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Post-9/11 Representations of Arab Men by Arab American Women Writers: Affirmation and Resistance

Marta Bosch Vilarrubias

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BARCELONA

Departament de Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya

**POST-9/11 REPRESENTATIONS OF ARAB MEN
BY
ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS:
AFFIRMATION AND RESISTANCE**

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Tesi doctoral en el Programa de Doctorat:
Construcció i Representació d'Identitats Culturals

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Resumen

Esta tesis proporciona un análisis de la representación de los hombres árabo-americanos en novelas escritas por mujeres después del 11 de septiembre. La tesis contribuye una novedosa investigación en relación a la literatura árabo-americana al juntar el estudio de la literatura escrita por mujeres y el análisis de las masculinidades árabo-americanas. La tesis explora la construcción de las masculinidades árabo-americanas, al mismo tiempo que explica la historia de los feminismos árabo-americanos, situando a las mujeres árabo-americanas en un privilegiado espacio de contestación y crítica en su lucha tanto contra el sexismo como contra el racismo. Esta tesis quiere visibilizar la matizada representación de los hombres árabes y árabo-americanos ofrecida por mujeres árabo-americanas después del 11 de septiembre, mujeres influenciadas por el feminismo desde los años noventa. En su lucha contra el sexismo y el racismo, estas mujeres proporcionan representaciones ambivalentes de hombres árabes que contrarrestan los discursos estereotípicos que se han arraigado en la psique norteamericana y recurrentes después del 11 de septiembre. Además, esta tesis también proporciona un análisis de la ficción como representación de la realidad, entendiendo la literatura como conductor potencial de cambio en los discursos culturales. Para ello, esta tesis se estructura en cuatro partes que examinan los contextos, razones y potenciales consecuencias de las representaciones específicas de las masculinidades árabo-americanas publicadas por mujeres después del 11 de septiembre. El primer capítulo cubre la vilificación y racialización históricas del

hombre árabe en los Estados Unidos, tomando las teorías de “biopolitics” (Foucault, Chow), “necropolitics” (Mbembe, Puar), y “monster-terrorist” (Puar y Rai) para entender la experiencia traumática del 11 de septiembre. El segundo trata sobre los discursos que ayudan a la construcción social de las identidades y masculinidades árabo-americanas, dando especial énfasis a las teorías de “neopatriarchy” (Sharabi), “heterotopia” (Foucault) y “thirdspace” (Soja, Bhabha). La construcción de identidades árabo-americanas también se analiza (David), así como las masculinidades árabo-americanas (Harpel). El tercer capítulo examina el desarrollo y características de los feminismos árabo-americanos (Hatem), así como su influencia para las escritoras árabo-americanas. Finalmente, el cuarto capítulo recoge las teorías expuestas en los capítulos previos y proporciona un análisis literario de los personajes masculinos en un grupo de novelas publicadas después del 11 de septiembre: *Crescent* (2003) de Diana Abu-Jaber, *West of the Jordan* (2003) de Laila Halaby, *Towelhead* (2005) de Alicia Erian, *Once in A Promised Land* (2007) de Laila Halaby, *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007) de Frances Kirallah Noble, *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007) de Susan Muaddi Darraj, *A Map of Home* (2008) de Randa Jarrar, y *The Night Counter* (2009) de Alia Yunis.

Abstract

This dissertation provides an analysis of the representation of Arab American men in post-9/11 writings by Arab American women. This thesis contributes a new inquiry regarding Arab American literature in joining the subject of literature written by women and the study of Arab American masculinities. It delves into the construction of Arab American masculinities, at the same time as it expounds on the history of Arab (American) feminisms, placing Arab American women writers in a privileged space of contestation and critique in their fight against both sexism and racism. This dissertation visibilizes the nuanced depiction of Arab and Arab American men provided by Arab American women writers after 9/11, who have been informed by feminism since the 1990s. In their attempt to fight both sexism and racism, Arab American women provide ambivalent representations of Arab men that counter stereotypical discourses historically entrenched in the American psyche and also recurrent after 9/11. Furthermore, this thesis also intends to provide an analysis of fiction as a representation of reality, while also understanding literature as a potential conductor of change in cultural discourses. To do so, the dissertation is structured in four main parts which examine the context, reasons, and potential consequences of the specific portrayals of Arab American masculinities published by Arab American women after 9/11. The first chapter covers the historical vilification and racialization of Arab men in the United States, by taking on theories on biopolitics (Foucault, Chow), necropolitics (Mbembe, Puar), and monster-terrorist (Puar and Rai) in relation to the traumatic

experience of September 11. The second deals with the discourses that aid in the social construction of Arab American identities and masculinities, with a special emphasis given to the theories of neopatriarchy (Sharabi), heterotopia (Foucault) and thirdspace (Soja, Bhabha). The construction of Arab American identities is also analyzed (David), as well as Arab American masculinities (Harpel). The third chapter examines the development and characteristics of Arab American feminisms (Hatem), as well as their influence on Arab American women writers. Finally, the fourth part takes on the theories from previous chapters and provides a literary analysis of the male characters from a group of selected novels published after 9/11. Those are: Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003), Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005), Laila Halaby's *Once in A Promised Land* (2007), Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007), Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007), Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009).

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Introduction

It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces or jackets over their heads. They had handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars.

The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standard sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall.

(Don DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 3)

I was in New York City, under the Twin Towers, two weeks before September 11, 2001. Before getting there, we had taken a sightseeing bus which had informed us about the 1993 First World Trade Center bombings perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists. Sitting at home in Barcelona on 9/11, and amidst incredulity towards the images that kept appearing over and over on television, I remembered those stories about terrorism that the sightseeing bus had informed us about,

thought about the implications those terrorist attacks would have worldwide, and could not help but wonder how my life could have changed if I had been there just two weeks later. This dissertation stems from the impact of September 11 personally and is an attempt at making sense of the consequences of these attacks for Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States.

At the same time, it originates from an early love for American Studies, especially ethnic-American Studies. The very same September of 2001, I started my degree in English Studies at the University of Barcelona, with an emphasis on American Studies. The courses I pursued during my degree,¹ and a collaboration internship with the department, helped in my decision to pursue a doctorate and a career in this field. During my undergraduate years, I became particularly interested in ethnic American literatures. The issue of complex identities constructed in the midst of different nationalities resonated with my own life. I was born and raised in Barcelona, after the end of Franco's regime, and in the middle of the resurgence of nationalism in Catalonia. Feeling both Catalan and Spanish, I conceptualize my own identity as being in-between.² Living in a Catalan community in Barcelona, I mostly feel Catalan, while at the same time, when leaving Spain, being Spanish takes on further relevance. Therefore, I usually define myself as Spanish when abroad, but Catalan when in Spain. The

¹ Here, I want to thank the American studies professors who inspired me throughout my undergraduate years at the University of Barcelona. In alphabetical order, Cristina Alsina, Rodrigo Andrés, Àngels Carabí, Mercè Cuenca and Teresa Requena. I was especially influenced by the course "Multiculturalism and American Literature," which focused on contemporary ethnic literature in the United States.

² Actually, the first time I really voiced this identity division was in the United States, at the University of California at Berkeley in 2004 when, in an American Studies course on Identity Construction in the United States, we were asked to explain our identities. The instructor, Trane DeVore, forwarded the idea that all identities result from discourses which interpellate us.

complexities of nationalism have always permeated my life.

In 2005, I spent my summer holidays on a trip to Jordan, Palestine and Israel. In Amman, most Arab women were wearing veils. Not covering up made me feel exposed and inadequate, a fact which made me wonder about what it would be like to live there. In Jerusalem, the different but equally gender-biased covering of orthodox Jews made me aware of the similarities between extreme religious practices. From Israel, we entered into the West Bank, and I powerfully felt the dismay of Palestinian poverty. The wall that isolated Palestine from Israel forcefully rose in separation of religion and privilege. Before going to Jordan and Israel, though, I had already become interested in Islamic feminism. In the spring of 2001, I attended a conference by Anna Tortajada about her experience living in Afghanistan at my former school (IPSI, Institució Pedagògica Sant Isidor). She brought a *burka* and let us try it on. The feeling of having it on was overwhelming. As a consequence, two friends and I joined an organization to help Afghan women (HAWCA, Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan), the Spanish branch of which became ASDHA (Association for Human Rights in Afghanistan).³ We conducted some activism from Spain, translating texts written by Afghan women from English into Spanish, and organizing events to raise awareness of the situation. Although Afghanistan is not an Arab country, the feeling of oppression derived from Islamic fanaticism informed my interest in Islamic and Arab feminism.

With all this in mind, I decided to continue with graduate school and

³ The original name in Catalan is *Associació pels Drets Humans a l'Afganistan*.

applied for grants to collaborate with the research project “Construyendo nuevas masculinidades: la representación de la masculinidad en la literatura y el cine de los Estados Unidos (1980-2003),” coordinated by Dr. Àngels Carabí.⁴ The project stemmed from the belief that traditional conceptions of masculinity could be changed by feminism, thus aiming to apply Masculinity Studies to the analysis of American literature written by women. Moreover, its aim was to question traditional patriarchal imagery of manhood in literature and to find new models of masculinity that moved away from sexism, racism and homophobia. As I was interested in literature, feminism, and gender, as well as ethnic-American Studies, exploring the construction of masculinities in feminist American literature seemed to me a very compelling field of study. It all fell into place. I would focus my research on the representation of men in ethnic American literature. Given my interest in Islamic feminism, I started wondering whether there was actually an Arab American corpus of literature broad enough to conduct research on.⁵ Intending to find out, I went to a bookstore next to the university, and I found Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003). The love story between Han and Sirine, complicated by Arab American Sirine's suspicions as well as attraction towards the elusive Iraqi professor Han, was fascinating.⁶ I devoured it. As I had to choose the topic of my Master's Thesis within a doctorate degree which focused on the

⁴ The title of the project can be translated as “Constructing New Masculinities: The Representation of Masculinity in Literature and Cinema in the United States (1980-2003).” It was funded by the Spanish government (exp. nº 62/03), which enabled the beginning of the process of writing this dissertation.

⁵ Here, and throughout the dissertation, I will be consciously avoiding the use of the hyphen in “Arab American” to underline the tension between these two cultures, as Mervat F. Hatem does in her article “The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s” (1998: 386). My aim in doing so is to highlight the complexity of Arab Americans as a group and of the Arab American identity.

⁶ *Crescent* will be examined in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

construction and representation of identities, examining the representation of masculinities in Arab American literature seemed a timely endeavor.⁷ I wrote my Master's Thesis on a previous novel by Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz* (1993), focusing on the alternative Arab masculinity embodied in the character of Matussem, whose in-between identity is epitomized in the novel by the Arabian jazz that he plays and his relationship with his two Arab American daughters. From then on, I continued my research on Arab American masculinities in literature written by women, and have attended, organized, and participated in numerous seminars and conferences.⁸ Moreover, I have continued my research at the University of Barcelona collaborating with the research project “Hombres de Ficción: hacia una historia de la masculinidad a través de la literatura y el cine de los Estados Unidos, siglos XX y XXI,” directed by Dr. Àngels Carabí.⁹ Being part of these research projects has enabled me to publish several articles, which have deepened my commitment to Arab American Masculinity Studies.¹⁰ Furthermore, these two research projects have also provided me with the invaluable opportunity to meet masculinity scholars as renowned as Michael Kimmel, Lynne Segal, and

⁷ The name of the doctorate is “Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities” (University of Barcelona). I thank my M.A. Thesis supervisor, Dr. Rosa González, for her valuable direction, which also informed the writing of this dissertation.

⁸ For example, I have been a member of AEDEAN (Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies) and SAAS (Spanish Association for American Studies) since 2006, and attended most of their conferences. The project also enabled my attending the conference “Beyond Don Juan: Rethinking Iberian Masculinities” at NYU in 2011.

⁹ The title of the project could be translated as: “Fictional Men: Towards a History of Masculinities through American Literature and Cinema in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.” It was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Competitiveness (ref. FFI2011-23589, 2012-2014).

¹⁰Some of my publications are “Contemporary Terrorist Bodies: The (De)construction of Arab Masculinities in the United States” in *Embodying Masculinities: Towards a History of the Male Body in U.S. Culture and Literature*; “Post-9/11 Representations of Arab masculinities by Arab American Women Writers: Criticism or Praise?” in *Men in Color: Racialized Masculinities in U.S. Literature and Cinema*; or “The Representation of Fatherhood by the Arab Diaspora in the United States,” in *Lectora* 14.

Todd Reeser, to name but a few. All in all, the research projects I have been a part of have helped define my research, broaden my knowledge, and finish this dissertation.

My PhD thesis examines the representations of Arab American masculinities in Arab American literature written by women after 9/11. It explores the impact of 9/11 on the depiction of Arab men in the United States, as well as the role of feminism in these portrayals. The present study probes the powerful stereotypes which are inscribed in the minds of Americans and demonstrates how, due to their perpetuation in the media and popular culture, these entrenched images result in racial discrimination. It also argues that Arab Americans, being knowledgeable about both the Arab world and the United States, have a crucial role in trying to demystify and positivize the figure of the Arab in the Americans' minds. Last but not least, the thesis contends that literature, seen as a tool for social change, works to provide new and more realistic images about the Arabs. Stemming from a belief that studying masculinities is a feminist endeavor which aims at gender equality, I feel that, by helping to deconstruct Arab masculinities, I am contributing to diminishing not only racism but also sexism.

It is my contention that, within the field of American literature, Arab American Studies are nowadays an essential endeavor. As Ibrahim Aoudé argues, "Arab Americans should be perceived by Ethnic Studies as an ethnic group that, in the social and political flux of transnationalism, globalization, and the present conjuncture, is the *sine qua non* for examining ethnic and racial relations in the United States" (153). Moreover, Arab American Studies are still an emergent field

of research. Investigation about Arab Americans has been conducted mainly in the last two decades. Books have been published providing a history of Arab immigration to the United States, like Gregory Orfalea's *The Arab Americans: A History* (2006) and Alixa Naff's *The Arab Americans* (1999). There are also a few studies published about the construction of Arab American identity, such as Ernest McCarus's *The Development of Arab-American Identity* (1994). In fact, since the 1990s, Arab American literature has been gaining growing attention in the American literary scene. This thesis proves that Arab American women writers from different countries are offering new and particularly interesting visions about what it means to be Arab American, as they have become especially prominent in the last decades.¹¹ Actually, most of them are encountering fewer difficulties to publish than their male counterparts because they are often seen as "harmless" in contrast to Arab men, who are stereotypically related to terrorism and perceived as a political threat (Elia 158). Thus, this thesis shows how the literary representations of Arab Americans currently being published are mainly those offered by women writers. Their preeminence is evident in scholarly research about Arab American literature, such as Amal Talaat Abdelrazek's *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers. Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings* (2007), Steven Salaita's *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide* (2011), or Carol Fadda-Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014). Given the preponderance

¹¹ Arab American writers come mainly from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Palestine, being Lebanon the first country of origin of Arab immigrants to the United States (39% of Arab Americans are of Lebanese descent).

of women writers, this study contends that a focus on feminism is of utmost importance. Anthologies like Joanna Kadi's *Food For Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994) have added to the feminist discussion, as well as articles such as Mervat F. Hatem's "The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s" (1998) and, more recently, books such as Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Asultany, and Nadine Naber's *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging* (2011). Within feminism, Masculinity Studies emerged in the 1990s as a necessary result of gender denormativization. As Judith Kegan Gardiner puts it, "feminists need to engage masculinity studies ... because feminism can produce only partial explanations of society if it does not understand how men are shaped by masculinity" (2002: 9). This dissertation addresses this need and uses it in the analysis of Arab American manhoods.

In terms of sociological analyses of Arab masculinities, some research had been previously conducted, with books such as Lahoucine Ouzgane's *Islamic Masculinities* (2006), and Mai Ghossoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb's *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (2000). These studies focus on the construction and social practices of Arab masculinities, but provide no reference to diasporic enactments of them. Recently, sociological and ethnographic articles are being published about the construction of Arab American masculinities, like for example Krisine J. Ajrouch's "Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity Among Arab American Adolescents" (2004), and Declan T. Barry's "Measuring Acculturation Among Male Arab

Immigrants in the United States: An Exploratory Study” (2005). Whittaker Wigner Harpel's Master's Thesis *Conceptions of Masculinity Among Arab Americans* (2010) also added to this endeavor, but the field is still incipient. While literary studies on Arab American women writers are currently filling the shelves of ethnic literature, they mostly explore Arab American women and characters and rarely analyze their representation of men. Although women have often been regarded as the object of the male gaze,¹² this dissertation intends to reverse the trend and focus on the way women look at men. Therefore, the aims of my thesis are to (a) show the plurality of representations of masculinities offered by contemporary Arab American women writers, (b) analyze the influence of Arab American feminism on gender depictions, and (c) go deeper into the construction of Arab (American) masculinities. This analysis will contribute to demonstrating the solid existence of an Arab American literature, as well as to proving the potential contemporary Arab American literature has for deconstructing stereotypes.

To do so, this dissertation is structured in four main parts, which examine the context, causes, and potential consequences of the specific portrayals of Arab American masculinities published by Arab American women after 9/11. The first chapter covers the historical vilification and racialization of Arab American masculinities, focusing on the stereotyping of Arab men in the United States.¹³ It thus deals with Arab American masculinities as seen “from the outside,” while the

¹² Laura Mulvey examined the male gaze over females in her study of cinema in her famous article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1999).

¹³ I will be using the term “Arab American masculinities” or “Arab American men” as regards men of Arab origin who live in the United States, and “Arab masculinities” or “Arab men” when talking about men who live in Arabic-speaking countries or when emphasizing the stereotypical representations of men of Arab origin.

second deals with the discourses on Arab American identities and masculinities “from the inside,” that is, drawing on both sociological and ethnographic perspectives.¹⁴ The third examines the development and characteristics of Arab American feminism, as well as its influence on Arab American women writers. Finally, the fourth chapter provides a literary analysis of the male characters in a group of selected novels by women writers published after 9/11. Within these four chapters, there is also an assessment of the relevance to the construction of Arab American masculinities of other cultural artifacts in Arab American contemporary culture, with references to television, cinema, art, theater and poetry.

Chapter 1, entitled “(De)Constructing Arab Masculinities in the United States: the Racialization and Sexualization of Arab Masculinity in America,” analyzes the mainstream perception of Arabs, especially Arab men, in the United States. It defines Arab Americans and their waves of immigration to the United States so as to examine the socio-economic composition of the group and their history of assimilation and discrimination. Taking Arab Americanness as a racial construction, this section also contains an account of the history of vilification of Arab men in the United States, starting with the historical invisibilization of the group by the U.S. government, and continuing with the American inheritance and adaptation of Orientalist discourses. A history of Arab stereotyping in the U.S. before and after 9/11 is also provided. Furthermore, from a historical point of view, I consider the discursive processes involved in the construction of Arab masculinity as racialized and sexualized from a mainstream perspective, with a

¹⁴ When saying “from the outside,” I am referring to a mainstream stereotypical perception of Arab men, while when using “from the inside,” I will be examining discourses on identity construction.

special emphasis on the nationally traumatic experience of 9/11. There is also a focus on the consequences of September 11 for the perception of Arab men as a threat in the United States. This part ends with an analysis of the vilification of Muslim men in the first season of the prime-time drama *Homeland*.

Chapter 2 is called “The Social and Identitary Construction of Arab and Arab American Masculinities,” and is set against the static backdrop of the stereotypes of Arab men examined in chapter 1. In contrast, it argues for the multiplicity, fluidity and hybridity of Arab American masculinities. Taking a poststructuralist stance, it problematizes the traditionally binary and essentializing view of sex and gender, and argues for a politicized stance on gender identity. The analysis of Arab manhoods is carried out through an account of discourses as well as male practices. There is a study of traditionally patriarchal Arab manhoods, as well as an examination of the concept of “neopatriarchy” (Hisham Sharabi). Afterwards, this part draws on ethnographic studies on Arab masculinities in order to elucidate the discourses that have interpellated Arab immigrants currently living in the United States and their male acts or behaviors. The last sections of this chapter are devoted to a theorization of hybridity in relation to Arab American (gender) identities (the concepts of “thirdspace” [Edward Soja, Homi K. Bhabha] and “heterotopia” [Michel Foucault] are employed), as well as a sociological analysis of Arab American manhoods, with a special emphasis on the differences between first- and second-generation Arab American men. All of these studies provide a framework from which to later analyze the representation of Arab and Arab American masculinities in post-9/11 literature and probe whether fiction

reinforces or deviates from the actual practices of Arab American men, which will also inform my stance on the potentialities of fiction writing against discrimination and racism.

Chapter 3 is entitled “Arab American Feminisms and Arab American Women Writers,” and deals with the definition and delimitation of the concept of Arab American feminisms as well as their relation with Arab American women writers. The history and characteristics of Arab American feminisms are expounded on, and situated within women of color feminism, with many points in common with other postcolonial feminisms (epitomized by the works of Gloria Anzaldúa or bell hooks). The current cultural activism purported by Arab American feminists is analyzed, offering examples that range from cinema to one-woman shows. This chapter also places Arab American women writers as part of this feminist movement, providing specific examples from Mohja Kahf's poetry, who epitomizes Arab American feminism in its powerful stance against sexism and racism.

Chapter 4 is called “Post-9/11 Representations of Arab (American) Men by Arab American Women Writers.” It deals with the literary analysis of a selection of post-9/11 Arab American novels written by women. This chapter is divided thematically, following some of the main tendencies of current Arab American literature, which actually mirror the first three chapters of the dissertation. Therefore, the first section of chapter 4 examines Laila Halaby's *Once in A Promised Land* (2007) and Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007), novels where 9/11 is a preeminent trope and whose main

characters are men who go through an identity crisis as a consequence of the terrorist attacks and the subsequent racialization they are object to. Thus, these novels take on the theoretical background exposed in chapter 1 to examine the consequences of September 11 for the successful construction of Arab American masculinities. The second section focuses on patriarchy and fatherhood, thus drawing on the theories of neopatriarchy and thirdspace masculinities developed in chapter 2, and four novels are analyzed. The first two, Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* (2007), depict a group of women (cousins and friends, respectively) and their relationships with their fathers; while the other two, Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005) and Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), portray one teenage daughter's coming of age and her conflicting relationship with her father. These four novels all problematize Arab patriarchy in the United States and offer ambivalent portrayals of thirdspace Arab American masculinities. Finally, drawing on the notions of Arab American feminism exposed in chapter 3, the third section provides an account of new Arab American masculinities of beloved and lovable men who counter the pervasive vilification of Arab manhood after 9/11. They do so in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009) with the help of powerful matriarchs, thus enhancing the role of Arab American feminism in conducting change in men, while at the same time offering positive models for men to follow. Last but not least, the conclusion offers a summary of the main trends in the literary representation of Arab American men by Arab American women, while insisting on the potential of Arab American

literature against both sexism and anti-Arab racism.

This dissertation aims to contribute a new inquiry into Arab American literature by uniting the subject of literature written by women and the study of Arab American masculinities. It delves into the construction of Arab American masculinities, at the same time as it expounds on the history of Arab (American) feminisms, placing Arab American women writers in a privileged space of contestation and critique of both Arab sexism and anti-Arab racism. This thesis also visibilizes the nuanced depiction of Arab and Arab American men provided by Arab American women writers after 9/11, who have been informed by feminism. In their attempt to fight both sexism and racism, Arab American women provide, as we shall see, ambivalent representations of Arab men that counter stereotypical discourses historically entrenched in the American psyche, particularly revived after 9/11. Ultimately, this thesis argues for an understanding of literature as a conductor of change in cultural discourses. It affirms Arabs as an ethnic group in American literature, and foregrounds women writers who conduct an effort of resistance towards both sexism and racism.

Chapter 1

(De)Constructing Arab Masculinities in the United States: The Racialization and Sexualization of Arab Masculinity in America

In ignorance, many Americans think of Arabs, Turks, and Iranians as one ethnic group; forget that not all Arabs are Muslims; and fail to understand that peoples in the Middle East are as diverse as those found in the United States.

(Hamilton 259)

In her article “The Image of Arabs in Sources of U.S. Culture,” Marsha J. Hamilton highlights the misconceptions Americans have about people of Arab descent. In the United States, Arabs are commonly equated with Muslims and regarded as a homogeneous group. However, diversity abounds in the Arab world in terms of ethnicity, history, and religion. The perception of Arabs as a group stems from the postcolonial union of Arabic-speaking countries. Originating from a linguistic coalition, Arabic-speaking countries allied in 1945 in the Arab League, constituted by Arabic-speaking states from North Africa (the Maghreb) and

Western Asia (the Middle East) that joined forces in political, economic, and cultural cooperation.¹⁵

Through the Arab League, Arabs historically organized themselves as a community united by their use of the Arabic language. This linguistic, cultural, and political association of Arab states has undoubtedly contributed to the Western view of Arabs as a group. Even though Arabic-speaking individuals from different Arab countries differ in their skin color, dress-code, history, culture, and even religion, in the West's view of Arabs there is a conflation of racial, geographical, phenotypic, religious, and even sartorial traits. From a Western mainstream perspective, Arabic-speaking people have been regarded as a single race that encapsulates diverse characteristics which are not necessarily Arab. In the minds of the Western masses, Arabness is both an extremely broad and a mostly blurred notion, which includes people that may or may not be Arab, but who appear Arab to a Western eye.¹⁶

One of the most expanded misconceptions regarding this community is the erroneous equation of the term 'Arab' with 'Muslim' and 'Middle Eastern.' Characteristics ranging from backwardness to enmity are ascribed to this

¹⁵ The Arab League was created in 1945 with the aims of strengthening ties between Arab countries, coordinating political, economic, cultural, and social programs, and providing a joint defense. The first seven member states were: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Later on, sixteen other states joined the League: Algeria (1962), Bahrain (1971), Comoros (1993), Djibouti (1977), Kuwait (1961), Lybia (1953), Mauritania (1973), Morocco (1958), Oman (1971), Palestine (1976), Qatar (1971), Somalia (1974), Sudan (1956), Tunisia (1958) and the United Arab Emirates (1971) (<<http://www.arableagueonline.org/hello-world/>>). For further information, the legal document of creation of the Arab League can be found in: "Pact of the League of Arab States, March 22, 1945". *The Avalon Project. Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*. 2008. Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/arableag.asp>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

¹⁶ As an example, Muslim South Asians or followers of the Sikh religion may seem Arab to the Western mainstream due to their skin color or use of traditional clothing, while their language is not Arabic, they do not come from the Middle East or North Africa, and so they are not part of the Arab community.

seemingly uniform group while, in fact, the Middle East refers to the specific geographical site, which excludes Muslims and Arabs that do not live in that area, such as people from the Maghreb; Muslim alludes to religion, that is, the Islamic faith, which may be followed by people from different geographical areas;¹⁷ and Arab refers to the Arabic-speaking peoples, those coming from the twenty-one countries that speak Arabic, found in the Middle East (or also, South-Western Asia) and North Africa.¹⁸ In fact, in the case of America, these distinctions become more prominent, since in the United States only 23% of Arab Americans are actually Muslim.¹⁹ Western mainstream narratives very often use these distinct concepts interchangeably, so that discourses about Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims are commonly likened in the West. As Amira Jarmakani puts it, there has been a “confusion of ethnic (Arab), religious (Muslim), and geographic (Middle Eastern) markers that construct Arabs/Muslims/Middle Easterners as a group in the United States” (897).

Despite the diversity of the Arabic-speaking population, Arabs in the United States followed the trail pioneered in the 1940s by the Arab League, and organized politically in the 1970s, as a specific ethnic American community, along

¹⁷ While most people in Arab countries are Muslim, there are also Muslim countries that are not Arab, such as Iran, Turkey or Indonesia.

¹⁸ According to the UNESCO, those are Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Palestine is listed separately, as it is not a worldwide accepted country, as can be seen in “Arab States.” UNESCO. 2012. UNESCO Regions. <www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/worldwide/arab-states/>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

¹⁹ The religions professed by Arab Americans are: 42% Catholic (including Roman Catholic, Maronite, and Melkite); 23% Muslim (including Sunni, Shi’a, and Druze); 23% Orthodox (including Antiochian, Syrian, Greek, and Coptic); and 12% Protestant. Figures from “Factsheets: Arab Americans”. The Prejudice Institute. <<http://www.prejudiceinstitute.org/Factsheets5-ArabAmericans.html>>. Accessed: 12 August 2012. Moreover, 30% of American Muslims are African American, and 33% South Asian (<<http://infousa.state.gov/education/overview/muslimlife/demograp.htm>>. Accessed: 12 August 2012).

with various Arab American organizations. Taking their cue from the African American ethnic voice gained through the Civil Rights Movement, the 1970s saw the “emergence of a pan-ethnic Arab-American identity bridging the different national and religious identities of immigrants and ethnics of Arabic-speaking background” (Majaj 69). Thus, Arab Americans organized in the 1970s as a new collective identity,²⁰ resulting from the politicization of the Arab American community, with the appearance of Arab American organizations, like the Association of Arab American University Graduates, founded in 1967, the National Association of Arab Americans, founded in 1972, or the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, founded in 1980. Arab Americans united on the grounds of their common language in an attempt to fight against discrimination and racism.

American Studies drew on that and, consequently, Arab American Studies emerged through the work of scholars devoted to this field, who published volumes such as Gregory Orfalea’s *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (1982), Alixa Naff’s *The Arab Americans* (1999), or Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash’s *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999). Still, however, more work is being done on the study of those outside America than about the diasporic identities of Arabs in the United States. In this respect, Middle Eastern Studies have advanced more in the U.S. than Arab American

²⁰ Here, I am borrowing the notion of “collective identity” from Omi and Winant, which they define as a “collective subjectivity” created by social movements, which offers “their adherents a different view of themselves and their world” (88).

Studies, but studies of the Middle East do not deal with the diaspora.²¹ At the same time, Muslim American Studies are not as consolidated as Arab American or Middle Eastern Studies, perhaps because they encompass very heterogeneous ethnic groups in the United States (of American Muslims, 25% are Arab American, 30% African American, and 33% South Asian).²² While all these fields deserve attention, the present study shall forward the work of Arab American Studies scholarship, as it deals with the specific situation of Arabs in the United States. As Ibrahim Aoudé argued, Arab American Studies are now “*sine qua non*” within ethnic-American Studies (153).

Thus, this dissertation is based on the conception of Arab Americans as defined by the Arab American Institute, that is, as an “ethnicity made up of several waves of immigrants from the Arabic-speaking countries of southwestern Asia and North Africa that have been settling in the United States since the 1880s” (Altaf 2006).²³ The union of Arab Americans as a community is, as pointed out before, based on language and politics. In conceiving Arab American identity, however, it is necessary to understand the particular position of Arabs in the United States regarding race, as well as the misconceptions derived from the equating of Arab and Muslim. In this respect, the racialization of Arab men in the United States is also particularly relevant, as there has been a tendency to vilify Arab men as a

²¹ Programs on Middle Eastern Studies can be found in universities such as Arizona, Texas-Austin, Chicago, Harvard, Columbia, NYU, and Yale, just to name a few. Courses and programs on Arab American Studies are more scarce. The University of Michigan, for example, offers a program on Arab American Studies as part of their Ethnic Studies programs,
<www.lsa.umich.edu/ac/arabamericanstudies> Accessed: 12 August 2012.

²² For further information on these figures, see: “Varieties of Worship. Demographic Facts.” Muslim Live in America. 2001. Office of International Information Programs. U.S. Department of State. <infousa.state.gov/education/overview/muslimlife/demograp.htm>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

²³ See footnote 18.

threat even towards Arab women, who have tended to be seen as victims of patriarchy and sexism.²⁴

This first chapter of the dissertation, then, explicates the way Arab American identities and masculinities are formed from an outsider point of view, that is, from the perspective of the Western mainstream. It provides theories on the construction of Arab masculinities that examine the vilification of Arab men in the United States against which Arab American writers fight. In the following sections, I shall consider the discursive and historical processes involved in the construction of Arab masculinity as racialized and sexualized, thus dealing with Arab Americanness as a racial and sexual construct. Moreover, I point to the seeds of the vilification of Arabs in the United States, and I elaborate on the stereotyping of Arab masculinity before and after 9/11, also providing examples from contemporary popular culture.

²⁴ The issue of the veil may be seen as an instance of masculine oppression towards women, and can thus be considered an example of the tendency to vilify Arab men and victimize Arab women.

1.1 Arab Americanness as a Racial Construction

As previously noted, Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslims are categorized in the Western mainstream mind as a single race and, as such, suffer a type of racism based on projected phenotype, that is, founded on the (not always truthful) view of Arabs as dark-skinned. However, in spite of this common thought, the phenotypic variation of Arabs²⁵ allows them to be placed in what Louise Cainkar has termed “racial liminality” (2008: 48), or what Sawsan Abdulrahim calls “critical whiteness” (2008: 131).²⁶ Arabic speakers can be related to a myriad of ethnicities, ranging from dark to white skin, allowing some to actually pass as white.²⁷ The stereotypical categorization of Arabs as dark also contrasts with their official classification by the American government. Officially, the United States Federal Government classifies Arabs as white, providing the following definition of this racial category: “**White.** - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa”.²⁸ This official classification reinforces, on the one hand, the idea that Arabs *can* be considered white, but, on the other, it invisibilizes Arabs as an American minority that may need institutional support

²⁵ Shrylock, 92-93.

²⁶ Cainkar expounds on “racial liminality” as the corporealization of difference and relates the racial discrimination of Arabs to post-9/11 governmental policies (2008: 48). On the other hand, Abdulrahim explains the concept of “critical whiteness” through the notion that Arabs are officially white but they identify both as white and non-white (2008: 131).

²⁷ For further information, see Abdulrahim (2008).

²⁸ From: “About Race”. Race. 2012. United States Census Bureau. Bold in the original text. <<http://www.census.gov/population/race/about/>>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

against racism. In other words, in denying a racial status to people of Arab descent, the government also hinders the possibility of their organizing as a group against discrimination and makes them ineligible for minority protection programs. Furthermore, this classification entails a blatant paradox: being officially considered white, Arabs have also been commonly considered dark; so, as Nadine Naber claims, “Arab Americans are racially white, but not quite” (2000: 50). The notions of “racial liminality” and “critical whiteness” are thus very adequate accounts of the racial space that Arab Americans occupy.

In accordance with this paradox, the issue of Arab ancestry or race in relation to the census was prominent in Arab American scholarly debates from the last decades of the twentieth century. Arabs were not able to acknowledge their ancestry in the census until the year 2000,²⁹ so before the twenty-first century, this issue was a central preoccupation in the Arab American community. This concern was voiced in Arab American literature in 1994 by Laila Halaby in her poem “*Browner Shades of White*.” Halaby’s poem starts by making reference to the invisibility of Arabs in the census, and then continues referring to the actual minority status of Arabs in the United States in relation to class and Othering stereotypes. The poem reads:

Under race/ethnic origin
I check white
I am not
a minority
on their checklists
and they erase me

²⁹ For a full account on the issue of Arab ancestry in the census, see G. Patricia de la Cruz and Angela Brittingham, “The Arab Population: 2000. Census 2000 Brief”.
<www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-23.pdf>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

with the red end
of a number
two pencil.
I go to school
quite poor
because I am white.
There is no
square to check
that I have no
camels in my backyard,
that my father does
not have eight wives
inside the tents
of his harem
or his palace
or the island
he bought
with his oil
money. (1994: 204)

Halaby expounds here on the racial liminality of Arabs in the United States, first referring to their official invisibility in the census, and then contrasting it with a number of stereotypes about Arab men and women which place them as backward, at the same time as it relates them to power or control over petroleum resources. In the poem, as in contemporary America, the abundance of stereotypes clashes with the difficulty of acknowledging Arabs as a race, and pinpoints the ambiguous relation of Arabs to racial classification.

In the year 2000 the census introduced an ancestry question, in which Arab Americans could acknowledge their origin. However, that has not solved the issue that, under race, Arabs still have to choose between “White” or “Other,” a fact which places Arab Americans at a crossroads in which they have to choose between passing or acknowledging their minority status.³⁰ At the same time, this

³⁰ For further accounts on this issue, see Abdulrahim (2008), and Ghazal Read (2008).

emphasizes their institutionalized invisibility in racial terms, which contrasts with their increasing visibility in society. As Keith Feldman puts it, “Advocates for a revision of the U.S. Census claimed that Arab bodies had become politically invisible when classified as white, yet all too visible in the national imaginary” (33). The census debate underscores the “racial liminality” and “critical whiteness” of Arab Americans because, even if it is accurate to deny a racial classification to Arabs (being Arab cannot be equated with belonging to one single race), Western mainstream culture has been conceiving of Arabs as a race since its first encounters with people of Arab origin.³¹ Considering Arabs as a race may be the best way to visibilize this community as a minority in need that could benefit from institutional anti-discrimination policies.

While Arabs cannot unequivocally be considered a race, accounting for Arabs as a racial group may be useful, and can also be supported by the idea that all races are a fictive construct. Michael Omi and Howard Winant call race “a social construction” (4), while Rey Chow argues, drawing on Etienne Balibar’s ideas, that “ethnicity, like all ideology, is 'fictive,' but its very real social functioning is made possible jointly by language acquisition (an open, inclusive process) and racial grouping (a closed, exclusive process)” (24). Moreover, in order to fight racism, there is a need to make discrimination—which follows a perception of racial difference—visible. As Omi and Winant put it, “today more than ever, opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it, that we afford it the recognition it deserves and the subtlety it embodies. By noticing race

³¹ This historical racialization of Arabs will be developed later on in this chapter.

we can begin to challenge racism” (159). With the aim of fighting racism, then, in this study I conceive of Arabness as a “racial construction.” Here, my conception of “racial construction” derives from the theory of “racial formation” of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, which, as they define it,

emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the “micro-” and the “macro-social” levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics. (4)

Taking race as a social construct, not as an essence, we are able to read Arabs as a racial construction, and use this categorization for political purposes, mostly against discrimination and racism. Moreover, talking about racial formation allows us to theorize the racialization process Arabs and Muslims have endured historically in the United States, as will be done in the next section of this chapter.

1.2 The Historical Racialization of Arabs by the United States Government

Bearing in mind Omi and Winant's notion of racial construction, I shall now delve into the historical racialization of Arabs by the United States government since their arrival to America, thus emphasizing the racial liminality (Cainkar) and critical whiteness (Abdulrahim) of Arabs in the United States since their first migration. This process of racialization has been accounted for by several scholars, especially Amira Jarmakani, who claims that "race has functioned as a submerged logic in the construction of Arab Americans in particular since the first wave of immigration in the late 1800s" (901). That is, from the first time Arabs landed on American shores their race has been questioned.

The first wave of Arab American immigration took place from the 1880s to the 1940s.³² Those first Arab immigrants were called "Syrian" because they came mostly from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire, which contained what nowadays are Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, part of present Turkey, and part of present Iraq. The first Arab immigrants to be recorded arrived in the United States in 1854, but they did not gain a separate classification as Syrian until 1899.

³² Gregory Orfalea explains the causes of the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States as follows: "Most certainly, a growing population caused by the advent of better hygiene and a scarcity of cultivable land—particularly in the Lebanon mountains—was an important factor, as well as periodic famines, insect blights, and droughts that, among other things, wrecked the crucial sericulture, or silkworm production, that was a staple of the Lebanese economy in the 19th century" (2006: 51). The reference to Lebanon derives from the fact that most Arab immigrants from the first wave of immigration came precisely from that area.

However, to become American citizens, they had to be naturalized. The problem was that from 1790 until 1952, U.S. Federal law provided naturalization to whites and blacks but not in-between races or skin colors.³³ Thus, people of Arab descent claimed whiteness as a way to become American citizens. The naturalization trials were the means by which new immigrants were to become citizens of the United States. The results of the trials that Arabs went through at the beginning of the 20th century were mixed: Arabs were sometimes considered white, but often not. As John Tehranian explains in his book *Whitewashed: America's Invisible Middle Eastern Minority*, one of the first reasons adduced for the naturalization of Arabs was their belonging to the Caucasian race (20). The term “Caucasian” had been coined by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in his treatise *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), where he defined it as referring to “the inhabitants of Europe, the Middle East ... and North Africa” (Tehranian 20). Thus, Arabs would inevitably pertain to this category. This was one allegedly scientific reason given for their naturalization but, in those trials, greater importance was given to assimilatory criteria than to scientific fact. Hence, as Tehranian puts it, “Taken together, the racial-prerequisite cases highlight the centrality of performative criteria in the race-making process” (39). A couple of examples from some cases that denied and some that accepted the categorization of whiteness to Arabs shall help illustrate this last point. For instance, in the judicial proceedings *In re Najour* (1909) and *In re Ellis* (1910), both applicants were granted naturalization on the grounds of whiteness. On the one hand, Najour was considered Caucasian and, thus, white.

³³ Omi and Winant, 81; Tehranian, 14.

On the other, Ellis was deemed white due to his demonstrated assimilability into American society because of “religious practices, educational attainment, marital patterns, and wealth accumulation” (Tehranian 46), which Tehranian calls “signposts of assimilation” (48). However, in other instances, Arabs were denied naturalization. In cases such as *Ex parte Dow* (1914), or *In re Hassan* (1924), issues related to common knowledge and concerns about assimilability made them be considered other than white. Dow’s case was rejected with the argument that Arabs could not be considered Caucasian because they had not traditionally been considered white.³⁴ Hassan’s case was denied on the grounds of skin color, religion, and assimilability. In this last case, the judge concluded that:

Apart from the dark skin of the Arabs, it is well known that they are a part of the Mohammedan world and that a wide gulf separates their culture from that of the predominately Christian peoples of Europe. It cannot be expected that as a class they would readily intermarry with our population and be assimilated into our civilization.³⁵ (Tehranian 58)

Thus, the whiteness of Arabs in the United States at the beginning of their immigration was accepted or denied because of projected assimilability.³⁶ According to Tehranian, “assimilationist policy considerations dominated the jurisprudence of whiteness, leading courts to dole out white status on the basis of how effectively Middle Easterners ‘performed’ whiteness” (61).³⁷ Furthermore, the naturalization trials of the beginning of the 20th century put to the fore the liminality and constructed nature of the concept of race when referring to Arabs.

³⁴ Once again, we can see here the contradiction of the categorization of Arabs as a race, being officially considered white from the very beginning, but commonly seen as dark.

³⁵ The equation of this racial categorization with “a class” is also noteworthy, as it emphasizes the abnormality ascribed to Arabs in the early twentieth century. The reference to “civilization” and the concern with intermarriage also point to a fear of miscegenation.

³⁶ For a detailed account of these cases, see Tehranian (46, 56); Gualtieri (52-80).

Arabs' racial whiteness is thus placed in a situational position, which depends on phenotype (the possibility of passing as white) and on assimilability (through behavioral, but mostly visual traits, such as—once again—skin color, clothing or religious practices).

Arabs' attempts to pass as white from the beginning of their immigration took the form, particularly in this first wave, of assimilation. In general terms, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, assimilation was easier than it has ever been for Arabs because they were not seen as a danger. As Helen Samhan puts it:

North American nativists of the early twentieth century did not perceive the 'Syrians' to be a significant threat compared to other immigrants because they were small in number and dispersed, and because their involvement with peddling was not particularly threatening to whites who resented the competition of immigrant labour. (1994: 3)

Moreover, in that first wave of immigration, “performing whiteness” was easier than it was later because most of the immigrants in that wave were Christian (90%). Based on religion, the performance of normativity became more feasible. That is, Christianity, in opposition to Islam, aided Arab assimilation to the United States.³⁸ In fact, Arabs found it easier to be accepted as white at the beginning of

³⁷ If we consider “performativity” in Judith Butler’s terms, we can understand how the performance of an identity is directly related to power discourses. For Judith Butler, “Performativity is the understanding of subjecthood as the non-voluntary citation of the culturally-given signifier in a reiterative process that is never stable or guaranteed, and that always risks its own undoing by the necessity—and instability—of reiteration” (Cover 69). Most of the times, the performance of an identity (the repetitive quotation of certain discourses of identity), and in this case an identity other than one’s own, will consequently be an involuntary or unconscious attempt at normativization.

³⁸ Even if it was easier for the first Arab immigrants to become assimilated, they had been seen as an Other by white Anglo-Saxon America since the beginning of their immigration. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, ideas such as the following appeared in U.S. textbooks: “Next to the Chinese, who can never in any real sense be American, [the Syrians] are the most foreign of all foreigners” (Orfalea 2006: 84). Other examples of discrimination at the beginning of the 20th century appeared in other spheres such as medicine or the government itself. A health officer at Marine Hospital referred to Syrians as “parasites in their peddling habits,” while a U.S. Commissioner of Immigration and

the twentieth century than they have been ever since, because while in the first wave of immigration most Arabs were Christian, the second wave brought a majority of Muslims (60%).

The second wave of immigration started after the Second World War, after Israel had become a new state (with the subsequent exile of Palestinian Arabs), and after Arab nations had started becoming independent.³⁹ In fact, the majority of immigrants at that time, mostly male, were looking for college education in the United States, so they first migrated with student visas and then stayed for work. Moreover, with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Arab professionals were allowed to migrate legally to the United States.⁴⁰ The better education and better financial position of these immigrants, in contrast to those of the first wave of immigration, helped their upward mobility. However, as pointed out before, their assimilation became more difficult because of their Muslim faith. After the second wave of immigration, and particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, the easier visualization of the ethnic difference of Arabs due to their religion (with its subsequent dress code and customs) has made them become

Naturalization stated that “the Syrian is a ‘doubtful element’ of ‘Mongolian plasma’ attempting to contaminate the pure American stock” (Naber 2000: 39).

³⁹ Gregory Orfalea deems as causes for the second wave of immigration the creation of Israel—as one quarter of second-wave immigrants to the United States were Palestinian, and explains the “brain drain” from the newly independent Arab countries because “[s]ome were dissatisfied with the series of coups that occurred frequently in these new states, some wanted a better standard of living and some were political exiles from intra-Arab squabbles and the Arab-Israeli conflict” (2006: 152-153). All in all, the higher education of second-wave immigrants entailed economic advantages in the United States.

⁴⁰ The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as Hart-Cellar Act, changed the national origins quota system (used since the 1920s) for a system based on immigrants' skills and family relationships with U.S. citizens or residents. Moreover, immigration from the Middle East was allowed to exceed the general quota: “SEC. 203 ... (7) Conditional entries shall next be made available ... to aliens ... from any country within the general area of the Middle East ... unable or unwilling to return to such country or area on account of race, religion, or political opinion.” (913). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 can be found here: <<http://library.uwb.edu/guides/usimmigration/79%20stat%20911.pdf>>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

a visual Other. As Amira Jarmakani puts it, there has been an “increasing racialization of Arab Americans and Muslim Americans since at least the 1965 Immigration Act” (897).⁴¹ Following the aforementioned logic relating assimilation to normativization, performance, and passing as white, the visualization of difference due to religion has caused Arabs to be considered by the mainstream as racially abnormal, that is, as a racial Other in the United States, particularly after their second wave of immigration.

Hence, Arabs were racialized since the beginning of their immigration (mostly due to phenotype and projected assimilation), but also and more particularly since their second wave of immigration because of the vilifying view of Islam in the West. As Nadine Naber puts it, “Arab Americans become racially marked on the assumption that all Arabs are Muslim and that Islam is a cruel, backward, uncivilized religion” (2000: 52).⁴² Because of the visibilization of Muslim religion in the newly arrived Arab corporealities, there has been a discursive reproduction of those bodies as marked by race. As Tehranian clearly states, “As it has grown less Christian, the Middle Eastern population in the United States is thought of as less assimilable and, consequently, less white” (70). This can be noted in surveys on post-9/11 discrimination, such as the one conducted by Jen’nan Ghazal Read in her article “Discrimination and Identity Formation in a Post-9/11 Era. A Comparison of Muslim and Christian Arab Americans,” which contrasts the discrimination and identity formation of Muslim

⁴¹ Section 1.3 will provide an account of the racialization of Arabs and Muslims in the United States before 9/11.

⁴² The racial marking of Muslim religion will be analyzed in the following section.

and Christian Arab Americans after 9/11. She concludes that Muslims are more prone to identifying as a minority group and suffering more discrimination than Christians who, in most cases, continue affiliating with whiteness due to their feeling of similarity with, and lack of discrimination from, white protestant Americans (305-317). Moreover, the particularity of this ethnic American group regarding assimilation must be noted here, as Arabs enjoy a higher median income than the American average,⁴³ have the phenotypical possibility of passing as white, and are, furthermore, officially white. While these characteristics would seem all-positive, they however facilitate their invisibilization as an ethnic group and mask the enmity established historically (from the eighteenth century but also, and very importantly, after 9/11) between the United States and those perceived as Arab, Muslim or Middle Eastern, since there exists the perception of a clash of civilizations.⁴⁴ As Rey Chow points out, “From biology, the problematic of racism has been displaced onto the realm of culture, so that it is the insurmountability of cultural identity, or cultural difference, that has become the justification for racist, discriminatory conduct” (13).

⁴³ The reasons behind the higher median income of Arab Americans in the United States are unclear. However, it may be due to the amount of student and professional immigration after 1965, and the easier assimilatory capability of those that could pass as white. For further information on the median income of Arab Americans, see: Altaf, Sabeen. *Arab Americans: Demographics*. 2006. The Arab American Institute. <www.aaiusa.org/arab-americans/22/demographics>. Accessed: 28 February 2007.

⁴⁴ This historical enmity will be examined in the remainder of the chapter. Moreover, the notion of a clash of civilizations comes from Samuel P. Huntington’s article “The Clash of Civilizations?” (22-49), and was later further developed in 1996 in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. In his writings, Huntington foresees global politics as dominated by cultural divisions centered on religion. One of his most preeminent examples is that of the clash between Islam and the West (1993: 32). His thesis has been controversial due to its political implications and its alleged lack of anthropological evidence. These critiques can be found in Carl Gershman’s “The Clash Within Civilizations,” Jonathan Benthall’s article “Imagined Civilizations?,” Gabriel A. Acevedo’s “Islamic Fatalism and the Clash of Civilizations: An Appraisal of a Contentious and Dubious Theory,” Jody C. Baumgartner, Peter L. Francia, and Jonathan S. Morris’s “A Clash of Civilizations? The Influence of Religion on Public Opinion of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” and Errol A. Henderson and Richard Tucker’s “Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict.”

In the case of Arab culture, discrimination comes mostly from the displacement of racism onto the province of religion. The racialization of religion has powerfully informed the racial liminality of Arabs in America. The historical vilification of Islam in the West has informed the racialization of Arabs in the United States, deriving from a long history of Orientalism.⁴⁵ As Nadine Naber puts it, “Conflations of the categories Arab, Middle Eastern and Muslim are not new, nor are they specific US images. Rather, they are rooted in a history of Western prejudice against Islam” (Naber 2000: 43). The following sections shall thus focus on the historical vilification of Arab and Muslim manhood from the inception of Orientalist practices to the post-9/11 milieu.

⁴⁵ In the next section I am going to examine the relevance of Edward Said's notion of Orientalism to the understanding of stereotypes about Arab men in the United States.

1.3 The Historical Vilification of Arab Men in the United States: A Discursive Survey of the U.S. Stereotyping of Arab Masculinity pre-9/11

Imagery about Arab men has been constructed in the West through stereotypes that have fixed notions of subaltern and/or subordinate manhood in the mainstream psyche. In this section, I examine how Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern men are perceived as embodying abnormal masculinities by the West in general, and the United States in particular. In order to study the representation of Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern men from an outside point of view, I shall use the term “Arabo-Islamist masculinity” to refer to the enactment of these masculinities as perceived by the mainstream masses, and as a result of the stereotyping discourses that have circulated, and still do so, in the United States about Arabs. I draw here on Shahin Gerami’s notion of “Islamist,” from her article “Islamist Masculinity and Muslim Masculinities,” where she defines “Islamist masculinity” as “a category recognized by others” or “an abstract construct applied by others” (448). The term Islamist, then, is used to emphasize the Othering nature of the naming applied to seemingly Muslim men, be they adherents to this religion or not. However, I have chosen to aggregate the term “Arab” in order to highlight the misconception and equation of these terms in the Western mind. Moreover, I use the singular “masculinity” in allusion to the fact that it is a stereotype (or a set of images) which configures *one* particular fixed view of masculinity. Not

introducing any American factor in the name also hints at the fact that from a stereotyping point of view, Arab American masculinities are not seen as American but only as subaltern. The concept of “Arabo-Islamist masculinity” shall be explored in this section, in contrast with the concept of “Arab American masculinities,” to which chapter 2 will be devoted, providing a sociological view of the construction of Arab American identity and Arab American masculinities. The present study on Arabo-Islamist masculinity shall also serve as a means to expound on the particular stereotypes of Arab men that Arab American women writers—the focus of chapters 3 and 4 of this study—work from and fight against.

The construction of Arabo-Islamist masculinity started with the first European colonial encounters between Europeans and Arabs in North Africa and the Middle East, which resulted, from a Eurocentric perspective, in the creation of fixed Western conceptions of the Arab world. This stereotyped vision of the Middle East was famously theorized by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), where he defined the term in his title as both the discipline of study, the approach, and the representations of the Orient by the West.⁴⁶ As Said explained:

Orientalism is the generic term that I have been employing to describe the Western approach to the Orient; Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabulary available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. (1995 [1978]: 73)

⁴⁶ Even though it was published in the late 1970s, Said's *Orientalism* is still an invaluable theoretical source for the study of the relationships between the West and the East. Said's historical explanation of the stereotyping process of imagery of the Orient by the West is the basis for current stereotypes.

Orientalism is, thus, the study of the semiotics, as well as the imagery and therefore stereotypes, created by the West, about the East. Orientalism appeared at the end of the eighteenth century when European powers started a systematic colonization of the East. It started as a coping strategy, that is, as a means of trying to understand the people being encountered in the colonized lands and as a way to control the unknown. Stereotypical imagery was applied to the East as an attempt at making sense of the new realities faced, and at the same time it was used to justify the colonial enterprise as “civilizing” and “necessary,” since the Orient was defined as the “contrasting image” to the West (Said 1995 [1978]: 1-2). These Orientalist images led to depictions of the Arab world as everything the West did not want to be in terms of politics, religion, and sexuality; that is, full of “corrupt and irrational despotism, fanatic religiosity, exotic mysticism, teeming markets and dreamy harems, sexually predatory and unstable men, and sensual, decadent and devious women” (Pickering 148). The Orient came to be represented in binary opposition to the West. As Said puts it, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1995 [1978]: 1-2). This was done by establishing Manichean characteristics that typified East and West. As Said puts it, there was an “absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior” (300). These images became pervasive in Western accounts of the East and allowed a rationalization of colonialism (and, later on, neocolonialism).

Following those first eighteenth century contacts, in the nineteenth century

ideas of Oriental backwardness and degeneracy came to be related with biological notions of racial inequality and, thus, the Oriental being (mostly equated with the Oriental man) was dehumanized. In other words, characteristics of abnormality were being ascribed to the Arabs in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, pathologizing and criminalizing them. As Said points out:

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory—taken over. (1995 [1978]: 207)⁴⁷

The notion of the Orient was thus founded on a clear relation of power based on the Occidental domination of the East, which resulted in the ascription of abnormality to the East in general and Arab individualities in particular.

Arabo-Islamist masculinity stemmed from this binary views of Western and Eastern identity. Although abnormality (as a pathologizing strategy) had been ascribed to the colonized since the nineteenth century, this fixed notion of alterity developed later in such a way that the Orient was seen either as submissive or threatening. As Said puts it, “the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever

⁴⁷ Said's conception of Orientalism as parallel to other “abnormalities” such as delinquency, insanity, or poverty shall be analyzed in the present dissertation in section 1.5, when applying Michel Foucault's notion of the abnormal to the imagery associated with Arab men in the United States.

possible)” (1995 [1978]: 301).⁴⁸ This dichotomy has traditionally informed the view of the Arab man in the West.

On the one hand, the Arab male has been conceptually emasculated by Orientalism. This was so because the colonial endeavor in itself was a gendered process from the beginning. Colonization has historically been portrayed as a male enterprise of penetration of the colonized lands, has been conducted mostly by men. Moreover, Western gender hierarchies were mirrored in the colonial space establishing a relation of power of Western dominance towards the East based on a masculine colonial endeavor and the Othering of the feminized East.⁴⁹ Since Orientalism was an exclusively male province, “it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders” (Said 1995 [1978]: 207). As R. W. Connell explains:

Imperialism was, from the start, a gendered process. Its first phase, colonial conquest and settlement, was carried out by gender-segregated forces, and it resulted in massive disruption of indigenous gender orders. In its second phase, the stabilization of colonial societies, new gender divisions of labor were produced in plantation economies and colonial cities, while gender ideologies were linked with racial hierarchies and the cultural defense of empire. (1998: 8)

Those first gendered colonial encounters resulted in the first stereotypes that would later constitute what I call Arabo-Islamist masculinity, based on colonial hierarchy and reinstated through neocolonialism. The view of the Eastern Other is still tinged by this sexualized and hierarchical perspective. That is, since the colonial endeavor was masculine, the subaltern masculine identities encountered

⁴⁸ As I will argue in section 1.5, using Michel Foucault's notion of abnormality, this is still true of the relations between the Arab world and the United States, as the Arab world is still feared in terms of terrorism (especially after 9/11), and has been consequently and recently attempted to be controlled by the United States through the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

⁴⁹ This gendering of colonial and postcolonial encounters will be examined in relation to Arab American identities in particular in the section 1.5 of this dissertation.

in the colonial process needed to be comprehended in contrast to the colonizers' view of "proper" masculinity. By thinking about the Arab male as someone to be dominated, the Western mind created an illusion of control over him. The construction of this specific side of Arabo-Islamist masculinity, which situates this masculinity in an inferior position to the hegemonic one, is therefore a result of a process of "internal hegemony," which Demetrakis Z. Demetriou defines as the ascendancy of one group of men over all other men (846). The colonizers had to ascertain their militarist masculinity against an inferior Other, as a means to justify their power. Thus, they had to subordinate the colonized masculinity through its emasculation.

On the other hand, historically, the Arab male has also been perceived as a threat in the West, represented through imagery that pictures him as despotic, fanatic, and sexually predatory (Pickering 148). This particular characterization of the Arab man results from a fear of the Other's hypermasculinity.⁵⁰ Arabo-Islamist masculinity is seen as abnormal also in terms of über-masculinity, a fact which comes from a fear that this masculinity may challenge the West's hegemony as a whole and, in particular, Western hegemonic and militaristic masculinity.⁵¹ This anxiety implies an advancement of this dichotomy, reinforcing the stereotypes of Arabo-Islamist masculinity, as well as the gendered hierarchy of colonialism. Establishing Arabo-Islamist masculinity as a threat implied a condonance of

⁵⁰ This threat perceived by the white man in relation to the Other's hypermasculinity has been notably related to black or African American masculinities by Franz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986).

⁵¹ This idea will be further explained in section 1.5, where I will examine how Arabo-Islamic masculinity has been constructed in the United States as a raced and sexualized non-hegemonic abnormal masculinity.

colonialism (and neocolonialism), a justification of the colonial endeavor.

All these Orientalist discourses were inherited in America, so that Orientalist imagery informed the view of Arabs in the United States. However, there are certain specificities in the development of Orientalist conceptions of Arab men in North America. Douglas Little, in his book *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, provides a historical account of the development of Orientalist views of the Middle East in the United States. In fact, he traces American Orientalist views of Arabs from the beginning of the Puritan immigration to America until nowadays, stating that since the pilgrims believed they were the new Israelites, their self-identification as the people of Israel may have informed their ambivalence towards Muslims and Arabs (9). At the very beginning of the nineteenth century, after the independence of the United States, the Barbary Wars helped reinstate stereotypes about Arabs inherited from Europe, that is, Orientalist stereotypes. The First Barbary War took place between 1801 and 1805, when the United States fought against the Ottoman provinces of Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and the Sultanate of Morocco; the Second Barbary War took place in 1815 and was fought against Algeria. They were wars intended to fight Muslim pirates who tried to exact tributes from Atlantic powers and, specifically, from the United States. As Little explains:

The revolutionary statesmen who invented America in the quarter-century after 1776 regarded the Muslim world, beset by Oriental despotism, economic squalor, and intellectual stultification, as the antithesis of the republicanism to which they had pledged their sacred honor. Three decades of sporadic maritime warfare with the Barbary pirates helped spread these orientalist images to the public at large through captivity narratives such as Caleb Bingham's *Slaves*

in Barbary and plays like Susana Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*. (12)⁵²

Little continues his historical chronicle of the development of Orientalism in the United States with an account of popular literature circulating in the nineteenth century, which helped reinstate stereotypes, and mentions books such as illustrated editions of *The Arabian Nights*, Washington Irving's *Mahomet and His Successors* (1849), and Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). These popular cultural artifacts reinforced Orientalist visions of the Arab world, which made U.S. Orientalism only became more pervasive in the first years of the twentieth century. Even Theodore Roosevelt stated that “it is impossible to expect moral, intellectual, and material well-being where Mohammedanism is supreme” (Little 15), thus equating Muslim faith to backwardness. Furthermore, in the first part of the twentieth century, according to Little,

[g]rounded in a Social Darwinistic belief in the racial inferiority of Arabs, Kurds, and Turks and sustained by an abiding faith in the superiority of the United States, orientalism American style became a staple of popular culture during the 1920s through such media as B movies, best-selling books, and mass circulation magazines. ... Many of the orientalist stereotypes of the Arabs evoked by films and books were reinforced by popular magazines such as *National Geographic*, which by the late 1920s had become a window on the world for millions of middle-class Americans. (17)

⁵² Steven Salaita also expresses a similar idea, when he points out: “Muslim piracy in the late eighteenth century off the Barbary Coast ... prompted a firestorm of vitriol among America’s so-called Founding Fathers against what they deemed to be Islamic barbarians. In many ways, the engagement of the early American military with Muslims off the Barbary Coast and the insidious moralizing against supposed Arab slavetraders produced a consciousness that was reinvigorated when Arabs migrated to North America decades later” (2006: 12). Moreover, in the conversazione held at Oxford from 7-9 June 1998 titled *The Arab Image in the West*, scholars expressed the same idea: “Some U.S. commentators identify one element contributing to negative images in the U.S.A. of Turks, Muslims and Arabs as being the attacks on American shipping and ‘hostage taking’ by North African pirates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This helped found an image in the American psyche of Turks and Arabs as being cruel, avaricious and treacherous –an image that was sustained by folklore and literature” (Tarbush 13).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the creation of the State of Israel aided in the Manichean views towards the Arab world spread in the West. The establishment of Israel in 1948 was immediately recognized as such by president Harry S. Truman, whose officials “were convinced that the peoples of the Muslim world were an unpredictable lot whose penchant for political and religious extremism constituted a grave threat to U.S. interests in the region” (Little 27). Texts such as Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) or the book *Exodus* (1958), brought to the screen in 1960, entered American popular culture and emphasized North American sympathies towards Israel and a consequent hostility towards the Arab world.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli war also helped reinforce the stereotypes already circulating about the Arab world. Conflicts in the Middle East after the 1956 Suez Crisis peaked in 1967 with the Arab-Israeli war, which took place between June 5 and June 10. Israel won the war as it took control of the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Jordan), and Golan Heights (Syria). Because of the defeat of Egypt, Jordan and Syria by Israel, views of Arab inefficiency strengthened.⁵³ As Little puts it, “Americans Israel's military triumph in June 1967 completed the transformation of Jews from victims to victors while branding the Arabs as feckless, reckless, and weak” (32). The stereotyping of Arabs was once more reinstated.

Throughout the twentieth century, these images were further enhanced. The United States started developing their own interests in the Middle East after

⁵³ The 1967 Arab Israeli War will be crucial to the construction of Arab and Arab American masculinities, as will be developed in section 2.2.3 of the present dissertation.

American geologists discovered oil in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. In 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt had a meeting with Saudi Arabia's monarch 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Saud, which established an official strategic relationship between the two countries.⁵⁴ Thus, especially after World War II, and after its increased contact with the Middle East, America revived the discourses about Arabs inherited from Orientalism. In his book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*, Michael Pickering called this appropriation "U.S. Orientalism." He coined the term to explore the particular attitude of the United States in relation to North Africa and the Middle East. Pickering notes that U.S. Orientalism developed with the rise of American neocolonialism in the Middle East, so that the strategic politico-economic interests of the United States reinforced stereotypes about Arabs that had been inherited from British colonial history in the Middle East, since Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt were British colonies. In the United States, during the second half of the twentieth century, foreign policies had been informed by these inherited stereotypes. The Persian Gulf War would be an example of the foreign policies the United States developed in the Middle East, which at the same time resulted from previous stereotypes and helped reinstate them.⁵⁵ The Persian Gulf War took place from August 2nd 1990 to March 1st 1991, and consisted of an armed conflict between Iraq and a coalition of countries from the United Nations, led by the United States, which tried to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. The liberationist discourse clearly served strategic purposes—namely, to obtain access

⁵⁴ For further information on the relationships between the United States and the Middle East, see Toby Craig Jones's article "America, Oil, and War in the Middle East."

⁵⁵ It is referred to here as the Persian Gulf War in order to distinguish it from the First Gulf War, also known as the Anglo-Iraqi War, which took place in 1941, when the United Kingdom occupied Iraq during the Second World War.

to petroleum resources in the Middle East. However, that was not the only reason for the Gulf War. Joseph S. Nye Jr. points to other factors as more important than oil resources, as he claims that only five percent of America's energy came from the region in the 1990s. Other aspects he refers to are the need to establish a "new world order" once the Cold War finished, which would forward the global hegemony of the United States. However, the anti-Iraqi political discourse quickly became an anti-Arab discourse, even though the War was made in alliance with Arab states such as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco. As Mervat Hatem puts it, "These views indicated a deeply held belief that being both Arab and American was an oxymoron to the mainstream: one negated the other" (373). Reports on the War tended to obviously vilify Arab culture. By extension, the aforementioned discourses on Arabo-Islamist masculinities were exacerbated, leading to the reproduction of stereotypes that represented Arab men as homogeneously Muslim, anti-American, and terrorist.

The twentieth century also saw attacks on American soil that reinforced the racialization and vilification of Arabo-Islamist masculinity as "abnormal." At the end of the twentieth century, there were terrorist attacks in the U.S. that were perpetrated by Arabs or attributed to them. The analysis of aggressions such as the First World Trade Center bombing (1993), or the Oklahoma City Bombing (1995), allow us to understand the recent upsurge in the racialization of Arab American men in the United States, and how the backlash suffered after September 11, 2001 did not appear in a void. In other words, before the twenty-first century, the association between Arab Americans and terrorism already existed. In 1987, there

was the case of “The Los Angeles 8,” when eight U.S. residents were arrested because of alleged ties to Palestinian terrorists, and were not released until ten years later, without charges, thus acknowledging their innocence. In 1993, there was the First World Trade Center bombing, which the FBI describes through the following (sensationalist) wording: “It was Friday, February 26, 1993, and Middle Eastern terrorism had arrived on American soil—with a bang.”⁵⁶ The relation established in this headline between the Middle East and Islamic fundamentalism, here called “Middle Eastern terrorism,” is blatant. An equation of terrorism with geography is clearly established. Another relevant event took place in 1995, the Oklahoma City bombing. A bomb exploded in a U.S. government building in downtown Oklahoma, and the attack was said to have been perpetrated by Arabs. In the end it was found out that it had been carried out by a Scottish American. However, as a consequence, the government passed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which made it easier to arrest and deny political asylum to Arabs.⁵⁷ Stereotypes about Arabs in the United States have thus induced discrimination and racial hatred. As Gregory Orfalea puts it:

[There were] alarming spikes in hate crimes against Arab Americans and those who look like them during the 1991 Gulf war and after the Oklahoma City bombing. Stereotyping in the media, film, books, advertisements, and so forth, grew exponentially in this period and is responsible in part for the unleashing of a subliminal hatred or

⁵⁶ From: “FBI 100. First Strike: Global Terror in America.” THE FBI. 2008.

<http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/february/tradebom_022608>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

⁵⁷ The association between Arabs, Muslims and terrorism was of course also enhanced in 2001. The events of September 11 led to the passing of the Patriot Act, which took up where the 1996 Act left off, and allowed indefinite detention, searches, seizures, wiretapping, and guilt by association. Thus, immigration to the United States became more restrictive for those coming from Middle Eastern countries, and so the migration of Arabs to the United States after September 11 has decreased. Moreover, these kinds of hate crimes have not disappeared since then. For instance, on August 6th 2012 there was a shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin that put to the fore, once again, the misconceptions related to Arabs and Muslims.

fear of the Arab in US society. (2006: x)

Hence, a racialization of Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern bodies was ignited by mid-twentieth century conflicts, contributing to the negative image of Arabs in the United States, and reinforcing the stereotypes ascribed to them. Edward Said traces some of the imagery associated with Arab males within the context of the twentieth century, and explains that, in the first half of the century, Arab males were portrayed with traditional clothes as their main marker of Otherness. Then, after the defeat in the June War in 1967, he came to be seen as incompetent. After the oil boycott of 1973-4, Arab men tended to be depicted as more menacing. Said traces a racist continuum and relates it to politics, thus pointing to the importance of foreign policies and nationalism to Orientalist racial constructions.

The perception that U.S. citizens have of the Orient and specifically of Arab males, then, has been historically negative. According to a study carried out by *The Middle East Journal* in 1981 about ethnic traits, Arabs were given high scores on characteristics such as “being rich, barbaric, cruel, treacherous, bloodthirsty, mistreating women, dressing strangely” (Tarbush 16). In the same vein, Pickering states that “US Orientalism has been supported by negative stereotypes of Arabs in American popular culture as lecherous and deceitful, bloodthirsty and sadistic” (164). Edward Said also relates the negative depiction of the Arab male to artifacts of popular culture:

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in the cinema. (1995 [1978]: 286-7)

In this sense, the Arab American scholar Jack Shaheen, whose work focuses on the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in American popular culture, talks about the “‘b’ factor,” arguing that Arabs are always portrayed as billionaires, bombers, Bedouin bandits, buffoons, or bargainers, and are also related to 4 myths: Arabs as wealthy, uncultured barbarians, sex maniacs, and terrorists (Tarbush 16).

In films, television, and the media all these stereotypes circulate freely, reaching a wide audience. In the specific case of cinema, this historical evolution of hatred has been documented by Jack Shaheen in his book *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture*, where he denounces over nine hundred Hollywood films which portray Arabs in a negative and offensive manner. As a consequence, he argues that these stereotypes are deeply rooted in the American mind and that they effect racial discrimination. He traces negative representations of Arabs to the beginning of the history of the motion pictures, and says that in the early 1890s Arab men already appeared on screen killing one another, that is, already represented as violent. Then, in the 1920s the image of the sheikh appeared, and was followed from the 1930s to the 1950s by caricatures or threatening portrayals. In the 1970s and 1980s, depictions of the oily sheikh appeared as a consequence of the 1973 oil crisis. According to Shaheen, the most pervasive picture at the end of the twentieth century was that of a fanatical fundamentalist terrorist. These negative depictions can be seen in several well-known motion pictures. Some examples would be *Jewel of the Nile* (1985), where there is an Arab ruler depicted as a deceitful and brutal dictator; *Back to the Future* (1985), where the two main characters are attacked by Libyan terrorists;

True Lies (1994), where the central plot revolves around spies who try to stop a radical Islamic terrorist group, which is depicted as highly inefficient; *Executive Decision* (1996), where the plot also revolves around a plane hijacked by terrorists of Arab descent; *The Mummy* (1999), which depicts Egypt as a violent place, a site of war; and *Rules of Engagement* (2000), part of which is set in a Yemen surrounded by riots, where Yemenite men are depicted as anti-American, bloodthirsty, and violent. Also, Disney films like *Aladdin* (1992) portray the Arab world as barbaric, as well as exotic.⁵⁸ In all those pre-9/11 movies, Arab males are portrayed either as violent, deceitful, or sadistic terrorist Muslims; that is, as an abnormal Other to American masculinity. The media depictions of Arabo-Islamist masculinity are both a reflection of the already-existent narratives on Arab manhood and an agent of reinforcement of those discourses. All these characterizations built up an ethos that was strengthened by the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, contributing to the equation of Arabo-Islamist masculinity with terrorism.

⁵⁸ The opening song of *Aladdin*, “Arabian Nights,” began as follows: “Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place, where the caravan camels roam, where they cut off your ear if they don’t like your face, it’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home,” thus characterizing the Arab world as cruel and violent. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) challenged Disney and persuaded the studio to change that phrase for the video version of the film to say, “It’s flat and immense, and the heat is intense. It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home,” but part of the negative stereotypes remained.

1.4 Understanding Post-9/11 Arabo-Islamist Masculinity: 9/11 as a National Trauma

September 11, 2001, signified a collective trauma for the United States of America. The Arab American Institute recognized the traumatic nature of the events when, in a press release from September 11 2001, they claimed that:

Arab Americans, like all Americans, are transfixed by this tragedy. We have family and friends who worked in the World Trade Center. We mourn for those who lost their lives and those who were injured. We mourn, as well, for our country in this time of national trauma. ... Regardless of who is ultimately found to be responsible for these terrorist murders, no ethnic or religious community should be treated as suspect and collectively blamed. (4)⁵⁹

If September 11 meant a national trauma for the United States, national victimization appeared as a means to counteract this affront towards a nation, its economic and political system, and its security. In relation to the collective dimension of community trauma, Kai Erikson points out:

[O]ne can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons. ... traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos—a group culture, almost—that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension. (183-185)

The attacks of September 11 undeniably entailed a social trauma, which established an ethos of fear in American society. The traumatic experience was

⁵⁹ From: Lee, Michael S. "Healing the Nation. The Arab American Experience After September 11," <http://www.newsu.org/course_files/wsu_islam_11/pdf/ArabAmericanExperience.pdf>. Accessed: 12 August 2012.

reinforced by the importance of the media in reenacting it. As E. Ann Kaplan argues, 9/11 was a “mediatized trauma” (2). Kaplan highlights the preeminence of technologies in the way this trauma was experienced—namely, via the internet, cell phones, and television. In relation to this, she also emphasizes the highly visual nature of September 11, arguing that,

[the Twin Towers’] visual absence was traumatic ... The images were part of the traumatic symptom already evident in the media’s constant repetition of the Towers being struck. Given trauma’s peculiar visuality as a psychic disorder, this event seemed to feed trauma by being so highly visual in its happening. (13)

Kaplan thus explains that the gap left by the Twin Towers themselves was filled with images of them, icons that inform the way this collective trauma is lived and relived by Americans in a simulacrum loop that seems to whirl and only get broader with time.

Arab American writers have also had to deal with the trauma of September 11. One of the most poignant accounts of the tragedy is Suheir Hammad’s poem “first writing since.”⁶⁰ As Trauma Studies scholar Anne Whitehead states, “trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation” (13). This difficulty of putting trauma into words is very present in Hammad’s poem, which precisely starts acknowledging this:

there have been no words.
i have not written one word.
no poetry in the ashes of canal street.
no prose in the refrigerated trucks driving debris and dna.
not one word. (1-5)

⁶⁰ No capital letters are used in the original poem “first writing since,” possibly as a way to emphasize the urgency of its delivery as well as the difficulty in wording trauma. Suheir Hammad is a Palestinian American author and political activist, who was born in Jordan to Palestinian refugee parents who migrated to Brooklyn, New York, when she was a child.

From the very beginning, the visual nature of this poem is clear. The references to ashes, debris, and DNA confront the reader once more with the images so many times seen on the media of the remains of the towers. The particular visual nature of the 9/11 trauma is reflected in Hammad's poem. Moreover, there is also an allusion to the disruption of meaning resultant from the trauma and the change in the New York City skyline. As the poem puts it:

out my kitchen window is an abstract reality.
sky where once was steel.
smoke where once was flesh. (7-9)

The poem refers here, again through images of disappearance and remains, to the trauma caused by the visual absence of the Twin Towers. Right after, Hammad faces the reader with the idea of fear, and focuses on the distinct approach Arab Americans take to September 11 in relation to their double trauma as both Americans and Arabs. First, Hammad asserts "I fear for the rest of us" (11); and then, in a series of parallelisms in a form of prayer, she implores:

first, please god, let it be a mistake, the pilot's heart failed, the
plane's engine died.
then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.
please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone
who looks like my brothers. (12-16)

This last plea underlines the root of her concern as an Arab American: the fear of being vilified, being racialized and discriminated against, because of the reinforcement of the stereotype that relates Arabs to terrorism. In stanza 5 (74-91), she expresses her indignation towards this ascription of abnormality to the Arab persona. The poem reads:

one more person ask me if i knew the hijackers.
...

one more person assume no arabs or muslims were killed.
one more people assume they know me, or that i represent a people.
or that a people represent an evil. (74, 76-78)

Hammad contests the vilification of people of Arab descent arguing that white people are not vilified in the same way for their terrorist acts. As an example, she refers to the Oklahoma City bombing, and to the Ku Klux Klan:

we did not vilify all white men when mcveigh bombed oklahoma.
america did not give out his family's addresses or where he went to
church.
...
and when we talk about holy books and hooded men and death, why
do we
never mention the kkk? (80-82, 88-89)

Hammad thus highlights the racial discrimination suffered by Arab Americans because of their being stereotypically perceived as terrorists. The poem finishes with an avowal of life which is tinged with the Manichean language used by the U.S. government in their foreign policy, and which reads:

affirm life.
affirm life.
we got to carry each other now.
you are either with life or against it.
affirm life. (142-146)

In a fragmented structure typical of trauma literature,⁶¹ Suheir Hammad presents a poetic piece which puts together the concerns of Americans and of people of Arab descent, and underlines the problematic position of Arab Americans after 9/11. While acknowledging the visual nature of trauma and the difficulty in putting

⁶¹ Ronald Granofsky, in his book *The Trauma Novel. Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster*, analyzes and exemplifies the characteristics of literature that results from a traumatic experience. Granofsky summarizes his findings by stating that “[d]espite the many different faces fictional trauma may present, ... it is striking to see how often it is greeted in symbolic fiction by some form of regression, fragmentation, and reunification” (107). Thus, he acknowledges fragmentation as one of the main characteristics of trauma literature.

trauma into words, Hammad explores the specificities of the traumatic experience of September 11 for Arab Americans, informed by their double mourning. As an American, Hammad fears terrorism and resents criticism against the US. As an immigrant of Jordanian origin, she dreads discrimination for being related to terrorism⁶².

Writing about 9/11 is a way for Arab Americans to exorcize the ghosts left by terrorism. The texts created by Arab American writers after 9/11 serve as a means to come to terms with the traumatic nature of the events, but also to assert their disconnection from terrorism. Art, literature, and poetry about traumatic experiences can be considered a potential site for healing. As E. Ann Kaplan puts it:

[There is an] increasing importance of “translating” trauma—that is, of finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as to oneself. Art, perhaps paradoxically, is one such way ... Trauma can never be “healed” in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe; but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being “translated” via art. (19)

Literature is seen by writers as a possible site for coming to terms with trauma. As Janice Haaken puts it, “By definition, traumatic events overwhelm existing meaning systems. But this very disruption of normalcy invites storytelling as people attempt to make sense of what has happened” (455). Literature about 9/11 “translates” the way Arab Americans experienced this catastrophe and, in so doing, allows the possibility of healing. The fourth chapter of the present

⁶² Other writers deal with this topic in different ways. For example, Mohja Kahf takes a subversive stance in her story “The Spiced Chicken Queen of Mickaweaquah, Iowa,” and Laila Halaby deals with the post-9/11 racist backlash in her novel *Once in a Promised Land*, which will be analyzed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

dissertation will be an account of the translation of the events of 9/11 into Arab American literature, as well as an exploration of writing as a potential site for the healing of trauma.⁶³ However, before dealing with literature per se, we need to understand the construction of Arabo-Islamist manhood in the United States after 9/11, as that will be the specific Arabo-Islamist masculinity that post-9/11 novelists will mainly have to write against in their depiction of Arab men. This is why the next section will take up the cinders of September 11 and theorize on the construction of the figure of the Arab male terrorist.

⁶³ This will be done particularly in section 4.1.

1.5 Sexualizing Abjection: Constructing the Arab Male as Terrorist

September 11 reinstated the already current stereotype of the Arab/Muslim male as a terrorist. The recurrent images that pervaded the media right after the attacks reinforced the view of Arabs as the utmost enemy to the American nation. The trauma of September 11 re-intensified the vilification of Arab men in accordance with their erroneous equation with Islamic fundamentalism. In order to analyze this libeling, in the present section I shall delve into the notions of abnormality, abjection, and bio- and necropolitics, to elucidate how this enmity has been represented and justified.⁶⁴ This theorization will also serve as a means to understand the construction of Arab men as terrorist bodies and as a way to expound on how Arab manhood is gendered, raced, and sexualized as a non-hegemonic, abnormal masculinity.

Abnormality has historically been ascribed to Arab men—even more so after 2001—, as their vilification resulted from the abjection projected onto them, as well as the workings of biopolitics and necropolitics in post-9/11 America. I shall start by drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of the “abnormal,” as developed in his lectures at the Collège de France between 1974 and 1975, where he studied, in his

⁶⁴ I take the concepts of “abnormality” from Michel Foucault, “biopolitics” from Michel Foucault and Rey Chow, “abjection” from Julia Kristeva, and “necropolitics” from Achille Mbembe and Jasbir K. Puar. These concepts will be examined in depth in the present section.

own words, “the emergence of the power of normalization” (1999: 26). Even if Foucault’s analysis of the abnormal focuses on criminality and psychiatry, his insights will help us illuminate the ascription of deviancy to Arabo-Islamist masculinity in post-9/11 America. In his lectures, Foucault pointed to the development of normalization in the eighteenth century, and related normativization to the exercise and legitimization of power (1999: 49-50). From that basis, Foucault examined the nineteenth century, and the different “monsters” that developed at that point (i.e., the human monster, the individual to be corrected, and the masturbating child). The concept of the “human monster” shall be of particular relevance to the present study, since the monster is a magnified human deviation and may very well be related to the figure of the terrorist. As Foucault put it, “The monster is the limit ... The monster combines the impossible and the forbidden ... The monster, in fact, contradicts the law” (1999: 56), transgressing both natural limits and human cultural classifications (1999: 63). These characteristics allow us, from a post-9/11 perspective, to place the figure of the terrorist as an example of this “human monster,” that is, as the abnormal. The (Arabo-Islamist) terrorist defies limits by using religious extremism and violence, and by defying the law—the forbidden—in enacting purportedly impossible acts.⁶⁵ The ascription of abnormality to the terrorist (and, by extension, to Arabo-Islamist masculinity) derives also from the relation of the acts of September 11 to

⁶⁵ Foucault adds that one of the traditional responses to these abnormalities is public torture (*supplice*) (1999: 83). Equating the figure of the monster with the terrorist, and following Foucault’s idea, it is indeed true that the Arabo-Islamist terrorist suffers public torture. An example of this are the acts that took place at Abu Ghraib, where public admonestation against Arabo-Islamist masculinities found a visual outcome that used sexuality as its primary means of torture. The reasons for and implications of this use of sexuality, and the gender blinders through which the terrorist is regarded in post-9/11 America shall be examined in the last part of this section.

abjection. Julia Kristeva has defined the abject as something or someone “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated” (1). In this respect, the abject would be very similar to Foucault’s “impossible” and “forbidden” abnormal monster. However, the concept of abjection adds to this characterization of the monster-terrorist,⁶⁶ as it also informs Arabo-Islamist masculinity. What the notion of abjection provides is a link with death, to which the terrorist is closely related. Abjection is the human reaction to a trauma, such as the one resultant from seeing a corpse (Kristeva 3). On a large scale, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center elicited that reaction. September 11 meant a materialization of death in the West, a moment of abjection. Reduced to a set of images that were reproduced over and over again, the attacks entailed a paralysis, signifying a trauma for America. As Michel Foucault points out, death is man’s “invisible truth, his visible secret” (1973: 172), it is “something to be hidden away, it has become the most private and shameful thing of all” (2003: 87). There is an attempt in modern society to forget about death as a real possibility and to take distance from it, but what 9/11 did was to make the prospect of death real in the West, while at the same time rendering the invincibility of the United States untrue. As such, the perpetrators of those unspeakable acts became abject.

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir K. Puar relates this alienation from death to biopolitics.⁶⁷ As she puts it, “This distancing

⁶⁶ The concept of “monster-terrorist” comes from “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” by Jasbir K. Puar and Amit S. Rai.

⁶⁷ I am relying here on Rey Chow’s definition of biopolitics as “a systematic management of biological life and its reproduction” (3).

from death is a fallacy of modernity, a hallucination that allows for the unimpeded workings of biopolitics” (2007: 32). Michel Foucault traced the development of biopolitics in his 1978 and 1979 Lectures at the Collège de France (edited by Michel Sellenart in *The Birth of Biopolitics*), where he used the term “governmentality” (2010: 168) to “rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population” (2010: 317).⁶⁸ According to Foucault, governmentality has used biopolitics as a way to take control over the lives of the governed. Biopolitics have historically been based on liberalism and neo-liberalism, so that there has been an entrenched use of economy to explain non-market based relationships (such as marriage or criminality) (2010: 240). As a result of biopolitics, neo-liberal economy rules life through political power, so that government practice results from a rationale that entails the continuation of the status quo in terms of economy, hierarchy, and class. In the same vein, whatever threatens neo-liberal governmentality must be erased. The economy of life involves a counter-economy of death, and thus necropolitics come into play. In other words, biopolitics and necropolitics are “two sides of the same coin” (Braidotti 2). Moreover, Achille Mbembe defines “necropolitics” as “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (39). Necropolitics go one step further than biopolitics, so that instead of governing life, they refer to the government over death. Mbembe argues that the state of exception and a fictionalized notion of the enemy “have become

⁶⁸ Thomas Lemke explains this notion in the following words: “the term [governmentality] pin-points a specific form of *representation*; government defines a discursive field in which exercising power is ‘rationalized.’ This occurs, among other things, by the delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications, etc.” (191; emphasis in the original text).

the normative basis for the right to kill” (16). This is a particularly appropriate concept as regards the vilification of Arab men in the United States after September 11. The terrorist attacks of 2001 resulted in a state of emergency that allowed transgressions of the law on the part of the government. What was done from a biopolitical point of view was to include the population of different countries as members of the “axis of evil,”⁶⁹ which allowed the government to enter a war where supposedly evil civilians would be killed. The governmentality imposed by the United States over the living resulted in necropolicies for all of those pointed at as members of “evil” nations. That caused, on the one hand, wars against Arab/Muslim countries and, on the other, discrimination and profiling towards those who looked Arab or Muslim in the United States. In other words, the United States and, in particular, the hegemonic masculinity of the military, would serve to compensate for American post-9/11 victimhood, establishing their sovereignty over what they perceived as a threatening Arabo-Islamist masculinity. This fictive enemy would encompass everyone who looked Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim, and would be characterized as a depraved abnormal monster-terrorist, with a set of well-defined traits: male, Muslim, and deviant from normative hegemony in terms of race, and sexuality.⁷⁰ Moreover, according to the workings of biopolitics and necropolitics that we have seen, the denial of life (whether literal or in the form of discrimination) to those regarded as part of the “axis of evil” can be seen as a response to the threat posed to life in the neo-liberal milieu of 9/11.

⁶⁹ The phrase was first used by George W. Bush in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, to refer to Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

⁷⁰ Regarding sexuality, Arabo-Islamist masculinity is perceived as both emasculated and hypermasculine, following Edward Said's conception of Arab masculinities in *Orientalism*. Further theories on the sexualization of race will be examined in the remainder of this chapter.

That is, the destruction of American lives as well as the emblems of capitalism on U.S. soil (the Twin Towers) meant not only a threat to life as it had been known in the West (and particularly in the United States), but also a challenge to neo-liberal capitalism. Thus, the result of this biological and economic menace towards the American status quo was to be the denial—both figuratively and literally—of the terrorist-monster’s life (or anyone who looked like this abnormal, abject Other).

However, there is an added component to this materialist view of the vilification of Arabo-Islamist masculinity based on bio- and necropolitics, which is the issue of religion. In “September 11 and America’s War on Terrorism. A New Manifest Destiny?,” John A. Wickham points to September 11 as setting up a reinforcement of Christianity in the United States. As he puts it, “To many Americans, this period of reflection [after 9/11] ignited a spirited revival of the nation’s virtual state religion—one belief combining the sacred and secular into a Christian sense of mission with patriotism” (116).⁷¹ This nationalistic and religious response to 9/11 also entailed an economization of biopolitics (the management and preservation of life) and was, thus, very much related to capitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow points to capitalism as the successor of Protestantism at the basis of the American ethos.⁷² Chow argues that “[c]apitalism ... has succeeded Protestantism in granting psychological sanction for hard work. Worldly success within capitalism stands de facto as the

⁷¹ Wickham also historically relates this religious and patriotic response to the attacks of September 2001 to the notion of manifest destiny, arguing that “[t]he national conversation after September 11 ... has generally indicated conservative rhetoric pining for a nostalgic return to the traditions and attitudes of manifest destiny” (129).

⁷² The title of Rey Chow's book draws on that of Max Weber's volume *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

secular equivalent of a demonstrated conferral of grace and the assurance of religious salvation” (44). One could, however, contest this idea and argue that the discourses of Protestantism and capitalism, instead of succeeding one another (as Chow states), coexist in the American psyche, particularly as far as the vilification of the Arab/Muslim community in the United States is concerned. In this case, the salience of the religious clash between traditional American Protestantism and Islamic fundamentalism, in the form of the 9/11 attacks, makes religion (Christianity) play a central part in the construction of the Arab/Muslim Other or, in other words, in the ascription of abnormality to Arabo-Islamist masculinity. The centrality of religion in the United States has also been underlined by Toby Miller, who relates the axial dimension of Protestantism in the United States to capitalism.⁷³ As he puts it, “I ... suggest that the US public subscribes to reactionary views in part because of their adherence to right-wing evangelical Protestantism, individualism, and nationalism, which are of increasing importance as US society becomes radically marked by economic exploitation” (121). He also points to the American dream as a hope or desire that enables the continuation of the capitalistic Protestant heteronormative system. Thus, my contention is that, being part of the U.S. foundational discourses, both Christianity and capitalism still form the basis of American nationalism and patriotism. In this respect, once the figure of the abnormal Other (in the case of 9/11, Muslim fundamentalists) challenges the United States in terms of both religion and capitalism, through an

⁷³ Miller mentions figures to justify his point, such as the fact that 96% of U.S. citizens believe in a higher power, for 59% religion is crucial to their lives, 79% are Christian, 41% are converts to fundamental evangelism, and 18% form part of the religious right (118).

attack in the name of Islam towards the emblems of Western economy, they are altering the basis of American patriotism. Therefore, there needs to be a collective/national psychological reaction to this challenging trauma. The vilification of the alleged terrorists, then, encapsulates a cry for life (through the workings of biopolitics), as well as the securing of the capitalistic and Christian status quo (through necropolitics). Capitalism is ensured through the appropriation of natural resources (namely, oil), and Christianity is exacerbated, as the war against the “axis of evil” is discursively condoned as a fight between religions and a civilizing mission. Miller points to this double agenda behind America’s reaction to 9/11 and argues that “September 11 provided an opportunity to blend a foreign-policy project of apparent pragmatism (securing resources and national defense) and apparent idealism (spreading the word) with a domestic-policy project of religiosity” (129). Thus, America’s vilifying of Arabo-Islamist masculinity serves as a means of securing both Protestant and capitalist hegemony.

Therefore, both the wars against Iraq and Afghanistan and the racist backlash undergone by Arabs in the United States are a response to the threat implied by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to the capitalistic and Christian American normativity.⁷⁴ According to Michel Foucault, twentieth-century racism works as an “internal means of defense of a society against its abnormal individuals” (1999: 317). Consequently, there has been a characterization of Arabo-Islamist masculinity as abnormal and abject in defense of the founding narratives of the United States. These ideas can also be understood as a legacy from colonialism.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ The backlash is said to have increased a 1600% after 9/11 (Kaptur 2003).

⁷⁵ Omi and Winant 37, 79; Salaita 2005, 2006.

The defense against abjection enacted in the United States is precisely that of “imperative patriotism,” a term coined by Steven Salaita in his article “Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism,” where he defines this notion as the specific form of nationalism that arises in settler societies which use a divine mandate as a means of justifying their settlement in foreign lands, thus deriving from colonial discourse and intertwining a civilizing and moral mission. As David Palumbo-Liu also argues, there is a need in these settler societies to have—or to create—an enemy against which to consolidate the nation (121). This moral condoning of the nation entails a situational patriotism through which, as Salaita elaborates, any dissent to this specific settler-derived nationalism is conceived of as disloyal.⁷⁶ Thus, the 9/11 attacks on American hegemony exacerbated the labeling of Arabs/Muslims in the United States as unpatriotic. Dissent in terms of patriotism became equated with being called a terrorist. As Salaita puts it, “the word *terrorism* ... is used uncritically to describe anybody (of the requisite Arab background) who contests either domestic or international American hegemony” (2005: 160).

This imperative notion of patriotism would also legitimize war outside the U.S. borders through its civilizing mission, as a means to drive the Muslim Other into Western heteronormative values. In the United States, Arabs would be perceived as challenging American patriotism (American Protestant heteronormativity) and, as a result, they experienced racism. The process of racialization of Arabo-Islamist masculinity (both inside and outside the United

⁷⁶ The division between patriot and dissenter is based on racial division, as it stems from the racial myth imposed on the foundation of America which is that of inherent whiteness established in contrast to the original inhabitants of the continent, the Native Americans.

States) is based on a perceived threat of the abnormal (at an individual and national level), seen as a danger to the status quo, that is, a defiance of the class (capitalistic) strata, as well as the heteronormative and patriarchal state. Abnormality is ascribed particularly to men because of the patriarchal militaristic milieu in which these discourses operate. The view of Arab men as abnormal in the United States derives from their perceived deviation from a set of normativizing aspects that ultimately aid in the signification of their alterity. Thus, Arab/Muslim men are projected in the Western mind as anomalous in terms of race, class, sexuality, and gender. These Othering strategies construct the Arab/Muslim man in the United States as an “intolerable ethnic,” in contrast to the “tolerable ethnic” who is straight, wealthy and male (Puar 2007: 59).⁷⁷ However, the contradictory fact is that, actually, the Arab American masculine population mostly conforms to the “tolerable ethnic” category in terms of their socio-economic positioning within the American majority, since Arab Americans have a median income higher than the American average.⁷⁸ Puar refers to class as being above other markers of Otherness (2007: 60-61). In other words, when class is not a sign of Otherness (as is the case of the majority of Arab Americans), other markers of Otherness diffuse. Arab Americans are in a good position in the socio-economic ladder. However, once the group they are related to signifies a threat to life (as is the case of 9/11), their racialization comes into play again. The singular advent of 9/11 set out a vilification of Arab men that had been built long before,

⁷⁷ Justifying this idea, in “Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming!” Nadine Naber points to the specific targeting of Arab individuals as being “working-class nonresident Muslim m[e]n” (2008: 277). In this respect, the issues of nationalism, class, and gender are intertwined in the specific racialization and vilification of Arab men in post-9/11 America.

⁷⁸ De la Cruz and Brittingham, 2003.

and that targeted not only Muslim, Arab or Middle Eastern men, but anyone who looked as such. These men, then, came to be perceived as terrorist bodies and, therefore, as deviating from the norm in terms of race, class, sexuality and gender.⁷⁹

As we have just seen, symbolically, the collapse of the Twin Towers signified the destruction of the emblems of (American) capitalism. The attack on the Pentagon also has a symbolic dimension, as the penetration of the utmost emblem of American military power. Both attacks were an affront to American nationalism, attacks to American Protestantism, and, ultimately, a challenge to the Western heteronormative status quo that America represents and encourages. The symbolic dimension of the attacks as a castration of this masculinist patriarchal heteronormative Protestant capitalist and patriotic America shall serve to, then, understand the process leading to the categorization of Arab men as deviant in terms of masculinity in post-9/11 America.

The first response to this affront towards America's normative manhood was an advancement of traditional masculinist notions of the hero.⁸⁰ As Diana Taylor argues, "The attacks immediately triggered the same old scenario: evil barbarians, threatened damsels, and heroic males drawn from a repertoire of frontier lore. 'Evil' wrongdoers attack the righteous defenders of manifest destiny"

⁷⁹ The representation of Arab American men's experiences of racial backlash will be examined in section 4.1 of the present dissertation in the analysis of Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*.

⁸⁰ I shall talk about "normative American masculinity" or "normative American manhood" to refer to the specific U.S. heteronormative white and Protestant masculinity that is established as the discourse of the norm in the United States.

(449).⁸¹ Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling compared the American state to a heteronormative household where a hypermasculine patriarch had to protect its nation and citizens (526). American patriotism is hypermasculine, militarist, and draws on colonial notions of masculinity. Conversely, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were situated as the nemesis of the American hero. These suicide bombers posed a threat to normative American masculinity, so that one of the strategies used to vilify the abject men that challenged the heteronormative status quo was to characterize them as deviant in gender and sexual terms. Jasbir Puar (2002, 2007) states that the terrorist has been pathologized as an exemplar of failed masculinity and failed heterosexuality. There is a queer-ification of Arab/Muslim masculinity in the United States, inasmuch as the conception of deviant masculinity is intermingled with sexual deviancy in the minds of the mainstream. This queer-ing also results from the disruption of the stability of the heteronormative status quo, which ultimately points to the agent of this disruption as “abnormal.” Puar characterizes what she refers to as “terrorist masculinity” as “failed and perverse” (2007: xxiii). As she puts it, “these emasculated bodies always have femininity as their reference point of malfunction, and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body—homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease” (2007: xxiii).⁸² These characteristics are encapsulated in what Puar names “Orientalist queerness” (2007: 59), which is based on a perception of “failed

⁸¹ Susan J. Brison (435-437), Marita Sturken (444-445), and Lydia Potts and Silke Wenk (459-461) all point to the similar idea that there has been a return to traditional forms of the American hero after 9/11, in *Signs* (2002) Vol. 28, No.1.

⁸² Here I do not think Puar is equating homosexuality with a pathology, but I read her claim as referring to a possible mainstream view of malfunction contrary to heteronormativity which may pathologize homosexuality and relate it to the perceived failed masculinity of the terrorist.

heteronormativity” (2007: 59). The failed, pathologized masculinity attributed to the terrorists is related to the perceived homosociality of the Arab world, where social relations between men have been, as perceived from the West,

linked to pedophilia, ascribed to the perceived lack of sexual contact with women, or continually misread as faggotry or homosexuality. ... The claim to homosexuality counters two tendencies: the colloquial deployment of Islamic sexual repression that plagues human rights, liberal queer, and feminist discourses, and the Orientalist wet dreams of lascivious excesses of pedophilia, sodomy and perverse sexuality. (14)

From this perception, the pathologized sexual abnormality ascribed to Arab/Muslim men is contradictory in itself. Paradoxically, their gender and sexual deviancy encapsulates both hypermasculinity and emasculation.⁸³

On the one hand, American normative patriotism is compensating the challenge to American militarist masculinity that Islamic fundamentalists may imply in enacting hypermasculinity in their acts of martyrdom. In other words, America’s manhood is questioned by über-masculine attacks against it. As a consequence, America takes a hypermasculine stance in order to counter a hypermasculine affront against it. As Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling put it:

[Hypermasculinity] arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity. We extend this usage of hypermasculinity to security and economic domains, especially as one hypermasculine source (e.g., U.S. foreign policy) provokes another (e.g., Al Qaeda) to escalate with iterative bouts of hypermasculinity (e.g., “jihad”/“war on terror”). (519)

⁸³ This idea was previously developed in relation to the specific characteristics ascribed to Arabo-Islamist masculinity as a consequence of Orientalism.

Agathangelou and Ling indeed use Ashis Nandy's term "hypermasculinity" to explain the narratives opposing the United States and the Middle East, depicting them as a dialectical struggle which attempts to elucidate which nation is more masculine. Thus, from the white mainstream perspective, there is a normative hypermasculinity (which is acceptable), and an abnormal hypermasculinity, which is pathologized.⁸⁴ That is, there is a tolerable hypermasculinity (the American hegemonic one) set against an intolerable one (that of the terrorists and, by extension, of those who look like them).⁸⁵

On the other hand, once this deviant, pathologized, queer, Arabo-Islamist masculinity has been projected as hypermasculine, it is feared by America's normative masculinity, as it entails a challenge to America's supremacy. Because of the anxiety resultant from this questioning of heteronormativity, this deviant masculinity needs to be conceived of by the American psyche as inferior and, thus, as emasculated. This emasculation can be understood, in turn, through the queerification or homo-sexualization of the terrorist, so that abjection ends up being sexualized. This equation between the body of the terrorist and homosexuality can be clearly seen in the acts of Abu-Ghraib, where torture of perceived terrorist bodies was conducted through sexualized practices. Jasbir Puar goes one step further, arguing that

the emasculated terrorist is not merely an other, but also a barometer of ab/normality involved in disciplinary apparatuses. ... This disidentification is a process of sexualization as well as of racialization of religion. But the terrorist figure is not merely

⁸⁴ However, those tolerable and intolerable hypermasculinities are actually very similar and can be seen as influencing one another. See Agathangelou and Ling for specific similarities.

⁸⁵ Here I am, once again, drawing on Puar's notion of the tolerable and intolerable ethnic (2007: 59).

racialized and sexualized; the body must appear improperly racialized (outside the norms of multiculturalism) and perversely sexualized in order to materialize the terrorist in the first place. (2007: 38)

Hence, in order to understand the pathologizing of the terrorists, they need to be seen as abnormal monsters, so that their racialization and sexualization appear, from the perspective of heteronormative culture, as so deviant that they fall into the category of the abject.

Arabo-Islamist masculinity has been historically pathologized and Othered. However, 9/11 induced a decisive resurgence of these discourses of deviance, hypermasculinity, and emasculation. It must be noted here that these narratives are not only familiar to Arabs, but also to other ethnic groups in the United States. Similarities in terms of ascription of abnormality to ethnic masculinities may be drawn in relation to African Americans, or Asian Americans, for example; and similar accounts could also be made in relation to homosexuality. All these are ideologies entrenched in America's psyche, so much so that they appear and reappear in several cultural products. Arab American authors are also aware of them, using them in their writings. The next section will exemplify the reproduction of these discourses in products of popular culture. Further on, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, we will also see how these discourses have been drawn upon and contested by post-9/11 Arab American women writers.

1.6 Muslim and Terrorist: Discursive Strategies of Abnormal Masculinity in the Post-9/11 Prime-time Drama *Homeland*

The discourses exposed in the previous sections impinge on the lives of Americans, and at the same time they both inform popular culture products and are reproduced in them. Entertainment media both reflect and create reality, as they stem from circulating discourses, while they also influence society by replicating ideologies. Thus, it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter by referring to popular representations of Arabs. Arab American scholarship has actually conducted relevant work regarding the representation of Arabs and Muslims in the media, particularly in film and television. The most well-known author in the field is Dr. Jack Shaheen, who has published several volumes on the topic, including *The TV Arab* (1984), *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (1997), and *Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs After 9/11* (2008). His most comprehensive account has been *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2003), where Shaheen documented over nine hundred films, 95% of which portray Arabs as a “cultural ‘other’” (Shaheen 2003: 2). The fact that a minimal 5% of the pre-9/11 Hollywood films assessed portrays Arabs as regular people (2003: 33) backs up the historicity behind the stereotyping of Arabo-Islamist identity that has been expounded on in the previous sections of this

chapter. In *Guilty*, his study on Hollywood depictions of Arabs after 9/11, Shaheen continues his thorough evaluation of the stereotyping and racialization of Arabs in the media, compiling more negative depictions in cinema and television, but also leaving space for “Reel Positives” (35). Some of the positivizing examples he gives are Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel*, Stephen Gaghan’s *Syriana*, or Steven Spielberg’s *Munich*.

In the same vein, other scholars have been pointing to the positivizing portrayals of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11, particularly in the realm of television. Evelyn Alsultany, in her article “The Prime-Time Plight of the Arab Muslim American after 9/11. Configurations of Race and Nation in TV Dramas,” demonstrates the post-9/11 shift towards more sympathetic representations of Arab Muslims in American television (in contrast to pre-9/11 depictions). While her article focuses on two 2002 episodes of the series *The Practice*, her perspective on the positiveness of such portrayals illuminates the present section. As she acknowledges the favorable accounts of Arab and Muslim identities in post-9/11 American television, she also points to their ambivalence since, to Alsultany’s mind, they end up supporting the U.S. government in their nationalist discourse by emphasizing the notion of a state of exception. As she puts it, “despite somewhat sympathetic portrayals of Arab and Muslim Americans, they narrate the logic of ambivalence—that racism is wrong but essential—and thus participate in serving the U.S. government narratives” (208). In other words, by focusing on the issue of terrorism, post-9/11 television dramas reinforce a rhetoric of danger that serves the purposes of governmentality.

Another assessment of post-9/11 positivizing accounts of Arabs and Muslims was published in September 2011, ten years after the terrorist attacks. Johanna Blackley and Shenna Nahm presented a report on the representation of the “War on Terror” in prime-time television series, a study conducted with the support of The Norman Lear Center and the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. Their findings add to Jack Shaheen’s work, and conform to the evaluation of the show *Homeland* that this section will be devoted to. Firstly acknowledging the “Jack Bauer effect” (5), that is, the impact of the Manichean series *24* on terrorist-themed television shows, the report examined “ten highly-rated one hour network dramas” (7), including *Law and Order*, *CSI*, and *NCIS*, from late 2009 and 2010. Interestingly, their research concluded that only 14% of terror suspects in these series were identified as Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim (8), while 62% were white Americans. Interestingly, also in 2011, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, in their book *Framing Muslims. Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*, pointed to the ambiguities lying underneath the main discourses in post-9/11 television dramas such as *Sleeper Cell*.⁸⁶ As they put it, “while there may be ‘preferred meanings’—coinciding with the perspective of dominant sections of society—they are still always confronted by other possible perspectives, resulting in ... ‘active contradictions’ in the television message” (117). In October 2011, adding to the Norman Lear Center’s study, Johanna Blackley wrote an article in the Center’s blog called “Keeping the War on Terror

⁸⁶ In their book, Morey and Yaqin analyze the ambivalence of Showtime’s *Sleeper Cell* emphasizing its didacticism towards the Islamic faith. They argue that, in being able to explain Muslim beliefs, the series contests binary oppositions (East vs. West, or Christianity vs. Islam) (166-176).

Terrifying,” where she pointed to possible reasons behind this avoidance of racial stereotyping in products of popular culture. According to Blackley, political correctness would be the first reason to avoid stereotyping. However, she also acknowledged the importance of innovation as the logic behind this lack of racialization of the terrorist. As she puts it, “They realize that they need to tell the story in a different way than we expect in order to engage our continuing interest” (par. 5), and mentions the show *Homeland* as an example.

Questioning these positive views, however, in this section, I will be arguing that while contesting traditional racializing stereotypes, Showtime’s drama *Homeland* draws on common conceptions of the racialized terrorist-monster, even if they are sometimes used to subvert those very stereotypes. In other words, my analysis of *Homeland* shall exemplify the logic of ambivalence in the depiction of the War on Terror that Evelyn Alsultany, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin pointed to, as following a post-9/11 tendency in prime-time scripted dramas.⁸⁷

Following the post-9/11 tendency that avoids a direct stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims, Showtime’s series *Homeland* (2011-) does not offer a Manichean view of Arab and American masculinities, but plays with the ideologies of

⁸⁷ Shaheen, Alsultany, and Blackley and Nahm all focus on drama. *Homeland* falls into this category, and so this section is devoted solely to the realm of prime-time dramatic series. However, the work of comedies must also be acknowledged, even if their analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Amir Hussain, in his article “(Re)presenting American Muslims on American Television” focuses on the difference between drama and comedy, arguing that there is a racialization of Muslim religion in American television dramas, while the contrary happens with comedy. My contention, however, challenges his view and points to the idea of ambivalence that Alsultany acknowledged, both in relation to drama and comedy. This can be seen in comedic cartoon series such as *American Dad* and *South Park*, which provide a seemingly stereotypical representation of the Arab world using satire as a type of contradictory humor. For instance, in *American Dad*’s episode “Stan of Arabia,” the father’s feeling of power as a patriarch in Saudi Arabia ends up turning against him, and in “The Snuke,” from *South Park*, there is a terrorist warning that seems to be from Islamic fanatics but has ultimately been plotted by the British in an attempt to re-conquer the United States. These examples, which I analyzed in depth in the XXXIV AEDEAN International Conference (not published), point to the ambivalence of comedic series, as they subvert stereotypes by reinstating them.

racialization examined in the previous sections.⁸⁸ *Homeland* derives from a clear awareness of the historical racialization of Arab men, which has equated Arabo-Islamist masculinity with terrorism, and works with those discourses to, oftentimes, subvert them. This Golden Globe-winning series begins with remarkably informative opening credits. They start with a young girl watching television, where she sees speeches by Presidents Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, former Secretary of State Collin Powell, and President Barack Obama, where all of them refer to terrorism. This overview points to Islamic terrorism as a continuum in American history, and refers to the importance of the media in expanding discourses that become entrenched in the mainstream American psyche, that is, in the minds of the viewers. This is the case of the little girl watching television, who will become the CIA agent Carrie Mathison, the protagonist of the series, whose sole concern in life is fighting terror. These political images are intertwined in the opening credits with pictures of war and of veiled women, thus associating discourses on terror with their bellic outcome and its resultant civilizing mission to counter the hyperpatriarchy of the Arab world. The opening credits end with images of September 11, and with a voiceover of the protagonist Carrie Mathison, where she says, “I’m just making sure we don’t get hit again.” The trauma that September 11 caused is the basis of this thriller, although the historicity of the enmity between the United States and the Middle East is also undeniably present in these credits. Therefore, this opening to

⁸⁸ The present section shall focus only on the first season of *Homeland* (October 2, 2011 – December 18, 2011) because it is in this first season where the issue of Nicholas Brody's Islamic faith is the basis of the plot.

Homeland sets the audience in a state of vigilance towards Muslim fundamentalists and reminds them of the historical vilification of Arab men, the production of political discourses of counter-terrorism, and the pervasive nature of these ideologies in the American media and culture.

From the opening of the series, and even in its first episode, there is an easy parallelism to be established with the series *24*, an idea reinforced by the fact that both series share the same producers. However, television critics have agreed in acknowledging the nuances that this series offers, in contrast to its precursor.⁸⁹ Even one of the creators and producers, Alex Gansa, acknowledged that, “it was just an idea in our heads, that we were not going to follow in ‘24’'s footsteps” (Fienberg, par. 36).

Homeland draws on discourses of racialization, abnormality, bio- and necropolitics, albeit in a mostly dissentive way, playing with the spectator's expectations and stereotypes. The main plot of the series revolves around Carrie Mathison, a CIA agent who is suspicious of Sergeant Nicholas Brody, a prisoner of war who has just been released after eight years of captivity in the hands of Al Qaeda. An informant in Iraq tells Carrie that an American marine has been turned into a terrorist, and she believes it is him. At the same time, Sergeant Brody is presented by the American government as a hero, as an example of normative

⁸⁹ Sam Wollaston in a review in *The Guardian* noted the “shades of grey” of the show in contrast to the black and white of *24* <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2012/may/06/homeland-final-episode-brody-carrie>>; Sarah Crompton from *The Telegraph* also acknowledges this idea, <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9089723/Homeland-episode-1-Channel-4-review.html>, as do Serena Davies -also from *The Telegraph* and Alessandra Stanley from *The New York Times*, <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/9246529/Homeland-episode-12-Channel-4-review.html>, <tv.nytimes.com/2011/09/30/arts/television/homeland-starring-claire-danes-on-showtime-review.html>. Accessed: 6 May 2012.

Protestant military masculinity that secures American hegemony. Therefore, what Carrie is doing in accusing Brody of being a terrorist is challenging that very notion of heteronormative masculinity. Because of that, she can only talk about her suspicions with her CIA confidante, Saul Berenson, but not with her superiors. Concurrently, in that same first episode, the audience learns that Carrie suffers from a mental condition (we find out in Episode 11 that she has a bipolar disorder), which she hides from the CIA, but for which she takes medication. It is my belief that Carrie is pathologized because she is defying American patriotic masculinity in her questioning of the heroicity and loyalty of an American marine. The pathologizing of the female lead character, in conjunction with her skepticism towards Sergeant Brody, leaves the spectator in a state of mistrust towards the two protagonists. In the first episode, we are also made aware of the fact that she is mentally distraught because of the trauma evoked by 9/11. As she puts it, “I’m just making sure we don’t get hit again. ... I missed something once before. I won’t... I can’t let that happen again” (00:44:06-00:44:16). The discourse on biopolitics that Carrie follows forms the basis of the reprehensible reinforcement of the rhetoric of danger that this TV series sustains, as its insistence on the need to avoid a terrorist attack justifies the bio-workings of the governmentality.

Regarding the relation between biopolitics and necropolitics, and the depiction of Arabo-Islamist masculinity in the series, we are confronted, also in the first episode, with Sergeant Brody’s memories of his captivity, which portray the members of Al Qaeda as monster-terrorists in their torturing of American prisoners. Thus, as pointed out before, this first episode seems to inherit the

stereotypical depiction of series such as *24* in its vilifying depiction of Arabo-Islamist masculinity. However, the state of mistrust towards the two protagonists shall actually serve, as the series develops, to contest the Manichean view of the good American hero against the bad Arab/Muslim terrorist that series like *24* emphasized.

As the series unravels, more discourses on Arabo-Islamist and American normative masculinities are drawn upon and (sometimes) contested. In the second episode, the image of Sergeant Brody as an American war hero already begins to be challenged. Firstly, he refuses to be called a hero and, instead, he wants to spend time with his family, thus enacting a nurturing kind of masculinity that defies hegemonic militaristic patriarchy. Secondly, also deriding normative American masculinity, we find out that Brody is a Muslim, as we see him praying in his garage. His Muslim faith implies a certain mistrust towards him from the spectator's perspective. This is even more apparent once his Muslim private faith is confronted with his public presentation as a normative Protestant, as in episode 4 he finishes a speech with "God bless you, and God bless America." (00:05:00-00:05:06). We see him concealing his Muslim faith as he is well aware of the importance of Protestantism in the building of the United States, as well as in the present-day American national ethos. The vilification of the Muslim faith is a narrative also used in the series, since his being Muslim makes the audience doubt the protagonist's allegiance to America. Thus, it points to the negative racialization of Islam that was pointed out in previous sections. This goes hand in hand with Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin's contention that there has been a "recent

proliferation of television dramas depicting Muslims in situations involving terrorist activity” (112).

At the same time, the imagery used regarding Arab men in the series is also of particular relevance in its ambivalent treatment of stereotypes of Arabo-Islamist masculinity. As Evelyn Alsultany pointed out, 9/11 representations of Arab and Muslim men are inherently ambivalent, which is actually condoned in this series. For instance, in the second episode of the series, we learn of a Saudi prince who is looking for girls to be part of his harem. That fact reinforces the image of hypermasculine Arab men, and is not contested in the first season of the series.

Nevertheless, there is a subversion of expectations about Arab manhood in a plot that develops from episodes 3 to 7. In those episodes, we are presented with an Arab American man, an Engineering Professor, married to a blonde (white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant) woman, who buy a house next to the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. As episodes go by, we see that they are part of a terrorist plot. Finally, we learn that it is the wife who is the terrorist, as she tells her husband that she is sorry that she dragged him into this situation, thus contesting the audience’s preconceived racialized and gendered ideas about Arab (American) men and terrorism. This would thus follow the ideas of Johanna Blackley and Shenna Nahm’s report on post-9/11 representations of terrorism. In episode 7, after the Engineering Professor has been killed and his wife has been arrested by the CIA, we are made to understand that she is Muslim and grew up in the Middle East, where she developed her terrorist ideology because she felt isolated as a white person in an Arab country. The implications of this fact are

twofold. On the one hand, there is, once again, a vilification of Islam in the series, as she is a white terrorist but she is also a Muslim. On the other hand, her criminality is psychologically justified as a response to segregation, so that, even if her plot does not conclude in that first season, a certain justification for her actions is provided. What this story emphasizes is that, in the middle of the season, we are left with two possible “privileged wealthy American terrorist[s]” (as Saul Berenson calls the woman): her and Sergeant Brody, both of whom contest the stereotypical views of Arabo-Islamist terrorism in their race, but whose shared religion serves to dehumanize them.

At the same time, discourses on the monster-terrorist continue to appear in the voices of both distraught characters and of the American government. In episode 8, we learn that another American marine that disappeared with Brody, Tom Walker, is alive and is possibly the one that was turned into a terrorist. Walker’s wife draws on the discourse of the abnormality of the terrorist and claims “he’s turned into some kind of monster ... planning an attack on his own country” (00:05:45-00:05:53). At the same time, the FBI kills two men praying at a mosque by mistake, and the FBI agent recommends the CIA to “call him a terrorist, [so that] what happened here won’t matter much” (00:40:21-00:40:26), thus referring to the entrenchment of terror in the American psyche, and the feeling of exceptionalism that may justify the workings of necropolitics (the death of Arabs/Muslims, be it through War outside the U.S. borders or discrimination or death inside) as a means to assert biopolitics (the life of Americans).

In that same episode the audience learns that, in fact, Brody is a terrorist,

and in the ensuing episodes, we learn why. After being captured, mistreated and confined for years, Brody had been helped by an Al Qaeda leader, Abu Nazir, who allowed him to teach his son Issa English. Nazir's goodness made Brody convert to Islam. However, Issa died because of a drone sent by the American government that fell on his school, killing eighty-two other children. After that, following his mourning for Issa, Brody decided to combat American injustice with terrorism. Therefore, we are made to understand that Brody turned into a terrorist because of the innocent people killed by the U.S. government, which humanizes and justifies, to a certain extent, the figure of the terrorist. We are made to sympathize with the terrorist, but in this case, he is a white terrorist. The racial implications of this empathy towards Brody contrast with the figure of Abu Nazir, who was a terrorist, member of Al Qaeda, long before his son was killed by the U.S. government. Abu Nazir's terrorist tendencies are not justified in the first season of the series, leaving space for the racialization of abnormal Arabo-Islamist terrorist masculinity. Moreover, Abu Nazir is always visually presented with a beard, a turban, and traditional Arab clothes, reinforcing his symbolic distance from the modern West. However, this partial justification of terrorism (even if it is that of a white terrorist) points to the possible rationalization of all acts of terrorism. The humanization of Brody, besides, is reinforced by Carrie, who in episode 10 tells Saul "to get the truth out of these guys, you try to find what makes them human, not what makes them terrorists" (00:10:40-00:10:48), thus pointing to the need to obliterate abnormality in the fight against terror, and reminding the public that even terrorists are human and there may be reasons which may have triggered their atrocious

acts.

Contrastively, the traditional patriotic heteronormative American discourse is still reinforced in the series by the American government. In episode 10, the U.S. Vice-President wants to convince Brody to run for office, and refers to him as a “War hero [that] returns home after eight years of imprisonment to his beautiful loving wife” (00:08:25-00:08:32), thus underlining the importance of the heteronormative family to American politics. Brody’s relationship with his wife, however, is tinged with his inability to make love to her while he is, however, able to have intercourse with Carrie, a fact which disrupts traditional conceptions of marriage. In the case of *Homeland*, the dysfunctional enactment of masculinity of the protagonist undermines the discourse purported by the government. However, the abnormality ascribed to the character of Sergeant Brody also serves to justify the malfunctioning of his family, thus ultimately pointing once again to heteronormativity as the antidote to terrorism.⁹⁰ The importance of family in fighting terrorism shall appear again at the end of this first season, when Brody will be unable to fulfill his act of terrorism because of a call from his daughter, which makes him change his mind about the attack.⁹¹ Brody fails to conform to this American hegemonic normativity because of his sexuality and his religion. Equating abnormal sexuality and Muslim faith, Brody's deviation from a Protestant heteronormative model justifies him being a terrorist. The vilification of the Muslim religion is reinforced here, since even if his terrorist tendencies are not

⁹⁰ In the same vein, the series 24 was based on “a deeply conservative reiteration of family values” (Morey and Yaquin 146), so that this preeminence of heteronormativity does not appear out of the blue.

⁹¹ Brody does, in fact, attempt to conduct his act of terrorism a first time, although the bomb does not work. It is only after fixing it that he gets his daughter’s call, which makes him reconsider his plan.

based upon his religion, this is his most prominent abnormal trait, which thus entails a racialization and vilification of religion. Once again, then, his quasi-normative masculinity adds to the ambivalence of this character for the spectators.

Confirming this quasi-normative masculinity, we learn in the season finale that, even if he is a terrorist, he is still an American patriot. The episode begins when he records a video explaining his future terrorist attack. He says that he loves his country, and he continues as follows:

As a marine, I swore an oath to defend the United States of America against enemies both foreign and domestic. And my action this day is against such domestic enemies: the Vice-President and members of his national security team who I know to be liars and war criminals, responsible for atrocities they were never held accountable for. This is about justice for eighty-two children whose deaths were never acknowledged and whose murder is a stain on the soul of this nation. (00:03:43-00:04:30)

Brody is thus humanized here as a terrorist and affirmed as a patriot. In this season finale, he is incapable of enacting his terrorist attack because of a call made by his daughter, a fact which reinforces, once again, the audience's sympathies towards the character. At the same time, the necropolitics of the American governmentality are put to the fore in the finale. The attempt to kill a terrorist (Abu Nazir) for the sake of biopolitics (the survival and hegemony of the American nation) resulted in misdirected necropolitics (the death of 82 children), which the government hid from public opinion, but which in turn fueled more terrorism.

Therefore, this prime-time drama, with an audience of more than one and a half million viewers in the U.S. (Nededog par. 3), results from the discourses pervasive in American culture, and affirms the ambivalence of current depictions of Islamic terrorism. Even if portraying the main terrorists as white (although there

are also Middle Eastern members of Al Qaeda, such as Abu Nazir, physically depicted in a very traditional manner), there is indeed a vilification of Muslim religion underlying this series. Furthermore, there is a clear indication of the workings of biopolitics and necropolitics. There is, admittedly, an attempt at enacting a critique of the necropolitics of the American government, although this is only diffused by the focus given to the War on Terror in the series (this being, actually, the basis of *Homeland*), which ultimately justifies a state of emergency that allows for the workings of biopolitical governmentality.

This chapter, then, has functioned as a theorization of the vilification of Arab and Muslim men in the United States. It will also serve, as we shall see, as a context from which to analyze post-9/11 Arab American writings by Arab American women authors.

Chapter 2

The Social and Identitary Construction of Arab and Arab American Masculinities

Arab culture is about being a certain way; knowing what is *abe* (shameful); knowing how to give *mujamalat* (flattery); knowing what you're supposed to do when someone greets you; knowing how to act at *azayim* (gatherings) and weddings; drinking *shai* (tea) or coffee; talking about politics so much; getting up for an older person; respecting your elders; looking after your parents and taking care of them; judging people according to what family they are from; marrying through connections; gossiping and having a good reputation; going anywhere with Arabs, with your own kind, with brothers, uncles, family, cousins, but not with Americans.

(Nadine Naber 2012: 63)

Nadine Naber emphasizes in the above quote the differences between Arab and American cultures in her enumeration of traditional characteristics of Arabness, and points to the difficulty of making sense of an Arab American identity, while giving examples of first-generation Arab American views of what it means to be Arab. As immigrants in the United States, Arab Americans have been fighting

against typified traditional views of Arab identity ever since their arrival in the United States. At the same time, some keep struggling between a traditional sense of Arabness and an effort to keep their reputation in the Arab community, on the one hand, and attempts to blend in American society, on the other. The complex position of Arab American men both in relation to traditional ideals of Arab masculinity and American enactments of manhood will be examined in this chapter, which will start with an account of the poststructuralist perspective taken for the study of masculinities, and will continue with an analysis of traditional conceptualizations of Arabness, to then explore neopatriarchal views of Arab subjectivity. Later, it will evaluate the social construction of Arab American identities in general, with a special focus on the practices of Arab American masculinities.

2.1 Politicizing the Study of (Ethnic) Masculinities from a Poststructuralist Scope

[Poststructuralism] is especially important for masculinity, because of a tendency to present it as a stable and impermeable surface that hides meaning and hides its functioning so that it can work seamlessly. ... [Poststructuralism] assumes that masculinity has no natural, inherent, or given meaning, that it does not have to mean something predetermined, and that whatever meaning it has is in constant movement.

(Reeser 10-11)

Following Todd W. Reeser's anti-essentialist view of masculinity, my understanding of gender identity is based on a poststructuralist approach to the study of masculinities, which is in fact the origin of Masculinity Studies themselves. Men's Studies started in the 1980s as an attempt at visibilizing manhood as a gender construct and, thus, trying to denounce unequal gender practices. In so doing, Masculinity Studies are an inherently poststructuralist practice. Reeser believes in a poststructuralist conception of masculinities as a tool to counter essentialist or universalist perspectives on masculinity. In fact, Studies of Masculinities implied a turning point in Gender Studies, which before had only focused on women, as they enabled the view of the masculine gender as a

construction and not as the norm.⁹² That is, through Men's Studies, manhood came to be seen as a fabrication that had "undergone historical and cultural processes of gender formation that distribute[d] power and privilege unevenly" (Gardiner 2002: 11). What we understand as masculinity, hence, derives from the cultural and, most importantly, discursive processes that have historically established relations of power between genders. Manhood is thus no longer seen as a universal category but as another construction, with innumerable intrinsic variations. As a consequence, there has been a conscious effort in using the plural when referring to Men's Studies or Studies of Masculinities. This use of the plural implies that one must take into account the local specificities of gender discourses, both in geographical and temporal terms when studying men, since there are diverse masculinities, different in relation to time, place, socio-economic situation, ethnicity, age, (dis)abilities, etc. As a result, masculinities can be defined as "contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, changeable and constantly changing, variously institutionalized, and recreated through media representations and individual and collective performances" (Gardiner 2002: 11), that is, built up through a wide array of discursive practices. Moreover, as researchers devoted to the Studies of Masculinities have been investigating the relations of power established between genders while deconstructing masculinity as normative, they have also served as means to undermine patriarchy. As Robyn Wiegman puts it:

In unleashing masculinity from its assumed normativity and reading its function and structure as the product of a contested and

⁹² Michael Kimmel notes that at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s feminist scholars realized that gender had been ignored in the study of men, and it was then that Masculinity Studies entered the academy, in particular, Women or Gender Studies programs (15-16).

contradictory field of power, a great deal of feminist work in masculinity studies has been motivated by the desire to intervene in the practices of patriarchal domination while locating the possibilities for men to challenge their constitution as men. (2002: 43)

By examining the discursive practices that have created traditional male domination over women and understanding how they are re-created in society (and the discourses produced and re-produced by its citizens), there is an attempt at challenging gender inequality. The Studies of Masculinities become, then, an invaluable political tool against sexism.

However, it is true that by constricting identity into gender categories and talking about men and women, there is, on the one hand, an implicit obliteration of transexual and intersexual realities and, on the other, a clinging to the much debated binary notions of masculinity and femininity, which essentialize notions of gender identity.⁹³ Therefore, if one focuses on the study of masculinities and femininities, there is a danger of forgetting the potential multiplicity of gender identities inherent in any subject, and so it could seem incongruent to talk about masculinity while at the same time taking a poststructuralist stance.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, I believe that while categories of identity (and in the case of the present study, masculinity as a category of gender identity) should be problematized and not taken for granted, there is still a need to study men and masculinities. My

⁹³ This idea has been eminently pointed out by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*.

⁹⁴ Criticism of Masculinity Studies in this respect can be found in Valérie Fournier and Warren Smith's article "Scripting Masculinity" (2006), where they provide a critique of the inconsistencies in Masculinity Studies regarding its poststructuralist view of identity and its reliance on essentialist and binary notions of gender (namely, masculinities and femininities). Despite Fournier's and Smith's efforts in the aforementioned article to problematize poststructuralist studies on masculinities, I believe that both a poststructuralist perspective and an analysis that focuses on *masculinities* are not incompatible theoretical approaches.

contention is that one shall understand (gender) identities as performances resulting from internalized discourses of gender difference, which will allow their analysis as well as their deconstruction. Hence, even if there is in this dissertation an awareness of the non-conformity to one single identity of all subjectivities, the discourses on gender (based on the gender-difference dichotomy man/woman) are still pervasive in our society. As a consequence, they are reproduced in literature, and are thus useful as an analytical tool for these texts. In addition, gender identity categories are also still needed nowadays as tools to counteract (in the case of this dissertation) gender inequality. In other words, the naming of identities is still needed for their political force.

Thus, this dissertation shall provide a poststructuralist view of identity, aiming at a post-identitary future, while at the same time critically using the discourses that interpellate (Arab American) men and stagnate their conception of themselves in a masculine, Arab American identity. To do so, I draw on Judith Butler's idea that problematizing identity as a *pastiche* of discourses entails a politicization of identity itself. As she puts it: "The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics, rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated" (148). Thus, analyzing masculinities, while deconstructing and problematizing them, entails a political endeavor towards equality. Following this logic, this thesis will recurrently refer to *men* and *masculinities* as discursively constructed and ideologically biased concepts. By referring to men, I do not want to obliterate the fluid reality of gender and sexuality, nor the homosexual, bisexual, transexual and intersexual realities of the

Arab American community. I do not wish either to forget the inter-gender possibilities in Arab Americans' individual ascriptions to both femininity and/or masculinity. I am, however, not going to deal with bisexual, transexual and intersexual realities in this dissertation, because they are virtually non-existent in contemporary Arab American literature written by women, which is, conversely, full of heterosexual biological males.⁹⁵ Heterosexual masculine-gendered men will be, thus, the focus of this study.

⁹⁵ Very few studies exist on the topic of non-heterosexual Arab American men. A recent sociological analysis is to be found in the M.A. Thesis *A Qualitative Study of Middle Eastern/Arab American Sexual Identity Development*, by Ayse Selin I Kizler (University of Tennessee 2013). Non-heterosexual Arab American men are also scarce in Arab American literature. Only one homosexual character will be analyzed in this dissertation (i.e., Amir in Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter*). Hopefully, Arab American literature will portray these realities in the future. Moreover, the absence of non-normative masculinities is very significant in relation to the development of Arab American literature. A possible reasons for this lack of diversity may be the focus of Arab American literature on the fight against ethnic and racial discrimination. Moreover, this very fact may be pointing also to the continuing persistence of discourses of patriarchy in the Arab American community. Thus, it is probably the feminist and anti-discriminatory effort of 21st century Arab American women writers, enhanced by the consequences of 9/11, that has stagnated Arab American literature written by women in this heteronormative space. Since the present dissertation aims at deciphering the efforts done by Arab American women writers both against the vilification of Arab men in the United States and for Arab American feminism after 9/11, the focus will be on male characters, while also remembering that, indeed, there is an overbearing presence of heterosexual male-gendered characters in contemporary Arab American literature written by women.

2.2 Discourses on Arab/Middle Eastern/Islamic Manhoods: Ethnographies on Arab Male Performativity and (Neo)Patriarchy

Following the notion of masculinities as “contingent, fluid, socially and historically constructed, changeable and constantly changing” (Gardiner 2002: 11), I shall now examine the attributes ascribed to Arab, Middle Eastern and Islamic masculinities from a variety of social constructionist and ethnographic studies, with the purpose of exploring the varying (sometimes even conflicting) discourses that have shaped the construction of Arab American masculinities.⁹⁶ I will thus analyze the different discourses that have interpellated Arab men into the conception and practice of their gender identities.

Bearing in mind the plurality of masculinities that can be encountered in any particular locale, combined with the myriad male subjectivities that exist in all the different countries that form the Arab world,⁹⁷ the present study intends to move away from essentialisms, while at the same time pinpoint intersections amongst these Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim manhoods, in order to provide a frame of reference applicable to the representations of Arab American manhoods. Thus, the present section does not aim (were it possible) at providing an

⁹⁶ Here I am mentioning the terms Arab, Middle Eastern and Islamic because studies about masculinities have been published referring to all these different denominations. These are not interchangeable words, as examined in chapter 1. In this dissertation, however, I will take into account only the publications in which masculinities from the Arab world (that is, from countries where Arabic is spoken) are the object of study, whether they are referred to as Arab, Middle Eastern or Islamic.

⁹⁷ See footnote 18.

enumeration of characteristics that all Arab (American) men share. On the contrary, it intends to supply the reader with different, sometimes contradictory discourses that have interpellated Arab men, and may have thus influenced them to a further or lesser extent.⁹⁸ In this regard, the concept of “multiple masculinities” proves particularly useful. In their article “Men, Masculinity and Manhood Acts,” Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe argue for the notion of “multiple masculinities” as related to hegemonic notions of manhood. They explain that

[t]he multiple masculinities concept ... has been helpful for seeing how various groups of men, using the material and symbolic resources available to them, are able to emphasize different aspects of the hegemonic ideal as a means to construct effective manhood acts. (284)

Believing that no one will (virtually) conform to all the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, we can understand masculinities as interpellated by both dominant and subversive discourses and as being constructed, to a certain extent, in relation to or in tension with hegemonic notions of manhood.⁹⁹

Regarding the study of ideologies that may help form Arab masculinities, I will take a social constructionist perspective, since I believe that the enactments of masculinity performed by Arab men, or “manhood acts” (Schrock and Schwalbe 281) derive from the discourses that have historically and locally interpellated them. Thus, as Shrock and Schwalbe point out, their masculinities will exist in

⁹⁸ Here, I am taking on an Althusserian view of identity as developed in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971), where he expounds on the idea of interpellation as the function of ideology which makes subjects aware of discourses being addressed to them (174). Following this notion, I understand manhoods as the results of the interpellations of available discourses on gender in a specific context (that is, a specific place—both geographic and socioeconomic,—and time).

⁹⁹ In the article “Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept,” Connell and Messerschmidt argue for a non-essentialist view of hegemonic masculinity that takes into account complex gender identifications as well as geography, privilege, power and the internal contradictions within masculinity itself.

accordance with and/or in contrast to hegemonic (as well as non-hegemonic) masculinities. All of them, though, will be “multiple masculinities,” in the sense that they will be in dialogue with the available discourses on manhood. The next section will, thus, start by exploring the influence of such discourses on the construction of Arab masculinities.¹⁰⁰

2.2.1 The Hierarchy of Patriarchy: An Assessment on Discourses of Traditional Arab Manhood

Traditionally, power hierarchies in the Arab world have been gendered and grounded in the perpetuation of patriarchy. Patriarchy is constructed through socialization (with the figure of the father at its center), through connectivity (relations), and through the perpetuation of ideologies of gender hierarchy both by society and by institutions. In this respect, Marcia C. Inhorn provides a very thorough and valuable definition of this power structure:

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note that the focus of the following section will be on Arab manhoods, since this dissertation deals with Arab Americans, an ethnic community established as such since the 1970s, as noted in chapter 1. To do so, the following section will draw on studies about both Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic masculinities, but will only take into account those from the Arab world, that is, no accounts from non-Arabic-speaking countries will be taken into consideration because the focus of this dissertation is on Arab American literature. This derives from an understanding that Arabic-speaking countries share certain values that have been shaped both by a common language, history, and religion. Although not everyone in the Arab world is Muslim, there is an Islamicate cultural element that is widely shared in Arab culture (an idea which will be further explained in section 2.3.1.1). By limiting to these views I am by no means implying that Arab countries are an entity separate from non-Arab Middle Eastern or non-Arab Muslim countries. On the contrary, multiple connections can be found between the Arab world and other Muslim countries, as there are common Islamicate elements in Muslim countries that would allow these similarities, but they are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Because of the organization of Arabs as a community in the United States, the dissertation focuses on Arab Americans, and not Middle Eastern Americans or Muslim Americans, as these two latter groups have not organized themselves as much as Arab Americans have. Moreover, it is clear that parallelisms could be drawn between the enactments of masculinity portrayed here and the patriarchal enactments of other masculinities in the world. However, so as not to deviate from the focus of this dissertation, the following section will analyze the specific Arab conception of masculinity, and shall start by evaluating traditional discourses on Arab manhood, which have commonly been related to the notion of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is characterized by relations of power and authority of males over females, which are (1) learned through gender socialization within the family, where males wield power through the socially defined institution of fatherhood; (2) manifested in both inter- and intragender interactions within the family and in other interpersonal milieus; (3) legitimized through deeply engrained, pervasive ideologies of inherent male superiority; and (4) institutionalized on many societal levels (legal, political, economic, educational, religious and so on). (1996: 3-4)

Thus, the gendered system of patriarchy is based on discourses and “politics of difference” (Anwar 16) between men and women that are reinforced by institutions such as governmental and religious powers, which perpetuate this gender binary. Cultural religion is also relevant in the construction of gender hierarchies.¹⁰¹ The case in point is that of Islamicate societies, where the figure of the patriarch is preminent. In pervasively Muslim milieus, the chosen interpretations of the Qur'an are the ones that reinstate the politics of difference (and hierarchy) between men and women (Anwar 17), which are, in turn, reinforced in the government and in the family. Arab men have traditionally been socialized into an ideal of hierarchical gender order where men are superior and normative, and women are inferior and Othered. As Anwar puts it, “The politics of sexual difference for some Muslims is not only religiously endorsed, it is also rooted in Muslim’s social-cultural construct” (29). These gender relations are not only linked to a specific interpretation of religion but could be applied to non-Muslim Arabs as well, who are interpellated by these Islamicate discourses. Moreover, the family and the governmental institutions function as “policing

¹⁰¹ I understand “cultural religion” as the religion shared by most people in a country, whether individuals actually profess that religion or not. This notion would be parallel to the idea of “Islamicate culture” in the Arab world, which will be further developed in section 2.3.1.1.

mechanisms” to forward this gendered binary construct (33-95).

This hierarchical patriarchal system is the basis of the traditional form of Arab masculinity that will be examined in the present section. This reactionary form of manhood is what Samira Aghacy calls a “traditional brand of hegemonic masculinity” (20), which she explains is a rigid and monolithic masculinity that separates spheres and is based on patriarchy (20-22).¹⁰² The construction of this traditional Arab masculinity within this patriarchal and institutionally endowed setting is thus characterized by certain traits that attempt to ensure the continuation of power and make virility visible (in terms of bravery and defense of honor). As Julie Peteet puts it:

Arab masculinity (*rujula*) is acquired, verified, and played out in the brave deed, in risk taking, and in expressions of fearlessness and assertiveness. It is attained by constant vigilance and willingness to defend honor (*sharaf*), face (*wajh*), kin, and community from external aggression and to uphold and protect cultural definitions of gender-specific propriety. (34)

Thus, according to Peteet, central characteristics of Arab masculinity are bravery, assertiveness, protection, and defense of honor. Furthermore, she goes on to refer to the importance of adulthood and reason in the construction of Arab masculinity while at the same time mentioning socially sanctioned and institutionalized practices that visibilize this entrance into adulthood:

Assumption of the tasks, authority, and status associated with masculinity is a gradual process of becoming a member of the world of adult men and acquiring ‘*aql* (reason) or social common sense. ... Milestones along this path to adulthood are circumcision, educational achievements, marriage, income earning, the birth of

¹⁰² It must be clear, though, that it is not a pure attribute of North Africa and the Middle East, nor is it nowadays being followed uncritically in the Arab world. By mentioning “hegemonic masculinity” here, I am referring to an ideal which contains a set of characteristics that virtually no men will completely conform to, and that *may* and *will* be contested by actual enactments of (Arab) masculinity.

children, and the acquisition of wisdom that comes from knowledge of one's society and its customs. Each of these points in time further reaffirms masculinity and belonging to the world of men. (35)

In this quote, Peteet mentions very important attributes that characterize Arab traditional/hegemonic masculinity. In fact, these are all very relevant aspects of a successful Arab masculinity in terms of prevalence of power. Achievement in education, marriage, income, fatherhood, and knowledge entails thriving as a man in a traditional patriarchal social structure.

Among these traditionally patriarchal traits, the issue of fatherhood is particularly important. As Peteet puts it, "Manliness is also closely intertwined with virility and paternity, and with paternity's attendant sacrifices. Denying one's own needs while providing for others is such a signifier" (34). The importance of fatherhood is inherent to the concept of patriarchy (the noun "patriarch" indeed comes from the Latin "pater," which means father), while at the same time being a provider is also central to this gender hierarchy. Amal Amireh refers to the "ability to provide" (725) as a central trait of Arab manhood. As will be developed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation on contemporary Arab American literature, failure to comply with the role of the provider will entail feelings of frustration and of unachieved manhood that may result in violence (Aghacy 20-22).¹⁰³ Moreover, other societal aspects reinforce patriarchy: the gender(ed) relation between men and women, and also the alliances established between men. Suad Joseph talks about "patriarchal connectivity" to refer to the gendered and aged

¹⁰³ As Aghacy puts it, in relation to post-1967 Arab literature, "many male characters resort to domestic violence to reaffirm male prerogatives, to confirm potency and eminence, and to restore and reenact a reactionary and stable manhood." (21), and this is very interesting since we will see how it resonates also in Arab American literature.

hierarchies that enable patriarchy, placing the patriarch in a space superior to all others. As she puts it, “Patriarchal connectivity entitled males and elders to see others as extensions of themselves and socialized females and juniors to see themselves as extensions of others” (469). Therefore, women and younger males are socialized into patriarchy within a power structure that establishes them as inferior to the patriarch, thus perpetuating the patriarchal structure.¹⁰⁴

One of the main ways to prove assertiveness and patriarchal power towards others is by securing the family’s honor. Pierre Bourdieu points to the importance of honor in the construction of masculinity and, especially, in relation to the perception of others. As he puts it, “It is the chance to prove one’s manliness ... to others and to oneself” (11). Traditionally, honor has been related to men, and shame to women. Nonetheless, current ethnographic studies tend to disestablish this notion.¹⁰⁵ The *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, published in 2001, also states that this traditional and gendered conception is dated. As they put it, “Feminist studies of honor and shame have rejected the idea that honor is exclusive to men, and contended that women are not to be construed primarily as the passive defenders of male honor” (6906). Unni Wikan explains that shame (*‘eb*) refers to actions and not to people, while honor (*sharaf*) does refer to people. These two concepts will be central in the construction of Arab masculinity, as honor and shame are intrinsically linked to the patriarch’s reputation, and will be essential tools to ensure the continuation of

¹⁰⁴ However, women are also the ones that will have the power to change traditional enactments of masculinities, as will be developed in the last part of the present dissertation, where we will see how Arab American women writers provide depictions of Arab men who change because of their relationships with women.

¹⁰⁵ Cornwall and Lindisfarne, Abu-Lughod.

traditional patriarchy in the diaspora. At the same time, honor itself will result from the relationships of a patriarch with others, so that the perception of the Arab community will be central to establish his status. In this respect, Wikan explains, “For a man’s honour is dependent also upon the behaviour of his women—or rather, on the repute of his women in the public world of (a few) friends, a number of acquaintances, and a host of strangers within which they move” (642). The importance of the community is preeminent, thus, in Arab societies as a regulator of behavior.

Furthermore, comparison between males also helps maintain patriarchy. As a consequence of male competition, men attempt to hold on to their power, that is, there is a fear of loss of hegemony resultant from the competition between men, which in turn derives in an enhancement of patriarchal practices. As Lahoucine Ouzgane puts it:

[T]he homosocial competition and the violent hierarchies structuring the relationships between men themselves constitute the core of what it means to be a man in the Middle East and North Africa. Because women are not the centre of men’s experiences (other men are), misogyny is actually fuelled by something deeper—by the fear of emasculation by other men, the fear of humiliation, the fear of being not so manly. (68)

Ingrained in this fear is the ability to provide and the attempt at securing a stable patriarchy. If these fail, the patriarch’s masculinity (both as perceived by himself, by the community in general, and by other men in particular) collapses, and this frustration oftentimes implies a use of violence to secure it. Fear of change or loss of control often entail aggression as a means to ensure the continuation of power; that is, as a strategy of overcompensation for a feeling of powerlessness. All in all,

Arab manhood has commonly been based on the power structure of patriarchy, with Islamicism as a sanction of patriarchy. Traditional Arab masculinity is thus based on assertiveness, reason, defense of honor, and ability to provide. Furthermore, failure to achieve an effective or successful hegemonic manhood may often result in violence.

2.2.2 Neopatriarchy: The First Step towards the Creolization of Arab Masculinity

The discourses pointed out in the previous section account for traditional narratives on Arab manhood that circulate in the Arab world. While Arab men may or may not conform to these ideals, these hegemonic discourses have actually been further unsettled historically by colonialism and postcolonialism.¹⁰⁶ The colonial status of the Arab world as subjected to European powers, and their subsequent independence, ensued a different enactment of masculinity which has been theorized as “neopatriarchy.” In his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (1988), Hisham Sharabi defines neopatriarchy as the specific patriarchy developed out of the particular context of the Arab world (15).

¹⁰⁶ Late twentieth and twenty-first century Arab masculinity can be considered postcolonial inasmuch as it is a consequence of the independence of Arab countries from the European powers that colonized them, with all the changes which that implied. I list here the years the different Arab countries became independent: Algeria (1962, from France), Bahrain (1971, from the UK), Djibouti (1977, from France), Egypt (1922, from the UK), Iraq (1932, from the League of Nations mandate under British administration), Jordan (1946, from the League of Nations mandate under British administration), Kuwait (1961, from the UK), Lebanon (1943, from the League of Nations mandate under French administration), Libya (1951, from Italy), Malta (1964, from the UK), Mauritania (1960, from France), Morocco (1956, from France), Oman (1950, from Portugal), Qatar (1971, from the UK), Saudi Arabia (1932, as a result of a unification of the kingdom), Somalia (1960, from the UK), Sudan (1956, from Egypt and the UK), Syria (1946, from the League of Nations mandate under French administration), Tunisia (1956, from France), United Arab Emirates (1971, from the UK), and Yemen (1967, from the UK).

Its main characteristic (or change) is that it stands between traditionalism and modernity, being seemingly modern while still based on tradition and patriarchy. In fact, Sharabi points out that it is based on contradictions, being “between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, capitalism and socialism, production and consumption” (126), while at the same time those extremes are just simulacra, based on “*the absence equally of genuine traditionalism and of authentic modernity*” (23, emphasis in the original text). Neopatriarchy, according to Sharabi, came into being as a consequence of the European colonization of Arab countries, so that its contradictions actually stem from the clash of Western and Arab cultures.¹⁰⁷ Thus, neopatriarchy is the result of a creolization of Arab masculinities.¹⁰⁸ Sharabi explains this hybridization emphasizing the contradiction resultant from the clash between two cultures:

From the force of Europe’s impact, a profound contradiction emerged between two cultural models: the rational, secular model, patterned after Western experience, and the traditional model, firmly based in the values of Islam. It is in this tension between religious conservatism and Western secularism that the basic form of European political cultural domination in modern times was reflected in Arab consciousness and experience. (57)

Moreover, this new form of patriarchy developed further as a consequence of the independence of the Arab nations from European powers, exacerbating the contradictions of an already precarious social and economic structure (127). Developing from the legacy of European colonization, neopatriarchy has been,

¹⁰⁷ While the different European powers that colonized the Arab world left distinct cultural traces in their respective colonies, Sharabi conceives of the notion of neopatriarchy as common amongst Arab countries which have historically been in continuous contact with Western colonists.

¹⁰⁸ Here I am taking Ulf Hannerz’s notion of “creolization” as the simplification of the structural principles of a culture in which cultural elements are rearranged into new patterns and assume new meanings (Kroes 318-337).

however, condoned and reinforced by institutions in the Arab world. This has been done by providing an authoritative discourse that may be followed by the different agents of power, from the rulers of the countries, religious leaders, to the teachers and the fathers. As Sharabi explains:

The monological discourse may be expressed in different forms and articulated in different voices, depending on its setting. Thus in the household the father's is the dominant discourse, in the classroom the teacher's, in the religious gathering or tribe the sheikh's, in the religious organization the *'alim's*, in the society at large, the ruler's, and so forth. (88)

Being all these agents of power masculine, there is a reinstatement of the preeminent figure of the patriarch, while at the same time, traditional patriarchy, unsettled by the progressive discourses brought by European modernization, is brought to a precarious position. Furthermore, while this monolithic dominant discourse is disseminated throughout all institutions, the family remains the main means of socialization in which the discourse of neopatriarchy has a crucial role. In fact, Sharabi locates the origins of neopatriarchy in the patriarchal family structure, based on "*authority, domination, and dependency*" (41, emphasis in the original text). Sharabi, while pointing to the existence of patriarchy around the world, also refers to the specificity of Arab patriarchy in traditional Arab society, deriving from its particular location and history of European domination (15). In fact, the hierarchical power established in neopatriarchy is inherited from the very workings of patriarchy, having the father at the center and top of the social structure. In this respect, Sharabi adds:

[W]hatever the outward ("modern") forms—material, legal, aesthetic—of the contemporary neopatriarchal family and society, their internal structures remain rooted in the patriarchal values and

social relation of kinship, clan, and the religious and ethnic groups. In a peculiar duality, the modern and the patriarchal coexist in contradictory union. (8)

This “contradictory union” makes neopatriarchy a specific development of the Arab world, resulting from its specific practice of patriarchy. Thus, the figure of the father remains central to neopatriarchy, as it is “the prototypical neopatriarchal figure,” being “the central agent of repression” whose “power and influence are ‘grounded in punishment’” (Sharabi 41). In fact, the centrality of the figure of the father extends vertically to other spaces of society, being paralleled in institutions where hierarchies are established with men at the top of the pyramid (7).

The values of neopatriarchy are mainly put forth in the Arab world by a specific social class: the petty bourgeoisie. Sharabi explains that the petty bourgeoisie is “the social class most representative of neopatriarchal society and culture” (8), and that “[i]n this class can be found the most contradictory values and tendencies coexisting without conscious resolution or synthesis, producing the kind of disjointed and contradictory structures and practices that are most typical of this society” (8). It is therefore this social class in which the contradictions of neopatriarchal society encounter one another, thus allowing for a mixture of a traditional (Islamist) discourse and a reformist or secular discourse (95-98). The former focuses on submission to the religious text and so is based on tradition; the latter is the discourse emphasized by the petty bourgeoisie, which is superficially modern, but still based on patriarchy and tradition, thus allowing for the neopatriarchal discourse that results from a mixture of both. This neopatriarchy that emerged after the independence of the Arab states was also informed by the

1967 Arab-Israeli War, which provided, as we shall see, further unsettlement to Arab masculinities.

2.2.3 Post-1967 Neopatriarchal Arab Masculinity: Challenges and Potentialities of (Post-)Modern Arab Manhoods

2.2.3.1. Anomie and Post-1967 Arab Masculinities

[The 1967 War] proved to be a catalyst for change, unsettled existing gender codes considerably and produced huge tensions and incongruities in the representations of femininity and masculinity.

(Aghacy 5)

As we have seen, neopatriarchal enactments of masculinity were based on patriarchy but located between traditionalism and modernity. After 1967, neopatriarchy was only enhanced, as traditional masculinity was further unsettled by the consequences of the Arab-Israeli (or Six-Day) War. Following the 1956 Suez Crisis, conflicts ensued in the Middle East, culminating in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. From June 5 to June 10, Israel managed to take control over the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Jordan), and Golan Heights (Syria), thus winning the war. The defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan destabilized neopatriarchal masculinity, as the war resulted in a feeling of failure for Arab men. Nonetheless, post-1967 masculinity continued to be rooted

in patriarchal and neopatriarchal conceptions of gender hierarchy and male superiority and power. As Samira Aghacy puts it in her book *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967* (2009), “The continuous rebuffs and debacles [after 1967] in the area caused many men a daunting sense of impotence and ineffectiveness, demystifying an essentialized masculinity generally viewed as firm and stable” (2). This feeling of a “crisis” of masculinity entailed, thus, a reinstatement of masculinist discourses. On the one hand, having lost the war, the Arab world experienced a feeling of failure that devolved into a crisis of masculinity. On the other hand, as a consequence of the independence of Arab countries and their subsequent postcolonial status, women started to assert their rights in the Arab world as free-willing individuals through access to the workforce and rejection of veiling, for example, which were seen as threats to male domination. In *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987), Fatima Mernissi theorizes on the consequences of the 1967 war in gender terms through the concept of “anomie.” Writing twenty years after the war, Mernissi concludes that “Relations between sexes seem to be going through a period of anomie, of deep confusion and absence of norms” (97), and goes on, stating that “[t]he anomie stems from the gap between ideology and reality, for more and more women are using traditionally male spaces, going without the veil, and determining their own lives” (98). Changes in women’s practices entailed a reaction in men, which destabilized the traditional notion of patriarchy and resulted, after 1967, in a return to traditionalism for Arab men. Mernissi’s contention complements Hisham Sharabi’s notion of neopatriarchy. Deriving from

the 1967 war, gender roles were unsettled, further complicating neopatriarchal masculinities that were already contradictory. As a consequence of this challenge to traditional masculinities, men oftentimes responded violently. According to Mernissi, the gender anomie resultant from the war allowed for a feeling of threatened masculinity which then devolved into aggressiveness against, and oppression of, women.¹⁰⁹ As Mernissi puts it, “In the short run the reduced power of the head of the family produces tension in the family such that resentful males are likely to compensate by oppressing their wives and children” (174). That is, the new roles taken on by women have been producing tensions and, therefore, harsh responses from males in an attempt at securing their power.¹¹⁰ In the same vein, Don Conway-Long talks about men feeling a “reverse oppression” (149) as a consequence of the questioning of their long-endured privilege. In his article “Gender, Power and Social Change in Morocco,” Conway-Long explains:

When privilege is called into question, any shift in the make-up of socially accepted power relations seems to be experienced as a reversal of institutional power to the detriment of the prior beneficiary of an unequal system. As the means by which a member of a dominant social group maintains the daily experience of power become challenged, no longer acceptable as mechanisms of absolute control, he often experiences the shift in social reality as ‘oppression.’ (147-148)

Conway-Long points to Westernization as causing change in gender relations, and to economic struggle (that is, not being able to provide for the family) as a source of conflict within masculinities. His theorizations thus coincide with Sharabi's

¹⁰⁹ As an example, Mernissi first refers to the sanction of beating in the Koran, while at the same time explaining how it should not be a common practice: “The duty of the man to command his wife is embodied in his right to correct her by physical beating. The Koran itself recommends this measure, but only as a last resort” (111).

¹¹⁰ We will see these justifications for male violence against women in the analysis of contemporary Arab American literature written by women in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

view of neopatriarchy and postcoloniality as unsettling traditional Arab masculinities, with the patriarchal figure of the father as breadwinner being a characteristic shared both by traditional patriarchy and by neopatriarchy.

Therefore, one can conclude that the aftermath of the 1967 war entailed a further unsettlement of the already precarious Arab masculinities, leaving them in a state of anomie due to the questioning of gender power after the Arab-Israeli war, and the change in women's behaviors. This crisis of masculinity, however, resulted in an attempt at reinstating traditional conceptions of Arab manhood, while, at the same time, leaving them in an unstable position that would, as we shall see, enable further change.

2.2.3.2 Emerging Arab Masculinities: Moving Towards Gender Equality

As we have seen, Arab manhoods have gone through a period of crisis since the late-1960s, unsettled by the Western influence on Arab countries and the change in gender relations. As a consequence, there have been negative masculine reactions, mainly through the use of violence and oppression, but in fact the disruption of traditional forms of masculinity has also enabled an emergence of new understandings of manhood, and therefore, has opened the door to new, more gender-equal practices. Marcia C. Inhorn, in her book *The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (2012)

examines the emergence of new forms of masculinity in the Middle East.¹¹¹ Inspired by Inhorn's ideas, my contention is that neopatriarchy and the consequent unsettling of Arab masculinities or destabilization of gender practices have opened a space for a movement toward more positive masculinities, which may eventually move away from both patriarchy and neopatriarchy into more egalitarian practices. Inhorn explains how she has seen this shift towards gender equality actually happening, and enumerates the characteristics she has found Arab men in the twenty-first century tend to share:

Middle Eastern men work hard, often *emigrating* for periods of their lives in order to eventually marry and set up a *nuclear family household*. They desire *romantic love, companionship, and sexual passion* within a lifelong, *monogamous marriage surrounded by a sphere of conjugal privacy*. *Fatherhood* of two to four children—a mixture of sons and *desired daughters*—is wanted as much for joy and happiness as for patrilineal continuity, patriarchal power, or old-age security. (300, emphasis in the original text)

Even if these characteristics mainly reflect patriarchal notions of family, with men at the center of the family structure as fathers, the emphasis Inhorn gives to love and privacy, and the openness to having daughters, point to a more egalitarian understanding of family, with a particular prominence given to nurturing aspects of manhood, and therefore moving away from traditionalist and neopatriarchal understandings of masculinity. In her book, Inhorn goes one step further and coins the term “new Arab man,” saying that Arab men

are rejecting the assumptions of their Arab forefathers, including what I call the four notorious Ps—patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and polygyny. According to the men in my studies,

¹¹¹ Although her focus is on infertility and reproductive technologies, Inhorn believes that these are examples of the changes of Arab conceptions of manhood, and so she also examines in her book the new postmodern masculinities emerging in the Middle East. Hers is the only text encountered so far which deals with new emerging Arab masculinities.

these four Ps are becoming a thing of the past. Instead, emergent masculinities in the Middle East are characterized by resistance to patriarchy, patrilineality, and patrilocality, which are being undermined. Polygyny is truly rare. (302)

Consequently, Inhorn states that Arab men are rejecting the traditional basis of Arab fatherhood, and pointing towards new masculinities.¹¹²

Arab American men have been influenced by these new performances of masculinity. However, when talking about Arab American manhood, we need to take into account the further disruption of traditional discourses as a result of immigration. The next section is going to expound on the hybridization of masculinity in the diaspora, as a starting point to examine the development of Arab American masculinities.

¹¹² However, she fails to define these further in her study. Nonetheless, potential new masculinities will be examined in the present study, as they have been envisioned by contemporary Arab American women writers. In this dissertation we will see how these Arab masculinities are further unsettled in the diaspora (in the following section) and how they are represented in literature (as will be developed in chapter 4).

2.3 Thirdspace and Heterotopies in the Construction of Arab American (Masculine) Identities

[W]hen men emigrate, they take a familiar, though not necessarily unified, set of masculine practices with them; when they immigrate, they encounter a second, less-familiar set of masculine practices. Migration thus involves a process of *cross-cultural refraction*.

(Daniel Coleman 3, emphasis in original)

Daniel Coleman uses the term 'cross-cultural refraction' to explain the changes in gender practices when moving from one culture to another. Even though he uses the concept to explain immigration to Canada, his approach is applicable to other migrations between different countries. His theory is based on the idea that any movement from one culture to another “produces distortions” (3), which increase as the difference between cultures expands. As Coleman puts it, “The greater the combined geographical, cultural, and political difference between origin and destination, the greater the index of refraction between the migrant male's two sets of masculine practices” (3). This scholar also emphasizes the importance of examining “the tensions between forces of masculine innovation and constraint”

(3).¹¹³ Interestingly, he explains that masculine innovations result from the instability of migrant masculinity. As he explains, “This instability makes possible what I have called 'masculine innovations' in so far as it causes the male subject to improvise new masculine practices within the dynamic tensions between cross-cultural refraction's continuities and distortions” (161). From this standpoint, in this section I am going to examine the specific cross-cultural refractions of Arab American masculinities.

The conception of identity resultant from cross-cultural refraction has also been conceptualized under the term “hybridity,” which has been explored by Homi K. Bhabha. Taking into account the postcolonial and migrant experience to talk about in-between identities and ambivalence, he states that the hybrid identities which result from the dislocation of some individuals are positive enriching elements for the creation of new identities (Bhabha 1), and considers liminality as a site of potentiality. As he put it in an interview entitled “The Third Space” conducted by Jonathan Rutherford, “I try to place myself in that position of liminality, in that productive space of construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness” (209).¹¹⁴ Apart from this potentially productive space that in-betweenness offers, hybridity is also a consequence of alterity, in the sense that it is not solely a sum of different cultures, but, on the contrary, it is a new identity altogether. As Bhabha explains:

¹¹³ This is one of the aims of the present dissertation, examining the tensions between innovation and constraint resulting from the cross-cultural refraction of Arab male immigrants in the United States.

¹¹⁴ In this chapter, I am going to refer to the concept of “thirdspace” both as two separate words, when used by Homi K. Bhabha, and as one word, as used by Edward W. Soja, whose ideas will be explained in the lines that follow. When expressing my own conception of “thirdspace,” I have chosen to use Soja's spelling, because I believe that using only one word gives strength to the term and the concept.

[F]or me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. ... The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (211)

All in all, for Bhabha, hybridity is a third space different from the two cultures that constitute it, a new site where identity is in the making, a consequence of cross-cultural refraction. This precarious identitary site, placed liminally between two cultures, leaves a space where identity needs to be re-constituted, re-negotiated, and thus is a potential site for alternative identities to emerge.

Edward W. Soja further develops on the notion of “thirdspace” in his book *Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (2012 [1996]). Soja starts defining “thirdspace” as “a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (2). Soja draws on bell hooks’s notion of resistance—being marginality for her a site of potentiality (1990),—and also Anzaldúa’s notion of “mestiza” (1987), and sees in-betweenness as a zone of possibilities because of the openness enabled by this condition.¹¹⁵ As Soja puts it, “Thirthing produces what might best be called a cumulative *trialectics* that is radically open to additional othernesses, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (61). This openness follows Bhabha’s conception of third space, being

¹¹⁵ The women-of-color feminisms that inform Soja’s notion of “thirdspace” will be the focus of chapter 3 of this dissertation, since the politics of resistance characteristic of women-of-color feminism have greatly influenced the Arab American women writers that are explored here.

an intrinsic part of the concept itself. In fact, the concept of thirdspace is just a metaphor for this openness. In other words, thirdspace is not only a third option outside the binary, but an open door to fourth-, fifth-, sixth-spaces, etc. In defying binaries, it is, thus, a poststructuralist endeavor. As Soja explains, “Thirdspace as a concept—is not sanctified in and of itself. The critique is not meant to stop at three, to construct a holy trinity, but to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known” (61). Consequently, this thirdspace provides a poststructural site of openness that allows for the development and potential improvement of hybrid identities.

Michel Foucault also coined a concept that, according to Edward Soja, was “described in ways that resemble what is being described here as Thirdspace” (154), which is Foucault’s notion of “heterotopology,” explained in the text “Of Other Spaces.”¹¹⁶ Foucault defines “heterotopias” as real sites of contradiction, real places at the same time as they are counter-sites or, as he puts it, “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986: 3). Foucault considered heterotopias as “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. ... heterotopias ... take the form of contradictory sites” (1986: 6).¹¹⁷ Therefore, taking

¹¹⁶ Translated from French by Jay Miskowic, the text was originally entitled “Des Espace Autres,” and was based on a March 1967 lecture by Foucault. It was published for the first time in October 1984 in the French journal *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*.

¹¹⁷ Foucault gives several examples of heterotopias: psychiatric hospitals and cemeteries are spaces that exist and have a specific function in society, while at the same time they are at the limits, they are somewhat regarded as places that should not exist, places that question life or values, and are therefore inherently contradictory. The psychiatric hospital is a place where deviation is hidden, and the cemetery hides the end of life.

the concept of “heterotopia” metaphorically, the borderland, or in other words, the hybrid space inhabited by thirdspace identities, would be a heterotopia in the sense that it is a real space, but full of contradictions and incompatibilities. It is a space where identities are and will inevitably be negotiated.

In the case of this dissertation, Arab American identity can be conceived as a heterotopia, since it is a space of contestation while a real space nonetheless. In other words, Arab American identity can be seen as a real identity space that Arab Americans inhabit, while at the same time the stereotypical view of Arabs in the United States (explored in chapter 1) makes it a contradiction in terms. That is, from the necropolitics and abjection associated with Arabs/Muslims in the United States to their vilification, there is an inherent difficulty in making sense of an Arab and American identity because the conjunction of both is conceived of as inherently contradictory. Arab Americans, thus, inhabit a heterotopic space in the very construction of their identity. Arab American identity has had to be constructed in a space of hybridity that contradicts and questions the very Arab origin of those involved in that process, as Arab culture is traditionally seen as contrary to Americanness.

This difficulty in making sense of an Arab American identity has been expressed both by writers and artists. Laila Halaby’s poem “Browner Shades of White,” already mentioned in chapter 1, is a good example of the heterotopic space that Arab Americans inhabit. The poem explores the contradiction between the theoretical (official) whiteness of Arabs in the United States and their racialization, that is, it puts to the fore their in-betweenness (the thirdspace they

inhabit) and their heterotopic identity. The poem finishes with the following stanza, which highlights the contradictory situation of Arab Americans in terms of identity, and so emphasizes the thirdspace that they inevitably live in:

My friend who is black
calls me a woman of color.
My mother who is white
says I am Caucasian.
My friend who is Hispanic/Mexican-American
understands my dilemma.
My country that is a democratic melting pot
does not. (1994: 204)¹¹⁸

The poem thus underlines hybridity as the basis of Arab American identity, while equating it with other identities that are placed in the borderland (e.g., Hispanic or African American), but also highlighting the obsession of the United States with considering Arab American identity a contradiction in terms. In other words, the poem accounts for the fact that Arab American identity is situated in a heterotopia, a contradictory space that is inhabited by real people that have to make sense of an identity that is not fully Arab nor fully American, and so needs to exist in a thirdspace of hybridity. Furthermore, the heterotopic nature of Arab American identity has been graphically and conceptually expressed by Mariam Ghani in her artwork *Points of Proof* (part of the IN/VISIBLE Art Exhibition which inaugurated

¹¹⁸ The whole poem, collected in Joanna Kadi's *Food For Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* reads: "Under race/ethnic origin / I check white. / I am not / a minority / on their checklists / and they erase me / with the red end / of a number / two pencil. / I go to school / quite poor / because I am white. / There is no / square to check / that I have no / camels in my backyard, / that my father does / not have eight wives / inside the tents / of his harem, / or his palace, / or the island / he bought / with his oil / money. / My father is a farmer. / My mother is a / teacher. / I am white / because there is no / square for exotic. / My husband / does not / have a machine gun, / though sometimes his eyes / fire anger / because while he too is white, / his borders have long since been smudged / by the red end / of a number / two pencil. / My friend who is black / calls me a woman of color. / My mother who is white / says I am Caucasian. / My friend who is Hispanic/Mexican-American / understands my dilemma. / My country that is a democratic melting pot / does not" (204-205).

the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan). Ghani, of an Afghan father and Lebanese mother, grew up in New York, and through her works of art has explored the contradictions of Arab American identity, constructing her oeuvre as a heterotopic space in the United States. *Points of Proof* is an installation made with different media, which includes postcards, polaroids, video, and also an interactive website (<www.kabul-reconstructions.net/proof>). All of that is assembled in a database centered on the question “If someone questioned your right to call yourself an American, what is the one story, object, image or document you would offer as your proof?.” Some options are given in postcards under the question “What makes you American?” in which people can write their own ideas about Arab American identity. The front page of these postcards is divided into four parts, putting forward four ideas: (1) blood as proof of nationality; (2) an American passport (with the word “Libertad”—i.e., “freedom” in Spanish—superimposed); (3) a text that reads “all the places I’ve visited in this vast country... the tales of the people I’ve met on my journeys... that is America: stories and people and the places they inhabit” superimposed over a U.S. road map; and (4) a yearly income form on top of which the sentence “I am so independently oriented” can be read. This postcard presentation *per se* provides the audience with very different views of American (and Arab American) identities: (1) a genetic view of nationality; (2) a citizenship-based view; (3) a lived-experiences view; and (4) a monetary view, implying in this latter case that nationality and citizenship are easier for the upper social classes. Maymanah Fohrat states that “Through Ghani’s piece, we are given a glance into the

difficulties faced when one's nationality is consistently questioned" (50-51). Having been historically vilified in the United States, Arabs and Muslims thus end up questioning the possibility of being both Arab and American. This installation takes on this conflict and reflects on it from the point of view of the proofs of American identity actually required by American authorities from people of Arab origin. As Ghani herself puts it:

Points of Proof thus reflects the situation in which increasingly large numbers of American immigrants find themselves by asking viewers and interviewees to reduce their American identities to a single point of proof—points being the system used by a number of state DMV bureaus to rate different documents for their effectiveness as proof of identity. (par. 3)¹¹⁹

Among the results of the project (which can be found on the web page, with pictures of the writings left by people on the postcards), the main idea is the difficulty in proving an identity through material means. The study concludes, thus, that identity is more related to a belief, will or feeling, than it is to anything tangible. As Ghiani points out:

Their surprisingly complicated and difficult answers are interwoven into a series of conversations that throw into relief the subjective and volitional nature of identity, the difficulty of pinning the constantly shifting idea of America within strictly national borders, and the question of proof as defined more by belief than by the material evidence at hand. ... the question of proof quickly raises other questions—Is geography destiny? Does culture extend beyond citizenship? Is proof finally a question of faith and belief or does it depend on the material evidence at hand?—whose answers are equally contested and complex. (par. 4)¹²⁰

Points of Proof, therefore, places (Arab) American identity as a metaphorical site of feeling, that is, as a thirdspace of negotiation of identity, with no single item

¹¹⁹ <<http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam/projects2.html>>. Accessed: 18 April 2014.

¹²⁰ Idem.

available that can prove it. Arab American identity is thus the specific heterotopia that will now be further analyzed.

2.3.1 Constructing Arab American Identities

Part of being Arab American then, according to a historically specific definition, is to think in a more sustained and in a different way about American foreign policy in the Middle East. For better or worse, this is a major source of Arab American identity for many, and it is this historically unique aspect of Arab American identity that [Edward] Said's writing so directly and eloquently addresses.

(Aboul-Ela 21)

Hosam Aboul-Ela explores the issue of Arab American identity in his article entitled "Edward Said's *Out of Place*: Criticism, Polemic, and Arab American Identity." As seen in the above quote, Arab American identity seems to be shaped by politics. Aboul-Ela argues that Arab American identity is different from other hyphenated American identities because of the "dissident relationship to the United States foreign policy in the Middle East" (15), and he takes Said's memoir *Out of Place* as proof of this contention. Referring to the title of Said's book, Aboul-Ela implies that one is alienated as an Arab in the United States (18). In other words, American foreign policies towards the Middle East are one of the main reasons why Arab American identity is conceived as contradictory, as a heterotopia. In the aforementioned article, Aboul-Ela goes on to argue that Arab

Americans' split identity results from a dissident view of American policies in the Middle East. As he puts it:

[T]he physical presence of the Arab body in America creates conflict that the individual can only resolve either by “mentally dividing” or by living in “unresolved sorrow.” The source of this conundrum for Said (as for the vast majority of the Arab community inside the United States) is American foreign policy toward the Middle East. (29)

This “divided mind” is yet another way to refer to the heterotopic thirdspace that Arab Americans occupy, divided by the contradictions that an American and Arab identity entails. Therefore, Arab Americans struggle to make sense of their identity. This places Arab American identity as a category that bases politics on ethnicity.

In fact, in his article “The Creation of ‘Arab American’ Political Activism and Ethnic (Dis)Unity,” Gary C. David defines the Arab American identity as an “ethno-political category” (835), thus implying a division between those Arab Americans who are politically active and those who are not. Because of the possible passing of some Arab Americans as whites, those who do not choose to participate in an ethno-political scene can detach themselves from public self-presentation as Arab. As a consequence, self-identification as an Arab American comes mostly from the political views shared in the Arab American community. Of course, origin, family, residence, community (that is, socialization or social construction) will also have a defining role in the creation and assertion of an Arab American identity, but its politicization against racism and discrimination will be central.

In this respect, one must remember not to take the notion of Arab American

identity as an absolute category, as explained at the beginning of this chapter in relation to the poststructuralist view of identity. On the contrary, Arab Americanness can be considered a category inasmuch as there is a community that acknowledges it and that comes together in their struggle against discrimination. In other words, what unites Arab Americans as a community is their common placement in a heterotopic space which is their very identity. As Arabs in the United States, Arab Americans are primarily a group because of their common fight against discrimination, as well as their common cultural origins. All these aspects are actually put together by Gary C. David, who points to three theories of ethnicity development that, according to him, intertwine in the ethnic self-identification of Arab Americans: (i) the *primordial perspective*, based on commonalities in relation to history, culture, language, religion, physical appearance, and acculturation; (ii) the *structural perspective*, based on ethnic solidarity as a consequence of discrimination; and (iii) the *social constructionist perspective*, which sees ethnicity as socially constructed and resulting from interaction within the ethnic group (838-9). All three perspectives are connected with one another and, while some Arab Americans' self-identifications will result from the three, others may identify as Arab American only because of one or two of those perspectives. In this section, drawing on historical and sociological analyses of Arab American identity, I am going to explore these three perspectives, while taking into account the associations amongst them. These will serve as a guide into the exploration of different ways or reasons to identify oneself as Arab American.

2.3.1.1 The Primordial Perspective: Ethno-Political Commonalities and Acculturation in the Historical Construction of Arab American Identity

Firstly, according to Gary C. David, Arab American identity is founded on commonalities, which form the primordial perspective. In other words, self-identification for Arab Americans may be based on shared history, culture, language, religion and physical appearance. While this is indeed the first strategy of identification for Arab Americans, as has been argued, creating an Arab American identity is problematic because of the diversity of countries of origin, religions, and skin-colors of Arab immigrants to the United States. However, Arab American scholars coincide in acknowledging a common cultural background for Arab immigrants to the United States. For instance, Steven Salaita refers to these commonalities as an Islamicate element, based on the idea that there is an Islamic influence that both Muslims and non-Muslim Arabs share. As he puts it:

[M]uch of the culture of Arab America, despite the religious diversity of its participants, is drawn from Islamic influences; Arab America thus is what Edward Said called an Islamicate community. ... The trick, in my mind, is to find a way methodologically to highlight the importance of Islam in Arab America without concurrently ignoring the realities of the many Arab Americans who are not Muslim. Construing Arab America as Islamicate offers a helpful start. (7)

Therefore, both Christian and Muslim Arabs are culturally influenced by Islam in the understanding of their identities, and so it can be said that they share a common culture.¹²¹ Barbara C. Aswad and Barbara Bilgé develop this idea,

¹²¹ Here, I have chosen to mention only Christianity and Islam as they are the main religions professed by Arabs in the United States.

relating it to gender roles in the Arab world:

[T]he values of Islam have shaped and confirmed Arab cultural values and thus continue to influence, however indirectly, the expectations of those who do not participate directly in religious activities. This is especially true in the definition of gender roles and in setting the parameters for what constitutes proper social interaction between the sexes. (20)

One of the main traits of this Islamicate culture is, thus, its continuation of patriarchy, and the ensuing hierarchies in gender terms. The development of gender roles and, in particular, Arab American masculinities, will be explored further on. Before, however, I shall draw on this understanding of Arab American identity as Islamicate and examine how, from this heterotopic space of common culture, an Arab American identity emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. In other words, I shall now explore the ways in which Arab immigrants to the United States started to identify themselves not according to their country of origin, but as Arab Americans, that is, as permanent immigrants in the United States.¹²²

A relevant volume that outlines the creation of Arab American identities is *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, edited by Ernest McCarus. Michael Suleiman's article in the volume consists of an analysis of the construction of a political Arab American identity. Suleiman's historical explanation starts in the 1880s, when the first wave of Arab immigration moved to the United States. He explains that, from then until the First World War, those immigrants were mostly sojourners who had little involvement with American society. After the First World

¹²² As examined in the first chapter of this dissertation, we must remember that before identifying as Arab Americans, this community conceived themselves as Syrian (coming from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th) and, later, according to their country of origin (for example, Lebanese, Jordan, Palestinian, etc).

War, Arab immigrants to the United States tried to become more assimilated, and thus acculturated, while at the same time starting to feel a sense of unity as a community. He even goes on to assert that “After World War I, the Arabs in the United States became truly an *Arab-American* community” (43, emphasis in the original text), as they started to identify as a broad but specific community that shared cultural characteristics and, preeminently, language. However, from then until the Second World War, Arab immigrants in the United States went through a process of assimilation, followed by a “weakening or near extinction of Arab ethnicity” (45). Suleiman even states that “the political identity of the Arab community was for all intents and purposes wholly American, i.e., not even hyphenated Arab-American” (45), thus implying the attempt by Arab immigrants before the mid-twentieth century to assimilate in American society (helped by their official categorization as white). The turning point in the development of an Arab American identity was the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.¹²³ The common politicization of Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) against Israel in the 1967 War aided in the creation of a pan-Arab national movement that was then mirrored in the United States. Thus, the 1967 War politicized Arabs in the United States based on a common political struggle. In other words, it joined Arab Americans together as an ethno-political category. In the same volume edited by Ernest McCarus, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad goes on to say that “The 1967 Arab-Israeli War ... shocked the Arab community in the United States and gave birth to the Arab-American identity” (1994: 79). What the war did was actually to

¹²³ David 843, Haddad 1994, Suleiman 1999, Shakir 1997.

establish Arab American identity as an ethno-political category (as Gary C. David stated). Because of the United States' opposition towards Arab countries in the War, Arabs tended to unite in solidarity with their countries of origin, and thus started to base their ethnic self-identification on their political involvement with Middle Eastern issues. At the same time, Arab immigrants became further racialized and discriminated against in the United States due to the very same war, a fact which only made their union, and the blossoming of an Arab American identity, stronger as a response to their racialization. As a consequence of this visibilization and discrimination of Arabs in the United States, Arab American organizations were created at that time, such as the Association of Arab American University Graduates, founded in 1967, the National Association of Arab Americans, founded in 1972, and the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, founded in 1980. Based on Islamicate cultural commonalities and anti-discrimination efforts, Arab American organizations aided in the building of an Arab American identity. As Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad summarizes it, "All Arab-American organizations were formed by a coalition of Christians and Muslims from the Arab states. What held them together was the shared vision of American stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims and their shared experience and interpretations of events in the Middle East" (2004: 23).¹²⁴ Therefore, from this common ground stemmed the ethno-political self-identitary category of Arab American. Nowadays, for instance, 87% of Arab Americans are in favor of an independent Palestinian state (El-Badry fig. 8).

¹²⁴ The Civil Rights Movement in the United States also inspired Arab Americans to assert a specific political identity.

After 1967, ethnic unity and solidarity continued to pull Arab Americans together in their fight against stereotyping and discrimination. In the construction of their Arab and American identity, however, they were left with the “divided mind” that Hosam Aboul-Ela referred to (29), since their ethnic-American identity was based on their rejection of American policies in the Middle East, that is, the policies of their adopted country towards their mother country. Their identity was, thus, contradictory from the very beginning, formed on a heterotopic space of contestation of the very elements of that identity. In this sense, the issue of hybridized identities and acculturation in the midst of a heterotopic space becomes particularly complex in the case of Arab Americans.

In fact, acculturation plays a key role in the construction of an Arab identity in the United States, or what is the same, an Arab American identity. Mona H. Faragallah, Walter R. Schumm and Farrell J. Webb, in their article “Acculturation of Arab-American Immigrants: An Exploratory Study,” analyze the variables of acculturation, naming exposure, age of immigration, traditionalism and discrimination as the most important factors, but also referring to others such as identification, adoption of American cultural practices, usage of American media, use of the English language at home, American friendships, socioeconomic success, gender-role orientation and permissiveness towards children. They relate acculturation (and these variables) with satisfaction. The results of their study, derived from responses from married fathers, pointed to the fact that

longer residence, younger age at immigration, having not recently visited one’s homeland, and being of a Christian religious persuasion are associated with greater acculturation to U.S. society and greater satisfaction with life in the United States, but with

reduced family satisfaction. (197)¹²⁵

The relationship between acculturation and satisfaction in the United States probably derives from the fact that in the study there was less discrimination when there was more acculturation. However, the fact that family satisfaction, from a male/father perspective, was reduced in connection to acculturation, may be due to the fact that acculturation entailed a potential deviation from traditional family structures. Therefore, the study concludes that Arab men in the United States were mostly satisfied with acculturation but not so much with their family life. The study did not point to possible reasons for this dissatisfaction with their household, but fear of loss of tradition or loss of power may be possible causes.

In relation to religion, the fact that the study pointed to the highest assimilation and satisfaction of Christian Arabs is also relevant. In fact, in 2007, Mona H. Amer and Joseph D. Hovey published an article entitled “Socio-demographic Differences in Acculturation and Mental Health for a Sample of Second Generation / Early Immigrant Arab Americans,” where they pointed to the differences between Christian and Muslim Arabs. Both groups used integration as their acculturation strategy, but Muslim respondents to the study “endorsed higher levels of ethnic identity including both Arab religious and family values as well as Arab ethnic practices (e.g., Arabic foods, music, and speech)” (343). Conversely, “Christian respondents reported greater assimilation and integration into American culture” (343), which makes sense given the Christian majority in the United

¹²⁵ The sexist aspect of the study must be noted here, as responses were limited to men. However, the reason behind this may be the easier access to Arab male participants than to female ones, particularly within an Arab American Muslim community. Furthermore, for the purposes of the present study, it is particularly relevant to know the results from (heterosexual) men as they will be the demographic group that is explored in this dissertation.

States. Amer and Hovey concluded that Muslims may be more Othered and discriminated against and, as a consequence, cling to their traditions. As they put it, “Muslims’ separation may not be intentional; instead, Muslims may face more challenges when attempting to integrate in mainstream society” (343).¹²⁶ This is a very relevant finding, since it points to religion (and Muslim religion in particular) as the key source of racial profiling towards Arab immigrants in the United States, and thus corroborates the hypotheses postulated in chapter 1 regarding the racism directed towards Muslims in the United States. All in all, common culture, political views, as well as assimilatory tendencies seem to have historically helped form and construct Arab American identities, both for Muslims (a minority) and Christians (a majority).

2.3.1.2 The Structural Perspective: Discrimination, Stereotyping and Ethclass in the Construction of Arab American Identity

As has been pointed out in the previous section, discrimination is also an essential element in the construction of the ethno-political Arab American identity. One of the main tasks carried out by Arab American organizations has been the struggle against anti-Arab racism. The Arab American community, thus, is united as an ethno-political force against inequity. In this respect, it is the structural racism (and even institutional, through the military or the Transportation Security

¹²⁶ This idea of Muslim religion as marker of Otherness (or even abjection) has also been pointed out by Abdulrahim et al (2012) and Awad (2010), and examined in the first chapter of the present dissertation.

Administration, for example)¹²⁷ towards Arabs and Muslims in the United States that also pulls the Arab American community together and helps consolidate an Arab American identity. In other words, the view of Arabs as Other from a mainstream American perspective aids in the reinforcement of an ethnic identity, that is, a racialized identity. It also helps bring together Arab Americans as a community, thus strengthening their hyphenated identity.

However, one must remember that not all Arab Americans are equally racialized. As expounded on in chapter 1, the official categorization of Arabs as white in the United States, and the ethnic variations on skin color and religion, make Arab Americans a difficult group to categorize in racial and ethnic terms. As a result, not all Arabs in the United States experience racialization and discrimination in the same way. In their article “Discrimination and Psychological Distress: Does Whiteness Matter for Arab Americans?,” Sawsan Abdulrahim, Sherman A. James, Rouham Yamout and Wayne Baker state the following:

The findings of the present study show that not all Arab Americans report discrimination at the same level, and not all those who experience discrimination are affected by it in the same way. These findings highlight the importance of considering the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, locations Arab Americans occupy in relationship to the U.S.-system of racial stratification. (2120)

One must not forget the diversity existent within the Arab American community, added to the official classification of Arabs in the United States as white. It is true, however, that according to Abdulrahim et al.’s study, discrimination is more often reported by (i) assimilated Arab Americans, and (ii) Arab American Muslims who

¹²⁷ In relation to the military, I am thinking of issues such as human rights in Guantanamo, and regarding the TSA I am considering airport profiling as an instance of a major institutional discrimination.

identify as non-white. Regarding the first group, the article points to possible reasons why “instrumentally assimilated” Arab Americans (US born, native speakers of English, with good education and good income) report more discrimination. That would be because assimilated immigrants may feel more entitled to equality. Abdulrahim et al. go on to explain this perception of discrimination by assimilated Arabs as follows: “the choice to self-identify as white signals that an Arab American is interested in claiming Whiteness and in drawing on its privileges. In this case, when discrimination disrupts the sense of privilege, its impact on health can be more harmful” (2121). Conversely, first generation or non-assimilated immigrants may report less discrimination because they tend to spend less time outside their community, may have more difficulty perceiving discrimination, and/or may prefer to deny it, as they have just arrived to the United States.

Secondly, as far as Muslim Arab Americans are concerned, Abdulrahim et al.’s findings are consistent with previous ones (Awad 2010; Hagopian 2004) when they point to the possible rise in discrimination because of this group’s increased visibility and profiling after 9/11. In relation to this, and regarding discrimination against Arab Americans as a whole, Abdulrahim et al. conclude that

[t]hese divergent findings are intriguing and highlight that, for Arab Americans in a post-September 11 era, skin color may not be the most important marker for racialization, but that other phenotypic characteristics, dress code, or accent may be more important. (2121)

Therefore, the issue of discrimination is perceived by Arab Americans in diverse manners, which do not (only) have to do with race (phenotype) or religion, but which may be related to North American foreign policies or profiling, and might,

therefore, be one of the bases for the creation of an ethno-political category, that is, an Arab American identity. Nonetheless, the view towards Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) is still a marker of abjection, and thus of racialization of Arab Americans in the United States. As has been noted, traditionally, Arabo-Islamic cultural traits are perceived as abject in the United States and aid in the Othering of Arab Americans.¹²⁸ In this respect, Jen'nan Ghazal Read refers to the Muslim and Christian tendency towards traditionalism:

Christian and Muslim Arabs share an ethnic heritage greatly influenced by Islamic values, especially those regarding gender roles and family relations (Bilge and Aswad 1996; Ghanea Bassiri 1997; Haddad 1994). The family is considered the foundation of the Arab community, and there is a strong emphasis on traditional gender roles (Esposito 1998; Haddad 1999). (210)

Moreover, she points to religiosity and ethnicity, more than religion itself, as this marker:

Muslim respondents are more gender traditional than their non-Muslim peers, but rather than reflecting the impact of religious affiliation per se, this study finds that differences in ethnicity and religiosity are more significant. Muslim respondents are more likely to be immigrants to the United States, have an Arab spouse, participate in ethnic organizations, and believe in scriptural inerrancy. Once these differences are considered, the influence of Muslim affiliation on gender traditionalism disappears. In contrast, the effects of religiosity and ethnicity on gender traditionalism are more stable and follow somewhat similar patterns for Christian and Muslim respondents. This finding may in part reflect the fact that Arabic traditions and Christian and Muslim doctrine all teach similar roles for women, so ethnic and religious affiliation may be less predictive of gender beliefs than degree of attachment to these communities. (218-219)

In other words, religion is not so much of a marker of difference, but place of origin or ethnicity and religiosity play a greater role in the reinforcement of

¹²⁸ See chapter 1 of this dissertation, especially section 1.5, for a full account on this issue.

traditionalism.

Precisely because of this diversity, the concept of “ethclass” becomes relevant here, and it will also help to understand the workings of discrimination for Arab Americans. Louise Cainkar draws on this concept in her article “Palestinian Women in American Society: the Interaction of Social Class, Culture and Politics,” where she divides Arab American immigrants according to social class. She draws on Milton Gordon's concept of “ethclass” from his book *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins*, where “ethclass” is defined as the “portion of social space created by the intersection of the ethnic group with the social class” (51), and “the subsociety created by the intersection of the vertical stratifications of ethnicity with the horizontal stratifications of social class” (51). Following these views, Cainkar points out that there are similarities between the same social class independently of ethnicity, describing, thus, the ethnic group as the “locus of a sense of historical identification,” and the ethclass as the “locus of a sense of participational identification” (53). It is relevant, then, to analyze Arab Americans in relation to their ethclass as a means to understand Arab American identity better. Louise Cainkar’s study centers on Palestinian Muslims living in the United States and divides them according to social class. Cainkar differentiates between two main groups that she calls “middle-class chain immigrants,” and “peasant-petit merchant.” The former follow middle class values and perceive their life in the U.S. as full of possibilities. They usually live in white suburbs, and although they do have Palestinian artifacts in the house, women tend to dress like westerners. They speak English but teach Arabic to their children, and

see college education as “a moveable asset” (93). The latter group, called “peasant-petit merchant” by Cainkar, are not middle class, and follow a more traditionalist way of life, while usually seeing their life in the United States as temporary (101). They also tend to live in urban neighborhoods, their primary language is Arabic, and for them college education is economically more difficult to provide for. Even if this study is only centered on Palestinian immigrants, I believe the division is similar within the Arab American community since the median household income of Palestinian Americans is the closest to the Arab American average.¹²⁹ Therefore, the ethclasses that are established within the Palestinian American community are potentially the same for Arab Americans as a whole. In general, then, lower social class for Arab Americans entails resorting to traditionalism and seeing immigration as a temporary adventure. Higher social class enables further assimilation. However, more assimilation may entail more perceived discrimination (as pointed out by Abdulrahim et al.), although there may be less racism due to the distance of this ethclass from traditionalism and its more privileged status.¹³⁰

Ethnic identity, thus, stems from a perception of difference, felt in part because of suffered discrimination. More or less acculturation results also from the socio-economic positioning of Arab Americans, ethclass being a marker of

¹²⁹ The median household income for Arab Americans between 2006 and 2010 was 56,433 dollars, while the Palestinian American average was 55,950. For a further account of Arab American median income divided by places of origin, see Mayan Asi and Daniel Beaulieu 's “Arab Households in the United States: 2006-2010. American Community Survey Briefs”:

<www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr10-20.pdf>, figure 2, page 4. Accessed: 12 October 2014.

¹³⁰ Arab American middle class is also the ethclass in which Arab American women have the economic and educational possibility to become writers. Therefore, we must bear in mind that the Arab American literature that will be analyzed in this dissertation will mainly come from this ethclass.

assimilation. With a majority of Arab Americans that have a higher income than the American average (Asi and Beaulieu), most Arab Americans will be in a relatively privileged position. In this respect, economic power may entail a decrease in actual racialization, but it may enhance the perceived prejudice, as discrimination may be hindering the very social advancement that the middle class strives for. Moreover, tensions and contradictions may ensue between assimilation and traditionalism. As Jen'nan Ghazal Read puts it:

On the one hand, Arab Americans as a group are more highly educated, have higher labor force participation rates, and earn higher incomes than the U. S. adult population, all of which suggest an assimilated and progressive ethnic population ... On the other hand, Arab cultural and religious customs reinforce traditional gender roles, especially those regarding women's responsibilities in the home and family. (208)

Middle class Arab Americans may not break all ties with their origins but tend to negotiate their understanding of Arab American identity within assimilatory upwardly-mobile patterns.¹³¹ Nadine Naber explains this return to traditionalism as a response to the sense of displacement inherent in living in the diaspora. Middle-class Arab Americans may find in tradition a way to make sense of their unsettled identity. As she points out:

Dominant middle-class concepts of Arab cultural identity indeed draw upon long-standing norms about religion, family, gender, and sexuality that have circulated in the Arab region for centuries. This helps explain why idealized concepts of Arab cultural identity provide middle-class Arab diasporas with a sense of cultural and historical continuity in relation to their places of origin. Middle-

¹³¹ Trying to mediate between acculturation and traditionalism is a central concern in the construction of Arab American identity, as well as Arab American masculinities, and this will also be the focus of many of the conflicts portrayed by Arab American women in their contemporary literature. While some tend to pursue assimilation, others will resort to tradition. In the case of Arab American men, first-generation immigrants will tend to resort to tradition while second-generation will try to assimilate. This issue is developed in section 2.3.2 of the present dissertation.

class articulations of an authentic Arab culture meet desires for connection, attachment, comfort, and security that come with displacement, immigrant marginality, and the pressures of assimilation. (64)

Resorting to the traditionalism of Islamicate culture may be, then, a form of re-constructing an Arab identity in a different setting. In other words, there is a tension between assimilation, the upward mobility that it entails, the personal identification as Arab American, the fight against discrimination, and the sense of belonging of hybrid/in-between identities. These contradictions, then, would seem to be central aspects of Arab American identities.

2.3.1.3 The Social Constructionist Perspective: The Role of Community in the Construction of Arab American Identity

The third perspective that, according to Gary C. David, aids in the development of an Arab American identity follows social constructionism and places family as the basis of the shaping of Arab American identities. Following the ideas explained in the previous section regarding the frequent return to traditionalism of Arabs in the diasporic setting of the United States, one of the main sites of enactment of tradition will be the family space. The importance of family is a characteristic trait of Arab and Arab American cultures.¹³² As Nadine Naber puts it in her study “The Politics of Cultural Authenticity,” “relational concepts of selfhood and family ties and attachments [are] among the most fundamental aspects of Arabness” (2012: 66). In the same vein, according to Germine H. Awad in “The Impact of

¹³² Awad 2010; Aswad and Bilg ; Naber 2012; Haddad and Smith 1996.

Acculturation and Religious Identification on Perceived Discrimination for Arab/Middle Eastern Americans,” family is crucial for Arab Americans. Awad explains that the concept of Arab family includes the extended family, and that in Arab families in the United States “there is a high level of family interdependence” (60). Awad goes on to state that “Individuals are also expected to put the goals of the family above their individual goals or success” (60). The traditional Arab conception of family is brought to the United States, and instilled in future generations. The clinging to a traditional Arab family is actually exacerbated once in the diaspora. This is explained by Yvonne Y. Haddad and Jane I. Smith:

Fearing the separation from family context that they see happening in many American families, Arab[s] hope that by keeping their children involved with them in as many ways as possible they can transmit to them the values of close family life in an Islamist environment. (30)

However, this traditional understanding of family life clashes with second generation immigrants. In fact, the relationships established within a traditional family do not end with blood ties, but the view of the community as part of the family is also essential. In this respect, the issue of family reputation is particularly important. The concept of family honor is in fact problematized in the diaspora, where the community is more difficult to find, and may thus become more of an imagined community than a real one. As Nadine Naber puts it:

[T]he concept of *al-nas* takes on a new form in the diaspora. It works as short hand for an imagined Arab community. It enhances the possibilities for the politics of cultural authenticity to regulate behaviors by rendering transgression not only as individual

rebellion but as cultural loss and Americanization. (2012: 101)¹³³

All this creates problems between first and second-generation immigrants, as the importance given to family and its ramifications significantly diminish with the generational withdrawal from the immigrants' country of origin. The young will be brought up with a more or less traditional conception of family and community (*al-nas*), and will find themselves split between their social ethnic identity construction within that family/community and their also social identity construction as Americans in the United States (operated by the school, peers, media, etc.). Conflicts thus ensue between these second-generation immigrants and their first-generation parents, who cling to tradition and use the discourse of cultural authenticity to convince their children to follow their path. As Nadine Naber concludes:

Claims to cultural authenticity reinforced parental control in my interlocutors' lives. Many young adults found a profound sense of security and comfort in the concept of Arabness as family. Yet they also said that it constrained their lives and contributed to intergenerational tensions. As parents exercise their control over young adults through claims to cultural authenticity, young adults experience normative generational wars as a conflict between Arab and American culture. (2012: 75)

The subsequent heterotopia second-generation Arab Americans inhabit places their identity in a contradictorily precarious position, and makes young people potentially defy their parents' orders. As Haddad and Smith put it:

Children may resent the pressures to remain within the family and may finally rebel. Younger people, especially, may have difficulty understanding the fact that traditional Arab family structures leave little room for personal privacy, a right highly valued in American society. (36)

¹³³ *Al-nas* means "the people" in Arabic, referring in this case to the Arab community.

First- and second-generation immigrants experience their identification as both Arab and American dissimilarly. Jon C. Swanson explains in “Ethnicity, Marriage, and Role Conflict. The Dilemma of a Second-Generation Arab-American” the psychological differences in terms of identity between first and second generation immigrants. As he argues:

The first generation is secure in its identity and, moreover, often moves into an ethnic community of peers who share its values and can offer support in dealing with what are familiar problems of employment, housing and the like in the new culture.

...

While the second generation finds fewer economic incentives for maintaining their ethnicity, their psychological ties to their parents’ tradition often remain strong. This can be a source of considerable role stress for ... they are brought up simultaneously in two markedly different worlds. (243)

The social construction of second generation Arab Americans both by an Arab family and an American social context thus appear to play a central role in establishing Arab American identity as a heterotopia, that is, a space of contradiction.¹³⁴

2.3.2 Tendencies in The Construction of Arab American Masculinities: A Contradictory Thirdspace of Cross-Cultural Refraction

Arab men, when they migrate to the United States, take with them their own understandings of gender identity and gender relations, as they have learned them

¹³⁴ In contemporary Arab American literature, these three conceptualizations of the construction of Arab American identity appear and shall be analyzed in chapter 4, with a focus on their consequences for Arab American masculinities in general, and the relations between first-generation fathers and second-generation daughters in particular.

in their countries of origin, that is, traditional conceptions of Arab masculinity, traditional hierarchical gender practices, and neopatriarchal, more modernized, post-1967 understandings of gender relations. Before the independence of the Arab states from European powers, that is, during the first wave of Arab immigration to the United States (1880s-1940s), Arab men brought to America their more or less traditional Arab masculinities. Being a mostly Christian community at the time, and mostly migrating for economic reasons, these Arab men considered themselves sojourners, that is, in their minds, their stay in the United States was temporary.¹³⁵ Thus, they clung to the traditions of their home countries. Conversely, the second wave of Arab immigration to the United States (from the 1940s until nowadays) has brought Arab men influenced by patriarchal and neopatriarchal notions of masculinity influenced by the consequences of the 1967 war. These more contradictory masculinities, caught between traditionalism and modernity, were even further unsettled in their migration to a different cultural space, i.e. the United States.

Once in the diaspora, any immigrants's understanding and enactment of their masculinities change as they go through a process of cross-cultural refraction (as argued by Daniel Coleman), since there is inevitably a hybridization of masculinities when in contact with another culture. Arab American masculinities, thus, inhabit a thirdspace, a space that will be different for every individual, but which will be an outcome of the mixture between Arab ideals, discourses of the Arab diaspora, and American values. Some tendencies can thus be found in the

¹³⁵ For a full account of Arab immigration to the United States, see chapter 1 of this dissertation.

construction of Arab American masculinities.

In this respect, Daniel Monterescu uses the very notion of “thirdspace” to talk about the Palestinian citizens of Israel (a particularly problematic group in terms of identity and national origin) in his article “Stranger Masculinities: Gender and Politics in a Palestinian-Israeli ‘Third Space.’” Even if Monterescu’s study is centered on the hybrid experience of Palestinian and Israeli Arabs, the notion of thirdspace that he advocates applies to diverse unsettlements or dislocations of Arab masculinity, namely neopatriarchy, as well as to Arab transnational masculinities, such as Arab American manhoods. Thus, it serves as a theorization for other diasporic enactments of masculinity, and in particular, for Arab men in the United States, who, just as Palestinians in Israel, must construct their identity in contrast to a set of vilifying views placed onto them. Monterescu talks about Arab masculinity and its relation to both Islamic masculinity and liberal-secular masculinity in the Arab world. Monterescu’s thesis is that “[b]etween the Islamic pious masculinity and the ‘modern’ liberal model, men practice a masculinity which defines itself as first and foremost Arab, as opposed to the two previous models” (142). According to him, Arab masculinity is an especially hybrid and contradictory type of masculinity, which returns to traditional patriarchal values while at the same time allows liberal practices that contradict those morals. Monterescu claims that, as a consequence of those ambivalences, Arab masculinity is a “situational masculinity,” which is a consequence of a mixture of discourses and so it is in a liminal position. He is thus placing what he calls “Arab masculinity” in a thirdspace of hybridity. He talks about Arab masculinity as a

location which lies between Islamic masculinity (characterized by its conservatism) and the liberal-secular masculinity that is also developing in the Arab world (characterized by tendencies toward modernity and Westernism). Arab masculinities, hence, are situated ambiguously between those other two masculinities, and so they inhabit a space of transition. The relevance of this theory lies in the fact that Monterescu's theorization of Arab masculinity fits in with the neopatriarchal values inherited by Arab men in the diaspora, which move in a thirdspace between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, this concept enables a theorization of Arab masculinities in the diaspora which goes hand in hand with current theories on Arab American masculinity, which also draw on hybridization and which are constructed on the tension between traditionalism and Westernism.¹³⁶

In fact, this Arab neopatriarchal, contradictory thirdspace is exacerbated once in the diaspora. When men of Arab origin migrate to the United States, they may resort to tradition as a means of making sense of their dislocated identity. The particular negotiation of Arab masculinities in America has been studied by anthropologist Whittaker Wigner Harpel. In his Master's Thesis *Conceptions of Masculinity Among Arab Americans* (2010), Harpel reviews the practices of masculinity enacted by men of Arab origin in the United States, particularly emphasizing the diasporic nature of their manhood. In his comparison between first and second generation immigrants, Harpel contends that there is a common resurgence of traditional notions of maleness in transnational settings. That is to

¹³⁶ Harpel; Barry; Elliott and Evans.

say, the neopatriarchal Arab values (with all their contradictions and ambivalences) are reinstated and enhanced in the United States. As Harpel argues, traditions tend to be restored in a transnational milieu, a fact which is particularly strict in the Arab diaspora from the Middle East and North Africa in relation to women, and to the issues of honor and shame. In other words, there is a strong attempt to preserve the respectability of the family. However, this reliance on traditionalism is full of contradictions, as the hybrid neopatriarchal masculinity immigrants bring to the United States is modified by North American Western culture as well. As Harpel puts it, “Arab-American men resolve their transnational experience by hybridizing masculinity. In essence, they are adapting traditional ideals to their new setting” (6). While, according to Harpel, both first- and second-generation male immigrants resort to traditionalism, in the second-generation there is a justification through choice, which contrasts with the first-generation who tends to follow tradition more uncritically as a way to cling to their countries of origin. As Harpel explains, “The second generation is using the idiom of personal choice and autonomy while simultaneously reproducing the values and traditions of their parents” (57). While immigrant parents (first-generation) take tradition for granted, second-generation individuals accept this inheritance and choose whether to follow it or not.

The return to traditionalism that may be experienced by both first- and second-generation males creates a reproduction of tradition that is not exactly the same as that of their place of origin, but that inhabits a thirdspace. As Harpel puts it, Arab American men “are blending the boundaries of masculinity while creating

a simulacrum of traditional Arab masculinity” (85). According to him, they do so as a result of the change in gender dynamics that transnationalism entails, that is, as a rejection of the change of Arab women’s behavior in the diaspora. As Harpel explains, “[i]n essence, my main argument is that the changing roles of women and women’s attitudes mean that Arab-American masculinity responds by appealing and returning to tradition in order to sustain patriarchy and men’s status and leadership” (5).¹³⁷

Arab men in the United States would thus seem to inherit, to a further or lesser extent, traditional understandings of life that follow patriarchal and neopatriarchal enactments of masculinity. In fact, Harpel defines Arab American masculinity as “being centered around self-sufficiency, decision-making and family” (2). He explains that decision-making, based on the use of rationality, marks a break between boyhood and manhood (34-35). Decision-making is related to being a leader (34-35), which is in itself a basic component of patriarchy. Being a leader implies also, according to Harpel, provisioning, providing and protecting (36). All these traits resemble the traditional masculinity previously examined in section 2.2. The difference between traditional Arab masculinity and Arab American masculinity resides in the fact that there is a tendency in the diaspora towards appealing to logic and reason to ensure male authority (36). In other words, masculinity and patriarchy in the diaspora tend to be less violent and more open to dialogue. However, there is still an influence from tradition. An important

¹³⁷ In the novels I will analyze in this dissertation, the main female characters that will cause changes in gender dynamics will be mainly daughters, who will find it difficult to conciliate their Arab American identities with their father's clinging to traditionalism in the diaspora.

trait anchored in traditionalism is the fact that Arab American men, according to Harpel, give preeminence to “having a wife” (76, 78, 85). In this respect, Nadine Naber also refers to the heteropatriarchy embedded in Arab American conceptions of masculinity, explaining that even young Arab American men see heterosexual marriage as an ideal to fulfill their manhoods (2012: 80). This heteronormative understanding of masculinity entails also a specific model of femininity which needs to ensure the continuation of the heterosexual family, of patriarchy, and, preeminently, of female sexual respectability (Naber 2012: 64, 79). In “Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity Among Arab American Adolescents,” Kristine J. Ajrouch summarizes this idea saying that “[g]endered behaviors are created and reinforced through such interactions, supporting heterosexual masculinity through the process of managing girls’ behavior” (386). Moreover, Declan Barry, Robert Elliot and E. Margaret Evans, in “Foreigners in a Strange Land: Self-Construal and Ethnic Identity in Male Arabic Immigrants,” point to other characteristics of Arab American male identity, such as “respect for male hierarchy within the family, ethnic pride, hospitality to foreigners, and speaking Arabic” (137), “respect of older male family members” (137), and “importance of their Arab identity in their everyday lives” (141), thus emphasizing the relevance of Arab traits to the construction of Arab American masculinity.

While these ideals can be traced back to the Arab world, Naber emphasizes the hybrid nature of Arab American manhood and also sees them as an attempt at complying with white middle-class ideals of decency and honorableness (92). As

Naber puts it, “[g]endered racism requires people of color to prove their acceptability by articulating who they are through white middle-class ideals of respectability” (92). As this scholar elaborates:

While Arab cultural authenticity serves to consolidate or solidify some sense of a distinct Arab identity, it simultaneously reifies white middle-class concepts of heteronormativity and marriage, incorporating US categories of respectability into this logic. (93)

There is, thus, a reinforcement of white and middle-class norms that actually correlate with traditional Arab ideals, so that there is an advancement of those same values. In other words, heteronormative conceptions of gender identity (with traditional marriage as its goal) are accepted and strengthened by both traditional Arab conceptions of manhood and white middle-class ideals of masculinity. Patriarchy is thus reinforced both by Arab and by American discourses of masculinity.¹³⁸

The issue of family is also developed further by Whittaker Wigner Harpel, who concludes his study emphasizing and explicating the thirdspace stance of Arab American masculinity between traditionalism and modernity, justifying the limits of modernity and the reinforcement of the heteropatriarchal family. As he puts it:

Arab-American masculinity, even though transnational and hybridized, continues to emphasize some of the dominating aspects of masculinity. Arab-Americans in general are not enforcing masculinity through punishment, discipline, or abuse, and are

¹³⁸ In this respect, it is relevant to consider the compliance towards these traditional conceptions of family in contemporary Arab American literature written by women, since there are virtually no deviations from heteronormativity in this post-9/11 literature. It is also important to note that no transgressive discourses deviating from heteronormativity were mentioned by male participants in Naber’s study in her book *Arab America. Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (2012), going hand in hand, thus, with the depiction of the Arab American community given by post-9/11 Arab American literature written by women.

generally more accepting of fluid boundaries and relations between the sexes. But these fluid boundaries and more open relationships only extend so far as they are still appealing to traditions and status divisions in order to maintain their status as men. (90-91)

Harpel contends, then, that Arab American masculinities mediate within a thirdspace between tradition and modernity. In this respect, the role of Arab American fathers is particularly relevant for this dissertation. According to Harpel, first generation immigrants learned their masculinity through their fathers (41), while second generation Arab American men learn it from their peers (from school, university, etc.), thus interiorizing alternative views and gaining more independence and autonomy (42, 46, 47).¹³⁹ Harpel also points to the tendency of fathers towards being more protective in the diaspora than in their countries of origin (73-74). As Harpel points out, “[Arab American men] continue to police their daughters and sisters” (92) more than their sons and brothers, so that there is a gender discrimination that persists.¹⁴⁰ As a consequence of this unequal view of gender, Arab American girls occupy a specific thirdspace, different from that of their male counterparts. Their identity building does not rely on the maintenance of power but on the negotiation of challenge. As Ajrouch puts it:

Arab American girls occupy a precarious position in that conforming to Arab cultural values constitutes a deviation from dominant cultural norms in the United States, yet conforming to dominant cultural norms likely challenges Arab cultural values. Arab American girls must negotiate between two worlds and two sets of cultural values that often seem incompatible. Restrictions on girls’ behavior represent a social practice whereby boundaries emerge to designate in-group membership. However, these social practices do not go unchallenged. The contested nature of these boundaries again suggests that girls are actively questioning the

¹³⁹ Krisine J. Ajrouch also points to the importance of peer pressure in constructing masculinities (385).

¹⁴⁰ We will see in chapter 4 how this issue is depicted in Arab American literature written by women.

gendered hierarchy. The adolescents' narratives illuminate where restrictions are identified, discussed and ultimately challenged, providing some context to the experience of growing up Arab American in an ethnic community. (388)

Usually constrained by traditional Arab masculinist and patriarchal values in the United States, Arab American girls have to mediate between their Arab family and their American setting, a predicament which is mirrored in Arab American women's literature, where female adolescence is often a core issue.

2.3.3. The Construction of an Arab American Identity: Ethno-Politics, Discrimination, and Social Construction in the Graphic Novel *Arab in America: A True Story of Growing Up in America*, by Toufic El Rassi

Standing on the beach
With a gun in my hand
Staring at the sea
Staring at the sand
Staring down the barrel
At the Arab on the ground
I can see his open mouth
But I hear no sound

I'm alive
I'm dead
I'm the stranger
Killing an Arab

(The Cure, "Killing an Arab," 1980)

The Cure's song "Killing an Arab" is one example of the stereotypical references to Arabness that Arab American children were in contact with in the 1980s.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ While the song was actually inspired by Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, it has been controversial due to its perceived promotion of violence against Arabs.

Toufic El Rassi refers to it in his graphic novel *Arab in America: A True Story of Growing Up in America* (2007). The novel depicts his confusion in making sense of his identity as an Arab man in the United States at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, thus exposing the state of anomie of Arab American masculinities in post-9/11 America. Exploring this identity uneasiness, El Rassi alludes to the stereotyping and profiling of Arab men examined in chapter 1 of this thesis, and the construction of an Arab American masculine identity referred to in chapter 2. In fact, the perspectives on the construction of Arab American identities that Gary C. David pointed out can be encountered, as we shall see, in *Arab in America*, and this makes it a representative example of an Arab American post-9/11 cultural production that explores the complex identity construction of Arab American masculinities.

This autobiographical graphic novel starts with the advent of 9/11, an event which places the author's self-identity conception in a space of anomie, a heterotopia of sorts in which El Rassi finds himself utterly confused in his identity struggle. Following the tendency of second-generation Arab Americans, he does not turn to his family in order to find models but to his friends (Naber 2012). In order to explain this feeling of estrangement, El Rassi compares his view of identity with that of other Arab friends: one of them rejects Muslim identity, while two of them embrace it as a sign of protest against discrimination and stereotyping. Not being religious himself, but not wanting to reject his origins, the author finds himself lost and devoid of models to follow. As he puts it, "I HAD NO IDEA WHO I WAS. AMERICAN? ARAB? I SPOKE ENGLISH

PERFECTLY AND GREW UP HERE IN THE MIDST OF THIS CULTURE BUT I DID NOT BELONG HERE AND I KNEW THAT” (75, emphasis in the original). He feels uprooted mainly because of the perception that others imprint onto him. Being racialized in American society because of his phenotype (skin color, and facial hair), El Rassi feels inadequate in the United States, a fact which denotes the heterotopic space that he inhabits. His identity is placed in a space of anomie after September 11, as he does not feel completely Arab and his Americanness is being questioned by biopolitical statements against monster-terrorists. As his sister ironically warns him via email at the very start of the novel, “Hey man you better shave...” (1), meaning that he will in all likelihood be discriminated against for being and looking stereotypically Arab after 9/11. After that, El Rassi emphasizes the difficulties in making sense of his identity: “THE STRUGGLE TO FIND AN IDENTITY AS ARAB OR MUSLIM OR MIDDLE EASTERN IS BOUND UP WITH THE NEED FOR ACCEPTANCE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY” (76, emphasis in the original). Indeed, his need for acceptance collides with his being stereotyped, as he is perceived as threatening because of his visually Arab physique. As he puts it, “throughout my life I have been constantly reminded how ‘scary’ I look to others. ... Who we are is in large part determined by how we are viewed by others and apparently, ‘scary’ or threatening is how most Americans see me” (76). His gender is very relevant here, since he is perceived as intimidating because of the preconceptions placed onto Arabo-Islamist masculinity in the United States as that of the abnormal terrorist.¹⁴²

¹⁴² The construction of the stereotype of the abnormal terrorist was examined in chapter 1 of this dissertation, in section 1.5.

The graphic novel is full of accounts of this stereotyping, from the sister's reaction after 9/11 (1), to his problems at school (5), stereotypical songs he hears when he is growing up in the 1980s (9-11), movies he watches (40-45), newspapers (20-21), and racial profiling of Arab friends (13-15). This discrimination in American society of Arabs in general, and Arab men in particular, unsettles his identity, at the same time as he is “rejected by more traditional Arabs for being too Americanized” (81). His identity is placed in a space of anomie, a heterotopia that he wishes to escape. In his case, sharing a common culture with his community (his family and some friends) is not enough to effectively construct his Arab American masculine identity. In other words, Gary C. David’s “social constructionist perspective” on the construction of Arab American identities, which places family and community at the basis of ethnic self-identification, does not serve El Rassi as a fruitful step towards a stable identity.¹⁴³ In fact, in the novel, the only solace that enables him to achieve a sense of identity is his resort to ethno-politics through the reading and study of radical literature. As he puts it:

I devoured radical literature and the concepts of rebellion and anti-imperialism really appealed to me. They filled a void in me, gave me an identity, and purpose. I now had a way of understanding the world and all the injustices that I so vehemently opposed. This way of thinking eventually overtook me and I declared myself a revolutionary. ... At last I found a cause, an identity. (89-90)

Therefore, David’s “structural perspective” is indeed a necessary tool for El Rassi to successfully build up an Arab American sense of self, and so he needs to find common political views with other revolutionaries in order to construct his

¹⁴³ David's perspectives on the construction of Arab American identities were explored in section 2.3.1.

identity in relation to an ethno-political endeavor. Interestingly, although El Rassi does not point to specific books when referring to his interest in radical literature, one can catch a glimpse of Jean Genet's *Prisoner of Love* in one of the illustrations. The autobiographical book recounts Genet's experiences in the Middle East and his relationships with Palestinian fighters and Black Panthers. In his article "On Jean Genet's Late Works," Edward Said explains that "an unstable personality perpetually at the border ... is the central experience of the book" (1995: 238). Provisionality is highlighted by Said in his critique of *Prisoner of Love*, which Said relates to Genet's "unceasing search for the freedom of the negative identity that reduces all language to empty posturing, all action to the theatrics of a society he abhors" (1995: 234). Said, in fact, is alluding to a heterotopic space made up of discourses which question the very identity of its inhabitants. Therefore, what one may infer from El Rassi's reading of Genet is his understanding of a necessity to accept the liminality of his own identity. Ethno-politics, and an acceptance of a poststructuralist sense of a fragmented, contradictory and heterotopic identity, give El Rassi a sense of self. Embracing the ethno-politics associated with an identity that is "perpetually at the border" helps him construct a stable (albeit provisional) self-image as an Arab American man, a thirdspace identity. In other words, the discrimination suffered as an Arab male in the United States (especially after September 11) unsettled his identity as a man socialized into American culture but with a markedly Arab phenotype, and therefore racialized by American society. Reading radical literature in general, and Genet in particular, make the heterotopia that he lives in an inhabitable space, and

allow him to come to terms with his contradictory identity.

El Rassi's novel, thus, portrays the heterotopia inhabited by Arab American men in their identitary construction, and proposes ethno-politics as a way to construct an in-between identity. Arab American masculinities do in fact exist in a perceived contradiction in terms, due to the historical antagonism between the United States and the Arab world. As a consequence of this instability and precarious identitary position, some men may return to traditionalism, while others may construct more egalitarian manhoods, thus enabling "masculine innovations," as theorized by Daniel Coleman (161). They may also choose to turn to ethno-politics in order to make sense of their own masculine identities, as is the case of El Rassi. The relationships between men and women in the diaspora are one of the main triggers of change in Arab American masculinities, their consequence being an attempt to preserve traditional gender hierarchies, or a change towards equality in those very same gender understandings. In this respect, the work of Arab American women and feminism is particularly relevant. In the case of literature, contemporary Arab American women writers, informed by feminism, portray both cases of men that return to traditionalism and men that change. However, before examining these depictions in detail, it will be necessary to analyze the influence of feminism on Arab American women writers, as their views on gender relations inevitably inform, as we shall see, the manners in which they represent men.

Chapter 3

Arab American Feminisms and Arab American Women Writers

[F]eminism—a social movement of and for *women*—discovered the nonbeing of *woman*: the paradox of a being that is at once captive and absent in discourse, constantly spoken of but of itself inaudible or inexpressible, invisible yet constituted as the object and the guarantee of vision; a being whose existence and specificity are simultaneously asserted and denied, negated and controlled ... a feminist theory must start from and centrally engage that very paradox.

(Teresa De Lauretis 115)

In her article “Eccentric Subjects,” Teresa De Lauretis explains that feminism is based on the antithetical notion of women as both invisible and hypervisible, perceived as objects of the male gaze rather than vocal subjects. Arab American women are at a particularly conflicting position regarding this paradox. Previously invisible, they have come to the forefront in the imaginary of post-9/11 America, being viewed as victims of Arab patriarchy and sexism, while at the same time being concealed in discourses against Arab and Muslim discrimination in the

United States.¹⁴⁴ Arab American women writers have been contesting these victimizing and/or invisibilizing discourses by forwarding their feminist concerns in their writings.¹⁴⁵ In fact, Arab American women have been published more than men in the last decades (especially after 9/11), and it has been argued that a voice has been given to them as perceived victims of Arab/Muslim patriarchy (Elia 2006: 158). Thus, Arab American women have been given a space to articulate their feminist and anti-discrimination concerns in post-9/11 America. At the same time, Arab American feminisms have had a substantial impact on the works of Arab American women writers. In order to understand this influence, I shall start by providing an account of Arab American feminisms, with a postcolonial conceptualization that will situate this dissertation and Arab American women writers within a specific space of feminist contestation. I will argue that understanding feminisms as a “genealogy” (Stone 152) enables the creation of bridges that span the concerns of transnational feminisms. Furthermore, I shall trace the origins and development of Arab American feminisms as transnational feminisms, and specify their relation to Arab American women writers, with a particular focus on post-9/11 developments. The chapter will finish by

¹⁴⁴ For example, the Arab American Institute has focused on anti-discrimination practices, but has not dealt with women's issues. Their main concerns revolve around electoral voices and policies. As their website states: “AAI was created to nurture and encourage the direct participation of Arab Americans in political and civic life in the United States. ... AAI represents the policy and community interests of Arab Americans throughout the United States and strives to promote Arab American participation in the U.S. electoral system. The Institute focuses on two areas: campaigns and elections and policy formation and research. AAI strives to serve as a central resource to government officials, the media, political leaders and community groups on a variety of public policy issues that concern Arab Americans and U.S.–Arab relations” (<<http://www.aaiusa.org/pages/about-institute/>>. Accessed: 28 February 2007).

¹⁴⁵ With the beginning of Arab American feminism in the 1980s, and with anthologies such as Joanna Kadi's *Food for Our Grandmothers* (1994), Arab American feminists gained force through activism and writing at the turn of the century, and have continued their endeavors in the 21st century. This history will be traced later on in this chapter.

exemplifying the work of Arab American feminisms with the poetry of the Syrian-American woman writer Mohja Kahf, who offers a paradigmatic indictment against both sexism and racism.

3.1. Feminism as a Genealogy: Creating Alliances among Transnational Feminisms

Contemporary feminisms stem from a convergence of poststructuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial understandings of gender identity. Identity is thus acknowledged as a self-defining discourse resultant from narratives that circulate in a specific time and place and are incorporated to a further or lesser extent into one's own conception of self. The 21st-century feminism that is my object of study has been influenced by the works of feminists traditionally placed within second- and third-wave feminisms.¹⁴⁶ In fact, the understanding of feminism that this chapter will follow is one that is very close to the so-called third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism started in the 1990s stemming from a poststructuralist and postmodern theoretical milieu which rejects both grand narratives and essentialism. Although this dissertation follows an understanding of feminism informed by poststructuralism and postmodernism, there is also a refusal to adhere to any particular wave. One of the first reasons for this lack of affiliation is that, adhering to one wave entails a narrowing definition which puts aside the complexities and nuances of any particular feminism. In other words, constricting the definition within a closed set of parameters may be deemed unrealistic due to the complexities of postmodern feminisms in general and Arab American

¹⁴⁶ In this chapter, I am going to allude to second- and third-wave feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and bell hooks; and Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, respectively.

feminisms in particular. Other reasons go against the use of the term third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminism claims to be inclusive and diverse but, in defining itself in contrast to second-wave feminism, dismisses second-wave feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Audre Lorde (Snyder 180). Furthermore, third-wave feminism has been criticized as politically unsound because of its perceived victimization of women. As Alison Stone puts it, “The central problem of third wave feminist theory, then, is that it risks undermining feminism both as a political practice and as a critique of existing society premised on the ontological claim that women constitute a (disadvantaged) social group” (Stone 2007: 16). In the specific case of Arab American women, traditionally perceived as victims of Arab patriarchy, it is particularly necessary to operate from a vantage point of power, so that a feminism that is based on victimization may be ineffective. In addition, third-wave feminism appeared as a construct created by white feminists, which may therefore hinder the power that transnational feminisms may have (Springer 1095). Thus, while third-wave feminism takes on a poststructuralist and postmodern conception of identity, it may be better not to adhere this dissertation to any particular wave. Rather, while indeed drawing on the work of both second- and third-wave feminists, I will be considering the feminism professed by this dissertation and that of Arab American women writers as based on a postmodern understanding of gender identity which is resultant from the interpellation of discourses, and which originates in the notions of inclusiveness and fluidity, discourses that were developed in the feminist milieu by second *and* third-wave

feminists.¹⁴⁷ Hence, this dissertation shall be grounded in a conception of feminism that is both poststructuralist and postmodern, and both postcolonial and transnational in nature. I shall argue, then, that a more fruitful conceptualization of (Arab American) feminisms will be that of (transnational) genealogies (Stone 2004: 152).

However, while questioning the notion of waves, there is still a need to talk about feminism and analyze the works of Arab American women writers from a feminist perspective. Postfeminism, then, does not serve the purposes of this study. In the same way that the notion of a post-racial society was rejected in chapter 2, I do not believe that full gender equality exists yet and, therefore, I conceive feminism as a political tool that is still needed in the road towards egalitarianism. In other words, since equality has not yet been reached in gender issues (neither within the Arab American community nor globally), I deem the use of the term postfeminism a future prospect but not yet a reality. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan support this idea in the introduction to their book *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*:

[W]e are not arguing that this is an era of postfeminism. We believe that many white, bourgeois feminists have announced a postfeminist era precisely because their particular definitions of feminism (which often require universalization) have not been able to withstand critiques from women of color as well as the deconstructions of poststructuralist or postmodern theory. (20)

Because of its currently unrealistic implications, postfeminism is not yet a tangible fact. Feminism is still a necessary endeavor in our fight towards gender equality.

¹⁴⁷ I will refer, later in the present chapter, to the notions of inclusiveness and fluidity in relation to Gloria Anzaldúa's work.

Hence, this is a feminist dissertation that analyzes the representation of men from a feminist perspective, in the particular transnational experience of Arabs in the United States. Moving away from the notions of waves and postfeminism, then, I defend an understanding of feminism that follows the notion of “genealogies” (Stone 2004: 152). Conceiving feminisms as genealogies allows for a politicization for a common purpose at the same time as essentialisms are avoided.

As Alison Stone puts it:

This rethinking of women and femininity as having a genealogy opens up the possibility of an anti-essentialism that supports, rather than paralyzes, feminist politics. To the extent that women remain a social group (united in their participation in a single history), they can mobilize together in pursuit of distinctive concerns. (2004: 151-152)

Tracing the origins of the notion of genealogy from Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and finding its use related to feminism in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), Stone explains that the concept of genealogy enables an alliance not based on shared experiences or on victimization, but on the existence of a social group that can engage in joint political activism for a common aim. Moreover, Stone explains that the concept of feminine identity comes from the inheritance of discourses of femininity. Women have been historically socialized as women, and their affiliation (to a further or lesser extent) with these discourses on femininity has made them identify themselves as women. In other words, women understand their identity as related to femininity because they are “taking up existing interpretations and concepts of femininity” (Stone 2004: 149). Women's learning of gender discursive distinctions has constructed their identity as women and, potentially, as feminists (Stone 2004: 137). All

personal identifications as women shall come from the understanding that there were previous women, previous models, that one can identify with. This does not mean that women uncritically inherit all these discourses, but on the contrary, their conception of femininity often exists in harmony and/or in contrast to discourses of femininity. It is, nevertheless, in relation to these inherited discourses of femininity that women can unite in their fight for gender equality. Once these shared discourses interpellate different women's identities, women can consider themselves part of a group, what has been considered a social group (Stone 2004: 146), since they have been socialized as members of one same (feminine) imagined community.¹⁴⁸ Uniting with common objectives in mind, women create alliances in their politicization and, thus, become feminists. Women, therefore, form genealogies which work through the establishment of alliances that feminists create with one another.¹⁴⁹ Feminist politics are, therefore, inherently coalitional (Stone 2004: 137, 153). As Alison Stone elaborates:

Coalitions may be said to arise when different women, or sets of women, decide to act together to achieve some determinate objective, while yet acknowledging the irreducible differences between them and the often highly divergent concerns that motivate them to pursue this objective. (2004: 152)

Genealogies are thus formed in feminist milieus as places of alliance between women with common objectives despite their potential differences. This conception of feminism as a genealogy opens up the possibility for affiliations that

¹⁴⁸ The concept of imagined community is taken from Benedict Anderson. Moreover, I believe that his notion of "horizontal comradeship" is also applicable to the conception of feminisms as a genealogy, following an understanding of genealogies as imagined communities based on affiliations, coalitions, or horizontal comradeships.

¹⁴⁹ Here, I am indebted to Caren Kaplan for the concepts of coalition and affiliation. As she wrote referring to a politics of location, "A transnational feminist politics of location in the best sense of these terms refers us to the model of coalition or, to borrow a term from Edward Said, to affiliation"(139).

expand beyond political borders. Therefore, considering feminisms as genealogies allows for a conceptualization of transnational feminisms that may be very fruitful as far as this dissertation is concerned. Chandra Talpade Mohanty agrees on the relevance of the concept of genealogy to a transnational conception of feminism.

As she puts it:

one of the most crucial challenges for a critical multicultural feminism is working out how to engage in ethical and caring dialogues (and revolutionary struggles) across the divisions, conflicts, and individualist identity formations that interweave feminist communities in the United States. Defining genealogies is one crucial element in creating such a dialogue. (Mohanty 2003: 125)

In a similar vein, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, in their book *Scattered Hegemonies. Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, call for the need “to formulate a transnational set of solidarities” (19) amongst feminists globally. This dissertation will take on this task by expounding on the transnational solidarities established by Arab American women, specifically in relation to their depiction of Arab men. Indeed, it shall take on the notion of Arab American feminisms as genealogies within ethnic-American feminisms, as imagined communities that share a common objective, and examine the influence of these coalitions in the portrayals of Arab men offered by Arab American women writers after September 11, 2001.

3.2. Women of Color Feminisms: The Political Force of Writing Between Borders

The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities.

(Mohanty 2003: 46)

As Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out in the above quote, following the notion of genealogy, women can be regarded as an imagined community, allied because of their common aims against classism, sexism and racism. In fact, the use of the term women of color is in itself political. Women of color can be considered sociopolitical groups, as they constitute a political entity in their attempt to forward equality. As Mohanty puts it in the introduction to her book *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*:

A number of scholars in the U.S. have written about the inherently *political* definition of the term *women of color* (a term often used interchangeably with *third world women*, as I am doing here). This is a term which designates a political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African,

Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the U.S. It also refers to “new immigrants” to the U.S. in the last decade—Arab, Korean, Thai, Laotian, etc. What seems to constitute “women of color” or “third world women” as a viable oppositional alliance is a *common context of struggle* rather than color or racial identifications. Similarly, it is third world women's oppositional *political* relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality. (1991: 7, emphasis in the original text)

Women of color thus form genealogies in their struggles for gender equality. Women's joint effort for gender equity politicizes the imagined community that women of color constitute, and therefore ensures their power towards the affirmation of their rights. This dissertation precisely stems from this endeavor, exploring a space of affirmation and resistance resulting from the alliance to these women of color's imagined communities, or as Mohanty also puts it, “communities of resistance” (2003: 47).

These imagined communities function through what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call “a transnational set of solidarities” (19). In her chapter appropriately entitled “The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Practice,” Kaplan goes on with the idea that women should write taking into consideration their politics of location. As she puts it, “As a practice of affiliation, a politics of location identifies the grounds for historically specific differences and similarities between women in diverse and asymmetrical relations, creating alternative histories, identities, and possibilities for alliances” (139). A women-of-color feminism would be, in this respect, a kind of feminism that takes its politics of location as a starting point to create coalitions for a common antisexist and antiracist struggle. In other words, the concept of genealogies can be taken to encompass all feminist struggle, at the same time as it can be considered

specifically for particularly located issues. In the upcoming sections, stemming from a broader conception of transnational feminist genealogies, I shall narrow my viewpoint and focus on the specifically located genealogy or imagined community of Arab American feminisms.

Taking the concept of “women of color” as a genealogy of women who affirm gender equality, the eccentric spaces inhabited by third-world women are to be seen as positive sites of resistance.¹⁵⁰ Being subaltern or constructing one’s identity either in the margins or transnationally between borders/nations can be a fruitful place from which to be politically active. As Kaplan puts it, “In identifying marginal space as both a site of repression and resistance, location becomes historicized and theoretically viable—a space of future possibilities as well as the nuanced articulation of the past” (144). Similarly, bell hooks considers marginality as “a site of transformation where liberatory black subjectivity can fully emerge,” and a “site of radical possibility, a space of resistance,” an “inclusive space” (22, 149, 152). She contends that “[i]t offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (150). That is to say, locating oneself in the margins opens up a space of affirmation that may result in political action. Inderpal Grewal expounds on the idea that eccentric transnational minorities, even with unsettled diasporic identities, are in a privileged place to establish coalitions. As Grewal puts it:

for those termed minorities, it is not the resolution of identity that is necessary for political action, but oppositional mobilization and

¹⁵⁰ Here I am taking on the notion of “eccentric subjects” from Teresa De Lauretis (1990: 145). I am also using the terms “women of color” and “third-world women” as synonyms, as Mohanty argues (1991: 7).

coalitional, transnational, feminist practices. For, after all, many immigrants or diasporic subjects, even those multiply located or with multiple voices, are not automatically oppositional; it is the consciousness of the linkages between the specific and multiple hegemonies under which these minorities live that makes them so. (251)

Being in the margins and, thus, having to negotiate their identity among hegemonic discourses that question those identities is what politicizes subaltern beings. In other words, it is in their self-identification as a genealogy, as resulting from inherited struggles for gender equality, that feminist political resistance flourishes. Hence, third-world feminists become politicized due to women of color's identity negotiations and their relations/tensions towards hegemonies.

The linkages that may be established between women of color in their common fight against classism, sexism and racism stem from their in-between identities, that is, a displaced (often diasporic and/or eminently postcolonial) sense of identity, which aids in the formation of imagined communities of feminist alliance. In this respect, Gloria Anzaldúa's seminal conception of the *mestiza* proves particularly relevant.¹⁵¹ For Anzaldúa, a *mestiza* is anyone who lives between two or more cultures, as is the case of Chicanos, who are her focus of study. My contention is that her conception of *mestiza* is applicable to other diasporic identities and would thus be appropriate for women of color in general, and Arab Americans in particular. Anzaldúa explains that a diasporic or in-between identity implies a different kind of consciousness. As she puts it, “[f]rom this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an ‘alien’

¹⁵¹ Anzaldúa develops her notion of *mestiza* in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (1987: 77). The notion of *mestiza* thus stems from the margins, from the oppressed, and that allows the breaking of binary opposites, the inclusiveness of ideas, and the possibility of creativity. As Anzaldúa explains:

[The *mestiza*] has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. ... Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. (1987: 79)

That is to say, by locating oneself in the margins (or in the borderlands, as Anzaldúa would put it), one is able to have a wider vision of the world that allows more creativity and, thus, more tools to challenge the establishment and to inflict change. This can be said to happen because of the existence of what Anzaldúa calls *la facultad* (the faculty).¹⁵² For her, “*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (1987: 38). She also explains that “Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. ... It is a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly

¹⁵² W.E.B. Du Bois’s concept of “double consciousness,” developed in “The Souls of Black Folk,” is a very similar notion to Anzaldúa’s *facultad*. I have chosen to focus on Anzaldúa due to her woman of color feminist endeavor.

cultivate” (1987: 38). Marginality has been seen by Anzaldúa as a condition that allows a deeper understanding of life and so becomes a good place from which to create alternatives. It may be that the suffering of discrimination enhances creativity, trying to find ways to overcome its effects by politicizing oneself. Anzaldúa herself developed this idea in the new concept that she coined in 2002, the notion of “*nepantla*.” In her article in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions of Transformation*, Anzaldúa defines the concept as a liminal site of transformation. The word “*nepantla*” means “in-between space” in Nahuatl, and thus is a further development of her conception of borderlands. In fact, Anzaldúa coined it as a way to broaden the idea of *mestiza*, which she found had been limited in common usage since her publication of *Borderlands*. As AnaLouise Keating explains, “Nepantleras use their views from these cracks-between-worlds to invent holistic, relational theories and tactics enabling them to reconceive or in other ways transform the various worlds in which they exist” (9). Therefore, *nepantleras* use their in-betweenness, which is not exempt from pain, vulnerability or isolation, as a potential site of positive transformation.

The writings of Arab American feminists stem from similar sites of in-betweenness resulting from the experiences of *mestizas* or *nepantleras*, as Anzaldúa would put it, thus constituting a form of affirmation of rights and resistance to gender and racial hegemony. We could indeed refer here to the Arabic term *mahjar*, which describes Arab emigrants, to allude to this space between cultures that Arab Americans occupy. Therefore, I will argue that Arab American feminists might as well be called *mahjar* feminists, in reference to their

similarities to *mestizas*, *nepantleras*, or, in effect, all women of color feminists.

As demonstrated precisely in Anzaldúa's feminist anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back*, women of color feminism has developed in close relationship to writing. In fact, political activism within women of color feminist communities has developed in great part in the forms of essays, autobiographies, poetry, as well as fiction. Writing often helps empower feminism. The act of writing itself can be useful when politicizing thought. As Mohanty puts it:

the very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself. ... Writing (discursive production) is one site for the production of this knowledge and this consciousness. (2003: 78)

Being indeed a production of discourses, writing enables a wording of political action, as well as an analysis of the interpellations that have culminated in that text. Furthermore, its importance not only lies in the circumstances of writing itself, but in the way these resulting texts are read, perceived, and used politically.

As Mohanty expresses it:

[T]he existence of Third World women's narratives in itself is not evidence of decentering hegemonic histories and subjectivities. It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally that is of paramount importance. After all, the point is not just to record one's history of struggle, or consciousness, but how they are recorded; the way we read, receive, and disseminate such imaginative records is immensely significant. (2003: 77-78)

From the firm belief that writing itself and the perception and interpretation of this writing are powerful tools for feminism's political advancement, I shall take on this understanding of writing practices, and shall read and interpret women of color feminist writings (in particular, those of post-9/11 Arab American women

fiction writers) from a feminist perspective. Moreover, I will do so by examining in detail the representations of Arab men in these writings. In order to evaluate the impact of feminism and of September 11 on post-9/11 writings, I believe it is crucial to consider the portrayals of men. Indeed, this study starts off from the assumption that exploring the way men are depicted will elucidate the political struggles of contemporary Arab American women. As bell hooks insists, “Attention to the politics of representation has been crucial for colonized groups globally in the struggle for self-determination. The political power of representations cannot be ignored” (72).

3.3. Arab American Feminisms: The Construction of Arab Women of Color Feminist Genealogies in the United States

3.3.1. Arab Feminist Trends in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Superman is an *Arab*. The same split personality. The same pretentious 'I can save the day' attitude. The same macho manners. The same 'I am Good and the rest are Evil' stance. The same 'I am indestructible' delusion.

(Haddad 2012: 14)

In her book *Superman Is An Arab. On God, Marriage, Macho Men and Other Disastrous Inventions*, Lebanese writer Joumana Haddad expands on the hypermasculine ideals that Arab men try to conform to, through a simile between them and the figure of superman. She takes a powerful feminist stance through a humorous critique of patriarchy in her examination of Arab masculinities, while she focuses on negative attributes of Middle Eastern manhoods. Haddad is a powerful example of Arab feminists who are currently striving for gender equality in the Arab world, although her work actually stems from a century-old struggle.¹⁵³ While a profound analysis of Arab feminism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this section aims to acknowledge the relevance of Arab feminists' history to Arab American feminisms, and provide a brief enumeration of current

¹⁵³ Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke acknowledge this century-old history in their edited volume *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (1990).

trends in Arab feminism that may be influencing the American diaspora.

Arab feminism started at the beginning of the 20th century, as Leila Ahmed traces in her book *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992). Ahmed understands the diversity of the Arab world and the fact that each Arab country's development of feminism is different. However, she takes Egypt as an example, which she considers “the mirror or precursor of developments in the Middle East” (175). Therefore, she focuses on Egyptian society when she explains women's increased education in the first decades of the 20th century and the decline in their use of the veil. Ahmed goes on to assert that at the time “women's literary, intellectual and social life began a period of enormous vitality, during which varieties of feminist activism emerged” (172). With the creation of several women's journals and associations, and even political organizations, “[t]he founding feminist discourses emerged” (174). These discourses developed, according to Ahmed, into two main subdiscourses: the dominant was Westernized and secularized, while the alternative was an Islamic feminist discourse. However, later in the 20th century, and especially after the 1967 Arab Israeli war, Islamic feminism gained force. Because of the Islamic reawakening of the 1970s in the Arab world, some Arab women also decided to focus on Islamic issues, mostly re-reading the Qur'an. As Fadwa El Guindi puts it, “These women, in their knowledge and adherence to Islamic principles, released men from the role of authority over them in Islamic matters” (160). The interpretations of the Qur'an purported by Islamic feminists were thus intended to advance gender equality among Muslims.

Other recent volumes explore current developments in Arab feminism. In *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (2011),¹⁵⁴ Zakia Salime, for instance, examines feminist and Islamist women's movements in Morocco starting in the 1990s, focusing on their common concern with patriarchy. Moreover, the work of Nawal El-Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi must also be acknowledged here, as they have been central in advancing the studies on Arab women. El-Saadawi's activist and literary work on female mutilation (*The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* [1980]) and Mernissi's studies on gender relations in Islam (*Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* [1987]) have transformed them into paramount figures in the Arab feminist movements.

Recently, some Arab feminists have also tried to counter the pervasive victimization of Arab women by the West, insisting that there is a need to empower Arab women. Suha Sabbagh, for example, argues in the introduction to her volume *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint* (2003) that “[t]he stereotypes of Arab women will have disappeared on the day that the titles and the text of articles about Arab women stress their strength, their resistance, and the commonality of their experience with women in the West” (xxi). Therefore, a coalition among women is also deemed necessary in current Arab feminist thought.

The plurality of Arab feminisms thus needs to be acknowledged, since their discourses, mostly focused on the fight against sexism and patriarchy, have

¹⁵⁴ I am indebted to Gretchen Head (2013: 287-289), for introducing me to Zakia Salime's *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (2011).

undoubtedly influenced Arab American feminisms. While this section has just briefly introduced the history of current trends within Arab feminisms, it is intended to forward the idea that Arab American feminisms do not stem from a vacuum. Apart from being influenced by women of color feminisms in the United States, Arab American feminisms are indeed diasporic or transnational developments of Arab feminisms.

3.3.2. Arab American Feminisms: Mapping their Origins and Development

We imagine a radical feminist politics that insists on the simultaneity of racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, and self-determination for colonized women, men, queer, and transgender people 'over here' and 'over there.' This transnational feminist vision inspires us to imagine a world without oppression and think about alternatives to exclusionary heteromasculinist and xenophobic politics.

(Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany and Nadine Naber 2011: xxxv)

Arab American feminisms may be seen as transnational forms of struggle aiming at all-encompassing justice, with special insistence on gender justice and specific concern for the Arab diaspora in the United States. Arab American women have long been creating spaces of contestation and resistance, which started in organized and institutionalized ways in the 1980s, as a result of their need to voice

their concerns against anti-Arab discrimination and against the workings of patriarchy and neopatriarchy within Arab communities in the United States. Arab American feminisms actually began when, in 1983, the Feminist Arab-American Network (FAN) was created with the aim of establishing transnational links between Arab women in the United States and in the Arab world, and at the same time addressing the specific stereotyping of Arabs in America.¹⁵⁵ FAN's founder, Carol Haddad, explains the creation of the network as follows:

Our statement of purpose discussed the need for us to increase public awareness of issues affecting our lives, to work toward eliminating negative stereotypes of Arabs, to work in coalition with women in Arab countries, and to support each other. Part of the statement read:

There is a critical need for Arab-American feminists to be visible in the feminist community. The U.S. feminist movement exists within, and has systematically suppressed information, news and research about the Arab world and Arab-American culture from an Arab perspective. The result is the portrayal of Arabs in negatively stereotypical ways, without regard for the wide range of cultures, religions, class and political affiliations in the twenty-one Arab states. (221)

FAN appeared as a reaction to the negative response received by Arab American women when they asked the National Women's Studies Association to condemn the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, to which the United States had given support.¹⁵⁶ This fact made Arab American women realize that they were being dismissed by the feminist establishment, becoming painfully aware of the racism pervasive in mainstream feminism. Therefore, they saw the need to set up a

¹⁵⁵ Evelyn Shakir explains that it was Carol Haddad who founded the network, and "recruited about 100 women from across the country, about a third of them immigrants, the rest born in the United States" (1997: 105).

¹⁵⁶ The National Women's Studies Association is a nation-wide American feminist group founded in 1977, based on "promoting and supporting the production and dissemination of knowledge about women and gender through teaching, learning, research and service in academic and other settings" (<www.nwsa.org>. Accessed: 18 April 2014).

separate feminism that would tackle both ethnic and women's issues. The Feminist Arab-American Network thus became, as Mervat F. Hatem puts it,

a loosely organized group of Arab American academics and activists who were committed to increase public awareness of issues affecting Arab American feminists, to eliminate negative stereotypes of Arabs particularly within the American feminist community and to work in a coalition with our sisters in Arab countries and to share resources and support among ourselves. (1998: 370-1)

Moreover, according to Evelyn Shakir, FAN made different Arab American women knowledgeable about each other's feminist concerns, at the same time as it visibilized Arab American feminists within American feminist communities (1997: 105). As a consequence of the creation of FAN, other Arab American feminist organizations started working towards equality and justice, like The Union of Palestinian Women's Association in North America, The Institute for Arab Women's Studies, and the Association for Middle East Women's Studies.¹⁵⁷

It was, thus, in the 1990s that Arab American feminism fully developed. In fact, it was in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War¹⁵⁸ that Arab American feminism gained force. As will be recalled, the Persian Gulf War took place from August 2, 1990 to March 1, 1991, and consisted of an armed conflict between Iraq and a coalition of countries from the United Nations, led by the United States, who tried to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. A side effect of the war was to highlight the ambivalence towards the Arab American community in the United States. In other words, the anti-Iraqi political discourse became an anti-Arab

¹⁵⁷ Carol Haddad mentions these organizations in her article "In Search of Home" (218-223).

¹⁵⁸ While one must bear in mind that this war has often been called, from an American perspective, First Gulf war, as pointed out in chapter 1, here I use another common name given to it, Persian Gulf War, in order to distinguish it from the First Gulf War, also known as the Anglo-Iraqi War, which took place in 1941, when the United Kingdom occupied Iraq during the Second World War.

discourse in the States, even though the War was made in alliance with Arab states such as Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. As Hatem explains, “These views indicated a deeply held belief that being both Arab and American was an oxymoron to the mainstream: one negated the other” (1998: 373). Reports on the War tended to vilify Arab culture, and that led to the reproduction of stereotypes: Arabs were represented as homogeneously Muslim, anti-American, and terrorists. The Persian Gulf War, then, put to the fore the difficult relations between Arab Americans and mainstream America, and made this community which in the past had tried to assimilate and pass as white, become knowledgeable about its links with other minority groups. At the same time, Arab American women, who had started to become aware of their specific needs in ethnic and gender terms back in the early 1980s, began to acknowledge “the reciprocal effects of the devaluation of women and the racist denigration of Arab culture” (Hatem 1998: 369). On the one hand, after the war Arab American women saw the need to fight against the pervasive anti-Arab discourses that the war had exacerbated. On the other hand, the War reinforced traditional gender roles within the United States and within its Arab communities. According to Hatem, “[w]hile the war highlighted the conflict of interest between the majority (Anglo) patriarchs and their Arab American counterparts, cultural nationalism reinforced the patriarchal control that both maintained of their community agendas” (1998: 381). During and after the War, the main problem that was highlighted by Arab American institutions and organizations, then, was racism, so that sexism was silenced and women were made invisible. The insistence on striving against discrimination tended to erase

women from the Arab American endeavor towards justice. Moreover, Hatem argues that Arab American men would not do anything to give a voice to Arab American women, since they would focus on racism as a means to preserve their (gender) privilege within their community. As she puts it:

Despite their difference, Arab American men felt at home in both [cultures]. The threat to this doubly privileged masculine existence came from the devaluation of one by the other. The goal was to eliminate the sources of misunderstanding and tension to preserve the privileged masculine gaze that these windows offered. (1998: 378)

Be it a conscious or unconscious issue, Arab American women thus felt invisibilized after the Persian Gulf War, and that gave them the necessary strength to organize in their attempt to promote gender justice and to allow their voices to be heard. That is, the War made the racism towards Arabs in the United States clear, but it also did the same for the sexism prevalent within Arab American communities, ultimately leading to a reassertion of Arab American feminism.

These women fought for gender equality, but not as one single unit. On the contrary, in the 1990s, diverse Arab American discourses developed within Arab American women's communities. According to Mervat F. Hatem, in her article "The Invisible American Half, Hybridity and Arab American Feminist Consciousness in the 1990s," three main Arab American feminist discourses appeared and developed in that decade. Although she explains them, she does not give them a clear name, so for the sake of clarity, I have designated the three as nationalist, liberal, and women of color feminisms respectively. While I consider these discourses not to be separate entities, but rather just tendencies in Arab American feminist thought, and I believe that these discourses are intertwined with

each other in Arab American feminist circles, it is useful to explain them and label them separately in order to elucidate the different ideas that were circulating in the 1990s in Arab American feminist communities.

I call the first discourse discussed by Hatem “Arab American nationalist feminism,” because this Arab American feminist narrative takes an American nationalist perspective to define Arab American identity. In other words, assimilation in the society of the United States is seen by these feminists as the best way to fight Arab sexism, since what they see as negative in Arab culture is the same that mainstream American culture sees, namely, patriarchy and neopatriarchy. This kind of feminism, according to Hatem the first to appear in the Arab American community, mirrored American traditional feminism, having its same aims. This could be considered, then, what has also been called “colonial feminism.” Leila Ahmed (1992) explains that “colonial feminism” arose in Victorian times, when the male establishment used the language of feminism (that was starting to appear at the time) for the service of colonialism, that is, as a means of portraying other cultures as inferior. This was very much the case in Arab countries, where “colonial feminism” highlighted and justified the image of the oppression of women. As Ahmed puts it:

The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples. (1992: 151)

“Colonial feminism” thus used the words of feminism for the purpose of male domination. It could be argued that “Arab American nationalist feminism” follows

the same premises as “colonial feminism” and, therefore, does not advocate the improvement of the situation of women within both Arab and American cultures. It takes into account only Western ideas and so undermines the Arab part of Arab American identities. It is an assimilatory feminist endeavor. Thus, in a way, it mirrors those first Arab American immigrants who tried to pass as white in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Another type of Arab American feminism that Hatem takes into consideration is what I call “Arab American liberal feminism,” since this feminist discourse argues that equality for women can be achieved through social reform. However, at the same time, it addresses politics in individualistic terms and does not believe in the possibility of a revolutionary change for Arab American women as a group. This discourse purports that it is “individual choices [that] can transcend problematic categories and realities” (Hatem 1998: 384). This kind of feminism also advocates the deconstruction of the notion of race: it considers the notion of race no longer viable and tries to provide a contestation of sexism in the Arab American context while obliterating racism. This discourse believes that identifying as women of color entails a perpetuation of racial thinking and politics, as it takes the notions of “white women” and “women of color” as social constructs, and brands them as inherently racist. Moreover, it often tries to celebrate heritage without taking race into account. Therefore, this type of feminists do not align themselves with women of color but try to celebrate the Arab American heritage without participating in racial classification. To my mind, this kind of feminism stems from an extremely postmodern and postcolonial view

of identity and feminism, as it believes in the existence of a post-racial space where individual choices can enact change. While it is true that communities are made up of individual choices, it is also my contention that an all-encompassing racial and gender justice does not exist yet, and thus there is a need to work as a community or communities, that is, to work together as a group in order to achieve political power to forward Arab American women's concerns. Hatem also critiques this kind of feminism, and she terms it as naïve. She states that “[t]he idea of individuals freely writing their lives without reference to the social relations of power that shape their experience is at best naïve and at worst a defense of the hegemonic liberal ideology and its strategy of domination” (1998: 384). I agree with Hatem in this respect, believing that in the current 21st-century context, political power necessitates from community power to conduct change, and therefore individualism alone does not serve as a political enactor of change.

The third discourse that Hatem explains in her account of the development of Arab American feminisms in the 1990s is what I call “Arab American women of color feminism.” This feminism stems from a “self-conscious definition [of Arab American feminists] ... as members of an ethnic minority” (Hatem, 1998: 382).¹⁵⁹ By establishing alliances among people of color, there is the possibility for Arab American women to exert their political power while they explore the interactions and intersections between their two cultures by means of asserting them, valuing them, and also criticizing them. As Hatem explains:

¹⁵⁹ It must be noted that, as explained in chapter 1, Arab Americans have been considered white for a long time by American political institutions (such as the U.S. Census), as Helen Hatab Samhan’s chapter “Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience” explores. The identification of Arab American women as women of color, then, stems from their self-perception as an oppressed group because of their gender and ethnicity.

Arab American feminism has not sat comfortably within either [Arab or American] cultures. It offers a hybrid perspective with all that this adjective signifies: the ambiguous cultural character, the multiple cultural mutations, and the equally diverse politics. As such, it promises a conscious double critique of both the Arab and the American determinants of women's experience/identity. (1998: 383)

Moreover, it allows the creation of a genealogy that encompasses women from different origins, allowing for a broadening of the politicization of Arab American women in their fight against sexism and racism. As bell hooks argues, it is crucial to cultivate "critical awareness of the way racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination" (62), and this kind of feminism is very conscious of that. Thus, women that follow this understanding of Arab American feminism question the possibility of assimilation and advocate the ambiguity and hybridity that stems from being at the same time Arab and American women. They do so by placing themselves within a genealogy of women of color feminists.

The anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994), edited by Joanna Kadi (now known as Joe Kadi), is an example of this kind of feminism.¹⁶⁰ It is an important work that stemmed from the need of Arab American women in the 1990s to establish their feminism as a distinct endeavor within other American (women of color) feminisms. In fact, the whole anthology is full of references to the intersection

¹⁶⁰ This volume includes Arab North American women writers who try to define themselves within the Arab American and Arab Canadian communities, and they do so through recipes, accounts of their family histories, poems and essays. The emphasis on grandmothers stems from the editor's effort towards a historicization of the Arab American feminist endeavor, as well as the fact that grandmothers are regarded as bearers of culture in the Arab world. The importance of grandmothers in Arab (American) culture is evident also in post-9/11 Arab American literature. As will be seen in chapter 4, grandmothers will be central to novels such as Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter*.

between Arab American feminists and other women of color. An instance of this link can be found in Michelle Sharif's essay "Global Sisterhood: Where Do We Fit In?," where she advocates the need to take up an Arab American feminism that aligns itself with other women of color. She says:

Arab-Americans belong to both cultures and therefore occupy a unique position. We can and must help this dialogue develop. Our struggle, like all women of color, includes overcoming racism as well as sexism. By joining women's groups in the United States, we can put issues such as anti-Arab racism on the agenda. Our time for recognition and respect in western feminist movements has come. (1994: 159)

Christina Civantos, in her article "Resisting Naming and Naming Resistance: Arab-North American Feminists Anthologize," reviews *Food for Our Grandmothers* and highlights the importance of these kinds of anthologies as they "foster a sense of agency and create a role as a new political force" (137). Ethnic feminist anthologies that line up with other women of color do indeed help empower feminist minorities. In this respect, *Food for Our Grandmothers* did not stem from a vacuum, but resulted from previous women of color anthologies. In the very introduction to *Food for Our Grandmothers*, Kadi establishes links between this Arab American anthology and previous similar ethnic-feminist anthologies:

I hope this collection of essays and poems offers landmarks, signposts, names, and directions not only for Arab-American and Arab-Canadian communities but for other communities of color and our allies.

Books such as this one have functioned and continue to function in those ways: I am thinking of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith; *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings By and About Asian American Women*, edited by Asian Women United of

California; *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection of North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant. Books such as these help record a community's history and spirit. They are valuable maps in our struggle for liberation, offering the hope and information, sustenance and analysis, education and challenges that we need so desperately. (xvii)

The publication of *Food for Our Grandmothers* thus has to be understood as a result of the publication of previous ethnic-American anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981).¹⁶¹ The other anthologies that Kadi refers to follow the lead of Anzaldúa and Moraga's volume, taking on their struggle for social justice. In fact, the importance of the 1994 book *Food for Our Grandmothers* is also paramount since no Arab American voices were to be encountered in Anzaldúa's and Moraga's 1981 volume. The lack of an Arab American voice in this early 1980s anthology speaks to the fact that Arab American feminists were still invisible at the time and did not articulate their concerns in wide arenas until the 1990s, with *Food for Our Grandmothers* as the preeminent (and first) Arab American feminist anthology. However, it is worth noting that Arab American feminists were called in to participate in the 2002 publication stemming from the 20th anniversary of *This Bridge Called My Back*. In *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002), six Arab American contributions were accepted and published. Nevertheless, the experience was not without its controversies, since Arab contributors to the volume felt questioned by others regarding the issue of Palestine. Rabab Abdulhadi, Nadine Naber, Evelyn Alsultany and Nada Elia have recounted their experience in the 2002 book listserv, where a forum created to decide the best title for the book eventually became a

¹⁶¹ Kadi also acknowledged its influence in Abdulhadi, Alsultany, and Naber (234).

politicized argument about Palestine and Israel.¹⁶² However, despite these pitfalls, these publications enabled the development of Arab American literature, and *This Bridge We Call Home* signified an inclusion of Arab Americans in the women of color feminists' debate.

Arab American women of color feminisms stem from all these genealogies, and it is because of their belonging to these coalitions that Arab American women of color feminism has more power than other Arab American feminist discourses to combat racism as well as sexism. The other trends or discourses of Arab American feminism that Hatem comments on are less useful in that regard. "Arab American nationalist feminism" does not address Arab American women's issues since it silences the Arab cultural specificity by intending a dissolution into a melting pot that erases one's origins. "Arab American liberal feminism," by taking into consideration only individuality, is not, to my mind, a powerful force that can inflict change. Therefore, "Arab American women of color feminism" seems to be the most effective discourse for political struggle against sexism and racism in the Arab American community. Forming genealogies by aligning with other women of color appears necessary in order to challenge white supremacy in mainstream feminism. Furthermore, challenging racism and sexism together seems the best way to put forward the needs of Arab American women. It is important to note, also, that building genealogies with women of color feminists takes on a negotiation between one's country of origin and one's current nation, that is, an

¹⁶² Rabab Abdulhadi, Nadine Naber, and Evelyn Alsultany explain their experiences in the introduction to the *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*' edition entitled "Crossing Boundaries, New Perspectives on the Middle East. Gender, Nation and Belonging. Arab and Arab American Feminist Perspectives" (Vol. 5, Spring 2005). Nada Elia tells hers in the article "The Burden of Representation. When Palestinians Speak Out".

understanding of in-betweenness, which necessitates an ambiguity and inclusiveness that makes the feminisms that develop from these discourses especially good sites of resistance. As a result of these potentialities, the present study will center on the ideas and practices of women of color feminisms.

Arab American women of color feminists have also acknowledged the potentialities of resistance, and the creative outcomes of living in between cultures. Expanding on this notion of in-betweenness, the image of the bridge is, perhaps because of that first *This Bridge Called My Back*, a recurrent trope in Arab American feminist writing. As Lisa Suhair Majaj writes in her poem “Claims” (in *Food for Our Grandmothers*), “I am opposite banks of a river, / and I am the bridge” (86). Indeed, creating a bridge between cultures is one of the main objectives and necessities of women of color feminists in the diaspora in general, and ethnic-American feminists in particular. Furthermore, Kadi, in his introduction to *Food for Our Grandmothers*, considers this anthology as a map.¹⁶³ He says that “I know it is possible and I believe it is necessary to create maps that are alive, many-layered, multi-dimensional, open-ended, and braided” (1994: xiv). By saying this, he emphasizes the ambiguity and hybridity of the immigrants’ experience, of the people that live between two cultures (that is, of Arab Americans), as well as the interlocking systems that conform Arab American (feminine) identities. He also problematizes and positivizes that experience by questioning the notion of home in the diaspora:

Do transplants ever find home? Are we weakened by the ever-present feeling of not belonging in the west or the east, of having a

¹⁶³ Since Joanna Kadi now identifies as Joe Kadi, I have chosen to use here the male pronoun.

foot in both worlds but no solid roots in either? Or are we stronger, more innovative and creative, able to make home in odd sites, able to survive in small, hard places, plants growing out of rocks? Perhaps this is our advantage, perhaps this is what we bring to the world. Find home wherever you can make it. Make home so you can find it wherever. (1994: xv)

Kadi takes the feeling of being uprooted to promote the ideas of inclusiveness, adaptability, creativity and survival that resonate of those of Anzaldúa's *facultad*. As we will see, Arab American women writers take on this understanding of Arab American (women of color feminist) identity and sublimate their concerns into literature.

Even though most published Arab American women writers are Christian and not Muslim, it seems necessary to refer here to Arab American Islamic Feminisms as well. Mervat F. Hatem does not mention Islamic feminism in her article about the development of Arab American feminist discourses in the 1990s.¹⁶⁴ However, it is still necessary to visibilize the work of Arab American Muslim feminists as it is also part of the discourses circulating in Arab American feminist circles. The truth is that, even within Arab American feminist associations, the work that is being done by Islamic feminists is observed with suspicion and mistrust; that is, even Arab American feminists often see Muslim women, especially those who wear a *hijab*, as victims of gender oppression, not true feminists. Nevertheless, Arab Muslim feminists are certainly conducting a meaningful endeavor by providing re-readings of the Qur'an that question gender-

¹⁶⁴ Mervat might have not mentioned Islamic feminism in “The Invisible American Half, Hybridity and Arab American Feminist Consciousness in the 1990s” because of the majority of Arab Christians in the United States. This fact can be explained by the different waves of immigration from Arab countries to the United States which, as explained in chapter 1, were in the 20th century mostly Christian. The last wave of immigration (1940s-present) has changed this tendency, and now most new immigrants are Muslim. However, most Arab American women writers published after 9/11 are actually Christian.

biased interpretations of the sacred text.¹⁶⁵ Given the existence and visibility of many American Muslim women (even if they are not the majority within Arab American communities), Islamic feminism should and must take part in the debates within and about Arab American feminisms. Lara Deeb analyzes this issue in her article “Silencing Religiosity: Secularity and Arab American Feminisms,” arguing that, in some Arab (American) feminist circles, religiosity is seen as backward or incompatible with feminism (204). Deeb claims, though, that attempting to invisibilize Muslim feminists in Arab (American) feminist milieus means doing the same that white mainstream feminisms are doing. It means, in fact, silencing a specific feminist voice in their struggle for social equality. As Deeb puts it, “The silencing of, and assumptions about, religiosity in Arab American feminist circles, to a certain extent, mirror particular problematic aspects of certain liberal white feminists in the United States” (205). Therefore, it is necessary for Islamic feminisms to become part of the conversation when talking about Arab American feminisms. Not doing so forwards a vilification of Islamic religion that validates mainstream stereotypical views of Muslim / Arab cultures. As Deeb explains:

When Arab American feminists insist on secularism as part of their current agenda, or assume that religious women and women who are visibly pious are somehow less empowered than those who are not, we fall into a pattern of privileging secularity at the expense of other forms of commitments and worldviews. (205)

Wanting to avoid falling into these patterns, the present study will thus take into account Muslim feminism as part of Arab American (women of color) feminism,

¹⁶⁵ Amina Wadud is one of the main exponents of this endeavor, with her book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999).

and will consider its specific relevance when dealing with Muslim Arab American women writers.¹⁶⁶

3.3.3. Post-9/11 Arab American (Women of Color) Feminisms: Affirmation and Resistance against Tokenization

September 11, 2001, marked a turning point for Arab American feminists. As can be seen from the inclusion of six Arab American feminists in *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002), Arab American women and their concerns were visibilized after 9/11. Involvement with feminist issues also increased as a consequence of the backlash suffered in Arab American communities following the terrorist attacks to the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Networks of solidarity arose as a result of the hypervisibilization of Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 United States. As Nadine Naber puts it, “the aftermath of September 11th expanded the possibilities for coalition building among activists” (2002: 218). However, because of the hypervisibilization of Arabs after 9/11, and the vilification of Arab masculinities, there was a subsequent victimization of Arab women as well. Therefore, after 9/11 there has been a tendency in mainstream feminist circles to utilize Arab American women as a symbol of U.S. openness, and even as a paternalizing attempt to help the perceived victims of Arab patriarchy. This tokenization of Arab American women is a result of the existing power structures and the very discriminatory discourses circulating in the United States at the beginning of the 21st century,

¹⁶⁶ For example, this issue will be taken into consideration when referring to Mohja Kahf in the last section of the present chapter, as well as when dealing with Muslim characters in chapter 4.

which entailed a victimization of Arab women against the denounced patriarchy of Arab men, seen as terrorist-monsters (Puar and Rai). This is, nonetheless, just one side effect of hypervisibilization, but not all attempts at inclusiveness have been detrimental to the social justice advocated by Arab American feminists. While visibilization has resulted in some questionable outcomes, there have also been constructive coalitions between feminists of color after 9/11. Nadine Naber explains the situation as follows:

The transition of Arabs/Arab Americans from invisibility to visibility within racial justice discourses and movements produced shifts in multi-racial coalition-building. As “including an Arab” came to be the in-thing, tokenizing has taken a variety of forms, ranging from the centralizing of Arab/Arab American bodies while silencing their voices to exotifying Arab/Arab American women’s beauty while dismissing their politics, particularly when it comes to Palestine. Transgressing the politics of tokenism, some organizations with anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-war agendas have forged solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination while encouraging Arab/Arab American leadership in activism and movement-building. In so doing, they have demonstrated consistency in their politics. (2002: 236)

Muslim feminists have also organized after 9/11, and employed their visible use of the *hijab* as a means to forward their concerns. Mervat F. Hatem, in her article “The Political and Cultural Representations of Arabs, Arab Americans, and Arab American Feminisms after September 11, 2001,” explains that

[i]mmediately after September 11, Muslim women emerged as the earliest targets of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab violence and were the first to successfully organize against it. They used Muslim attire, which gave them away, as a means of educating Americans in general about their experiences and their religion. (2011: 23)

In other words, the *hijab* has been used after 9/11 by Arab American Muslim feminists as a political weapon against vilification of Islam and as a way to assert

freedom of expression. Of course, not all Arab American (or women of color) feminists agreed with this, as some would see the *hijab* as a symbol of oppression. Others, more conservative, would also be against its activist service, as they would consider the political use of a religious symbol as contrary to their religious practices (Hatem 2011: 23-24). However, it is important to note that Muslim American feminists also organized against the vilification of Islamic religion.

Due to all this, Arab American feminism became noticeable after 9/11, and both Arab (American) and women of color feminist organizations provided Arab American feminists with a site from which to be active politically. “INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color Against Violence”¹⁶⁷ was created in the year 2000 and, in 2002, started to also give a space for Arab American women of color to voice their concerns in their conferences and publications.¹⁶⁸ INCITE! was also a source of inspiration for the creation of other organizations. In 2006, for example, AMWAJ (Arab Movement of Women Arising for Justice) had a conference intended as a workshop for social justice that had been inspired by INCITE!'s conference in 2002.¹⁶⁹ The first AMWAJ conference took place in Chicago on June 9-11, 2006, and provided “a skills-sharing space, in an effort to build a larger vision and movement of and by Arab and Arab American women and girls opposed to all forms of oppression” (par. 2). INCITE! continues to give a voice to Arab American feminists in the association's conferences, such

¹⁶⁷ The original name was INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

¹⁶⁸ INCITE!'s publication *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2006) includes writings by Nadine Naber, as a major exponent of Arab American feminism.

¹⁶⁹ It was said that “The momentous event inspired the women to imagine a space where Arab/Arab-American women would not simply be a caucus, but would constitute the entirety of the participants” (<<http://www.leftturn.org/arab-movement-women-arising-justice>>, Par. 1. Accessed: 18 April 2014).

as 2015's Color of Violence 4 Conference (March 26-29), where Nada Elia, Nadine Naber, and organizations such as AROC (Arab Resource and Organizing Center) and SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine) offered talks, round tables and panels. AMWAJ also had its own workshop in the conference, with Leila Abdelrazaq, Dena Al-Adeeb, Nadine Darwish, Farah Erzouki, Nesreen Hasan, Nadine Naber, and Camille Odeh as its speakers.

Arab American associations for women, such as AMWAJ, SJP and AROC, are currently working in the United States promoting social justice. Arab American women writers, informed by these feminisms and the political agenda described above, also depict in their writings the challenges that Arab American women face in the United States, in contrast to the Arab (American) masculinities that they encounter in their communities.¹⁷⁰ I consider literature a site that allows a politicized voice for women in their fight for all-encompassing justice, and Arab American literature written by women has, in fact, advanced this struggle in crucial ways.

¹⁷⁰ Examples of Arab American feminist poetic and fiction writings will be found in the last section of this chapter, as well as in chapter 4, which will be devoted to the assessment of representations of Arab American masculinities as a means to elucidate the feminist concerns of Arab American women writers.

3.4. Arab American Women Writers: A Feminist History of Arab American Literature and Performance Arts

So is there an Arab-American literature? I believe there is. But despite its century-long history, it is still an emergent literature. Like Arab-Americans themselves, Arab-American texts are part of Arab culture, part of American culture, and part of something still in the process of being created.

(Majaj 2007: par. 16)

Lisa Suhair Majaj traces the origins of Arab American literature to the early years of the 20th century, concurrent to the arrival of the first wave of Arab immigrants to the United States, who started settling there at the end of the 19th century. Those first Arab American writers were called *Al-Mahjar* writers ('immigrant poets'), and were part of the New York Pen League. They were a group of émigré writers led by Kahlil Gibran, which was founded in 1913 and dissolved in 1931. The main aim of this group was to promote Arab literature in the United States. Most of them used free verse in their lyric writings, which were written both in Arabic and English. Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) was the founder of this movement, and became quite well-known for his novel *The Prophet* (1923). Ameen Rihani was also a *mahjar* writer, and he has been deemed the "father of Arab American literature" (Abinader 2000: par. 7). His best-known novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911), deals with the experience of immigrants. Gibran and Rihani are

representative of the first generation of Arab American writers, who were all men and felt the need to use certain techniques to approach the American readership. As Evelyn Shakir puts it, they “dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters. They could not hide their foreignness, but they could make it respectable” (1996: 6); that is, they intended to make Arab American literature reputable by presenting themselves as intellectual men.

From the 1940s until the 1970s, there was a decline in the production of Arab American literature, due to the fact that Arab American writers were not yet acknowledged as a group and so they often did not write about their heritage. Majaj calls these decades “a period of quiescence” of Arab American literature (2008: par. 6). Writers at the time, still mostly men, tended to distance themselves from their origins, although a few made reference to their Arab American identities; some of them were Salom Rizk (author of *Syrian Yankee* [1943]), Vance Bourjaily Vance (*Confessions of a Spent Youth* [1960]), or William Peter Blatty (*Which Way to Mecca, Jack?* [1960]).

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement provided ethnic voices in the United States with a space to advance their identity politics. Majaj explains that at the time “Arab-Americans found it easier to write about their ethnic heritage and find publishers and audiences” (2008: par. 7). This was concomitant with the second wave of Arab immigration to the United States, which brought more Muslims, who also had higher education than previous first-generation immigrants. All this, added to the defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, made Arab

Americans become more political in their activism and also in their writings (literary or not). It was at that time, also, that Arab American women began to be published. D.H. Melhem and Etel Adnan became well-known authors. D.H. Melhem has written poetry, published in volumes such as *Conversation with a Stonemason* (2003), *Country: An Organic Poem* (1998), *Rest in Love* (1995), and *Notes on 94th Street* (1972), and she is also the writer of a novel called *Blight* (1994). Etel Adnan, author of poetry and prose fiction, is well-known for her feminist novel on the Lebanese Civil War *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978), and also her books *Of Cities and Women: Letters to Fawazz* (1993) and *Paris When It's Naked* (1993).

In the 1970s, Arab American literature began to be recognized as an ethnic American literature. That decade saw the “emergence of a pan-ethnic Arab-American identity bridging the different national and religious identities of immigrants and ethnics of Arabic-speaking background” (Majaj 1999: 69). Arab American identity and, as a consequence, Arab American literature appeared as a result of the politicization of the Arab American community, with the appearance, as previously mentioned, of Arab American organizations like the Association of Arab American University Graduates (1967), the National Association of Arab Americans (1972), or the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (1980).

As a consequence of this politicization, in the 1980s Arab American literature gained visibility. A catalytic publication in this respect was Gregory Orfalea’s anthology *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (1982). As previously explained, it was also in the 1980s that Arab American feminism

started to develop, allowing Arab American women to voice their concerns. This became noticeable with Joanna Kadi's (now Joe Kadi) *Food For Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994), which helped establish this community as agents of antiracist and antisexist struggle; but also Evelyn Shakir's *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997), a history on 19th and 20th century Arab women in the United States, and Susan Muaddi Darraj's edited anthology *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* (2004). The visibilization of Arab American women and their feminist ideas in the 1980s and 1990s made them also articulate their struggles in long prose fiction. In this sense, the publishing of novels by Arab American women and the rise of Arab American feminism go hand in hand. According to Lisa Suhair Majaj, "It is noticeable ... that the growing emergence of a body of feminist Arab-American writing corresponds with a shift toward prose writing" (1999: 71). Thus, it was in the very last decades of the 20th century that, to use Evelyn Shakir's words, "Women, in particular, ... found their tongue" (1996: 15). In the turn from the 20th to the 21st centuries, Arab American writers found their place in American letters. A lot of Arab American women writers are now writing poetry or short stories, which have appeared in newspapers or magazines such as *Al Jadid* or *Mizna*, or are compiled in anthologies such as *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999), edited by Khaled Mataba and Munir Akash, and *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* (2004), edited by Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mataba. Moreover, Arab American women writers are also

publishing their own volumes. This is the case of prolific writers like Naomi Shihab Nye (*Habibi* [1997]; *Going, Going* [2005]), Mona Simpson (*Anywhere But Here* [1987]; *The Lost Father* [1991]; *A Regular Guy* [1996]), Elmaz Abinader (*Children of Roojme* [1991]; *In the Country of My Dreams* [1999]), Diana Abu-Jaber (*Arabian Jazz* [1993]; *Crescent* [2003]; *The Language of Baklava* [2005]; *Origin* [2007]; *Birds of Paradise* [2012]), or Laila Halaby (*West of Jordan* [2003]; *Once in a Promised Land* [2007]).¹⁷¹

The praise towards Arab American women writers has not been exempt from controversies within Arab American circles. As pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, Nada Elia argues that the victimization of Arab women in the United States has helped them become published, especially after 9/11 (2006: 158). In other words, Arab American men continue to be related to the figure of the terrorist-monster, and Arab American women, seen as victims of Arab patriarchy, may have been given a voice as a means to counteract patriarchy and sexism. However, as I will argue in the remainder of this study, Arab American women after 9/11 are not only struggling against this sexism, but they are also enacting a strong anti-discriminatory effort which attempts to undermine the stereotypes of Arab masculinities. Therefore, even if the reason behind the publication of their writings may stem from stereotypical views of Arab masculinity and femininity, Arab American women are using their writings to forward both their feminist and anti-racist efforts.

The 21st century has also brought an increment of academic works on Arab

¹⁷¹ This is just a selection of prolific writers and their publications, some of which will be analyzed in chapter 4.

American literature and Arab American women writers. Important publications in this respect are Amal Talaat Abdelrazek's *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings* (2007), Steven Salaita's *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide* (2011), and Carol Fadda-Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014). Lisa Suhair Majaj insists on the need for publications like these. She says:

A body of informed and nuanced literary criticism would play a significant role in situating Arab-American literature for both Arab and non-Arab readers, thereby lessening somewhat the pressure on Arab-American writers to serve as “translators” of their culture. Literary criticism also has a crucial role to play in highlighting not just the cultural and sociological, but the literary dimension of our writing, reminding us that we are, first and foremost, writers. (1999: 72)

The present study intends to add to this endeavor and provide a critical literary analysis of Arab American literature written by women especially after 9/11 in order to evaluate their efforts against sexism and racism through an investigation of their representations of Arab men. While the fourth chapter of this dissertation will deal with prose fiction, it is necessary to recognize the activist work that Arab American feminists have been conducting in milieus other than prose after September 11. On the one hand, poetry will be examined in section 3.5. On the other, cinema, drama, solo performances (monodrama), and stand-up comedy must also be acknowledged here as they have been paramount after 2001 to Arab American feminists in their efforts to convey their concerns to their audiences.

Some films have been produced after 9/11 dealing with the situation of Arab Americans and, interestingly enough, most have women as protagonists.

Although a thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the work of Arab American women in motion pictures must be addressed. *The Visitor* and *Towelhead* (also known as *Nothing Is Private*),¹⁷² both written and directed by non-Arab males (Thomas McCarthy and Alan Ball, respectively), were released in 2007. With well-known stars in them—such as Richard Jenkins, and Aaron Eckhart and Toni Collette, respectively—, they have been relevant in advancing anti-discriminatory representations of Arabs. Moreover, Arab American women have also been releasing films recently. The first Arab American movie produced by an Arab American (woman) was *Amreeka* (2009). Written and directed by Palestinian American Cherien Dabis, the film tells the story of immigration of a Palestinian single mother and son from the West Bank to rural Illinois, where they face the challenges of a new life and experience discrimination caused by the discourses surrounding the Persian Gulf War. Dabis has also written and directed *May in the Summer* (2013), a story of family, love and reencounter set in Jordan, and starring Bill Pullman as the estranged American father of three sisters who go back to their mother's country, Jordan, in preparation for one of the sisters' wedding. Depicting a Christian Arab family in Jordan, the film counters stereotypes about Arabs in general and Arab American women in particular. Finally, another film written and directed by an Arab American woman, Rola Nashef, is *Detroit Unleaded* (2012), a love story that takes place in a gas station inherited by an Arab American man from his father. All these motion pictures have promoted the visibilization of Arab American life and helped counter the traditional misrepresentation of Arabs in

¹⁷² *Towelhead* is the film adaptation of Alicia Erian's novel with the same title. The novel will be discussed in chapter 4.

American cinema.

The performing arts have also been working against anti-Arab discrimination. Especially after 9/11, different projects and collectives appeared with the mission to deal with Arab American themes and put forward the complexities of Arab American identities. The Collective Nibras, for instance, was created in 2001 as a space for Arab Americans to express themselves and thus raise awareness about Arab identities and communities in the United States. As their website explains:

Nibras is an Arab-American theatre collective built upon a shared passion and united by a common heritage. Its mission is to create a network for Arab-American theatre artists to share their talent, experience and passion by staging imaginative and articulate productions that increase the positive visibility and creative expression of Arabs and Arab-Americans. It is Nibras's belief that by fostering an understanding of the Arab experience in America, we can begin to create a greater understanding between all the communities that form the rich and intricate web of American culture. (par. 20)¹⁷³

As a collective, Nibras has been working in partnership with the New York Theatre Workshop and the organization 'ASWAT: Voices of Palestine' to provide a space for writers of Palestinian descent to explore Palestinian themes, and has produced the work of women playwrights such as Nathalie Handal and Naomi Wallace.¹⁷⁴

Another group that has provided a space for Arab Americans in the theatre is the Silk Road Rising (formerly known as Silk Road Theatre Project), founded

¹⁷³ The Collective Nibras's website is <www.nytw.org/aswat.a-sp>. Accessed: 18 April 2014.

¹⁷⁴ Nathalie Handal has written plays such as *Between Our Lips* (2005, unpublished) and *Hakawatiyeh* (2009, unpublished). Naomi Wallace has written *In the Heart of America*, *Slaughter City*, and *One Flea Spare*, among others, which can be found in the volume *In the Heart of America and Other Plays* (2000).

by Jamil Khoury in 2002 as a creative response to the 2001 terrorist attacks. The group originated as a means of fighting anti-Arab discrimination, and ended up opening to the Far East, encompassing thus a more open reflection on American identities and transnationalities. As their website expresses it:

Their hope was to counter negative representation of Middle Eastern and Muslim peoples with representation that was authentic, multi-faceted, and grounded in human experience. That theatre would be the medium in which they'd "create change" was a given; a decision dictated by their mutual love of theatre, and Khoury's vocation as a playwright.

Their idea quickly expanded beyond the Middle East to encompass that vast geographical area known historically as the Silk Road; a territory stretching from Japan to Italy. Silk Road Theatre Project thus officially came into existence in summer of 2002, becoming the nation's first ever theatre company dedicated to representing such a diverse grouping of peoples and cultures. (par. 9-10)¹⁷⁵

Interestingly enough, Silk Road Rising does not only offer live theater performances, but intends to reach wider audiences through the online videos that can be found on their website <<http://www.silkroadrising.org/>>, which provide what they call "a polycultural worldview" (par. 1). The project's inaugural play, *Precious Stones*, written by Jamil Khoury, provided an allegory of the relationship between Israel and Palestine through two female protagonists, an Israeli and a Palestinian, who advocate for political dialogue and end up falling in love. Another example of Silk Road Rising's work is one of the performances available online, called "The Balancing Arab",¹⁷⁶ which is a 15-minute sketch about two women in a gym, a white Anglo-Saxon protestant personal trainer and her Arab American client and friend, who talk about an Arab American celebration that they

¹⁷⁵ Silk Road Rising's website is <<http://www.silkroadrising.org/about>>. Accessed: 5 May 2015.

¹⁷⁶ <<http://www.silkroadrising.org/video-plays/the-balancing-arab>>. Accessed: 5 May 2015.

both attended. In it, they delve into the complexities of Arab American identity, anti-Arab racism, and the misunderstandings and/or suspicion about Arabs from a white, Anglo perspective. The performance finishes with the reconciliation of the two friends, and with a consideration of the American metaphor of the salad bowl as a better national image than that of the melting pot. Although written by a man—Jamil Khoury,— both these plays star two female protagonists, and become an example of Arab American feminism and an instance of the work that these Arab American organizations are doing in terms of educating society through the field of the performing arts.

A female contemporary playwright worth mentioning here because of her prolific and critically acclaimed body of work is Betty Shamieh. *Chocolate in the Heat: Growing Up Arab in America* (2001, unpublished), *The Black Eyed* (2007) and *Roar* (2004) stand out among the fifteen plays that she has written. The Palestinian-American author has become a well-known figure in Arab American writing and performance. As her website states:

Shamieh's contributions to theatre and literature have not gone unnoticed. Her life and work has been the subject of features in the New York Times, Time Out, American Theatre magazine, Theater Bay Area, the Brooklyn Rail, San Francisco Chronicle, Svenska Dagbladet, Teaterstockholm, der Standard, Aramco Magazine, Kathimeiri, and the International Herald Tribune among others. (par. 4)¹⁷⁷

Other notable female writers are Nathalie Handal, author of *Between Our Lips* (2005, unpublished) and *Hakawatiyeh* (2009, unpublished), and Heather Raffo, author of *Nine Parts of Desire* (2006), among others. Their plays, although beyond

¹⁷⁷ <<http://www.bettyshamieh.com/>>. Accessed: 5 May 2015.

the scope of this study, are also advancing Arab American feminism within the field of the performing arts.

Another form of performance art that has been widely used by women of Arab origin in the United States has been that of the solo performance or, as Michael Malek Najjar calls it, monodrama.¹⁷⁸ An important exponent of this type of performance is Laila Farah, whose article “Dancing on the Hyphen: Performing Diasporic Subjectivity” provides the script of her four one-woman shows: “Stars and Stripes,” “Adolescence in 'Absentia',” “Scheherazade Don't Need No Visa,” and “Stars and Stripes Forever.” All of them are related to Farah's personal identity negotiations as a woman in the diaspora and as an Arab in the United States. Through her performance, she tries to put forth an Arab American women of color feminist critique of stereotyping. As she puts it:

In this moment of contested rights, both civil and human, and the heightened abuses of state power/terror, performative reflexivity offers a unique way to have diasporic subjects critique their own positionality and, at the same time, transforms the audience's polemical and stereotyped viewpoints. In this time where emergency is touted as normalcy through a number of codes, the resistance located within this act of heightening reflexivity within the performative moment allows for all involved to deepen their understandings of the transnational moment from yet a new perspective. (335)

These solo performances are actually being enacted primarily by women. Their reflexive nature, as Farah points out, make them an important site for the advancement of Arab American women of color feminisms. Another relevant Arab

¹⁷⁸ Michael Malek Najjar's analyses of performance art—plays, stand-up and monodrama—can be found in his book *Arab American Drama, Film and Performance: A Critical Study, 1908 to the Present* (2015). His study of Arab American performing arts had also previously resulted in his volume *Four Arab American Plays: Works by Leila Buck, Jamil Khoury, Yussef El Guindi, and Lameece Issaq & Jacob Kader* (2013).

American solo artist, and playwright, is Leila Buck, whose solo play *ISite* also deals with the personal conflicts resulting from an Arab and American identity. Finally, Najla Said is worth mentioning too. Edward Said's daughter became well-known because of her one-woman show entitled “Palestine” (unpublished), where Said expands on the politicization of Arabs in the United States, and her personal growth in Manhattan as the daughter of a well-known and well-respected Palestinian.

Stand-up comedy is another popular site of performance of Arab American feminism. In fact, Arab American comedy festivals abound (mostly founded after 9/11). Some of them are: the New York Arab American Comedy Festival, the Arab American Comedy Tour, the Watch List, the Allah Made Me Funny Tour, and the Axis of Evil Comedy Tour.¹⁷⁹ Women comedians worth examining are Helen Maalik and Maysoon Zayid. Malik's performances, some of which can be seen in her eponymous Youtube channel,¹⁸⁰ defy stereotypes of Arab women, but do not do so with those about Arab men. On the contrary, traditional ideas about Arab Muslim men, such as the belief in virgins to be found in heaven or in polygamy, are reinforced in her feminist comedic acts. Maysoon Zayid is the co-founder of the New York Arab-American Comedy Festival. Zayid's comedy intertwines her personal response to stereotypes about her Arab descent and her cerebral palsy, with which she ends up making a powerful stance towards female empowerment.¹⁸¹ However, there is in fact also a reinforcement of stereotypes

¹⁷⁹ Michael Malek Najjar enumerates them in his volume *Arab American Drama, Film and Performance: A Critical Study, 1908 to the Present* (2015).

¹⁸⁰ <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2u8bHXpJaqEnLQRevhMMtw>>. Accessed: 18 April 2014.

¹⁸¹ Somaya Sami Sabry (2011).

about Arab men, such as her recurrent reference to the similarities between her father and Saddam Hussein. In fact, Yasser Fouad Selim, in his article “Performing Arabness in Arab American Stand-up Comedy,” argues that post-9/11 Arab American stand-up comedians are minstrelizing their Arab origins in their performances, and thus reifying stereotypes of Muslim and Arab life, and, I would add, of Arab masculinities, especially. Fouad Selim claims that they do so to reinscribe themselves as Arab Americans and distance themselves from Arabs. Michael Malek Najjar also questions whether Arab American stand-up comedy challenges or reinforces clichés because of the comedians' use of stereotypes in their routines (2015: 98-124). While a deep analysis of stand-up comedy is beyond the scope of the present volume, it is my contention that in Arab American stand up comedy there is indeed a reiteration of stereotypes of Arab men.

Finally, there is a different performance/poetic experience that I want to acknowledge, and it is that of Suheir Hammad and her work in HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*, where she performed between 2002 and 2004. Her poem “first writing since” was examined in the first chapter of this dissertation, and while her poetry has been published in anthologies, and she has also produced plays and worked as an actress, I believe it is important to analyze the feminist power of her performances in HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*. I shall do so through a reflection on her poem “Exotic” (2002), which provides a powerful standpoint against the exoticization of Arab women.¹⁸² In this poem, Hammad starts with the claim: “don't wanna be your exotic,” which is followed by a powerful reasoning that rejects the notion of Arab

¹⁸² Suheir Hammad's delivery of her poem can be seen in <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xarc5PFknfw>>. Accessed: 18 April 2014.

women as vulnerable by saying that women of Eastern origin are not delicate birds, victims of a specific patriarchy.¹⁸³ The poem continues with the assertion that Arab American women are just like other women, and that their exoticization is just a projection from Western masculine eyes. The whole poem makes reference to stereotypes about Arab women, such as vulnerability, foreignness, exoticism, lechery, but it ends up with an enumeration of other stereotypes about women related to different cultures (the geisha and *la malinche*, for example), which serve as an epitome for the need of non-white women to overcome both sexism and racism together, and thus make the poem representative of women of color feminism. The poem ends with the powerful lines “don't wanna be your erotic / not your exotic.”¹⁸⁴ This poem expounds on the idea that men try to exert power over Arab women by imagining them as exotic, that is, by projecting them as vulnerable but also seductive. Putting together the stereotypical images of the Arab woman as both submissive and provocative, men undertake an economy of appropriation and possession of the “Othered” female body, epitomizing its colonization in the name of love. Suheir Hammad, but also Mohja Kahf, whose poetry will be analyzed in section 3.5, are informed by feminism and therefore

¹⁸³ The whole poem reads: “Don't wanna be your exotic / Like some delicate fragile colorful / bird imprisoned caged in a land / foregin to the stretch of her wings. / Don't wanna be your exotic / women everywhere look just / like me some taller darker / nicer than me but like me / Just the same women everywhere / carry my nose on their faces / my name on their spirits. / Don't seduce yourself with my otherness / the beat of my lashes / against each other ain't some / dark desert beat it's just / a blink get over it. / Don't build around me / your fetish fantasy your / lustful profanity to / cage me in clip my wings. / Don't wanna be your exotic / your loving of my beauty ain't / more than funky fornication / plain pink perversion / in fact nasty necrophilia / because my beauty is dead to you / I am dead to you. / Not your harem girl / geisha doll banana picker / pom pom girl poom poom short / coffee maker town whore / belly dancer private dancer / la malinche venus hottentot / laundry girl your immaculate vessel / emasculating princess / don't wanna be / not your erotic / not your exotic.”

¹⁸⁴ Significantly enough, Pauline Kaldas also has a poem entitled “Exotic” (1994), which refers to some of the same ideas as Hammad’s poem, such as the emphasis on the exoticization Western men make of non-white women, and the subsequent advocacy of a feminism that encompasses all women of color.

aware of all this stereotyping, which they attempt to fight in their poems.

The aforementioned performances are part of the literary and artistic work being conducted by Arab American feminists, which help create a space of contestation that does not only take place in literature, or published feminist anthologies or articles, but that extends to other audiences. However, in the remainder of this thesis, I will focus on poetry and prose fiction, since I consider that it is there where the theme of Arab masculinities has been further developed. Moreover, I believe that Arab American literature does not necessarily have to deal with Arab American themes and that any production coming from Arab American writers may be considered Arab American literature. In the present study, however, only Arab American novels that deal with Arab American themes will be taken into consideration, since the aim of this dissertation is to assess the representation of Arab American men by Arab American women writers, and in particular those who have published writings after 9/11. Furthermore, to my mind, Arab American feminism does not need to be forwarded by Arab American women only (it can be and is also forwarded by non-Arab Americans and by men). Nonetheless, this dissertation will center specifically on Arab American women (feminists) writing about Arab American themes, because it is within this context where I hope to elucidate more clearly the tendencies of Arab American women in their portrayal of Arab American men. Bearing this in mind, the following section will focus on the poetry written by Mohja Kahf about Arab (American) men, as Kahf's poetry takes a powerful stance against sexism and racism.

3.5. In Love, We Remain Whole: Mohja Kahf's Feminist Poetry against Sexism and Racism

Arab American feminism is known for its fight against both sexism and racism. With their writings, Arab American women prove stereotypes about Arab men to be wrong at the same time as they forward gender justice. They show a strong stance against men's projections of them as exotic, while, at the same time, they cannot avoid a certain ambivalence—but nonetheless ultimate love—towards Arab men. This struggle places Arab American women writers in a complex position when depicting men of Arab origin, since they attempt to fight sexism without falling into racist stereotypes. Thus, after 9/11, Arab American women writers are offering an ambivalent depiction of heterosexual love stemming from their feminist struggle against both sexism and racism. In an effort to counter the stereotyping of both Arab men and women, (heterosexual) Arab American women explore the possibility of love towards Arab men, at the same time as they take a stance against their own double colonization as ethnic women. In doing so, they forward Arab American feminism. Feminist discourses as intertwined with heterosexual love shall be examined in relation to Mohja Kahf's poetry, while centering on her representation of Arab American masculinities and femininities.

Love towards one's origins, towards Arab men, and towards oneself is powerfully articulated in Mohja Kahf's poems, a second-generation Syrian-American Muslim woman who currently teaches at the University of Arkansas.

Following the precepts of Arab American women of color feminism, Kahf's poetry expresses feelings of love for Arab men which are not exempt from nuances. In the different poems that are part of Kahf's volume *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003), she puts forward her affection for Arab men, clinging to their common origins, while at the same time she acknowledges the existence of sexism from her male counterparts. Nathalie Handal, when commenting on this anthology, explains that "all of Kahf's poems are love poems—we find joy and pain, trust and distrust, beauty and horror, pleasure and repugnance, peace and conflict, we find the world and the self" (2005: 3). In other words, Kahf's poetry exemplifies the ambivalence she feels towards love and towards Arab men. The present section aims to use a selection of Kahf's poetry to exemplify her concerns as an Arab American woman of color feminist. We shall see how her emphasis on racism and sexism are intertwined with a cry of love as the ultimate enabler of gender equity, an idea which will also be reflected in the novels that I analyze in chapter 4.

In her poem "You Are My Yemen" (2003: 48-49), Kahf makes her love for Arab men and their shared culture evident. The poem starts with a reference to Muhammad's *hadith*¹⁸⁵ "God bless our Yemen and our Damascus," which appears quoted under the poem's title, and is paralleled at the beginning of the very poem, which continues by providing a series of images that remind the reader of the Middle East and that relate the feelings of love of the poetic persona to this specific geographical context. Through a vivid imagery that involves sight, sound, and taste, Kahf proclaims her love both for her significant other and her ancestry,

¹⁸⁵ *Hadiths* are accounts of Muhammad's or his companions' deeds or words.

with lines such as “I shimmy up palm trees to wait for you / To squint into the sun and watch for you / You are my caravan loaded with lentils and cracked wheat / Snacking its way into town / We the city-dwellers trill with joy / Layla and Majnun will fry chopped onions tonight!” (5-10). The colorful and savory details that Kahf employs serve as a celebration of both her beloved and her Syrian origins, which come together once again at the end of the poem through the equation of the lover’s face and the horizon, “Your face / the horizon / I want to see” (45-47).

Nevertheless, this love for Arab men is complicated in the rest of Kahf’s poetry, where it appears imbued with an acknowledgement and questioning of the stereotyping of Arab men in the West. In “I Can Scent an Arab Man a Mile Away” (2003: 29-30), there is a humorous acceptance of the stereotypes attributed to Arab masculinity starting with the poem’s very title, although ultimately, the “I” persona’s love for Arab men remains unquestioned. The poem starts by referring to the looks traditionally associated with Arab men (where darkness, hair, and traditional clothes are emphasized), and then ironically delves into the ideals they may have (in relation to tradition, on the one hand, and to the Israel-Palestine conflict, on the other). Then, Kahf takes a feminist stance and turns to explore the stereotypes associated with Arab men through an exhaustive enumeration that entails images of machismo, patriarchy, sexism, egotism, and even facial hair, “They may be / mustachio’d, macho, patriarchal, / sexist, egoistical, parochial - / They may, as men may, / think themselves indomitable, / being easily manipulable” (16-21). Nonetheless, the poem finishes by asserting her love for

Arab men by saying “but they’re mine, my / sleek and swarthy, hairy-chested, / curly-headed lovers of the Prophet” (22-24). Her affection for Arab men seems to come from their common ancestry, and their common tradition, a fact which is further developed in the following part of the poem, where the “I” persona goes on to explain that she loves them because she knows them, that is, because of their shared origins and their shared language (making specific reference to their pronunciation of the Arabic letters *ghayn*, *dad*, and *kha*). Kahf writes, “I know them by the growling *ghayns* / and gnawling *dads* and hoarse hungry *khas* / that rumble up from the hollow in their chests / and fill the throat and swell the cheek, / distend the lips and pearl off the tongue, / and emerge, a language, theirs-ours-mine” (30-35). Once again, in this poem, Kahf takes on the same idea that she developed in “You Are My Yemen,” the intertwining of romantic love and love for one’s origins, to evince the importance for Arab Americans of acknowledging their ancestry. At the same time, in “I Can Scent an Arab Man a Mile Away,” the familiarity the “I” persona defends is also used to make an ironic account of stereotypes about Arab men, rendering them as untrue. This is done throughout the poem and is especially evident at the end, with the last line, which reads: “(God, they look so sexy in those checkered scarves)” (49). The use of humorous irony in this poem becomes a strategy Arab American women may use to be able to critique both sexism and racism. Acknowledging stereotypes is an effective means to proclaim love for Arab men while also making clear that sexism needs to be fought. As a consequence, it can be argued that Kahf’s declaration of love for Arab men does not leave her powerless in front of them.

This idea is developed further in the poem “The Woman Dear to Herself” (2003: 55-56), where love is taken as a means of empowerment for women: “The woman dear to herself lives in the heart, / alive to the everywhere presence of divinity / The woman dear to herself does not lose herself / In the presence of a man woman or child” (1-5). The poem continues by an acknowledgement of love as the basis of humanity, when Kahf writes “In love she remains whole” (10). This love that Kahf professes is ultimately based on love for oneself as an Arab American woman, and as such it encompasses an irrefutable effort towards gender justice, an idea shared by Arab American (women of color) feminists. Kahf expresses overall love and, especially, love for oneself, as women’s ultimate power and, in so doing, renders the power of love and peace as her ultimate objectives. In the last two lines (“She knows the geography of her body / and how to give good directions home” [16-17]), Kahf also makes an erotic reference to the woman’s body, an image that is recurrent in her writings. These two lines convey the idea that not only do Arab American women have power because of their knowledge of their own bodies, but also because of their origins. The images used to ascertain this knowledge and love for oneself come from the association made between romance and origin, body and geography, which can be taken as a feminist critique of the “double colonization” of women (that is, appropriation both through colonialist and sexist practices). In the poem, this link is subverted in giving the power over geography to the woman, thus breaking the connection between colonialism and patriarchy.

Furthermore, Kahf also advocates love, female empowerment, and the

female body in “My Body Is Not Your Battleground” (2003: 58-59), where she makes a powerful stance against war. As Nathalie Handal puts it, “In the poem ... she criticizes the nations and rulers, more specifically the U.S. government, whose arrogance seem limitless as they use God’s name to conquer, kill, to justify the unjustifiable” (2005: 3). The first three stanzas of “My Body Is Not Your Battleground” focus on different body parts, starting with breasts, continuing with hair, and finishing with the torso. The first stanza puts together the woman’s ownership of her own body (her breasts in this case, with lines such as “My breasts seek amnesty; release them” [6]), and a pacifist stance towards the nationalistic view of land ownership (referring to the battles of Badr and Uhud, and rejecting any flags or banners). The second stanza centers on the image of the woman's hair, and the issue of whether to have it covered or not, with lines like: “My hair will not bring progress and clean water if it flies unbraided in the breeze” (14-15). The issue of the use of the veil is expounded on by Kahf as an exemplification of freedom, thus challenging the notion of backwardness in relation to its use. Kahf is once again advocating women’s ownership of their bodies, and their liberty to use them as they please. The third stanza defends the concept of property again by paralleling women's bodies to a besieged city and, thus, reflecting once more the “double colonization” of women that had already been explored in “The Woman Dear to Herself.” In this case, the traditional images that link the colonized land and the female body are used to make a point against war, colonialism, and sexism. The next stanza in the poem is full of eroticism, as Kahf states that the female body is only hers: “Leave me to fill or not

fill my chalice / with the wine of my sweet love” (31-32). Kahf finishes with a reflection on boundaries (both physical and political), reasserting her rejection of both male and colonial illegitimate appropriation of female bodies by stating that, “My body is not your battleground” (35).

A strong stance for gender equality underlies Mohja Kahf's poems. They all sustain the Arab American feminist claim against sexism and racism, resulting in a complex and ambivalent portrayal of love, passion and desire. Completely aware of the stereotypes about both Arab men and women, Kahf articulates a discourse of women's ownership of their own bodies (feminine and ethnic) that constitutes a very powerful tool against their “double colonization,” that is, against the sexism and racism that they are subject to. Kahf conducts a feminist endeavor through her writings, offering potential sites of resistance against sexism and racism. Despite her ambivalent feelings towards traditional masculinities and her acknowledgement of both positive and negative aspects Arab men may share, she presents love for Arab men as a desired possibility as long as women are aware of the need to love themselves first. Paraphrasing Kahf, “In love, we remain whole.”

Chapter 4:

Post-9/11 Representations of Arab American Men by Arab American Women Writers

If the image of [Arabs] is truly being created by the American imagination, the time has come to invalidate that image and render it unrecognizable ... However slow and painful the recovery, Arab-American destiny will continue to come under Arab-American control so long as the image of the Arab-American comes increasingly under the control of Arab-American writers.

(Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash xi)

As the above quote notes, Arab American writers play a central role in the mainstream perception of Arabs in the United States. This chapter aims at illustrating the specific contribution of Arab American women writers in the dissemination of anti-discriminatory portrayals of Arab American men. In the sections that follow, I will thus be exploring Arab American masculinities in novels written by Arab American women, specifically those published after 9/11. The aim of this chapter is not to provide a fully detailed list of Arab American novels but to focus on a selection so as to point to trends common in post-9/11

writings. Above all, it intends to elucidate the main discourses forwarded by Arab American women writers in their representations of Arab (American) men. At the same time, it shall examine the influence of Arab American feminism on these depictions, while focusing on women authors from different origins and immigrant generations.¹⁸⁶

This chapter shall be divided following a thematic rationale. That is, it will be structured by bringing together topically-similar novels and thus pointing to common discourses among them. To do so, it is divided into three different sections, which mirror the first three chapters of this dissertation. Section 4.1, then, draws on the theory from chapter 1 and examines the racialization and sexualization of Arab American men which ensued after 9/11, and their subsequent crisis of masculine identity, as illustrated in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007). Section 4.2, relying on theories on the construction of neopatriarchal (Sharabi) and thirdspace masculinities (Bhabha, Soja) developed in chapter 2, analyzes the representation of fatherhood in post-9/11 Arab American literature. This section is divided into two subsections: one deals with Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories*

¹⁸⁶ The authors explored will be: Laila Halaby (first-generation immigrant of Jordanian father), Frances Kirallah Noble (third-generation immigrant from Lebanon), Susan Muaddi Darraj (second-generation immigrant of Palestinian origin), Alicia Erian (second-generation immigrant of Egyptian father), Randa Jarrar (first-generation immigrant of Egyptian-Greek mother and Palestinian father), Diana Abu-Jaber (second-generation immigrant of Jordanian father), and Alia Yunis (second-generation immigrant of Lebanese and Palestinian origin). As explained in chapter 1, given the pan-Arab movement established in the United States since the 1970s, when organizations against the discrimination of Arab Americans started to operate, Americans with origins from Arabic-speaking countries united to gain force in their fight for visibilization and against racism. Moreover, in the case of women, Arab American feminists also got together in the 1990s in their struggle against both racism and sexism. Therefore, it is relevant to consider Arab American writers as a group despite the heterogeneity of the authors' origins, as they share a common Arabo-Islamicate culture and feminist concerns.

from South Philly (2007), both of which portray four Arab American young women and their relationships with their fathers, thus providing in only one volume each a portrayal of multiple fatherhoods; the other subsection delves into Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005) and Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008), each of which explores the complicated relationship between one daughter and her father, whose situational masculinity places him in a neopatriarchal space between tradition and modernity. Finally, section 4.3 addresses Arab American (women of color) feminism and Mohja Kahf's plea for love examined in the previous chapter, and provides an account of lovable and beloved men who deviate from traditional enactments of *rujula* (Arab masculinity) while surrounded by Arab American feminist matriarchs. This last section examines romantic love, prejudice and exile in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), and new Arab men in Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009). All these novels provide a *mahjar* feminist claim in favor of gender equality.¹⁸⁷ As Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash looked forward to in the quote above, Arab American writers are thus taking control of the representation of Arab men after 9/11 and, in the myriad masculinities that they portray, are countering the monolithic stereotypes about Arabs pervasive in the United States. Above all, they are indeed trying to invalidate, as we shall see, the image of the Arab/Muslim monster-terrorist (Puar and Rai) enhanced after 9/11 and “render it unrecognizable” (Mattawa and Akash xi).

¹⁸⁷ The term *mahjar* has been introduced in section 3.2 to refer to the Arab diaspora, and has been used in this dissertation to refer to Arab American feminism.

4.1 Men in Crisis: Unsettled Masculinities After 9/11

As expounded on in chapter 1 of the present dissertation, Arab men suffered a backlash after September 11, as they became visibilized as well as vilified in the United States. A few Arab American women writers have used this fear to analyze the possible implications of racial targeting towards Arab men in a post-9/11 milieu, specifically in terms of the characters' understanding of their Arab American masculine identities. One of these authors is Laila Halaby, born in Beirut to a Jordanian father and American mother, and who grew up in Arizona, where she currently lives.¹⁸⁸ Another one is Frances Kirallah Noble, whose grandparents migrated to the United States at the end of the 1890s from what nowadays is Lebanon and was at the time part of the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸⁹ Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007) both revolve around successful and assimilated Arab American men whose sense of self is shattered after 9/11 as a consequence of the racialization projected onto them. Indeed, the Arab American men represented in these novels living right after 9/11 suffer life-changing identity crises. Their traumatic experience is twofold. On the one hand, they share the national trauma resultant from the collapse of the Twin Towers, while, on the other, they experience a personal trauma, being perceived as

¹⁸⁸ For more information on Laila Halaby's biography, see: <lailahalaby.net/bio>. Accessed: 2 August 2015.

¹⁸⁹ For more information on Frances Kirallah Noble's biography, see: <<http://ccdlibraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cmt/id/899>>. Accessed: 2 August 2015.

monster-terrorists and/or intolerable ethnics in the United States.¹⁹⁰ In this respect, I shall draw on the theory on the racialization and sexualization of Arab men in America, as put forward in chapter 1, and use it to examine the post-9/11 representations of Arab men in novels that deal directly with September 11. Thus, the following sections are going to explore *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007), focusing on the consequences of the 2001 national trauma for Arab American men and their masculinities.

4.1.1 9/11 and the Consequences of Racialization in Laila Halaby's *Once in A Promised Land*

As already suggested, Laila Halaby's *Once in A Promised Land* (2007) takes September 11 as its starting point, and revolves on the consequences of this national trauma for American society in general, and an Arab American couple in particular. The protagonists, a husband and wife named Jassim and Salwa, are a couple whose marital problems are exacerbated after 9/11. In particular, it is Jassim's sense of self that is unsettled by the national trauma and the consequent backlash for Arabs in the United States. The novel starts with a chapter that works as a preface and is entitled "Before," pointing to the historical turning point that 9/11 entailed for the United States and for Arab Americans. In this introduction to the story, we learn about the two protagonists, who live in Tucson, Arizona, and we know that the story that will ensue will take place right after the 2001 terrorist

¹⁹⁰ The notions of "monster-terrorist" (Puar and Rai) and "intolerable ethnic" (Puar) were explained in section 1.5 of the present dissertation.

attacks (viii). In the preface, Halaby, in a direct interpellation to the reader, makes sure that they leave all preconceptions and prejudices behind, and places the audience as travelers that will take a journey into the characters' lives. In the manner of an airport questioning, Halaby ensures that readers do not take any excess baggage with them. As she puts it:

Were you the only person to pack your luggage?

...

Has your luggage been out of your possession at any time?

...

Please remove your shoes ... jewelry, wallets, belts, coats, and all the contents of your pockets and place them in a gray bin.

Before I tell you this story, I ask that you open the box and place in it any notions and preconceptions, any stereotypes with regard to Arabs and Muslims that you can find in your shirtsleeves and pockets, tucked in your briefcase, forgotten in your cosmetic bag, tidied away behind your ears, rolled up in your underwear, saved on your computer's hard drives. This box awaits terrorists, veils, oil, and camels. There's room for all of your billionaires, bombers, and belly-dancers. (viii, emphasis in original)

Alluding to stereotypes about Arabs in general, and Arab men as monster-terrorists (Puar and Rai) in particular (the quote actually refers to both "terrorists" and "bombers"), Halaby makes sure we do not perceive Salwa and Jassim as stereotypical at all. In fact, they are an assimilated Arab American couple, with connections with their origins but no links to an Arab American community. Their identities, one could argue, have been constructed outside the perspectives on identity construction that Gary C. David explained in his article "The Creation of 'Arab American' Political Activism and Ethnic (Dis)Unity," examined in section 2.3.1 of the present dissertation.¹⁹¹ Laila Halaby, after making sure that the readers

¹⁹¹ Those perspectives are: (a) the *primordial perspective*, related to ethnopolitical commonalities and acculturation; (b) the *structural perspective*, based on discrimination, stereotyping and ethclass; and (c) the *social constructionist perspective*, which emphasizes the role of the family and community in the construction of Arab American identities.

have left their prejudices behind, wishes they “*Enjoy [their] trip*” (ix, emphasis in the original text), and the story starts.

The main male character in the novel is Jassim. While his name means “big” or “huge” in Arabic, Jassim Haddad is “neither tall nor short, and his body [is] lean in an almost gawky way ... if it were not for his face, with the large eyes and very thick eyebrows, he would look fragile, breakable” (243). Jassim is a hydrologist and a swimmer. His whole life revolves around water, as water was indeed his first love (243). He is infatuated with it, and his passion is related to his origins, since when he was a young boy living in Jordan, his uncle Abu Jalal instilled in him the love and acknowledgement of the importance of water. Jassim’s uncle told him: “Water is what will decide things, not just for us but for every citizen of the world as well” (40). Because of these words, Jassim moved to Arizona to study Hydrology, did a Master's, a PhD, and although his aim was to go back to Jordan and help with water shortage issues there, he ended up staying in the United States. That youthful politicization vanished as he attained his American dream, encapsulated in the form of marriage and a well-paid job. His wife is Salwa, a Palestinian who had been born in the United States but grew up in Jordan. She went back to America with Jassim, became a banker and also started working as a real estate agent. They pertain to an upper-middle class, which has made them disregard their ethnic background in the United States, so that they do not have any connection with an Arab American community. As Carol Fadda-Conrey puts it:

[I]t becomes apparent that in their pursuit of material comforts, they had slowly relinquished all forms of transnational political

engagement, building their image in implicit compliance with the assimilative criteria that guarantee the good Arab-American label. Such criteria mandate that the good Arab-American subject denounce, renounce, or at best neutralize his or her political and/or religious identity, thus conceding to the directive that the only acceptable iterations of Arab culture within the US are those that reify a bland, uncritical type of US multiculturalism. (2014: 152)

Thus, their assimilation to the United States makes their lives after 9/11 more difficult as they are confronted with discrimination.¹⁹² They will have to come to terms with being pushed to the margins of a society that, prior to that, embraced them and their professionalism. Although the couple is described by the author as “parched around the edges” (viii), it is after 9/11 that their marital problems become visible. On September 11, 2001, Jassim's day starts normally, with him going to the swimming pool in the morning before work. Following his love for water, for Jassim, swimming is his way to “attain equilibrium” (5). However, this indulgence in water denotes the privileged status he has reached in the United States. While before moving to America his love for water implied a politicized view of it, now reveling in the affluence of his position in the Western world, his love for water has evolved into an enjoyment of it as a commodity. Later that day, a worried call from their family in Jordan alerts Salwa and Jassim about what happened in New York, and the national upheaval resultant from September 11 starts changing their lives. The national trauma also becomes a personal trauma as it implies a newly felt profiling, especially for Jassim, who up to then had enjoyed the color-blindness that was associated with his being part of a privileged social class. After the “day that changed everything” (5), Jassim cannot find his balance,

¹⁹² As explained in section 2.3.1.2, the more Arabs are assimilated to American culture, the more likely they are to perceive discrimination (Abdulrahim, James, Yamout and Baker).

as the imagery from 9/11 is replayed in his head: “his brain seized on picture after picture, humans leaping from impossible heights, plumes of smoke filling the air and then charging down the narrow streets” (19). The trauma that 9/11 entailed in the United States also permeates Jassim's thoughts while in the swimming pool. As is explained in the story:

[I]t was not until he was in the pool and swimming that his mind wrapped around the pictures of those two massive buildings collapsing to the ground so neatly beneath the columns of smoke, that he returned to the impossibility of what he had seen. What entered into someone's mind to make him (them!) want to do such a thing? It was incomprehensible. And unnatural – human beings fought to survive, not to die. And had they, those many people who seemed to join together in crazy suicide, had any idea that they would cause such devastation? (20)

Interestingly, while pointing to the visual nature of the trauma of September 11,¹⁹³ Jassim also considers the impossibility of the events, thus conceiving of 9/11 as a heterotopia, a site of contradiction, a real space which is at the same time a counter-site. His feeling of traumatic hopelessness actually stems from the fact that he understands the necropolitics purported by the terrorists as contrary to biopolitics, and therefore, as abject.¹⁹⁴ As he considers the events “unnatural” (20), Jassim feels utterly traumatized. As Anne Whitehead would put it, the traumatized individual is overwhelmed in a way that resists language and representation (13), but which is characterized by regression and fragmentation (Granofsky 107). The notions of bio- and necropolitics surround Jassim's mind in his trying to make sense of the national trauma, which will later result in a double mourning for him

¹⁹³ The visual nature of September 11 has been expounded on in section 1.4. It has been argued that the trauma resultant of the absence of the towers was recurrently recreated through the repetition of the images of the attacks on television (Kaplan 13).

¹⁹⁴ The concepts of heterotopia (Foucault), necropolitics (Mbembe, Puar), biopolitics (Foucault, Chow), and abject (Kristeva) were examined in chapter 1 of the present dissertation.

as an Arab American. However, perhaps because of his actual detachment from any Arab American community, Jassim's first reaction to 9/11 only mirrors that of millions of Americans, and does not have any specifically ethnic (Arab/Muslim) component. It is his wife Salwa who, once back home, makes him think about the possible consequences of the terrorist attacks for those perceived as Arab or Muslim. Salwa voices her concerns about the potential backlash against Arabs/Muslims in the following manner: "People are stupid. *Stupid and macho*" (21, emphasis in the original text). In saying this, Salwa associates Western patriarchy to institutionalized racism, and refers to the masculinist patriotism that would ensue after 9/11. Moreover, she emphasizes the ethos of fear that would pathologize those who look Arab or Muslim making them be perceived as threatening and abject Others, and branding them as "intolerable ethnics" in contrast to white Anglo-Saxon protestant heroes.¹⁹⁵ As Salwa develops:

Macho. You know, throwing their weight around if something happens that they don't like. Only it doesn't matter to them if they get the people who did whatever it is that they are angry about, just as long as they've done something large and loud. I hate to think what sort of retaliation there is going to be on a governmental level for what happened. Jassim, it's not going to be easy, especially for you. (21, emphasis in original)

Salwa is, unfortunately, anticipating what will happen to Jassim in terms of both personal and governmental retaliation—he will eventually get fired after an FBI investigation. Salwa relates the mainstream racial reprisal to the Western understanding of patriarchy, as well as the masculinity condoned by the American government. By calling Western masculinity "macho", Salwa is referring to

¹⁹⁵ The notion of "intolerable ethnic" is explained in section 1.5 of the present dissertation (Puar 2007: 59).

hegemonic Western masculinity, which establishes itself as superior to other masculinities, in this case the abject masculinity of the intolerable ethnic. At the same time, she foresees the consequences for Arab (American) men as their Arabo-Islamist masculinities will be pathologized by being related to the image of the monster-terrorist.¹⁹⁶

Indeed, backlash towards Jassim soon ensues. The first instance of racial visibilization that Jassim experiences takes place on 9/11 itself, when at the gym a man called Jack Franks inquires about Jassim's origins, and upon saying that he's Jordanian, Franks explains how his daughter married a Jordanian and “converted. She's an Arab now” (6). This resentful statement makes the reader aware of the racial and religious confusion of this character, who equates Arab with Muslim and does not understand that one cannot convert into Arabness. His misconceptions about the Arab world are corroborated by the next question he asks Jassim, which is whether his wife is veiled. After he says no, and that in fact, although he is culturally Muslim, he does not believe in God, Franks tells him about a woman at his bank who is from Jordan, and eroticizes/exoticizes her by stating, “I'm just amazed by the beauty of the women there. Incredible. The hair, the eyes. No wonder you fellas cover them up” (7).¹⁹⁷ It turns out that the woman he is referring to is Salwa. Although at this point Frank's questions seem relatively innocent, if not just ignorant, the reader will later become aware of the fact that he has called the FBI to report Jassim. Moreover, at his work place, Jassim starts to

¹⁹⁶ The notion of “monster-terrorist” (Puar and Rai) was examined in section 1.5.

¹⁹⁷ Here I am taking Suheir Hammad's notions of eroticization and exoticization as expounded in her poem “Not Your Erotic, Not Your Exotic,” examined in section 3.4 of the present dissertation.

hear comments about possible terrorists damaging the water supplies, after which his colleagues start mistrusting him:

Jassim felt a vague prickle as he reviewed his comments at the meeting, as he analyzed the dropped gazes of several of the staff members, the less than warm reception he had received from some of the city's engineers, a group who usually welcomed him with doughnuts and laughter. (26)

Furthermore, Jassim also undergoes racial profiling in a mall, where a security guard follows him around because he has been reported as looking suspicious. While he takes it lightly and jokes "Apparently I am a security threat" (28), Salwa takes charge of the situation and confronts the girl who reported Jassim, who just breaks down at the mention of 9/11 as she lost a relative there. The girl's manager, however, turns out to have a Turkish grandmother, and therefore understands the profiling and apologizes, thus indicating that American multiculturalism may allow for instances of compassion towards targeted minorities. After all these events, Jassim is coming to realize that he exists in a heterotopic space where the stable identity that he had constructed as a successful Arab American is being questioned after the visibilization and subsequent racialization of Arabo-Islamist masculinities in the United States.

Just as Jassim is experiencing this backlash, Salwa is going through a traumatic experience of her own, which denotes the lack of communication between her and her husband. While Salwa combines her job in a bank with her newly started career as a real estate agent, Jassim feels lonelier and lonelier (23). At the same time, Salwa also feels neglected by her husband (99), and tries to fill the void through consumerism as well as a pregnancy. Not feeling fulfilled in the

“promised land” she was expecting, Salwa would like to try and change that by becoming a mother, so she decides not to take her contraceptive pills and gets pregnant (49, 91). However, since Jassim does not want to have children, she keeps it a secret. The knowledge about her pregnancy becomes “the Lie” that she keeps from her husband (26). Oblivious of his wife's deception, Jassim continues preoccupied about the terrorist attacks of September 11 in the following weeks. As is put in the novel, “Each day that Jassim had gone swimming since that fateful Tuesday when the planes hit, his mind had not cleared on entering the water but rather captured memories, mostly of home, and rolled them around the duration of his swim” (62). The visual nature of the trauma resultant from 9/11 is recreated in Jassim's mind, yet, in this case, the images are no longer those of the towers collapsing (20), but memories of his ethnic origins. The double mourning that September 11 entailed for Arab Americans is evinced in Jassim. Once his ethnic identity has been visibilized to others, and therefore to himself, Jassim's process of healing from the trauma of 9/11 entails a reflection on his own origins. Jassim's and Salwa's problems continue as Salwa has a miscarriage, which she also hides from Jassim, until he finds her crying and confesses. Jassim's reaction is described as nurturing. While comforting his wife, Jassim is preoccupied:

He would think about it later, process what it meant that she had gotten pregnant (on purpose or by accident?) and not told him (to protect him or because she was scared he would get mad because she had done it on purpose?), but for now he could console her. He felt warmth in holding her, in being able to offer her comfort. After all, he was not a man given to irrational loss of control or anger. It was not anger that he felt, either. It was... nothing that he felt. That would come, when he had time to think about it more, but for now he would hold his wife, as that seemed the right thing to do. (104)

Yet, later on, Jassim starts thinking about his wife's miscarriage, and that the reason for her hiding her pregnancy might have been his unwillingness to have children. While driving after being in the swimming-pool, Jassim's mind races in a fragmented fashion characteristic of trauma literature (Granofsky 107), "*Salwa had a miscarriage*. Jassim's conscious and semiconscious thoughts were colliding, creating a heady, almost blinding panic. Deep breath. Hold it. Exhale. One more time. Two breaths" (117, emphasis in the original text). In the midst of this state of mind, Jassim runs over a skateboarding boy with his car, who eventually dies. He is cleared by the police after his explanation of the accident is corroborated by witnesses (120-125). However, Jassim feels guilty, and is also aware of the potential consequences of this fact so he pleads "Let none of this be happening. *Dear God, let this be a nightmare*" (119, emphasis in the original text), and eventually has a panic attack (154). Incidentally, the boy's skateboard had a license plate which read "Terrorist Hunting License" (76), which only makes Jassim more suspicious to the FBI.

The post-9/11 milieu in which Salwa and Jassim's story develops and the consequences of these events to the characters's identities make this couple's marriage deteriorate even more. Both Jassim and Salwa have affairs. Salwa with a young intern, Jake, and Jassim with a waitress, Penny. Their extramarital relationships are complicated by their ethnicity. While Penny likes Jassim but at the same time wants retaliation towards Arabs/Muslims after 9/11, Jake likes Salwa as a consequence of the exoticization that he projects onto her. Unable to find happiness in their "once promised land," Jassim finds himself longing for his

origins, and Salwa decides that she needs to go back to Jordan. Their privileged position in American society has been questioned by the racialization projected onto them after 9/11, and that has reawakened their concern for their origins. In the case of Jassim, it has made him question his love for the United States as “for the first time he felt unsettled in his beloved America, vaguely longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arabs” (165). September 11 unsettles this assimilated couple in such a manner that their identities are set in a state of anomie, so that the only way they see out of the feeling of inadequacy resultant from their racialization is going back to their country of origin in search of a stable identity. For Jassim, his nostalgia for home results in a breakdown full of water imagery, as water is what helps Jassim make sense of life:

A dead boy and an incomplete fetus weigh the blood down with their unfulfilled promises. Jassim looked down over the hills and felt his misdeeds flood through him, a convulsion of sadness and guilt that brought him to his knees ... Jassim gasped for air, for something to pull him up, for Abu Fareed’s mighty hands to lift him out of the water. ... Perhaps if he lay there long enough, he would cry himself into a puddle, transform into the substance he had spent his life revering and loving. (218)

In this last sentence, Jassim acknowledges the urge for his identity to become fluid. This need comes from his in-between identity and the space of anomie that he experiences as an Arab man in post-9/11 America, where his assimilated privileged identity (in terms of social class) is being questioned after the 2001 terrorist attacks because of his ethnic (Arab) looks. Moreover, further destabilization ensues as the FBI, first alerted by Jack Franks (Jassim's acquaintance from the gym), start questioning Jassim and his coworkers (223).

Jassim is asked by the FBI about his job, the car accident, and his religious background (he is culturally Muslim but does not believe in God). Jassim's boss, Marcus, is on Jassim's side for the most part, yet when he starts getting phone calls from clients who do not want to work with Jassim anymore, his conviction about Jassim's innocence starts to weaken. Finally, an article about engineering faults in the Twin Towers that the FBI finds on his desk makes Marcus decide to fire him (295). Jassim's response to this targeting is as follows:

Jassim had done nothing wrong and this was America and there should have to be proof of negligence on his part for his job to be affected. People, companies, the city, shouldn't be able to pull accounts on the basis of his being an Arab. Yes, finally he saw what had been sitting at the back of his consciousness for some time in a not-so-whispered voice: *with or against*. But was he not *with*? *I understand American society*, he wanted to scream. I speak your language. I pay taxes to your government. I play your game. I have a right to be here. How could this be happening? (234, emphasis in original)

Two aspects are particularly notable here. On the one hand, there is a reference to being “with or against” the United States, which denotes the Manichean view of the world that America projected after 9/11 as the traumatic necropolitics inherent in the attacks are built in contrast to the biopolitics purported by the state. On the other hand, by saying that he plays their game, Jassim implies that he has been assimilated and become an active participant in America's upward mobility dream. In having this privilege questioned on account of a race that had been invisibilized until then, Jassim feels unsettled. In fact, it has been argued that, at the beginning of the novel, Jassim finds himself in an advantageous position, forming part of the

ethclass of white privileged America.¹⁹⁸ September 11 disrupts this and forces Salwa and Jassim to a recognition of their ethnic position (Valassopoulos 3, 11). They are thus pushed towards the margins because of Jassim's physical appearance. As Steven Salaita puts it:

This phenomenon, which occupies an important position in *Once in a Promised Land*, reflects what in previous critical work I have referred to as “imperative patriotism,” a type of patriotic outlook in the post-September 11 United States that demands acquiescence to a particular notion of safety and the national interest. Imperative patriotism relies on a certain ethnic imagery to produce a distinction between “us” and “them,” with “us” representing good Americans and “them” representing evildoers. Stereotypical imagery of the Middle Eastern male—beard, dark skin, menacing eyes, and so forth—accompanies representations of “them.” Americans such as Jassim who are unfortunate enough to resemble that image automatically become threatening. (2011: 88)

Jassim becomes painfully aware of the Manichean view of America's imperative patriotism, and as a consequence, his identity as an Arab American feels like a contradiction in terms, a heterotopia of sorts. Therefore, he finds himself in an identity crisis that makes him long for his origins. Jassim expresses his longing in the following manner: “Funny how nostalgia breathes heavily under pressure, how longing blossoms under the veil of hatred. Veiled by them. Hated by them. Hated for living. Hated for veiling” (234). For Jassim, nostalgia and longing stem from America's recent rejection of his ethnicized self. Moreover, Jassim relates hatred to a kind of veiling which does not allow the mainstream to see Arabs outside of stereotypes, and to a veil which Arabs themselves have historically put onto

¹⁹⁸ Jassim and Salwa form part of this “white privileged America” since, being officially white, and a part of the majority of Arab Americans who have a higher median income than the American average, they are part of an ethclass that has not made them need the help of an Arab American community. They have, therefore, in a way, rejected those Arab Americans who are not as privileged and who have come together in their fight against discrimination. The concept of “ethclass” had been developed in section 2.3.1.2.

women. In this case, hatred against Arabs is related to their religion and equated with Muslim faith. Seeing Islam as the enemy because of the necropolitics associated with it, any person who looks Arab is racialized and, therefore, discriminated against. Furthermore, the fact that Jassim has not established himself in the United States with the support of any Arab American community just enhances his feelings of discrimination and nostalgia. Without a community to act as a safety net, the rejection of the American community who had accepted him until then unsettles his identity as a man of Arab origin who had previously made it in the United States.

While both Salwa and Jassim feel homesick, the novel comes to an open ending for them. Salwa visits her lover Jake to say goodbye to him before her trip to Jordan but, unable to accept her departure, since his mind exoticizes Salwa as a submissive woman, Jake beats her (321). In the hospital, with Salwa laying disfigured in bed, Jassim has an epiphany. First, he realizes that his in-between identity marked who he chose as a wife. As Halaby explains:

He loved Salwa because in her he saw home, which made her both more precious and a source of resentment. This realization, this seeing, was at once so sad as to twist his stomach and so liberating that he felt he could float in the air. ... He had married Salwa because he had wished to protect and nurture her. Because he needed her. (325)

Jassim's realization both revolts him and eases his pain. He has gained insight into the fact that he should not have forgotten his politicized origins in favor of a privileged life. He has understood that deep down his in-between identity had always been part of him, even in his marriage to Salwa. Jassim's acceptance of his origins and his identity, not only as a (formerly) privileged American but as an

Arab American (with the political implications that this in-between identity entails), point to an identitary resolution from his part. By accepting his ethnicity, he is in fact accepting Gary C. David's "primordial perspective," which is helping him to accept his *Arab* American identity. After that, he is able to reestablish the communication with his wife. But this is only because he has been able to come to terms with his contradictory heterotopic self and has accepted his weaknesses. Thus, after his epiphany, Jassim tells the whole truth to Salwa:

I've not provided for you what you needed, allowed you to be who you wanted. I should have recognized that you would have been better off staying in Jordan. I was selfish to have brought you here. I realized that today. Salwa, I am so sorry. All of this is my fault for being weak, for not being able to tell you what I've done, first killing the boy. And then, Salwa, I've lost my job. Marcus fired me. The FBI investigation, they've fired me. (327)

Acknowledging the importance of his origins in his American life enables Jassim to see his life from a more objective perspective and, as a result, establish a more equal and fluid relationship with his wife, not based on need or resentment for unfulfilled dreams, but on love. This enables a new beginning for their relationship, and it is Jassim's understanding of fluidity, extended to both identity and relationships, that makes this possible. Jassim's infatuation with water reflects the fluidity of his identity, and ultimately helps him to understand it in its heterotopic nature. As a consequence, one could say he becomes aware of his identity as a *mahjar* (Arab immigrant) and, using his *facultad* (Anzaldúa), positivizes his in-betweenness, facilitating the reestablishment of communication with his wife.

The novel finishes with a chapter entitled "After," which is a story in the

vein of Arab storytelling. In what Steven Salaita calls an ambiguous ending (2011: 92), the tale finishes with a nightingale which becomes an ordinary man, and tries to save a maiden who has been stabbed and is now disfigured. As the story goes:

This ordinary man was not so handsome—above average, perhaps, but nothing of the prince-hero type—and had only once before found himself folded over a nearly lifeless body. Years of exercise had left him strong and sound in mind and body, so he lifted up the unconscious and damaged maiden and carried her home across land and sea, hoping that with proper care she would recover from her wounds. (335)

The story certainly parallels Jassim's and Salwa's, being an allegory of their own life. The reader is left, thus, with the hope that Salwa will recover, and that the couple will be happy. The novel ends with this questioning:

There's no "they lived happily ever after"?
"Happily ever after" happens only in American fairy tales.
Wasn't this an American fairy tale?
It was and it wasn't. (335, emphasis in original)

Once in a Promised Land is an American tale, but also an Arab American tale, an Arab American journey, an Arab American story of the consequences of 9/11. In this novel, the male protagonist is presented as a caring husband, whose relationship with his wife goes through a crisis due to the lack of communication between them, which is exacerbated by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent backlash in racism against Arabs. Jassim is portrayed as a victim of the circumstances: having nothing to do with terrorism, he is discriminated against at a mall due to his skin color, is accused of killing a racist boy on purpose, and is eventually fired. The workings of bio- and necropolitics make evident for him the heterotopic space that his identity inhabits. He encounters himself in a state of anomie as a consequence of the Arabo-Islamist masculinity ascribed onto him

because of his looks, and made evident after the hypervisibilization resulting from 9/11. This is what makes him be perceived as a monster-terrorist and, thus, be discriminated against. This feeling of abjection from the very country that adopted him, welcomed him, and made him part of a privileged minority, makes him live in a heterotopia that results in an identity crisis and, ultimately, a panic attack. Nevertheless, he is not described just as a victim: his identity crisis allows him to learn to communicate and to come to terms with his in-between identity, that is, with his Arab origins, which he had forgotten about as a result of his assimilation and the lack of an Arab American community surrounding him. It is through the erasure of borders that water entails that he can reconcile his identity. On the one hand, water reminds him of his origins, and of the politicized reasons that made him want to become a hydrologist. On the other hand, it also implies a fluidity, an elasticity that he must acknowledge in order to make sense of his in-between *mahjar* identity. Once he is able to make sense of his complex identity, the novel ends, leaving the reader with a sense of hope; a hope for the end of the oxymoronic view of Arab and American cultures.

In conclusion, Jassim is an eminently positive character who counteracts stereotypes about Arab men in the United States, but who undergoes a learning process in the story based on his understanding of his Arab American identity. The novel denounces racism and questions sexism, therefore making evident that stereotypes about Arabs are a construction. In so doing, it advocates Arab American women of color feminism and encourages the need for the politicization of the Arab American community after 9/11. More than that, in giving Jassim the

agency of change, the text promotes the active role men must have in feminism. It advocates the need for dialogue between men and women, and the need for them to work together in a common struggle against sexism and racism. Only through this joint effort will Arab American feminism be able to fulfill its aims.

4.1.2 Failed Heterosexuality in Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*: Moving Towards a Non-Binary Understanding of Masculinity

And one of the elders of the city said,
Speak to us of Good and Evil.
And he answered:
Of the good in you I can speak, but not
of the evil.
For what is evil but good tortured by its
own hunger and thirst?
Verily when good is hungry it seeks
food even in dark caves, and when it
thirsts, it drinks even of dead waters.
You are good when you are one with
yourself.
Yet when you are not one with yourself
you are not evil.

(Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*, 75)

Frances Kirallah Noble's novel *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* (2007) revolves around the search for the meaning of good and evil of a middle-aged Arab American man who goes through a mid-life crisis in post-9/11 America. The protagonist shares his name with the Lebanese American poet Khalil Gibran, author of *The Prophet*, who so eloquently reflects on the nature of good and evil (above). In contrast, Khalil (often called Kali) struggles in post-9/11 America with

his Arab American identity, as he conceives of it as a heterotopia as a consequence of the abjection projected onto Arab men after 9/11. Kali is a 52-year-old optician who goes through a mid-life crisis that makes him start talking to the ghost of his late grandmother in an attempt at understanding the meaning of life. His troubles stem from his failure to understand the nature of good and evil after the tragic terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims in the United States. Since he, as an Arab, has come to be considered part of the “axis of evil,” he tries to make sense of the Manichean view that has been imposed in the West and that unsettles his sense of self. He lives in a heterotopia, a real site of contradiction in which his sense of self is being challenged by the outside Western perception of his identity, and thus leaves Kali in a state of anomie. This heterotopic thirdspace, based on an exclusionary view of nationality which brands him as an intolerable ethnic or monster-terrorist, has made Kali unable to distinguish between good and evil. As he puts it: “I can’t judge anymore. What’s right? What’s wrong? What isn’t? I face the last third of my life and I don’t know what to do with myself” (23). Paralleling Jassim in *Once in a Promised Land*, Khalil is also an accomplished professional without many ties to his origins or an Arab American community to fall back on. Actually, Kali is a third-generation immigrant whose grandparents migrated to the United States in the first wave of Arab immigration, that is, they arrived in the U.S. at the end of the nineteenth century from what nowadays is Lebanon, which was at the time the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire (141). Moreover, Kali’s father instilled in him a concern for assimilation. His father wanted him to be “American” (119), and so he did not even teach him Arabic (89). Besides, due to

the racialization inflicted towards his father because of his markedly dark phenotype, as a child Kali denied to his classmates that the dark man who accompanied him was his father, and instead defined himself as Italian (143-144). Kali had thus been rejecting his origins from an early age, a fact which, unsettled by 9/11, resulted in the beginning of his identity crisis.

Approaching his mid-50s in post-9/11 America, Kali's identity crisis permeates his masculinity. Kali finds his manhood questioned by his erectile dysfunction. At the beginning of the story, "He wanted to please [his wife]. He tried. It was no use" (1). His failed masculinity may be an effect of his identity crisis, and may also be a consequence of the feeling of inadequacy resulting from the abject masculinities ascribed to Arab men in post-9/11 America. As pointed out in chapter 1 of the present dissertation, September 11 furthered an Orientalist stereotype towards Arab men which made their manhoods be considered at the same time hypermasculine and emasculated. In fact, Kali's crisis of masculinity and identity stems from people's projection of him as a monster-terrorist, which unsettles his Manichean view of life that up until then had been divided into good and evil. As he becomes identified as evil by others, but considers himself a good man and is also presented as such in the novel, Kali enters a heterotopic space of anomie in his own identity, even projecting his feeling of inadequate or failed masculinity towards his wife. Thus, the public sexualization of his abjection as an Arab in the United States (as examined in section 1.5) is mirrored in his private life in his relationship with his wife.

The heterotopia that he inhabits makes him establish connections to his

origins through his grandmother, Situe, the spirit of whom he talks to throughout the novel, as an attempt at clinging to a stable identity. In their conversations, he tries to understand the meaning of life.¹⁹⁹ Khalil's grandmother guides him through the series of comic misfortunes that he goes through in the novel, and he keeps having "ethical discussions" (110) with her. Although he is an optician, Kali's lack of vision is emphasized in the text, "[His grandmother] must teach him to see clearly, knowing he saw little" (105). Situe tries to make him come to terms with the notion that there is no clear division between good and evil, which is difficult for Kali to understand. He asks Situe, "Are you saying that nothing is clearly good or clearly bad? That there is no line between good and evil?" to which she replies "It's more complicated than you think" (29). Their conversations will aid Kali along the story and will eventually help him move towards a more fluid understanding of his identity.

As pointed out before, Kali's uneasiness stems from 9/11 and the subsequent unsettling of his seemingly stable identity into a heterotopic (contradictory) one, being a man who had consciously obliterated his origins from an early age. He is visibilized after 9/11, racialized, and therefore experiences discrimination. The first instance of racism that Khalil faces in the novel takes place when he is trying to deliver glasses to the house of a client who claims to be called Jane Plain.²⁰⁰ Her landlord is suspicious of Kali due to his physique and the fact that he is carrying a package, and tells him, "For all I know you could be a

¹⁹⁹ The relevance of the figures of grandmothers for Arab Americans was noted in the discussion on the anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers*, in section 3.3.2.

²⁰⁰ The name "Jane Plain" is significant as it makes the character stand for the mainstream, as "plain Jane" refers to an ordinary-looking girl.

terrorist” (17). After talking to Miss Plain's landowner, Kali finds her flat, and a note that says that he should go find her at “The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy” contest in Santa Vista. Infatuated by the memory of her smell, he decides to lie to his wife, tell her that he has to fly to an optician conference in Cincinnati, and drive to Santa Vista instead. The first problem comes when his wife wants to take him to the airport. He cannot say no, but this being the first time that he has lied to his wife, he is agitated when he arrives to the airport and has to talk to the clerk and security guard pretending that he has a ticket when in fact he does not. His restlessness makes him raise his voice to his wife and thus look suspicious:

In a voice so loud that surprised them both. A voice so loud it carried over the immediate commotion of the check-in line to the X-ray machine. Where the security guard took note of the anxious expression on a man's red and perspiring face, the man's excessive hold on a briefcase, and the agitation of the woman who accompanied him. (37)

Embedded in the stereotypes of Arabo-Islamist masculinities is the issue of patriarchy and mistreatment of one's wife, so that seeing him raise his voice to his wife corroborates the workers' suspicion that he may be a terrorist. His wife ends up leaving before Kali has to face any questions about him not having a ticket or boarding card. Then, he rents a car and drives to “The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy” contest. The car rental employee also considers him a “suspicious person” (40). As Noble explains about the car rental trainee:

[H]er duty was clear. Her conclusion, inevitable. He'd convicted himself after all: that name; the name of his business [Oasis]; the way he brushed off every good point she made in her sales pitch; the way he got impatient when she asked him a question; saying he didn't know where he'd be staying. But the clincher, the most important evidence against him, was the MONEY WAS NO OBJECT. She underlined and capitalized that part of her report and

faxed the whole thing to the head office. (40)

In her head, the woman combined the images of an Arab-sounding name, with images of the desert (through the name of his business, the Oasis), his nervousness, and most of all his lack of concern for money, which for her pointed to terrorist funding or to oil money, exemplifying the entrenchment of stereotypes on Arab men in the United States—yet another instance of the retaliation against Arabs after 9/11 in the United States. Yet, Kali is able to rent the car and drive to “The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy” contest. The title of the contest also serves in Noble's effort to problematize Arab stereotyping in the West, as it uses a practice related to Arab women as a trope for exoticization, even though, ironically, Kahlil fails to see any Arab women in the contest venue. In the same vein, the practice is also linked by the title to outer space, thus detaching it from any Arab origins. The foreignness denoted by the title of the belly-dancing contest may also be linked to the uprootedness felt by Arab Americans, particularly as their identity was questioned after September 11, 2001. Both exist in a heterotopic milieu: from the Arab American perspective, by having their alliances to the United States seemingly questioned by their very identity, and regarding the belly dancing contest, promoting an exoticization of Arab femininity by forwarding a traditional Arab dance while no Arab woman is there. The reference to “galaxy” also provides a sense of distance from Kahlil's origins who, just as Jassim in *Once in a Promised Land*, also forms part of a privileged ethclass that has made him obliterate any connections to an Arab American community, a fact which triggered his road trip to understand his own identity. In the contest venue, Kali finds Jane

Plain, a belly dancer wannabe and one of the contestants, who had previously bought glasses from him. After giving her the glasses he is delivering, he is actually able to have an affair with her. It may be because of his feeling of proximity to his origins—even if in a very simulacrum-like manner (as none of the contestants are actually Middle Eastern or Mediterranean, nor is Jane Plain)—that allow him to overcome his erectile dysfunction. Moving closer to a (seemingly) stable identity, Kali's sense of masculinity does not feel threatened anymore and he regains his virility.

However, just as part of his sense of effective masculinity has been restored, Kali is arrested by two men, whom he defines as “fire marshals.” They start questioning him about his name and origins, which they humorously fail to understand and reproduce correctly. The interrogation continues, with the “fire marshals” identifying themselves as “keepers of peace” (95), and thus satirizing the figure of the American hero, placing themselves in a position of power and superiority over the intolerable ethnic Kali. Although Kali is presented as honest, innocent, and more in touch with his American upbringing than his Arab origins, the “keepers of peace” emphasize all the aspects of his life and behavior that have made him seem suspicious of terrorism to others. Everyone he talked to on his way to Santa Vista had reported suspicious behavior, the “[a]irline reservation clerk, security guard, [and] airport car rental trainee” (81). Even Jane Plain is said to have stated that he seduced her and was stalking her (83). Furthermore, the “keepers of peace” gloat over Kali’s ineffectual sexuality, asking him whether “the frustration of not being able to get it up” had made him become a terrorist (107).

In saying so, they consider Kali's failed masculinity that of an abject terrorist, while at the same time they are trying to emasculate him by questioning his manhood. These American heroes' attempt at colonial emasculation also takes place through a body examination which entails the insertion of devices in various holes of his body, as "the man shoved the device in Kali's mouth, chipping one of his front teeth. The man ran the device over the surfaces of Kali's mouth, under his tongue, the inside and outside of the gums ... ears and neck, leaving the nose alone" (115). This evinces to the actors involved that the tolerable adequate masculinity is that of the American hero, in charge of the penetrating act, in contrast to the intolerable ethnic who needs to be emasculated, castrated, queered, making his failed heterosexuality patently clear.²⁰¹ The fact that Kali is confined in a Guantanamo-like cell entails also a denunciation of the conditions of the infamous prison, as well as the post-9/11 indiscriminate arrests of Arab men.

Kali is eventually able to escape (151). His identity crisis is further emphasized after his confinement, as he cannot identify his own face ("It was the face of another being. Not his. Not his. He didn't recognize it" [155]). However, after his escape, he meets characters that have gone through other identity crises, which helps him come to terms with his own sense of self. Firstly, he meets Benny, a female to male transsexual truck driver, who questions gender identity boundaries. Furthermore, Benny is in a relationship with a Mexican man who smuggles Mexicans across the border by hiding them inside Benny's truck. Border crossing, gender, and heterosexuality are thus blurred through Benny and his

²⁰¹ Arab racialization as sexualized has been expounded on in chapter 1, section 1.5.

boyfriend, thus forwarding a postmodern anti-essentialist view of identity. Indeed, Benny and his lover encompass a flexibilization of identities that point towards a de-binarization of identity categories. Later on, Kali meets another character who also helps him to see the constructed nature of the self. Maximilian is a sixty-four-year-old man, keen on drinking Scotch, who is missing an arm. The story that he explains is that he lost it while fighting in the Vietnam War (225). Posing as a veteran gives his amputation a sense of heroism, a patriotic and thus masculinizing reason for his lack. However, it is later learned that this is a made-up narrative, as in fact he had lost his arm in a windmill accident (237). Max created an account of his own identity that allowed him to overcome his feeling of emasculation after losing an arm by posing as an American hero. Both Benny and Max help Kali learn that identity can be narrativized in manifold fashions. Understanding that identity is a construction will help Kali come to terms with his own. At the same time, they help him realize that prejudice is not something solely experienced by Arab Americans, but that gender, sexual, and even disability issues, as well as the failure to display a hegemonic image of masculinity, might also create traumas, thus pointing to a potential common fight against all kinds of discrimination. In other words:

The point Noble attempts to make here is that solidarity among minorities can be key to overcoming the spread of racism, discrimination and othering in 9/11 America. ... Noble illustrates, through the help Kali gets from Benny and Maximilian, the advantages of forging solidarity among marginalized groups and across cultural divides. (Maloul 202)

Thus, Noble forwards one of the tenets of women of color feminism, which is the importance of transnational solidarities in favor of activism and equality. Although

Kali fails to fully comprehend the fluidity of Benny and Max's identities, they help him understand that his identity is not a single coherent unit, but that there are myriad aspects that conform to it. In this manner, considering the manifold aspects that form his identity, he attempts to apprehend it from a non-binary approach through its diversified compartmentalization. As the narrator explains, "When he got home and had time to reflect, he'd have to rethink his mixture: how many parts Arab, how many parts husband; how many parts father; how many parts optician, church member, nonbeliever, neighbor, Chamber of Commerce member, voter (not down party lines, usually). Man?" (234). Using his own body as a metaphor, he comes to the conclusion that, just as his body is divided into different parts, so has he different identities. His road trip has thus allowed a spur in his learning. The questioning "Man?" at the end of the enumeration above may point to the fact that he is ready to question his manhood, thus suggesting that, in the face of all the other aspects of his identity, gender may not be all that relevant. Conversely, it may imply that since his manhood has been one of the most challenged aspects of his identity throughout his ordeal (resultant from the abject masculinity ascribed onto him), it may be the one that remains the most questioned.

Finally, Khalil goes back home. There, he finds out that his family thought he was dead since his wallet and a headless body were found in a car accident where the agents that had arrested him were killed. He claims he does not remember anything about the last few days, and both the authorities and his family believe him, since they deem his mental state questionable as he has been talking to his dead grandmother for a long time. This enables him to start a new life with

his wife, who affirms that he, the optician whose grandmother thought had to teach him to see clearly (105), has finally opened his eyes (261). Throughout his journey, Khalil has gone through a process of learning, although his enlightenment remains in progress. As the novel explains, “After all that had happened, Kali found that he knew things. And he knew he knew things. Though exactly what, he couldn’t say” (263), “What he knew,” Noble insists, “became clearer in a pattern of two steps forward and one step back” (270). Khalil’s new understanding of himself appears to stem, above all, from his mixed identity, that is, from all the different parts that, metaphorically speaking, conform his body. It is by dividing his own self into parts that he has been able to make sense of an Arab American identity which is a contradiction in terms. An identity, that is, which allowed him to pass as white in the past, but has rendered him as a racially profilable body in post-9/11 America. At the least, Khalil has learned to accept the ambiguity of good and evil, in a manner less eloquent than that of the author Khalil Gibran, but not less powerful. He has been able to understand the futility of a Manichean view of life as he has come close to coming to terms with the contradictions of his own identity. Consequently, he is able to find peace within himself. As a result, he stops seeing Situe on a day to day basis. However, at end of the novel, he has a heart attack and sees his grandmother in Heaven, but she gives him a second chance on Earth, and tells him, “It’s a cruel world, Kali. Enjoy” (273). This is the last sentence in the novel, and it epitomizes what Khalil has learned: that even if life is difficult, one must try to make the most out of it. Khalil had felt puzzled as his once seemingly uniform identity, which was that of an assimilated Arab American,

felt questioned. At the very end, Kali seems to have ultimately understood what Khalil Gibran preached in *The Prophet*, that “[y]ou are good when you are one with yourself. Yet when you are not one with yourself you are not evil” (75).

4.1.3 Understanding Masculine Identities as Fluid in Post-9/11 America: Some Conclusions

September 11, 2001 made all those who looked Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern, especially men, more visible in the United States, and consequently more feasible victims of anti-Arab racism. As a result, Arab American women writers have been writing about Arab men's reactions to 9/11. Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Frances Kirallah Noble's *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*, both published in 2007, are two of the few Arab American novels which deal directly with the consequences of the terrorist attacks of 2001 through the personal identity crises of their male protagonists.²⁰² These post-9/11 portrayals of Arab men emphasize their assimilation in the United States. However, at the same time, they show how men of Arab origin are affected by their hypervisibility after the collapse of the Twin Towers, and how that unsettles both how others see them as well as their understanding of their own identity, which becomes a heterotopia that is difficult for them to understand. On the one hand, the depictions that these novels offer emphasize how assimilated Arab men are in American society, as a means to counteract the images that relate Arabness to Islamic traditionalism. On

²⁰² *The Night Counter*, by Alia Yunis, is the other novel that will be discussed in this chapter (in section 4.3.2) which refers directly to 9/11.

the other, because of this very assimilation, once they become visibilized and racialized, that is, once they have been victims of racial profiling, they also question their ethnic-American identity. Denouncing the fact that their identity has been destabilized after 9/11 evokes the contradiction in terms that the Arab American identity has become and the thirdspace of anomie Arab Americans inhabit, but at the same time forwards the possibility of a union between the two cultures. In other words, September 11 leaves Arab American men in a thirdspace where their identity is neither American nor Arab. Jassim and Kali are represented in these novels as victims of institutionalized racism that brands them as abject, intolerable ethnics. While they are not without faults, their shortcomings are not ethnically or religiously marked (in fact, both characters are depicted as particularly devoid of religiosity). On the contrary, their lack of communication with their wives and feeling of inadequacy actually stem from their obliviousness towards the Arab part of their identities. In fact, these two characters, who because of their social class have constructed their identities as closer to an American (white) privileged notion of self, find themselves deprived of in-between Arab American models to follow once the Twin Towers have collapsed and they feel insecure after the backlash and racialization of their personas that ensued. Their seemingly stable identity as assimilated (Arab) Americans has been unsettled by the racial backlash after 9/11. They are visibilized and thus perceived as intolerable ethnics and abject men, since their identities as upper/middle-class Americans are being questioned because of their Arab appearances and names. Thus, they become aware of the fact that they indeed inhabit a heterotopia, a real

space of contestation. They need to accept their *mahjar* (immigrant) identities in order to resolve their identity crises. They both do so (to a further or lesser extent), Jassim through his understanding of fluidity because of his love for water, and Kali with his movement towards an understanding of the blurred boundaries of identity and between good and evil.

Interestingly, through the unsettlement resulting from racial profiling, these two novels use the very same images that had been discursively constructed in the process of racializing Arabs to de-racialize Arab male bodies. *Once in a Promised Land* and *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* thus attempt to break the traditional link between the Arab male body and terrorism, besides denouncing the hyper-racialization of Arab men after 9/11. Yet, Arab American feminist women writers dealing directly with 9/11 tend not to denounce sexist practices. On the contrary, they portray Arab American men of an upper-middle class who believe in gender equality but feel isolated in an identity crisis that stems from the oversight of their Arab ancestry. However, resolving their crises ultimately entails a reunion with their beloved wives, which may, on the one hand, validate Islamicate notions of family while, on the other, might point to an expression of love as a women-of-color feminist stance against racism.²⁰³

²⁰³ One could relate this expression of devotion, to the love professed by Mohja Kahf in the selection of poems analyzed in section 3.5.

4.2 Arab American Fathers: Post-9/11 Representations of Patriarchs Navigating a Thirdspace of Cross-Cultural Refraction

Post-9/11 novels written by women that portray the coming of age of female protagonists and focus on their relationship with their fathers abound. Following this trend, this section deals with the representation of fathers in post-9/11 Arab American literature and will take on the theory from chapter 2, especially in relation to the concept of neopatriarchy (Sharabi). In this sense, four novels will be examined here. Interestingly, all these texts are the authors' debut novels, which may stem from personal experiences while also pointing to their need to fill a void in ethnic American literature in the portrayal of Arab American families.

Firstly, two novels which portray four young Arab (American) women and their relationships with their fathers will be analyzed. These are Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003) and Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories of South Philly* (2007).²⁰⁴ They both follow a similar narrative pattern, presenting different chapters for each of the female characters. Halaby, as previously mentioned, was born in Beirut to a Jordanian father and American mother and was raised in Arizona. Susan Muaddi Darraj is the daughter of immigrant Palestinian parents.²⁰⁵ She is also the editor of *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* (2004), which denotes the

²⁰⁴ Deemed by some a short story collection, *The Inheritance of Exile* actually reads as a novel, since the four protagonists reappear in all chapters.

²⁰⁵ For more information on Susan Muaddi Darraj's biography, see: <<https://lprjournal.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/darraj1.pdf>>. Accessed: 2 August 2015.

preeminence given by her to Arab American feminism and writing, as we will see. Both *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *The Inheritance of Exile* (2007) ponder over Arab American fatherhoods which find themselves in a transnational thirdspace.²⁰⁶ In so doing, both novels offer a variety of enactments of *rujula* (Arab masculinity) that counter homogeneous views of Arab manhood and thus defy stereotypes.

Secondly, Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* (2005) and Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) shall be studied, focusing on the relationships established in each novel between one daughter and her father. In both novels, the daughters' lives are marked by their fathers' neopatriarchal enactments of masculinity, and the daughters' active role in challenging tradition and ultimately changing their fathers' manhood (as argued by Ajrouch). Alicia Erian is the daughter of an Egyptian father and an American mother and was born in Syracuse, New York.²⁰⁷ Randa Jarrar grew up in Kuwait and Egypt, daughter of an Egyptian-Greek mother and Palestinian father, and moved to the United States after the Persian Gulf War.²⁰⁸

All four novels deal with diverse family situations, but what they all have in common is that 9/11 is not mentioned in the stories so that, even if some do not provide a specific time frame, one can infer that they are placed in a pre-9/11 setting. In addition, these novels tend to portray overprotective fathers, confirming that in the United States Arab American daughters are more policed than sons as fathers are more vigilant of daughters in the diaspora (Harpel). Moreover, girls

²⁰⁶ The concept of “thirdspace” (Soja, Bhabha) was examined in section 2.3 of the present dissertation.

²⁰⁷ For more biographical information on Alicia Erian, see: <<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/e/alicia-erian/>>. Accessed: 2 August 2015.

²⁰⁸ For more biographical information on Randa Jarrar, see: <<http://randajarrar.com/about/>>. Accessed: 2 August 2015.

also question this hierarchy in the novels, and challenge the “patriarchal connectivity” that their fathers try to impose onto them (Harpel 388).²⁰⁹ Halaby, Muaddi Darraj, Erian and Jarrar's writings are indeed narratives that illustrate these confrontations and establish what could be termed a “feminist connectivity” so as to question the gender (and age) hierarchy of patriarchy.

4.2.1 Multiple Fatherhoods in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* and Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories of South Philly*

4.2.1.1 Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan*: Different Negotiations of Situational Arab Fatherhoods

Laila Halaby's first novel, *West of the Jordan* (2003), recounts the story of four cousins, Mawal, Khadija, Soraya and Hala, young women who live either in the United States or Palestine, and who are trying to make sense of their identities. They are surrounded by very different father figures, who are depicted from the point of view of their daughters, and cover a wide range of potential attitudes by fathers of Arab descent.

To start with, Mawal's father is not very present in the text, but in the few instances where he appears, he seems to be a caring man. Mawal lives in Palestine, in the village of Nawara, with her family. She seems attached to their traditions, as

²⁰⁹ Suad Joseph talks about “patriarchal connectivity” to refer to the gendered and aged hierarchies that enable patriarchy, placing the patriarch at a place superior to all others (469). Women and younger males are socialized into patriarchy within a power structure that establishes them as inferior to the patriarch, thus perpetuating the patriarchal structure. Harpel's and Joseph's contentions have been explored in chapter 2 of the present dissertation.

there are no important conflicts between them. Mawal wants to become a teacher in Palestine if her parents allow her to. She is seemingly secure in her traditional life, although she feels oppressed by the regulations instated by her Palestinian parents, who are anchored in a patriarchal view of family. However, she does nothing to change the situation. As Amal Talaat Abdelrazek explains, “She hates being what she is, but instead of seeking the rights that her Islamic religion has endowed her with and proving the male patriarchy has perverted them, she suppresses her desires and remains a good girl in the eyes of the whole village” (135-136). Therefore, she invisibilizes herself and her feminist inner desires. She decides to “Accept that which is God's will. Accept that which is God's will. Accept that which... I will accept” (Halaby 2003: 206).

In the United States, Khadija also leads a traditional life, but is marked by the violent outbursts of her father, which result from his resentment in not being able to provide for his family. He enacts a kind of transnational Arab American masculinity that entails a violent channeling of upward mobility frustration. Khadija’s father, a mechanic in the United States, migrated there full of dreams of economic success that never came true, leaving him as one of the poorest characters in the novel (19). His sense of underachievement helps his rooting into traditional enactments of patriarchal power against his family. As Amal Talaat Abdelrazek explains, “He feels great disappointment with his life in America where he had hoped to realize his dreams but instead found that, with his failure in his job and his devastating feelings of loss for his homeland, his dreams have been crushed” (153). Moreover, she adds, “As a Palestinian immigrant, he has lost hope

of ever returning to his homeland” (153). In fact, the relevance of his dislocation is tinged with a feeling of uprootedness and nostalgia for a homeland he will not return to. These feelings are portrayed in the novel in a passage full of desert imagery,

My father has many dreams that have been filled with sand. That’s what he tells me: ‘This country has taken my dreams that used to float like those giant balloons, and filled them with sand. Now they don’t float, and you can’t even see what they are anymore.’ (37)

The image of sand dragging Khadija's father in the wrong direction is a recurrent trope in the novel, which indicates that his violent actions are actually a result of his sense of displacement, as one can relate sand to the desert and thus to the Middle East. As Whittaker Wigner Harpel pointed out in *Conceptions of Masculinity Among Arab Americans*, first-generation immigrants tend to return to traditionalism, and thus to violent enactments of masculinity to ensure patriarchal power and as a means of making sense of their distressed sense of self (6, 85).²¹⁰ Khadija’s father is a very traditional man, with very rooted ideas of family honor. In fact, it is emphasized in the text that “[Khadija’s father] thinks that his daughter’s reputation is the most important thing in the world” (30), and so he does not even allow her to talk to boys. Furthermore, the role of provider or breadwinner is an important part of Arab masculinity,²¹¹ and so for him having failed at economic success implies a failure in accomplishing an endeavor that he feels constitutes his manhood. Khadija's father is attempting to salvage his sense of proper masculinity by using violence, which confirms Samina Aghacy's thesis

²¹⁰ Whittaker Wigner Harpel's thesis is expounded on in section 2.3.2 of the present dissertation.

²¹¹ Amireh 725, Aghacy 20-22.

that “many male characters resort to domestic violence to reaffirm male prerogatives, to confirm potency and eminence, and to restore and reenact a reactionary and stable manhood” (21). Beating his wife and daughter is also his way of channelling his resentment. In addition, that frustration makes him drink, a fact which only exacerbates his bouts of violence. Hence, this return to Islamicate traditionalism is also coupled with the unIslamic behavior of his drinking. In fact, Khadija's father resorts to a traditionalism which stems from his upbringing within traditionally Islamic conceptions of masculinity, while it is also influenced by neopatriarchy and the situational thirdspace masculinity that the diaspora implies. That is, Khadija's father's sense of self is placed in a simulacrum between traditionalism and modernity inherent in neopatriarchal notions of masculinity.²¹² This precarious position of his masculine identity results, as a consequence of cross-cultural refraction (Coleman), in a situational manhood placed in a thirdspace, which in his case reinforces patriarchal practices, albeit taken to the extreme, as he resorts to violence as a means to secure patriarchal power. However, confirming the complexities of neopatriarchal masculinities, he is not presented as a flat character, but is described instead as being in an ambivalent position, in which he can be both very violent and very caring. As Khadija notes:

Sometimes my father loves my mother—and the rest of us—so much that he becomes a kissing and hugging machine. Sometimes, though, he is an angry machine that sees suspicious moves in every breath. But most of the time he is sad, his thoughts somewhere I cannot visit. (37)

As evinced by the quote, his behavior is justified in the text through his sadness,

²¹² A detailed explanation of the notion of neopatriarchy (Sharabi) can be found in section 2.2.2 of the present dissertation.

his uprootedness, and his nostalgia for the Arab world. In fact, the transience of him not being able to go back to his homeland is used in the novel as a rationalization for his use of violence, as the overwhelming experience of trauma is channeled through destructiveness. As Khadija explains, “‘My ache comes from losing my home,’ my father tells us a lot” (39). However, although his enactment of masculinity is justified in the text through the trauma of exile, it is also denounced, as this male character’s extremely patriarchal behavior is not accepted by other members of the family, such as their relative Esmeralda, who “‘cursed Khadija’s father in Arabic and said he was an old shoe with a hole in his head as well as one in his ass” (34). The novel actually ends with a reference to the unacceptability of this behavior in the United States, thus pointing to a feminist denunciation of sexism. At the very end, during one of the father’s bouts of rage, Khadija calls the police, and the novel concludes with her father’s arrest. In fact, when the police arrive, he seems a different man: “‘My father’s fire just goes away like it started raining inside him and he lets them pick him off [my brother] Hamouda, who I pick up from the ground as soon as the police pick up my father” (208). This ending leaves the plot open to future change in his mode of behavior, while highlighting the objectionable nature of his actions. Thus, the end of Khadija’s story conducts a feminist stance against sexism and places the daughter as the agent of change in (neo)patriarchal masculine practices.

The third cousin, Soraya, could be considered the opposite of Khadija. According to Amal Talaat Abdelrazek, “‘She refuses her parents’ traditional way of life and favors the American sense of freedom she feels and enjoys outside her

home” (140). She lives in Los Angeles, and is a very independent girl, outspoken, and very aware of her sexuality. Her father, though, appears as a disempowered man, who does not take responsibility for his family and whose only strength comes from economic success. As is expressed in the novel:

My mother is the strong one in our house and people would probably make fun of my father if it weren't for all the money he has. Money is his favorite thing, like somewhere along the way he decided he could only focus on one thing and he thought better money than family, less headaches. So men respect him because of his success. (26)

Soraya's father has interchanged traditional Arab ideals of patriarchy for traditional American ideals of upward mobility. He has moved away from the traditional importance given to fatherhood by Arab culture, and is resorting only to the image of the breadwinner in order to fulfill the American economic dream of success which, in turn, has made him respectable to other men. As pointed out by Amal Amireh (725), the ability to provide is central to a successful construction of patriarchal Arab identity, and as a consequence Soraya's father's identity is built around this aim. However, being only a provider, he has eluded most of his responsibilities as a patriarch, and is presented as an ineffectual, neglecting father. His neopatriarchal masculinity has favored commodities instead of actual presence and commitment to a family. In the above quote, Soraya emphasizes that her father's masculinity is perceived as successful because of this economic accomplishment. However, she also refers to the fact that, other than that, his masculinity does not follow any traditional patterns since her mother is the strongest figure in the family. Soraya does not consider this rejection of traditionalism positive because it results in her father's ineffectual fatherhood, as

he neglects his family and her.

Finally, Hala is a student in Tucson who grew up in Jordan and migrated to the United States as a teenager. In the novel, she tries to make sense of her Arab American identity during her visit to Jordan for her mother's funeral, where she reencounters her father. At that point, her father does not want her to go back to the United States and continue studying there. Besides, having become a single father, he is determined to make all decisions about his daughter's life by himself. As Halaby remarks, "While [Hala's mother] was alive, [her] father respected her wishes, but not even two days into my mourning her death, he made it clear that he was going to be the one to make the decisions about [her] life from then on" (45). In an attempt at securing his family's honor by resorting to traditional Arab behavior (as Peteet [34], Bourdieu [11], and Wikan [642] argued was common among Arab men), he decides then that Hala has to finish studying in Jordan and "put [her] roots [t]here as a woman" (45), and thus follow his traditional Arab understanding of family. As she phrases it, "I was to replace my mother with a husband. I was to stay in Jordan forever. Marry ... Have children. Be someone else's burden" (45), that is, follow the traditional Arab modes of feminine behavior. She is against the idea, and even considers suicide as an exit strategy from a world that constrains her. As she tells her father, "My mother's wish was that I study in America. If I stay here I will kill myself" (45). He becomes paralyzed by this confrontation and, as Hala explains, "He stared at me. No yelling. No cursing. No invitations to kill myself this very minute at his feet—something I surely would never have been able to do even with my grief at its

strongest. Just staring. He turned and walked away. We did not speak again” (45-46). Right after that, she goes back to the United States, having broken any contact with her father. Nonetheless, Hala returns to Jordan for her grandmother’s funeral, and by then her father has understood that he must negotiate his decisions with her, because otherwise she will leave forever. As she puts it, “my father must know by now that he will lose me forever if he pushes too hard” (83). Some signs of change in her father start to appear when Hala is in Jordan and she wants to go visit people by herself, and her father accepts her wishes: “My father does not seem surprised, doesn’t try to dissuade me, and even offers to drive me there” (153). Hala’s father has been transformed by his daughter. So much so that at the end of the story he tells her that she should wait to get married, and that she should go back to the United States to finish her schooling there first. Hala’s father undergoes an enormous change as the story develops, from being a traditional father only worried about his family’s honor and not about his daughter’s wishes, to being a “new father,” more open-minded, more caring and nurturing, a father that accepts his daughter’s ambitions and is proud of her.²¹³ Hala's father has always lived in Palestine, so his masculinity, albeit neopatriarchal, is not a transnational one. However, in contact with his transnational daughter, his enactment of patriarchy has been disrupted and this has made him inhabit a thirdspace. That is, it has made him move from a markedly traditional understanding of the patriarch's prerogatives into a more open conciliation of his

²¹³ The notion of “new father” here stems from the concept of “new Arab man” analyzed by Marcia C. Inhorn in her book *The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*, and examined in section 2.2.3.2. of the present dissertation.

daughter's wishes as an Arab American woman. It has been his daughter that has enabled this change, making Hala's story a paradigmatic tale of Arab American feminism which emphasizes women's power to inflict change on patriarchy.²¹⁴ At the end of the story, Hala has also changed as a result of her return to her origins, and when she is going back to the United States, she has learned about the importance of her ancestry and decides to wear a *roza*, a typical Jordanian dress, while, ironically enough, her father's evolution has been so substantial that he tells her, "You are flying to America! Miss Modern Lady Who Had Almost No Interest In Dresses Until Today, why can't you wear your beloved jeans like you do all the time?" (203).

Steven Salaita states that "One really interesting thing about [*West of the Jordan*] is the way nothing, human or geographical, ever descends into a tidy stereotype" (2008: par. 3). This statement is particularly relevant in relation to the Arab fathers that appear in this novel, whose behaviors are justified in the text by their circumstances. A wide variety of fathers appear, evincing the situational position of Arab fatherhood and masculinity, the thirdspace that these masculinities occupy, and which may be negotiated in manifold manners. In general, these fathers occupy a thirdspace of cross-cultural refraction derived from neopatriarchy, and navigate between traditionalism and liberalism, while their diverse stories portray the multiplicity of understandings and enactments of Arab (American) masculinity available. The attitude demonstrated by Khadija's father, even if he is subscribing stereotypical views of Arab manhood, is justified by his

²¹⁴ This will also be seen in section 4.2.2 in relation to the novels *Towelhead* and *A Map of Home*.

transnationalism. His behavior is also explained as a common reaction to uprootedness through which, as Harpel contends, there is a tendency to return to tradition. At the same time, his frustration over his inability to properly provide for his family also entails violent reactions. All in all, Khadija's father's enactment of manhood exemplifies characteristic views of traditionalism, while simultaneously condemning them. Hala's father also starts as a traditional man, but his daughter helps him learn that he must open his view of masculinity towards gender equality or he might lose her forever. Soraya's father's neglected role as a patriarch makes him base his sense of masculinity only on the trait of provider, as he is attempting a privileged economic position in the United States that erases his connections with the Arab world and the importance of family and fatherhood. Finally, Mawal's father reenacts traditionalism, which constrains his obedient daughter. Altogether, these myriad masculinities provide an eclectic view of Arab (American) manhoods which navigate a heterotopic space where their identities need to be negotiated in relation to their families, and which result in more or less traditional or modern enactments of those masculinities. Cross-cultural refraction, especially enhanced by their daughters, changes some of these fathers into more nurturing, accepting, and gender-equal beings.

4.2.1.2 Arab American Feminist Writing and Emerging Masculinities in Susan Muaddi Darraj's *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*

Susan Muaddi Darraj's novel *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories of South Philly* (2007) takes on a format similar to that of *West of the Jordan*, its chapters focusing on four different women of Palestinian origin living in the South of Philadelphia. Their different relationships with their fathers once again inform the polyhedric view of Arab American masculinities that post-9/11 Arab American literature provides. In this case, the novel is divided into four parts, which concentrate on four Arab American young women: Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan and Reema. For the purposes of this dissertation, the focus is going to be on the main male figures that appear in these chapters, as well as on the author's emphasis on female writing.

The novel starts with Nadia, whose father died when she was twelve years old in a car accident. We only get to know about him through her memories, which as a little girl were mainly related to his appearance and daily life customs. In Nadia's words:

I have only scattered memories—his mustached smile; the slim, gold crucifix he wore around his neck nestled in the black hairs that curled up on his chest; the mole behind his neck that I used to look at when he gave me rides on his back; the neatly trimmed hairline behind his ears; the slam of the door and the burst of sound, because his habit was to start talking about his day the minute he walked into the apartment, whether or not he saw my mother in front of him. He just assumed she would be there, standing by the stove or playing with me, ready to listen, waiting for the sound of his footsteps on the stairs. (38)

As a form of narrativization of her late father, Nadia expresses her love for him.

She emphasizes his positive mood (in the image of his smile), his Christian religion (because of the crucifix), his playful nature (as Nadia used to ride on his back), his cleanliness (in relation to his haircut), but also his belief in traditional gender divisions. The quote seems to imply that his role of provider was at the heart of the construction of his masculinity and took for granted that his wife would occupy the domestic sphere, waiting for him to talk to her every time he arrived home. Nadia's father thus confirms Amal Amireh's contention on the centrality of being a provider for the construction of Arab masculinity (725), as developed in chapter 2 of the present dissertation. In *The Inheritance of Exile*, the memories of her father inform Nadia's youth, at the same time as her story only becomes more tragic. Her life ends up paralleling that of her father. With a degree in business administration and a work internship, and thus with a promising future ahead, she has a car accident just as her father did, which leaves her recovering in bed for a long time, and makes her unable to have children in the future. She hides this information from her boyfriend George Haddad after her mother tells her “[George's family] are an Arab family, with only one son, who have put all their savings to send him to medical school in America. Do you think they will accept for him to marry and not have children?” (44), which denotes the importance of fatherhood in constituting a successful masculinity (or *rujula*) in the Arab world. From a traditional perspective, a man, and especially an heir, would not be considered accomplished without having children and thus becoming a patriarch (Petet 34). After her mother's speech, Nadia distances herself from George, and it is only at the end of the novel, with help from her friend Reema, that she reunites

with him. After Reema tells him the truth about their estrangement, his response is that “there is more than one way to become a father” (188), a statement that highlights his thirdspace enactment of Arab American masculinity. His reference to alternative reproductive means reinforces the importance of fatherhood, but at the same time points to the “emergent masculinities” that Marcia C. Inhorn examines in her book *The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (2012), where she tackles the new reproductive technologies used in the Middle East and their consequences in relation to new modes of manhood.²¹⁵ By accepting Nadia's infertility, George establishes himself as a “new man” (Inhorn 2012: 302), who values romantic love over fatherhood. As he expresses it, “I'm not a shallow man. If I have Nadia, that is everything. I want you to make her understand that. We'll figure out the rest later” (188).

The novel's second part focuses on Aliyah. Recalling her childhood, Aliyah's story begins with her remembering the importance that her father placed on her education and, in particular, on her vocation of writing: “Many years ago, Aliyah's father had given her five dollars for winning the fourth-grade essay contest. More importantly, he had finally allowed her to have her own room” (49). At the age of ten, her father not only gave her money as a reward for winning an essay contest but he also provided her with a room where she could write. Mirroring Virginia Woolf's feminist space for writing, this room of her own implied, from the perspective of Aliyah's father, an advancement of feminist views on literature, thus affirming the preeminent space of women writers in the Arab

²¹⁵ Inhorn's book and ideas were reviewed in section 2.2.4. of the present dissertation.

diaspora. As Aliyah grows up, her father continues to emphasize the importance of the education of his daughter, and supports her as a writer. However, Aliyah's father inhabits a contradictory thirdspace, his masculinity being constructed in a heterotopic space between his Arab upbringing and his life in the United States. Thus, he is not presented a flawless character, and his love for her is not unconditional. After she writes a story where she recounts a shameful event in the life of their family (in particular, an episode where her drunk uncle ruined her cousin's wedding), Aliyah's father bursts out in anger and questions her abilities, arguing that being a good writer entails using her imagination (53). He is in fact responding in a traditional manner to his family honor. He deems the publishing of his family's misdeeds as something that will ruin their reputation, and in so doing, he forwards a diasporic view of *al-nas* (Arab community) that Nadine Naber referred to (2012:101).²¹⁶ Therefore, while the relationship that Aliyah's father has with his daughter encourages education and writing, even giving her a room of her own to write in (while her brothers have to share one), he is also concerned about his family's honor. One can say, then, that he inhabits an ambivalent thirdspace of cross-cultural refraction in between a neopatriarchal fatherhood, in which reputation and what *al-nas* (the Arab community) might think matters, and a diasporic one that favors women's education as an upward mobility asset.

Thirdly, the reader encounters Hanan, who has been considered the most developed character in the story (Awad 2). Hanan has a very positive relationship with her father which contrasts with her negative relationship with her mother. She

²¹⁶ The reference can be found in section 2.3.1.3.

relates more to her American upbringing than her Arab ancestry: “Hanan had been born right here, in Philadelphia, ... and she had lived here all her life ... This was where *she* was from” (81). Because of this, she feels better understood by her father, a second-generation Arab American man, than her mother, a Palestinian refugee. In fact, it is emphasized in the novel that Hanan's father is more American than Arab and that, as a consequence, he has distanced himself from traditionalism. In Muaddi Darraj's words, “Her father was an American, born to Arab parents” (81). In contrast, “her mother hadn't been born here—she'd grown up in the hilly town of Ramallah, had fled a series of wars, had left behind camps strewn with shrapnel, legless corpses, wailing women, and eyes too weary to weep” (81). As a consequence, her mother clings to traditions as a way of remembering the Palestinian homeland that she cannot go back to. Hanan's life choices only emphasize the rift between her and her mother, while her father remains supportive all along. Hanan has a child out of wedlock with a man of Irish descent, and after they separate, she ends up raising him as a single mother. All this is frowned upon by her mother due to her traditional education, but accepted by her father, thus confirming that he is a “new Arab man” (Inhorn 2012). He is presented as a quiet person (88-89), a fact which is taken as a positive trait by her, as if “[h]e doesn't know what to say, so he doesn't say anything. This is actually one of the things I love about him. He doesn't prattle and spew empty words and phrases, he just smiles understandingly. Sympathetically. And he squeezes my hand” (100). Nonetheless, he has a better ability to talk to his daughter than her mother. Thus, he is used by Hanan's mother to talk to her:

Mama enlisted her father, who came to Hanan one evening after dinner, while her mother had conveniently gone for a walk. "I just wanted to check in with you to see how things are," he said, reaching out as if to pat her hair, but then pulling his arm back as an afterthought. "Is everything OK?" (95)

The mother actually loves his attentiveness and nurturing nature, and she asserts that "He is always kind and eager to please me" (101). Hanan also looks up to him. In fact, Hanan's love for her father is so strong that she gives her son his grandfather's name, as she wants to instill his positive sense of masculinity to her newborn son. She is thus attempting to reinscribe her father's supportive enactment of masculinity on her son. She remembers that "Baba would smile at me in the darkest moments" (116), and he continues to support her even after she separates (115-119, 133-135), while at the same time her mother cuts any contact with her. However, her father's heart attack ends up reuniting mother and daughter (164). It is the possibility of losing the man that comforts them that makes mother and daughter recover a sense of familial unity. Thus, not only does he provide an attentive ear, but he also ultimately enables the reconciliation between mother and daughter and, as such, also between the Arab and American parts of their identities.

Finally, the last story is that of Reema, the only Muslim character in the novel.²¹⁷ Arab American feminism is personified in her, as she feels uneasy after the exoticization that her non-Arab boyfriend ascribes to her as a Muslim. His favorite film is *The Sheik* (1921), which offers a very stereotypical portrayal of the

²¹⁷ The fact that there is only one Muslim character in this polyphonic novel mirrors the Muslim minority (23%) amongst Arabs in the United States ("Factsheets: Arab Americans". The Prejudice Institute. <<http://www.prejudiceinstitute.org/Factsheets5-ArabAmericans.html>>). Accessed: 12 August 2012.

Arab world.²¹⁸ Reema is aware of the difficulties of being an Arab (American) woman in the United States, and as such she is writing a PhD dissertation on immigrant women. As part of her PhD research in sociology, Reema interviews her mother about growing up as a refugee. Their conversation closes the book, and ends up with an acknowledgement of the importance of the writer in shaping culture: “*Just shape the words I said the way you want—fix them and make them sound good. You are the writer, habibti, not me*” (196, emphasis in the original text). Reema mirrors the author Muaddi Darraj in the novel, thus placing her as a shaper of culture through her writing. As Yousef Awad explains, “In fact, Reema’s project of keeping alive her mother’s memories is not entirely different from Muaddi Darraj’s project because it entails re-living the traumatic experiences of war, immigration and displacement lived by Reema’s mother and her generation in the form of a postmemory” (2015: 6). Thus, Darraj finishes her novel with a feminist stance in favor of writing.

In *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*, published in 2007, three years after Muaddi Darraj’s *Scheherazade’s Legacy: Arab and Arab-American Women on Writing* (2004), the author continues to favor the importance of writing for Arab American women. In doing so, she also provides depictions of Arab American men that move toward emerging and new Arab American masculinities as they navigate a thirdspace of cross-cultural refraction. The difference between first- and second-generation Arab American manhoods is made palpable, especially through Aliyah’s and Hanan’s fathers. While both are depicted

²¹⁸ *The Sheik* is a 1921 silent film starring Rudolph Valentino about an Arab sheik who abducts an Englishwoman he has fallen for.

in a mostly positive fashion, the masculine performance of Hanan's father, very nurturing and sympathetic, points to the idea that perhaps second-generation Arab American men may tend to deviate more from traditional conceptions of Arab (neopatriarchal) manhood, as there is more of a critical approach to tradition, thus confirming Whittaker Wigner Harpel's contention about this choice from second-generation immigrants (57).²¹⁹ George Haddad, Nadia's love, also points to emerging masculinities in his broad view of fatherhood (Inhorn 2012). The mostly positive depiction of Arab men in *The Inheritance of Exile* may also be due to an effort from Muaddi Darraj's part to counter the pervasive vilification of Arab American men after 9/11. By portraying complex but non-negative patriarchal fathers, Muaddi Darraj is advancing a de-stereotyping of Arab men in the United States and thus conducting an effort against racism. At the same time, in portraying powerful female figures through the characters of Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan, Reema and their mothers, Muaddi Darraj is also advancing Arab American feminism. Her insistence on women writers also affirms women of color feminism and the power of literature in conducting change. Muaddi Darraj's writing and sympathetic representations of manhood may actually come from her fulfilling personal experience with her father, which she has explained as follows:

I have a father—unlike Aliyah's—who encouraged me to write, without limitations on subject. He was and is always supportive of what I do. I guess in Aliyah's story, I tried to imagine, "What if I did NOT have that support? How would things be different?"

I come from a family of readers: my father is a literary reader, and he especially loves poetry. I have said in the past that he used to walk around the house, doing chores, etc., and just recite passages

²¹⁹ Further information about the choice of second-generation immigrants can be found in section 2.3.2 of the present dissertation.

of Arabic poetry from memory. ... My father always told us stories at night, before bedtime, stories that he would make up to entertain us. (Horner par. 12-13)

No wonder that Muaddi Darraj writes, no wonder that she portrays mostly positive father figures, and no wonder that her work focuses on women writers.

4.2.2 The Transformative Power of Daughters In Challenging Patriarchy in Alicia Erian's *Towelhead* and Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*

4.2.2.1 Alicia Erian's *Towelhead*: Neopatriarchy and Thirdspace Fatherhood between Strictness and Neglect

Alicia Erian's first novel *Towelhead* was published in 2005, and it tells the story of Jasira, a 13-year-old daughter of an American mother and an Arab father. She is sent to live with her father at the beginning of the story, after her mother's boyfriend shows interest in her. Indeed, the first sentence of the novel reads "My mother's boyfriend got a crush on me, so she sent me to live with Daddy" (1), which sets the tone of the novel, a first-person unapologetic account of an Arab American adolescent as she tries to make sense of life and of her sexuality while living with a father of Lebanese origin, who is both very strict and irresponsible. Jasira's father is Rifat, the central male character in the novel, a man of Arab origin who moved to the United States to pursue a university degree and ended up staying to work at NASA. When he has to take care of a teenage daughter that he barely knows, he feels very uneasy, and cannot help but disregard her needs.

The relationship established between father and daughter is complicated by

the daughter's sexual awakening as an adolescent. Rifat's response to the discomfort he feels towards his daughter becoming a woman is unabated strictness. In fact, clinging to traditionalism by first-generation Arab immigrants has been considered a trend in the construction of Arab American masculinities (Harpel 85). As a first-generation Lebanese man in the United States, Rifat experiences a return to traditionalism as his masculinity has been unsettled by his movement from Lebanon to the United States, on the one hand, and by his challenging Arab American daughter, on the other. Indeed, his understanding of his Arab (American) masculinity is performed through an enactment of neopatriarchy (Sharabi) that combines tradition and modernity and that, in addition, has been further unsettled by his uprootedness, thus making him inhabit a thirdspace of cross-cultural refraction. Following this ambiguity, he acts as a moralizer, being very conservative and strict when he deals with his daughter, while, simultaneously, oftentimes neglecting her and not paying enough attention to her. All in all, Jasira's perception of her father is tinged with fear, as his violent strictness has resulted in her being "afraid to move half the time" (1). She conceives of her father as foreign, which adds to her anxiety. As Jasira expresses it at the beginning of the novel, "He had a weird accent and came from Lebanon" (1). Moreover, the way he relates to her makes her view him as an eminently traditional patriarch, as he attempts to establish a "patriarchal connectivity" through the assertion of a strict superiority over his daughter.²²⁰ However, at the same time, the rules of her new house have not been openly explained to Jasira,

²²⁰ The notion of "patriarchal connectivity" (Joseph 469) was explained in section 2.2.1.

who therefore feels devoid of a clear path to follow. As Jasira puts it, “He wanted everything done in a certain way only he knew about” (1).

Nonetheless, Rifat actually attempts to provide a moral path for Jasira to follow, but in his situational neopatriarchal position between tradition (encapsulated by his strictness and sense of honor and shame) and modernity (in relation to his work place and his American girlfriend), he is unable to. In fact, the working title of the novel (later changed to *Towelhead* upon the editor’s request) was *Welcome to the Moral Universe* (Kachka par. 2), which puts to the fore the centrality of the father figure as this “moral universe,” ruled by his strict moral principles, and his immovable ideas about life and about what his daughter should and should not do. Rifat’s representation thus mirrors Kristine J. Ajrouch’s argument about the tendency of Arab fathers to constrain their Arab American daughters (386-388). As Erian puts it, “He has specific ideas; he does a very bad job of implementing his plan for his daughter, and how she should grow up” (Wiehardt par. 17). For example, he enacts violence towards his daughter for her to obey him (she is slapped in several instances—for example, on pages 3 and 91), leaving marks on her (216), and even a black eye (180). These violent instances are actually a result of his perceived lack of control towards his daughter, as they take place when she disobeys him or shows signs of sexual awakening. Therefore, as a way of regaining patriarchal control over his daughter’s honor, Rifat resorts to violence, which is a common resource for Arab (American) men to attempt to regain control over their fatherhood. Samina Aghacy had referred to this traditional use of violence to regain patriarchal power (21), which actually stems

from a resistance to the feeling of emasculation resultant from the daughter's challenge towards authority.²²¹ Steven Salaita explains that “[Rifat's] inability to control [his daughter] further demasculinizes him, causing him to resent Jasira when he is not withdrawn from her” (2011: 128-129). In other words, it is this feeling of demasculinization that makes Rifat resort to violence. However, he is not presented as a flat or unequivocally evil character. Despite his bouts of violence towards his daughter, he also shows affection for her, and sometimes tries to help her. As Erian puts it, “at the same time, I think he has some sympathy for her and he has moments of pain, and he defends her at times” (Wiehardt par. 17). Rifat's manhood is very much in a thirdspace of neopatriarchal masculinity (inherited in his case from the neopatriarchal masculinities of post-1967 Lebanon),²²² but further unsettled by his traditional movement to the United States, which has implied a cross-cultural refraction that has made his manhood even more ambivalent.²²³ Therefore, while, as is the tendency for first-generation immigrants, he resorts to traditional masculinity as a way to cling to his patriarchal power (Harpel 85), he also enacts modern masculinity in other instances, such as often leaving Jasira home alone at night to go sleep at his girlfriend's house. Thus, in the case of Rifat, his masculinity is further complicated because of his Arab American identity, placed in between two cultures, a fact which makes him exist in a thirdspace. Rifat's Arabness has become more complex with his life in the United States, where some aspects of Western culture have undoubtedly

²²¹ For a full account on her theory, see section 2.2.1 of the present dissertation.

²²² The characteristics and causes of post-1967 neopatriarchal Arab masculinities were examined in section 2.2.3.

²²³ For a further account on cross-cultural refraction, see section 2.3.

influenced him. For example, his relation to women has changed in the sense that he is divorced and has a girlfriend with whom he spends most of his time, consequently neglecting his daughter. His ambivalence and oversight are not condoned in the novel. On the contrary, they entail tragic consequences. Rifat's carelessness and Jasira's subsequent confusion enable their neighbor, Mr. Vuoso, to sexually molest her. Rifat remains oblivious to this fact until the end but, as a consequence, Jasira's feelings of isolation and confusion only intensify.

Moreover, Rifat and Jasira's racialization increases due to the Persian Gulf War, as Rifat feels he must make sure that his neighbors are aware of his Americanness by putting an American flag in his yard and thus avoiding any retaliation against him.²²⁴ In contrast, their neighbor Mr. Vuoso, an army reservist, distrusts Rifat, and ultimately attempts an Orientalist colonization of the Arab persona by sexually molesting Jasira. Mr. Vuoso intends to establish his “imperative patriotism” (Salaita 2005) by penetrating the exotic abject Other and thus reasserting his masculinity. In fact, Mr. Vuoso's masculinity is built on a misunderstood notion of imperialism. In his racist mind, he feels drawn to Jasira, the forbidden fruit for him both in terms of ethnicity and, above all, age. Steven Salaita considers his harassment a result of his powerlessness and conflictive relation with the Arab world. As he observes:

[His deviance] arises from his need for power, which, like many American males (and men everywhere), he conflates with sexual prowess. His anti-Arab racism does not deter him from seeking Jasira, but rather makes her more desirable because an important

²²⁴ It is interesting that the novel, although published after 9/11, is set during the Persian Gulf War. It thus takes an earlier source of resentment towards Arabs in the United States as a backdrop, which may be an attempt at distancing the reader from the issue of terrorism while still emphasizing the conflictive relationship between the United States and the Arab world.

dimension of that sexual prowess is a desire or a need to control her, something nobody seems able to do. By controlling her sexually, Mr. Vuoso can finally make her culture palatable and comprehensible. (2011: 129-130)

Oblivious to this fact, Rifat continues to enact a kind of fatherhood based on both traditional views of female chastity and modern acts that enable his daughter's misguided independence. It could be said that Rifat seems to reinforce some stereotypes which vilify Arab males as fathers. As a consequence, it could be argued that Erian is conducting an Arab American feminist denunciation of traditional (and violent) enactments of masculinity by Arab fathers towards their daughters. In this respect, Ginny Wiehardt, in an interview to Erian, precisely asked her, "I didn't find the father to be a flat character or a stereotypical character, but he does demonstrate some Arab male stereotypes. Were you concerned about creating a character who might reinforce negative ideas about Arab men?" (par. 15). Answering the question, Alicia Erian said:

[C]ertain parts look stereotypical. But all I could think was, "I'm writing my experience. I apologize if my experience is stereotypical." Everyone says there's a reason why stereotypes exist. They're real sometimes. And I'll tell you that a lot of Arab women have approached me or written and said, "This is my family. This is how my father acts." (par. 15)

Alicia Erian was not concerned about the fact that Rifat might fulfill stereotypes about Arab males, and so she wrote what she considers to be a realistic character. Indeed, the character confirms the theories on neopatriarchy, the return to traditionalism for immigrants, and the special policing towards daughters that were analyzed in chapter 2 of the present dissertation. In the same interview, Alicia Erian explains that she had had a similar experience in relation to her father. Her

mother was having difficulties and sent her to Texas to live with her Egyptian father. However, he was overwhelmed by the situation, and would repeatedly hit her. She soon went back to live with her mother, but wondered what would have happened if she had stayed, and from those thoughts she started to write the novel. Nevertheless, at the same time, she acknowledges that this kind of behavior is not the norm amongst Arab fathers, but just something experienced by some. As Erian expresses, “[A] lot of women don't have fathers like that. Arabs are very, very warm people. They're very emotional; I love them. I love my family. My father is different from his family, and sometimes their attitude is, ‘We don't know where he came from’” (Wiehardt par. 15). In the same vein, even if Rifat's behavior follows conventional views about Arabs, his attitude is condemned in the novel, a fact which forwards a feminist stance against Arab sexism and patriarchy. In particular, his fatherhood is questioned by their neighbors Gil and Melina, who end up sheltering Jasira after Rifat finds a *Playboy* that Mr. Vuoso had given her.

Furthermore, Rifat's traditional parenting methods are also justified in the text through his uneasiness towards his teenage daughter. Erian justifies the father's behavior by pointing to his nervousness when facing his daughter's sexuality. As she puts it, “He doesn't know what to do. I wanted to come up with a character who looks at a young girl's sexuality and says, ‘I don't know what to do. This is just not something I know anything about. And it makes me very uncomfortable’” (Wiehardt par. 17). This is present in the novel, for example, when she gets her first period, when he takes her to buy underwear, or when he finds the *Playboy* under her bed (Erian 15, 42, 286). This discomfort could be

easily considered to be related to the father's Arab background and the patriarchy surrounding that world, which traditionally leaves the care of the children to the mothers. However, it is not so much a cultural issue but a gender one, being pervasive in single fathers, no matter their background. Empirical research has concluded that "single-parent fathers [in general have] difficulty in being able to cope with their adolescent daughters' emerging sexuality. Many of the fathers lack the knowledge or fear dealing with the issue of their daughters' sexuality" (Smith and Smith 413). In fact, Erian has also affirmed the universality of her depiction.

In an interview for Detroit Public TV, she stated:

I would do readings and typically there would be one or two young women who would come up to me and say "This was the experience I had with my father." And some of them were Arab American girls, like, a colleague of mine ... was Korean and said "This is my father," Indian women said "This is my father." It was sort of this universal foreign difficult dad book and ... many women seem to connect to it in that way (00:05:00-00:05:27)²²⁵

Erian thus rejects the idea that her representation of Rifat is distinctively Arab by asserting the pervasiveness of contradictory enactments of fatherhood globally. Be as it may, one can argue that the character of Rifat is not portrayed as an entirely traditional or unequivocally evil father, but rather inhabits a thirdspace between tradition and modernity. This father's relation with his daughter takes up traditional Arab notions of family honor which are translated into strictness and which, combined with the common single fathers' uneasiness towards their daughters' sexuality, turn into the neglect of Jasira's needs as an adolescent. This father seems to have an ambivalent relationship with his daughter because his

²²⁵ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj1SAm8TTxw>>. Accessed: 20 August 2015.

identity is placed in a “situational” position, as Daniel Monterescu would put it (2005).²²⁶ As pointed out before, Arab American tendencies—such as the ambivalence between tradition and modernity inherent in the thirdspace that Arab American men occupy,—only exacerbate this single father’s apprehension. While his neglect leaves Jasira living with their neighbors, where she actually feels safer, at the end there is a slight change in Rifat. When he finds out about the rape that Mr. Vuoso inflicted on his daughter, Rifat is indeed supportive. The novel ends with him showing affection toward his daughter and telling their neighbor, Melina, who is in labor, that “[Jasira]’s a good girl” (371), thus eventually pointing to a more nurturing relationship between father and daughter based on trust and respect. It has been his learning about a traumatic situation that his daughter has gone through, and in fact one that is related to the sexuality that Rifat was trying to protect her from, that has signified a turning point in the relationship between the two, and has allowed Rifat to head toward potential alternative modes of masculine behavior. He might have learned that protection and neglect are not viable modes of education, and that affection might be the only way to reestablish a positive relationship with his daughter. In effect, Rifat does fulfill stereotypical aspects commonly ascribed to the traditional Arab man, but at the same time, some of his actions, such as showing emotion for his daughter at the end of the novel, deviate from those. While Rifat’s ambivalence is justified through his uneasiness toward his daughter’s sexuality, which results in (violently) punishing strictness, his enactment of masculinity leads to potential change at the end. His daughter’s

²²⁶ For a full account on Monterescu’s theories, see section 2.3.2 in the present dissertation.

challenging actions, which ultimately make her move in with their neighbors, show Rifat that in order to fulfill a successful fatherhood, he must change. After he has been made aware of his daughter's rape, Rifat's understanding of his patriarchal connectivity towards his daughter undergoes a necessary upheaval. He may have learned about his own misconceptions about fatherhood, comprehended that his situational and transitional manhood must be reconstructed, and so he may be moving closer to becoming a "new man" (Inhorn 2012).

To conclude, I believe it is important to point out here that out of all the Arab American novels analyzed in this dissertation, this is the only one that has been turned into a film, which premiered in 2007 under the title *Nothing is Private*. It starred mainstream Hollywood actors Aaron Eckhart and Toni Colette, and was directed by Alan Ball. The fact that precisely this novel, which is arguably the most controversial one among post-9/11 Arab American literature written by women because of its title and its use of sexuality (Salaita 2011: 126), is the only one so far that has been turned into a film may speak to the fact that a mainstream American audience still demands and accepts markedly stereotypical Arab American men, who eventually change when in contact with American culture, and in this case an Arab American daughter and liberal American neighbors. However, one could also argue, as Erian has done, that these more traditional and neopatriarchal masculinities do indeed exist both inside Arab and Arab American communities and outside them, and as such, they also need to be represented and brought to light.

4.2.2.2 Transnational Neopatriarchal Fatherhood: Tradition and Education in Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home*

Randa Jarrar's debut novel, *A Map of Home* (2008), traces the transnational movement of a family, in the 1970s and 1980s, from Boston through different Arab countries, until they settle in Texas. It revolves around the coming of age of the main character, an Arab girl called Nidali, whose upbringing is marked by her father, Waheed, a Palestinian man. Nidali's name is derived from the word "battle" in Arabic, while Waheed means "alone." Both names are representative of these characters' roles in the novel. On the one hand, Waheed's life is marked by his uprootedness from Palestine, leaving him nationless and lonely, a fact which only exacerbates his bouts of violence. Nidali, on the other hand, struggles throughout the story against her father's sexism and patriarchal attitudes. Actually, Waheed is described in the novel from the perspective of his daughter, so that her lack of understanding toward her father underscores the main contradictions in his enactment of masculinity.

The novel starts with Nidali's birth in Boston, considered gender-improper by her father. Waheed's hopes of having a boy are shattered once he knows he has had a daughter, after which "he raced on, doubtlessly feared by the hospital's patients and nurses who saw an enormous mustache with limping legs" (4) trying to change the name in the birth certificate. While he cannot change it, he can add a letter. So, as Nidali explains, he "added at the end of my name a heavy, reflexive, feminizing, possessive, cursive, cursing 'I'" (5). From the masculine proper name

“Nidal” (battle), the “i” suffix feminized the name, but it also implied a possessive, so that her name became “my struggle,” foreshadowing the complex relationship between father and daughter that pervades in the novel. In fact, Waheed's wish for having a boy stemmed from his experience with female siblings. The reasons are explained as follows by Nidali:

Why had Baba assumed, no, hoped, that I was a boy? Because before his birth, his mother had had six daughters whose births all went uncelebrated. He'd watched his sisters grow up and go away, each one more miserable than the last, and didn't want to have to be a spectator to such misery ever again: to witness his own girl's growing and going. (5)

Waheed's awareness of the difficulties of being a woman in the Arab world encourages him to attempt to provide a different life for his daughter. He wants her to pursue a doctorate while, at the same time, she is supposed to follow a chaste and honorable life (24). Once again, it is his experience with his sisters, seeing them get married, that make him want a different life for his daughter:

'All my sisters,' Baba said, 'got married before they were fifteen. No, I'm lying; Kameela was seventeen. They got married against that whitewashed wall outside... like prisoners awaiting execution ... going to Egypt, going to university, gave me my freedom. Your aunts never received such an opportunity. I want more than anything in the world for you to have that opportunity' (105)

According to him, Nidali should think about boys and marriage only after getting a PhD. As he tells her, “Don't worry, there'll be no marriages for you until you want to. And you won't want to until you have a doctorate. That's that!” (44). He is trying to live vicariously through his daughter in encouraging her to get the PhD that he could not pursue (Salaita 2011: 132) and, in so doing, he is forwarding female higher education, a fact which could be considered a feminist act.

Moreover, Waheed also professes a modern understanding of Islam, as he does not want his daughter to cover her hair: “Baba would have never let me cover my hair. He said it was for donkeys. 'What? Don't even consider it,' he told me that evening. 'Forget those retarded idiots! You must be cleansed to read the Koran, but no one ever said you had to be covered.’” (49). Waheed’s emphasis on his daughter’s education and his disagreement with the veil, which are modern traits of his personality, contrast, however, with his will to preserve his daughter’s chastity (her honor), and his violent mistreatment of both his wife and his daughter. For example, when Nidali fails to recite the Qur'an properly, he whips her with a hanger (50), and she wonders:

Why did this happen to him? How did he let it happen? He looked different when he was mad. Sometimes he'd do this to Mama, just drag her on the floor, and she'd cry and tell him to stop. But I couldn't tell him to stop; I was scared I'd say it wrong. Now I was out of breath from crying, sobbing little sighs out every other second. Baba stopped hitting me and told me to start over. (50)

In another instance that Nidali recounts, “I saw it almost in slow motion: his thigh lifting his knee lifting his leg lifting his foot, his foot sweeping through the air, and the cleft in his brown shoe landing swiftly on Mama's bottom” (27). His modernity is in fact countered by his violence. Steven Salaita explains this ambiguity as follows:

Motivated by an active temper, he sometimes does terrible things, regularly beating his wife and children. He foists his expectations onto Nidali and does not allow her the sort of freedom she covets. Yet at the same time he is sometimes likable, sympathetic even. He is passionately anticolonial and believes profoundly in the repatriation of Palestinians. . . . Waheed is not the stereotypical Arab male of American lore, though he does exhibit a need for too much control over Nidali's decisions. Nevertheless, he is too multifaceted

to be read as a simple representation of one or a few things: he fits nicely into Jarrar's pattern of writing contradictions into singular characters and situations. (2011: 132)

His contradictory enactment of masculinity perfectly fits the conflicting characterization of neopatriarchy between traditionalism and modernity (Sharabi), which is, in this case, exacerbated by his sense of dislocation, by the thirdspace and space of cross-cultural refraction that he inhabits. Waheed is an eminently transnational character, who was born in Palestine but throughout his life moved to Boston (where Nidali was born), Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and finally Texas. Being Palestinian and forbidden to go back to his birthplace after the 1967 war, his origins are central to his feeling of uprootedness and loneliness. Nidali refers to this lack of homeland as follows, “Baba, who didn't really know who he was or where he belonged, having been forbidden from re-entering Palestine after the 1967 war” (37). Moreover, she explains that, “Baba said moving was part of being Palestinian. ‘Our people carry the homeland in their souls,’ he would tell me at night as he tucked me in” (9), and she adds, “It helped to know this when I was little, forced me to have compassion for Baba who, obviously, had an extremely heavy soul to drag around inside such a skinny body” (9). This reference to his “heavy soul” may refer to both his nostalgia and his return to traditionalism due to this same uprootedness. As happened with Khadija’s father in *West of the Jordan*, his wife justifies Waheed’s violent behavior through both his feeling of uprootedness and fear of failure, saying to Nidali, “Your father misses home ... He misses his life, his mother, even his sisters. Also, he’s uncertain about our future, *ya binti*” (177). His neopatriarchal enactment of masculinity is thus rationalized

through his frustrated sense of successful manhood as he might not be able to be a good provider (Aghacy 20-22), as well as his nostalgia for an origin he cannot return to (Said 2000).²²⁷ In other words, his inability to make sense of his eminently transnational identity and questioning of his role as provider result in violence against those who may question the patriarchal authority that grounds him in a sense of Arab self.²²⁸ At the same time, his frustration as an exile is emphasized in the novel, as after wishing to go back to work in Kuwait, he receives a phone call and afterwards tells Nidali and her brother about it, “it was clear he'd been weeping. He told us what over 300,000 Palestinians would tell their families that year: We were not returning to Kuwait. We were not wanted there; no Palestinian person or family with Palestinian member was” (191). The trauma of his dislocation in not being able to go back to his home country of Palestine is exacerbated by the impossibility of going back to Kuwait. Jarrar justifies Waheed's behavior not only through the nostalgia inherent in his name, but also through his fears of failed patriarchy, and she does so by placing Waheed against his historical background. In an interview, Jarrar herself explains the historical value of the character of Waheed, as his masculinity derives from the space of anomie existing in the Arab world after the defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War which resulted in his neopatriarchal, eminently contradictory manhood.²²⁹

Baba's beliefs about how young women should behave was

²²⁷ Edward Said ponders on the trauma that exile from Palestine might imply in his article “Reflections on Exile,” where he considers exile as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place,” adding that “its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (2000: 137).

²²⁸ Indeed, there seems to exist a tendency among Arab (American) males to resort to violence to “reaffirm male prerogatives” (Aghacy 21), examined in section 2.2.1 of the present dissertation.

²²⁹ The construction of post-1967 neopatriarchal masculinities has been examined in section 2.2.3 of the present dissertation.

inherited from his own parents, and was always in opposition to his feminist beliefs and outlook. It was this conflict—between his desire for his daughter to become a famous professor and his desire that she be virtuous until she marries—that I found fascinating. I think the advent of modernity and the fact that more and more women in the Middle East are entering the workforce creates a little conflict in the way their parents see them. Women no longer need to be married to live lives separate from their parents, and yet culturally there's still a huge value being placed on marriage. (Rigby par. 9)

Jarrar's reference to Waheed's learned patriarchal connectivity thus seems to confirm the point made in chapter 2, wherein we saw that first-generation Arab men tended to learn about their masculinities taking the model of their own fathers (Harpel 41). Against the patriarchal power that Waheed attempts to secure at home, Nidali and her mother gauge their strength throughout the novel. Waheed's violent assertions of patriarchy actually make Nidali's mother leave him for a brief period of time early in the story. After “the biggest [fight] they'd ever had” about her spending too much time playing the piano and neglecting her wifely duties, she goes to spend some time with her sister (63). Nidali believes that “Mama was winning the war” (71), although she eventually goes back home. Her mother's matriarchal challenge will serve as an example for her daughter Nidali later on in the story when she wants to leave home to study at university in another state.

Waheed ends up looking for and finding a job in America, which makes him feel more at ease with his role as a provider. He first moves there by himself, but soon after that his family goes there too, and they end up settling in Houston, Texas, where Waheed also tries to overcome his feeling of dislocation from the Arab world through a return to traditionalism (confirming the tendency put forward by Whittaker Wigner Harpel [5, 85]). In relation to Nidali, his main

purpose continues to be her education. In order to ensure it, Waheed does not let her go out with her friends. As a consequence, Nidali (following in her mother's footsteps) leaves home with her father's credit card, and ends up in a motel from where, out of fear, she calls her parents. She talks to her father, manages to negotiate a curfew extension, and goes back home (234-237). Later on, she continues feeling constrained by patriarchal restrictions, and so she decides to use the power of writing to induce change. Nidali writes a fictional letter to her family saying that she is dead because she was not allowed to stay longer at the library and attend a poetry slam. When her father reads the letter, he continues not to let her go to the poetry slam (alcohol is served there), but she is allowed to stay in the library until 10 p.m. (240-241). Her small victory thus points to a successful feminist challenge to patriarchal authority.

After incidents like these take place in the United States, Waheed's masculinity inevitably changes, as his wife's and daughter's understanding of gender relations also shift. After yet another of Waheed's attempts at imposing his will, Nidali's mother argues, "This is a democratic nation ... Three against one" (252). As a consequence, "Baba screams for two hours till his throat goes hoarse and his nose gets red and he passes out from sheer exhaustion. He cannot change the fact that our household is changing" (252). The transformation of the patriarch is in fact conducted through the power exerted by the women in the family.²³⁰ Nidali observes that "The fights are different. Baba and Mama no longer choke each other or argue. Sometimes Baba will throw a plate and that will be that"

²³⁰ Kristine J. Ajrouch had referred to this tendency (388).

(247). However, in a heartbreaking paragraph written in the second person as a softening strategy, Waheed continues enacting his patriarchal rage against his daughter as he feels the family honor threatened.²³¹ After Nidali is raped, she explains her father's reaction, as well as their neighbors' inability to help:

If and when you receive an anonymous letter saying your daughter sucks dicks, don't automatically believe it and beat the shit out of her. She doesn't. She was, technically, raped. She won't tell you this because you're strict. And when you beat her up, for the nine thousandth time, she will dare you to kill her. She doesn't want to live the life you've come all the way to America to give her. She doesn't want to live it. Reminding her how many hours you work so she can eat Oreos will not work. Attempts to gain recognition from a teenager rarely work, especially when said teenager is in a headlock. Neighbors in America don't call the cops when they see their Arab neighbor chasing his daughter around the house with a knife. But don't be surprised when your daughter runs out of the house after you're done beating her up and calls the cops. The cops will take pictures of her bruises and the marks your hands and fingers left behind in all the red places. She will take you to court. Parents in America can't get away with Everything. She will drop charges against you. She will assume you've learned your lesson. Daughters in America can teach their parents lessons. Cops in America don't like Arabs and they definitely don't like Arabs who hit their teenage daughters and chase them around the house with knives. But they'll eventually drop the charges. (248-249)

The painful implications of this paragraph are manifold. Firstly, Nidali emphasizes how her father's strictness prevents her from explaining herself, and leads to her being beaten up. Her father, then, refers to his working hours as his duty in order to provide comforts for his family, and so he indicates that his role as a breadwinner is what is helping him make sense of his masculinity and should be understood by his daughter. Nidali, however, cannot cope with more violence

²³¹ Jarrar has explained the use of this strategy in an interview, where she acknowledged that “[she] thought [the use of 2nd person narration] would make the reader just uncomfortable enough after they’ve spent all this time in the 1st person” (Yaman par. 28).

inflicted on her own persona, and she calls the police, thus exerting the power that she has been building in the United States against her father. This fact denotes the ability daughters may have in criminalizing their abusive fathers, “teach[ing] their parents lessons.” However, it also explains the complex position these daughters find themselves in, as she eventually drops the charges against his father because she believes that he must have learned his lesson.

Nidali's struggle for her freedom continues until the end of the novel. She wants to leave home to go to university, but her father would rather she stayed home and went to a local college. She questions the reasons behind her father's strictness, and concludes that everything is done because of his love for her. Therefore, she believes that no action that she takes should change that, and that as a consequence she might as well do whatever she pleases. She ponders her father's reasons for wanting her to stay, and ultimately decides to leave:

So now, did Baba want me to stay a girl because he didn't want me to struggle, because he wanted to be there to help me when I did? Or was it because he loved me and didn't want me to go away from him? I decided that that was the root of his desire to keep me in Texas, at a college “up the street.” He just loved me. And his love for me would remain, even if I decided to leave. (259)

She applies for a small college in Boston and is accepted. After her father rejects the idea, she decides to run away, and spends ten days at a friend's house (281). Her mother eventually finds her, and Nidali goes back home. Her father's reaction entails a yielding on his part. It seems that he has understood that his violence is ineffectual with respect to his daughter. When she arrives home, he yells at her, “I won't hit you this time. I won't hit you! What's the point?” (286). Nidali, being “Waheed's struggle,” has caused his eventual surrender. Later on, Waheed asks her

if going to Boston is her final decision, she says yes and hugs him. His change is epitomized by this nurturing scene:

I reached out to hug him; I rested my face in the cloth of his suit; I breathed in the fabric and heard my father's heart, and Baba said, "I remember the way you used to breathe against my neck when you were a baby. I'd rock you to sleep and you would breathe ... two tiny columns of breath against me, here," he gestured with his hand. "I can still feel it." (288)

Waheed has realized that there is nothing he can really do against his daughter's wishes, as there is always the possibility of her disappearing from his life. Therefore, he reluctantly accepts her departure. His last words to her (in the aforementioned quote) signify a step into a more nurturing and caring relationship with his daughter.

The precarious position of diasporic Arab masculinity is traced by Jarrar in her novel *A Map of Home*, which puts to the fore the ambivalent thirdspace that Arab American masculinities inhabit. The novel leaves the reader with a hopeful ending that is a step away from the inherited neopatriarchal attitudes of Arab men in their new setting in the United States, sparked in this case by the confrontation of Arab women, thus professing a feminist stance against male supremacy. While I take the novel's ending as an optimistic resolution, I find it pertinent to point out that Jarrar's reality was not as hopeful. After publishing this novel, her father branded it as "pornographic," and refused to talk to her again. In a conference in the Liberal Arts college of IUPUI (Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis), Jarrar read an unpublished essay entitled "Biblioclast," where she explains how after the publication of her novel her father felt his honor threatened and told her that he would not speak to her again unless she made all copies of her

book disappear.²³² The text mixes her story, her dreams of finding a way to burn all copies of *A Map of Home* and regain contact with her father, and historical instances of biblioclasts. At the end of the essay, Jarrar imagines how seeing her father again after having met his demands would be like. She figures that he would then ask her to lose weight because he wants in fact for her to disappear, just as Israel wants her father, as a Palestinian, to disappear. Jarrar remarked that “My novel was a heretical text ... In our household, my father was God, and his word was truth and everyone who spoke against him or even interrupted him at breakfast was a heretic whose book needed to be burnt” (00:34:40). The story ends with her father dissolving after she throws the last existing copy of her book at him, in what I see as a stance of the power of literature and women against patriarchy, which also lies in Jarrar's novel, albeit with a more hopeful ending. The moral of both stories is, though, that Arab American feminism can dilapidate patriarchy. Women can resist traditional fatherhood, affirm their freedom and, in doing so, hopefully transform masculine identities.

²³² The conference can be seen on: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFh1rWKFFvU>> (00:25:00-00:35:00). Accessed: 5 August 2015.

4.2.3 The Representation of Fathers in Post-9/11 Arab American Literature Written by Women: Some Conclusions

A variety of depictions of Arab (American) manhoods has been provided in this section. At the same time, the tendency of Arab American women writers after 9/11 in their debut novels to deal with coming-of-age stories of young women and their complex relationships with their fathers has been illustrated. This trend may be due to the visibilization of Arabs after 9/11, which branded Arab women as victims. Arab American women writers, versed in feminism, might have wanted to change this perception by providing accounts from women's perspectives, specifically those of daughters who challenge, in most cases, their usually traditional fathers, and have the power to evince change in them. However, none of these four novels deal with 9/11 directly, and are either set previously, or their time frame is not mentioned, yet they add to post-9/11 depictions of Arab manhoods. As Carol Fadda-Conrey argues:

[W]ith the self-conscious shift in identitarian representation among Arab Americans after 9/11, many literary texts, even if not referencing 9/11 directly, still contribute to a repertoire of texts that capture the distinct and multiple political, religious, ethnic, and transnational outlooks of this community. (2014: 551)

In particular, the novels examined in this section have expanded the discourses on Arab American fatherhood. Within this trend, which portrays fathers and daughters, two tendencies have been identified. On the one hand, *West of the*

Jordan and *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly* offer a wide array of female characters (four in each case), who explain their different relationships with their fathers. These novels provide numerous accounts that are varied in the representation of men's relations to their daughters. From the more traditional depictions in *West of the Jordan*, to the more nurturing ones in *The Inheritance of Exile*, both novels offer justified reasonings for the fathers' complexities, thus advancing nuanced representations which add to the unsterotyping of Arab men in America. On the other hand, *Towelhead* and *A Map of Home* focus on only one daughter and her conflictive relationship with her traditional and neopatriarchal father. As transnational characters, both fathers in these novels return to traditionalism, but their neopatriarchal sense of masculinity is further unsettled by their transnationalism, leaving them in a thirdspace of cross-cultural refraction that makes them very contradictory beings. Both use violence as a means to assert their patriarchal connectivity towards their daughters. Moreover, in both novels the daughter undergoes a sexual awakening and an instance of rape, denoting that these fathers, who want to secure their daughters' honor, are actually ineffectual in their endeavor, and thus pointing to the idea that nurturing (instead of strictness) might be more effective in ensuring protection. The consequences of the fathers' knowledge of these rapes are relevant. In *Towelhead*, it is this awareness that motivates Rifat's change. However, in *A Map of Home*, Waheed reacts violently and ends up being arrested, a fact which asserts the power that his daughter has in the United States as she calls the police. This instance ultimately results in the father's reluctant acceptance of his daughter's departure to university. In both

novels, the daughters are given the power to bring about change in their fathers, thus providing a feminist stance on the power women have against (neo)patriarchy.

4.3 Arab American Feminists and Beloved Men: Post-9/11 New Arab American Masculinities Written by Women

In chapter 3 of the present dissertation, Mohja Kahf's poetry encapsulated the importance of love towards Arab men for Arab American feminists. In her poem "The Woman Dear to Herself," Kahf claimed that, "In love, she remains whole." Drawing on this line, the present section shall examine representations of beloved men in post-9/11 Arab American literature, and elucidate the feminist potential of these depictions, following the necessity to provide not only images of Arab men to be critical about, but new, alternative models to look forward to. The new Arab American manhoods presented in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003) and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009) defuse characterizations of patriarchy and patrilineality, which Marcia C. Inhorn argues is common to new Arab manhoods (302). Hence, the men in this section deviate from traditional Arab masculinities and perform acts of manhood that point to a tendency towards an obliteration of ethnic markers. Furthermore, Abu-Jaber and Yunis offer a variety of enactments of masculinity, thus invalidating homogenizing stereotypes. At the same time, these novels offer matriarchal spaces that establish Arab American feminism as the model to follow. In the following sections, romantic love, prejudices and exile will be analyzed in Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), and beloved male family members will be explored in Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009).²³³

²³³ Diana Abu-Jaber was born in New York to a Jordanian father and an American mother and currently

4.3.1 Prejudice, Exile, and Romantic Love in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*

Diana Abu-Jaber's novel *Crescent* (2003) revolves around the love story between the protagonist, Sirine, a second-generation Iraqi American chef, and a recently arrived Iraqi UCLA professor, Hanif (also known as Han). Their love story is tinged with Han's traumatic exile, and Sirine's negotiation of her Arab American identity. The novel is set in 1999. Abu-Jaber started writing it before 9/11 and was hesitant about publishing it after the terrorist attacks, but ultimately decided to do so. Amelia Maria de la Luz Montes explains that, "On September 11, 2001, Abu-Jaber was not quite finished with the writing of *Crescent*. She thought about abandoning the book, but then realized the importance of its presence post 9/11" (213). Indeed, I deem this novel a very relevant contribution to post-9/11 literature.

The novel tells the story of Sirine, who lives and works as a chef in Nadia's Café, an Arab restaurant in the neighborhood of Teherangeles in Los Angeles, an area with a vast Iranian population. Sirine is half-Iraqi (of Iraqi father and American mother), thirty-nine years old, and lives with her uncle, who took her in when she was nine after her parents died while working for the American Red Cross. Her uncle is a professor in the Near Eastern Studies department at UCLA, and is very keen on storytelling. He becomes the guiding thread in the novel as he

lives in Oregon. Alia Yunis was born in the United States but her parents are from Lebanon and Palestine.

tells Sirine “the moralless story of Abdelrahman Salahadin” (5). As Sirine's uncle puts it, “It's the story of how to love” (5). The role of Sirine's uncle is essential in the novel, as he is also the one who introduces Han to Sirine. His storytelling places him as the link between Sirine and her Iraqi ancestry, as well as within “a communicative (and communal) tradition of oral authority and cultural sharing” (Salaita 2011: 104). It also punctuates the love story between Sirine and Han.²³⁴

Sirine and Hanif meet at Nadia's Café, a place the Lebanese Um-Nadia inherited after the previous owner saw his business fail when the CIA started frequenting his restaurant, making the clientele leave (8). The presence of the government agency monitoring the movements of the regulars at the Café contributes to the idea of racial profiling of Arabs even before September 11, 2001. A month after taking up the business, Um-Nadia hired Sirine, who had to go through “her parents' old recipes” (9) and relearn the foods of her childhood to start working there, a fact which denotes how much she had become distanced from her origins. In the Café, drawing on the pervasive stereotyping of Arab men, Sirine “[s]ometimes ... used to scan the room and imagine the word *terrorist*. But her gaze ran over the faces and all that came back to her were words like *lonely*, and *young*” (9, emphasis in original). Thus, although tempted to encapsulate Arab men as monster-terrorists, Sirine's experience makes her emphasize their nostalgia. What she feels for the young men who are recurrent customers of the café parallels what she will feel towards Hanif—a mixture of mistrust and nostalgia for her own

²³⁴ An account of the parallelisms between the story of Abdejarahman Salahadin and Sirine and Han's is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which will focus on the depiction of Han's masculinity. For a further analysis on the story of Salahadin, see Taalat Abdelrazek (213-220), Gana (207-209), and De la Luz Montes (212).

origins.

Early on in the story, Sirine's uncle feels that Sirine and Han would be a good match. Before introducing them, he describes Han to Sirine as “tremendous, covered with muscles, and shoulders like this—like a Cadillac—and a face like I don't know what” (6). Emphasizing Han's virility, Sirine's uncle tries to make him look appealing to her, but she actually feels repelled by this description and replies, “That's supposed to sound good?” (6). However, when Sirine meets Hanif, what her perception of him emphasizes is both his darkness and his exoticism, which is what attracts her. Being a chef, Sirine's description is full of food metaphors:

Her main impressions of Hanif are of his hair, straight and shiny as black glass, and of a faint tropical sleepiness to his eyes. And there is his beautiful, lightly accented, fluid voice, dark as chocolate. His accent has nuances of England and Eastern Europe, like a complicated sauce...She looks at him, the white of his teeth, the silky dram of skin, cocoa-bean brown. He's well built, tall, and strong. (11)²³⁵

Sirine, following a perception of the world through food similes, relates Han's exoticism to dark chocolate. In doing so, she expresses her longing to find the Arab part of her identity somewhere other than in the stove. For Sirine, Han encapsulates the Iraqi side of herself that she relates to her late parents. Hanif is described in the novel through the focalization of Sirine. The story is marked by Han's displacement and the prejudices that Sirine projects onto him. Sirine herself believes that “he seems elusive and far away” (35). Over a conversation with her uncle, Sirine expresses her doubts:

²³⁵ Further analysis on the role of food in *Crescent* can be found in Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom.

“What do you think [of Han]?”

“Oh. I don't know. Of course, he's very sweet. And not bad-looking ... But there's something complicated about him...”

“Complicated? ... Well, but he's an exile – they're all messed up inside. But I thought girls were supposed to love that.” (37)

Following her uncle's words, Sirine feels both threatened and compelled by Han's complexity and by his stateless condition. Han is marked by the trauma of exile.²³⁶ As he voices it when they are making baklava together, “I miss everything, Sirine. Absolutely everything” (51). Han's painful nostalgia is grounded in the longing for a return to his homeland and the knowledge of the danger he would face if he ever went back. As Amal Talaat Abdelrazek expresses it, “Hanif embodies the painful Iraqi exile experience, not only because he is away from Iraq with its threatening dictatorship but also because he can never return to Iraq, and some part of him cannot grasp the thought of never returning” (188). In their first encounter in Han's house, his emotional side is emphasized by Sirine, as during their first dinner together, Sirine ponders, “He seems different in this glazed atmosphere, his face softer, as if all his emotions have drifted to the surface of his body, so she can feel all of him in the touch of his hand” (57). Sirine feels “disconcerted by his intensity” (59). The relevance of Han's sensitiveness is twofold. On the one hand, it makes him depart from traditional conceptions of Arab masculinity which emphasize the patriarch's power over females. On the other, it denotes the affecting nature of Han's exile, which will ultimately become a source of reticence on Sirine's part.

Their relationship consolidates, as Sirine continues to relate Han to the

²³⁶ For a full account on the issue of exile in *Crescent*, see Amal Talaat Abdelrazek.

exotic foods of Iraq: “the scent of his skin echoed in the rich powder of spices” (101). As they are getting to know each other, they talk about their origins and their families, but Han seems to be hiding something. In the middle of their conversation, his feeling of nostalgia is so evident that for Sirine it is as if he has disappeared: “he is far away now, a dot of light between the trees, so far away he might as well not have existed” (110). In fact, Han's elusiveness is tinged with his nostalgia, as he believes that “The fact of exile is bigger than everything else in my life. Leaving my country was like—I don't know—like part of my body was torn away. I have phantom pains from the loss of that part—I'm haunted by myself” (152). Having been exiled, Han needs to attempt a reconstruction of his identity, while the traumatic nature of his displacement anchors him in a revival of his origins that is difficult to overcome. Not being able to come to terms with a trauma which obsesses him will indeed hinder his love story with Sirine.

At the same time, Um-Nadia fills Sirine's head with stereotypes about Arab men. She starts by pointing out the importance of Han's religion, which she actually relates to race, and tells Sirine, “‘He's a Muslim, you know.’ Um-Nadia's voice is half-warning and half-laughter. ‘Dark as an Egyptian’” (27), and she goes on, “All these guys really want is to get us back into veils, making babies, and I don't know what, nursing goats or something. You watch out, I'm telling you” (28). Um-Nadia's advice draws on stereotypical conceptions of Arab and Muslim manhoods and relates them to race (“Dark as an Egyptian”) and to a lower social class (in its reference to goats). The owner of Nadia's Café reinforces stereotypes of Islamicate masculinity, while in fact Han will prove to be nothing like that. Um-

Nadia may be the most feminist character in the story, her Café being in fact a matriarchal space, which, in itself, questions the hegemony of patriarchy in the Arab world. In this environment of female power, which does not condone patriarchal enactments of masculinity, Um-Nadia's crusade against sexism is clear. However, at the same time, she may be the most biased character in her prejudice against Muslim men. Um-Nadia's words (added to Han's elusiveness) persuade Sirine that there might be something suspicious about Han, and she decides to distance herself from him, "Um-Nadia's coaxing makes her anxious and uncomfortable and she senses again that her feelings are rushing away from her, that it's wiser to pull back a bit, to try to understand who Han is a little better" (74). Moreover, Sirine starts to feel frightened. After seeing her "jumpy," her uncle asks her if Han is scaring her, to which she answers, "Oh no—" She starts to shake her head. *Yes*" (117, emphasis in original). Her mistrust toward Hanif is intensifying.

From Han's perspective, however, Sirine is helping him overcome the trauma of his exile. As he tells her, "You are the place I want to be—you're the opposite of exile. When I look at you—when I touch you—I feel ease. I feel joy" (130). He even gives her a scarf that he tells her his mother was wearing when his father fell in love with her (133). Nonetheless, Sirine's suspicions are escalating and she feels that "She needs to know more about him, to know if it is safe to feel this way about him" (146). In a state of paranoia, she looks for clues in his house and finds a letter which mentions a murder, which leaves Sirine "paralyzed" (148), and makes her "recall Um-Nadia's stories about women betrayed, their faithless

men” (148). As a consequence, “Sirine feels dizzy and weak-kneed. She sinks down onto the bed. What if he's planning to go? Han might be married, she thinks. Perhaps he has children. And perhaps he has killed someone” (148). Simultaneously, their friend Aziz asks her out and, scared of falling in love with a potential murderer, she ends up having an affair with him (250). Guilt ensues, but Sirine does not tell Han about it.

Ultimately, however, it is proven that Han does not fulfill those stereotypes that Sirine had internalized, as he finally tells Sirine about his trauma, which stemmed from his feeling of guilt for his sister's death (281-283). He is hiding nothing but his trauma after having lost part of his family in Iraq in the hands of Saddam Hussein. His sincerity, however, takes him back to his paralyzing nostalgia, and after telling her the story, “something ... pull[s] him away from her again, out of her grasp, as if the story itself has filled his lungs and drawn him under” (284). Remembering the most painful part of his life in Iraq leads him to an urgent need to go back there. The next morning, Sirine wakes up next to a note that says, “Things are broken. The world is broken. Hayati, it's time. I've gone. Imagine that I was never here at all” (286). His decision to go back to Iraq has been analyzed as follows:

For Hanif, going home means more than taking a journey to the place where he was born. The ability to go, the decision to embark on such a trip, and the experience of actually crossing borders to one's native land involves an “interrogation” of the makeup of Hanif's identity and a definition and redefinition of the meaning and location of home. His relationship to Iraq has again shifted now that he has confronted his traumatic history and understands ... that he did not cause [his sister] Laila's murder. Just as he has confronted his past, he can now confront his homeland and his family. (Talaat Abdelrazek 193)

His guilt has dissipated and has allowed his sense of self to be resolved. His identity can now be redefined as that of an innocent man. He needs to go back to Iraq to find closure and thus be able to start anew. One year later, through a photograph in a newspaper, Sirine knows that he is not dead and later receives a phone call from him (339), although the reader is left unaware of the nature of their conversation. The novel finishes with an open, hopeful ending, deconstructing the stereotypes that relate the Arab male's physical appearance to untrustworthiness. The story thus ends by opening up to the possibility of love. Despite Sirine and Um-Nadia's suspicions, Han is in fact depicted throughout the novel as a caring and nurturing man. Abu-Jaber herself has acknowledged her deliberateness in providing a positive portrayal of an Arab man, specifically one from an educated social class, in order to counter stereotypical images of Islamic traditionalism:

Han is meant to be representative of a specific kind of very literate, sophisticated Arab man. He is someone who has studied and traveled. He is a man that I have known among my family, among friends, but that I never see represented in our media. I very deliberately set myself to task, to see this profile come forth—we needed to see this other man. Definitely he is a bit idealized, but not that idealized. (Field 219)

Hanif is not presented as traditional in any way. His Islamic faith does not have any sexist component, and his love for Sirine is portrayed as sincere devotion. Marcia C. Inhorn states in *The New Arab Man. Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (2012) that the “new Arab man” desires “romantic love, companionship, and sexual passion” (300), and rejects “patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and polygyny” (302). Han does

undeniably fulfill the characteristics of this new masculinity, as he is depicted in his romantic but also sexual relationship with Sirine as a loving man who does not condone patriarchal power, but just needs to exorcise the trauma that has caused him to be “haunted by himself.” Hopefully, after having come back to an Iraq he never thought he would see again, he will be able to materialize his love for Sirine.

At the same time, taking on the theory on Arab American feminism developed in chapter 3, Sirine can be considered a *nepantlera*. In fact, Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that Sirine, as the chef in Nadia's Café, has taken the role of a “bridge” (that image often used by Arab American women of color feminists),²³⁷ and that,

Sirine's inbetweenness, her potential space in the hyphen between “Arab” and “American,” propels her into a constant state of border-crossing. With her ethnic, racial, and religious indeterminacy (which ultimately becomes a positive characteristic since it escapes the defined boundaries of standard categorizations), Sirine becomes an incarnation of what Anzaldúa denotes in her preface to *this bridge we call home* as the “nepantlera,” existing at the frontier, bridging the gulf between realities, perspectives, ethnic communities, and racial categorizations. (2006: 198)

Theorizing Sirine as a *nepantlera* relates her to the powerful feminist figure that I renamed “*mahjar* feminist” in section 3.2 of the present dissertation. In a feminist stance for women of color feminism, Sirine's understanding of her in-between identity enables a change in Han who, through his love for her, is able to come to terms with his identity. *Mahjar* feminists or *nepantleras* use their in-betweenness as a potential site of positive transformation, and this is what Sirine

²³⁷ The pervasive use of bridge imagery by Arab American feminists was analyzed in section 3.3.2.

has encouraged in Han. Thus, although Sirine has had difficulties coming to terms with Han's exiled self, her love has remained at the center of her learning and, therefore, may be supporting Mohja Kahf's statement that "In love, she remains whole."

4.3.2 Alternative Male Characters in Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter*: Building Feminist Affective Bridges

Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* (2009) tells the story of the Abdullah family, originally from Lebanon and now scattered around the United States. The novel is structured through the unifying thread of grandmother Fatima's conversations with Scheherazade—the Arab queen and storyteller from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Fatima thinks that she will die after her one thousand and first night with Scheherazade arrives, so she tells her about the history of her family while she ponders on how she will divide her inheritance. Pauline Homsy Vinson states that "Fatima's stories ... trace the ways in which cultural mobility informs contested negotiations of gendered, sexualized, and racialized notions of national and transnational belonging" (57). Certainly, through Fatima's storytelling, the reader is left to question Arab (American) notions of gender, sexuality and race. Most chapters are written from Fatima's perspective, although others take on Scheherazade's point of view, as well as that of various members of the Abdullah family, and even an FBI agent's. This provides the reader with an unabridged picture of the clan. Relevantly, the story is set after 9/11, with references to the tragic events throughout. The male characters in the novel, even if not without

flaws, point to Arab American manhoods that move away from traditionalism, albeit each of them in different ways. Their masculinities are in a situational position, but their acts of manhood do not connect them to patriarchal or neopatriarchal enactments of masculinity.²³⁸ In this section, I am going to analyze several characters: the two husbands Fatima has had (Marwan and Ibrahim), three of her grandsons (Amir, Rock and Zade), her son (Bassam), and one of her daughter's husbands (Ghazi).

The story starts with Fatima's conversations with Scheherazade, where Fatima reminisces about her life, and specifically about her two husbands. Fatima's first husband was Marwan, who married and brought her to the United States soon after he fell in love with her at a funeral in Lebanon. To the question of whether Fatima liked him, she answers, "Marwan? Sure, why not? He was very nice ... Marwan made six dollars a day working for Mr. Ford. Mama was sure that in America I would have a better life. ... But I did like Marwan because I was getting older and I didn't have a father and I wasn't so good-looking" (34). Fatima emphasizes the significance of her mother's dreams of upward mobility in the decision, as well as the role of provider that Marwan was able to fulfill, and the suitability of the engagement as she thought she might not be able to find another husband because of her looks. However, Marwan died soon after, and Fatima

²³⁸ In fact, Alia Yunis has expressed this divergence from ethnic markers in the following manner, "It's not a personal story in the sense that it's not my family, but I think the disconnects we all feel, not just ethnic disconnects, or religious disconnects with whatever it is considered the mainstream, but sometimes we don't feel comfortable with who we are on a lot of different other levels, like Amir is dealing with issues of his homosexuality, and, you know, sometimes your weight can be an issue that defines who you are, so it's about trying to figure out who you are despite what society is telling you you are or supposed to be." (00:03:15-00:03:50), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o7s6QssY10>>. Accessed: 30 August 2015.

ended up marrying his friend Ibrahim, who also worked “with Mr. Ford” (83) in Detroit.²³⁹

Ibrahim's marriage to Fatima was brought to a halt before 9/11, when she asked him for a divorce. Then, she moved to Los Angeles to live with her grandson Amir, while Ibrahim stayed in Detroit. Throughout their sixty-five years of marriage, Fatima believed that Ibrahim married her out of pity after she became a widow. However, Ibrahim was actually in love with her. In a conversation with his stepdaughter Laila (Marwan and Fatima's only daughter), Ibrahim vindicates his love for Fatima saying that, “I wouldn't have had no nine other children with her if I did not want to marry her” (99). Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of Fatima in reminding him of home: “When your mama talked, she laughed a laugh—she brought Lebanon back to me” (99). Fatima reminded him of his origins. At ninety-six years old, when the story develops, Ibrahim is depicted as a lonely man who longs for his origins. Twice a week, he takes public transportation from his house in Dearborn to the Detroit Metropolitan Airport where he waits for flights that arrive from Lebanon and Jordan so that he can “hear the sound of his childhood dinners in their hyperbolic greetings” (19). The end of his life is tinged with a nostalgia that has been exacerbated by Fatima and his children's disappearance from his life. In fact, he resents that his children have been scattered all over the United States, so that now he only “accept[s] occasional telephone calls from them that mostly consist of weather reports” (18). However, his parenting is presented in the novel as that of an emotionally absent father (129),

²³⁹ The Arab migration to Detroit at the beginning of the twentieth century to work at the Ford car plants has been documented by Sarah M.A. Gualtieri (48-50).

which is justified in the story through his fear for his children's safety. On the one hand, two of his three sons were killed by a tornado in the United States. On the other hand, his sisters had been killed in Lebanon three years before he moved to America, so that once he had his daughters, he curtailed their freedom as an attempt at keeping them safe. As a consequence, Fatima explains to Scheherazade that,

[w]ith each daughter that was born, Ibrahim laughed less and less. ... He stopped being the man who used to tell me jokes in Arabic when I first got here so I could laugh sometimes. I couldn't understand American humor back then, but I loved his old Juha jokes. I can't imagine him telling a joke today. (199)

Thus, his enactment of traditional masculinity, in terms of overprotection in his relationship with his daughters, a common trait in Arab patriarchy (Ajrouch 386-388, Harpel 92), is justified in the text through his sorrow. His silence is explained through his nostalgia. However, despite his quiet nature, Ibrahim is depicted as a caring man, who continued to fulfill his role as a provider even after his divorce by sending money to his family.²⁴⁰ The story ends with Ibrahim passing away on the bus coming back from the airport. After his death, his family remembers him:

Just as Ibrahim had not made many waves in their lives when he was living, he had passed out of them like a calm storm, easy to avoid but still powerful. His children's sadness was as deep as if he had been close to them, as if he had been Randa's typical American dad fantasy. [Fatima's] husband had been loved by so many children yet left alone on a bus at the end, a bus that took him twice a week to a place where he once imagined his children would have stayed near him, even lived next door, if not in the same house. (361)

This paragraph evinces his children's love for Ibrahim despite his faults. Ibrahim's imperfections made him long for a home full of children. His love for Fatima is

²⁴⁰ Being a provider is a central element to the construction of *rujula* or Arab masculinity (Amireh 725).

evident at the end when he leaves everything to her in his will (362), and because of this gesture, she finally becomes aware of his love for her. At that point, Scheherazade tells Fatima that “Some people are storytellers, and some people, like Ibrahim, are story keepers” (363), thus denoting that Ibrahim's silences had been a result of the nostalgia that he kept inside. All in all, it can be argued that Ibrahim's manhood is an example of “multiple masculinities,” as it had been constructed through a negotiation between dominant and subversive discourses, especially in relation to his enactment of fatherhood.²⁴¹ Following tradition, Ibrahim performed conservative acts of protection of his daughters, and was also emotionally absent. This is justified in the novel through his traumatic experience with his sisters' and sons' deaths, as well as his nostalgia for his homeland. Conversely, Ibrahim also deviates from traditional conceptions of Arab masculinity as, maybe because of his silent nature, he did not promote a patriarchal connectivity that rendered him at the top of the family structure, but enabled Fatima to be regarded as the matriarchal center of the clan. Ibrahim's situational thirdspace masculinity is thus epitomized in the contradictory nature of his passing, not only lonely, but also filled with love.

The third character that will be analyzed here is Amir, Fatima's grandson, with whom she goes to live after her divorce, the day before September 11, 2001. After the attacks, Amir decides that she should stay with him. As pointed out in the text, “[Fatima] began to worry about what revenge the United States would wreak on the Middle East, [so] Amir decided he didn't want her living alone” (22). Amir

²⁴¹ The concept of “multiple masculinities” (Schrock and Schwalbe 284) was examined in section 2.2 of the present dissertation.

is gay (making him one of the only homosexual characters encountered so far in post-9/11 Arab American literature written by women), but Fatima does not understand that and is determined to find a wife for him before she dies. His positionality in a marginal space regarding his sexuality informs the understanding of his masculine identity, which deviates from all discourses of traditional Arab manhood. As Linda F. Maloul argues, “Amir who is a homosexual Arab American might be more aware than others of the marginalization and stereotyping of certain minority groups in the U.S.” (204). His deviation from tradition contrasts with the roles that are offered to him as an actor. In most of the auditions he attends, he has to portray terrorists or cabdrivers, all of them requiring him to wear a long beard. That is, his typecasting only serves to reify stereotypical depictions of Muslim manhood, which continue to relate Arab men to monster-terrorists or, in the best-case scenario, portray stereotypical immigrant jobs like that of taxi driver. To add insult to injury, he even gets offered a part as the young Saddam Hussein. From his modern Arab American masculine perspective, he feels dissatisfied by the kinds of roles that he auditions for as he feels uneasy with the racialization that is being ascribed to him. As he argues in reference to his audition as Saddam Hussein, “He reached down for a script and checked the line. Yeah, he was ready for his audition tomorrow. Saddam Hussein as a young man. Jesus Christ, he needed a better agent. Or a better heritage” (77). His emphasis on needing “a better heritage” underscores the situational position of his Arab American identity. While markedly ethnicized externally, especially after 9/11, he accurately blames this racialization on his origins and on an agent that may not be digging far enough for roles that

deviate from mainstream conceptions of Arab masculinity. While his sense of self is punctuated by the roles he is offered, this ascription of the physical features of a terrorist is corroborated also in the novel through the FBI investigation that he is subjected to. In a comical conversation between his grandmother Fatima and FBI agent Sherri Hazad, whom she confuses with Scheherazade, the FBI tries to find clues that relate Amir to terrorism in every one of his movements, but the investigation is eventually resolved as a misunderstanding and no further actions are taken against Amir.²⁴² Ultimately, through the care he takes of his grandmother Fatima, Amir is represented in the novel as the main point of support for the matriarch, as he is the only member of the family who takes responsibility for her. In this regard, he regularly sends e-mails to his family telling them about her. Yet, he usually does not receive any replies, which makes him resent his family and their lack of emotion. In the end, after his estranged mother convinces him to send a more dramatic e-mail to their family, Fatima's children react and eventually go visit her the day she believes she is going to die. She fortunately does not, but it has been Amir who has enabled the family to come together. The homosexual grandson has been given the power to unite the clan around the figure of the matriarch, giving him thus the agency to vindicate the unity of the family, something that had been forgotten by the rest. In doing so, Amir is advancing the argument that family does not need to be a heterosexist formation. Moreover, Amir's sexuality and his role as caregiver make him escape traditional conceptions of Arab (American) masculinity and place him in a thirdspace where his ethnic

²⁴² It is also worth noting that the FBI agent Sherri Hazad also has an Arab last name, thus further complicating the concepts of tolerable and intolerable ethnic (Puar) in the novel .

self seems to be only marked as such externally through the roles that he is offered as an actor. Both his sexuality and his personification as caretaker are normalized, a fact which serves to further destabilize traditional conceptions of Arab (American) masculinities. In fact, his homosexuality is only used as one more comic device in the novel, leading to misunderstandings with Fatima in her insistence on finding him a wife. By doing this, Alia Yunis offers a very valuable inclusion of alternative modes of identity in Arab American literature.

Zade is another of Fatima's grandsons. He has his own company in Washington DC, an Arab café and dating site, following the family tradition started by Fatima's grandmother, who was a matchmaker. It is relevant here that a task traditionally performed by women is being performed by a man in the novel. In his case, the role is being reversed, thus pointing to an alternative enactment of masculinity as well. His enterprise is called Aladdin and Jasmine, a name which forwards traditional views of marriage at the same time as it reinstates the company as an Arab American business. The story of Aladdin comes precisely from the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* told by Scheherazade, while the character of Jasmine was added by Disney in the 1992 film version of the story, a fact which transforms the name into an eminently Arab American one. Moreover, his café is called Scheherazade's Diwan Café, and “Under the words was a drawing of a half-naked belly dancer” (42). Zade is aware of stereotypes and uses them to his advantage. Following this contradictory view of Arab American identity, Zade is concerned with the success of his business, but he actually despises most of his customers. As is explained in the novel, “He had been raised

to disdain the majority of his clientele: the Arab elite's children, rich through business or family name, shallower, his father once remarked, than the plates of hummus the café served” (44). As a result, he speaks sarcastically to his clients (although they seldom realize it). For instance, talking to a Qatari customer, he tells him, “So basically, sir, you want a nice Arab-American bilingual highly educated virgin not opposed to wearing the *abaya* and conversant in French cuisine” (46). Zade's masculine identity is represented as an eminently Arab American one, in the sense that while he acknowledges and even takes advantage of his Arab ancestry in his business, and although he is not comfortable in dealing with traditional enactments of Arab masculinity, he needs to accept such in order to reify his capitalist dream of monetary success. The questionnaire that he uses in his matchmaking business is also noteworthy. In it, he asks about country of origin, religion, the issue of the *hijab*, the percentage of Arab blood desired in the partner, and support of the war in Iraq, among other questions. His questionnaire covers a broad variety of issues, which actually mirror the variety of Arab Americans that exist in terms of religion, countries of origin, generation, and even politics. After rereading it, Zade proclaims, “So much for Arab unity” (49), thus expressing the need to rationalize the diversity of the Arab world through the questionnaire so that Arab people can find a husband or wife that is compatible with them among this variety. This reference to “Arab unity” also evinces the existence of a panArab movement that started in the 1970s with the foundation of several organizations, and which unified Arabs against their discrimination in the United States. In contrast to his parents’ intellectual drive (they are both college

professors, and would like him to pursue a doctorate), Zade is motivated by business, and justifies his enterprise by insisting on its Arab background. As he claims, “We will be promoting the revival of Arab culture ... The hookah is a four-hundred-year-old tradition. There are thousands of Arab students in D.C. who miss back home. Commerce isn't a dirty word. It's perceiving a need and meeting it” (51). His mentality follows the capitalist ideas of prosperity, while using his Arab ancestry as an added value. Moreover, while his father Elias is not convinced that that is the right path for his son, he believes that the fact that his company is based on love is aiding in the stabilization of Arabs in the United States. As he explains, “Love is very important in maintaining a culture ... Cultures without love die” (54). The love which is forwarded is that of traditional heterosexual marriage. However, just as conflictive as his Arab Americanness, Zade promotes views of marriage which are traditional both in the Arab world and in the United States, while he does not fulfill these ideals. He started this dating service with his partner Giselle but they have since separated. All in all, Zade's masculinity is placed in a dream of success which encourages heterosexual marriage, and one could argue even traditional conceptions of Arab marriage in his acceptance of sexist requests from neopatriarchal clients, while he does not conform to any of these traditional views.

Another one of Fatima's grandsons is Rock. This character reverses the stereotypical conceptions of Arabs as terrorists and white Anglo-Saxon Protestants as heroes, problematizing the concept of imperative patriotism (Salaita), as he is an Arab American man who decides to enlist in the U.S. army. He is twenty-nine

years old, divorced, and has a daughter. He is aware of his intellectual limitations, so that he “love[s] the army. The military was a job that paid you to let them do the hard part for you, the thinking part. There wasn't any better gig” (243). In fact, in his town, his family were the only Muslims and, “[u]ntil 9/11, they had been known mostly as a military family” (252). However, after September 11, their life changed as “neighbors came over with cakes to show that President Bush was right: Arab Americans and Muslim Americans were Americans period. That very support made them aware that they were no longer just Americans” (252). George W. Bush's speech in Congress on September 20th, 2001, and the visibilization that it entailed in their community made Rock aware of his own racialization.²⁴³ Nonetheless, his commitment to the United States army stays strong. As he is destined to Iraq three years after 9/11, his family is reluctant to the idea and they question the political nature of the endeavor. However, Rock tells them, “I'm not going to fight ... I'm going to be building schools over there. Righteous stuff. Someone has to do the righteous stuff,” to what his cousin Dawood from Lebanon says, “You build schools again you bombed,” and Rock replies, “What do you want America to say? The damage is already done ... All we can do now is fix it” (255). This argument between cousins denotes Rock's apoliticized view of his role in the army in contrast to his Arab cousin's much more political opinion of war.

²⁴³ In his speech, George W. Bush said, “I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.” <<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/george-w-bush-addresses-muslims-in-the-aftermath-of-the-9-11-attacks>>. Accessed: 20 August 2015.

The portrayal of the character of Rock in the novel, albeit slightly lacking in depth, contributes yet another depiction of Arab American men which escapes traditional conceptions of Arab manhood from a mainstream perspective.

Another unsterotypical character is Bassam. He is one of Fatima's sons, actually the only one still alive. He lives in Las Vegas and has an addictive personality that has made him get married many times as well as caused his alcoholism. As is explained in the novel:

Bassam couldn't do anything in less than extremes: He couldn't go on a date without getting married, he couldn't drink without becoming an alcoholic, and he couldn't get an education without getting a Ph.D. He couldn't be a success without being a complete success or a loser without being a complete loser, and the latter came more naturally. (313)

In fact, he studied at Harvard, but ended up working as a limousine driver in Las Vegas. He is eminently an underachiever. In fact, his alcoholism has a lot to do with his downfall, which started when he began drinking upon his brothers' deaths: “Before going to bed he took a few shots of his father's *araq*. Fatima said it was for special occasions, but with Laith and Riyad gone there never would be special occasions in the house again, and no one missed it” (308). After September 11, he decided that he would not drink anymore as he became conscious of the precarious situation of Arab men in a post-9/11 milieu, since he “realized it was too fucking dangerous to be both drunk and Arab in America” (307). Bassam's enactment of masculinity is tinged with failure. His extremist personality, however, does not take up any traditional stereotypes of Arab men in the marginal space which it occupies. Moreover, he is aware of sexism and racialization in American society. As he drives some Saudi men to a belly dancing show, where no women are Arab,

he thinks, “they were having such a kick-ass good time. The women were a fantasy. Women who looked as cheap and easy to them as McDonald's. Women who didn't think of them as the faces of terror. For the women, the Saudis were a fantasy, too: rich, handsome, interested, really rich” (314). In fact, Bassam is relating the sexualization of American women with the eroticization of Saudi wealth. In his awareness of the workings of sexualization and racialization, Bassam is presented as a knowledgeable individual who might be on the road towards a less extreme enactment of his life. In fact, he is able to stay sober because of the help of his mother, as there is a “black-and-white photo of Fatima above the cash register” (308) in the bar where he goes now to have “club soda and apple juice” (306), a fact which highlights the power of the matriarch, whose image reminds him of the importance of temperance.

To finish with, I will analyze the husband of one of Fatima's daughters, Laila. He is Ghazi, and he “discovered Islam” (92) after Laila was diagnosed with cancer. His feeling of devastation in knowing that he may lose his wife to cancer made him turn to a strict view of Islam. As the novel has it:

Until then they had been the kind of Muslims who fulfilled their duties by giving to the poor and not eating pork. ... Now Ghazi was the kind of Muslim who went to the mosque five times a day, didn't drink, and gave all the money he used to spend on his fancy gym membership to the new mosque, as if trading in fat for prayer would make his family healthy again. (93)

However, in resorting to religion, he actually neglects his recovering wife, as he leaves her at home. As is explained in the novel, “He spends most Friday nights these days at the mosque praying to God to keep her with him for as long as he could, leaving her at home to watch TV alone” (108). Moreover, Ghazi also starts

taking his sons to the mosque with him, which Leila does not agree with. Facing this carelessness for her desires, Laila decides to retaliate by cooking Ghazi and his Muslim friends pork while telling them it is veal, which signifies a victory for her, who therefore becomes a (secular) feminist activist in her endeavor against extreme religiosity. In fact, despite her challenge, Laila's love for her husband remains affirmed. Ghazi tells her that he cares for her, and Laila interprets those words as epitomizing his affection for her. As expressed in the novel:

That was not easy for a man from Egypt, an engineer no less, to say. Maybe it wasn't easy for any man. Laila had no experience with any other man. One day, Ghazi might even try "I love you," although she knew he would never be American enough to throw it around like "hello" and "goodbye" the way her regular American friends' husbands did. He had said the three words to her when he had asked her to marry him, and that had been enough for both of them through the years. (114)

For Laila, words of affection from an Arab man of science are treasured, thus denoting her view of traditional masculinity as emotionally distant (maybe because of her stepfather Ibrahim's silent nature). Ultimately, Laila maintains her love for Ghazi regardless of his religiosity and in a prayer she confesses, "I am lucky to have a good man, which is hard to find in any religion." (116). Therefore, she is portrayed in a manner similar to the "I" persona in Mohja Kahf's poetry. Both Kahf and Yunis are critical of Arab (American) men's patriarchy and religiosity but ultimately profess their love for them.²⁴⁴

Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* validates the non-conformity to monolithic portrayals of Arab men by Arab American women writers. In contrast to

²⁴⁴ Mohja Kahf's poetry was examined in section 3.5 of the present dissertation. It is relevant to point out here that Kahf also draws on the proto-feminist nature of Scheherazade as the title of her book of poetry is *E-Mails from Scheherazade*, where the poems previously analyzed come from.

mainstream discourses that depict men of Arab origin in the United States as monster-terrorists, Yunis provides multiple representations of masculinities in her novel, all of which deviate from traditional conceptions of Arab manhood both in terms of stereotypical discourses and actual tendencies of traditional patriarchy and neopatriarchy. *The Night Counter* explores a diversity of existing manhoods which are devoid of recognizable ethnic markers. In so doing, it implies, on the one hand, a step forward in the transnational and multicultural endeavor of post-9/11 literature written by Arab American women and, on the other, helps normalize Arab American manhoods in the United States. By deviating from traditional indicators of ethnicity in her representation of men, Yunis reveals new models of Arab American manhood that indeed occupy a thirdspace full of alternatives. Moreover, the novel contrasts these masculinities to Fatima's femininity, and places her as the ultimate point of union for her extended family, thus positing her at the end of the story (when her children finally visit her) as the preeminent matriarch who has had the power to bring her family together. This is epitomized by the fig tree that Fatima brought to the United States from Lebanon, which blooms for the first time at the very end of the story. The tree's fertility encapsulates Fatima's own fecundity in bearing her ten children as well as her capacity at the end of the story to reunite them. As a consequence, Fatima (with the help of Scheherazade and Amir) may be seen as a *nepantlera* of sorts, a *mahjar* feminist²⁴⁵ who has been able to create bridges among an Arab American community which deviates from tradition, and thus has brought to life diverse

²⁴⁵ The concept of *mahjar* feminism was developed in section 3.2.

lovable men.²⁴⁶ Following in Scheherazade's proto-feminist footsteps, Fatima has unknowingly become an advocate for Arab American women of color feminism. At the end of the novel, and right before leaving the Abdullah family, Scheherazade tells Fatima that “Family lines are not as straight as they could be, but they are continuous” (364-365). They are, indeed, the everlasting bridges that Fatima has ultimately succeeded in creating.

4.3.3 *Mahjar* Feminism and New Arab American Men: Some Conclusions

Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* offer accounts of *mahjar* feminism in their portrayals of matriarchal spaces and in their representations of unsterotypical Arab men. The former gives heterosexual love the power to counter prejudice, while the latter delves on family affection in order to defy vilifying accounts of Arab manhood. As Elias states in *The Night Counter*, “Cultures without love die” (54), and these two novels are making an effort in promoting love in the conciliation between Arab and American cultures.

Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* examines issues of exile and stereotypes in its depiction of the love story between Han and Sirine. The novel acknowledges prejudices while it asserts the need to challenge them by providing a positive depiction of Arab men. In other words, it denounces radical feminist views which vilify men (epitomized by Um-Nadia), and advocates an Arab American women of

²⁴⁶ Fatima's role in creating a community or a home has been further developed in Jumana Bayeh's book *The Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora* (2015).

color feminism which carries out a joint struggle against sexism and racism. At the same time, Abu-Jaber purposefully offers positive accounts of Arab manhood which entail a feminist endeavor as, apart from challenging sexist and racist practices, she is presenting positive models to follow, and men to love.

Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter* displays a plurality of representations of Arab American masculinities, most of which diverge from ethnic markers and thus counter vilifying and stereotypical visions of Arab manhood. Among a family of secular Muslims, Ibrahim's absence as a father and his strict relation with his daughters are justified in the text by his sons' and sisters' deaths. Amir defies traditionalism by being a homosexual and a caretaker, and Zade, by being a matchmaker who has a conflictive relation with his Arab self both in his awareness and rejection of traditional enactments of Arab masculinity. Rock defies terrorist ascriptions to Arabs by enlisting in the U.S. army and going to Iraq. Bassam's intelligence, despite his alcoholism, makes him aware of his potential racialization after 9/11, which ensures his sobriety. Finally, Ghazi's return to religiosity and his wife's consequent challenge provide a space for feminism to arise. *Mahjar* feminist bridges are also built in the novel around the figure of Fatima, the grandmother protagonist, who eventually brings the family together.

Certainly, both Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter* advocate *mahjar* feminisms in their depictions of Arab (American) men. Both novels present characters who are aware of stereotypes and racialization. All in all, they provide portrayals of new Arab American men who reject enactments of masculinity that follow “patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and polygyny”

(Inhorn 302). In contrast, they offer matriarchal spaces (Nadia's Café in *Crescent*, and Fatima and Amir's home in *The Night Counter*) which aid in empowering women and allowing them to become *mahjar* feminists. In their feminist endeavor, these *nepantleras* also profess their love for Arab (American) men. Abu-Jaber and Yunis portray beloved men in their novels, men who deviate from stereotypes and preconceptions, as well as from traditional patriarchal and neopatriarchal enactments of Arab and Arab American masculinities. In so doing, they provide models for new alternative masculinities. Ultimately, then, they are also forwarding Arab American women of color feminism.

Conclusions

Steven Salaita states in his book *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (2007) that “emphasis on plurality is the only plausible way to discuss Arab Americans” (1). Indeed, this dissertation has presented multiple enactments of masculinities, thus reflecting the variety of manhoods represented in post-9/11 Arab American novels. In so doing, there has been an effort in countering stereotypical and homogenizing portrayals of Arab men. The analysis of Arab American literature in chapter 4 has confirmed the theories expounded upon, especially in the previous chapters.

Chapter 1 has traced the historical racialization of Arabs in the United States. Taking Arab Americanness as a racial construction, the chapter has provided an account of the liminal position of Arabs in the United States regarding their racial categorization, as they are officially classified as white by the government, while their experiences of discrimination have historically constructed their identities as Other and abject. If a survey on pre-9/11 discourses has offered a perspective on the historical stereotyping of Arab (American) men, September 11 has been explored as a national trauma, and its consequences for the perception of Arab masculinities in the United States have been examined. A special emphasis has been given to the construction of Arab men as terrorists

through the ascription of abjection and deviance onto them, as the necropolitics resultant from 9/11 (Mbembe, Puar) invited the pathologization of Arab/Muslim men as “monster-terrorists” (Puar and Rai), and consequently rendered them as “intolerable ethnics” (Puar). An example of the abjection of Muslims in the post-9/11 ethos has been examined in the TV series *Homeland*.

In chapter 2, Arab American masculinities have been studied from a poststructuralist perspective, understanding the construction of identities as a result of discursive interpellation. Tendencies regarding the construction of said masculinities have been traced in this second chapter. In order to do so, there has been, first, an analysis of traditional masculinities in relation to the concept of patriarchy, delving then into the concept of neopatriarchy (Sharabi), defined as the contradictory masculinity between tradition and modernity resultant from the independence of Arab countries from European powers. Neopatriarchal Arab masculinities are explained to have been further destabilized by the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, forwarding a precarious position that has been seen as an enabler of change (Inhorn). Arab male immigrants to the United States have taken these discourses on Arab manhood with them and transported them to a Western culture, thus enhancing the instability of their identities even more. This unsettlement has been theorized in this dissertation as thirdspace (Bhabha, Soja). Moreover, Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia has also served to explain the contradictory space that Arab men occupy in the United States. Through a process of “cross-cultural refraction” (Coleman), Arab American men build a precarious identity which makes them tend to cling to tradition in order to overcome the

contradictory nature of their Arab American identity (Harpel). Moreover, Gary C. David's perspectives on the construction of Arab American identities have been exposed: (i) the *primordial perspective*, based on the commonalities of Islamic culture, (ii) the *structural perspective*, which stems from ethnic solidarity against discrimination, and (iii) the *social constructionist perspective*, which believes in ethnicity as socially constructed through the concept of family and *al-nas* (community). These have been complemented with ethnographic studies which have helped point to the tendencies of Arab American identity construction.²⁴⁷ The difficulties in constructing a stable Arab American (masculine) identity have been seen in Mariam Ghani's art installation *Points of Proof*, and in Toufic El Rassi's graphic novel *Arab in America: A True Story of Growing Up in America*. Both emphasize the space of anomie that Arab American men are placed in while trying to make sense of their heterotopic identities.

Chapter 3 started by forwarding an understanding of Arab American feminisms as a genealogy (Stone), placing them as part of the women of color feminist movement, an interethnic feminism that Arab American women advocate in their writing between borders while drawing on the work of other women of color feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa. Arab feminisms have also been acknowledged as an antecedent to the development of Arab American feminisms in the 1990s. This chapter has then focused on post-9/11 Arab American women of color feminisms through the work of organizations (such as INCITE!, AMWAJ, AROC, or SJP), as well as Arab American women writers, playwrights, and

²⁴⁷ Abdulrahim et al., Amer and Hovey, Ajrouch, Awad 2010, Naber 2012, Faragallah et al., Read.

performance artists. Finally, the chapter has provided an example of Arab American women of color feminism through a selection of poetry by Mohja Kahf.

Chapter 4 has followed a structure which mirrors the three previous chapters. Therefore, its first section has focused on the national trauma of September 11 and the notions of abjection (Kristeva) and necropolitics (Mbembe, Puar). The Arab American men described in section 4.1 feel the racialization (Jassim in *Once in a Promised Land* and Khalil in *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*) and sexualization (Khalil in *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*) of their recently-visibility Arab bodies. They suffer the consequences of the necropolitics resulting from the terrorist attacks of September 11 in the form of discrimination, racism, and even detention in the case of *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*; but, at the same time, they also experience the trauma of 9/11 in their difficulties in understanding the very attacks. Both their suffering as Americans and the pressure put on them as Arabs make Jassim and Khalil go through an identity crisis, where they find it difficult to accept an ethnicity that they had forgotten about in the United States in their upward mobility experiences. It is through the acceptance of the Arab part of their Arab American selves that they are able to come to terms with their identities. Thus, *Once in a Promised Land* finishes with Jassim accepting the importance of his Arab background not only in his choice of a profession (hydrologist), but more importantly in his choice of a wife. More relevantly, Jassim has understood that he needs to apply the fluidity that permeates his infatuation with water to his understanding of his own identity. In the case of the optometrist Khalil, in *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*, he learns to see

more clearly after he has pursued a woman that reminds him of his origins (a participant in “The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy” contest). As he navigates in a space of anomie that prevents him from comprehending the difference between good and evil, he ultimately learns that he needs to accept the fluidity and border crossing of his own identity. He is able to do so because he is confronted with the constructed identities of two markedly fluid characters he meets on the road. Therefore, both novels provide the reader with a similar account of the experiences of Arab American men after 9/11: well-off professionals in the United States, who find their identities unsettled after they experience backlash and need to accept the fluid and ethnic aspects of their own identities in order to continue functioning in American society. Arab American women of color feminism conducts a joint fight against sexism and racism. In denouncing anti-Arab racism, *Once in a Promised Land* and *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* affirm one of the aims of women of color feminism, while in portraying non-sexist Arab American men they also attest the other.

In relation to section 4.2, the novels examined denote the ubiquity of debut novels by Arab American women writers after 9/11, whose protagonists are teenagers or young women and which narrate coming-of-age stories, most of which portray Arab (American) fathers in a critical manner. While it is true that the trend, as theorized by Whittaker Wigner Harpel, of Arab American men returning to traditionalism in a transnational setting has been confirmed by the characters of Khadija's father, Rifat and Waheed in *West of the Jordan*, *Towelhead*, and *A Map of Home*, respectively, it is also necessary to highlight the fact that portrayals that

deviate from this path are also present (for example, Aliya and Hanan's fathers depicted in *The Inheritance of Exile*). All in all, these four novels portray Arab men in an ambivalent manner. They do not tackle the issue of terrorism *per se* (as they are not set after 9/11), but they do delve into the theme of fatherhood, providing a portrayal of Arab men as mostly traditional, but also nuanced. Their flaws are justified and explained in the texts mainly through images of their nostalgia or homelessness (as is the case of the Palestinian characters of Khadija's father in *West of the Jordan* or Waheed in *A Map of Home*). The overall image provided by these novels is one of complex men, some of whom may be sexist, but who might also learn from their mistakes. Therefore, since these fathers are placed in a position of learning, and it is mostly their daughters who are conduits for that change (for instance, Hala in *West of the Jordan*, Jasira in *Towelhead*, and Nidali in *A Map of Home*), there is an assertion of the power of women to fight sexism, thus providing an affirmation of Arab American feminism. Moreover, because of the variety of depictions, one can conclude that Arab American women writers are providing a diversity of representations that promote the debunking of monolithic stereotypical views of Arab manhood. Indeed, these novels aid in establishing a feminist connectivity constructed in contrast to a formerly patriarchal one and, thus, assign the potential to conduct change in patriarchal and neopatriarchal masculinities to Arab American women.

Finally, section 4.3. has taken up notions of Arab American feminism and love from chapter 3, and examined beloved new masculinities in post-9/11 Arab American literature. While, as seen in sections 4.1 and 4.2, in their feminist stance

most Arab American women writers have offered a critical representation of Arab (American) men who return to traditionalism once in the diaspora, it is worth noting that some authors, such as Diana Abu-Jaber and Alia Yunis—i.e., those analyzed in section 4.3,—are deviating from this pattern. I believe that providing positive images is a feminist endeavor in a twofold manner. On the one hand, portraying models of manhood that depart from stereotypes may be a way to counter the pervasive vilification of Arabs after 9/11. This anti-discriminatory undertaking is actually part of the Arab American women of color feminist fight. On the other hand, these positive figures might encourage an anti-sexist enactment of Arab American masculinities. This is the case of the masculinities examined in section 4.3, which evince an opening in post-9/11 Arab American literature written by women towards more positive representations of Arab men. In *Crescent*, stereotyping within the Arab American community against Arab men is evinced, while ultimately pointing to the falseness of such assumptions and foreshadowing a victory of love. In *The Night Counter*, many (mostly) lovable men that depart from ethnic marking are depicted. Thus, prompted by Mohja Kahf's poetry which declared her love for Arab men, this section asserts a third tendency in post-9/11 Arab American literature written by women, which is that of new Arab American manhoods.

Interestingly, from the point of view of religion, the novels analyzed demonstrate that Islamicate cultural traits permeate most of the manhoods explored, whether Muslim or Christian. In fact, Arab American women writers are not depicting extreme religiosity but are offering both positive and negative

accounts of Arab (American) manhood, mostly influenced by neopatriarchy and cross-cultural refraction, which have however nothing to do with religion. While both Jassim and Kali in *Once in a Promised Land* and *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy* are not religious, the former is Muslim and the latter Christian, and both their masculinities have been constructed in a similar manner. The characters of *West of the Jordan* and *A Map of Home* are Muslim, while those in *The Inheritance of Exile* and *Towelhead* are not. These four novels, however, provide similar accounts of Arab masculinity. Finally, both Han in *Crescent*, and the Abdullah family in *The Night Counter* are Muslim and defy stereotypes of Muslim traditionalism. Therefore, one can conclude that there is indeed an Islamicate culture that is shared by those who emigrate from Arab countries, while in Arab American literature written by women there is also an effort at questioning traditional Islamicate traits but also at invalidating the vilification of Islam.

Moreover, in the novels explored in this dissertation, most Arab Americans enjoy a good socio-economic position, thus following current statistics.²⁴⁸ However, it is true that those male characters depicted as poorer tend to cling more to tradition (like Khadija's father in *West of the Jordan*, or Waheed in *A Map of Home*), as their inability to provide also becomes a source of frustration and, thus, breeds violence. Thus, as markers of ethnicity disappear as a consequence of upward mobility, masculinities become more positive. In contrast, men find it more difficult to obliterate tradition when economic circumstances are not so positive. Ultimately, in both cases, masculine identities remain complex and a

²⁴⁸ For further information, see Altaf.

need to acknowledge one's origins or ancestry is asserted.

Finally, there is actually a new tendency in post-9/11 Arab American literature worth noting here, which takes its cue from the unsterotypical representations of masculinities in *Crescent* and *The Night Counter*, often devoid of ethnic references. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, there are more and more Arab American women writers that have recently been publishing novels where Arab American themes are not present, or are just mentioned but have no actual relevance in the plot. This is notably the case of Mona Simpson's prose writing (*Anywhere but Here* [1986], *The Lost Father* [1992], *My Hollywood* [2010], and *Casebook* [2014], for example), which, despite her Arab ancestry, have no traces of ethnic marking. Recently, however, writers versed on ethnic commentaries have also started publishing novels where the Arab American issue is just dealt with in passing or not at all. For example, Naomi Shihab Nye's young adult novel *Going Going* (2005), focuses on a teenage girl of Arab and Mexican origin, but the only reference to her Arab ancestry is a rather short reference to her grandfather, whom she idolizes. Another relevant example is Diana Abu-Jaber's recent novels *Origin* (2007), a mystery novel about crib deaths, and *Birds of Paradise* (2011), a story about a runaway teenager. This literary tendency of Arab American women writers to obliterate ethnicity seems to be currently followed by writers who previously dealt (more or less) extensively with their ethnic background. In relation to *Origin*, Steven Salaita argues that,

[b]y not identifying any of her characters as Arab, Abu-Jaber is making a specific political point in addition to an artistic choice. It is possible that she simply wanted to move away from being typecast as an ethnic author, but her choice not to name Arabs

ultimately reinforces the importance of culture and identity in literature. Think of it as an inclusion by omission. (2011: 107)²⁴⁹

In fact, I am responding here to this “inclusion by omission” by emphasizing the relevance of obliterating ethnic markers by Arab American women writers. Nonetheless, I find it remarkable that this trend paradoxically coexists with an acknowledgement of the need to return to one's origins which permeate the novels analyzed in this dissertation (for instance, in the characters of Jassim and Salwa in *Once in a Promised Land*, Khalil in *The New Belly Dancer of the Galaxy*, Hala in *West of the Jordan*, or Sirine and Han in *Crescent*). This is, indeed, another trend in post-9/11 Arab American literature worth exploring elsewhere.

There have been other aspects of Arab American literature that I have not been able to analyze in this dissertation. Firstly, this study was first conceived as a comparison between pre- and post-9/11 Arab American women authors and their representation of Arab men, but as its writing developed, its focus was limited to writings published after 2001. Centering on post-9/11 representations seemed innovative, timely, and placed the study into the area that interested me the most, which is that of the consequences of September 11. However, it would be very interesting to provide a comparison between pre- and post-9/11 literature in future research. It would also be relevant to study the representation of manhoods provided by Arab American male writers. In addition, I am also interested in the study of similar realities in Europe, and in particular in Catalonia, with authors such as Najat El-Hachmi, author of *L'Últim Patriarca* (2007),²⁵⁰ similar in content

²⁴⁹ For a full account on Diana Abu-Jaber's *Origin*, see Salaita (2011: 106-111).

²⁵⁰ The novel was translated by Peter Bush into English and published in 2010 under the title *The Last Patriarch*.

to *Towelhead* and *A Map of Home*. I think that a comparative analysis between these novels could be very illuminating. Last but not least, an account of Arab American masculinities in other genres within Arab American literature, such as poetry, drama, or short stories, would also prove enlightening.

This dissertation has taken the perspective of Arab American women writers who are knowledgeable of the Arab American reality as well as critical of patriarchal enactments of Arab American masculinities. The view that women offer in their portrayal of men subverts the traditional active role of men depicting (and often objectifying) women, and thus constitutes a feminist endeavor in itself. Their writings also forward the tenets of Arab American women of color feminism in their struggle against both racism and sexism. In addition, countering the monolithic depiction of Arab men resultant from their visibilization and vilification after September 11, the men presented by these novels are full of complexities and nuances, and stereotypical enactments of masculinity are justified in the texts through various traumatic experiences. Ultimately, Arab American women writers are providing diverse depictions of Arab American masculinities, which help problematize and debunk clichés. All in all, there is, in Arab American novels published by women after 9/11, an effort to resist the stereotyping of men as emasculated or threatening, and of women as victims, while there is also an affirmation of Arab American feminism, thus forwarding gender and racial equity.

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