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Denied Citizenry and the Postnational Imaginary: Arab-American and Muslim-American Literary Responses to 9/11

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.
>
> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

1. The 9/11 Memorial and Freedom Tower

On May 15, 2014, the highly controversial September 11 Memorial Museum at Ground Zero in New York City was inaugurated. An historical document, a monument to the dead, and potentially a theme-park-style attraction for tourists, the Memorial Museum displays captioned photos, sound recordings, and original wreckage from the twin towers and functions as the living historical narrative of the larger rebuilding effort of Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan. This new urban development rising out of the ashes of the WTC towers also includes yet another memorializing effort, the 9/11 Memorial, a twin monument of granite basins cascading water into the footprints of the original twin towers (and inaugurated in 2011), as well as a newly-planted urban park, and the recently completed Freedom Tower (due to open in 2015), the world's fourth tallest building, which sits at the north-western corner of the site and rises from a 185-foot, windowless concrete base, designed to protect it against terror threats. At

1,776 feet, the Freedom Tower signifies, as former New York governor George Pataki announced when the final plans for its construction were unveiled, America's "defiance, strength and resolve in the face of terrorism" (Dunlap and Collins).[1]

Except for its entry pavilion between the memorial fountains, the 9/11 Memorial Museum is entirely underground, having been excavated right between the foundations of the former Twin Towers, in a staging meant to evoke among visitors a sense of invisibility and loss, as well as the stark contrasts of light and darkness that marked the collective psyche in the U.S., and particularly in New York City, in the wake of the attacks. A descending ramp leads visitors down seven stories to the true ground zero, where the path ends at bedrock and gives visitors a choice of ways to go, toward a subdued exhibition commemorating those killed by the terrorist attacks or toward a disturbingly vivid evocation of the events themselves.

The high drama of the museum's staging, which has not sat well with the families of some of the 2,983 people who died on Sept. 11, 2001, and in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center (also commemorated in the new museum), has been met with skepticism as to the ambiguity of its intent. Is it historical memory or an attempt in poor taste to stir New York's collective psyche? Does it properly represent all sides involved in that tragedy? Is it respectful of not-yet-quenched individual pain, or does it use that pain to highlight a tourist experience? Summarizing some of the questions that have been raised, the *New York Times* has poignantly asked:

> How many historical museums are built around an active repository of human remains, still being added to? How many cemeteries have a $24 entrance fee and sell souvenir T-shirts? How many theme parks bring you, repeatedly, to tears? (Cotter)

In their ambivalent semiotics, the 9/11 Museum, Memorial, and the Freedom Tower seem to mirror America's controversial entry into the twenty-first century – their burden of loss and anxiety symbolizing the country's sudden transition from End of History to global War on Terror. That transition, from America's illusion of total world supremacy after the fall of the Soviet Union to the agonies of the new millennium –

global terror, the financial meltdown, the erosion of individual liberties, especially for minority groups – highlights the crisis of the U.S. in this new beginning of century.

The crisis struck, almost symbolically, at the very turn of the new millennium: 2001 had not yet been over and the U.S.'s place in the world changed in a matter of hours, in the deadliest attacks ever to take place on U.S. soil. 9/11 marked a sudden and decisive historical transition, in ways that were both unexpected and highly taxing for the U.S. and the western world in general. And whereas Ashley Dawson and Malini Schueller have argued that 9/11 should not be seen as a watershed moment in U.S. history, but rather as a moment in "the punitive, unilateral, militaristic ideology" of U.S. imperialism (2), I would also suggest that the 9/11 aftermath has spawned a chain sequence of crises – from which the U.S. is not likely to recover any time soon into the future – that seem to call for a distinction between a time prior and one following the attacks. The aftermath of 9/11 has seen the deployment of a state of exception that has cost the U.S. over a trillion dollars, two inglorious wars, thousands of deaths, and – perhaps even more importantly – the suspension of the rule of law "in the name of sovereign power in more and more sites at home and abroad" (Dawson and Schueller 2). Domestically, a financial meltdown and a subprime mortgage crisis have presided over the widening gap between the rich and the poor – the effects of these crises having been felt especially in poor and minority neighborhoods across the country (Kneebone and Berube 35). Moreover, civil rights for ethnic and racial minorities have taken a backseat in America's grand narrative of progressive inclusion, as specific minorities have been, post 9/11, targeted for eviction from the promise of the American Dream. From Congress' resistance to grant citizenship rights to undocumented Latino workers, to the backlash of the USA PATRIOT Act especially on alien residents,[2] to the thousands of incidents of hate violence and the revamped practice of racial profiling, this time targeting the new minority under the national spotlight – Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. – the post-9/11 shock therapy has been severe and pervasive.

This paper will focus on the problematic construction of the Middle Eastern (often summarily stereotyped as "Arab," "Islamic," or "Muslim") in the U.S. as disidentified citizen in the age of the War on Terror. I

will try to lay out a frame of reference for addressing the practice and consequences of racial profiling in post-9/11 U.S., and for analyzing the way in which cultural representations of Arabs and Muslims in America have contributed to both reinforcing the trope of "disidentified citizenry" as well as questioning the ideological premises of such disidentification. In the second part of the presentation, I will look specifically at the intellectual responses to the 9/11 crisis that have emerged from within the Arab and Muslim minority in the U.S., which I will try to define within Donald Pease's notion of a "postnational" imaginary.

2. National Identity in the Age of the War on Terror

The post-9/11 years have called for a redefinition of the relationship between ethnicity and Americanness. Leti Volpp, professor of law at Berkley, has argued that "post-September 11, a national identity has consolidated that is both strongly patriotic and multiracial." This new national identity, according to Volpp, has been used as a strategy of difference "through its opposition to the new construction, the putative terrorist who 'looks Middle Eastern'" (1584), a new identity category that groups together persons who appear Arab or Muslim and identifies them as terrorists and disidentified citizens.

As is well known, the media has played a decisive role in creating this space of cultural and civic disidentification, by both reflecting and, more often, encouraging what John Tehranian had defined "invidious stereotyping of Middle Easterners" (7). In 2012, a random sample period and eleven years after the attacks of 9/11, "invidious stereotyping" abounded: a crude anti-Muslim video circulated on the Internet suggesting the existence of a Muslim plot to take over the West; a mosque was burned down in Missouri; an acid bomb was thrown at an Islamic school in Illinois; one speaker at the Republican primaries accused Muslims of harboring plans for "stealth Shariah;" and a group of Republican House members, led by Michele Bachmann, conducted a witch-hunt against two prominent Muslim federal officials for alleged loyalty to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood

(Saunders). The allegations turned out to be groundless, but the pruriency for a revival of McCarthyist obsessions stuck.

Unlike many other racial minorities in the U.S., Arabs and Muslims have faced rising, rather than diminishing, degrees of discrimination over time. If prior to 9/11 they occupied "a contested and unclear space within American racial and cultural discourses" (Majaj, "Arab Americans" 320), in the new century they have shifted "from marginal white status to a more subordinate status that shares many features common to the experience of people of color" (Cainkar 46). Recent targeted immigration policies, racial profiling, the War on Terror's decided racialist bent, as well as grueling rates of job discrimination and hate crime (Tehranian 3), have made Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans the subjects of a blatant racial project of exclusion reminiscent of the Jim Crow era, postulated – as Louise Cainkar has well articulated – "on essentialist constructions of human difference" (48), in other words on the deeply un-American notion that all men are *not* created equal. These constructions have centered on the idea that Arabs and Muslims have become the antagonist in a "Clash of Civilizations" that opposes the denizens of the West to their new cultural Other, the "sand nigger," the Arab/Muslim. "For the first time in decades – a *New York Times* article has recently pointed out – it has become acceptable in some circles to declare that a specific religious minority can't be trusted" (Saunders).

"How does it feel to be a problem?" CUNY professor Moustafa Bayoumi has recently asked – quoting W.E.B. Du Bois and his classic call for justice and equality for African-Americans at the start of twentieth century, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). In the preface to a book entitled after the same question asked by Du Bois, *How does it Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (2008), Bayoumi identifies alarming analogies between the condition of African-Americans in the Jim Crow era and that of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. after 9/11. Quipping that they are "the new blacks," Bayoumi presents ample evidence that the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment in post-9/11 America has turned these ethnicities into new "problems" in American society – "two groups virtually unknown to most Americans prior to 2001," who now hold what Bayoumi defines "the dubious distinction of being the first new communities of suspicion after the hard-won victories of the civil-rights era" (3).

Suspicion is the key word to define the widespread anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. after 9/11, a sentiment that has reignited exclusionary practices based on racial and ethnic appearance. Bayoumi provides a shocking inventory of their outcomes:

> Bias crimes against Arabs, Muslims and those assumed to be Arab or Muslim spiked 1,700 percent in the first six months after September 11 and have never since returned to their pre-2001 levels. A *USA Today*/Gallup Poll from 2006 shows that 39 percent of Americans admit to holding prejudice against Muslims and believe that Muslims – U.S citizens included – should carry special IDs. Different studies... concluded that the more positively one feels about the U.S., the more likely one is to harbor anti-Arab feelings. (3-4)

In his newly published *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (2014), Arun Kundnani shows with shocking detail the way in which the domestic War on Terror after 9/11 has spawned a pervasive network of counter-terrorism structures of policing and surveillance in the U.S. (and in Europe) that has largely drawn on unwarranted practices such as racial profiling, infiltration of local communities by police informants, and enhanced interrogation techniques (a euphemism for "torture"). According to Kundnani, surveillance has grown explosively post 9/11: at least 100,000 Muslims in America have been secretly investigated in recent years – and in incredible detail; counter-terrorism agents have a file on every Moroccan taxi driver in New York City. British police compiled a secret suspect list of more than 8,000 Al-Qaeda "sympathizers," and included almost 300 children 15 and under on its list of suspected extremists, while MI5 doubled in size in just five years. In the new century, Arab- and Muslim-Americans have been subjected to loss of civil rights in ways unparalleled by other ethnic groups. For them, Bayoumi reports, the American Dream appears to have been put in jeopardy (3).

3. Representing Arabs and Muslims post 9/11

It has been in fact since the heightened anti-American turmoil in the Middle East of the 1990s that mainstream representations of Arab-Americans have amply condoned, often prior to the laws enacting it, the post-9/11 State of Emergency that has been responsible for the loss of civil rights by Arab and Muslim minorities at various levels: movies such as *Rules of Engagement* (which in fact predates 9/11) have made it clear that Americans tolerate, perhaps even encourage, the murder of civilians in the Middle East by the U.S. military; TV series such as *24* or *Homeland* have provided a compelling case for torture as a desirable anti-terrorist measure. Post-9/11, the U.S. appears less ready to represent itself in terms of the tropes that have shaped its cultural history since the beginnings of European colonization, and especially those of individual liberty and religious freedom. Or, more precisely, post-9/11 the U.S. has appeared less prepared to apply those tropes indistinctly across ethnic groups. American culture at large seems to have shifted, in the throes of the War on Terror, along an alternate path of viewing nationhood and national definition as less inclusive and more discriminating.

Volpp has called attention to a recent "redeployment of old Orientalist tropes" that have directed America's collective imaginary to view the Arab World and the Middle East once again as "phantasmic sites on which the U.S. nation projects a series of anxieties regarding internal and external threats to the coherence of the national body," (1586) and through which the U.S. constructs its national identity in opposition to those categorized as "foreigners," "aliens," and "others." In describing Orientalism as a master discourse of European civilization that constructs and polarizes the East and the West, Edward Said has pointed out that Western representations of the East serve not only to define the objects of the Orientalizing gaze, but also to redefine the West by way of its opposition to the East. In a famous argument, Said has postulated that the West uses the East as an "inverted mirror," imagining the East to "belong to a negative realm" in which it is everything the West is not (268). Therefore, for example, the West is defined as modern, democratic, and progressive through the East being defined as primitive, barbaric, and despotic. Post-9/11, the discourse

of Orientalism in the U.S. has received "new currency in relation to what are depicted as the barbaric regions of the world that spawn terror" (Volpp 1587). It is within this revival of Orientalism that the Arab and Muslim experience in the U.S. has come to be shaped and defined in the age of America's global War on Terror.

The term Arab-American itself has not been around for long. In fact, it is a relatively recent creation, a pan-ethnic designation appropriated over the last twenty years by a minority group under increasing pressure to confront their identity "in a political environment of heightened racial consciousness and mobilization" (Majaj, "Arab Americans" 327). Echoing other previously designated hyphenated ethnicities – such as African-Americans, Native-Americans, and Asian-Americans – the term Arab-American traces a path of more uneven and contradictory identification than the others, because it strives to assimilate communities noted for their ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, sectarian, tribal, and national diversities (Haddad 2). As a linguistic marker, "Arab" refers to a language shared by many but not all; as a religious category, it often functions as a misplaced code name for Islamic; as a term for ethnic designation, it fails to account for the complex ethnic variety among Middle Eastern peoples (Majaj, "Arab Americans" 325-27). In his recent book *White-Washed* (2009), John Tehranian talks about "America's invisible Middle Eastern minority," and adopts the marker "Middle-Eastern" to extend the field of investigation also to those Muslim identities that cannot be labeled as "Arab" (such as, for instance, Pakistanis and Iranians), and yet have largely fallen within the ethnic groups explicitly targeted by the War on Terror.

There are no accurate figures for Muslims in the U.S., since neither the census nor the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) provide information on religious affiliation of citizens. Estimates range anywhere between two and eleven million, approximations to the latter figure being more frequent in scholarship and media reports. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) places the figure at seven million. "While the numbers are contested," notes Yvonne Haddad, "it is generally agreed that they are significant" (2). More accurate figures are available for Arabic-speaking people (and their descendants, a few of whom are in their sixth generation) living in the U.S. – especially in California, New York,

Michigan, and Texas – who, at around three million, make up about one per cent of the overall U.S. population (Haddad 2). And although, as I have already pointed out, the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" in the U.S. are often taken to mean the same thing, these two groups only partially overlap: whereas only 25 percent of U.S. Muslims are Arab, only 25 percent of Arab-Americans are Muslim. Contrary to widespread sentiment in the U.S., the majority of Arab-Americans are Christian (Haddad 2).

4. Postnational Narratives

In spite of the pressures Arabs and Middle-Easterns have undergone in the U.S. under the War on Terror, readerly interest in their literature has surged in the years after the 9/11 attacks, making the present time "a moment of remarkable and unprecedented literary production among Arab Americans" (Meters 3). If in the past Edward Said quipped that the Arab-American community was in a "gestating stage," and that its literature "simply play[ed] a very tiny, marginal, unimportant role" (Shalal-Esa), the last two decades have seen a dramatic increase in publications by Arab-American and Muslim-American writers, a burgeoning which reflects, as Lisa Suhai Majaj has recently noted, "in part the shifting historical, social, and political contexts that have pushed Arab-Americans to the foreground, creating both new spaces for their voices and new urgencies of expression, as well as the flourishing creativity of these writers" (Majaj "Arab-American Literature").

Even more interesting, this last decade has witnessed the emergence of a new generation of mostly young, diasporic, Arab and Muslim writers in the U.S. (as well as film-makers) reflecting on the problematic state of "community" and "identity" in America today. Writers such as Mohsin Hamid, H.M. Naqvi, Diana Abu-Jaber, and Mohja Kahf, just to name a few, and film-makers such as Hesham Issawi, Cherien Dabis, and Denis Villeneuve have claimed a space for counter-narratives to the predominant "white," "national" intellectual response to 9/11 as well as to the overwhelming official rhetoric of the War on Terror. A few words on the latter first.

The "white" (or "mainstream") response to 9/11 has focused on subjective responses to the attacks (especially in articles appearing as early as September, 2001) and on the way that the U.S. government's response to the attacks quickly veered towards the infringement of civil liberties, surveillance, and a renewed Cold War rhetoric of good versus evil. One common concern of most "mainstream" intellectual responses to 9/11 was the emergence of an overall climate of government-fanned fear (see Morley 2007, 83). In one widely commented essay, entitled "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September," and published in *The Guardian* in December 2001, Don DeLillo tried to establish a counter-narrative to the attacks based on the memory of the victims and collective mourning, while at the same time arguing that the attacks did not occur in an historical vacuum, but rather in light of what he called "the high gloss of [American] modernity." It was this very modernity, claimed DeLillo, that the terrorists were trying to undo through the "fire of aggrieved belief" of their isolation and exclusion from the thrust of globalization. By drawing a vision of the contemporary world as defined by the clash between "men who have fashioned a morality of destruction" and an exceptionalist nation that doesn't have "to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments," because "[w]e are the astonishment," the sole crafters of a "miracle [that] we ourselves produce," DeLillo highlighted the 21st-century emergence of irreconcilable world-views, capitalism and terrorism, on a collision course and both out of control.

Bravely speaking against what she called "the unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators" in the immediate 9/11 aftermath, Susan Sontag criticized America's one-dimensional approach to global history. In a piece published on September 24, 2001, in the *New Yorker* magazine, Sontag claimed that the attacks had been a direct response to America's imperialism, and she took exception from the unanimous patriotic fervor post-9/11 by critiquing the official rhetoric of the national response to the attacks:

> Where is the acknowledgment that this was not a "cowardly" attack on "civilization" or "liberty" or "humanity" or "the free world" but an attack

> on the world's self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions?

In speaking up against the grain of the emerging War on Terror discourse, Sontag chastized the "unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators," which appeared to her "unworthy of a mature democracy."

Prevailing mainstream responses to the 9/11 crises are well detailed in Catherine Morley's essay "The End of Innocence: Tales of Terror after 9/11" (2008-09), where the author points out that these responses have been plentiful and have traced a trajectory going from very early "commentary, consolatory, inflammatory or diagnostic pieces" by authors such as Paul Auster, Ian McEwan, Jay McInerney, and Jeanette Winterson (and, I would add, DeLillo), to later "creative reflex" as exercised by what is by now accounted for as a sub-genre of American literature: the 9/11 novel (or story), and which includes, among others, in a list that is added to year after year, Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006), Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* (2004), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2005), Patrick McGrath's *Ghost Town* (2005), Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children* (2006), Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (2008), as well as DeLillo's own *Falling Man* (2007), and John Updike's novel *Terrorist* (2006).

Alongside the "mainstream" intellectual reactions to the traumas of 9/11, the emerging aesthetic response to the crisis by Arab and Muslim authors writing in English (not always *in* the U.S, but definitely *about* the U.S.), combines voices of writers who may or may not be U.S. citizens or residents, yet whose writings appear to make up a corpus focusing on representing and attempting to make sense of the ruptures, discontinuities, and contradictions of the Arab and Muslim experience in the U.S. during the War on Terror. According to Moustafa Bayoumi, one of the writers of this generation, these voices, and the communities that their narratives represent, constitute the "concentrated, unedited, twenty-first century answer to who we, as Americans, are as a people" (Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel* 9).

Arab-American writing is, *per se*, no newcomer to American literature, having spanned most of the twentieth century, yet always remaining

peripheral to the national mainstream. Although primarily consisting of poetry, Arab-American literature has witnessed a resurgence since the late 1980s, due to a growing swath of fiction, written mostly by women and initially extending the safe tropes of food and family through which Arab-American writers had for more than a half century sought inclusion within the American canon. Generally speaking, these novels have addressed the struggle for survival, physical and cultural, within contexts of injustice and violence, emigration, and transnationality, in books such as Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), Patricia Ward's *The Bullet Collection* (2003), Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* (2003), or Sahar Delijani's *Children of the Jacaranda Tree* (2013). Others have probed the identitarian displacement that occurs in the transition from Arab/Muslim to Arab-American/Muslim-American, depicting both the immigrant struggle for adaptation and subsequent generations' attempt to negotiate the complex facets of their identities, including issues of patriarchy, sexuality and the problematic topic of assimilation within American culture. This category includes novels such as Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*, published in 1993 and hailed as the beginning of contemporary Arab-American literature, as well as Naomi Shihab Nye's *Habibi* (1997) and Moja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006).

Post-9/11, the literary output coming from this constellation of voices that escapes definition in traditional terms of nationality, ethnicity, or genre, has more and more focused on the predicament of disidentification as well as social and political exclusion in the wake of the War on Terror and its political ramifications. A new corpus of writing has surfaced, merging the established themes of transnationality and assimilation with a questioning of whether transnationality and assimilation as such are still available to Arab and Muslim Americans in the wake of 9/11 in the U.S. The English language being the only common, unifying element of their corpus, these new authors defy the dogma of a national literature, and call for the emergence of new configurations and definitions. Their writings question nation and nationality in any previous, nineteenth- and twentieth-century sense of the terms, yet engage the idea of nation and nation formation under perspectives that are new for American literature.

Cases in point are Mohsin Hamid's best-selling *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy* (2009), and Moustafa Bayoumi's *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (2008). In these books, global, cosmopolitan subjectivities override national particularities, while pondering whether the Muslim diaspora in the U.S. can still claim its own space within the American Melting Pot. And whereas Hamid's and Naqvi's fictions depict transnationalism as a present-day form of identity in America, in Bayoumi's non-fictional narratives – a must-read for every university student, and in fact the target of a conservative backlash in the U.S that would like to see it blacklisted from college reading-lists (Duboff; Bayoumi, "My Arab Problem") – real-life characters shift in and out of their Arab (Muslim or otherwise) identities through their efforts of surviving the xenophobic backlash of the War of Terror.

These narratives, as well as their authors, share a global, transnational condition that engages the U.S. in ways that transcend nationality and in fact question the very ideology of American national identity. Born in Lahore, Pakistan, Mohsin Hamid was raised and educated mostly in the U.S., and since then has lived between London (he is a British citizen) and Pakistan. H.M. Naqvi, born in 1974, grew up in Islamabad, Algiers, and the U.S., where he pursued higher education, later to return to Karachi, where he now lives. Raised in Ontario, Canada, and currently living in Brooklyn, where he teaches at Brooklyn College, Moustafa Bayoumi was born in Zurich, Switzerland, in the 1970s, to Egyptian parents.

The characters arising from these writers' texts mirror the kinds of global identity that has defined their own experience. Arab and/or Muslim émigrés, disenfranchised immigrants or college students and graduates on a study visa in the U.S. in the age of the War on Terror, these characters have in common the fact of being the subjects of what Donald Pease has defined "postnational narratives" (*National Identities* 3), i.e. individuals whose identity is defined through conflicting narratives of nation, and predicated in the breakdown of the nation-state as guarantor of communal identification. These narratives challenge what Pease has defined "the fallacious assumptions of American liberalism." In other words they challenge the idea that particulars produced out of universal norms (such as Reason, Equality, Social Justice, Liberty) could enable the construction,

in Pease's words, of "imaginary relations to actual sociopolitical conditions to effect imagined communities called national peoples" (*National Identities* 3-4). Such scene of emancipation, which H.M. Naqvi has defined "the theoretical premise of America" (14), i.e. the idea of the existence of a self-proclaimed, chosen people enabled to build, *ex pluribus*, a cohesive national body, is precisely what postnational narratives take exception from. Their subjects challenge such binary arrangements, by moving figures of class, race, and gender "from the status of objects of social regulation within the national narrative into performative powers, postnational forces able to change that narrative's assumptions" (Pease, *National Identities* 4).

The books I am discussing converge in their efforts to address the status of Arabs and/or Muslims who, in post-9/11 U.S., have suddenly found themselves – to return to Bayoumi's appropriation of Du Bois – to be "problems." Negotiating their identities in a post-9/11 context, these individuals succumb to various forms of negative stereotyping which fuel widespread discrimination. Inhabiting the same condition as African-Americans at the start of the twentieth century evoked in *The Souls of Black Folk*, they contest the social and political arrangement of America during the War on Terror, a time when the Arab and Muslim minorities have become a hindrance, a threat, and ultimately undesirable.

This sentiment is echoed in Naqvi's *Home Boy*, published in 2009 and the story of the three young Pakistanis living in New York and suffering the city's post-9/11 anti-Muslim backlash. The story is narrated by Chuck, a 21-year-old from Karachi who has moved to the U.S. to gain a degree in English literature. In the U.S. Chuck has become part of an inseparable trio, along with AC, the brother of his mother's friend, and Jimbo, a DJ and son of a Pakistani immigrant to New Jersey.

The novel spans pre- and post 9/11 events, to emphasize the gulf that separates these two phases in the city's (and the nation's) recent history. "The turn of the century had been epic, and we were easy then... AC, Jimbo and me" – the novel's three protagonists are self-defined "Metrostanis" who "[fancy themselves] boulevardiers, raconteurs, renaissance men" and have their fingers on what the author calls "the great global dialectic" (4; 14; 1). The protagonists straddle between continents and cultures, listening to Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Nina Simone, and old school gangsta-rap, and

subscribe to the pleasures of American liberated sexuality, drinking, and drug sub-cultures. Yet, they inhabit a cultural space that is as American as it is Middle Eastern, in which their South-Asian culture and customs (food, dress codes, family values) exist as defining markers of their everyday lives.

In the aftermath of 9/11, they see themselves suddenly projected into unfamiliar, hostile territory. The U.S. has become an altogether different place, and the narrator feels "the fear, the paranoia, the profound loneliness that [has] become routine features of life in the city." (211) In an impossibly reassuring phone call to his mother in far away Karachi, Chuck depicts the hysteria of post-9/11 New York:

> What do you want me to tell you, Ma? That life has changed? The city's changed? That there's sadness around every corner? There are cops everywhere? You know, there was a time when a police presence was reassuring, like at a parade or late at night, on the street, in the subway, but now I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid all the time. I feel like a marked man. I feel like an animal. It's no way to live. Maybe it's just a phase, maybe it'll pass, and things will return to normal, or maybe, I don't know, history will keep repeating itself… (206)

The novel's narrative revolves on the way in which the whole country has altered, and especially in its attitude towards Muslims, who have suddenly become, "Japs, Jews, Niggers. We weren't before" (1). The horrors of racial profiling become the protagonists' daily experience, and they soon realize that in post-9/11 America, "just like three black men were gangbangers, and three Jews a conspiracy, three Muslims had become a sleeper cell" (153). As the novel reflects on the way in which the promise of assimilation for Arab and Muslim immigrants in America as a whole was put on hold, it explicitly points to the way that this happened in New York City, the proverbial melting pot of peoples and cultures. Chuck receives a hard awakening to the new state of things when he is arrested on (totally fallacious) suspicions of terrorism and asks the police to make a phone call:

> "I want to make a phone call. I know my rights"
> You aren't American!" [the officer] fired back. 'You got no fucking rights' (107).

Chuck's consequent decision to leave the U.S. is a sad commentary on the elusiveness of the American Dream in the new century. In the novel's last chapter, as Chuck prepares to board a flight back to Karachi, his mind wanders back to that scene's reversal during his first arrival to the U.S.: as he recollects the feeling of longing during his first cab ride into Manhattan, he also captures a distinct sense of not having known "all the words" to that place, as in a warning of his eventual demise.

Likewise, the post 9/11 displacement of Muslim immigrants from the American Dream is an underlying concern in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, published in 2007 and soon turned into an international best-seller. A book-long monologue narrated from the perspective of Pakistan-born and Princeton-educated Changez, the novel thematizes the ambiguous dynamics of globalization as experienced from the heart of U.S. capitalism after the terrorist attacks to the Twin Towers. Changez, a brilliant corporate analyst for a top Wall Street firm up to 9/11, is awakened to the self-serving logic of U.S. imperialism after the start of the Afghanistan campaign, leaves his prestigious job which he has come to view as narrow and alienating, and returns to his native Pakistan, bitter and full of resentment against the American way.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist is essentially a tale of the lure and subsequent let-down of the American Dream of success and freedom, which the events of 9/11 force the narrator/protagonist to evaluate from an external, finally liberating perspective. In a significant passage, Changez ponders on the perversity of the Protestant work ethic in obliterating both individual and political consciousness:

> I too had previously derived comfort from the firm's exhortations to focus intensely on work, but now I saw that in this constant striving to realize one's financial future, no thought was given to the critical personal and political issues that affect one's emotional present. (165)

For an immigrant to subscribe to the values of American capitalism, Changez is suddenly made to understand, is to become "a modern-day janissary" (173), someone prepared to obliterate one's own values and beliefs for the sake of the adopted empire. In another passage, the narrator

recalls the horrors of the attacks' aftermath for Arabs and Muslims in the U.S., when individual freedoms were given up to random racial hatred:

> Pakistani cabdrivers were being beaten to within an inch of their lives; the FBI was raiding mosques, shops, and even people's houses; Muslim men were disappearing, perhaps into shadowy detention centers for questioning or worse (107).

Changez reflects on the way in which America's gut response to the attacks signaled its incapability to come to terms with the core roots of anti-American sentiment, and the short-sightedness of its exceptionalist self-perception:

> Affronts were everywhere, the rhetoric emerging from your country at that moment in history... provided a ready and constant fuel for my anger. It seemed to me then – and to be honest, sir, seems to me still – that America was engaged in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with these who attacked you. You retreated to myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums. (190)

Like his counterpart in *Home Boy*, the narrator in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* returns to his native Pakistan in a blatant reversal to the narrative of the American Dream, which mobilizes radically new dynamics of immigration and transnationality. In the twenty-first century – Bayoumi has underlined – the Arab-American Dream looks no longer to the U.S., but rather to the new-found lands of opportunity in the Persian Gulf – Dubai especially – where many young Arabs now focus their hopes of individual success (*How Does It Feel* 118).

Neither wholly American nor wholly Middle Eastern, these global responses to 9/11 give center stage to sentiments of exile and unhomeliness that transcend the boundaries of national literature. Rather, they designate what Pease has defined the "more complex patterns of interdependence grounded in the belief that the local and international are inextricably intertwined" ("National Narratives" 2). To put this another way, these

narratives interrogate the space of the postcolonial within the field of representation of the U.S., in that they resist – in the manner of the postcolonial – the establishment of narrativity as concealment of the state's sovereign power over the national people (Pease, "National Narratives" 7).

5. Postnational, Transnational, and Postcolonial

The introduction to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) mapped out a postcolonial modernity emergent from the writings of the migrants, transnationals, and dispossessed. These writings, emanating from interstitiality and unhomeliness, creating cultural hybridities, and interrupting the progressive linear time of modernity, Bhabha argued, testify of a "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion." Bhabha posited as theoretically innovative and politically crucial what he called,

> the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities [such as class, gender] and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences... "in-between" spaces... of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

If we begin to see our globalized spaces of modernity as caught in a continual shifting of internal and external borders that create racial outsiders (Singh and Schmidt 38-43), the U.S. remains no longer neutral to the creation, in Bhabha's decisive wording, of spaces "in-between," that have historically shaped the emergence of a postcolonial imaginary. Within this frame of reference, the dimensions of transnationalism and diaspora are brought to bear on American studies, thereby raising the issue of the plausibility of such a thing as postcolonial American studies.

In an influential 2004 essay, entitled "Postcolonial American Studies," Malini Johar Schueller has argued that the heightened climate of xenophobia and compulsory patriotism, as well as the rallying together

behind "Western" values by many intellectuals in the aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11 "makes painfully clear the necessity of interrogating U.S. culture through the lens of postcolonial studies." Repeated invocations of "differences between our civilization and their barbarity," entreaties for a "new imperialism," and calls for reinstating a nineteenth-century type of colonialism[3] are, in Schueller's words, "ample proof that the suitability of postcolonial theory to the study of U.S. culture should no longer be a subject of debate" (Schueller 162).

The editors of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), one of the founding texts of postcolonial studies, have pointed out that the common trait of postcolonial literatures "is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial" (2). In a more recent essay, Winfried Fluck has defined an approach to U.S. studies that closely reminds of the postcolonial shunning of the "imperial center," and which he has defined "political transnationalism." According to Fluck, transnationalism,

> is the counterprogram to the state of exception that characterizes the American nation-state and manifests itself in the formation of a national identity that is based on racialization, violent exclusion, or enforced deterritorialization. (374)

In characterizing a state of exception that creates individuals of exception, outsiders "in-between" nation-states who manage "to transform trauma into a source of disinterpellation, and in doing so, has been able to envision a new international communality constituted by 'transnational' subject positions" (374), Fluck has provided a frame of reference to situate post-9/11 Arab and Muslim narratives in and about the U.S. within the larger framework identified by Pease as the "postnational."

Global and transnational, Arab and Muslim narratives in and about the U.S., especially those produced in the age of the War on Terror, precisely claim a discursive space in which the assumptions of national sovereignty can no longer provide the geographical parameters within which to read

cultural texts. These narratives exist within the discursive space that Bhabha has defined as the "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (2). These postnational narratives function as discursive acts that have "neither ratified the sovereign power of the state nor effected the inclusion of stateless persons within pre-existing narratives," but rather "materialized the postnational as the internal boundary insisting at the site where stateless individuals have not yet consented to state power and the state has not yet integrated the stateless into its national order" (Pease, "National Narratives" 7-8). It is within this frame of reference that further scrutiny is called for on the postnational response to America's War on Terror.

Notes

[1] An earlier, shorter version of this essay was published in *La guerra e le armi nella letteratura inglese del novecento*. Ed. Lucia Folena. Torino: Trauben, 2013.

[2] A ten-letter acronym that stands for Uniting (and) Strengthening America (by) Providing Appropriate Tools Required (to) Intercept (and) Obstruct Terrorism Act, the USA PATRIOT Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2001. The act weakened restrictions for the gathering of intelligence within the United States; allowed the U.S. government to closely monitor and regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreigners; and gave broader discretion to authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts.

[3] A *Wall Street Journal* article published on October 9, 2001 was tellingly entitled "The Answer to Terrorism? Colonialism."x

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