Islam and the West

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A Love Story?

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PREFACE

A COLD BUT FERTILE GROUND

LEILA ABOULELA

I didn't become a writer until I had left home. That was what gave me the material and subject matter I needed. When my husband and I first settled in Aberdeen, we were not sure when we would return to Sudan, or if indeed we would never go back, remaining as immigrants in the U.K. or moving on to a second foreign country. This uncertainty gave me a sense of dislocation. There was homesickness to deal with, as well as cultural confusion and awkwardness of being an Arab and a Muslim in the Europe of the 1990s. Exile, by definition, is a life one has not been prepared for; it is a removal from the familiar. It is "the saddest of fates", as Edward Said described it. It is an ancient form of punishment. Looking back, this trauma seems to have been the catalyst that awoke in me a dormant ability to write. Had I continued to live in Khartoum, this creativity might have slept forever.

When I left Sudan in 1987, I was twenty-three and the idea of writing was the furthest thing from my mind. Back home I had read a lot of novels. I read whatever came my way, according to an ebb and flow of books that varied in both quantity and quality. I read freely, without guidance or recommendation. I was an economics student at the University of Khartoum, specializing in statistics. Literature was not one of my subjects, and so reading was only ever a leisurely activity, a hobby. I was able to discover, alone, which books I liked, and which were superior. In English I read Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, Antonia White, and Somerset Maugham. I read Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in translation and Tayeb Salih, Zeinab Bilal, Nawal Al-Sadawai and Ihsan Abdel-Qudoos in Arabic. There were not many opportunities to discuss these books with others - reading was an entirely private affair, a secret world that was completely fulfilling. I had no urge to write.

My move from Sudan to Scotland changed all this. The ending of one kind of life and the beginning of another was dramatic enough to make me

pause and reflect. The gulf of difference between Khartoum and Scotland compelled me to comment, to compare, to notice absences and observe additions. The end of my life in Khartoum demanded an elegy. And it was in fiction that I found a language to express my anxieties, my misgivings and my reactions to all that was new and surprising.

Travelling away from home is considered positive for a writer. Looking at one's home from a distance means greater detachment and that is characteristic of the writer. He is the one standing back, observing and warning. In exile there is time and space away from the throb and grind of the everyday life left behind. Describing his own development as a writer exiled from Zanzibar to London, Abdulrazak Gurnah said that, "… displacement is necessary - …the writer produces work of value in isolation because he or she is then free from responsibilities and intimacies which mute and dilute the truth of what needs to be said".

And what was it that I wanted to say, in Scotland in 1992? I wasn't sure. At first I was simply gripped by a compulsive need to express myself. Words were whizzing through my head all the time. The mechanics of constructing a coherent story or plotting a novel were far from my mind – they came later. In the beginning, there was just the need to speak to out. I tried to put my thoughts into discursive articles or essays but I faltered. Disagreeing with something I had read in the newspaper one day, I tried to write a letter to the editor. Fiction came out instead.

I was obsessed with the need to express my homesickness and document the daily incidences of cultural difference that I was experiencing. I was anxious about the future of second-generation Sudanese and Muslim immigrants in the West - both from a personal and from a general perspective. Issues such as the dilution of identity and language, integration, the rights and wrongs, the gains and losses of leaving home – occupied my thoughts. Around me I could see other immigrants like myself. Many insisted that their stay in the U.K. was temporary, and yet their children were spending their entire childhoods, formative years, away from home. I watched the parents struggle to adapt to a new life, strive to benefit from it while in the background their children silently became less and less Sudanese, less and less Muslim, more and more a part of Britain.

There is something unreal and brave about a gathering of Sudanese in Britain. We get together to eat our familiar food, laugh in our familiar way. We are replicating the past, taking comfort in each other, needing for an afternoon or an evening to forget the reality that we are not in Sudan. And of course in these warm, pleasant gatherings the difficult, sensitive topics are never discussed. When/should we go back? Has it been worth it to leave? What about our children- what is their relationship to Sudan?

How far away from us are they going? None of this is mentioned. We eat, we drink tea and we leave having entertained and comforted each other but those questions remain unanswered. Such questioning is a luxury, anyway, in the immigrant's struggle to survive. It felt awkward and pointed to pose these dilemmas in most social situations. As I kept my speculations and anxieties to myself, they floated down to my subconscious mind, fuelled fictions of culture clashes, loss of identity, wishful dreams.

The Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić, describes this situation with insight and clarity in her essay, "The Writer in Exile". She says,

> The writer tries to rationalize his personal nightmare in writing, to calm his exile's fears in writing, to put his broken life into some sort of shape through writing, to order the chaos he has landed in through exile, to fix the insights he has come to in writing, to dilute his own bitterness in writing … An exile's writings are often "nervous"… subversive and nostalgic. This is because exile is itself a neurosis, a restless process of testing values and comparing worlds: the one we left and the one where we ended up.

In my case the comparisons between the world of Khartoum and the one of Aberdeen seemed endless and fascinating. I went from light into darkness, from warmth into cold; from the former colony to the land of the old colonizer, from poverty to wealth, and from a Muslim society to a secular Christian democracy. I was in awe of these differences, full of conflict and tension. It was a fertile ground for fiction.

While I can see my writing in Ugrešić's description, her words are also applicable to writers, who had been writers before they left home. In my case, it was the exile itself that triggered the writing. Why? The answer, I believe, lies in the power of words, of narrative and stories, to compensate for something that is missing. In her classic book, *Becoming a Writer*, the American author Dorothea Brande instructs writers on how to increase their output without effort, how to write freely and abundantly and how to cure periods of creative drought or "writer's block". Her main advice is that while working on a story or novel, one should stop reading, watching television or going to the theatre. The writer's recreation should be wordless. In this condition, she says, "words would rush in to fill the wordless vacuum … If we are left alone long enough and forbidden to read, we will very soon be talking to ourselves.. . Prisoners who never wrote a word in the days of their freedom will write on any paper they can lay their hands on". Exile shares that characteristic with prison; the language, speech patterns and gossip of home are gone, a torrent of words rushes in to fill a vacuum.

There were other deprivations too, of colour, of scents, of know-how and the ability to penetrate depth. In my early years in Scotland, before I started to integrate, life around me seemed predictable and over-organized. All the people around me were polite and efficient; I could not distinguish them from one another. The present was sterile and alienating, so I had to live out dramas in my mind.

Starker still was the silence of the muezzin, the absence of the words *insha'Allah* and *alhamdullilah*; the absence of faith. I had left a life connected to the source; a world in which angels moved among humans and it was common to say, "If Allah gives me life tomorrow…." Now I found myself praying in a place where people had stopped praying. I was as foreign and as new as the words Ramadan, hijab, haj, Eid and jihad listed in the updated editions of the English dictionary. Perhaps, I told myself, I had a calling after all; perhaps I had a role to play, a gift to give, a seed to plant. I could put Islam in British fiction, I could write novels that reflected Muslim logic with flawed and complex characters trying to practise their faith or make sense of Allah's will in difficult circumstances.

Another spur to writing was defensiveness. Suddenly I needed to express that life in Khartoum was tolerable, that the people were good, that it was circumstances and not choice that had made us all leave. Here I was, in a culture and place that asserted every minute that West was best, Africa a mess, only Islam oppresses women and that I should be grateful I had escaped. Youth and pride made me resist this description. True, I was not an expert on the Sudan, I could not challenge these judgements objectively or scientifically. But I had an intimate knowledge of both Sudan and Islam - they were in my blood. I wanted to bear witness to what I knew, to put down on paper the Khartoum I knew - a place where the impossible and the romantic pulsed within reach, a place that was easy and deep, harsh and vast, wayward and rich. I wanted to pin-point exactly what I was missing. I wanted to show the people around me that an African city could be as atmospheric as London, livelier than Brighton, more beautiful than Edinburgh. Stories couldn't prove that but it was enough for me to express that Sudan was a real place, its culture a valid way of life. There was more to it than the stereotypical images of famine and war.

Writing is an extension of reading. It is an imitation and a development of an existing body of literature. As readers, we hold memories of prose and storylines in our consciousness. It is not just a story that stays with us, but its rhythm, its atmosphere, its voice. The writer puts his own life - his particular pain, his vision of the world, his idea of joy and beauty - into that construct called a story. But he needs to have read first in order to

know what a story is. He needs to know what others are saying in order to say something new.

One of the things I enjoyed most about living in the U.K., and the thing I miss most when I am away, is the institution of the public library. Yes, it is possible to buy books anywhere in the world or order them through Amazon but it is, I think, only the free borrowing from a library that can satisfy the hunger to read. The abundance of books, the freedom of choice, the knowledge that even if you didn't enjoy a book you could return it at no loss encourages the reader to take risks, to experiment and truly fulfil himself with what he loves best. From the beginning, being in the U.K. meant more access to books and a wider scope in my reading. Despite my best efforts, access to books in Khartoum was never as easy, sadly, it is usually only the best-selling, mass-marketed books that make their way to developing countries. It is ironic to think that I had to wait until I got to the local library in Aberdeen to read Chinua Achebe or Ismail Kadare – neither of whom I had heard of in Khartoum. From Aberdeen library, I borrowed books by Scottish writers, books on poetry and biographies of authors. I borrowed books and only read half of them, or a quarter, and sometimes I borrowed the same book again and again. And it was a joy too to live in a culture where reading was valued. There were radio programmes about books, women's groups met to discuss books, the newspapers devoted pages to book reviews and there were television programmes about the lives of writers. All these I reached for and they became the activities of my new life, what I gained by moving to Britain.

Encouraged by my husband, I started to attend weekly Creative Writing classes. These were informal, held in the evening and open to the general public. One course was held at the University of Aberdeen, another in a high school, another in the central library. It was always fascinating to watch a piece of writing transform from the intimately personal into something for public consumption. I learned that a writer could easily fail in communicating his own ideas to others. Skill was necessary, practice was necessary. In my situation – writing for another culture, a place my classmates didn't know – the potential for misunderstanding was great. I learnt how to be clear and precise, how to hold the attention of a reader with a subject they could not relate to, how to present my point of view of the West without causing offence, how to entertain without degrading or belittling my own heritage.

I began to read critically instead of just for enjoyment, to discuss fiction in terms of process and craft. Gradually I developed the understated style characteristic of Scottish and American realism. This meant natural-sounding dialogue and characters grounded in their socio-economic

surrounding. On a more practical level, I picked up tips on how to approach agents with my first novel synopsis and how to submit my stories to competitions.

Published writers started to visit our classes. The local library also hosted readings by established poets and novelists. I attended as many of these events as I could - they were well advertised and open to the public. This was in the early/mid-nineties, when a new Scottish realist movement emerged as an exciting feature of British writing. Those young Scottish writers who were winning prizes and gaining recognition were living close to me. I had the privilege of listening to William MacIlvanney, Kathleen Jamie, Janice Galloway, Duncan McLean, Alan Spence, Robin Jenkins, and A.L. Kennedy. I was inspired by these writers. Most of them did not come from literary backgrounds and they were championing their own Scottish culture and traditions, which they saw as being marginalized and dominated by the metropolitan literary tastes of London. Instead of writing about the circles of power in London, they wrote about ordinary characters who listened to pop music and loved football. They wrote about the unemployed, the working classes, the young drug addicts. To me, this meant there was space for other marginalized characters – those who were marginalized because of religion, those who were immigrants or asylum seekers. The Muslim woman in her hijab, the reluctant Sudanese immigrant, could now claim a place in literature written in English.

INTRODUCTION

SADIA ZULFIQAR WITH SUMITA MUKHERJEE

Islam is complex, bound up with faith and family, history and community. It is a heterogeneous set of historically and contextually variable practices and beliefs shaped by region, ethnicity, sect, and class, as well as by varying responses to local and transnational cultural and economic processes, all of which have diverse effects on the lives of Muslims around the world. As Nigerian theorist and activist Ayesha Imam argues, Islam and Muslim are not interchangeable.[1] This differentiation, according to Imam, helps avoid "essentializing Islam as an ahistorical, disembodied ideal which is more or less imperfectly actualised in this or that community".[2] However, in the "West", according to Kenneth W. Harrow, "Islam has conventionally been reduced to the notion of a predetermined monolith."[3] This totalising tendency reduces Islam to an unchanging doctrine, and its adherents to a single identity. It also reduces Islam to a religion of the "East" and the "Orient" while characterising the "West" as its monolithic Christian opposite. We use this undefined, stereotypical term the "West" as a counterpart to that of "Islam". In the present day, stereotypes about Islamic fundamentalism, jihadists and veiled women obscure the long-standing dialogues that practitioners and interpreters of Islam have been conducting with themselves and others about faith and culture. This collection seeks to continue these dialogues, to explore and understand the love-hate relationship between Islam and the West, through a variety of interdisciplinary topics and methods.

Islam and the West have had a very difficult relationship for centuries. In the seventh century, the Vatican church declared Islam a heresy, and during the early part of the Renaissance in Europe, it was considered a sacrilegious and heretical doctrine.[4] However, in recent years tensions have heightened. This is partially due to the increasing politicisation of Islam and the concurrent development of stereotypes portraying Muslim women as victims oppressed by their religion. It can be hard to recognise that Islam – like every other religion – is not uniform in interpretation, but intellectually rich and complex, and should be considered with equanimity and equitability. Recent events such as 9/11 and 7/7, and the media

coverage of them, have further strengthened stereotypes of Muslims as vicious "others" in stark contrast to the peaceful and democratic western world. The reductive and simplified designation of Islam has become increasingly problematic in the post-9/11 western world, in which Islam is often considered as a violent political movement devoid of the faith informing Abrahamic religions.

In recent years a number of western scholars have addressed the relationship between Islam and the West. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin have examined contemporary representations of Muslims in the West through their research network "Framing Muslims" and in the resulting volume *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11* (2011).[5] According to Morey and Yaqin, Muslims have been represented as a disturbing presence in the West, as they are unable to exercise western values of individuality and freedom. This stereotyping, Morey and Yaqin argue, is framed within western cultural, political and media discourses.[6] Claire Chambers has also recently scrutinised Muslim stereotyping in Britain in her work, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (2011).[7] Chambers uses the term "writers of Muslim heritage" rather than "Muslim writers" in order to challenge the stereotypical representation of Muslims as one homogeneous community.[8] The writers Chambers focuses on are from diverse cultural backgrounds, which have also shaped their understandings of religion and their literary aesthetics, and they therefore subvert the prevalent problematic representations of Muslims.[9] In a historical analysis dating back to the medieval period, Humayun Ansari has written extensively about the role of Islam in Britain and British images of Islam, providing a vital framework for understanding the way in which western societies have been influenced and shaped by the encounter with a faith and culture deemed to be Eastern and Other.[10]

In building upon Morey, Yaqin and Chambers' work on stereotyping, this collection advances the discussion around the politics of Muslim authorial identity. However, rather than focusing purely on stereotypes, the writers in this volume attempt to locate hidden spaces and alternate frames in media, literature and cinema, which can help in building a dialogue between Islam and the West. In the epilogue, Michael Ellison also talks about art (specifically opera) as a fertile ground for experimentation, which enables the audience to look beyond fixed meanings and demeaning depictions. Despite crusades and hatred between these supposedly irreconcilable cultures, there have been numerous exchanges of scientific knowledge, art and literature between the West and the Islamic world. The purpose of this collection is to explore these hidden corners to facilitate an

intercultural dialogue, and thus encourage the reader to understand the relationship between Islam and the West not only as a story of hatred, but also a narrative with some threads of love in it. Difference, as Leila Aboulela says in the prologue, is a fertile ground for the initiation of a dialogue which can accommodate both anxieties and fears by making the unknown accessible. According to Aboulela, the differences between Sudan and Scotland – anxieties connected with exile from homeland, homesickness, fear of losing her identity, and discomfort in her new adopted home – contributed to her development as a writer. These experiences enabled Aboulela to put her faith in her fiction, which in turn was well received by those who were equally uncomfortable with Islam and its adherents, but who engaged with her subtle representations of a misunderstood way of being. Discomfort, in this context, is essential in order to tell the story of both sides to each other. However, we cannot deny that in these exchanges the potential for disagreement or misinterpretation is also great. This collection offers nuanced representations of Islam, and thus encourages readers to look beyond the stereotypes, beyond the propaganda of the history of colonisation, and to excavate buried histories – thus developing the dialogue which Goethe initiated in the early nineteenth century in *West-Eastern Divan* (1819).[11]

Islam, the West and Violence

Stereotypical representations of Muslims can most commonly be seen in cinema, on television, and in the press, where violence constitutes Muslims' main identity, together with female victimhood and the veil, fanaticism and fundamentalism. Explaining the current media bias against Islam and Muslims, Morey and Yaqin have argued:

> As in so much of the fiction and film about contemporary terrorism, the Americans, and to a lesser extent the British, are *psychologised* and the Muslims are, in contrast, *pathologized*; they and their religious, social, and political systems are seen as inherently predisposed to violence, be it terrorism or brutal law enforcement.[12]

And according to Zohair Husain and David M. Rosenbaum,

> [h]umiliating stereotypes of Muslims constructed for entertainment provide a catharsis through which Western paranoia and "Islamophobia" is expressed and partly relieved. The news media is the instigator of that paranoia and "Islamophobia".[13]

As Michael Munnik argues in his essay on British journalism in this collection, the media needs to construct a more nuanced picture to counteract these negative stereotypes. According to Munnik, a more complex representation, which acknowledges the ways in which the media and "Muslims" are influencing images of each other, is required to "disturb the orthodoxy of an essentialising journalistic discourse."

As stated, these essentialised images have been evident for a long time. During the 1980s and 1990s, popular Hollywood movies portrayed Muslims exclusively as terrorists determined to conquer the United States.[14] The lesson that films like *Invasion USA* (1985)*, Iron Eagle* (1986)*, Delta Force* (1986)*, Death before Dishonor* (1987)*, Navy SEALs* (1990)*, True Lies* (1994)*, Executive Decision* (1996) and *Rules of Engagement* (2000) teach is that diplomacy is worthless in the face of an alien culture.[15] Kerem Bayraktaroğlu's essay on the portrayal of Muslim children in American cinema illustrates how this negative representation of Muslims started before 2001, but he argues effectively that Muslim children have also been used as symbols of terror and violence in American cinema since 9/11.

The homogenisation of the Muslim as terrorist is problematic; however it is widespread not only in the media but also in literature. One such example is Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* (2004), an atheist work, which argues that all religions are evil, and "[w]ords like 'God' and 'Allah' must go the way of 'Apollo' and 'Baal.'"[16] However, rather than focusing on every religion, Harris makes Islam his main focus, and he develops an unhistorical and de-contextualised reading of the Quran. Harris supports America's military invasions of Muslim countries, arguing that "we cannot wait for the weapons of mass destruction to dribble into the hands of fanatics".[17] He is also willing to consider the option of a pre-emptive nuclear strike against a weaponised Islamic state: "it may be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe."[18] *The Second Plane,* by Martin Amis, published in 2007, also reveals a reductive understanding of Islam and the Muslim world, and explains current upheavals in that world as the outcome of male sexual frustration.[19] Amis focuses on Islam as the supposed "last sanctum of male power", ignoring western injustices against Islam: the European colonisation of Muslim lands; America's interference in the Middle East, and its support for Arab dictators (in the 2011 Egyptian revolution, America was very reluctant to abandon its support for the dictatorial president, Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt for three decades); America's support for the autocratic rule of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran against the wishes of the people of Iran; and the US-UK invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.[20] In an interview with *The Times* in 2006*,* Amis argued: "There is a definite urge – don't

you have it? – to say, 'The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order.'"[21]

Edward Said defined this process as a "parody of how knowledge gets produced; the idea that Islam is medieval and dangerous, as well as hostile and threatening to 'us', for example, has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity that is very well defined."[22] Lenore Bell's essay on Don De Lillo's *Falling Man* and John Updike's *Terrorist*, both published in 2007, contends that the Muslim antagonist is portrayed as essentially "evil." Bell argues that the villain can often be the most insightful, complex character in literature, but the post 9/11 villain has been portrayed as a one-dimensional pathological figure by both the American government and media. The sheer ubiquity of this perception needs to be challenged in order to give a nuanced understanding of Islam. Daniel O'Gorman's essay on three Pakistani novels – *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie (2009), *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam (2008) and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid (2008) – argues that the authors of these texts challenge the definition "fundamentalist" in the context of the war on terror. This renegotiation of fundamentalism, according to O'Gorman, will prompt readers to consider their own prejudices, which should lead to a better and more sophisticated understanding of "fundamentalism" and the "fundamentalist".

These dialogues extend to other forms of literature and media, such as graphic novels or comic strips. Kenan Kocak perceptively discusses the genre of comic journalism, linking it to new journalism and the blurred lines between reality and fiction. Kocak's essay on Turkish comics, specifically *Ayşegül Savaşta: Irak Şahini* (2006), contends for the inclusion of "other" narratives in the global discourse on Islam and the West, in order to investigate whether the relationship ever was or can be a "love story". The genre of television, whether in long-form drama or short-form documentary, is another area in which various representations of Muslims, often violent, abound. Recent successful programmes such as the American television series *Lost* (2004-2010) and *Homeland* (2011-), which is based on the Israeli television series *Hatufim* (*Prisoners of War*), have depicted violent Muslims in various forms, attempting to add more nuance to these depictions for mainstream audiences, with varying success.

Islam, the West and Women

The most important discourse about the difference between the West and Islam is the question of women. The narrative of Muslim women's oppression by Islam is inseparable from the question of the veil.

According to Robin Yassin-Kassab, "[t]he cloth [veil] has become a flag waved by Islamists and Islamophobes to define each other [...] Removing it, and putting it on are loaded political acts".[23] The veil is a powerful symbol and it would be naive to generalise about the phenomenon of veiling, particularly as there are different levels of the practice. It is important to see veiling in its historical context, in order to understand it as an emblem (in the West) of Muslim women's supposed oppression.

The veil has different connotations in different Islamic cultures, and therefore the phenomenon of veiling cannot be reduced to a single elucidation. According to Daphne Grace, veiling can be an index of "class identity, gender inequality and western opposition"; however, it is important to establish who is explaining "the phenomenon of veiling, for whom and to what end."[24] The question of who is speaking is crucial, as many Muslim women underline the complexity of veiling by giving varied reasons for using it. Aziza al-Hibri asks, "[w]hy is it oppressive to wear a head scarf but liberating to wear a mini-skirt?"[25] In Oman, where the veil signifies high class status, Unni Wikan argues that it is "as much a symbol of male oppression as Western women wearing a blouse."[26] Marina Lazreg argues that a woman "who takes up the veil accepts her essentialized difference from men (valued negatively) and gives it credence. Furthermore, she enfolds herself in a gamut of behaviour stemming from the unacknowledged self-deception that veiling entails."[27] The veil is no longer a mere piece of cloth in Muslim women's attire; rather, it has become a precarious political issue. Fadwa El Guindi has argued that "a reaffirmation of tradition and culture might again be played out in the near future through the idiom and politics of the veil".[28]

The American and British political rhetoric used to justify the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan confirmed El Guindi's prediction. Lila Abu-Lughod asks why, in this so-called "war on terrorism",

> knowing about the "culture" of the region, and particularly its religious beliefs and treatment of women, was more urgent than exploring the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history. […] Instead of political and historical explanations, experts were being asked to give religio-cultural ones. Instead of questioning that might lead to the exploration of the global interconnections, we were offered ones that worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres – recreating an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims, cultures in which First Ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around silently in burqas.[29]

For example, Laura Bush's speech on 17 November 2001 used the position of women to justify the invasion of Afghanistan.[30] In a confrontation often portrayed as a clash of civilisations, "Islam is seen as a triple threat: political, civilizational, and demographic."[31] Margaret Thatcher described Islamic extremism as the new bolshevism in 2002, observing that "like Communism, it requires an all-embracing long-term strategy to defeat it."[32] The veil plays a central role in this process of othering Islam. In the propagation of American democracy in Muslim countries, the veil is also appropriated as a signifier of Muslim women's repression. As the British journalist Polly Toynbee writes, "the burka was the battle flag […] [and] a shorthand moral justification" for invading Afghanistan.[33]

The justification of protecting women as a pretext for invading other countries has precedents in colonial history. Marnia Lazreg described how French colonialism enlisted women to its cause in Algeria. She writes:

> Perhaps the most spectacular example of the colonial appropriation of women's voices, and the silencing of those among them who had begun to take women revolutionaries […] as role models by not donning the veil, was the event of May 16, 1958. One day a demonstration was organized by rebellious French generals in Algeria to show their determination to keep Algeria French. To give the government of France evidence that Algerians were in agreement with them, the generals had a few thousand native men bused in from nearby villages, along with a few women who were solemnly unveiled by French women. […] Rounding up Algerians and bringing them to demonstrations of loyalty to France was not in itself an unusual act during the colonial era. But to unveil women at a well-choreographed ceremony added to the event a symbolic dimension that dramatized the one constant feature of the Algerian occupation by France: its obsession with women.[34]

Seeing veiling as indicative of Islam's nefarious attitude towards women became central to the European narrative of Islam, in which the veil symbolised the religion's fundamental inferiority. However, veiling predates Islam. An important Coptic intellectual, Salama Musa, wrote in his memoirs that his sisters and mother stopped wearing their veils in 1907 and 1908.[35] Christian women in the near east were veiled before the arrival of Islam and continued the practice in Europe up until the twelfth century; and before them Jewish, Roman, Greek, Zoroastrian, Assyrian, and Hindu women were also veiled.[36] In the New Testament, St Paul insists that women must veil during their prayer, and warns that if a woman "refuses to wear a head covering, then she should shave off all her hair".[37]

Egyptian Sociologist Leila Ahmed writes of the imperial nineteenth century: "Veiling to Western eyes – the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol (in colonial discourse) of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam."[38] However, as noted, it was not only Muslim women who wore veils in the imperial age, as many Hindu women wore veils and observed purdah in British India.[39] Ahmed further observes that the views of the veil as a sign of Islam's inferiority were predominant in the late nineteenth century, especially in France and Britain, both of which were involved in invasions of Muslim countries at that time.[40] And, as Julia Arifeen cites in her essay, Ahmed demonstrates that Islam and feminism are not contradictory terms. Sadia Zulfiqar, in her essay on Leila Aboulela, also discusses the symbolic relevance of the veil, and notes the ways in which Aboulela shifts preconceptions with her depiction of a veiled woman who "saves" a white man, rather than vice versa. Zulfiqar argues for constructive negotiation between Islam and the West through Goethe's "poetic intercultural dialogue" and Said's "contrapuntal" thought.

The recent protests (2013) in West Yorkshire by far-right groups to condemn crimes against women committed by Muslim men are another example of the politicisation of Islam by the white patriarchy. Laurie Penny describes these protests as an attempt to disrupt debates on western sexism. According to Penny:

> I condemn all sexism within the academy. I condemn segregated drinking societies and the under-representation of women at the top levels of academia. I condemn rape culture on campus, traditions like "seal clubbing" and "slut dropping" where male students are encouraged to sexually humiliate their female classmates. […] Structural sexism does take place every day in our universities, as it does in our offices, shops and homes – and we should oppose it everywhere. But demanding that feminists of every race and faith drop all our campaigns and stand against "radical Islam" sounds more and more like white patriarchy trying to make excuses for itself: "If you think we're bad, just look at these guys."[41]

Extremism is not limited to Islam; it is also present in other faiths, but historical and contemporary discourses have not always reflected this. The recent attacks by extremist Burmese Buddhists on Muslim minorities indicate the presence of violence in other religions; and the silence of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi on these atrocities suggests that it is easy to ignore the crimes committed against Muslims, even by those who usually champion human rights.[42] The West Yorkshire protests also reflect the imperialist tactic of exploiting Islam, and

especially Muslim women, to prove the inherent moral superiority of the West. The United States of America, like France in Algeria in the twentieth century, uses the position of women and the veil to validate the righteousness of the "War on Terror" in the twenty-first century. However, perhaps this war has nothing to offer to Afghan women except "bikini waxes and Oprah-imitators", in the words of Priyamvada Gopal.[43]

Roxanne Ellen Bibizadeh's essay on Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma* discusses how white patriarchy is not radically different from brown patriarchy. Salam, an Arab woman, was forced to leave her hometown due to her pregnancy outside marriage, and is eventually murdered by male relatives. Elizabeth, Salma's British landlady, was not allowed to marry Hita due to class and racial hierarchies, as Hita was one of her father's housekeepers in India, and consequently Elizabeth drinks herself to death. The deaths of these two women, "who are confined and oppressed by power structures of gender, history, geography, and cultural idioms", indicate that extremism and exploitation of women is not limited to Islam. Julia Arifeen has discussed how female Muslim writers (including Faqir again) have used literature as a form of political protest, challenging western discourses about women in Muslim societies. It is critical to challenge over-simplified versions of Islam, Muslim women and their culture. As Edward Said has remarked, "[b]y using the skills of a good critical reader to disentangle sense from nonsense, by asking the right questions and expecting pertinent answers, anyone can learn about either 'Islam' or the world of Islam and about the men, women, and cultures that live within it, speak its languages, breathe its air, produce its histories and societies".[44]

Islam and the West: A Love Story in Historical Context

This entangling of sense from non-sense cannot take place in an atmosphere of violence. Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh's essay on the fourteenth-century manuscript *The King of Tars* traces non-violent exchange between Islam and the West. According to Rajabzadeh, "[w]hile many experienced the Islamic world through violence and conflict, there were also those engaged with the Muslim world via cultural and intellectual exchange. From the twelfth century, leading up to the production of *The King of Tars*, there were vast translation projects set in place from Arabic into Latin. These translated texts ranged from religious texts, such as the Quran, to mathematical, astronomical, and philosophical texts." In another instance of fourteenth-century western literature inspired by Islamic exchange, Abdelkader El-Mokhtar Boutaleb's essay discusses the various

influences on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Boutaleb reveals the interchange of manuscripts and theological discourse dating back to at least the tenth century, which all had an influence on Dante's seminal work. These positive exchanges between Islam and Christianity in the distant past also indicate that the encounter between Islam and the West is not always full of mistrust and hatred.

These collaborations continued into the modern era and can be seen beyond the realm of literature in religion and politics. Islam became prominent mentally and materially in the West and has not always been a faith for the "Other". For example, many African-Americans converted to Islam – the faith played a prominent role in the Black Power movement in the United States – and many Muslim soldiers fought for the Allied troops in the First and Second World Wars.[45] The increased presence of mosques in Britain and other western countries, coupled with Eid celebrations involving the local community, indicates the ways in which the presence of Islamic communities became more familiar and accepted as parts of western "multicultural" society. Britain's first mosque, the Shah Jahan Mosque, was built in Woking in 1889, and in 1910 the fund for the East London Mosque began.[46] It is the erasure of this shared history that has been used by right-wing commentators to argue about the unwelcome influx of Islamic values into western cultures, downplaying the "love story".[47]

This collection of essays covers a range of topics from Islam's relationship with western bodies of thought through discussion of western media and films, and literary and visual analysis of novels, plays and graphic novels. Inevitably there are various areas that these essays do not cover, but they provide a range of perspectives from the fourteenth century to the present day. This collection can also be considered as an extension of Goethe's nineteenth-century intercultural dialogue for the nuanced understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures.[48] Following the preface by Leila Aboulela, the chapters follow a thematic path, starting with a number of essays that discuss representations of terror and violence. We begin with Michael Munnik's discussion of British journalists' representations of Muslims, and how these have been affected by the events of 9/11, followed by Daniel O' Gorman's piece deconstructing "fundamentalism" in three Pakistani novels written after 9/11. Lenore Bell's essay discusses 9/11 novels by major American authors such as John Updike and Don De Lillo, and Kerem Bayraktaroğlu analyses the depiction of Muslim children in American cinema post-9/11. Kenan Kocak's essay on the depiction of the female protagonist in the Turkish graphic novel *Ayşegül Savaşta: Irak Şahini* during the Iraq War concludes this section of essays on Islam and

violence after 9/11. The attention of the collection then goes back to the fourteenth century, with Abdelkader El-Mokhtar Boutaleb's essay on Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Consideration then focuses on representations of women in literature. Roxanne Ellen Bibizadeh focuses on the theme of exile with particular reference to Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*. Julia Arifeen looks at the female Muslim writers Monica Ali and Hanan al-Shaykh to discuss forms of Islamic feminism. Sadia Zulfiqar's essay on Leila Aboulela's representations of Islam continues this discussion of female empowerment; while the final essay, by Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, returns to the fourteenth century to discuss the crusades, conversion and love in the *King of Tars*. The collection ends with an epilogue by the composer Michael Ellison discussing his contemporary opera *Say I am You-Mevlâna*.

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Notes

[1] Ayesha Imam, "The Muslim Religious Right ("Fundamentalists") and Sexuality", *Women Living Under Muslim Laws Dossier,* 17 (2000), 7-25; see also Farida Shaheed, "Controlled or Autonomous: Identity and the Experience of the Network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 19.4 (1994), 997-1019.

[2] Imam, "The Muslim Religious Right ("Fundamentalists") and Sexuality", 7.
[3] Kenneth W. Harrow, "Introduction: Islam(s) in African Literature", in *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1991), p. 3.
[4] See Edward Said, "Islam and the West" in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Expert Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 5.
[5] See Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
[6] Morey and Yaqin, "Introduction" in *Framing Muslims*, pp. 1-2.
[7] See Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (Palgrave, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011).
[8] Chambers, "Introduction" in *British Muslim Fictions,* pp. 1-32.
[9] Other recent collections by the same group of scholars which address similar issues include Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, ed. *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing* (London: Routledge, 2012); Claire Chambers and Caroline Herbert, ed. *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and the Diaspora: Secularism, Religion, Representations* (London: Routledge, 2015).
[10] Humayun Ansari, "The Muslim World in British Historical Imaginations: 'Re-thinking Orientalism?'", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 38 (2011), 73-93; Ansari, *'The Infidel Within': Muslims in Britain Since 1800* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004)
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[12] Morey and Yaqin, "Performing Beyond the Frame: Gender, Comedy, and Subversion" in *Framing Muslims*, p. 156.
[13] Zohair Husain, David M. Rosenbaum, "Perceiving Islam: The Causes and Consequences of Islamophobia in the Western Media", in *Religious Fundamentalism in the Contemporary World: Critical Social and Political Issues,* ed. Santosh C. Saha (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 183.
[14] See Mir Zohair Hussain, *Global Islamic Politics* (New York & Munich: Longman, 2003).
[15] See Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).
[16] Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate explained that in the early years of the third Christian millennium, western civilization witnessed the birth of a curious cult calling itself the "New Atheism". It began with the appearance of four best-selling polemics against religion: Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* (2004), Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* (2006), Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (2006), and Christopher Hitchens's *God is Not Great* (2007). Bradley and Tate define the new atheist novel as "disturbing aesthetic-political dogmatism – about science, about reason, about religion and, in many cases, about Islam". See Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate, *The New Atheist Novel: Fiction, Philosophy and Polemic* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 10; Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 14.

[17] Harris, "The Problem with Islam", in *The End of Faith*, p. 151.
[18] Harris, "The Problem with Islam", p. 129.
[19] See Martin Amis, *The Second Plane: September 11: 2002-2007* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), pp. 47, 60, 67, 89.
[20] Amis, "Terror and Boredom: The Dependent Mind", in *The Second Plane,* p. 89.
[21] Amis, "The Voice of Experience", *The Times,* 9 September 2006, http://www.martinamisweb.com/documents/voice_of_experience.pdf [accessed 23 January 2014].
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[27] Marnia Lazreg, "Letter Five: Why Women Should Not Wear the Veil", in *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 107.
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[31] See J. L. Esposito, "Islam and Civil Society" in *Modernising Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East,* ed. J. L. Esposito and François Burgat (London: Hurst, 2003), p. 89.
[32] Margaret Thatcher, "Islamism is the New Bolshevism", *Guardian,* 12 February 2002, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/feb/12/afghanistan.politics [accessed 23 January 2014].
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[34] Marnia Lazreg, "Nationalism, Decolonization and Gender", in *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 135-136.
[35] Salama Musa, *The Education of Salama Musa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), p. 15.
[36] Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body the Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveiling in the Middle East", in *The Veil:*

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[37] 1 Corinthians 11. 3-17.
[38] Leila Ahmed, "The Discourse of the Veil", in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of Modern Debate* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 152.
[39] For more on variations of observance of purdah in South Asia see Hanna Papanek, "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15, 3 (1973), 289-325.
[40] See Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*: *The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
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[44] Said, "Introduction", in *Covering Islam,* p. lix.
[45]Although it should be noted that many of these Muslim soldiers did not fight 'willingly'. For more see Ansari, "Islam in the West", in *The Cambridge History of Islam Volume V* , ed. Francis Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 686-716.
[46] "East London Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre", *Making Britain Database,* <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/east-london-mosque-and-islamic-cultural-centre> [accessed 23 January 2014].
[47] See Claire Chambers, "We are here because you were there", *Dawn*, 13 July 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1118799/column-we-are-here-because-you-were-there> [accessed 13 July 2014].
[48] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-Eastern Divan* was published in 1819. *Notes and Essays,* a book-length prose supplement to the lyrical *Divan*, appeared in English for the first time in 2010. For this see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Marin Bidney, and Peter Anton Arnim, *West-East Divan: The Poems, with "Notes and Essays": Goethe's Intercultural Dialogues* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).