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The Arab World and the Westin the Post-Colonial Arabic Novel

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Abstract

Being at the centre does not mean that those on the periphery (i.e., the Third World) automatically accept that the West is the master while they are the followers and subordinates. A certain attitude adopted by many Arabs towards the West derives from this unfair relationship, and accepting this as a fact undoubtedly means that those who can better convey this mind set are Arab artists, theorists, writers, and scholars in general. The chief literary discourse through which this peer group expresses this attitude and the thinking connected with it, e.g., opposing the unjust hegemonic equation in Arab-West relations, is the Arabic novel. The paper is based on the hypothesis that post-colonial Arabic novels, particularly those published during the past four decades, express rejection of the West as a hegemonic centre in its relation with the Arabs. In this regard, the dominant image of the West presented by the authors is mostly negative. Portrayed in the novels by western characters, the West and its hegemony will usually be opposed by the protagonists and other Arab characters. This, the paper believes, is one of the idealistic post-colonial discourses in which Arabs intellectuals engage.

1. Introduction: This Paper and the Previous Writings

Based on my previous research concerning the Arabic novel from the mid-twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century, this paper concentrates specifically on Arabic novels published during two decades, i.e., the period that beganin 1991 with the US and the West's war against Iraq, and was followed by America's overthrow and occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2010. My intention here is to present a comprehensive over view of what I have already written on this topic, in addition to further notes and points of view.

When writing on the 'Other' in Arabic literature, I usually begin by explaining that my motive for pursuing this subject is prompted by my personal experiences with the West and Westerners. Inan academic paper I prefer to confine these encounters to an appendix; here, however, the main body of this article includes details and outcomes of such occasions. What are known as facts and believed by most Arabs about the Americans is mostly negative, and about the British is only a little less negative; whereas my mostly positive experiences, from personal contact with the West and Westerners, give contradictory images of the West. During the last ten years I have been thinking about the conflicting images forming in my mind and indeed in the minds of many Arabs, and studying them as they are expressed through literature. In fact, in my writing about the Other in general and the West in particular I have attempted to explain the contradiction between the negative images that are presented in literature and perhaps in all Arabic cultural discourse, and the experiences I have had with the West and Westerners which are mostly positive and happy, not excluding the experiences and writings of others.

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Many books, papers, essays and articles have been written in the last four decades or more, on the subject of the 'Other' or 'We/Us and the Other' in modern Arabic literature. In his famous book *Orientalism*(1978), and in many of his other writings, Edward Said focuses more on images of the Arabs from the Western point of view and how the West looks to the Others, especially in the colonial period, than on images of Westerners that have been constructed by the Arabs. Apart from Said's works, perhaps the most important pioneering book in the field is George Tarabishi's *Sharqwa-gharb; rijoolawa-unutha* [East and West, Virility and Femininity], (1979). This has always been are mark ably profound book, despite the reservations of some critics about his sexual vision of the relationship and the East-West encounter. This is why,when praising one of the novels which deals with the East-West encounter, Tarabishisays,

> It was able to treat the cultural relation between the East and West appropriately through the sexual relation between the educated Eastern man and the Western woman(p. 71)

Among the latest of these studies is Rasheed El-Enany's book (written in English) entitled *Arab Representations of the Occident, East-West Encounter in Arabic Fiction* (2006). I consider this as one of the best and most important works to have been written around the theme in the past two or three decades. Aminor reservation is that the book covers a very long period. From a critical point of view, this would be convincing as long as we were concerned only with the literary work itself and inside an imagined world. However, aware of this, El-Enany divides this long narrative into four historical parts and deals separately with the novels and representations of each period, explaining that

> …the substantial scope of this study [covers] two centuries of writing and the large number of authors from different periods of development and different geographical regions of the Arab world at different stages in their intellectual evolution(El-Enany, p. 14)

In my view, such a study is not just critical. Rather, it deals directly and indirectly with social subjects. In addition, as Abdulfattah Ahmad Yusuf (2007) suggests, it can no longer be regarded simply as a literary text in which the reader is only interested in literary and aesthetic meanings; indeed, it should be seen as cultural discourse combining literary, aesthetic, historic and social meanings as components of culture(p.167) Therefore, the changing society from which the novels, and indeed all other literary works we study, and how they are subsequently changed, must be taken into account. This is why we often expect fiction, especially the novel, to give us the illusion of the 'real' as long as it deals with societies and historical and social phenomena. Since

novelists tend to base their versions and points of view chiefly on their own real-life experiences, on what is happening in society, and on social and political events including relations between the East and the West, such versions and viewpoints are changeable according to the changes that occur in all these fields. All this has been taken in account in my own writing on the subject.

My contributions to this field are presented in three books, four papers and many articles. The present paper is built on some of these earlier offerings, without disregarding the studies of other scholars and writers, some of whom are noted above. In referring to these previous writings about the Other, particularly the West and Westerners and their images in Arabic literature, it should be pointed out that this literature, especially novels, presents both positive and negative images of the West, but with the latter predominant. This paper's research question arises from this phenomenon: when seeking the reasoning behind these positive and negative images, why does the second prevail, and is this dominance logical? My hypothetical answer is that Arabic novels that were mostly published during and after the second half of the twentieth century and that deal with the West, on the whole present negative images of the West. This suggests that the majority represent the post-colonial era and post-colonial theory and therefore aim to deconstruct the arguments of colonial theory and its West-centralism. The paper sets out to prove this by recalling and studying images of the West in various Arabic novels that have appeared during the past two decades.

2. Colonialism and Post-Colonialism

Colonialism was represented most on the cultural level in the oriental discourse with which Said most often dealt, and which he attempted to an alyze and deconstruct. According to Said, along with many scholars and intellectuals who, like Said, have come originally from Third World countries and live in the West, the most important things expressed, if not practiced, through the oriental discourse, were racism, dominance, and marginalization. All this was shaped into what has become known as Euro-Centralism, although I prefer to call it West-Centralism. As a reaction to colonialism and in countering colonialist argument, it had to be a complementary theory that rejected, stultified, deconstructed or responded negatively to that theory which was valid on the ground. Thus Post-Colonial Theory emerged to deal with this centralism which caused the West to impose marginality, exclusion and permanence in its varied forms, on the Others, specifically the Third World including the Arab World.

In fact, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995),

post-colonial writing and studies appeared as a result of post-colonialism deconstructing the reading of colonial discourses (pp.291-292).It is agreed that it is more or less natural formations and states to try to export their culture and principles in order to dominate others (at least in their regions), and to practice the act of expansion, even though this theory does what it ought to do to colonial cultures and to the colonial states and nations. Thus early post-colonial theory appeared chiefly by way of its important and influential scholars and intellectuals, such as Edward Said. It is believed that while Edward Said, a Palestinian Arab, was the founder of post-colonial theory and studies, Frantz Fanon, who was originally from Martinique, was behind the way it attracted the attention of recipients, not forgetting the important enthusiasm and influential activities of many others, all of them originally from Third World countries and livingin the West, such as the Indians Homi Bhabha, Spivak, and others.

While post-colonial theory, as propounded by Said in *Orientalism* and various other writings, aims to deconstruct the Western discourse concerned with the Third World by analyzing and critiquing oriental discourse, including of course the Arab World, it finds that colonial discourse expresses the West as being the centre while the Other, namely the Third World, is at the periphery. When examining the oriental discourse, it appears that the West sees the world as a universe with the West at its centre. We may agree that the West, in some ways and to some extent, can indeed be a centre. Significantly however, if the world is like a universe surrounded by various galaxies and/or solar systems that means it is multi-centred rather than uni-centredas the West claims.

It would seem that Arab writers, scholars and intellectuals who dealt with the West and Western thinking, found that to reject the Western discourse and the unaccepted colonial project meant rejecting West-Centralism. The result was that post-colonial writers who came originally from Third World countries, adopted what was termed a'counter-discourse', having rejected West-Centralism in all its aspects.

3. The Arabic Novel and the West

Images of the West have been classified by earlier books, papers, and other articles into major groups as they emerge in the Arabic novel and to some extent in the whole of Arabic literature. Despite the numerous divisions or groups into which these images can be put, and due to the limited space available here, I prefer to narrow them down to two major categories. The first includes those which present the Other negatively and the second is those which present it positively. Here I examine each of the two groups in general, but also describe secondary groups within the two main ones, especially those which display negative images. As noted above, this does not suggest anything unusual, being quite commonly found among images that anybody, any nation and any country might develop towards others. However, what is worth noting about these images, especially during certain historical and/or literary stages or periods, is the dominance of the negative and the regression of the positive images. Trying to find out why negative images of the West are dominant in Arabic novels raised the interesting question as to whether this negative image is in the minds not only of the characters in the imagined worlds in the novels, but also of the Arabs in real life?

Although it would be preferable to go through the novels themselves to discover the nature of the images and the contexts in which they appear, it is necessary to establish how various scholars identify the pre-writing factors that lie behind some of these images. In fact, there appear to be five major factors responsible for the varied and changing images of the West and Westerners that are found in Arabic novels and literature in general. They include:

- Colonial and foreign presence, particularly of military forces, in the Arab World, e.g., the prevalence of the British, the French and the Americans.

- The Arab-Israeli conflict and the mostly pro-Israel attitudes of the Western states towards it.

- The previous and already-established intellectual, cultural, political, social, ideological and doctrinal backgrounds of the novelists.

- The media, whether that of the West which mostly represents various lobbies, or that of the Arab World which mostly represents various governments and groups.

- The personal experiences of Arab novelists with Westerners, whether in the novelists' own countries or in the West itself.

Alongside these factors, some scholars try to explain the prominence of specific negative images by referring to the nationalistic trend in the Arabic novel which they believe is an Arab reaction towards Western colonialism. However, while those factors explain the general images of Arabic novels in dealing with the West and Westerners, and partly account for the dominance of their negative presentation, it does not answer the whole question. Again, referring to the contradiction between the negative images of the West that are presented in literature, and the positive experiences I and many others have personally enjoyed with the West and Westerners, the first and the last factors are of concern.

As noted, attempts to answer the question are based on analyzing the literary discourse itself, which here means the

novels. In my view, this does not answer the whole question about the dominance of negative images, either in the novel or in real life. It would seem that any nation or society can use novels,or literature in general including the novel, to express in one way or another life, people, interests, problems, dreams and attitudes towards every aspect of that nation or society. So one may hope that discovering the reason, or reasons, that underlie each kind of negative image of the West, will actually provide the answer to the question of the paper: why donegative images of the imagined worlds of Arabic novels dominate?

To achieve this and to reach a conclusion, it is of course important to remember some of the images in the novels that were studied during previous research. Obviously it is necessary to recall the negative images, but later I will also assemble some of the positive images since I believe that they will be equally useful in explaining the phenomenon. Having in my previous work undertaken detailed studies ofthe themes that are of concern in most of the major novels, there is no need togo over the same details again.

4. The Negative Images of the West

Most examples of negative images are those which present Western individuals, groups and communities as colonialist, hostile, racist and unfriendly. Due to their closeness to the colonial era, the typical images of colonization and colonists are usually found in the very early novels, as well as in the late novels because of the bloody wars in the Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Because colonialism ceases to exist in some countries does not mean that it is no longer present in some of them; nor does it mean that the people in these countries have forgotten about it. These countries can still be regarded as colonized but in different ways. Some critics argue that innovation and modernity brought by colonialism are clear such as education, railways, hospitals, reviving local cultures and breaking taboos. Here one could also claim the bringing of liberty, spreading democracy and ending dictatorships.

The fact that colonialism stays in the minds of the people of the colonized countries is expressed in novels such as that by the Algerian author Ahlam Mustaghanemi,‘Abi rSareer [A Crosser of a Bed] (2003),in which the French character, Françoise, says about a painting by an Algerian artist:

> This was painted by Zian as a tribute to the (Algerian) victims of the protests of October17th, 1961 who went out on peaceful protests. The French police threw a large number of them, tied up, intothe River Seine. Many of them drowned…the bodies whose shoes floated on the surface for days [died] as a lot of them did not know how

to swim (‘Abi rSareer, pp.58-59).

It is only to be expectedthat many of the Arabic novels that have dealt with the colonialists in the last decade are by Iraqi writers, including Maysalun Hadi whose novels include Al-hudud al-Barriyya [The Land Border](2004), Nubu't Fir'awn [Pharaoh's Prophesy] (2007), Hulum Fatih al-Lawn [A Rosy Dream] (2009)and Shay al-'Arus[The Bride's Tea] (2010).Other Iraqi writers are Najim Wali, whose novel is entitled Mala'kat al-Junub [Angels of the South](2009), Zuhair Al-Hiti withAl-Ghubar al-Amriki [American Dust] (2009), and 'Awwad 'Ali with Halib al-Marins [The Marine's Milk] (2008). 'Ali presents a character who is fully aware of false Western, and particularly American claims that liberation and the spread of freedom and democracy were the reasons behind the war. In the novel, he says:

> The Marines did not enter Baghdad carrying a torch of freedom, and America did not go to war in Iraq to breast-feed its people, but to give them asinister Pandora's Box (Halib al-Marins, p. 63).

In some ways these images, characters and behaviours in the Arabic novel are an expression of the rejection of colonialism in both its old and new forms. Hostile Western individuals, groups or communities are seen or confronted by the Arab protagonists who have usually had unpleasant experiences in the West while living therein most of the cases as students or as refugees. In the novels, incidents, which usually take place in the post-colonial era, appear, in a way, to be a continuation of previous colonial practice. Among the novels which present these images are Al-Rihla, Yawmiyyat Taliba Misriyyafi Amrika [The Journey: Diary of an Egyptian Student in America](1983) by the Egyptian writer Radhwa 'Ashur;Al-Riqs 'ala al-Ma'[Dancing on Water](2000) by the Iraqi Mahmud Al-Bayyati; Sun'Allah Ibrahim's Amrikanli [An American] (2004); and May salun Hadi' sal-Hudud al-Barriyya[The Land Border](2004).[1]

The most extreme case of this negative image of the West in the novels examined is, however, one that is not concerned with the West and Western countries and populations in general, but instead deals exclusively with the United States and the Americans, who are depicted as extremely hostile and ugly (which is why in my studies I call this image 'The Ugly American'). In these images, American characters really do look ugly, whether in their personalities, in their behaviours or even in their ways of speaking. Examples of such images are to be found, for example, as minor characters in Radhwa 'Ashur's Al-Rihla, in the Jordanian Muhammad Azzuqa's novel Al-Thaljal-aswad [The Black Snow](1988), in

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1) Maysalun Hadi has continued to present these negative images of the West and of Westerners in all her subsequent novels: Nubu'tFir'awn (2007); Hulum Wardi Fatih al-Lawn (2008); and most recently in Shay al-'Arus (2010).

MaysalunHadi's *Al-Hududal-Barriyya*,and most importantly and obviously in the novel *Al-Shahidawaal-Zinji*[The Witness and the Negro](1987)by anotherIraqi writer,Mahdi 'Isa Al-Saqr'. Although this does not connect directly to reactions towards the colonial discourse asdo the othernovels mentioned, the implications are there as long as it is against the West.

In most of theseand other novels, the protagonists are confronted by unfriendly or racist Westerners, whether in the United States as in the first novel, or in Sweden as in the second, or elsewhere. The following example from Al-Bayyati's novel*Al-Riqs 'ala al-Ma'*is a dialogue between the main character, an Iraqi refugee, and a Swedish man who says to him:

You are terrorists, the most violent nation... Do you not think that immigrants are a dangerous threat to our democracy?(*Al-Riqs 'ala al-Ma'*, p. 134)

This Arab discourse marksa clear counter-colonialist Western discourse which was described by Edward Saidas racist.Sometimes, however, it is not known whether the discourse conveyed bythe novelist through anarrator or afictional character is a racistattitudeor behaviour, or whether it is perceived as racist by the novelist him/herself. For example, inMahmoud Said's*Al-Mawt aJamil*[The Sweet Death](1998], the Iraqi scientist, Isma'il, remarks, while proposing a scientific theory before a scientific assembly in a Western country:

> There is a group of professors who hate people from the East, Arabs particularly, and they are being represented by one who is racist and fanatic (*Al-Mawt al-Jamil*, p.80-81)

While this is not direct and clear in novels like NajiAl-Tikriti's *Nura*[Noora], (1981), the protagonist in Radhwa Ashur's *Al-Rihla* [The Journey] does not hide her prejudiced ideas against the West when she goes to America. She has a racist Westerner or American in her mind even before she actually goesto America and meets Americans – and her prejudice proves correcta fter she has arrived there. We do not know whether it is actually racism that she experiences or whether her prejudice guides her to picture something that is not actually true,

> My roommate Louise left the room two weeks after her arrival. The Southern white girl was very conscious of my skin color, my religious background and my nationality. She was simply afraid of me and of the fact that I exist in this world… However, what matters is that she departed from the university… and I'm free of her (*Al-Rihla*, pp. 23-24).

Another image that portrays the West and Wester nersis that of the Western woman. In the Arabic novels he is very often

presented negatively. If not immoral, from the point of view of the Arab characters, she certainly does not possess any kind of decency. Clearly the Arab novelists, by depicting Western women in this way, wanted to undermine the image of the West. Some feel that, as Eastern novelists and even as people, they are victims of their prejudiced views of the Western woman, which are subjective and biased towards the West. Therefore, in some Arabic novels the Western woman appears indecent whether or not she is married. In the Iraqi 'Ali Khayyun's novel *Al-'Azf fi Makan Sakhib* [Playing Music in a Loud Place], (1987) the main character describes his uncle's English wife:

> Mary came back from work. I was surprised by her sexy appearance, wearing clothes that did not cover her white underwear… (Following her), I went in as I was looking at her underwear through her thin clothes. (*Al-'Azffi Makan Sakhib*,p.85)

In another part of the novel, the protagonist says:

> I opened the door. She entered and invited me to come in. She disappeared into a room… and came back after a minute in a see-through shirt with no bra underneath it. I could not see anything underneath that shirt but her little white panties.(*Al-'Azf fi Makan Sakhib*, p.85).

At the end of the novel, the English wife leaves her Iraqi husband in order to elope with an American. In this way, the writer justifies the Iraqi protagonist's description of this woman.

Even though this is a clear distortion of the image of the Western Woman which is either made up or based on personal experience, it is still a counter-response to how the Western oriental discourse has depicted the Eastern woman, and in particular the Arab, as explored by Edward Said. In similar examples of the negative images of the Western woman, this woman is, in one way or another, the dominant side of the West-East encounter, and the (male) Eastern protagonist will normally have ambivalent feelings for the Western woman, feelings of both attraction and caution, fascination and doubt.

Another kind of image of Westerners, especially of women, that is presented in some novels cannot be said to be negative, though it is not positive. I believe that this image expresses the ambivalent attitude towards the Westre presented by the Western woman who passionately loves an Arab. This beloved Arab, who is of course the protagonist, very often appears to be the Arab prince or knight that women have dreamedof all of their lives.[2] To me, this protagonist seems

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2) This image of the Western woman possibly appears more often in other Arabic literary forms, particularly the short story and poetry, than it does in the novel, though discussion of the underlying reasons for this is not appropriate in this paper.

to be the author himself, as a dreamer, as the Arab who has such an idea, rightly or wrongly, about the Western Woman, or as the Arab intellectual who practices a kind of self-revenge for what the colonial West has done to his/her people. This is clearly reminiscent of the relations of Said (the protagonist) with Western women in the famous novel by the Sudanese Al-Tayyib Salih, *Mawsim al-Hijraila al-Shimal*[Season of Immigration to the North], (1970) which is not included in thisstudy. However, such images appear in Azzuqa's *Al-Thalj al-Aswad,* and in *Misk al-Ghazal*[The Musk of the Gazelle], (1988) by the Lebanese writer Hanan Al-Shaykh.

In Azzuqa's novel, in a scene setin a public place in Jordan, Janet, the American woman, says to Said, the Jordanian protagonist,

> Let's go back to the car before the last cells of logic in my head collapse and I rape you.

> Said replies,

> Take it easy, dear. I know that I am so sexy, handsome and smart that I am irresistible… (*Al-Thalj al-Aswad*, p.40).

Looking at this example, the Eastern/Arab man is portrayed as the centre of the novel's world around which Western women gather and want.

As far as life in the West is concerned, some novels present only its defects and negative aspectsas perceivedby the novelists and their Arab characters and including crime, racism, materialism, the weakness of social relations, and feelings of loneliness. The main novels that follow this mode are *Sibaq al-Masafat al-Tawila* [The Long-distance Race], (1979) by the Saudi author 'Abdulrahman Munif, as well asAl-Bayyati's *Al-Riqs 'ala al-Ma'*, 'Ashur's *Al-Rihla*, and Azzuqa's *Al-Thalj al-Aswad*. Whenthe protagonist of this last novel is visitingan American city, he is told by a friend that:

> Most of the people here do not know each other, and the high crime rates make them cautious and careful with strangers. (*Al-Thalj al-Aswad*, p.110)

If this negativity in most of the Arabic novels is presented in this way on purpose, as a distorted, criminal and materialistic world, it is in a way the response of Arab intellectuals to the way the West presents the East as irrational, oppressive, and backward, and whose people are narrow-minded and sex-maniacs, as depicted in the oriental discourse. In other words, if the Arabic novel and other types of cultural discourse deliberately present the West in such a distorted way, this can be considered a response to the way the oriental discourse has distorted the East and the Arab world.

Edward Said emphasized how, when the West presented the East in the oriental discourse, it did not present the real East.

Rather, it was a vision of it that the West had in mind or maybe wanted. Conversely, a lot of the images that the Arab cultural discourse, including novels, presents about the West are not factual either. Instead they offer a distorted version of the West that they have in mind or have even deliberately depicted in this way in order to criticize or attack it.

5. Positive Images of the West

Although negative images are dominant compared with positive ones, the latter are still found in most of the novels which present the West. This apparently contradictory statement needs to be explained; positive images are not dominant or related to main characters, except in one particular novel entitled *'Imarat Ya'qubyan* [The Yacoubian Building], (2005) by 'Ala' Al-Aswani. Nevertheless they can be found, to a certain extent, in afew other novels such as *Al-Taw'am al-Mafqud* [The Lost Twin], (2002) by the Iraqi Salim Matar, and the Egyptian Baha' Tahir's *Wahat al-Ghurub* [Sunset Oasis],(2006) by. On the other hand, there are very few of these novels which do not present the West or the Westerner positively albeithrough allusions and minor characters.

To me the positive image in most of these cases is presented not as an illustration of the novelists' points of view, but for three main reasons: artistic, realistic and subjective. For the work to be artistically perfect, the writer tries his/her best to be, or to appear, objective in dealing with the delicate and ill-defined subject of the West and Arab-West relations. It is common knowledge that, in real life, there is no absolute good or absolute bad. The writers are certainly aware that the same is rightly said about people, and therefore attempt to transfer this fact into their novels. In terms of the 'realistic', the novelists cannot ignore Arab-West relations in real life, sincethere are always friendships and hostilities between every Eastern or Arab country and the West. By 'subjective'I mean the personal experiences of the novelists.

Within the positive images, the Other who, in our study, is the Westerner, is mostly presented as friendly, nice, likeable, and with a desire to communicate with Arabs. In one of those images, he/she is presented as a humane individual especially in his/her relations with the Others or in his/her feeling towards them in certain matters. Being apparently presented from the point of view of the Arab protagonist (i.e., the novelist), it should be pointed out that such a Westerner is presented according tothis point of view only when he/she is a minor character in the novel. In such images, the writer focuses on feelings and everything that makes one human being close to another. In her novel *Mudakkarat Imra'aghayr Waqi'yya* [Memoir of an Unrealistic Woman], (1992) the Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifa presents a brief sceneon an

airplane that includes a very beautiful, tangible and deeply moving description of what arises between the female Palestinian protagonist and an Irish woman sitting to her. The Palestinian character explains how they find themselves, with their backgrounds, experiences and life, becoming very close to each other. In the end the Irish woman confirms their similarity:

> I found out that I was sitting next to an Irish artist who plays the piano at cultural events. I smiled at her and she smiled back. I talked to her with what was left of the Western language in my head. As I had been deprived of contact with people, I was back in a world I had missed, "who are you? What do you do? How did you get married? Why did you get divorced? How did you start over? A piano player? A profession or a passion? Yes yes..," I cried like a child as I listened to her… and we met. She caught me pondering so she patted me on my shoulder and smiled: "Both our peoples have similar stories and you and I are alike".(*Mudakkarat Imra'a ghayr Waqi'yya*, p.82)

The image of the friendly Westerner is not much different from that of the human. However, it means in particular that relationships between Westerners and Arabs are deepened and developed and very often become friendships. In one way or another, such an image is found to an extent in Azzuqa's *Al-Thalj al-Aswad*, and to a considerable degree in the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif' snovel *The Map of Love* (1999),[3] and in *Al-Mahbubat* [The Beloved Women], (2003) by the Iraqi 'Alya Mamduh. In this last novel, which covers a period of days, a group of women of various nationalities, Iraqis, Arabs and Westerners are gathered around their Iraqi friend as she lies on her hospital sickbed. The natural differences between the women simply disappear.

Of the novels that present the friendly Westerner, it is Al-Aswani's *'Imarat Ya'qubyan* (2000) in which something inexplicable can be detected. According to their manners, and moral conduct, I divide the characters of this novel into two groups. The first includes all except one of the characters, and the second includes only this one, Kristin Petholas. Apart from her, all of the rest of the characters are morally or sexually perverted, criminal, corrupt, or, at least, misled. My reason for describing this novel as bizarre is because all the characters, except Kristin, are Egyptian. On the other hand, Kristin, who is Western, unlike the others, is not only a good and noble person but is also a kind, generous, helpful, beautiful, attractive and loving person. In fact she is almost an angel. This is to say that Egyptians are completely bad and Westerners are good, or at the very least, that without the West Egyptians are nothing. To me it is as simple as that.

The last of the positive images are those that portray the West as a place of attraction that for some Arabs makes it a magical dream. This image glorifies the West as a world of hi-tech, modern thinking, beauty, a flourishing economy, easy living, and freedom and democracy. As El-Enany notes, such images show us that "the West for the Arab individual is no longer an oppressor but a savi or, a place of refuge from repression at home, a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity"(p.186) However, in some of these novels the West is presented from this apparently positive point of view, not to confirm it, but to say it is so at the beginning and later on to refute it. The two faces of this image can be found in the same novel, for example in Sahar Khalifa's *Al-Mirath* [The Inheritance], (1997), in which one of the characters, Fiyulit, is talking to herself:

> I want to run away to America in order to forget all these surroundings… I have no friends, there is no club and there isnot a single place where I can be in touch with people. (*Al-Mirath*, p.135)

Later, the protagonist, who is the narrator, comments that:

> It is obvious and even certain that America has become for Fiyulit, as for many here and there, a place of escaping, a world in which they have changed but it has not. (p.223)

Another character, Mazinthen remarks:

> Miss Fiyulit has forgotten herself and forgotten awhole people. She remembers nothing but America. Let us see what America has that is better than here. (p.256)

6. Conclusion

Experiences of social change are commonly communicated through a variety of representational means, among which are fine arts and literary genres. We believe that "in contemporary globalized and mediated culture, experiences of social change are commonly communicated through a variety of representational means, and the reach and influence of mass communication increases the possibility that representations can be used to create social change as well as to reflect it."[4] Here we must draw attention to two facts relating to this statement. First, to be in novels, this content or phenomenon must certainly and naturally occur in other fields of Arabic writing, such as drama, short story, and poetry. The second is that it must exist in the lives of many Arabs and in their person alities and awareness. But this does not mean that people who appear not to like the West are terrorists, as certain Western governments, politicians, and leaders like George Bush have described them. The negative

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3) The novel was written in English and was published in 1999; it was translated into Arabic by Fatima Musa and republished in 2001.

4) An Interview with Laura M. Carpenter and Bonnie J. Dow, co-directors, letters, Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Vanderbilt University, Fall 2010, Vol. 19, No. 1.

images of the West and Westerners are, in fact, seen or made by ordinary Arabs who are represented by characters in the novels, as much as by the intellectuals who are represented by the writers of these novels.

Moreover, it is unfair and unwise for Western governments, politicians and leaders, especially the Americans, to claim that the Others are against America and the West because they do not like the Western and American way of life. I think this is a simplification of a serious phenomenon. If I do not like the American way of life and pray that most of its values and aspects will never come into my life, does that necessarily mean that I hate the American people and American technology, literature and culture? The novels themselves answer this question by this time presenting positive images of Western characters, as if to say: 'Certainly no, we don't hate the West, but the West must understand us – Muslims, Arabs and Middle Easterners in general – and respect our way of life'. In my opinion, Westerners must look for the real reason or reasons that cause the Other ssuch as the Arabs to perceive them in this way. However we must not excuse the Arabs themselves from doing so.

Most of the Arab post-colonial discourse, as noted, is a response to the Western colonial discourse. This is proved through positive portrayal of the West rather than presenting only negative images. According to this positive representation, the discourse is not against the West but against Western colonial discourse. Maysalun Hadi's novel, *Al-Hudud al-Barriyya* [The Land Border], (2004) presents all levels of Arab-West relations by simultaneously expressing refusal, objectivity and acceptance. The by

In this novel, the protagonist, Khalid, accepts the Other when he emigrates to this Other's land, the United States of America, to escape the conflicts and the many difficulties he faces in his own country. He goes even further by agreeing to merge with this Other by marrying an American woman while he is waiting for hisgreen card. Later, however, he decides not to carry on with this merging when he discovers that it means that he must get rid of his identity (his self) and in effect become the property of his American wife. This refusal of the merging process is perhaps expressed by the symbol of the birth of a deformed child. In the end he divorces his wife and goes back to Iraq. Returning to his country, he is shocked by the way in which the West is choosing to deal with it and with his beloved Baghdad, following the American-Western invasion of 2003:

> O, my God! What is this mess?! What is this smoke?! It is more ruined than ever. *(Al-Hudud al-Barriyya, p.141)*

Post-colonial writers from Third World countries adopted acounter-discourse; while according to Ashcroft and others (1995), the post-colonial Arab discourse has also functioned as a counter-response. This is evident from the fictional contexts we have already examined, as follows:

- Post-colonial discourse aims at decolonizationand opposing imperialism.
- It attacks the idea that the West is a centre by presenting Arabs in the fictional world as being at the centre.
- It responds to the superiority and sometimes arrogance shown by the West by treating the Arabs as equal and sometimes superior.
- It attacks marginalization by portraying Arabs as a point of attractions that were evident in the imagery of the Arab man and the Western woman.
- It responds to hegemony by revolting and rebelling against the West as a dominant centre.
- In the post-colonial Arabic novel, the West tries to keep the situation as it is, (i.e., being followed by others), while Arabs actually try to escape the state of being followers. In other words, according to the post-colonial Arabic discourse, while the West as a centre keeps the Arabs tightly within its orbit, Arabs are eager to be free from acting as planetsatits periphery.

Finally, the question arises as to whether these negative images of the West, be they in fiction or in the minds of the Arab writers and people in general, are a reflection of Western behaviour and reality, or whether they are a depiction that Arabs, particularly writers, have deliberately created in order to claim their existence. In both cases, whether facts or fictional representations, these images are counter-responses to the West. Clearly the lines written in 1889 by the British author Rudyard Kipling, that "East is Eastand West is West and never the twain shall meet", come from an almost forgotten page of history. However, though technically true (since geographic compass points will never meet), in practice, and if the will to do so exists, people from both eastand westcan and do meet as equals.

As far as the Arab novel is concerned, it is obvious that the fictional characters, the novels in general, the novelists, and indeed the real people who, I believe, are represented by those characters, novels and novelists, wish to say or to suggest that there are many things going wrong in East-West and/or Arab-West relations. This is undoubtedly a very important trend which, in my opinion, the West, especially its governments, politicians and intellectuals, must take seriously.

Appendix

The real experience

When I decided to return to my country, Iraq, in 2003, after seven years of being away from my relatives and friends, big questions arose within me, which were: How would I bear the impact of seeing my country occupied by the Americans? How could I see those invaders? What should I do when I saw any of them? Then, as if Fate wanted me to experience pain and confusion straightaway, I glimpsed, at the very moment of setting foot on Iraqi soil, an American soldier, just like the ones I had only ever [seen on television or in films. Again as if Fate wanted me unconsciously to confront an unwanted reality, I found I could not avoid approaching him, because he was standing near the place where passports had to be stamped. When I was two or three feet from him he unexpectedly smiled at me and asked: "Coming home?" Hesitantly, and trying to avoid any further words with him, I brusquely uttered the single word: "Yes". In spite of my apparently impolite reply, the soldier then said: "You are welcome home", and as if he was insisting on communicating with me, he continued to askvariousother questions. I found myself having to respond and even make some comments. Then suddenly I felt that this enemy was just an ordinary person, an ordinary human being and even a very nice and rather shy young man. For the next few months, I tried without success to stop myself thinking about that experience and the contrasting images of the Americans and the other Westerners that I had come across previously.

I recalled two other similar instances that I had encountered. The image of Britain has been always been that of the colonialist, and the image of America has always been that of the big enemy of the Arabs. And frankly speaking, I could not, and cannot, say that these images are wrong. In 1980 I went to Britain to study and spent four years which are still among the happiest years in my life, and in 1989 I was invited to the USA to spend five weeks visiting ten states where I met dozens of friendly American writers, scholars, artists, politicians, journalists and ordinary people. Obviously what is generally 'known' about the Americans and the British, and these very personal encounters and experiences give rise to contradictory images.

Now when I come to the present day I find again the same contrasting images. I cannot recall President Bush and Tony Blairwho followed Bush's example, without remembering their dirty war in Iraq. Again, this being said, I cannot accept this apparent fact without considering the other living fact; which is to say that I can now enjoy lovely days in America, the home of Bush, with many who, in one way or another, relate to those who invaded my country. In short, I am again in the midst of unresolved confusion and an intellectual and moral predicament.

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