and estrangement similar to what immigrant communities experience away from their birth places. The recent explosion of revolts in the Arab world exposes the oppressive practices of autocratic regimes and nation-states as well as the politics of racial alienation inside Arab homelands. Al-Muqri's work invites diaspora critics and in particular scholars of Black cultural studies to rethink the relationship between racial persecution inside the homeland and migratory movement of African communities on a regional as well as a global scale.

**The Exclusionary Tunisian State and the Politics of Racial Estrangement in Kamāl al-Riyāḥī's الغوريلا / *Al Gorilla***

> In Tunisia, Blacks are neither a problem nor a taboo. At the most, a secret minority; a social sub-category, which, faced with insults, suppresses its rebellion like a scandal is hidden in silence and shame. However, when Tunisians speak of an Ivoirian or a Malian, they refer to him as an "African." Aren't we ourselves Africans? What is the meaning of this self-exclusion by this verb?
>
> *Jeune Afrique, Être Noire en Tunisie /Being Black in Tunisia*

This chapter explores the dynamics and politics of ethno-racial marginalization of North-African Arabs in Tunisia and the way racialization has created sentiments of rootlessness that render Black Tunisians strangers in their homeland. The main focus of this chapter is the work of the Tunisian novelist Kamāl al- Riyāḥi and his critique of governmental corruption and racial discrimination against North African Arab communities living in rural areas. As a novelist, al-Riyāḥi is interested in the social, economic, and racial conditions that have sparked the explosion of the Tunisian revolution against the rule of Bin Ali in January 2011. In his novel, *Al Gorilla* [75] al- Riyāḥi depicts the various forms of hardships young Tunisians face on daily basis due to dehumanizing state policies and racial discrimination against North-African Arabs in major Tunisian cities. By examining the dynamics of internal exile and alienation in the Arab world, this chapter demonstrates how contemporary Arabic literature presents diaspora as an empowering political aesthetic not only for the Arab migrant overseas but also for the Arab intellectual at home.

[75] The title of the Tunisian novel is written in English in two different ways: *Al Gorilla* and *al-Ghūrīlā***.** I will use the first one (*Al Gorilla)* in my discussion and analysis in this chapter.

Published in 2011, al- Riyāḥi's novel demonstrates how racial and institutional policies have formed an internal revolt for the marginal in North Africa by showing us how diasporic sentiments generate a political aesthetic that challenges the social and economic disparities imposed by autocratic regimes, thus forging transregional forms of Afro-Arab identity. By examining the dynamics of internal exile and racialization in Tunisia, I claim that diasporic consciousness is employed today as a regional political aesthetic against autocratic regimes, not only for the Arab migrant overseas, but also for marginalized Arabs at home. Poverty, governmental corruption, and racial discrimination against North African Arab communities in Tunisia are some of the main incentives that initiated the recent wave of revolt in the Arab world and North Africa.

In this chapter, I argue that diasporic consciousness constitutes a significant aspect of the uprisings that have sparked a civic revolt against the former Tunisian president, *Zine* El Abidine Ben Ali and his autocratic state. The Tunisian novel points an overlooked relationship between the persecution of Black Tunisians and illegitimate children living in rural areas often subjugated by police tyrants, and the development of civic resilience. Put differently, regional displacement, racism and state apparatus reveal how diasporic communities in Tunisia are formed against the backdrops of state oppression and racial marginalization. In *Al Gorilla*, al- Riyāḥi reveals the social and racial injustice of the Tunisian state by revisiting the political incidents that led to the overthrow of the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, who is considered the founder of the Tunisian modern state.[76]

[76] Habib Bourguiba (3 August 1903 – 6 April 2000) was a Tunisian statesman and the first President of the Republic of Tunisia from 1957 to 1987. Bourguiba worked as a lawyer in France in the 1920s and then returned to Tunisia and became active in the country's nationalist movement. In 1934, he co-founded *The Neo Destour* that spearheaded the Tunisian movement for independence. After being arrested and exiled several times by the occupying French protectorate, he decided to both negotiate and put pressure on the Fourth Republic to put forward his nationalist agenda. Following the country's independence on 20 March 1956, Bourguiba put an end to the monarchy, declared

**Kamāl al- Riyāḥi and Tunisia's Revolutionary Writing**

Born in the village of Al Manafikh in 1974, Kamāl al- Riyāḥi is a popular Tunisian novelist and currently teaches at the Institute of Languages in Tunisia. Al- Riyāḥi holds a higher graduate degree in modern criticism and Arabic literary studies. He also worked as an editor for Tunisian newspapers and directed a number of programs for local television. In 2005, he was awarded a national prize in Cairo for the best short story in Arabic. Al- Riyāḥi also received the Golden Kumar Prize in 2007 for his novel, *Scalpel*. His name has been mentioned in many literary competitions, and he was one of the winners of Lebanese Competition 39 in 2009. Al-Riyāḥi's writings, especially his short stories, have been translated into a number of languages, notably French, Italian, Hebrew and English. Because it is a recently published literary work, al-Riyāḥi's novel, *Al Gorilla*, has not been translated yet.[77]

Al- Riyāḥi's literary career began while he was a college student with the publication of two collections of short stories in 1999 and 2001.[78] As a young writer and literary critic, al-Riyāḥi has been recently described as one of Tunisia's best writers. In 2009, he was chosen as one the distinguished young Arab authors in the Beirut Hay Festival. In his literary works, al-Riyāḥi is conspicuously interested in the social, economic, and racial disparities of rural communities in Tunisia. Growing up in the countryside of Tunis, al-Riyāḥi contends that the "country" and the "city" shouldn't be viewed as complete opposites or two antithetical social

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the republic of which he served as first president on 25 July 1957 and then focused on building a modern Tunisian state. For more, see Norma Salem, *Habib Bourguiba: Islam and the Creation of Tunisia*.

[77] In this chapter, I include the original Arabic text followed by my translation.

[78] The first two collections of short stories the author published early on in his career are: *Gulls of Memory* / نوارس الذّاكرة(1999) and *He Stole My Face* / وسرق وجهي (2001).

realities, but rather as a dynamic system of change and transformation that disrupts the centrality of culture and political oppression. By occupying various low-paying jobs (as a farmer, a lizard hunter, a trafficker of clothes from Morocco and a bookseller), al- Riyāḥi learned about a rich array of social conditions for various segments of the Tunisian society. His childhood experience in both rural and urban settings in Tunisia is clearly expressed in his views about the conditions of minorities, especially Black Tunisians, and the way they are marginalized and persecuted by cultural and institutional practices. The proletarian views al- Riyāḥi encapsulates in his novels and short stories expose the prevailing social and racial injustices and further calls for a revolution against the exploitive and discriminatory attitudes of the Tunisian state. Racism is one the central themes that al- Riyāḥi explores in his writings. In an interview conducted by Beirut 39 titled "White Skin, Black Mask," al- Riyāḥi states:

> We still curse each other using "you're Jewish" or "you're Kurdish", this is also racial and religious discrimination. Watch any Egyptian sitcom and tell me about the image of the Sudanese character. Listen to the Tunisian jokes about the Libyans or jokes about people from Hums in Greater Syria. Listen to the debates regarding noble families and family lineage . . . . even horses now are divided between what is considered "noble" and what is not. We are racist to the bone. Attempting to hide or silence this fact will not help with the matter because we are a sick society which still suffers from the complexes of color and race. (Hammad)[79]

[79] Sousan Hammad conducted this interview with the author in Arabic and later translated it into English. The translation from Arabic to English was provided by *Beirut 39*.

Through his critique of racial and ethnic marginalization in Tunisia, al- Riyāḥi aims to uncover the social and cultural ideologies that have permeated such misrepresentations and stereotypes in the Arab world and North Africa. Although Tunisia has a relatively high rate of literacy in comparison to other Arab countries, racial prejudice still remains a major concern for various Tunisian minorities. A large number of Black Tunisians have no access to education and limited access to social services. By exposing the struggles of Arab minorities in Tunisia, al- Riyāḥi illustrates how racial disparities have created a sense of solidarity between different races in Tunisia. In the same interview mentioned earlier, al- Riyāḥi informs his interviewer that "Negro was the term people called my Black grandfather. I consider myself as someone of a Negro descent, although I am not Black" (Hammod). Al-Riyāḥi's use of the word "Negro" to describe how his grandfather was racially labelled implies an undeniable history of interracial historical relationship between Arabs and Africans, a fact that the majority of white Tunisians will question.

Al- Riyāḥi represents a new phase of Tunisian literature that is mainly concerned with the socio-economic, psychological and racial conditions of ethnic groups in the Arab world and North Africa. Unlike the earlier generations of Tunisian writers whose major concern was how to forge a national consciousness to bring an end to French colonial rule in North African, al-Riyāḥi focuses on new structures of social realism that expand the cultural, territorial, and racial demarcations of Tunisia society. The paradigmatic shift in Tunisian literature from the discourse of nationalism and anticolonial liberation against colonial rule to concerns about internal exile, diaspora and the emergence of Black activism in North Africa registers an aesthetic revolution that uses literature as a tool to bring about cultural and political change.

**Saleh's Revolt and the Symbolism of the Tunisian Clock Tower**

In *Al Gorilla,* al- Riyāḥi depicts the internal turbulence of Saleh and his decision to climb the clock tower in the capital of Tunisia to announce his revolt to the public. At the beginning of the novel, al- Riyāḥi explains how the clock tower is a symbol of the coup carried out by General Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali against President Habib Bourguiba. The novel begins with the social status of Bourguiba's statue, the clock tower of November 1987, and finally the statue of a famous North African thinker and historiographer, Ibn Khaldun, in an attempt to show the entangled relationship between politics, economics and social development in Tunisia.

The author illustrates how these significant incidents in Tunisian history are now witnessed today under the used-to-be advocates of liberation and civil equity in the oppressive government of Habib Bourguiba. Saleh (later named Gorilla) the protagonist in this novel who is also known as the Black man, the outcast and dweller of alleys turns out to be one of the illegitimate children / لقيط of the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba.[80] As an Arab-North African, Saleh presents the despair and fate of Tunisia's Black communities and the way they struggle to have dignity and freedom. Saleh's servitude to the Tunisian state and his co-opted participation in the affairs of governmental corruption turns him into an undignified object on the streets of Tunisian cities.

Al- Riyāḥi presents Saleh as a tragic hero to further show how Saleh's rise and fall from the clock tower marks the start of the Tunisian revolution against the government of Ben Ali and his corrupted regime. The novel centers around the character Saleh, a Black Tunisian deprived of civic rights and national identity due to state corruption and exclusionary practices against Black

[80] The Arabic word لقيط refers to an abandoned child or a child born out of wedlock.

minorities in Tunisia. The author introduces his readers to a group of people ravaged by political tyranny, racism and state corruption in Tunisia.

*Al Gorilla* begins by giving a dramatic depiction of the main character, Saleh, revolting against the Tunisian government by climbing the famous clock tower next to the tomb of the former Tunisian president, Habib Bourguiba. While Saleh is hanging onto the famous clock tower, the author reveals important details about Saleh. Due to his dark skin color, Saleh remains a long time in the orphanage before he is adopted by a man called Iyad and his wife Sasiya. Through the representation of Saleh, al- Riyāḥi exposes the fate of the abandoned and exiled children of the Tunisian society, who were called "children of Bourguiba," a problematic designation that aims to show how the former Tunisian leader embraced all segments of the Tunisian society. To enact revenge against this oppressive social label and exclusionary practices against minorities in Tunisia, Saleh fires at Bourguiba's tomb and climbs the clock tower to announce his revolt to all Tunisians. This act of social rebellion makes Saleh a wanted criminal in the eyes of the security forces, who invent serious charges against him and portray him as a Black rebel working for a terrorist organization.

From the moment Saleh climbs the clock tower to the minute he falls dead, al- Riyāḥi uncovers a world of social relations torn by political corruption and state violence against North Africans and Black minorities in Tunisia. In addition to the character of Saleh, the author narrates the stories of other characters including: Surduck, a French-educated intellectual who later becomes a Muslim fundamentalist; Al Jatt was a drug dealer who illegally migrated to Italy and was imprisoned there. Another important character in the novel is Ali Kalab, a security officer who is in charge of tracking Saleh and getting him down from the clock tower. The Tunisian author divides his novel into incidents that reveal the historical underpinnings of revolt

in Tunisia and how these incidents reveal suppressed realities of Black Tunisians in their country. Al- Riyāḥi chooses the theme of revolt as the starting point of his narrative and as a way to expose the story of a Black man exiled inside his homeland:

> عند الساعة الواحدة بعد الظهر تقريباً، كانت الريح تدحرج علبة جعة منهوبة الروح في الشارع المقفر. سكون كبير يصل قوس بابْ بْحَرْ ببرج الساعة العملاقة عند تقاطع شارع محمد الخامس وشارع الحبيب بورقيبة. العاصمة الخالية يشوّش سكونَها مهتوهها الشهير، رجل من ظنون يطوف بالساعة طوافه الأخير، قبل أن يأخذ في إبعاد النّاس و تحذيرهم من سمّ العقارب العالية ، ثم يبدأ برجم أعدائه بالحجارة و الحديد والبيوت والأشجار و الغربان و التيوس. (7)

> At about one o'clock in the afternoon, the wind was rolling a spiritless beer can in a desolate street. A noticeable quietness prevailed around the entrance of a huge clock at the intersection of Mohammed the Fifth Avenue and Bourguiba Street. The empty capital is disrupted by its famous lunatic, a man of doubts offering his last roaming of the clock before he warns the public about the venom of the clock's highly-elevated pointers and begins to pelt his enemies with stones and iron, houses and trees, crows and goats. (7)

The novel begins by calling the reader's attention to Saleh, an ordinary young man, who climbs up the clock tower at the intersection of Boulevard Mohammed V and Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis to announce his revolt. People gather around the tower to observe, state forces arrive at the scene and force Saleh to come down by electrifying him. The killing of Saleh at the top of the clock tower marks the beginning of the Tunisian revolution which led to the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 24, 2011. The unjustified killing of Saleh sparks civic protests and, like Saleh more people fall dead in the face of violent police forces. Through his depiction of Saleh's act of revolt, al- Riyāḥi attempts to dig deep into a society torn

by tyranny, state oppression and marginalization. 9Saleh's story discloses how Ben Ali's government has imposed an autocratic system that has cultivated ignorance, injustice and racial subjugation in Tunisia. For Saleh, the clock tower symbolizes the government's power and control over the life of Tunisians. The movement of people, their work schedule and daily life is determined by the clock's pointers. Saleh climbs to the top of the tower to disrupt this predetermined reality for Tunisians.

The clock tower also signifies the coup carried out by Ben Ali, former President against Habib Bourguiba. Before the clock tower was erected there was a green statue for the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba. After the coup Bourguiba's statue was replaced by this giant clock tower to commemorate Ben Ali's used-to-be liberation movement. The replacement of the statute with the clock tower shows the fragile and unstable condition of Tunisia's national identity. By describing this change, al- Riyāḥi demonstrates to his readers how the clock tower lacked a clear national identity:

استبدلت السّاعة بأخرى سويسرية أو إنكليزية أو أمريكية، أخبار متضاربة حول جنسية الساعة الجديدة وجذعها البرونزي المزيّن على طريقة الرقش العربي. كلام بلا دليل و لا برهان عن ساعة مجهولة النسب غرست في قلب المدينة الاهية بأبنائها. لا أثر للزعيم الذي رُحّل تمثاله إلى ((حلق الوادي)) ليظل ينظر إلى البحر المر. (10-9)

> The clock was replaced by a Swiss one or English or American. There are conflicting news about the nationality of the new clock and its bronze trunk decorated with Arabic art designs. There is speech without evidence or proof about an unknown clock that was planted in the heart of the city distracted by its dwellers. There is no trace of the leader, whose statue was uprooted and discarded nearby a valley cliff to continue looking at the sour sea. (9-10)

The clock tower symbolizes a national identity defined by Western clock brands and imposed on the Tunisian soil. No one knows the true origin of the clock and why it has become an important symbol of the Tunisian government. Although the clock has traditional Arabic art engravings on its outside, the internal parts have an unidentified element in them. Many Tunisians are not aware of why the clock has been changed so many times. Tampering with the clock leads to undesirable repercussions. Saleh's ability to climb the tower registers a bold move to challenge Ben Ali's rule and further illustrates an attempt to break the barrier of fear most Tunisians have towards the government and police forces.

Al- Riyāḥi dramatizes this atmosphere of fear and state manipulation by referring to the Tunisian capital's prevailing "quietness" to highlight how Saleh, a marginalized Black Tunisian, disrupts this oppressive atmosphere in order to challenge it and warn Tunisians about "the venom of the highly elevated clock's pointers" (7). For Saleh, the clock pointers contain a deadly substance that have suppressed the freedom and dignity of Tunisians. The author uses the Arabic word "سمّ العقارب", which literally translates as scorpion venom, to highlight a parallel between the sharp edges of the clock's pointers and scorpion's venomous tail. Saleh believes that the Tunisian government, symbolized by "the highly-elevated clock pointers," has poisoned the freedom and liberty of Tunisian people. Al- Riyāḥi describes the city dwellers as "a spiritless beer can" that is easily drifted and dragged by the powerful wind of the Tunisian state. The metaphorical language the author uses in the first few lines of the novel calls attention to the vulnerability of the Tunisian people and their inability to remember how advocates for liberation have become oppressors.

Also, by choosing the clock tower as a site of civic revolt, al- Riyāḥi unravels the hypocrisy and fragility of the liberation movement that was initiated by President Ben Ali

against the rule of Habib Bourguiba on November 7, 1987. Since the start of Ben Ali's rule the clock tower became a signifier of state domination and political power despite the civic history the place has encompassed in the last three decades. The local police consider any attempt to get closer to the clock tower as a threat:

> الصعود إلى أعلى الساعة جرم كبير ومعصية لا تُغتفر وما حدث يومها مسألة تمسُّ الأمن، والشرطة في مأزق. كيف يمكن أن تسيطر على الأمر والفضيحة تحدثُ أمام الجميع: أهالي وأجانب والبلاد في عزِّ الموسم السياحي؟ (10)
>
> Climbing the clock tower is considered a great violation and an unforgettable sin. What happened that day is a matter that concerns national security and the local authorities are in trouble. How can you control this mess and this scandal is taking place in front of everyone including locals and visitors in the midst of the summer season? (10)

To emphasize the intensity of state control in Tunisia, al- Riyāḥi portrays how the Tunisian government uses the discourse of religion in its oppressive practices. Climbing the tower is described as a "جرم كبير ومعصية لا تُغتفر"/ "great violation and an unforgettable sin" that causes a threat to national security and more importantly locals and visitors and tourists. The author scrutinizes how the police forces are more concerned about losing their autocratic image and manipulative power in front of locals and outsiders than finding out why Saleh decided to protest. The authorities make no distinction between locals and outsiders as far as the act of violation and what it means to the general public. Al- Riyāḥi also criticizes the way the police forces have camouflaged their autocratic practices by assuming that locals will be shocked to see this act of resistance. The author is interested in showing how like tourists, local Tunisians are also blinded to the social and psychological conditions that led to Saleh's revolt. There is a

certain reality that the city seems to masquerade by the presence of police forces and national monuments such as the clock tower and Bourguiba's graveyard. Unlike other Tunisians, Saleh has a deep understanding of oppressive social and institutional practices:

أشياء لا يراها إلا هو، يتوهّم أنه يلتقطها من القاعدة الرخامية لساعة الفولاذ المتبرجة كعاهر في آخر سنوات النضال.(7)

> There are certain things that no one else can see except him [Saleh]. These things are reflected on the marble base for the ornamented steel clock. He could see these realities like a prostitute in the last years of struggle. (7)

Saleh presents a critical understanding of the social dynamics that often cover over the racial, political and economic conditions of minorities in Tunisia. The "things" that Saleh could see as a marginalized Black Tunisian are not limited to his orphanage experience the fact that he doesn't know his parents, but more precisely the curses of color (being a Black Tunisian) and the naming that followed Saleh since his childhood. The curse of color, his Black skin, turned Saleh to an undesired child in the orphanage. His adoption was only possible when the Tunisian couple had no other option but to take him. The second curse is no longer a source of pride. For Saleh, the label "son of Bourguiba" is in fact a social description that is full of contradictions and racial stereotypes. To be called "son of Bourguiba" means to show a linkage to Bourguiba, but at the same time to give up one's cultural and ethnic individuality. When the children of the village used to describe Saleh as "son of Bourguiba," Saheh used to smile in a way that is identical to Bourguiba's smile. However, Saleh never smiled again upon being called a son of bitch, batard (bastard in English), and a baby chic. The use of these degrading keywords would make Saleh envision the teeth of Bourguiba like a beast wanting to demolish his bone. As a Black Tunisian,

Saleh finds in Bourguiba's label an attempt to suppress the unique cultural and ethnic diversity of many North African ethnic groups represent.

**Habib Bourguiba and Exclusive Inclusiveness**

In *Al Gorilla,* al- Riyāḥi shows Saleh's revolt against the name "children of Bourguiba" aims to expose the exclusive nature of Bourguiba's attempt to embrace all the social segments of Tunisia. Saleh sees the naming "children of Bourguiba" as an exclusionary tool that the Tunisian state uses in the name of national inclusivity in order to obscure the North African roots of many ethnic groups in Tunisia.

لم يحب بورقيبه يوماً لكنه تحول إلى ضرورة. كان هدفه وملاذه و عدوّه و ذريعته لارتكاب أي شيء. ينام اليوم هادئاً بينما الضجيج يمزق الغوريلا. عمل المستحيل حتى يكون بجانبه. يحرسه من العفاريت ومن الديدان والذكريات. بدلة نظامية. لم تكن هناك طريق أخرى إليه غير تلك البدلة الزرقاء. حارساً للمرقد. كان يجب أن ينفرد به وحيداً. وجهاً لوجه. الغوريلا الذي أنجبه الإله الأبيض ذو العينين الزرقاوين.

> He [Gorilla] never liked Bourguiba, but it was a necessity because Bourguiba was his goal, his final destination, his foe and a pretext to commit anything. Bourguiba sleeps peacefully in his tomb while Gorilla is disturbed. He did the impossible to be close to Bourguiba in order to protect him from memories, worms and the supernatural. An official uniform. There was no other way to reach him other than that uniform. A guard to the shrine. He wanted to confront him alone, face to face. Gorilla, the one begotten by the blue-eyed white god. (12-13)

Saleh's interest in becoming a guard of Bourguiba's shrine was mainly driven by a desire to find out what exactly defines Bourguiba's interest in embracing all the foundling children of Tunisia.

Saleh defines himself by stating that "I am his child, his lonely child, come to me, come to console me" (13). Through the character of Saleh, al- Riyāḥi exposes the plight of becoming a foundling child in Tunisia and how dark skin makes the homeland an alien place for Tunisian minorities. Saleh describes himself living in "a dark grave of a foreign land" (13), a feeling of resentment that is mainly informed by the way the Tunisian state treats orphans. The novel reveals how the designation "children of Bourguiba" forges feelings of estrangement and disorientation rather than social acceptance. Saleh sees his living in Tunisia as a form of exile that makes him lonely, alienated and disenfranchised. As one of the children of Bourguiba, Saleh discovers that he doesn't have any civic rights as a Tunisian:

> يحاول أن يصرخ صرخته القديمة ، تخونه كفاه ، تنهالان على صدره كجثتين، تنهار صورة الغوريلا ليتصاغر إلى قرد منسيّ في الصحراء يبحث عن شجر أو غصن أو حبل أو كوبر تلدغه حتى ينهى عذابه.
>
> He tries to shout his old shout. But his shoulders betray him and collapse like two corpses. The image of Gorilla diminished to become a forgotten monkey in the desert looking for trees or trunks or a rope or copra to bite him in order end his suffering. (14)

As a minority, Saleh struggles to speak against all the social and cultural conventions that have turned him to a "forgotten monkey." Saleh sees Bourguiba as the embodiment and main source of racial and cultural subjugation in Tunisia. Shooting Bourguiba's graveyard and revolting on top of the clock tower symbolizes Saleh's attempt to demolish Tunisia's oppressive social practices against minority groups. Saleh's struggle is not limited to racial subjugation and social exile, but more precisely suggests the way his life is dominated by the politics of racial subjugation.

To demonstrate state corruption and the atrocity of militia loyal to the ruling party, al-Riyāḥi includes the character of Ali Kalab / علی کلاب, a tyrant police officer appointed by the Tunisian ruling party in order to protect their illegal activities and silence any social criticism against the government. The novel illustrates how the local police functions as a militia to oppress political opposition and instigate horror in the public sphere. Al- Riyāḥi describes Ali Kalab as "the king of back streets and all the ruins. No ant can move without his commands" (19). The novel exposes not only the atrocities of local police against ethnic minorities, but also shows the level of corruption which had turned police to state gangs and militia. Ali Kalab not only works to maintain the safety and security of certain districts in the capital, but he also designates territorial boundaries and borderlines under his police control. This territorial demarcation inside the city includes public and general places such as local markets, parking garages and back streets. The militia forces present themselves in the name of law and legality. However, they also exploit the terrible economic conditions of low-income Tunisians and coerce them to feel estranged and alienated inside the homeland. Ali Kalab not only chases thieves and criminals, but he also coerces them to bribe local police forces.

The first encounter between Gorilla and the police force in a parking garage where Gorilla was working becomes the main source of dispute between the two. Gorilla tells the local police that "I am not going to pay anything. What I get is from my own hard work" (18). Gorilla presents a segment of Tunisian society persecuted by local authorities and militia forces loyal to the ruling party. The force of local police is insinuated through the dissemination of horror and limitless persecution of any dissidents in the country:

فهم علي كلاب أن خصمه هذه المرة عنيد ولا يخاف، لكن عزرائيل الكلاب الذي روّع شطار ((الجبل الأحمر)) و ((حي الزهور)) وروض مجرمي ((الكبارية)) و ((حي النسيم)) و((الملاسين)) لن ينهزم أمام مجهول أسود و لن يتنازل عن إتاوة سوق الجمعة. الكل يعلم أنه قادر على كل شيء وأن في إمكانه أنياتي بأي كان ولو من بطن الحوت (19)

Ali Kalab understood that this time his opponent is a stubborn person. But the angel of death {Ali Kalab} who frightened the wittiest in ((Red Mountain)) and ((Roses neighborhood)) and tamed the criminals of ((night clubs)) and ((Naseem district)) and ((Almlasin)) will not be defeated in front of an anonymous Black and will not stop going to the Friday Market. Everyone knows that he is capable of everything and that he can catch anyone even from the belly of the whale. (19)

As a representative of a corrupt authoritarian institution, Ali Kalab believes that he has the right to control the income of Tunisian workers on the streets of the capital by forcibly taking a percentage of their daily wages. Local police are not present to serve the Tunisian people, but rather to ensure the perpetual subjugation of individuals and to maintain this coercive practice to solicit money and briberies from people. As the novel shows, Tunisian workers are appointed by local police to certain positions in order to serve the needs and interest of local authority. In one of the local markets, Ali Kalab appointed Rasheed Bukha as a guard to a parking guard. Bukha had no option but to be loyal to his master by obeying all the commands and paying his dues on time, a practice that extended the authoritative and territorial dominion of Ali Kalab into every corner of the Tunisian capital. Discrimination against Black Tunisians and minority workers in the country is a major issue in al- Riyāḥi's novel. The author illustrates the dynamics of police

militia and the way this corrupt system has produced a violent and dehumanized social atmosphere among ethnic minorities themselves. After becoming loyal to Ali Kalab and state police, Bukha becomes a replication of Ali Kalab and persecutes any dissidents in the neighborhood:

> بوخا قادر، بفضل علي كلاب، على أن يدير الملاسين كلها. يحيي و يميت. يغني و يفقر ، إله صغير في فلك إله أكبر اسمه علي كلاب. وهو يعلم أن قدرته محدودة وهي مثل ؛ شيئ يشبه العرش وليس بعرش. عهد الحماية لاأكثر الاستقلال الذاتي أو حكم البايات ولاأقل. (21)
>
> Bukha has the ability, because of Ali Kalab, to manage all the affairs of *Al Malaseen*.[81] He can bring to life and cause death. He gives sustenance and brings forth poverty. A small deity in the orbit of a larger god named Ali Kalab. He knows that his capacity is limited, it's like independence or the rule of Beys.[82] Something that looks like a throne and not a throne. It's the period of protection no more or less. (21)

To demonstrate the venality of local authorities, al- Riyāḥi presents Bukha as an unofficial replication of Ali Kalab's autocratic control over some of the major neighborhoods in the Tunisian capital. Although Bukha doesn't have any official position or rank with the Tunisian government, he is used as a spying eye to exert and forcibly protect the interest of the police forces. Through Bukha's character, al- Riyāḥi discloses the varying levels of state corruption in

[81] *Malaseen* / الملاسين is the name of a dangerous neighborhood in the capital Tunis.

[82] The word Bey / باي in Tunisian Arabic refers to the head of the state or ruler during colonization. This political role came to an end by the Tunisian constitution in 1957 after Tunisia gained full independence from France.

Tunisia. By working under the protection of Ali Kalab, Bukha becomes a source of power entitled to decide the life and death of others as well as their economic conditions. It is in Bukha's hands to make people rich or poor. For Saleh, Bukha represents a smaller oppressive system, a deity, shielded by a larger and stronger center of power called Ali Kalab. Bukha knows that his limited power and control; however the rule of Beys, which Tunisia still uses today in its political system, generates an absolute power that enables Bukha to have control over many areas in the capital. Influenced by the ruling system of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, "Tunisian Beys" were the monarchs that ruled the country until the collapse of the Husainid Dynasty in 1957.[83] Saleh critiques how the new Republic of Tunisia has failed to implement the objectives of its independence from the Ottomans and the French. Al- Riyāḥi compares the Bey system to the dynamics of neocolonialism in an attempt to show how colonies after independence become protectorates that promote colonial power through political control and economic hegemony.

**Black Tunisians and Racial Discrimination**

Race is a central theme in al- Riyāḥi's novel. Discrimination against Blacks and ethnic minorities in Tunisia is exposed in relation to the way the ruling government of Ben Ali has persecuted Black Tunisians. In his novel, al- Riyāḥi exposes the violence of racial stereotyping that the local police employ as a mechanism of legal persecution against dark-skinned Tunisians. In addition to political marginalization and lack of civic equality, dark-skinned Tunisians are

[83] The Husainid or Ḥusaynid Dynasty, originally of Cretan-Turkish origin, came to power under Al-Husayn I ibn Ali at-Turki on July 15, 1705, replacing the Muradid Dynasty. For most of their dynasty, the Husainids ruled with the title of Bey. The Husainids ruled under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire until May 12, 1881, when Muhammad III as-Sadiq signed the Treaty of Bardo and the Beylik of Tunis came under the control of France as a protectorate. In 1957, Prime Minister Habib Bourguiba impeached the Husainid dynasty and declared the establishment of the Republic of Tunisia. For more information about the Ḥusaynid dynasty, see *Encyclopedia Britannica* and Kenneth Perkins, *A History of Modern Tunisia*.

perceived as a threat to the stability and security of the Tunisian state. Prejudice against Black Tunisians is not only visible in legal and institutional practices, but is also expressed in social beliefs that date back to the time when slavery was practiced in many parts of North Africa.

Although slavery ended in Tunisia as early as 1846, social and political marginalization of Black Tunisians has taken on new forms of racialization mostly visible in social and historical inaccuracies.[84] Afifa Ltifi asserts that the persistence of racial attitudes towards Black Tunisians is perpetuated through the use of stigmatizing racist terminology in which "Black Tunisians in the north are sometimes confused with sub-Saharan Africans, who are viewed as lower class by many non-Black Tunisians" (1). The use of Arabic words such as *abeed /* عبيد , Arabic for slaves, and *atig /* عتيق to describe a freed slave as parts of their last names on identity cards is one of the ways by which Black minorities continue to be persecuted after the legal abolition of slavery in Tunisia. Al- Riyāḥi's narrative demonstrates how local police perceive the presence of Black Tunisians as a source of barbarism and backwardness that contradicts the objectives of the modern nation –state. Even before Saleh was identified as a suspect in the murder of Bukha, local authorities identify skin color, particularly Blackness, as a signifier of criminality and transgression in the Tunisian capital. The chief of local police presumes that Blacks are the main source of insecurity and social chaos. The narrator describes how Blacks become racially criminalized by police forces:

> قيل إن من طعن بوخا رجل أسود غريب فرّبعدها عبر سكة القطار. قفزت صورة الغوريلا إلى علي كلاب من جديد. وأقسم أن يوقع به. فراح يطارد السود في كل زقاق و في كل سوق. عندما أخبروه بقصة الرجل الأسود المعتصم فوق الساعة، قطع إجازته في طبرقة وطار بسيارته نحو العاصمة. (21)

[84]See Afifa Ltifi "Never Keep Silent: Tunisia Confronts Racism." Ltifi contends that Tunisia is considered to be the first Arab country to end slavery in 1846, but there is still a continuation of racial attitudes in which Black Tunisians are perceived as the descents of North African and sub-Saharan slaves.

> It was said that a strange Black man stabbed Bukha and fled via the train trail. At that moment the image of Gorilla is recalled by Ali Kalab. And from that moment Kalab swore to trap him and to chase Blacks in every alley and market. When they told him the story of the Black man protesting on top of the clock tower, Ali Kalab terminated his vacation in *Tabraka* and rushed into the capital. (21)

The use of the words "Black" and "strange" here elucidates not only the racial classification maintained by the state against dark-skinned Tunisians who are often described as "foreigners" and "outsiders", but also shows how the local police thrive on the business of racial oppression. The persecution of Blacks in the novel sheds light on the way racism is employed as a state policy that renders Black Tunisians unwelcomed exiles in their homeland. By describing Saleh as a strange Black man, the narrator points to a misconceived historical fact towards ethnic minorities in Tunisia. As an illegitimate child, Saleh is described by the orphanage officials as one of the "Children of Bourguiba," a label used to show how Bourguiba's government and the modern Tunisian state is inclusive of all Tunisians, and sympathetic to ethnic and racial differences. This state designation, however appears to be a lie that the state uses to masquerade its marginalization and discriminatory attitudes towards Black Tunisians.

As a representative of the Tunisia state, Ali Kalab considers it a national duty to eradicate all Blacks by chasing them in every corner of Tunis. This authoritative attitude is clearly manifested in Kalab's decision to terminate his vacation in order to go back to the capital and deal with Saleh's publicized revolt on the clock tower.

By exposing these racial disparities throughout the narrative, al- Riyāḥi reveals an important aspect of the recent Tunisian revolution: that is, how racial marginalization and

autocratic state policies forge a diasporic sentiment for minorities inside the homeland. Today over eighteen percent of the Tunisian population faces hurdles of inequality, social marginalization and lack of civic liberty. Black Tunisians are treated as "second-citizens" with limited access to higher education and political participation in the affairs of their country. The majority of Tunisians believe dark-skinned Tunisians are the grandsons of African slaves who have migrated to many parts of the Muslim world. Even though Tunisia was the first Muslim country that abolished slavery as early as 1846, the legacy of discrimination persisted in terms of social and cultural prejudices towards dark-skinned Tunisians.[85] In an interview conducted by Al Jazeera English, Abdelhamid Largueche explains: "The first fallacy that we have to debunk is that of considering all Tunisian Blacks as slave descendants . . . . With colonisation the idea of a Black sub-Saharan Africa and white North Africa was constructed. The advent of decolonisation did not help to eliminate this division" (quoted in Ltifi 1-2). This historical fallacy about slavery and Black Tunisians has obscured how the *Bey* /Monarch system and the Tunisian government contributed to the belief that there is an illegitimate existence of Black communities in Tunisia.

In *Al Gorilla,* al- Riyāḥi illustrates how the legacy of this historical fallacy has perpetuated the persecution of Black Tunisians. Saleh expresses his concerns about the way the history of slavery in North Africa is used as a pretext for racial subjugation of Black Tunisians. The racial attitudes of the local authorities force Saleh to question his genealogical roots and whether or not he is a descendant of an ethnic tribe in Africa. The majority of Tunisians believe that slavery is the main reason why there are Black Arabs in the northern and southern parts of Tunisia. The narrator scrutinizes this historical misconception:

[85] For more, see Abdelhamid Larguèche, "The Abolition of Slavery in Tunisia: Towards a History of Black Community" in Marcel Dorigny's book, *The Abolitions of Slavery: From L'eger F'elcit'e Sonthonax to Victor*.

كم مرة فكر في أن سواده يشي بأنه أحد أحفاد الزنوج ، فهو بلا شك منحدر من أحد بلدان أفريقيا أو ربما كان جده من العبيد الذين حرّرهم الباي، لعنة الله على إرثه، أحياناً كان يخمن أنه من أصول قبائل "الأشولي" أو "الماساي". قامته الطويلة وشعره الاحرش يدعمان هذه الفرضية حتى تكاد تنبُت عنده حقيقة. عشقه لكرة القدم الأفريقية و حُلمه الذي يرافقه منذ طفولته ، حلم الركض حافياًعلى أرض مشققة كوجه ورثه عن أم لم يعرفها ، المغص الي ينتابه وهو يتابع أنباء مجازر التوتسي و الهوتو وفظائع دارفور ومشاهد الجوع في إثيوبيا والتشاد. كل ذلك يؤكد أن له علاقة. هل كانت جيناته تنادي أصولها؟ (59)

> He thought many times that his Blackness indicates that he is one of the grandsons of Negroes. He is undoubtedly a descendant from Africa or perhaps his grandfather is one of the slaves the Bey has freed. May Allah curse his legacy. Sometimes, he would guess that he belongs to the tribe of "Acholi" or "Maasai."[86] His long stature and curly hair support this hypothesis until almost he finds it truth. His passion for African football and his dream since childhood. The dream of running barefoot on a cracked land as a face inherited from a mother he did not know. The stomachache that comes when he watches the news of the massacres of Tutsi and Hutu and the horrors of Darfur and the scenes of hunger in Ethiopia and Chad. All this confirms his relationship. Were his genes calling for their roots? (59)

By trying to trace the roots of his Blackness and "Negro" lineage, Saleh questions the logic of Arab historiography in describing the ethnic development of Black people in Tunisia. Saleh curses the Bey not only for administering the slave trade, but also for freeing these slaves without granting them civic and constitutional rights. In other words, the abolition of Black slaves in Tunisia and the lack of legal rights contributed to the persistence of racial persecution

[86] Acholi is a Luo Nilotic ethnic group from Northern Uganda, whereas Maasai is a Nilotic ethnic group of semi-nomadic people inhabiting southern Kenya and northern Tanzania.

in new ways. Saleh scrutinizes the way Arab historiographers have defined the biological and cultural genealogy of Blacks in Tunisia by simply guessing, implied by the Arabic words يخمن / presume, that Black Tunisians are originally descendent from either the tribe of "Acholi" in northern Uganda or the "Maasai" in Congo and Tanzania. Saleh's inability to distinguish between these two different African tribes reveals the sweeping and stigmatizing approach Arab historiographers use in their study of Black people in Tunisia. Saleh exposes the shortcomings of this approach by illustrating how physical traits – "long stature and curly hair"—represent enough evidence to assume that all Black Tunisians have Negro roots. The reliance on biological and racial classifications as a means to understand the struggles and conditions of Black Tunisians is genuinely critiqued in al- Riyāḥi's novel. Saleh challenges the absurdity of such broad and totalizing racial misconceptions when in fact he doesn't know who his parents are and if they truly belong to the Nilotic African tribes of Acholi or Maasi. By asking if Saleh's "genes [were] calling for their roots" (59), al- Riyāḥi demonstrates to his readers how racial discrimination is perpetuated through the search for genealogical roots and by historicizing the legacy of slavery in North Africa.

**The Tunisian State and Islamic Fundamentalism**

Religious fundamentalism is another social dilemma that al- Riyāḥi addresses in his novel to illustrate how the failure of the Tunisian secular state has forged a religious consciousness for Tunisian ethnic minorities. Islamic fundamentalism is presented in al-Riyāḥi's novel as a consequence of the corruption and economic disparities the secular state has cultivated in the last two decades. The rise of the Islamic movement in Tunisia emerged in 1972 as a form of resistance to the secularization of the country when President Habib Bourguiba

came to power in 1957 and during the rule of the second Tunisian President Zaid Al-Abeedin Ben Ali from 1987 to 2011.[87] The Islamists have criticized Bourguiba's government due to its western secularization of the country and more significantly its focus on the interests of a small elite of Tunisians educated in the West. Bourguiba's political vision started as an anti-colonial movement against the French in North Africa, but his secular state and autocratic rule failed to address the social, economic and religious needs of all Tunisians.

Bourguiba considered Islam and the implementation of Islamic teaching unfit for the economic and social modernization of Tunisia. During his rule, Bourguiba restricted the use of Islamic teachings in the political sphere and limited the development of Islamist parties in the country.[88] Not only were civil liberties dictated by state law and in accordance to the interests of the ruling party, but there was also massive imprisonment of Muslim dissents. The local media in Tunisia become an endorsing mechanism of the state and its oppressive policies. Since the rule of Bourguiba, the Tunisian state has used the discourse of terrorism and anti-modernization to describe any form of civic revolt or resistance to its autocratic practices.

Throughout *Al Gorilla*, al- Riyāḥi demonstrates how the Tunisian government employs Islamic fundamentalism as a pretext for its oppressive practices against dissidents and Black minorities. After Saleh fires at Bourguiba's shrine in the capital and runs away towards the

[87] Various historical accounts show that the Islamic movement in Tunisia started by adapting the views of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, however the movement has also attempted to modernize the Islamic tradition in the sectors of education, political organization and the role of women.

[88] The Islamic movement in Tunisia, *En Nahda Movement* / حزب النهضة , was the only Islamist party that was established in 1972 as an opposition to the secular rule of Habib Bourguiba in 1957, and later the goverment of the second Tunisian president Zaid Al-Abeedin Ben Ali from 1987 to 2011. In its initial development the movement followed a religious ideology that was very similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. For more, see, Barry Rubin, *Guide to Islamist Movements*.

countryside, the media presents his attack as a deviant act of terrorism. Saleh was shocked to see his pictures in local newspapers describing him as a Black supported by a terrorist Salafi group. The newspaper advertises Saleh's action in the following way:

> إفشال عمليات إرهابية في العاصمة من قبل جماعة سلفية متطرّفة تسلل عناصرها من الجزائر، وكانت تخطط للقيام بعمليات إرهابية داخل التراب التونسي وقد عثر في أماكن المداهمات بمدينة سليمان على رسوم موقعية لبعض السفارات الأجنبية و حجزت وثائق تتضمن أسماء بعض الدبلوماسيين الأجانب المقيمين بتونس و كمية من المتفجرات من الصنع التقليدي المحلي. (24)

> Disruption of a terrorist operation in the capital by an extremist Salafi group whose members sneaked in from Algeria. The group was planning to carry out terrorist operations on Tunisian soil. Evidence was found on the site of confrontation with the group in the city of Suleiman, including planning charts for foreign embassies, documents about foreign diplomats currently residing in Tunis as well as explosives made locally. (24)

The state's oppressive practices, corruption and the lack of economic stability attracted many moderate Muslims to see Islam as a more inclusive political system than Bourguiba's secular rule. This new religious view changed the attitudes of many Tunisians, especially Black minorities. This transformation was used as an incentive to people to cause a change and address the social, religious and economic conditions of many Tunisians. Al- Riyāḥi represents this ideological transformation in the way Tunisian ethnic minorities have embraced the teaching of political Islam to challenge the secular ideology of the Tunisian state. Surduk's change from being a French-educated scholar to radical Muslim demonstrates how Islam is invoked in the Tunisian context as a form of transnational identity for oppressed Muslim minorities. In the novel, Surduk is described as a genius who graduated from college and travelled to France to

pursue higher studies. Everyone in the village expected to see Surduk on the TV screens occupying important political positions in the country. The narrator describes him as "a clock, moving and thinking in a regularized manner" (47). Surduk was known in the village for his political visions and dedication to becoming an important political figure in Tunisia. However, after returning from France, he is transformed into a psychopath with a long beard and dirty clothes chasing and warning people about the danger of the clock tower. Surduk's psychic disequilibrium, his inability to find employment and participate in his country's economic development and political organization, turns him into a religious radical accusing Bourguiba's government of corruption and blind westernization.

The radical change that has impacted Surduk's personality inside the homeland demonstrates how autocracy and state apparatus induce an exilic sentiment for impoverished communities. Through his detailed depiction of Surduk's ideological change, al- Riyāḥi elucidates how racial subjugation and political marginalization foster radical views of religion:

سردوك اليوم كائن آخر يسكن الريح و يصارع طواحينها وحده.

الساعة همّه الوحيد وطرد الناس من تحتها غايته كل يوم.

عندما يعاود الهياج و يأخذ في إبعاد الناس يصبح عنيفاً و قاسياً وهو يصرخ فيهم : (( ابتعدوا ، ابتعدوا ، ستُسمّمون ، لا تلمسوها ، إنها قاتلة)). (49)

> Today, Surduk is a different person fighting the wind and its tornados alone. The clock is his main concern and moving people away from the clock is his ultimate goal in life. When he is nervous and in the middle of steering people away, he becomes violent and tough, screaming out loud: "move away, move away, you will be poisoned, don't touch it, it's fatal." (49)

Although Surduk's ideological transformation is presented here as a psychological symptom, social stereotypes and state subjugation are the main reason behind the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Tunisia. In an attempt to question the legacy of Bourguiba's rule as the founder of the modern Republic of Tunisia, Surduk informs the clock visitors of the pitfalls and fatal consequences of visiting the former president's graveyard.

**Conclusion**

In *Al Gorilla*, Kamāl al- Riyāḥi demonstrates a significant aspect about the revolution that ousted the former Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali by disclosing the relationship between civic revolt, state corruption and racial marginalization. The author insightfully shows how state oppression, racial subjugation and the imposition of secular rule in Tunisia have formed diasporic communities inside the homeland. By presenting Saleh as an outsider in his homeland, al- Riyāḥi discloses how diasporic consciousness has become an important sentiment for Black minorities in the Middle East and North Africa. Autocratic regimes, the persecution of Black Tunisians, and the misrepresentation of African heritage turns the homeland to a site of alienation and estrangement.

The noticeable presence of Black minorities in the recent Tunisian revolution shows an important aspect about this revolt: that is, how the social, racial and economic disparities of oppressed minorities (like Saleh) pose a challenge to scholars in Arabic literature and the African diaspora to reconsider how Black Tunisian writing in the Arab world projects a transnational vision for belonging beyond the borderlines of the nation-state. Although Saleh's revolt ends with his death by police forces, the Tunisian novel presents an exilic journey that succeeded in mobilizing all Tunisians to demolish oppression and end the corrupted regime of Ben Ali. Al-

Riyāḥi ends his novel by showing how the fall of Saleh from the clock tower marks the beginning of the revolution with protestors repeating "Dégage, Dégage, Dégage / Leave, Leave, Leave…" (179).

In this chapter, I illustrate how diasporic consciousness is not only defined by spatial displacement or the crossing of national borders. State oppression justified by racial difference and genealogical research on ethno-racial groups can also induce sentiments of diaspora inside the homeland. The case of Black Tunisians presents a rich history of regional and interracial relations between Arabs and various African tribes that dates back to the spread of Islam in the mid seventh century C.E. French colonialism and the bey system administered by the Ottoman Empire in North African have produced a complex diasporic consciousness for Arabs who migrated to parts of Africa as well as for Nilotic African tribes that were enslaved and chose to integrate into Arab and Muslim societies. This regional history of intercultural and diasporic contacts between the Maghreb and the rest of the Arab world still remains unexplored.

**Conclusion: New Trajectories of Transnationalism in Contemporary Arab Writing**

This dissertation traces a deterriterialized form of belonging I call "diasporic consciousness" in the work of Anglophone-Arab writers from the United States and Britain writing in English and contemporary Arab novelists writing in Arabic from Yemen and Tunisia. By examining different manifestations of diasporic consciousness in the United States, Britain, Yemen and Tunisia, I demonstrate the different migratory visions and diasporic interconnections Arab writing has produced in the last two decades. The four contexts I examined in this project show that the formation of diasporic consciousness is directly influenced by race, religion, regional politics, and ethnicity.

The migratory experiences of Anglophone-Arab authors writing in English and the diasporic sentiments of Middle Eastern authors writing in Arabic project a transnational form of belonging that is borderless and extraterritorial. This form of diasporic belonging provides a thoughtful framework for the study of diaspora formations inside and across national borders. The four authors I examined in this project present deterritorialization as a conceptual framework to expand the national, cultural and historical boundaries of identity for Arab migrants as well as ethnic Arab communities inside Arab homelands. Deterritorialization creates new possibilities for transnational linkages between various diasporic communities. Race, ethnicity and religious consciousness are some of the new transnational trajectories that Arab diasporic writing presents today.

Understanding the formation of diaspora beyond spatial demarcations and the focus on nation-states enables us to identify the relationship between internal diasporic formations and immigrant visions abroad. The evolution of the Arab diaspora today is not simply a spatial phenomenon, but also an artistic vision that enables Arab writers to traverse the borders of

nation-states and to forge a collective agency characterized by un-rootedness and multiple networks of cultural and historical interrelations.

Diasporic writing from Yemen and Tunisia envisions a rootless form of African-ness that aims to rewrite the African diaspora beyond the Black Atlantic The growth of Black Arab communities demands a post-transatlantic framework of analysis that can explore diasporic writing and further implement a non-teleological conceptualization of how African roots are routed and rerouted to enunciate new forms of borderless belonging beyond the political strictures of Arab nation-states and regional boundaries. The emergence of ethnic Arab authors writing about their diasporic experiences inside the homeland and within the regional boundaries of the Middle East and North Africa demands a thorough examination of contemporary Arab writing and the formation of diasporic minorities in local peripheries. The emergence of ethnic literatures in the Arab world challenge literary critics to rethink the political visions of Afro-Arab communities and how Black activism has become a significant aspect of the Middle East's civil revolt and revolutions. The Yemeni and Tunisian texts I examined in this project make a compelling case for a form of diaspora that is mainly informed by racial configurations and ethnic marginalization rather than spatial displacement and travel across nation-states.

The recent wave of upheavals that have stirred the Arab world and North Africa often referred to as the Arab Spring poses new challenges for scholars in diaspora and postcolonial studies to explore not only the political underpinnings of these uprisings, but also the dynamics of dwelling and displacement as they intersect with questions about race, ethnicity and religion. The diasporic visions of Anglophone-Arab writers in the West and contemporary Arab writers at home have prefigured this Arab revolution in literary terms**.** The diasporic visions of

Anglophone-Arab writers in the West and contemporary Arab writers at home have prefigured this Arabs revolution in new literary terms**.**

The invocation of diasporic sentiments inside the homeland has intensified the need for political collaboration between Arabs at home and Arab migrants abroad. By using the trope of diasporic writing Arab writers are able to intervene as a displaced -activist depicting the economic and political disparities of the homeland while also envisioning a collective transregional Arab identity across national borders. Contemporary Arabic literature shows us how diasporic consciousness is employed as an empowering political aesthetic to challenge the imposed boundaries of Arab nation-states and fosters a migratory understanding of Arab identity.

Contemporary Arab writers project a conception of diasporic belonging that is no longer defined by the idea of roots (fixed homelands) and border-crossing to the West. Racial subjection, ethnic marginalization and exclusive state-policies can also produce a diasporic sentiment that makes the homeland an alienating and fractured site of dwelling. Exploring the nuances of Arab diasporic writing yields an opportunity to introduce an interdisciplinary platform for the study of diaspora, race and ethnicity in the 21$^{st}$ century. A new generation of Arab diasporic writers is coming of age, and with this evolution comes a demand for understanding not only the prevailing cultures of the Arab world, but also the undefined boundaries of Arab literary revolutions.

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