

Essay

Post-humanizing Arabs: Case of Diana Abujber's *Arabian Jazz* (2003) and Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014)

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Abstract: The present paper offers a reading of three selected novels by two Anglophone Arab writers Diana Abujaber and Fadia Faqir. Our reading is fundamentally based on a philosophical post-humanist perception of other ethnic minorities as being inferior and un-human. In interpreting the three novels, *Arabian Jazz* (2003), *My Name is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014), a main concern is to bring to light how Arabs –and Muslims –have been zombified and de-humanized in Western mainstream media and culture based on a biased stigmatization and stereotyping of a large heterogeneous ethnic group wherein religions, traditions, languages and cultures are diverse. Also, a pivotal preoccupation is going to be the exiling journey of the protagonists from their homelands to Western countries, and how these journeys contribute to the post-humanization of the self, the identity and the culture of Arab displaced immigrants.

Keywords: posthuman; deterritorialization; diaspora; home; Arab women; Arab Anglophone

1. Introduction: Excluding the *Other race* (the Arab)

The deterioration of the human race has reached its peak in a contemporary global and post-postmodern era when technology has made it impossible for the human race to escape being dislocated and exiled whether to a virtual world or to a place where money is to be made. This new state of being is what scholars like Francis Fukuyama, Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway have theorized as post-humanity, i.e. beyond being human. In fact, the most well-known theorist to have contributed to the rhetoric on posthumanity is Fukuyama [1]. His invocation of posthumanism combined the distinction between transhumanism and posthumanism, as a disguise for a, more specific, interest in emerging cultures of enhancement technology.

In fact, the rapid shift toward a *life beyond the self* as referred to by Braidotti [2], who has re-theorized the post-humanistic condition of Man in the twenty first century, should be looked at very closely in research areas and disciplines which are fundamentally 'frameworked' to explore and decipher the state of being displaced outside an inhabited and familiar *Self*. Among these fields of study, post-colonialism and feminism are placed in the very nucleus of a-self-outside-the-center revelation. Though 'post-humanism' has appeared in the humanities to refer to the state of being beyond humanism due to techno-scientific factors, my theorization of the notion, in this essay, stems from a philosophical perception of ethnic groups to be un-human, or excluded from mainstream white humanism. Attempting to investigate the journey of exclusion and deterritorialization experienced by the Subaltern –the postcolonial Arab immigrants –in a posthuman era, I suggest that Arabs and/or Muslims have been, in the last two decades or more, *zombified* and stereotyped as a threat that endangers the liberal world of the White Man. Thus, posthumanism will be utilized in this essay to inspect how Arabs are de-humanized once displaced and dislocated to the strange culture of the dominant West.

In this respect, what is to be re-questioned is the legacy and the relevance of postcolonialism and feminism in a time of human crisis that scholars like Donna Haraway, Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti identify as anti-human and/or post-human. In this re-questioning, anti-humanism rejects the dialectical scheme of thought, where difference or otherness played a constitutive role, marking off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth) ([2], p. 27). In fact, the globalization phenomenon that we thought might equalize ethnicity and gender is taking place, as Spivak puts it, only in capital and data, and the maxim 'think global, act local' becomes irrelevant if we consider the many double standards of the dominant over the dominated. In particular, Arabs and/or Muslims have been placed in a critical marginal zone dislocated from a global human race and represented as a threat to humanity.

To explain further, one should note that over the last two decades or so, racial discrimination against Arabs as an ethnic minority group and against Muslims as a religious minority group in most Western host countries—in international media and in world politics—has led to falsified and perverted characterizations of these human beings as bloody religious fanatics endangering world peace. Muslims and/or Arabs are being de-humanized, in-humanized and *zombified* for the simple fact that they are broadly perceived as a terrorizing group. Recent terrorist attacks in European and American cities such as Paris, Boston, Brussels and very recently Orlando have increased the phobia against Muslims or Arabs. They have also undermined the idea of a shared humanity. As a result, the West and its media apply a double standard when dealing with terrorist attacks committed by radical fanatics identified as Arabs and Muslims who are European citizens in European or American cities and similar contemporaneous attacks on non-European and non-American cities: Istanbul, Bamako, Beirut, Benguerdane (Tunisia), Damascus, Aleppo and others. It is a fact that puts into question, again and again, the future of global humanism, neo-humanism and may even portend the 'death of Man'[3] or the end of humanity.

Edward Said notes in *Orientalism* that the West promotes a deep-rooted hatred for Islam. The term "Islam" as it is used today is in fact part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. Today "Islam" is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently made it known. But this coverage is misleading, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances "Islam" has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility ([4], p. 2).

In another context, Braidotti assumes that the negative dialectical processes of racialization (sexualization and naturalization) of those who are marginalized or excluded have another important implication: they result in the active production of half-truths, or forms of partial knowledge about these others ([2], p. 28). These half-truths can only be revealed, re-articulated and re-produced by native *others* themselves. If scholars like Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Iain Grant Hamilton and Melinda Cooper among others, have focused attention on the aftermaths of a growing global, growing dis-human world, I opt in this paper to reflect on the post-humanizing and anti-humanizing of minority groups dislocated on the threshold of mainstream culture, immigrants who do not belong to the "humanist" world of Europe and the United States of America.

A pivotal concern in this paper is who, how and why to voice the exclusion of Arab and Muslim immigrant groups in the West. As for the who, we insist that international media's biased representation of Arabs (and Muslims) has failed to give voice to one of the largest communities of

immigrants living in Europe and America, and what we shall present in this paper is how Anglophone Arab writers have assumed the responsibility of voicing this belittlement and vilification of Arabs, exposing untold truths about *Arabness* and Muslim-ness and suggesting the many paradoxes of European/Western humanism.

The racial un-human discrimination of Arab immigrants has been subject to criticism in many Anglophone Arab writers' literary works. Giving voice to marginalized ethnic minorities has become, as such, a priority for *diasporic* Arab writers, particularly those living in the most xenophobic countries where racism against ethnic minorities persists. In the United States alone, an unprecedented *Arabophobic* and *Islamophobic* ill-treatment of migrant communities of diverse origins mis-recognized as Arabs—including Pakistanis, Afghanis, Indians and *Amazighs* (Berbers of North African countries like Morocco and Algeria who are not of Arab origin) has been marked recently. One should note that like many other ethnic terms, Arab is notoriously difficult to define. According to Lewis Bernard, Arabs are not a nationality in the legal sense ([5], p.6). Therefore, it may be irrelevant and irrational to refer to communities of immigrants coming from the different countries of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region as being homogeneously *Arabs*. Also, the Syrian refugees' crisis has brought into question the *Arabness* of the *Arab* world when thousands of Syrian refugees are being allowed to European countries and Canada while they are not welcome in neighboring countries of the *Arabian* Peninsula.

In an effort to verbalize the fallacious, deceptive and biased representation of Arabs in a post-modern and/or neo-humanist era, and to deconstruct the use of the term '*Arab*' to refer to a non-homogenous ethnic minority of people coming from the Middle East, the present paper offers a critical reading of fictional works produced by Anglophone Arab writers, focusing on various female Arab characters in the selected works. My intention is to raise issues of gender and race discrimination. The selected works include Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz* (2003), Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* (2007) and Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). Highlighted throughout is the biased mis-representation and exclusion of immigrants from the MENA region considered racially not quite white and thus not quite human. In what follows, I articulate the whiteness dilemma of Arab immigrants (and Arab Americans in particular) through a post-human critical reading of Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz* published in 1993 yet still relevant to a contemporaneous context. The novel has been analyzed, read and investigated by many literary critics and scholars, including Geoffrey Nash, Anastasia Valassopoulos and Yusuf Awad. What I seek to add to previous readings is a post-human critique that the novelist has woven into the text to raise some of the most polemic issues related to Arab-ness vs. American-ness.

2. Arabs: not Quite White, then not Quite Human

Diana Abujaber's *Arabian Jazz* [6] foregrounds the bitter journeys of Arabs' displacement and the re-territorialization of an invisible dislocated Arab American community. Abujaber, among many other fourth generation Arab American novelists, tends to highlight major facets of Arab American daily experiences of race-based exclusion and anti-Arab bigotry. In fact, it is the precarious position which Arabs have long occupied in the ethnic and racial discourses in the US that has nourished much of Arab American narrative. As a minority group, it has often been very difficult to re-locate this community within a feasible ethnic-based *frame*. As for other ethnic minorities, skin color has been one of the major characteristics upon which African Americans, Asian Americans and Latin Americans are ethnically categorized in the United States. However, the ethnic existence of Arabs in the U.S has always been problematic for Arabs who have been living on American soil for more than a century. The visibility of the Arab minor community among other groups has not been identified, I contend, only and mainly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks which dragged Arabs and Muslims into a red zone of accusation and exclusion.

Abujaber's debut novel narrates the story of the *Ramouds*, an Arab American family living in upstate New York. Matussem, the head of the family, migrated to the US from Jordan, and married an Irish American woman, Nora. The couple, apparently, represents the fusion of two colors, two distinct races: Arab and European or the Brown (if we refer to the Arab as Brown) and the White (if we refer to the European as White). The two are united, as two human beings, in the once-called *Promised Land*, and have two girls: Jemorah and Melvina. Nora subsequently died during a visit to Jordan as if the European White human being dies in this space, this region and this part of the world where the culture, the religion and Nature are different.

If we consider that *Arabian Jazz* narrates the life of an Arab immigrant family who lives in a small town in upstate New York, then we are invoking an urgent re-questioning of the American Dream and the old humanist idea that the United States is the land of immigrants where humanity is celebrated. The novel's title puts forward the myth of the American Dream to gather two elements which refer to two main oppressed ethnic minorities of today's America: jazz for black Americans and Arab for Arabs or Middle Eastern immigrants. The two may be considered as the most belittled groups. Other analyses of the novel's title have rather focused on jazz as an obsession of the main character Mutassem. In this respect, Mazen Naous asserts that the term "jazz" in the title of Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Arabian Jazz* [6] implies a process of improvisation and intertwining. As an essential characteristic of jazz music, improvisation manifests itself linguistically in *Arabian Jazz*, even as it intertwines with the novel's major themes [7].

The novel deconstructs the Truth of neo-liberal and *neo-human* America. Those narratives about individuals whose presence in the United States is practically rejected, that the novel depicts, unveil truths of race-based exclusion still persisting in America, the land of free MAN. Arab immigrants, native people, and Black Americans all get ridiculed as the other races by the dominant group or the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) that is the White Man. However, the novel also presents characters whose presence and upbringing in the United States liberate them from the trap of paralyzing traditions. We are referring here to second generation Arab Americans.

For instance, in a provocative statement, the young American-but Arab-Jemorah emphasizes that "*The homing desire [...] is not the same as the desire for a homeland*" ([6], p. 197). This statement reflects the dilemma of being in-between two places where one is your *home* while the second is your *diaspora*. This precarious space is what creates the post-human condition of *diasporic* individuals. It is a beyond the body experience. To elaborate this idea, I ought to refer to the following quote by a leading figure in the Arab American contemporary history, Edward Said. In his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* [8], Said confesses that exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement ([8], p. 173). Reading through this statement, I argue that exiled and/or diasporic subjects live a post-humanistic journey while oscillating between two memories, two homes, two histories, and therefore two selves.

In fact, it is this journey of displacement that de-humanizes the status of Arab immigrants in the U.S. It is, in fact, a nomadic journey. At this point, Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of *Nomadism* should be evoked to decipher the Ramouds' experience of a nomad lifestyle which made the family disperse around the world, and this is very similar to the current situation of thousands of Syrian refugees who left their homeland to roam around the world. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.).

But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. ([9], p. 380)

In the novel, the Ramoud family lives in Jordan, in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Also in the novel, a light is shed on the particular zone where the Ramouds live as being a peculiar space where: “No one ever escapes this place [...] You want to think twice about moving here. It’s like that show – *The Twilight Zone*?” ([6], p. 90) Although Jemorah and Melvina are American born, they do not feel part of the American mainstream whiteness-centric society because of their father’s nationality, their appearance, and life experience. What they will conclude is that they are “everything and nothing” ([6], p. 330). In this prospect, it becomes clear that being recognized as both an Arab and American seems to be extremely difficult.

Another crucial point, to be discussed subsequently, is this distinction to be made when referring to Arabs in America. We read in the novel: “Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how life was meant to be lived” ([6], p. 360). One may suggest that Arabs are seen as a different race, different creatures, and thus different human beings. In fact, the difference is not only ethnic-based, but also culture-based.

As a concluding point, I assume that Abujaber’s *Arabian Jazz* represents Arabs from a post-human position since it portrays Arabs in America as being a nomadic group who is belittled by the mainstream culture. This status of constant nomadic motion from an Arabian land to a Western world may be the very reason of their dislocation that results mainly in a bitter feeling of displacement and exclusion. In the next two sections, another post-humanization of Arabs in the Diaspora is going to be discussed in two works of the British Jordanian female writer, Fadia Faqir: *My Name is Salma* (2005) and *Willow Trees Don’t Weep* (2014).

3. Dehumanizing the Arab in Faqir’s *My Name is Salma*

Faqir’s *My Name is Salma* is set between the Middle East and Britain. It investigates immigration to a Western country–Britain–not only as a new theme in terms of the central character Salma who is an unskilled Bedouin woman, but also in terms of raising questions about the future of Arabs who live in Britain. Salma is cut off from her country of origin and arrives in Britain for a permanent stay; as such, the novel portrays conflicts of forced dislocation, integration, assimilation, racism and the settlement experience.

Fadia Faqir’s third novel is postmodern in genre and feminist in essence. *My Name is Salma* [10] examines issues related to women’s invisibility in Arab countries and Arabs’ invisibility in the Diaspora. Faqir’s masterpiece tells the story of Salma, a young woman from a traditional Bedouin society in the Middle East, who was impregnated before marriage. For this, she was sentenced to death by her society and family whose honor was tarnished. Starting a long journey of displacement, dislocation and exile, Salma was put in prison for her own protection for several years where she gave birth to a baby girl, Layla, whom she could not raise or see until years later when the girl was murdered by her uncle, Mahmoud. After prison, Salma, was again dislocated to another place, a new home, but this time for a permanent stay in England, a completely different country that seems to be different in culture and religion.

It is in Exeter that Salma goes through a process of forming a new identity, with a new name 'Sally Asher' in a new home (-land) while she is still haunted by past experiences echoing from Hima, her home-village. Undertaking a brutal process of acculturation, Salma's identity is fluid and unstable to the point of fragmentation as she does not appear to have survived the move to England with an intact psyche. She, I claim, becomes a post-human subject after having been deported and exiled to Exeter. Her disrupted, disorganized memory is echoed by a disturbing, yet impressive and expressive fractured narration. At this point, I evoke the idea of 'forgetting to be post-human' according to which Salma, as an Arab exiled woman, becomes a destabilized human being with a disrupted memory. It is, in fact, in this very disruption that Salma or Sally is considered as posthuman.

Salma eventually starts putting together the pieces of her new life. She first finds a shelter, and then a job; she starts doing an MA in English literature, and finds at last a husband with whom she begins a new life with a new identity. However, being a dark skinned Arab in the land of whiteness is a major failure in her process of integration. We read: '*A few years ago, I had tasted my first fish and chips, but my mountainous Arab stomach could not digest the fat [...] Salma resisted, but Sally must adapt*' ([10], p. 9). The above few lines quoted from the first chapter of the novel sum up a long process of dislocation, acculturation and assimilation the Bedouin Arab woman goes through. In the following passages, I will suggest how Salma as an Arab is made an invisible in-human creature both in her native home and in the Diaspora.

In point of fact, Faqir's writings are hybrid, and the hybridization of Faqir's novels is due to, as Bakhtin [11] notes, the mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor [12]. I am referring here to the mixture of English and Arabic at different levels--lexical, semantic and inter-lingual. From another perspective, and although 'hybridity' has dominated conceptual discussions of mixed identities in the field of cultural studies, the use of 'hybridity' in the field of postcolonial studies is closely linked to post-modern sensibilities that challenged modernist ideas, which assumed in part that fixity, territoriality and distinctive languages and ethnicities constituted themselves as separate identities [13].

However, hybridity has had its own mesh of social and cultural clashes mainly and particularly for 'subalterns, to use Spivak's concept,¹ or those coming from ex-colonized countries to the West to live a unique diasporic experience. This experience is usually interwoven with some disturbing behaviors like islamophobia, Arabophobia, racism and rejection, all of which lead to a constant feeling of foreignness, inferiority and alienness in relation to the host culture and its mainstream people. Again, this foreignness, I contend, is what makes Salma and people like Salma become posthuman subjects. Moreover, regardless of their will to assimilate and integrate into the host culture, immigrants, Arabs and Muslims particularly, still suffer from cultural humiliation, a religious disdain, and social disintegration. In this connection, we claim in Faqir's *My Name is Salma* a constant state of invisibility that both immigrants in diaspora and Arab women back home may confront. The novel portrays the difficulties and hardships people living in the Diaspora do face and it voices the agonies of women living in Bedouin conservative societies. The novel deconstructs home and Diaspora from a different angle to translate how invisible women are in Bedouin

¹ In her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"--originally published in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), Spivak encourages but also criticizes the efforts of the subaltern studies group, a project led by Ranajit Guha that has reappropriated Gramsci's term "subaltern" (the economically dispossessed) in order to locate and re-establish a "voice" or collective locus of agency in postcolonial India (and other postcolonial countries).

homelands, and how marginalized immigrants are in Diaspora. Both are portrayed from a post-human perspective as in the following passages.

Throughout the first pages of the first chapter, *"Where the River Meets the Sea,"* the reader faces images and scenes portraying Salma/Sally's awareness of being an alien both in her culture in Hima and in the foreign culture in England--an awareness mingled with a bitter feeling of pain and chagrin: "If I did not know me I would have said that I was Salma, but my back was bent and my head was held low. I wrapped my trembling body with the warm towel and sniffed the air" ([10], p.5). Salma appears alien even to herself, and this confession made by the protagonist after long years of her stay in Exeter is simply an inescapable result of being seen as strange and invisible, wherever she goes and whenever she appears: by Elizabeth (the owner of the hostel where Salma lives in Exeter), by Mahmoud (her brother who is the omnipresent threat for her staying alive), by Parvin (her Pakistani friend who would later be Salma's guide to assimilate and adopt to the diasporic life), by her tribe back in Hima (where she was condemned to death or exile from her tribe's and family's memory), and by many other members of her 'new' country, England (where people see in her the exotic image of castaway Arabs/Muslims).

Elsewhere in the story, we read:

Using his master keys, the porter opened the door and let in a short, thin, dark young woman ... when she looked at me she could only see the slit of my eyes and a white veil so she turned to him. 'Where does she come from?' 'Somewhere in the Middle East. Fucking A-rabic! She rode a camel all the way from Arabia to this dump in Exeter,' he said and laughed. 'I am not going to share a room with an Arab,' she spat [...] I looked at her straight hair and long fringe and turned in my bed. The smell of hurt and broken promises filled the brightly lit room ([10], p. 15).

In this extract, we perceive an Arab woman facing a strong antipathy from people around her because she comes from 'somewhere' called the Middle East. We also recognize the scornful attitude conveyed even by someone of her own gender, Parvin, who can be seen in this extract as an *Arabophobic* like many British people and immigrants other than Arabs. However, even Parvin belongs to the Orient if we go back to Edward Said's conceptualization of the Orient [14]. According to Said, the West has created a "dichotomy" between the reality of the East and the romantic notion of the Orient. The Middle East and Asia are viewed with prejudice and racism. The West has created a culture, history, and future promise for the East. On this framework, rests not only the study of the Orient, but also the political imperialism of Europe in the East. He discussed the dialectical relationship between Occident and Orient as a manifestation of "*us versus them*".

Thus, based on the British colonial and imperial experience in India, Pakistan and Indochina, the Pakistani British Parvin does belong to the same imaginative geography perceived as the exotic Orient Salma, to which the British Bedouin Arab woman belongs. This Western, British visualization of people, like Salma and Parvin, is an old new story that dates back centuries and still persists, mainly after the drastic events of 9/11. We read Parvin's words: 'You know, Salma, we are like shingles. Invisible, snake-like. It slides around your body and suddenly erupts on your skin and then sting sting,' Parvin said and laughed' ([10], p.25). Parvin was, in this extract, referring to the homeless, immigrants or 'those who were either without a family or were trying to blot out their history' [ibid], i.e. the Orientals. Following Said's definition, the Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that that region culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. In contrast, the American understanding of the Orient will seem considerably less dense, although recent Japanese, Korean, and Indochinese adventures ought now to illicit a more sober, realistic "Oriental"

awareness. Moreover, the vastly expanded American political and economic role in the Near East (the Middle East) makes great claims of understanding the "Orient" ([14], p.3).

This discourse is clearly noticed in Elizabeth's conversations with Salma/Sally. Many scenes gathering Salma and Liz –Elizabeth who is the owner of the semi-detached house Salma hires – clearly portray an oriental view of the *Other* who is not a native British, who is thus alien and who is legitimately scorned. In the very beginning of the novel, we read Salma's presentation of Liz as follows: "Liz, Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth I, Her Highness, my landlady was still asleep" ([10], p.10). This description encloses an orientalist view of Elizabeth who may represent imperial power and the British Empire particularly. In a later scene, Salma and Liz are watching television together:

'Was that the shadow Chancellor?' I asked Liz. 'No, the Prime Minister. The Chancellor does not spit,' she answered and looked at the television screen, not wanting to be interrupted. 'Who are these puppets?' I asked. 'Foreigners! Aliens like you,' she said and smiled. 'Like me?' I asked. 'Yes, illegal immigrants,' she said. 'I no illegal,' I said losing my English. 'Yes, you are. You must be,' she said. 'Would you like a cuppa?' I asked, imitating my friend Gwen and trying to change the subject". ([10], p.23-4)

This conversation carries a multiplicity of meaning and multi-layered nuances. First, we interpret Liz's answers as a legitimized belittlement and vilification of whoever is *Other*, hence a foreigner who must not be visible to a Westerner. The other thing we comprehend from the above extract is that Salma, who feels unfairly undermined despite her British citizenship, tries hard to mimic, an act which, as Bhabha explains, "repeats rather than re-presents....and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred [15]. By imitating Gwen's English, Salma loses her *self* and in this way becomes invisible again. In another scene, the reader is shocked by Salma's reaction when Elizabeth injures her arm. Drunk, Liz injured Salma's forearm while she was trying to take a whip out of Liz's hand. Liz was hitting bottles with the whip imagining she was talking to some Indian upahs and wallahs (maids): "Slaves must never breathe English air" Liz says while Salma is waiting for a taxi to take her to the hospital ([10], p.185). Surprisingly, Salma lies to the doctor and tells him she cut her hand while chopping salad. Salma's reaction may be an empathizing with Liz's state of being stripped of her status as an alien in this new world despite being the daughter of a rich family who had Indian maids.

My Name is Salma, like many other novels by Fadia Faqir, unveils bitter truths about being an Arab in a foreign country where this ethnic group is vilified and denigrated based on orientalist representations of an Arab world, a world that is different from Western culture but not inferior. This novel situates Arabs (and Arab women) in a mainstream white culture at the center of the post-humanization of Arabs (and Muslims) in the West. The following section will explore this theme in another novel by Fadia Faqir, *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, which reflects another facet of the disparagement of Arabs: the stereotype of all Arabs as terrorists i.e. a threat to the human race.

4. Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*: A Journey of Discovering Oneself

Initially entitled *The Terrorist's Daughter*, the British Jordanian Fadia Faqir's most recent novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep* [16] has made a difference in Arab Anglophone literature and in world literature by fictionalizing a journey that represents a threat to the Western world. Writing about a man who leaves home to join al Qaeda may be considered one of the bravest literary acts so far attempted by an Arab female author writing in English mostly for a Western readership. Faqir has admitted that setting some of the action in Afghanistan, a country she could not visit, was especially challenging for her:

What made the task of writing *Willow Trees Don't Weep* harder is constructing a country out of research material and photographs. The difficulty in relying on books is that

you need to read a hundred to get a few useful facts that you could use in fiction. It is an arduous journey, but I hope I did justice to Afghanistan and its brave people [17].

In another interview, Faqir refers to the journey of an innocent when she explains that she wanted the innocent, that is, the young daughter Najwa, to go on a difficult journey that will change her into someone who becomes aware of what is happening in the world.² It is with this perspective in mind that I will explore Najwa's journey. My intention is to inspect the truths about her home nation that Najwa discovers while tracing her 'predator' father, and how these truths metamorphose Najwa into a posthuman subject.

Raised by her mother and grandmother, Najwa knows her father only through her mother's stories of his betrayal. After the death of her long-ill mother, Najwa decides to trace the figurehead of patriarchy, her father, in Jordan, knowing that in such a country being on her own will cause her troubles. Najwa travels from Pakistan to the center of Taliban training, to Afghanistan and eventually to Europe, where she metamorphoses into a civilized but more alien individual.

Fadia Faqir's novel is an exploration of self-discovery, both Najwa's and her father's. It leads the reader to some conclusions about those *ihadis* who have prioritized religion over their loved ones as is the case with Omar Rahmane, Najwa's father. Throughout the novel, we travel along with Najwa who—while searching for her father—unveils bitter truths about women's status in Jordan and in other countries she visits. For instance, in chapter one "*Behind the Poppy Field*," Najwa's grandmother unveils a first truth about single women living on their own in Jordan. She says: "you know how it is in Amman and particularly in this neighbourhood. Chaste women don't live on their own" ([16], p. 6). In this quotation, one can apprehend that women in conservative Arab societies are also being de-humanized. That chaste women cannot live on their own may refer to the status of women as being incapable, unable and powerless creatures.

The novel also reveals many aspects of women's life in different places and homes. The life of Najwa, her mother, and her grandmother represents the predicament of Arab women in Jordan and neighboring Arab countries who are caught between patriarchal practices, mis-interpreted religious texts and failed attempts to get liberated. In Afghanistan, Amani and Gulnar—Najwa's step-mother and half-sister respectively—are archetypes of Afghani women who were accidentally trapped in a war zone under Taliban rule but still experience love and affection from their kind and caring men. Even in London, we meet other female characters who are deserted for a reason or another. Isabel, a lonely kind lady is one example. Therefore, this novel may be considered a women's book in essence. However, other critics would argue that the ideas and journeys in the novel are universally human rather than gender-based. One way of defending this standpoint is the parallel synchronic re-telling of events by the daughter and the father simultaneously. In this, one can infer that the state of posthumanity, in the novel, results from losing hope, love, stability, history and faith.

By this same token, Najwa's journey in tracing her father can also represent a journey of finding her history as a human being. In fact, what disturbs Najwa is the missing part in her past where the father must have been present. We read: "No, you must go and look for your father. The past might make you whole" ([16], p. 28). Folding the many letters that Najwa finds hidden in a box represents a revelation, an unveiling of many truths related to decisive queries that could make her whole again. The letters that her father was sending all through the years of his absence helps her re-construct the father she barely remembers. A first truth she could unearth is that her father was a secular student of nursing, and that in four years—from 1981 to 1986—he turned from a normal loving father and husband into a vagabond ([16], p. 36). It was this first truth and the many letters

² In an interview posted on youtube.com with the link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK4K1V8SreA>, the writer introduces her latest novel in a couple of minutes trying to explain the choice of a terrorist's life journey as a major theme of her book.

that would initiate her journey to find her father after being deserted and exiled from society for more than twenty years.

Najwa's long journey from one place to another and from one country to another brings her into contact with different people and different truths. She also de(re-)constructs her father via his letters. At this point, we recall Michel Butor's essay "Le Voyage et l'écriture" ["Travel and Writing"] [18] in which he claims that "to travel is to write (first of all because to travel is to read), and to write is to travel." Perhaps Najwa's and her father's divergent journeys and many letters (narratives) reflect a truer discovery of home and identity as conceived in this paper. In fact, we may argue that through her father's letters Najwa unearths striking truths about why people abandon their families for the sake of jihad and other facts that have been fictionalized by the author in order to re-construct verities of a sacred war.

There is, indeed, a deliberate distortion of history for the sake of bringing about a more authentic view of issues long subject to bias in the international media, including jihad and women of the Orient. In this regard the author recognizes that "the difficulty in relying on books is that you need to read a hundred to get a few useful facts that you could use in fiction. It is an arduous journey, but I hope I did justice to Afghanistan and its brave people." [19] *WTDW* distorts as much as it reveals historical facts to meet the main concern of the narrative. For instance, in the following extract, we visualize many historical elements related to Taliban fighters that we know only through the images the media passes on to us:

Masada 'Lion's Den' Training Camp, Afghanistan, April 1987...The five-star camp has seven caverns, each a hundred yards long and twenty feet high.... It was built by Sheikh Osama's construction company, mainly to house Arab Afghans, mujahideen of Arab origins. The beds are comfortable and there is plenty of food, cooked by a Saudi chef...I felt like an imposter when we cried 'Allahuakbar' in unison in Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, Egyptian, Sudanese and Saudi accents ([16], p. 95-96).

In the quoted lines above, the Masada 'Lion's Den' Training Camp is a real life camp that Osama Bin Laden did build near Jajhi Afghanistan, where only Arab fighters were allowed. It was known as al-Masada or The Lion's Den: a series of barracks, ammunition stores, firing ranges, makeshift first-aid clinic, communication point and so forth. The Mujahideen al-Masada or "Lion's Den" compound had been constructed by Bin Laden so as to have a training facility and not to rely on Pakistan [20]. Omar Rahman's letters contain detailed descriptions of untold stories of Taliban camps, battles, training and social life. Taliban is described as a home that Najwa's father was forced to inhabit, but had to get used to: "When Hani³ and I arrived here [Aybak, Afghanistan], we knew what we were doing: we were fighting the communist Soviets and trying to get them out. I was not and didn't wish to be a combatant like him, no matter how hard the warlords tried" ([16], p. 114). In fact, we would argue that the home Omar was looking for was rather the love that his late wife could not offer a few years after their marriage. His journey to Afghanistan was at heart a journey of love for his best friend, Hani. In Peshawar, Omar meets Gulnar and falls in love with her, and during the long years he stayed in Afghanistan to fight, he was not himself. About the love he found in and with Gulnar, his Afghani wife, Omar says: "Was I Qays Ibn al-Mulawwah, the poet who roamed the deserts reciting love poetry for Leila? [...] I looked for the sea in her, migrating birds, fields of wheat swaying in the wind. I searched for a centre, a walled garden with grape vines and jasmine, my country..." ([16], p. 143). Indeed, Gulnar was Omar's new home and new country after having been displaced from his cruel wife and young daughter.

³ Omar's best friend whom he wanted to help and sustain in his journey to Afghanistan.

Similarly, Najwa's home was not Amman, Peshawar, or even Durham where she ends up residing. Najwa was looking for a home where she could be re-territorialized after being alienated from all places she inhabited. We may figure out that her father represents this home Najwa is tracing; however, there are many other clues that lead us to re-configure this home according to the state of being the protagonist experiences in every place she visits and with the different people she meets. In her homeland, Amman, Najwa was a different human being because she was a woman left on her own, that is a woman without a man to control her deeds: "I knew I was different. I was not allowed to cover my head, wear a long school uniform or trousers, recite the Qur'an [...] I would stand by the iron gate, listening to them sing, 'Welcome Ramadan!' The house was secular and it took me years to understand the meaning of that word" ([16], p. 9). Being different from other conservative and Islamist girls of Amman excludes Najwa from a home she inhabits physically but with traditions to which she cannot adopt. Even in her own family, the protagonist was exiled from a secular authoritarian mother who imposed secularism in the same way that the society imposed its Islamism on her. Najwa blames both her mother and father for her bewilderment: "You're as bad as each other. You abandoned me and she deceived me," she says ([16], p. 4). During her journey to different countries, including Pakistan and Afghanistan and even the UK, Najwa seeks a home where she can settle peacefully, a place where she can reterritorialize, to use Deleuze' and Guattari's⁴ concept, the identity that she lost between her mother's extreme secularism and her father's extreme fundamentalism. All she is looking for is herself: "Yes. Lucky indeed. Unlike me, my grandmother knew who she was, where she came from and what she believed in" ([16], p. 138). Therefore, one can claim that Najwa could not recognize who she was, and in this state of loss, she is recognized as posthuman.

Arriving in Britain, Najwa meets her father in Durham, along with other British people. Some perceive her through the lens of orientalism, such as Andy, with whom she had her first sexual experience. After having hosted her with unexpected generosity in their 'pigeon loft', Andy and his mother reject her because she is from the Middle East and the daughter of a terrorist: "I got up and walked towards him. He stepped back [...]. Why was he so cold with me? My grandmother had said that men were predators[...] He might not have wanted to get involved with a foreigner" ([16], p. 208-210).

However, Najwa also meets other good, tolerant British people in Durham, particularly Elizabeth, in whose house Najwa finds inner peace and tranquility. Elizabeth is depicted as a humane British woman who respects other ethnic groups and non-white individuals. In Durham, next to Elizabeth's house, Najwa is interested in knowing all the trees in the neighborhood: "As the days got longer and the nights shorter, I began to wake up early and go for a walk by the river just after sunrise. I took Herbert Edlin's book *Trees*, which I borrowed from Elizabeth's library, with me and tried to recognize some of them" ([16], p. 251). This may suggest that Najwa finds more companionship and community with nature than with other human beings, and in this companionship, we evoke again another aspect of posthumanism that is this fusion between Nature and Man.

At the end of her journey, Najwa finally feels liberated after having understood that her father's love for Hani, his friend, was his motive for leaving his family: "You loved him dad? He took off his glasses and wiped them. Too much, perhaps" ([16], p. 274). She feels released after having seen and talked to her father who tells her that 'At dawn and after morning prayers, I imagined you [...] I whispered my answers and blew them, hoping that the breeze would carry them to you' ([16], p. 269). Najwa's final home is liberation, daring and knowing: "liberated by the

⁴ The two concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization were first coined by the French scholars Deleuze and Guattari (1986). The two terms are used to characterize a constant process of transformation: while deterritorialization is the process through which to undo what has already been done, reterritorialization usually follows. It is the process of un-doing what has already been done.

spaciousness, I stretched my arms out and said to the chariot-shaped cloud, 'Peace be upon you, wherever you are!' After months of studying British trees, and much quizzing by Elizabeth over many dinners, I had begun to recognize them[...] I must go back to sweep my mother's grave" ([16], p. 276). Najwa decides to return to Jordan having finally found a way in-between her father's fundamentalism and her mother's secularism: a way that perceives the Truth from a neutral and ideology-free position.

5. Conclusion

My aim throughout this essay was to bring to light how Arabs are not only vilified based on an ethnic and religious inferiority, but also excluded based on a post-human representation of this minority group in Western countries where they are considered a threat to humanity, a vilification of an entire ethnic group that contains Muslims and non-Muslims. Many Anglophone Arab writers—American Arabs and British Arabs particularly—tend to leave raise questions about hybridity, hyphenation and the integration of Arab immigrants in mainstream Western cultures when the latter exclude them from aspects of cultural and social life. Faqir and Abujaber, among others, successfully fictionalize the agonies of excluded and deterritorialized Arabs in the Diaspora.

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