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Articles (Theme)

MASCULINITIES IN MUSLIM WOMEN`S POST-9/11 NOVELS: MEN IN THE NIGHT COUNTER AND SAFFRON DREAMS

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Abstract

This article explores the representation of masculinities in Alia Yunis' The Night Counter and Shaila Abdullah`s Saffron Dreams. The two novels I examine represent Arab-American and Pakistani-American Muslim masculinities in the post-9/11 context. In the first part, I provide an overview of research on Arab, Arab-American, Muslim, Pakistani and Pakistani-American masculinities after defining the key terms. In the rest of the paper, I trace the representations of masculinities in the two novels. Yunis redeems Arab manhoods by underscoring diversity in Arab-American masculinities whereas Abdullah erects a metaphorical monument for a young Pakistani-American man who loses his life during the attacks on the World Trade Center, thereby arguing that some Muslim men were innocent victims of the attack.

Keywords: post-9/11 novels, Arab and/or Muslim masculinities, The Night Counter, Saffron Dreams, novels by women authors

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MÜSLÜMAN KADINLARIN 11 EYLÜL SONRASI ROMANLARINDA ERKEKLİKLER: THE NIGHT COUNTER VE SAFFRON DREAMS'DE ERKEKLER

Öz

Bu makale, Alia Yunis`in The Night Counter adlı romanı ile Shaila Abdullah`ın Saffron Dreams adlı eserindeki erkeklik temsillerini irdeler. Müslüman kadın yazarlarca 11 Eylül 2001`de gerçekleşen terör saldırısını takip eden dönemde kaleme alınan bu iki eser, Arap ve/veya Müslüman erkeklerin heterojen bir grup olduğunu ve masumiyetlerini kanıtlama çabası içindedirler. Makalenin ilk bölümünde erkeklikler literatürüne dönerek devamında kullanacağım kavramlara açıklık getiriyorum ve Arap, Arap-Amerikan, Müslüman, Pakistanlı, Pakistanlı-Amerikan eril bireylerin erkeklikleri üzerine literatürü kısaca tarıyorum. Makale, sırasıyla The Night Counter ve Saffron Dreams romanlarının incelemeleriyle devam ediyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 11 Eylül 2001 sonrası romanlar, Arap ve/veya Müslüman erkeklikler, The Night Counter, Saffron Dreams, kadın yazarların romanları

Introduction

Four coordinated airstrikes by the militant terrorist group al-Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 people on September 11, 2001. The first two planes targeted the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. A third aircraft crashed into the west side of the Pentagon, the headquarters of the American military in Virginia. The fourth jetliner would have hit the White House or the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. had it not been diverted. The 9/11 terrorist attacks triggered major changes in U.S. politics. President George W. Bush vowed revenge and thus began the “war on terror” or the allied occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2011, and the war in Afghanistan for the past 20 years, until the U.S. military left the country on August 30, 2021 (Zucchino, 2021). At the societal level, U.S. citizens of Arab heritage and Muslims became hyper visible (Bayoumi, 2008, 2010, 2015; Jamal & Naber, 2008; Naber, 2012), and their religion racialized (Garner & Selod, 2015). In addition, Muslim and/or Arab men found themselves rendered terror suspects and under surveillance of the state. Many women authors responded to the vitriolic discourse in literary works. Commenting on the discursive configurations of the Arab-American identities in transnational Arab-American literature in the aftermath of 9/11, Fadda-Conrey (2014) notes the increased interest in production and circulation of literary works that respond to the hurtful portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in

political and media discourses. Arab-American author Alia Yunis joins this sisterhood of female authors with The Night Counter (2009); Pakistani-American author Shaila Abdullah carves a niche for herself as a spokesperson of Pakistani-Muslim-American masculinities through her novel Saffron Dreams (2009). This article traces the representation of masculinities in these two novels. Yunis redeems Arab manhoods by underscoring diversity in Arab-American masculinities whereas Abdullah erects a metaphorical monument for a young Pakistani-American man who loses his life during the attacks on the World Trade Center, thereby presenting Muslim men as innocent victims of the attacks. The Night Counter is a humorous reinterpretation of the classic A Thousand and One Nights told in frame story format: Saffron Dreams utilizes a memoir or journal format.

Arab, Arab-American, Pakistani and Pakistani-American Masculinities

Masculinity "is the taking up of an enunciative position," writes Bhabha (1995, p. 58). It is, then, related to power at its core. Current masculinities scholarship underscores men`s identity performances and gendered power relations with women and other men. In keeping with Connell, Hearn, and Kimmel (2005), I understand that men`s masculinities are "socially constructed, produced and reproduced" through discourse (p. 3, emphasis in original). Masculinities are variable both within societies and through life courses of individual men. Masculinities are enacted and signified within specific contexts (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Moreover, masculinities intersect with education and social class, religious, racial, and ethnic identities sexualities, age, and abilities. It is possible to speak of hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, "hybrid" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) and "marginalized" masculinities (Haywood & Johansson, 2017). Considering the gendered relations in the novels, I use "hegemonic masculinity" to refer to "the configuration of gender practice … which guarantees … the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Robert William Connell, 2005, p. 77). Masculinities are constructed in distinct institutional settings such as family, education, workplace as well as through popular culture images.

There is a tendency to mix ethnic (e.g. Arab), religious (e.g. Muslim), and geographic (e.g. Middle Eastern) markers. This pervasive conflation mistakenly constructs Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners as a homogenous group (Jarmakani, 2011, p. 897). I deploy the term "Arab-American" to refer to U.S. citizens whose roots lie in Arabic speaking countries. The hyphen between the categories "Arab" and "American" as well as "Pakistani" and "American" underlines the multiple localities and cultures that influence identities that sit at the "interstices" of these distinct categories (Bhabha, 2004). Moreover, I use "and/or" to indicate that not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Muslims are Arab. It is worth noting that while many Arabs are Muslim, they do not make up the majority. In addition, most Muslims live outside the Middle East.

Though masculinities in Muslim-majority societies remained relatively underexamined until the turn of the century, the 9/11 marks as a turning point in scholarly interest in the topic. Among few book-length publications prior to the 9/11, Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb's (2000) Imagined Masculinities is a significant collection that addresses different aspects of being and becoming a man in the Middle East by turning attention to social practices that constructs masculinities through ritual as well as representations in literature and film. The terrorist events of September 11 animated research on Arab and/or Muslim

masculinities globally (De Sondy, 2015; (Inhorn, 2012)Inhorn, 2012; Inhorn & Naguib, 2018; Naguib, 2015; Ouzgane, 2008; Ozyegin, 2016; Peletz, 2021). Much of this research sheds light on the processes and practices through which masculinities emerge.

Despite this expansion of knowledge in Muslim masculinities, research on masculinities in Pakistan is a much younger sibling. Researchers investigating masculinities in Pakistan lament that, traditionally considered the moral guardians of women, most male members of the Pakistani society embody a deeply patriarchal masculinity (Jafar, 2005). Notable recent scholarship focuses on masculinities in northern Pakistan (Marsden, 2007), the nexus of Islamism and terrorism (Aslam, 2012, 2014), adolescents` perceptions of their fathers` adherence to ideology of masculinity (Rizvi, 2015), "pious masculinity" among Pakistani Tablighis (Khan, 2018), and men`s and women`s perceptions of the link between masculinity and violence (Peletz, 2021). Aslam (2014) comments that honor is a prescriptive value integral to Pakistani manhood. In a similar vein, Rizvi (2015) outlines the features of a culturally defined Pakistani man as "an aggressive, powerful, dominant and successful person, having due interest in heterosexuality and avoiding femininity" (p. 15). The author remarks that strong family bonds and mutual dependency take precedence in Pakistani society.

It is crucial to read literary representations of Arab, Arab-American, Pakistani, and Pakistani-American masculinities in Yunis`s and Abdullah`s novels in relation to the social contexts, which studies cited above explore. Nonetheless, it is instructive to keep in mind that the masculinities portrayed in the two books are fictional. For this reason, one needs to underline burgeoning scholarship on the cultural representations of Muslim masculinities in literary criticism, cultural studies, and masculinity studies (Ahmed, Morey, & Yaqin, 2012; Armengol, Bosch-Vilarrubias, Carabí, & Requena-Pelegrí, 2017; Chambers, 2019; Cherry, 2021; Morey, 2018). In Framing Muslims, Morey and Yaqin (2011) pinpoint the emergence of "the Islamic Rage Boy" stereotype in the post 9/11 cultural landscape. Whilst 9/11 is a crucial turning point, it is important to note other crucial incidents that mark the politicization of Arab, Arab-American, Pakistani, Pakistani-American, and Muslim masculinities. The Satanic Verses Affair was one such moment for the politicization of Muslim populations.

In the U.S. context, on the other hand, though the post-9/11 representations of Arab and/or Muslim masculinities have been particularly vitriolic, media`s targeting of Arabs spans over a century. Hollywood did not create the negative Arab stereotypes, which some commentators humorously call "the 3 B Syndrome," pointing at the ill-informed portrayal of Arabs in the media as bombers, billionaires, or belly dancers. Degrading images of "the Orient" were created by European colonizers. Hollywood embellishes and recirculates these inherited caricatures. In addition, as commentators note, one needs to read the emergence of the image of Arabs as terrorists in the U.S. context in relation to the establishment of Israel on Palestinian land, the Arab-Israeli war, and Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967 (Alsultany, 2012, 2013; Naber, 2012). Yunis`s novel successfully problematizes and challenges these widespread stereotypes of "reel" Arabs such as camel-riding nomad, corrupt sheikh, and terrorist.

Arab-American Masculinities in The Night Counter

If the image of [Arab/ness] is truly being created by the American imagination, the time has come to invalidate that image and render it unrecognizable…. However slow and painful the recovery, Arab-American destiny will continue to come under Arab-American control so long as the image of the Arab-American comes increasingly under the control of Arab-American writers. (Akash & Mattawa, 2000, p. xi)

Yunis responds to the call to duty in The Night Counter and successfully writes diverse Arab-American masculinities in the post-9/11 context by imaging an extended Lebanese-American family scattered in the United States. Resembling Dunyazad, Scheherazade's beloved sister in One Thousand and One Nights, Fatima Abdullah is the main character. The 85-year-old matriarch lives with her openly gay grandson and believes that she will die after recounting her life stories to Scheherazade. Fatima`s stories and Scheherazade observations work to poke fun at the "3B Syndrome" and disrupt the tarnished image of Arabs-Arab Americans in the post-9/11 United States. The novel features numerous male characters, most of whom distance themselves from hegemonic Arab masculinities. I analyze the representation of Fatima`s two husbands (Marwan and Ibrahim), one son (Bassam), three Arab-American sons-in-law (Ghazi) and three grandsons (Amir, Rock, and Zade). I omit some minor Arab and Arab-American characters.

Having migrated to the U.S. at the age of eight, Marwan is an assimilated Lebanese-American. He can barely speak Arabic. But he is proficient in reading American cultural codes: he wears a "funny" hat saying it is what "gentlemen" wear (Yunis, 2009, p. 81) and is passionate about American football and baseball. Marwan is a helpful and kind husband. He teaches his wife to cook with corn oil and is appreciative of her cooking, which he calls "zaki, delicious, [using] one of the few words he says in Arabic" (p. 145). Fatima underscores Marwan`s guardian roles. When they arrive at the Ellis Island, Marwan writes down Fatima`s year of birth as 1919, thus speaking for his illiterate bride (p. 35). Work is an important aspect of Marwan`s masculinity. Prior to his trip to Lebanon, Marwan works for Ford Motor Company. His visit to his home country takes place during the Great Depression when he loses his job at Ford. In his new job with General Motors, he needs to commute long distance and board with other men during the week. Fatima recalls that Marwan came home exhausted on "late Friday nights and just stared at the walls or watched a baseball game" (p. 83). Unsatisfied with working conditions and wages, Marwan joins the union five months after bringing his wife to Detroit. In Fatima`s words, "Marwan was never home even on weekends after that, always out organizing" (p. 84). Fatima rationalizes their failure in procreation by saying, "he was always tired or gone" (p. 85). Fatima also confesses that "he smelled unfamiliar" probably alluding to the men`s cannabis use (p. 146). Marwan suffers an injury during a strike and then a heart attack at work, which causes his death at the age of thirty-nine (p. 85). In Fatima`s opinion, it was thanks to Marwan that the workers at General Motors and Ford were given fair wages. He not only organized workers for fair wages but also watched out for migrants from Lebanon. It may be argued that Marwan contributed substantially to workers` wage raise by acting as a union member. Marwan`s masculinity is interlinked with his migration as a child, assimilation, and his relationship with Fatima and male coworkers. By creating this male character, Yunis underlines how the early 20th century male Arab immigrants` masculinities were determined by their role in Detroit`s auto manufacturing industry.

Fatima`s second husband is another male character whose masculinity is depicted vividly. The most salient expression of Ibrahim`s masculinity is linked to his relationship to women. Yunis portrays this Arab-American character as a lover (twice a heartbreaker) who ages to become a lonely senior citizen. When he migrates to the U.S. in 1924, Ibrahim leaves Dalal, the fifteen-year-old girl he was supposed to marry, with a promise that he will return “worthy of marrying” her (p. 17). His dream of bringing Dalal to Detroit is destroyed with an immigration bill that restricts “yellow people" from entering the country (p. 17). Ibrahim marries “the waitress who [takes] him in" upon his arrival and divorces her when Marwan comes back from Lebanon with Fatima (p. 17). His comment on separation after a decade of marriage is blunt: he does not “want to live with a stranger anymore” (p. 17). Ibrahim marries Fatima after Marwan dies. They stay married until she divorces him and goes to Los Angeles in 2001 while Ibrahim stays in Detroit. At an old age, though, Ibrahim regrets having broken these women`s hearts. In a conversation with his stepdaughter, Ibrahim expresses his continuing love for Fatima as if old age has put him in a trance:

> *Oh, you should have seen her hair. But it wasn’t just about no hair …When your mama talked, she laughed a laugh—she brought Lebanon back to me. It wasn’t just that, but that’s what I told to my first wife—Betsy. (Yunis, 2009, p. 100)*

The quote makes clear that Fatima reminds Ibrahim of his Lebanese roots. In addition, it portrays this old man “as someone capable of being love-struck” (p. 99). At ninety-six, Ibrahim is much less “a father symbol” for his stepdaughter, a theme Bosch-Vilarrubias (2016) explores in somewhat superficial manner, but “a man with a life of stories, including some about love” (Yunis, 2009, p. 99). Younger Ibrahim flatters his woman: on Fatima`s seventieth birthday their grandson Zade hears him describe Fatima`s face as “luminescent as the moon on its fourteenth day” (pp. 52-53), but the crooner`s expression of endearment goes unnoticed by everyone else in the room. In his last days, Ibrahim deeply misses, and is not ashamed to talk about Fatima, or “the purple in his life” (p. 19). In allowing Ibrahim to speak of his passion, Yunis ensures that readers meet an Arab-American patriarch who is capable of romantic love.

In addition, Yunis`s portrayal of Ibrahim`s masculinity intersects with his age and immigrant status. Ibrahim is a nostalgic first-generation immigrant who longs for his natal home and close-knit family relations. Despite having spent over seventy years in the United States, Ibrahim remains attached to Lebanon. He commutes to the Detroit Metropolitan Airport twice a week and awaits KLM Flight 6470 until he passes away during one of his journeys. He seeks solace in watching passengers from Arab countries and hearing “the sound of his childhood dinners in their hyperbolic greetings” (p. 19). He inhales “smells of his mother’s evening gatherings in the heavy perfume of the … grandmothers and in the sweat of the young men” (p. 20). Furthermore, his longing is exacerbated by his children`s leaving home. He resents his children`s “occasional telephone calls … mostly consist of weather reports" (p. 22). The narrator reveals: “[i]f [Ibrahim] had known that in old age in America having children was the same as not having them at all, he never would have so many” (p. 18). Combined with the diaspora experience, Ibrahim`s age affects his masculinity in profound ways.

It is worth exploring Ibrahim`s masculinity in relation to fatherhood. Ibrahim enacts traditional Arab masculinity in the form of overprotection of his daughters (Harpel, 2010; Hossain & Juhari, 2015). He does not meet the “typical American dad fantasy” his daughters desire (Yunis, 2009, p. 360). Still, it is necessary

to distinguish between the man's inability to express his fatherly love from an alleged deficiency in love (Bosch-Vilarrubias, 2016). His expression of fatherly love involves being vigilant against male strangers and protecting his daughters. During their only holiday, they are denied the bathrooms designated for white people, which infuriates Ibrahim. Fatima explains, “Ibrahim grabbed my arm so hard it bruised for a week and dragged me into the restaurant” (p. 197). Furthermore, when someone calls the girls “mulatto” i.e. a person of mixed white and black ancestry, the strangers` use of this derogatory term for his third daughter and his inappropriate interest in her enrages Ibrahim. He yanks the man’s hand off her shouting, “You don’t touch my kids" (p. 197). Fatima recounts the ensuing scene as follows:

> *Then he drove straight back to Detroit without a word. … I didn’t know what color my children were and why my husband had turned such an awful red and purple .... When I asked Ibrahim for the third time, he finally spoke and said it didn’t matter because the girls should never leave the house again. He said he’d rather they were unhappy at home than dead outside. (Yunis, 2009, p. 197)*

The quote invokes the race-based segregation of public bathrooms in addition to underlining Ibrahim`s fear for the safety of his daughters. His obsession with their safety forces him to limit their excursions outside the house. In Fatima`s words, “as long as the girls were in the house safe, he didn’t care what they did” (p. 199). Also, Fatima reveals that “[w]ith each daughter that was born, Ibrahim laughed less and less … He stopped being the man who used to tell … jokes in Arabic” (p. 199). His apparent sexist choice may be justified with a deeper understanding of his past: Ibrahim witnesses, and cannot prevent, the shooting of his two sisters when he was thirteen. In Fatima`s view, his girls “remind Ibrahim of his sisters” (p. 301). Modeling the reaction, the assumed reader should have Scheherazade’s deduction that Ibrahim “distrust[s] all men in the presence of his daughters” because he fears that he will fail to protect his daughters (p. 199). Ironically, he is not able to shield his twin sons from death and third son from alcohol and substance abuse whereas his daughters flourish in their own ways. Ibrahim`s stern outlook on life deepens after the death of his two sons. Amir remembers the man`s “stone-cold silence” (p. 25). Still, by detailing the traumas Ibrahim faces, Yunis ensures that the reader does not rush to judge him.

Ibrahim embodies multiple masculinities as he goes from boyhood to adulthood and ages into his nineties (Messerschmidt, 2018). In his nineties, Ibrahim “no longer ha[s] any rage, just loneliness, an aching for [his children] that overwhelm[s] him during his nearly nightly bouts with insomnia” (p. 18). Even so, Ibrahim tries to fit in. He chimes in “Rock on, dude” during his banter with the bus driver he befriends in hopes that one day he will speak the same language with his children (p. 20). His multiple masculinities are constructed through a negotiation between his Arab and American identities. Younger Ibrahim relies on the discourses of hegemonic Arab masculinities whereas senior Ibrahim enacts a vulnerable fatherhood. Following the heteropatriarchal tradition, younger Ibrahim performs what may be considered conservative and strict. In old age, however, he deviates from the traditional conceptions of Arab masculinity. Therefore, it is worth exploring his manhood acts in relation to aging (Bosch-Vilarrubias, 2021). It would be simplistic to claim that he is a typical Arab patriarch who endorses traditional masculine roles.

It is not merely his relationship to women, children, and his home country that define Ibrahim`s multiple and evolving masculinities. Although, Ibrahim`s masculinity is securely attached to his religious identity. Fatima refers to his consumption of araq on special occasions until the death of their sons (p. 308). This passing

comment hints that Ibrahim is not a practicing Muslim. Moreover, having migrated as an adult, Ibrahim is more proficient in his mother tongue and converses with Fatima in Arabic “much better than Marwan`s” (p. 82), but he does not read Arabic newspapers regularly. His immigration to the U.S. needs to be stressed when exploring Ibrahim`s masculinities. Coleman (1998) proposes the metaphor of a straw in water to introduce the idea of cultural refraction that comes about with migration. Just as a straw appears to bend as it enters the liquid, masculinities of migrants become vulnerable to distortion when they shift from one cultural space to another. This is not to say that codes of masculinity a man internalizes before migration become completely unrecognizable due to migration. Rather, it means that relocation makes noticeable impacts on the gendered performances of migrants. It is for this reason, Yunis' fictional dramatization of im/migrant masculinity hints that any reading of im/migrant masculinity should pay attention to the conditions of migration and the refractions it may result in.

Bassam is the only son of Fatima and Ibrahim after a tornado claims Laith and Riyad. He is described as a “boy genius” on account of his mathematical talent (p. 302). Following his two elder brothers` demise, Bassam finds “the quiet … of his parents` home … unbearable” and turns to alcohol and substance abuse. Fatima describes her as a “drunk in Las Vegas” (p. 302). The addictive personality of Bassam manifests itself in his four unsuccessful marriages, previous alcoholism and cocaine addiction and current gambling. He runs away from his parents` home but yearns for a home and family. He oscillates between a “functioning” and “nonfunctioning” drunk until the 9/11 attacks force him to stay sober (p. 308). Bosch-Vilarrubias (2016) attributes Bassam`s sobriety to Fatima`s influence, but the real factor is the precarious “alien citizen” status Arab-American men occupy in the wake of 9/11 (Ngai, 2007). Bassam admits that “it [is] too … dangerous to be both drunk and Arab in America” (p. 307). He abstains from alcohol due to anti-Arab sentiments. He experiences what Naber (2012) terms an “internment of the psyche” (pp. 39-40). Following 9/11, Bassam navigates in the anti-Arab milieu delicately.

Yunis imagines four very divergent Arab-American sons-in-law for Fatima. Ghazi is of Egyptian descent. The man “discover[s] Islam” after his wife`s diagnosis of cancer, which corresponds to the invasion of Iraq (p. 92). He goes to the mosque five times a day, abstains from alcohol, and donates money he previously used for gym membership to the new mosque. The narrator underlines the divergence between the man`s wishes and actions by saying, Ghazi “spends most Friday nights … at the mosque praying to God to keep [Laila] with him for as long as he could, leaving her at home to watch TV alone” (p. 108). Ghazi is traditional in his enactment of heteropatriarchal masculinity. He urges his wife to have breast reconstruction surgery while also whispering that he cares so much for Laila. Laila acknowledges that a verbal display of affection is “not easy for a man from Egypt, an engineer no less” (p. 114). Yet she hopes that “One day, Ghazi might even try ‘I love you.’” Still, she doubts that Ghazi would ever “be American enough to throw words of endearment the way her regular American friends’ husbands did” (p. 114). Ghazi is closest to what Shaheen (2003) considers a regular Arab-American man (pp. 172-173). He is highly respected among his co-workers and Muslim friends; he prays with his sons at his mosque. Still, Yunis mocks this Arab-American man’s newfound religiosity.

Yunis continues to be playful with the masculinities of younger Arab-Americans. Amir is Fatima`s favorite grandson. He is a gay actor: two facts Fatima refuses to acknowledge. Every time the young man tries to assert his queer identity, the elderly woman prevents him from articulating “that awful word” (p. 4). Fatima insists that being gay is “Haram. Sacrilege” (p. 8) and that “such dreadful nonsense [does] not exist in

Lebanon" (p. 9). For her acting is only a hobby, not a real job. She hopes that Amir will become 'sensible' once she finds him an Arab-American wife. Amir`s sexuality places him in a marginal position in relation to discourses of traditional Arab manhood, which endorses compulsory heteronormativity (Harpel, 2010). In his interactions with Fatima, Amir is in constant negotiation of his queer masculinity (Carbajal, 2019). In most of the auditions he attends, he is asked to play a bearded terrorist or a taxi driver. In other words, Hollywood casts him for stereotypical portrayals of Arab men, or what Morey and Yaqin (2011) call "the Islamic Rage boy" with a long beard and angry voice in the post 9/11 cultural landscape. In reference to a part as a young Saddam Hussein, Amir resolves that he needs "a better heritage" (p. 77). His emphasis on heritage underscores his dissatisfaction with Hollywood`s penchant for biased portrayals of male Arab-Americans. In his private life, Amir enacts a "nurturing" masculinity: he is Fatima`s caregiver in the post 9/11 (Naguib, 2015). He cooks and raises flowers, two domestic activities considered quintessentially feminine. The gay identity and role of Amir as a caregiver destabilize imaginations of hegemonic Arab masculinities which endorse heterosexual desire. By imagining a character such as Amir, Yunis both introduces an alternative mode of Arab-American masculinity and challenges the hypermasculine depictions of young Arab men as angry terrorists.

Fatima`s third grandson, Rock is a twenty-nine-year-old bachelor with a daughter. Rock is raised by his mother, who teaches him at a young age that, though he died in Vietnam, his father was not a hero; rather, he was an alcoholic dreamer who left them with a considerable debt. Rock resents his father. Rock is a construction worker and maintains a homosocial camaraderie with his colleague. The woman he loves has left him for this friend. Like his uncle Bassam, Rock is a math savvy character in the novel. Rock is not intellectually challenged as Bosch-Vilarrubias (2016, p. 175) suggests: he even receives a partial scholarship to study engineering at Penn State thanks to "his spatial and mathematical adeptness, particularly the gift for squaring" (p. 263). However, he quits university because of his mother`s codependency. In other words, it is "Miriam's oppressive love" that stops Rock from earning a university degree and prepares Rock for a construction job (p. 264). The portrayal of Rock as a man of spatial and mathematical genius can be explained by the author`s insistence on entrenching the positive image of Arabs. His relationships with his mother and ex-partner with whom he is still in love do not make Rock a hegemonic man. Rather, Rock escapes traditional conceptions of Arab manhood. Rock`s masculinity is defined by his role as a father, which he needs to assert frequently. To illustrate, he must refuse the offer his ex-wife's current partner makes to share costs incurred in the upbringing of his daughter. In addition, when the other man volunteers to save for his daughter`s college tuition, Rock refuses: "I don't want your help … [s]he, at least, is still mine" (p. 279). Rock accepts a construction contract in Iraq because he "is looking forward to being … the only man … who [takes] care of his daughter" (p. 280). As he is preparing to leave, he consoles his grieving family that he goes there to build "schools … righteous stuff" (p. 278). He frames his mission as "fixing" the damage in Iraq (p. 278). The response signals Rock's dispassionate view of U.S. presence in Iraq. Furthermore, it underscores his loyalty to his paternal duties over ethnic or religious allegiance to people in the Middle East.

Zade, another of Fatima's grandsons, owns Scheherazade's Diwan Café in Washington, D.C. and a matchmaking service with Giselle, his former girlfriend. Marriage-oriented matchmaking is traditionally performed by older women. Zade reverses this gendered role. Working with his business oriented ex-girlfriend, he deploys Arab stereotypes to his advantage in his booming dating business. The public

masculinity of Zade gears towards heteropatriarchal conceptions of marriage. He even acquiesces to sexist requests from clients such as his flashy Qatari customer who is in search of a virgin to be his second wife (p. 46). One would assume that Zade, a successful matchmaking enterprise owner, would exhibit a hegemonic masculinity in his relationship with his (former) girlfriend. The truth is far from Zade being the powerful one of the two. Giselle reigns in decision making in their relationship. To illustrate, she cuts him off when he is about to propose and announces her plan to open the hookah bar as if it were a shared passion (p. 59). If masculinity acts are about power relations, Zade is certainly not the one who enjoys power in his personal relationship. In Yunis` portrayal, similarly to that of Rock, the masculinity of Zade is subordinated to his female partner.

Pakistani and Pakistani-American Masculinities in Saffron Dreams

Set in the post-9/11 United States, Saffron Dreams depicts the challenges of Arissa Illahi, a Muslim Pakistani American widow of the attack on World Trade Center faces after the death of her husband. Arissa's first-person narrative confronts Islamophobia, i.e. hatred and hostility toward Islam and Muslims in the United States (Morey, 2018, pp. 12-16). Islamophobia is linked with prejudice and dehumanization of the subject deemed the other. Cainkar (2009) contends that "gendered dehumanization" of Muslim identities develops in three ways: (1) veiled women are discursively constructed as anti-American; (2) Muslim women are imagined as producers of terrorists due to their so-called coldness in childrearing; and (3) Muslim men are stripped of their masculinities through actual emasculation in overseas detention centers or domestically through fear of incarceration. Keeping Cainkar's concept of "gendered dehumanization" in mind, I claim that Saffron Dreams is an attempt at a gendered re-humanization of Muslim men in the aftermath of September 11. The first-person narrative constructs a young Muslim man from Pakistan as an innocent victim of the 9/11 attacks. According to the female narrator, associating him with the terrorists by virtue of his religion and ethnicity would be a grave error. The narrator vociferously distances her deceased husband from the terrorist label.

The central male character is Faizan in Saffron Dreams. Abdullah`s female narrator-protagonist introduces Faizan as an aspiring author who leaves his "dream project" incomplete when the 9/11 explosions claim his life (p. 90). As a writer, he is methodical: the note Arissa finds in his unfinished manuscript reveals a countdown to completion. This unpublished author waits tables at Windows on the World, the restaurant in the story world of Saffron Dream. Through her fictive narrator-protagonist, Abdullah is intent on constructing a memorial for the fictional character and other young Muslim men not as jihadis but as victims of the 9/11 attacks for whom readers should feel empathy.

Faizan`s masculinity is defined with his adherence to tradition. He believes that his wife`s hijab is bound with Pakistani culture. Arissa recalls that Faizan "harboured a reverence for the veil" because "to him it defined a woman" (p. 12). Arissa also reveals that the man opposes his wife`s wish to drop the hijab. The incident quoted above illustrates that Faizan is not only traditional but also controlling the dress choice of his wife. Moreover, Faizan`s insistence on hijab corresponds to his role as the 'guarantor' of his wife's honor. Aslam (2014) reports the argument of Islamic scholars that the "Divine-assigned masculine role of

qawwam" makes men "guardians for women and responsible for their overall socio-economic and emotional welfare" (p. 146). This masculine role often connects women`s hijab with their protection. Men following the traditional Islamic Akhlaq, or the disposition for virtue, morality, and good manners in Islamic theology, link threats to the security of their female relatives with their outfit and involvement in activities outside the home. In the imaginative rendering of Abdullah, Faizan socializes in Pakistan in the 1980s, so his masculinity in relation to his wife`s hijab may be understood with reference to the dominant values there.

Faizan is a literary representative of hegemonic masculinity. Although the story is told from the perspective of Arissa, Faizan is the one who directs his male gaze at the female character. The day he asks for her hand Faizan inspects his prospective wife "like a lab technician would look at a specimen, wondering what he would find when he finally ran some tests" (p. 44). The man acts out the roles his Pakistani tradition sets for him: he undergoes an interview with Arissa`s father before the couple's marriage-oriented match is finalized. Faizan`s traditional masculinity is also manifest in his initial reticence in expressing affection in public soon after they marry. Still, the man pulls his wife to him and "plant[s] a full kiss on [her] lips in a grand display of affection when [they pass] a seemingly conservative group." (p. 113). Arissa interprets his action as provocative and bold. His two conflicting public actions seem indicative of his being stuck between demands of public decency and public bravado. Moreover, despite being traditional in the sense that he finds his wife through the 'proper' way of matchmaking, Faizan does not shy away from expressing his hegemonic masculinity during their engagement. He picks up Arissa with the pretense that they visit his parents when the parents are away. Once inside the door, Faizan undresses and inspects Arissa while remaining chaste, a consequence of the author`s efforts to create a moral fictive Pakistani-American/Muslim man. Faizan`s act indicates the tension between his adherence to tradition and his corporeal desire. In Abdullah`s fiction, the young man from Pakistan prefers to delay conjugal intimacy in line with the expectations of his society.

Embodying a hegemonic husband, Faizan leaves little wiggle room for his wife to discuss crucial matters. In a scene that reveals much about the two main characters, Faizan insists that they move back to Pakistan. The young man is adamant that their return is "the right choice" because his elderly parents need him (p. 106). Whereas he acts out his role as a responsible son, he excludes Arissa from the decision-making processes. Faizan`s attitude corresponds to the widespread view in Pakistan that even though men should take care of the need of their wives, they need to prioritize parental rights and family obligations (Aslam, 2014). With his refusal to consult his partner, Faizan establishes a clear dominance in the relationship. Another revealing conversation is about their prospective child. Faizan defines his masculinity around fathering a son. Moreover, he has already chosen "the perfect" name for their four-month-old fetus (p. 156). He dismisses Arissa`s suggestion that they may call the baby Reesa if it is a girl by saying "we are not having a girl" (p. 157). This scene references male preference in Pakistan. In Abdullah`s novel, even a young, educated man wants a son.

Furthermore, Abdullah`s portrayal of Faizan as the sole breadwinner aligns well with traditional notions of Pakistani masculinities. Aslam (2014) reports that men cite Islamic texts that reinforce this gendered role assignment. In their view, a Muslim man is under religious obligation to take care of his wife by the virtue of being her guardian. Abdullah`s male character seems to draw on religious and cultural masculinity imperatives when he insists that Arissa stay home: he promises that she "will be well provided for" (p. 139).

Faizan dismisses his wife`s wish to contribute and concerns regarding the incongruence between his education and his job.

Abdullah`s depiction of Faizan`s masculinity also includes ample references to his sexual performance. Sexual potency and stamina are seen by many Pakistanis as vital in maintaining domination over their wives (Rozan, n.d.). Abdullah`s rather sentimental novel allows a large space for sexuality. Comparing her own intimate relationship to that of a couple in a romance novel, Arissa comments, “the empowered female character … automatically slipped into gender-dictated role of waiting for the man to make the final move, kind of like how we were” (p. 132). She, then, describes a scene from “a shoddy Victorian romance” they read and roleplay together (p. 131). Abdullah tries to depict the young Muslim man from Pakistan as a sexually playful individual through explicit scenes similar to the hypermasculine characters in Harlequin romances.

The author introduces two Pakistani father characters. Arissa`s father, Abu, is “a soft-spoken" cardiologist (p. 122). To Arissa, her father is “the best thing happened to mankind” (p. 16). A scene from the narrator-protagonist`s youth reveals much about the man's masculinity. At a gathering in 1993, Abu talks passionately about pervasive corruption in Pakistan and praises the prime minister for targeting tax evaders and loan defaulters. His signification of ethical manhood does not impress his companions, who excuse themselves one by one until he loses all audience. In addition, Abu hides himself at the library of his host when his wife is “busy charming the crowd" at gatherings (p. 23). When he witnesses his wife's infidelity, his question, “Did it occur to you that you might have gone too far?” portrays a mature man who resists the temptation to resort to violence. When his wife leaves him for another, Abu does not deprive his children of paternal warmth but hands over their care to paid servants. For instance, he hires a tutor to help his daughter learn drawing. Abu`s reliance on paid service in childrearing needs to be considered as an affordance of his wealth and education (Hossain & Juhari, 2015). Moreover, he approves of Arissa`s delaying of marriage for career reasons (p. 29). Abu is also “open” to his daughters` finding of their future partners, but he “tolerate[s]" the visit of the matchmaker because he is careful not to arouse unpopular sentiments among the community (p. 28). When his lenient disposition is interrogated, he is irritated and defends himself saying that he is “well aware of [his] duties as a parent” (p. 42). He consults with his daughters when the old matchmaker woman mentions potential educated candidates. In Arissa`s opinion, Abu follows “the age-old tradition of arranged marriage, a science perfected over centuries" (p. 28) so long as his daughters agree to marry the person they are presented with. It may be inferred that, for Abdullah, educated Pakistani men such as the fictional Abu are tolerant husbands and fathers.

The second paternal figure Abdullah creates is Faizan`s father. Baba and his wife live with Arissa for five years after Faizan`s death. Baba reminds Arissa of their old driver and “a sincere advisor” with his “rock solid strength” and “silent love” (p. 74). Almost taking over the role Azad Baba performed when Arissa was a child, Baba provides moral support to the grieving woman. The reader is told that Baba learned to knit for the sake of his pregnant wife and completed the sock she was unable to finish when pregnancy edema prevented her from knitting (p. 97). At the same time, the man has a stern look. When his wife becomes overanxious, he “gently command[s]” his wife “with his eyes to calm down” (p. 154). Arissa opines that Baba is a pillar of strength and he can calm his wife and daughter-in-law “without uttering a single word” (p. 154). Moreover, he is involved in his grandson`s upbringing. In matters of postpartum nourishment for the young

mother, however, “Mothers know best, and I am a better man today because I listen to her” advises the man (p. 160). Abdullah portrays senior Pakistani men as nurturing patriarchs through Baba`s character.

Conclusion

My analysis of two post-9/11 novels by two Muslim women in terms of their representation of masculinities reveals the authors` ardent engagement with the vitriolic 9/11 discourse on Arab and/or Muslim masculinities. Yunis`s The Night Counter launches an attack on the misconception that Arab and Arab-American manhoods are homogeneous and stable by portraying differences within a single Lebanese-American family; Abdullah`s Saffron Dreams reconstructs the 9/11 terrorist attacks as a traumatic incident for a Muslim family from Pakistan and maintains that not all young male Muslims are terrorist. Yunis utilizes the very same images that have been deployed to stereotype Arabs to acquit Arab-American masculinities.

Men in The Night Counter deviate from hegemonic conceptions of Arab manhood in significant ways. They desire companionship and love. Except for Amir, men in Abdullah`s novel are subordinated to women in their lives. The novel rejects monolithic portrayals of Arab-American men. Yunis points at numerous possibilities of masculinities in her novel. Migration and old age, among other factors, influence the first-generation Arab-Americans` manhood acts as characterized through the characters of Marwan and Ibrahim. Some of the diverse manhoods in second generation Arab-Americans bear recognizable religious markers, as in Ghazi`s case, while others do not as in Bassam`s case. The masculinities of the third generations Arab-American males diverge from one another. While Amir asserts his masculinity as a queer person, Zade and Rock remain subordinated to the women in their lives. By introducing readers to over ten fictional men in the novel, Yunis counteracts stereotypical images of Arabs. Through her younger characters, she rejects the pervasive association of Arab bodies with terrorism. The novel manages to break the link between terrorism and Arab-American masculinities while denouncing the stereotyping of Arab men after 9/11 as terrorists, through the character of Amir. The Night Counter allows the reader to feel the sting of racialized surveillance of Arab-Americans while inviting them to witness ‘lived masculinities’ of fictive men.

Abdullah`s novel offers fewer choices of Pakistani and Pakistani-American masculinities. The author seeks to utilize fiction to teach the American reader the rights and obligations of Pakistani men. Faizan`s masculinity is embedded in power relations with his wife and others. His character portrays hegemonic masculinity in relation to his wife. To salvage Faizan`s image as a hardworking immigrant whose masculinity is informed by his loyalty to family tradition, Abdullah accentuates his provider role. In the fictional universe of Saffron Dreams, Pakistani men are loving partners and fathers.

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