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**Assimilation and Exclusion of Muslims in Post 11th
September America: a Postcolonial Study of Selected
Plays.**

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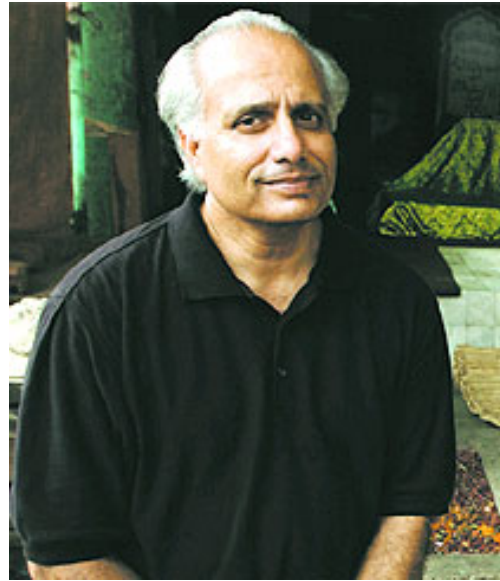
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Yussef El Guindi



Shahid Nadeem



Wajahat Ali

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Preface

Of the many catastrophic events and terrible scenes that appalled humanity, the sight of the collapsing twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City is significantly reckoned the most terrible. On the morning of September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists belonging to al-Qaeda group hijacked four American passengers' airplanes, crashing two of them intentionally into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, crashing the third plane near the Pentagon outside Washington, and crashing the fourth in Pennsylvania. All passengers in the four planes died, besides other people working in the two towers, and others in the area. The death toll of the attacks was 2995, including the 19 hijackers. The scene looked wilder than the wildest American science or action movie. Every where in the world, not just in America, eyes saw, but minds could not believe that this is happening to America, the world's only Super Power and epitome of strength, development and freedom.

The tragic events of 9/11 had very devastating effects on Americans. The attacks shattered Americans faith in the efficiency of their country's intelligent system in anticipating threat, aborting danger and thus preserving domestic security. Besides, the attacks shook America's image as the watchdog of democracy and peace in the world as they proved America's inability to protect its own citizens within its own borders. The attacks had also a very negative effect on the Arab and Muslim American relationships that already were seriously facing many obstacles. But, worst of all, the aftermath of 9/11 threw their grey shades on Muslims in America more than they did on any other ethno-religious group. Since that date, Muslim Americans, particularly those of ethnic roots, had to

face their worst nightmares. They became the prime target of persecution both by the American government, and by their fellow Americans.

Just few hours after the attacks, and in his first speech to pacify the American public, President George W. Bush declared a thorough American war on terrorism both on the international level and on the domestic level. The war, Bush claimed was meant to chase all terrorists all over the world, subdue all the countries that support terrorism, and abort terrorists' plans to harm America. Internationally, a black list was devised with the names of the terrorist countries that need to be subdued. The names of these countries were arranged according to the degree of danger they constituted to America. Afghanistan was on top of the list. It is the country that harbors Osama bin Laden, head of al-Qaeda terrorist group and the man thought to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The American/British invasion of Afghanistan (October 2001-up till now) proceeded and the whole world condoned it and stood silent watching American bombs destroy Afghani cities and kill innocent civilians. Ironically, nine years since the attacks, Osama bin Laden was never found nor any of his crew high-ranking men up till this very moment.

Before ending the American army plight in Afghanistan, the former Bush administration hastened to invade Iraq, the second terrorist country on the list, on April 2003 with allegations that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons that were classified as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). But, despite a worldwide objection to the invasion this time, the American/British forces fulfilled their plan, invaded Iraq, captured the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and executed him. Ironically, the American forces did not find any Weapons of Mass Destruction and the country fell prey to sectarian strives and got torn by a fiercely bloody civil war. Syria, Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Egypt were the following targets of the American-sponsored War on Terrorism.

But the accession of the new Democratic Party President Barrack Obama put an end to this plan.

On the Domestic level and in order to strengthen its anti-terrorism legislations and give extra or expanded powers to law enforcement agencies, the American government then issued the US Patriot Act. The PATRIOT ACT Law was issued by the US congress and signed by President Bush on October 26, 2001. The letters in the title of the law are the initials or the acronym of "Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001". The law involved many items that give American law enforcement agencies the right to spy on people's telephones, search them or search their e-mails and private records. The Act also gave law enforcement powers the right to suspend any suspect and detain him without trial, deport any immigrant suspected to have ties with terrorist groups, and control the financial dealings of any suspect, preventing some people from sending or receiving money. In most cases, the wired, suspended, or deported suspects were Muslims.

On the social level, Muslim Americans, particularly of ethnic roots, had to face the consequences of other radical Islamic groups' misdeeds. They were incriminated as bin Laden counterparts, harassed by their fellow Americans, deprived of their civil liberties as American citizens, demonized and maligned in the American mainstream media, shunned, excluded, ghettoized and besieged. Despite the civil liberty ravishing provisions of the Patriot Act, it had many supporters in the American public who preferred to sacrifice their freedom to their safety. America became no more the land of freedom.

Mainstream American media played a crucial role in sustaining American policy makers' plan of recruiting the American public opinion against Islam and Muslims. The role of mainstream American media was twofold: first, blocking Muslim literary men's voices from getting heard

for fear they would introduce a correct image of Islam, and second producing and circulating huge number of films, programs, reports and books that indict Muslims and stereotype them. The American anti-Islam propaganda succeeded in arousing an unprecedented American fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims; a phenomenon known as Islamophobia. The unjustified fear of Islam or Islamophobia did not stay within America's borders but was exported to the whole world, thanks to the wide popularity and circulation of American culture represented in movies, internet websites, and books.

In America, as well as in other parts of the Western world, Islamophobia crossed the lines of being a mere feeling of fear, suspicion and hatred to being a practice of bullying, harassing, and even using violence against Muslims of other ethnicities. Many incidents were reported of American students savagely hitting other Muslim students in campus. Other reports referred to destroying and burning local mosques, destroying renowned Muslim public figures' cars or houses, or using very nasty words of insult, abuse and racism. Many Americans engaged in reporting their Muslim neighbors or fellow colleagues to the police even if there was nothing against them. Reports of racial profiling against those of Oriental features or Arabic names at airports were countless. Examples of suspending those of different colors in the streets and searching them, paying unexpected visits to every Muslim American in the neighborhood of the police officers' duty work were numerous. Every Muslim became a suspected terrorist and every American, a possible victim. The paranoia became aggravated with American media fuelling this frenzied feeling of threat, insecurity and anticipation on the one hand, and American political figures' continuous fiery announcements, on the other.

Although the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were responsible for creating the contemporary phenomenon of Islamophobia, they also participated in the noticeable increase in the number of American converts to Islam. The attacks catalyzed Americans' curiosity to know about Islam and Muslims. The objective scholarly works of some unbiased American writers, the views of some fair American announcers, and the true images presented by some sincere American reporters helped enlighten the ignorant American public and balance the unethical anti-Islam false propaganda. Gradually, the American people became more enlightened and understood that not all Muslims are terrorists or Osama bin-Laden advocates; that Allah is the same God of Muslims, Christians and Jews, that all three divine religions' call is the same, and that Islam does not instigate or condone violence against non-Muslims. Americans also started to realize that Muslims are not those flat characters and nasty stereotypes they used to see in the American movies for decades. One can confidently say that today and nine years after the attacks, the American anti-Islam propaganda fired back at its plotters and the way now seems much paved for establishing a better Islam/America relationship.

The bad experience Muslim Americans passed through in the wake of September 11, and continued to suffer until very recently, sharpened Muslim American literary men's minds and hearts to write about this experience. Their writings came to be classified as Muslim American literature; a form of minority American literature and a branch of the American literature mother tree. Despite the diversity of Muslim Americans ethnic roots, nationalities, homeland cultures, histories, and mother languages, there is "an identifiable core Islamic way of thinking and acting, based on the example and teachings of the Prophet Mohammad (570-632 C.E.)" (Leonard 3). Islamic faith, American identity and the hardships they faced in the wake of September 11 were

the main uniting elements of Muslim American writers that are reflected in their literature. Muslim American literature which mainly revolves around the difficulty of being a Muslim in the American mainly Christian/Jewish society handles a number of topics: 1- the sense of besiege, ghettoizing, discrimination and exclusion Muslim Americans of immigrant ancestors face in the wake of 9/11 due to the double criteria policy of the American government; 2- the complicated love/hate feeling towards America the country that provides financial prosperity for colored immigrants but refuses equating them with white Americans, a country where they are needed but not wanted; 3- the generational conflict between the first generation of immigrants and their Americanized children regarding the preservation of homeland culture and traditions; 4- the problem of Muslim girls and women wearing head covers or veils in a mainly Christian society, and 5- the role of the mainstream white American media in maligning and stereotyping Muslims.

Muslims and Islamic culture have long been an integral part of the American society. Historical records determine "a pre-Columbian Muslim presence in the Americas [even though] the data available are limited to a few sources cited repeatedly in the literature" (Bukhari. Introduction xvi). All along their history of existence in America, Muslims have been treated, like any other religious minority, according to the American constitution which grants equal rights to immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities as citizens. Like other minorities, they were unnoticed:

Though for some time the second largest of world's religions, Islam has remained invisible on the cognitive maps of most Americans, whose first major encounters with the Muslim world were the Arab oil embargo of 1973 and the Iranian Revolution of

1978-1979. However, by the beginning of the twenty first century, Islam and Muslims represent the second largest religion in Europe and the third in North America" (Esposito, Forward xi).

The tragic events of 9/11 brought Muslims, Islamic culture and faith to a focal point. On the one hand they aroused Americans curiosity to know about Islam, and on the other the events aroused a sense of solidarity among Muslims and the term Muslim American identity was born and started to be recurrently heard. The events could be fairly described as the real birth date of a thorough American interest and study of Islam and Muslims, reminiscent of European Orientalism. It also gave birth to a recognized Muslim American identity and literature.

This thesis is devoted to discussing the impact of the September 11, 2001 tragic attacks on Muslims living in America as reflected in the literature produced by some Muslim American playwrights. Six post 9/11 American plays reflecting the impact of the 9/11 unprecedented events are chosen. The six plays are written by three Muslim American playwrights, namely Yussef El-Guindi, Wajahat Ali and Shahid Nadeem. The similarity of the atmosphere or the background of the six chosen plays, that is post 9/11 America, is the reason behind the choice of the six plays. The plays register the reaction of Muslim Americans of immigrant roots to the attacks and the hardships they go through in a mainstream white American society.

It is noteworthy that while preparing for this thesis, none of the six plays under discussion was published either separately or in an anthology. So, one had to e-mail the three playwrights to get the manuscripts of the six plays. Another problem appeared with the scarcity of in print references, i.e. books analyzing these plays, so one had to depend on the few articles available from the Internet, besides the e-mails one kept sending to and receiving from those playwrights in order to reach a clear

understanding of their plays. Back of the Throat is the only play that got recently published in 2008. The three playwrights reported finding great difficulty in having their plays printed by a mainstream American publishing house, despite the great success these plays achieved when produced on theatres. That is why one had to rely on the scripts sent by the three authors through e-mails. The rarity of printed sources handling those writers' works was another obstacle in completing the thesis, which one overcame by keeping in touch with the three playwrights via e-mails to untangle the mystery of the titles, some words, and some events in the plays. This live contact with the three dramatists gave one the privilege of communicating with people in the middle of the event and getting a vivid image of post 9/11 America as it is seen through the eyes of Muslim and non-Muslim Americans.

Yussef El Guindi (1960-), the first of the three writers under discussion, is an Egyptian Muslim American Seattle-based playwright. Four plays are to be covered in this thesis for Yussef El Guindi. These plays are: Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith (2002), Back of the Throat (2004), Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes ((2006), and Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat (2008). Wajahat Ali (1980-up till now), the second chosen playwright, is a Pakistani Muslim American young playwright. His only post 9/11 play is The Domestic Crusaders (2001), for which he is preparing a prequel and a sequel. Shahid Nadeem (1947- up till now) the third playwright in the list is also a veteran Pakistani Muslim American playwright with a very rich heritage of plays but Trapped (2001) is his only short play that depicts the ramifications of 9/11.

The thesis is divided into four chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one entitled "Postcolonial Theory and Literature" sheds light on the definition of postcolonial literature, and registers the controversy aroused about how

far this nomination is acceptable. There is also a reference to the thematic and technical features of postcolonial literature and examples of colonial and postcolonial writings. The names of the most effective postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri S. Spivak and Homi Bhabha and their contribution to the theory are also discussed. Culture, history, language, hybridity and cosmopolitanism are also covered as basic principles of the postcolonial theory in literature. The philosophy of cosmopolitanism as a vital requirement in our hybrid multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic world is covered with a reference to the most active theorists of cosmopolitanism: Anthony Appiah, Martha Nussbaum and Homi Bhabha. Cosmopolitanism is highlighted as a philosophy that advocates a respect of pluralism and cultural difference and proposes a dialogue rather than a clash of civilizations and cultures.

Chapter two entitled "Ethnic American Minorities" sheds light on the features of three main minority American literatures namely Arab American literature, South Asian American literature and finally, Muslim American literature. The choice to highlight the features of Arab American literature was made to provide an image of the cultural background of Yussef El Guindi, the Egyptian American playwright under discussion. Likewise, the choice to highlight South Asian American literature was made to help the reader have an image of the cultural background of Wajahat Ali, and Shahid Nadeem, the other two playwrights under discussion, as both are Pakistani Americans. At last, the choice to highlight the features of Muslim American literature came to examine the common thread that binds all three dramatists as Post 9/11 Muslim American dramatists.

Chapter three is entitled "Islamophobia and the role of the American Media". The aim of this chapter is twofold: first to analyze the post 9/11 phenomenon known as Islamophobia, and second to examine the negative

role played by mainstream American media in maligning Muslims and exporting Islamophobia all over the world. The chapter provides a brief historical survey of the ageold European antagonism to Islam and declares how this animosity is transported to North America during the European exploration journeys to the New World in the 17th and 18th centuries. The study also sheds light on the 20th century Arab/American relations and the reasons why such relations keep deteriorating. The second part of the chapter provides examples of how mainstream American media recruited all its potentialities and used all its venues to tarnish the image of Islam and Muslims. American movie makers, reporters, Radio and T.V. announcers, and journalists all participated in this anti-Islam propaganda. The thesis provides examples of each type of these American media ports anti-Islam production.

Chapter four is entitled: "Sample Post- 9/11 American Plays by Muslim American Playwrights". This chapter introduces examples of some Muslim American writings that record the aftermath dramatic condition of Muslims in the short period of post 9/11 America. Six plays for three Muslim American playwrights are chosen as representatives of the features of this new evolving genre known as Muslim American literature. A comparison between the six plays is provided to highlight the aspects of difference attributed to the difference of the writers' homeland culture, and similarity attributed to the unity of the writers' American Muslim identity. The three playwrights themes, techniques and styles are discussed supported by quotations from their plays.

The conclusion is a brief summary of the basic issues covered in the thesis. It sheds light on the features of Muslim American literature as an evolving literary genre and probes into the zones where Muslim American literature and Postcolonial literature meet and part.

CHAPTER I

Chapter 1