Literacy, Literature and Identity

Literacy, Literature and Identity: Multiple Perspectives

Edited by

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The tone, diction, rhythm, speed and melody of our spoken language reveal to others all manner of details about who we are, our cast of mind, our disposition - in many contexts even our social class. In a word, they reveal our identity. For students of socio- and psycholinguistics this is a simple truism. But language scholars and literary critics also know that expressing ourselves in writing can be similarly revealing. The late Professor Francis Berry, for example, showed in his *Poetry and the Physical Voice* that by closely analysing the diction of Lord Tennyson's verse, he could even detect whether the poet possessed a high or low pitched voice.

Written language in its literary form reveals of course not just the identity of individuals but the characteristics of whole societies – their values, their economies, their history, the landscape they live in, their strategies for survival. Hence those of us involved in language and literary education are acutely aware not just of the radically empowering importance of literacy itself but also of the need to remind our students of the central part its literary manifestations have played, and continues to play, in shaping their identity – their comfort in being themselves. We are aware too of the need for our teaching strategies to reinforce this basic truth, especially when students are encountering a foreign language that carries its own, possibly competing, culture.

Meanwhile, we are indebted to those who have generously contributed to this volume, namely Christopher James Denman, Suaad Ambu-Saidi, Berrington Ntombela, Sam Raditlhalo, Sandhya Rao Mehta, and William Schreck. We must also warmly thank Cambridge Scholars Publishing for recognising the importance of the project. We trust that our readers will enjoy the book as much as we have enjoyed editing it.

Rahma Al-Mahrooqi
Adrian Roscoe

INTRODUCTION: IDENTITY AND LITERATURE

RAHMA AL-MAHROOQI AND ADRIAN ROSCOE

If it is true that our every utterance, spoken or written, in some way reveals aspects of who we are, then a book which links the question of identity with literature should come as no surprise. For who can deny that the record of reflection on human identity is overwhelmingly a record inscribed in the world's literature? And this is so whether identity is considered at levels individual, national, continental or even racial. Indeed, among the most memorable reflections on man, not just as an individual but as a puzzling species, are carried in those famous lines from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*:

> Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
> With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,
> With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
> He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
> In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
> In doubt his mind or body to prefer,
> Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
> Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
> Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
> Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
> Still by himself abused, or disabused;
> Created half to rise, and half to fall;
> Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
> Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

If this is perhaps literature's most concise statement of humanity's case, we can understand that every line of lyrical outpouring down the ages, every first-person poetic statement a writer has made *in propria persona*, is, in some degree, an effort to draw up from the depths some hint, some tiny mark, of identity. Consider the brooding introspection of

Shakespeare's Hamlet, the sophisticated self-doubt of Eliot's Prufrock, Arnold's efforts in "The Buried Life" to reach into heart and soul for his real self, which he knows is there though sealed off by a wall of frozen feeling. Consider the passionate efforts of John Donne in his Holy Sonnets to affirm aspects of his spiritual identity or the dilemma of Nigeria's Mabel Segun, caught between two worlds, tired, and asking "where can I go?" Think of South Africa's Sipho Sepamla's engagement with identity in his "To Whom It May Concern" or Palestine's Mahmoud Dawish's defiant poem "Identity Card." Little wonder, then, that Zimbabwe's Chenjerai Hove (2002) can assert that when he goes to a new country and wants to uncover its identity, he goes to its creative writers and not to its professional historians or sociologists. Contributors to the present text would almost certainly do the same.

CHAPTER ONE

CULTURAL DIVIDES BETWEEN ARAB-MUSLIM STUDENTS AND WESTERN LITERATURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

CHRISTOPHER JAMES DENMAN

Abstract

Within the Arab-Muslim world, the teaching of English-language literature and European languages could be argued to have ties to the advancement of Western political designs. This alleged association has taken a number of forms, though historically has perhaps been most visibly expressed in the culture of mimicry encouraged through the widespread availability of Western literary works in translation, beginning in the nineteenth century, and the appearance of English-, French-, Italian- and Russian-medium schools and universities across the Arab world. This suspected use of Western languages and literature to consolidate and expand foreign control of Arab lands has a number of parallels today in American pressure on regional governments to reform educational systems by giving English a more prominent role. This situation has, perhaps inevitably, led a number of Arab-Muslim learners to question the place of English within their respective societies, with several recent investigations reporting a sense of suspicion towards English language learning in the region. Within this context, Alkire (2007) posits two cultural divides between Muslim learners and English-language literature: the imperialistic and the moral/religious divide. The historical and contemporary nature of these divides is explored here before implications for the use of Western literary works in English-language teaching in the Arab-Muslim world are described. The relative merits of excluding English-language literary works from language teaching classes, utilizing literature drawn from

outer- and expanding-circle nations, and the development of a bicultural reading list, are detailed.

Keywords: cultural divides; Arab-Muslim learners; Western literature

Introduction

The integration of Western literature into the English language classrooms of the Arab-Muslim world has become widespread accepted practice. This use of literary work drawn from the Western Anglophone canon is often urged as being one of the most authentic ways in which learners can explore the sophisticated uses of the English language (Collie & Slater, 1990). Moreover, even a basic introduction to the literary traditions of a specific society is often seen as a means through which learners can begin to understand the values, beliefs and perspectives underpinning the culture/s associated with the target language. In this process of understanding, students of foreign language literature are not only given the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of the target language culture, but also to re-examine their own identities within a wider socio-political context (Hismanoglu, 2005).

Despite these potential benefits, however, the reshaping of a learner's perspectives can nonetheless be an unsettling experience. After all, it is entirely feasible that the introspection necessitated by this re-examination could result in feelings of estrangement from either the target language culture or the learner's own. However, a significant amount of research from Muslim majority countries suggests that such an examination can also act as a conduit for learners to reaffirm the strength of their values and beliefs, thus validating their socio-cultural identities (Elyas, 2008; Karahan, 2007; Sinno, 2008). With regard to Arab-Muslim nations, however, the historical use of Western literature within foreign language classrooms has often had less to do with the enhancement of a learner's worldview than with serving Western political ends.

This paper will therefore explore the potential pros and cons of integrating Western literary works into the English language classrooms of the Arab-Muslim world. In doing so, it will examine the uses of English as a tool of colonization and neo-imperialism from the period of the British Empire up to the current era of American-led globalization, before placing the historical uses of English language literature teaching within the Arab-Muslim world within this context. It will then explore how

political associations with the language have led to the emergence of what Alkire (2007) describes as two cultural divides between Western literature and Muslim students. Finally, the implications of these divides for classroom practice will be discussed.

English as a tool of colonization

Before examining the historical uses of English language literature within the classrooms of the Arab-Muslim world, it may be beneficial to take a broader look at the role English has played both historically, and through its more contemporary links to globalization, as a tool of colonization. It should be stated here that perhaps the most popular conceptualization of English's antecedents as the world's current lingua franca tends to adhere fairly closely to that presented in Phillipson's (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*. In brief, Phillipson argues that, as masters of almost two-thirds of the world's landmass, the British systematically imposed English upon their foreign subjects to dilute local beliefs and valorize the metropolis. In this way, they proffered England's pre-ordained "superiority" as a justification of inequalities between rulers and ruled.

Phillipson (1992) also suggests that the linguistic and cultural processes of dominance and subjugation brought into play during the colonial period are still much in evidence today. In particular, he argues that English's current dominant status is promoted by Anglophonic Western nations as a means of maintaining economic, if not social and cultural, control over the nations of the periphery. This linguistic imperialism is one way that the West maintains the global inequalities on which many of its modern economies have been built.

This sketch largely takes as its basis the British policy of making English-medium education in the colonies available to anyone in a financial position to access it. However, as Howatt (2004) points out, it is more than likely that only a fraction of the number of school-aged children across the empire ever attended government-sponsored schools. Although there are various reasons for this situation, one suggested by evidence from countries as physically and culturally disparate as Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Lesotho and Hong Kong (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Evans, 2006; Powell, 2002; Saxena, 2008) is that most colonial authorities were more concerned with curtailing the spread of English than encouraging it. This concern mostly sprang from a widely-held fear among administrators that access to English would diminish the

willingness of the masses to participate in colonial economies. Brutt-Griffler (2002) reminds readers that the British dominions were, first and foremost, financial concerns. Therefore, whatever concern administrators may have had for the social "betterment" of their subjects came secondary to maintaining the socio-economic stratification that supported colonial production.

As a consequence, English-medium education in British colonial societies was generally targeted at two main groups: the children of local elites and the urban middle classes. The first group was especially important to colonial designs as it was seen as a buffer between the foreign overlords and the local population - a means of avoiding widespread resistance to imperial rule and support for democracy which would, it was feared, lead to "premature" calls for independence (Powell, 2002). Complementing this group were the English-literate middle classes, with their roles in trade and the lower rungs of colonial bureaucracy. These are perhaps best represented by members of the uncovenanted Indian civil service - the English-speaking army of local bureaucrats that allowed a relative handful of Western officials to administer the breadth and width of British India stretching from, at various times, Aden and Trucial Oman in the west to Burma and Ceylon in the east and south (Ferguson, 2003; Onley, 2007).

Following the post-World War II decline of the British Empire, however, it was the United States that assumed the role of world policeman, economic powerhouse, and, eventually, sole superpower. In this environment, it was a combination of the emergence of transnational companies adopting English as an official working language, alongside increases in the pace of globalization due largely to the development of new communication technologies, that re-enforced the status of English as the world's lingua franca (Sinno, 2008). This is evident today in the dominant position of English across a wide range of domains, including international organizations and conferences, science and technology, banking, tourism, audio-visual cultural products and so on (Graddol, 1997). The extent of this spread can be seen in the set of "privileges" (Coulmas, 1992) English is assumed to hold over other languages, such as being the world's most taught foreign language, the most popular source for loan words into other languages, and the language of "higher communication" associated with science, technology, government and law in the developing world (Sinno, 2008; Zhughoul, 2003).

English's penetration into a wide array of domains is claimed by a number of scholars as a result, if not as an act itself, of Western neo-imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999; Cooke, 1988; Crystal, 2003). Critics of this form of cultural and linguistic encroachment hold that the promulgation of English is associated with the transmission of Western cultural values and ideas capable of alienating learners from the values of their own speech-groups. This risk is viewed as being especially apparent in the developing world, where English-language audio-visual cultural products, including movies, television programs and internet pages, often present materially-abundant, relatively promiscuous "modern" lives based around the nuclear family to which people are encouraged to aspire. To confound the issue, it has also been claimed that vested interests in a number of developing nations have adopted policies of English as an official or second language that exclude or marginalize the majority of citizens in ways mimicking the British exclusionary policies presented above (Bamgbose, 2000).

Whether the spread of English across the globe is beneficial or detrimental to other languages, cultures, and ways of being, however, remains an important area of debate. With reference to the Arab-Muslim world, regional government education policies have largely focused on the positive outcomes of promoting the widespread use of English as a second or foreign language. However, despite official government support within most Arab nations, a small but significant number of learners appear resentful of the place of English within their societies and their lives (Al-Tamimi, 2009; Clarke, 2007; Malallah, 2000; Sinno, 2008). This can perhaps be traced to the early part of the nineteenth century when English, alongside French, Italian and Russian, was employed as part of a political and military strategy to extend foreign control over Arab lands. At the forefront of the increasing Western influence over the Arab-Muslim world were educational policies giving European languages a "civilizing" role for at least the upper-echelons of society. Central to foreign language education in the newly-acquired territories of the Arab-Muslim world was the use of literary work drawn from the Western canon.

Historical uses of Western literature in the Arab-Muslim world

Casewit (1985) states that the spread of Western literature in the Arab-Muslim world began almost two hundred years ago at a time when the European powers of Britain, France, Russia and Italy were exerting

political and military pressure on the lands of the region. Within this context, Casewit continues, Arabs started to abandon their traditional disdain for writers and thinkers from the West and looked towards Europe to unravel the secrets of its military, technological and economic resurgence.

Lewis (1993) states that a direct result of this growing interest in the West was the appearance of numerous European works of fiction and poetry appearing in translation. As these were available to readers across North Africa, Central Asia and Arabia in the dominant Muslim languages of Arabic, Turkish and Persian, they may have initially appeared to offer no direct infringement upon traditional Muslim cultures. However, Lewis states, as the number of translated works grew, a culture of literary mimicry began to emerge, with local rhetorical patterns altering beyond recognition or even disappearing altogether.

This act of imitation was not just limited to works of literature, however, as it also found form in more colloquial and daily expressions of language use. For instance, Lewis (2002) offers the case of newspapers across the Arab world today reading as little more than direct translations from French or English. Although minimal evidence exists from the nineteenth century about when such changes were first widely witnessed, it is hard to imagine these altered written discourses not affecting the everyday patterns of oral interaction among at least the upper and middle classes of Arab societies.

The encouragement of linguistic mimicry, therefore, was one way in which Western literature was employed to influence both the shape and content of local Arab-Muslim expression. Thus, in turning to the West to learn more about the technology that had allowed it to bring many of the countries of the Arab-Muslim world into its sphere of influence, those readers seeking knowledge inadvertently opened the door to what Ngugi (1994) terms the "colonization of the mind". Furthermore, it could be argued that it was this mental grip the European powers exerted on the region that allowed them to eventually invade and control vast swathes of Arabia following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.

In the aftermath of the British occupation of Istanbul and the inevitable dismembering of an empire stretching, at the turn of the twentieth century, from Tunisia in North Africa to Yemen and the Gulf coast of modern-day Saudi Arabia, much of the Arab world was divided into smaller mandated

territories falling under British and French control (Fieldhouse, 2006). Within the newly-established mandates of Trans-Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, for instance, the new colonial masters soon encouraged schools and institutions of higher education in which the language of instruction was primarily English or French.

Verde (2010) reminds readers that an extensive network of American and French missionary schools had already been established across Turkey, Egypt and the Levant as early as the 1730s. These schools were actively encouraged by the founder of the early nineteenth-century Egyptian Empire, Pasha Mohammed Ali, who, according to Kirk's (1964) seminal history of the Middle East, turned to Britain and then France in an attempt to modernize Egyptian society. Under the rule of Mohammed Ali and his son, General Ibrahim Pasha, European language missionary schools flourished to such an extent that, by 1914, Kirk estimates more than half of all school-going children in Syria and Lebanon attended French-medium schools.

It was under direct European colonial rule imposed after the fall of the Ottomans, however, that many of these academies and schools grew into, or were complemented by, fully-fledged universities. One of the most notable examples was the Syrian Protestant College founded in Beirut in 1866. Towards the end of 1920, during the early years of French control in the newly-formed mandate of Lebanon, this college moved even further from its missionary origins and was re-launched as the nominally secular American University of Beirut – a Western style university to this day still highly regarded in the region.

Other notable examples from the post-Great War era include the missionary-founded American University in Cairo, Iraq's Al-Hikma University and, in the Maghreb, the University of Algiers - perhaps one of the most famous of the French-language institutions in the Arab world. The medium of instruction in these institutions was primarily, if not exclusively, English or French, and it wasn't until the end of the Second World War that calls for independence across the Arab-Muslim world came to be associated with a growing demand for the "Arabization" of schools and universities across North Africa and the Middle East (Landau, 1996). Despite these challenges to the primacy of Western languages in local education systems, however, in many cases the language of colonizers came to be complemented, but not entirely replaced, by Arabic.

Of the Gulf Arab states, the island kingdom of Bahrain - the center of colonial administration in the Gulf and, perhaps consequently, the last British colony in the Middle East - was the only territory to experience large-scale protests against foreign rule (Metz, 1993). This lack of open-resistance towards British influence and control, especially when compared to the popular liberation fronts in India, Aden and elsewhere in the empire, may be due to many factors. However, perhaps most significant among them is the fact that British influence in the Gulf was generally exercised in a far more indirect fashion than in many other parts of the globe. In particular, the modern Gulf states were ruled by the British as either formal or, in the case of Oman, informal protectorates, rather than as colonies proper (Lloyd, 1996; Onley, 2007). As such, local rulers were largely left to rule according to tradition, with few efforts made to develop infrastructure that was not essential to British military and communications interests in the region.

Added to this relative latitude, the lucrative pearling industry allowed merchants across the region to fund a system of formal schools for the benefit of their tribesmen. According to Verde (2010), these schools, including those found in Dubai, Sharjah, Qatar and Bahrain, often adhered to Egyptian curricula and included instruction in the subjects of math, geography and Arabian history. With the demise of the local pearling trade in the 1930s, however, the region entered a long period of economic decline and this system of formal education largely disappeared. However, unlike in many other parts of the Arab world, where Western-run schools assumed a central role in local education, the void in the Gulf was largely filled by madrassas where instruction in the Qur'an, Arabic and basic mathematics dominated (Al-Khwaiter, 2001).

That is not to say, however, that the Gulf States were devoid of English-language educational institutions, with perhaps the first "modern" Western academy in the region being established in Manama by a group of American Protestant missionaries known as the Arabian Mission in 1892 (Al-Misnad, 1985). Although the evangelical nature of this academy may not have been as overtly manifest in the "secular" Western-style universities established elsewhere in the Arab-Muslim world in the years that followed, the ultimate aim nonetheless remained the same: "civilizing" Europe's newest subjects.

The teaching of Western literature within these institutes, therefore, was one form of expanding the level of control the European colonial

authorities exerted over the Arab populations of their territories. It must be reiterated here that the study of foreign languages for much of the previous century, unlike today, was commonly viewed as inseparable from the study of a foreign literature (Hall, 2005). Nonetheless, the primary focus of promoting European-language education in the Arab-Muslim world could perhaps best be viewed in the light of the assertion by the British philologist William P. Russel (1801), as cited in Crystal, 2003, pp. 78-79) that:

A thousand pounds expended for tutors, books, and premiums would do more to subdue a nation of savages than forty thousand expended for artillerymen, bullets, and gunpowder.

Of course, as outlined above, the debate about the most appropriate language for education in the British colonies - vernacular versus English – was not as black-and-white as the above depiction suggests (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Evans, 2006; Saxena, 2008). However, there still can be little doubt that the creation of a local ruling class "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835, cited in Kent, 1999, p. 205), to act as a medium of colonial rule was one of the core designs of Western educational policies imposed on the Arab-Muslim world.

Given the historical uses of English-language literature within the region as a tool of subjugation and control, there is perhaps little wonder that the teaching of Western literary works is still today often viewed with suspicion by some learners. This suspicion within the region, moreover, has been seemingly exacerbated by global-political events unfolding in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

In particular, one of the most remarkable political initiatives accompanying the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively, was increasing Western pressure on countries across the Muslim world to reform their education systems (Karmani, 2010). Such pressure could be said to originate from the "preventive war" notion put forth by the Bush administration's National Security Strategy (Karmani, 2005), and is perhaps best seen in contemporary US government reports and media stories claiming that education systems within both the Gulf and the larger Muslim world acted as breeding grounds for potential anti-American terrorists (*Washington Times Editorial*, 2003).

For instance, in a resolution before the House of Congress in June 2002, it was claimed that some textbooks in Saudi Arabia fostered a "combination of intolerance, ignorance, anti-Semitic, anti-American, and anti-Western values" (House of Congress Resolution 432, 2002), in a way that threatened the peace and security of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and the world itself. Similar claims were leveled by certain segments of the Western press at governments across the Muslim world, with a number of nations responding by implementing wide-reaching changes to public school and university curricula. According to the logic underlying these reforms, the primary purpose of these changes was the promotion of a broader and more "secular" worldview than one supposedly available through extensive religious and Arabic study (Glasser, 2003).

This overt American pressure, often presented in the form of education aid, hastened a process of educational reform across large parts of the Muslim world, which has come to be summarized by the now infamous "less Islam and more English" phrase in Glasser's (2003) account of American-designed Qatari education reforms. In the *Washington Post* article entitled "Qatar Reshapes its Schools Putting English over Islam", Glasser reports moves by Qatar's government not only to rewrite textbooks to remove any trace of "violence and fanaticism" (p. A4), but also to completely overhaul the nation's education system by employing the services of a conservative American think tank - the Rand Corporation. Glasser reports supporters of this overhaul as saying that a new, modern education system in the kingdom, with English playing a central part, would enhance citizen participation in Qatari society, increase opportunity, and encourage the individual entrepreneurship increasingly demanded by globalization.

The place of English language texts in such reforms is outlined by a report on US diplomacy in the Muslim and Arab world. This report, from the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World (2003), claims daily exposure to native and non-native teachers, in addition to the English language texts they employ, is a form of education-based diplomacy that is extremely effective in shaping both the information learners receive and their attitudes.

US foreign policy goals of fostering more positive attitudes towards the West by putting pressure on governments in Muslim-majority countries to increase the amount of time in which students are exposed to English, share therefore many similarities with the education policies

adopted by the Western powers in Arab lands almost a hundred years ago. Given the mistrust of Western literature often associated with these historical and contemporary developments, Alkire (2007) suggests two cultural divides separating Muslim learners from Western literature.

The imperialistic divide

The first point of separation Alkire (2007) offers is the imperialistic divide. As the name suggests, this can trace its roots to the historical control Western nations have sought to exert over the Arab-Muslim world. Today, this is often expressed in terms of neo-imperialism, with the continuing presence of American and British military bases across Arabia one of the most visible manifestations. In terms of literature, the imperialistic divide is perhaps most apparent in those literary works typified by a Western ethnocentric sensibility. This sensibility can often result in the promotion and re-enforcement of negative stereotypes, and is often witnessed in portrayals of Arab-Muslims that are based more on populist misconceptions than experience.

Unfortunately, anyone delving into American or British literature does not have to venture far to find examples of this divide. It must be recalled here that the British Empire at its height included control of the vast majority of the predominantly Muslim lands of South-East Asia, Arabia, the subcontinent and east coast Africa (Lloyd, 1996). Given the dominance of British colonial interests in these regions, it should perhaps come as no surprise that not only do Muslim characters abound in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British writing, but that often these portrayals are far from flattering.

Examples of even some of the more enlightened Western portraits of Muslims appearing in twentieth-century British fiction could be easily interpreted as typifying this divide. For example, in Conrad's 1908 novel *Lord Jim*, Mecca-bound pilgrims afloat on the Indian Ocean are sketched as a pious, though huddled and ultimately powerless, mass, asleep during the unfolding of an impending tragedy. Moreover, the one specifically Arab character to make a brief appearance in the novel, Sheriff Ali, is a marauder who cannot be contained by two Malay Muslim chiefs but who, nonetheless, is put to flight by the ingenuity of the white British protagonist.

Arab-Muslim students working their way through these characterizations, therefore, may experience a variety of reactions, including incredulity, confusion, or even disdain for the writer and his portrayal. However, in the current global-political environment, perhaps one of the biggest dangers of the imperialistic divide is that the representations associated with it are not confined to the literature of another era, but are still widely evident in the popular press today.

For example, Norma Khouri's 2007 putatively non-fiction account of a Muslim family's honor-killing in Jordan, "Forbidden Love", was eventually exposed as a work of imagination owing much of its popularity to its reproduction of Western stereotypes about the ill-treatment of women and the prevalence of violence in Arabia. Added to this continuing divide in Western literature, such negative portrayals remain common across large segments of the populist Western press (Ameli, Marandi, Ahmed, Kara & Merali, 2007). These two factors, therefore, combine to create a real danger that Muslim students dealing with the imperialistic divide during their language studies may all too readily find negative representations reinforced across a variety of texts and media.

The moral/religious divide

The second cultural divide Alkire (2007) posits as separating Muslims from Western literature relates directly to moral and religious concerns. According to Alkire, this divide is a result of the opposing worldviews underpinning secular Western and Arab-Muslim thought. It can perhaps be best framed by the conflicting value systems associated with the Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian foundations of Western scientific reason, on the one hand, and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the sacred texts of the Hadith and Sunna on the other (Charise, 2007; Metz, 1993).

This separation, therefore, cuts to the very heart of language as a semiotic system, and thus encompasses some dramatic implications for the place of Western literary work in the English language classroom. That is, if the fabric of English and Arabic is, indeed, made of such different material, then it stands to reason that meanings constructed with and by each language stand every chance of being mutually incomprehensible.

For example, the "Western" outlook espoused by the literature of Europe and the United States is often claimed to encompass a commitment

to the principles of human rights, freedom of speech and equality. To these, however, can also be added far less "universally" shared attitudes such as a general tolerance of alcohol, illegal drugs and promiscuity (Charise, 2007). However, this latter set of attitudes is largely opposed by law or custom across the Arab world, and therefore a local Muslim student encountering them within the literary works of the West will most certainly find a major source of conflict with their own values.

Moreover, the nature of this divide is not limited to the values and beliefs underlying Western literary work, but can even be witnessed, according to the noted Malaysian scholar Syed Al-Attas (1980), at the lexical level. Al-Attas's theory of basic Islamic vocabulary maintains that the languages of the Muslim world are infused with a basic understanding of ideas and constructs in which key concepts, including God, knowledge, happiness, truth and so on, have become imbued, through association with the beliefs and traditions underlying the religion, with an essentially Islamic meaning. These same concepts in English, according to al-Attas, are influenced by non-religious traditions, and hence are fundamentally different from their Islamic counterparts.

To highlight this point, Asraf (1996) cites the word "happiness". From a Western perspective, happiness implies something fleeting and difficult to grasp. By way of contrast, in the Islamic worldview, happiness is defined as a permanent state of the soul, achieved when one has attained certainty regarding important matters of existence. However, that this noun might be uttered by Muslims in any number of tongues, from Arabic to Malay and Kiswahili, does not remove it from the of basic Islamic lexicon, as those languages used by Muslim people around the world have become "Islamized" through exposure to a comprehensive network of beliefs, values and principles.

Alkire's (2007) two basic cultural divides, therefore, encompass a wide array of concerns ranging from the appearance of negative and uniformed stereotypes to opposing values underlying everything from textual structure to word selection and intended meaning. When taken within the context of Western imperialism across the Arab-Muslim world, it appears as though the implications for the integration of Western literature into English language classes in the region remain quite complex.

Conclusions: Implications for classroom practice

The corollary of these cultural divides may appear to be an acceptance that the gap between Western literature and Arab-Muslim students is so wide that foreign literary works should be excluded from English language classes altogether. Perhaps not surprisingly, some scholars support this course of action (Lazar, 1993; Taglieber, Johnson & Yarbrough, 1988). They often focus upon Haggan's (1998) report of the unease her Kuwaiti students experienced when reading already rigorously colleague-censored Western literature and contend that, even when conscious measures are taken to filter the level of exposure students experience to conflicting cultural and religious values, the divides explored here are just too wide to bridge.

The immediate efficacy of this course of action is difficult to deny. However, it may be that taking this decision away from students and telling them that engagement with literature from Western cultures will be too unnerving an encounter, may not only rob them of the chance to experience English in the full flight of its expression, but may also be an act of what Brutt-Griffler (2002) terms linguistic paternalism. After all, a number of studies from nations across the Muslim world suggest that students all the way from high school to the post-graduate level often report a developed-enough sense of their own religious and cultural selves to identify and reject values encountered in their English language studies incongruous with their own (Dan, Haroon & Naysmith, 1996; Elyas, 2008; Karahan, 2007). Al-Attas (1980), lends support to this argument, stating that it is only those students who are poorly versed in Islamic ideals who are vulnerable to cultural deracination through exposure to English.

One important feature common across the majority of these studies is the high level of critical literacy skills displayed by respondents. Of course, it would be folly to assume that all students in the English-language classroom can boast a similar set of skills. A recent investigation by Clarke (2007) of English majors in an Emirati university, for example, showed that, despite a curriculum seeking to actively develop critical thinking skills, the majority of students still digested the values and principles encountered in their English-language studies in an unthinking way. Given the possibility that even those students familiar with critical literacy skills may not have enough experience in applying them in a systematic and effective way, it seems as though the teaching of Western

literature in English classrooms must necessarily go hand-in-hand with the development of critical reading abilities.

One way to complement this development is the selection of a wide range of English-language literature drawn from Kachru's (1992) outer and expanding circle nations. The outer circle comprises former British dominions where English is today still widely employed as a second or common language. The expanding circle, on the other hand, consists of those nations without direct experience of British rule but where English now plays an important role. Well-known examples of English-language literature from these circles include Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* - the first novel by an East African writer published in English - Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*.

English-language literature emanating from these outer and expanding circles, therefore, not only demonstrates a variety of communicative means typifying the different cultures from which it is drawn, but also offers learners examples of how a language often assumed to exclusively convey central Western values can be appropriated to express a diverse range of socio-cultural identities. Therefore, readers of literary work from these circles, apart from being far less likely to encounter the cultural divides explored above, will also be introduced to different means of using the English language in a way that can potentially empower, rather than marginalize, them.

Finally, Alkire (2007) offers a way in which outer- and expanding-circle English-language literature can be used to complement American and British work through the identification of "bi-cultural" literature. According to Alkire, bi-cultural literature refers to fiction and non-fiction texts that explore West-Muslim cultural divides and commonalities. Such literature usually consists of explorations of the Muslim world by Western writers and similar examinations of the West by Muslims. Alkire divides his list of bi-cultural texts according to region, with examples offered for the Arab-Muslim world that include Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* and Alireza's *A Drop of the Veil*.

How useful these suggestions are in mitigating the potentially negative effects of exposure to the imperialistic and moral/religious divides experienced by Arab-Muslim students, however, will still largely depend on the cultural sensitivity of language instructors and on their ability to place students' reading within a broader socio-cultural framework. It is

interesting to note that, despite the extent of the cultural divides Alkire (2007) offers, he remains committed to the use of English-language literature in the classroom. Here, he finds support from a variety of scholars and researchers but always with the proviso that students are suitably versed in critical literacy skills, and that the literature they encounter is varied enough to express a wide array of cultural values, thus allowing them to successfully pursue their explorations.

Such provisions do, it is true, place a heavy responsibility on the English language teacher, often more accustomed to dealing with the development of communicative abilities rather than analytical skills. Nonetheless, if the study of English-language literature is to become a valued and worthwhile part of the English-language classroom in the Arab-Muslim world, then these steps must necessarily form the very first part of an arduous journey.

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