

## 75. Feminizing Islam and immigrant Arab masculinities in *The Road From Damascus*

Mustafa BÜYÜKGEBİZ<sup>1</sup>

**APA:** Büyükgebiz, M. (2023). Feminizing Islam and immigrant Arab masculinities in *The Road From Damascus*. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, (33), 1229-1238. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1285367

### Abstract

Non-western masculinities were extensively shaped by the Western colonizer to a large extent. It has been frequently discussed that Western colonizers in South America, Africa, and Asia deliberately aimed to establish a heternormative gender order and boost patriarchy so as to break the mould of non-heteronormative and fluid concepts of gender in indigenous cultures and to ensure social and political domination by redesigning gender representations. The patriarchal understanding is dominant in the Global South, especially in Arab masculinities. In addition, a guarantee of the autonomy of the Western sense of masculinity is the feminization of marginalized cultures. In this way, Western hegemonic masculinity guarantees its global domination. Feminizing the religion of Islam as the other is a severe source of crisis for Western immigrant Arab masculinities because the man, who continues to dominate in his own culture, becomes the party whose own culture is feminized in his new society. In this context, this study aims to discuss the feminization of Islam in the Global North on a theoretical basis by focusing on Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel *The Road from Damascus* and examining the immigrant Arab masculinity crises with examples from the novel.

**Keywords:** Immigrant Arab masculinities, masculinity crises, feminized Islam

## *The Road From Damascus* romanında İslamın kadınsılařtırılması ve göçmen Arap erkeklikleri

### Öz

Batılı olmayan erkeklikler, büyük ölçüde Batılı sömürgeciler tarafından kapsamlı bir şekilde şekillendirmiştir. Güney Amerika, Afrika ve Asya'daki Batılı sömürgecilerin, yerli kültürlerde heteronormatif olmayan ve akışkan cinsiyet kavramlarının kalıbını kırmak ve cinsiyet temsillerini yeniden tasarlayarak toplumsal ve politik tahakkümü sağlamak için kasıtlı olarak heternormatif bir cinsiyet düzeni kurmayı ve ataerkilliği güçlendirmeyi amaçladıkları sıkça tartışılmaktadır. Ataerkil anlayış Küresel Güney'de, özellikle Arap erkekliklerinde baskındır. Buna ek olarak, Batı'nın erkeklik anlayışının özerkliğinin bir garantisi, marjinalleştirilmiş kültürlerin kadınsılařtırılmasıdır. Bu şekilde, Batı hegemonik erkekliği küresel egemenliğini garanti altına alır. İslam dinini öteki olarak kadınsılařtırmak, Batılı göçmen Arap erkeklikleri için ciddi bir kriz kaynağıdır, çünkü kendi kültüründe egemen olmaya devam eden erkek, yeni toplumunda kendi kültürü kadınsılařtırılmış olan taraf haline gelir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, Robin Yassin-Kassab'ın *The Road From Damascus* romanına odaklanarak ve göçmen Arap erkeklik krizlerini romandan örneklerle inceleyerek Küresel Kuzey'de İslam'ın kadınsılařtırılmasını teorik bir temelde tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

<sup>1</sup> Dr., Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu (Antalya, Türkiye), mustafa.buyukgebiz@alanya.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1911-1766. [Arařtırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 19.03.2023 kabul tarihi: 20.04.2023; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1285367]

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Göçmen Arap erkeklikleri, erkeklik krizleri, kadınsılaştırılmış İslam

Especially since the beginning of the 21st century, the increasing immigrant population in the world and the racist attitude that has been on the rise in the global sense in the recent period tend to show the migration and the demographic change brought with it as a crisis. However, the winds of multiculturalism blew in the Global North at first. After the 9/11 attacks, which was one of the critical reasons for the rise of the racist attitude in the Global North, Muslim immigrants of Arab origin who migrated from the Middle East to Western countries were frequently seen as potential terrorists, and this brought a new dimension to the adaptation problems. However, racism is not the only reason for the adaptation problems of the Muslim Arab immigrant population in the West. The source of the issues dates back to the colonial period. Colonial power has not built its hegemony only on military, political and commercial foundations.

Western masculinity has been associated with colonialism, both historically and in contemporary contexts. During the European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, many colonial powers believed that it was their duty to “civilize” and “Christianize” the people they encountered, and this belief was often tied to ideas about masculinity. For example, the British Empire's self-image was often associated with a “civilizing mission” and the idea that British men were inherently superior to men from colonized nations.

In practice, this often meant that colonial powers imposed their own systems of governance and religion on colonized peoples, and that men from colonial powers were put in positions of authority over men from colonized nations. This reinforced the idea that Western masculinity was associated with power and dominance.

Colonialism also shaped the way that masculinity was constructed in colonized societies. Colonial powers often disrupted traditional systems of governance and social organization, and this disruption often led to the destabilization of traditional gender roles. In some cases, this has led to the adoption of Western gender norms in colonized societies, which can also reinforce the idea of Western masculinity as dominant.

In contemporary context, the legacy of colonialism can be seen in the global power imbalance between the developed and developing world, with the developed countries having more influence, cultural power and access to resources, which is often tied to Western masculinity notion.

Western white masculinity also adopted a strategy parallel to colonial ideology from a social perspective. It established a heternormative gender order and boosted patriarchy to break the mould of non-heteronormative and fluid concepts of gender in indigenous cultures to ensure social and political domination by redesigning gender representations. This attempt to establish colonial dominance deeply affects traditional gender roles in the Global South. Colonial powers sought to impose their own cultural norms and values on the people they colonized, and this often included traditional gender roles. For example, colonial administrators often sought to limit the autonomy of women in colonized societies and to restrict their roles to domestic responsibilities such as caring for the home and raising children. This was often done in the name of “civilizing” colonized people and making them more “European.”

During the colonial period, many women in the Global South were forced to work in mines and fields, and in many cases were subject to sexual exploitation by colonizers. They were also not given the right

to vote, own property, and have political representation, this was based on the notion that they are inferior and domestic beings that need to be protected by men, and this can also be seen as a harbinger of deep crises in representations of masculinity. Identity crises, stuck between traditional masculinity roles and Western masculinity, especially among Muslim men living as immigrants in Western civilizations, are also frequently seen in the literature. Realistic and concrete characters created by writers of Muslim origin, such as Tabish Khair, Leila Aboulela, or Mohsin Hamid, form a suitable basis for exemplifying immigrant masculinity crises and discussing them academically. One of these writers is British Syrian novelist Robin Yassin-Kassab. Yassin-Kassab's successful novel, *The Road from Damascus*, captures the in-between identities and struggles of Muslim immigrant men living in Britain. The effort to be a part of hegemonic masculinity as an immigrant gives the novel's protagonist, Sami's father, Mustafa, a secular and Islamophobic identity. The goal of becoming a man by holding on to the knowledge and science allegedly produced by Western masculinity results in Mustafa's raising his son Sami as an Islamophobe and Sami's deep psychological problems with the father figure.

Critical studies of masculinity, which have become increasingly important within the scope of gender studies, have brought a new perspective to the issue of gender and allowed the concept of domination to be reconsidered, especially in the patriarchal society structure shaped by the West. Hegemonic masculinity, one of the critical instruments of Western colonial understanding, has caused severe damage to the individual, social and gender dynamics of the colonized societies and has shaped them within the scope of colonial ideals. White masculinity, which is very stingy in sharing authority and power, has made it necessary for colonized societies to develop identities accordingly, and "conceptions of manhood are not only negated by colonization but also restructured as a means to fit into the newly emerging colonial realities" (Nyawalo, 2011, p. 126). Looking at the development of masculinity in Western society, it can be seen that masculinity has been shaped according to the need of white men, who dominate the community, to protect their power and create an identity by separating themselves from other individuals. "It is also manifested in the need to conquer and silence others, who were perceived to lack masculine characteristics, such as female and colonised subjects" (Prianti, 2019, p. 701). In this context, it is not surprising that masculinity has a parallel structure with colonialism and is used by colonialism as a tool to achieve colonial ideals.

During colonialism, European colonizers imposed their own ideas of masculinity on the colonized peoples, portraying them as inferior and in need of civilization. This often involved the portrayal of indigenous men as savage, uncivilized, and in need of being controlled or "tamed." In addition, colonial powers often explicitly linked masculinity to the ability to conquer and control land and people, which was used to justify their territorial expansion and subjugation of native peoples.

Colonialism also had a profound impact on the gender relations and the construction of masculinity within colonized societies. The cultural disruption brought about by colonialism often resulted in the erosion of traditional gender roles and the destabilization of indigenous masculinity. In some cases, colonial powers actively attempted to change the gender roles and expressions of colonized peoples, as a means of exerting control and domination.

Moreover, colonized men who adhered to European norms of masculinity and worked for colonial powers were able to gain privileges and power, while those who resisted were punished. This created a class of 'collaborators' who gain the upper hand against their own people. Thus, colonial masculinities were a complex and multifaceted aspect of colonialism that was used to justify and uphold systems of

power and oppression, while also shaping the ways in which masculinity was constructed and performed in both colonizing and colonized societies.

Kabesh asserts, “Psychoanalytic understandings insist that all human beings, whatever our diverse heritages, live under the shadow of the other” (Kabesh, 2013, p. 4). This statement is interpreted as always needing an ‘other’ to establish identity. The Western understanding of masculinity, imposed by the colonial powers to maintain power and domination, silence possible voices of resistance, and establish a lifestyle in line with Western norms, also reinforces its sense of superiority by feminizing the colonized culture. This feminization is a traumatic process for cultures such as Islamic societies that have patriarchy at their core and place men above other gender roles.

Eastern identities that developed under Western hegemony have been built with the understanding of the superiority of Western power and civilization throughout history. “A prominent viewpoint divides the world into the superior West and the inferior Rest” (Kabesh, p. 6). The predominantly male-dominated understanding of these Eastern cultures has evolved under the shadow of Western masculinity. Although they have developed on a patriarchal level, just like the Western culture, the fact that they have been suppressed globally has caused them to be heavily affected by masculinity crises. The Islamic culture, which is intensely lived in the Middle East, is not an exception in this regard.

When the Arab societies, which are the starting point of Islamic culture, are considered, it can be easily seen how dominant a patriarchal and normative culture is. In Arab cultures, traditional masculinity is often associated with honour, courage, and strength. Men are expected to be providers and protectors for their families, and to defend their communities and nations. This idea of masculinity is deeply rooted in Arab culture and is often reinforced by social norms, religion, and family expectations. The Arab understanding of Islam marginalizes women and other gender roles in society and adopts men as society's sole sovereign and rightful power. “Arab men have traditionally been socialized into an ideal of hierarchical gender order where men are superior and normative, and women are inferior and othered” (Bosch-Vilarrubias, 2016, p.48). This understanding of gender roles is not just for Muslim Arabs. Non-Muslim Arabs have also adopted male-dominated gender roles. Although the Arab social order that exalts men seems to be beneficial for the men in the society, it fuels the masculinity crises of Arab men. Arab men, who are providers and hold power in the community, feel on their shoulders the burden of maintaining this power and their patriarchal position by constantly repeating masculinity, as well as the advantages of power. The only way to retain control and maintain the existing patriarchal social structure depends on the male's ability to maintain his role as a provider. It may be easy to maintain patriarchal Arab masculinity away from global or Western hegemony “but while it is usually men who gain more than women from migration, it is also men who are more likely to need welfare support, and men who are exposed to greater intolerance, violence and discrimination, in the host country” (Donaldson, et al., 2009, p.210). When immigration is involved, the whole order changes, and it becomes more and more challenging to maintain the Arab man's role as the sole power, both financially and socially.

The Arab man, whose power is questioned in the shadow of Western hegemonic masculinity, progresses to an inevitable crisis of masculinity. “Migration movements from the global South to the global North posed new challenges to men, in their individual lives, and to the gender order, as an institutional whole” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2014, p.268). The immigrant Arab masculinity, which is in an identity crisis between racism, Islamophobia and adaptation problems, is trying to maintain its dominant structure within the family, which it has lost in its new society. According to Marcia C. Inhorn (2012), “so many

Americans are, in fact, Islamophobic, carrying with them pernicious stereotypes about Middle Eastern men as particularly dangerous, loathsome, and fanatical” (p.300). Immigrant men, who are oppressed and lose their hegemonic privileges, try to adapt to Western masculinity in order to become a part of hegemonic masculinity again in their new homeland. It can be said that one of the best ways of adaptation and acceptance is mimicry because “in an attempt to escape subordination, mimicry plays a key role insofar as strong entanglements between different symbols are constructed in a way that generates new categories and also new forms of enacting masculinity” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, p.276).

It is indisputable that some adopt the strategy of feminizing subordinate culture, one of the crucial instruments of Western hegemonic masculinity, among immigrant Arab men trying to imitate Western masculinity and gain a place for themselves. Feminizing the religion of Islam, a prominent indicator of Arab culture, and developing a secular perspective and turning to science and technology, an essential product of Western hegemonic masculinity, is a preferred strategy for acceptance since “the colonial vision of European masculinity as the superior western identity can only be sustained through the feminization of indigenous values” (Prianti, p. 701). Exhibiting an Islamophobic attitude like some of the local people in the host culture, trying to move away from the Arab identity by despising the native culture, and displaying a Western and secular attitude, unlike some immigrant Arabs, are essential reflections of mimicry on the immigrant Arab masculinity. The effort to break away from the native culture and develop a Western understanding does not solve the problems; on the contrary, it triggers immigrant masculinity crises because mimicry is only an illusion. It is not enough to make immigrant men a part of Western hegemonic masculinity. Being aware of this, immigrant masculinity strives to make a difference and attract attention. This difference is “mainly constructed through the body and sexuality as a sort of weapon of true manhood” (Aboim & Vasconcelos, p.272). The effort to create exotic immigrant masculinity with Western views makes a hybrid type of masculinity. This hybridity often results in inextricable masculinity crises and will seriously affect the next generation of immigrant men.

On the contrary, the existence of immigrant men who defy Western hegemonic masculinity and adopt a toxic and marginalized masculinity model is too common to be underestimated. Migrant Arab men, wholly or partially closed off to adaptation, are reluctant to give up the hegemonic masculine role that the Global South has provided them and strive to maintain this power in their new homeland. Although completely ignoring the local society and culture by living in small communities where cultural belongings such as Islam come to the fore, partially makes it possible to maintain power within the established small and isolated community, it cannot wholly eliminate white masculinity, which is the dominant power of the society in which one lives. Therefore, it is a fact that immigrant masculinity crises are inevitable in both ways.

The different types of immigrant masculinity crises mentioned above are often reflected in contemporary immigrant literature. A remarkable work reflecting the identity and masculinity crises experienced by immigrant Arab men is Syrian-English author Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel; *The Road from Damascus*. The book, first published in 2008, begins with Sami Traifi, who is of Arab origin living in England and wants to go to Damascus to investigate his family roots. Sami, who lives in an unhappy marriage and cannot get rid of uncertainties in his academic career, has great admiration for his father, Mustafa, a successful and respected writer, but cannot build a career like him. He is about to face family secrets and the truth about his father when he sees his forgotten uncle in Damascus again in a dark room after several years.

The novel tells the story of a Syrian dissident who returns to Damascus after living abroad and becomes caught up in the political turmoil of the Syrian civil war. The book explores themes of revolution, betrayal, and identity, and offers a glimpse into the complex political landscape of Syria before and during the civil war. It is a story of how the world of a young intellectual, one of a new generation of Syrian writers and journalists, is turned upside down by the revolution of 2011 and its aftermath.

From the very beginning of the novel, Sami's admiration for his father Mustafa is often emphasized. Professor Mustafa Traifi, the author of *The Secular Arab Consciousness*, comes across as a severe Islamophobe despite his Muslim family root. Mustafa, who targets everything that science and technology cannot explain and harbours an obsessive hostility towards them, raises his son Sami in this perspective. Sami's mother, Nur, is a conservative Muslim. Mustafa is seriously disturbed by this and is very afraid that Sami will grow with an Islamic understanding. He wants to raise Sami from a Western secular point of view, and accordingly, he describes Islam as mythology and sees it as stories that helpless women need to believe.

Show me a jinn. Measure me a jinn. Weigh one. Can you? We want logic in this house. Two plus two equals four. It can never equal five. That's how we talk here.' Then he would quote Qabbani's 'Stupid Woman'. (Yassin-Kassab, 2008, p. 42)

Mustafa's strategy to feminize Islam is not simply out of islamophobic anxiety, of course. The effort to become a part of Western masculinity through science and logic necessitates suppressing Mustafa's subordinate masculinity. Proving that he is a 'real man' and can defend his endangered masculinity as an immigrant is through feminizing Islam, an important symbol of his immigrant identity.

Poor immigrant men are not powerful if we define power in materialistic terms, but their global subordination does not inhibit them from aspiring to power, which they try to demonstrate and enact, particularly in relation to women but also to other men, through complex strategies (violence, for instance) and discourses. (Aboim & Vasconcelos, p.269)

For Mustafa, feminizing Islam means emphasizing its illogicality by approaching it as superstition and assigning a female-specific feature, unlike Western masculinity, which is representative of science because, like all masculinities, immigrant masculinities are "socially constructed, produced, and reproduced" (Connell, Hearn, and Kimmel, 2005, p. 3). To be meaningful, they must be embodied with their opposite. Feminizing Islam is vital in this respect because feminizing a religion that symbolizes immigrant identity and places it in the opposite category gives a chance to create a masculine identity.

Mustafa is so obsessed with masculine power as an immigrant that he sees every perspective of life as a means to achieve power. He says that Islam will not help in this regard, so Arabs do not need religion to be strong like the West. At the same time, "he saw the Islamic period as a falling off from previous glory" (p.40). This is how he grounds his Islamophobic thoughts. The crisis of masculinity he tries to suppress reveals itself in his comments about religion throughout the novel. He insists that the way to have masculine power and domination is to contribute to material culture, that is, to Western philosophy. Religion is the biggest obstacle to power for Arabs.

All this false consciousness. All this focus on the unseen. All this superstition and bloody otherworldly stuff. It's out of character for us. We should be a people of worldly power. We should be contributing to material culture, as we did before. (p. 40)

Mustafa tries to find a place in hegemonic masculinity as an immigrant. He builds an Arab nationalist and secular identity and claims that Arabs were more civilized than Ancient Greeks, the root of Western

culture. In this way, he tries to overcome his subordinate masculinity. He expresses that “any Arab could feel pride simply by observing the stars. It was Arabs before Greeks who had navigated by their light” (p. 39).

Although Mustafa sees himself as secular, he reflects the Arab patriarchal structure. He does not respect his wife Nur's views on religion and lifestyle and does not even allow Nur to practice Islamic rituals in the family and in the presence of her son, Sami. Like a strict dictator, he wants to keep all house control and impose his ideas on others. He tries to raise Sami with his thoughts as if he were only his son and make him an individual like himself, pushing Nur entirely out of this process. As stated before, “patriarchal gender relations are not only linked to a specific interpretation of religion but could be applied to non-Muslim Arabs as well” (Bosch-Vilarrubias, p.48). When Mustafa's patriarchal approach is assessed in this context, it is not surprising and makes deep masculinity crises even more visible.

When his mother had visitors and dared to roll out her prayer mat with them. Mustafa slammed doors and played Egyptian dance music as loud as the stereo would allow, screamed ‘For God’s Sake!’ – in English, so that it wasn’t an invocation of the supernatural but an entirely realist expression of bad humour. Sami, swirling in a vertigo of shame and self-loathing, observed his mother from the height of his disdain. The worst of it was, he felt an urge to jump. (p.43)

Mustafa's subordinate masculinity and Arab patriarchal approach cause him to clash with Nur about religion, but the most crucial point here is Sami's position on this issue. Sami is caught in the middle of the Muslim Arab identity his mother maintains and the modern and science-based worldview required by the Western hegemonic masculinity that his father tries to be a part of. His mother desperately tries to teach Sami about Islam, but Mustafa is very strict. As expected, “women and younger males are socialized into patriarchy within a power structure that establishes them as inferior to the patriarch, thus perpetuating the patriarchal structure” (Bosch-Vilarrubias, p.49). Sami chooses his father as a role model and grows up with his ideals. Mustafa raises Sami as an Islamophobe like himself, and he wants to be an academic like his father and contribute to the secular Arab culture. In this way, he dreams of generating ideas and having power based on science. “Mustafa Traifi who’d shown his son the stars, taught him his history, protected him from womanly superstition, planned for him a career” (p. 14). Sami appears in the novel as an immigrant male who inherits his father's masculinity crises and identity problems.

After his father's death, Sami cuts off all ties with his mother “because she hadn’t talked to his father, even when he was dying, and because she’d betrayed his father’s secularism by wearing a hijab” (p. 13). In this way, he hopes to break free from his immigrant identity and become a part of white hegemonic masculinity, just like his father. Developing a secular and exotic Arab identity, Sami plays the role of an immigrant male adapted to the West.

Sami had grown up on the simple, revolutionary language of Nizar Qabbani, language which smashed both literary and social conventions. This was particularly important. Its eroticism, secularism and defiance all contributed to the sexiness of Sami’s Arabism. And Mahmoud Darwish, national poet of Palestine, was a further source. Sami would gloweringly recite Darwish in Arabic to the bar girls. (p. 16)

In this image, he meets his wife, Muntaha. She is the daughter of an Iraqi Muslim immigrant family. Muntaha, who has a modern outlook, catches Sami's attention, and they get married, but over time, Muntaha's conservative views disturb Sami. The couple's marriage gradually begins to evoke the relationship of Mustafa and Nur, and Muntaha's decision to wear a hijab puts their relationship in serious trouble. The moment they go out together for the first time after Muntaha starts wearing a hijab

is an excellent opportunity to examine the patriarchal Arab understanding that Sami inherited from Mustafa and the migrant masculinity crisis he tries to hide.

Sami supposed they must look like a proper Muslim couple, what with the hijab, Muslims out on dark business, their trauma children and a string of austere relatives left behind in an unfurnished overcrowded room. Four or five children already, that's what it probably looked like. These two Muslims at large. Sami was thirty-one years old. He reflected on this. In his mind's eager eye he looked twenty, at a stretch twenty-two. Twenty-two next to Muntaha – Muntaha aged, in reality, twenty-eight, and in a hijab. Did he look younger than her, then? Unlikely. Her skin was unravaged, her eyes fresh, while his bore the marks of nicotine, alcohol, insomnia, oversleep. Un-Islamic capillary damage. He hoped that was apparent, the un-Islamic part. (p. 76)

The fact that Sami conveys these thoughts from an orientalist point of view does not want to be seen as an immigrant and hopes that his un-Islamic personality will be visible since Islam, which was feminized in his mind by his father, poses a threat to his masculinity. On the other hand, the loss of control in the family and the inability to impose the religious prohibitions in the family that his father had accomplished put the secular and patriarchal Arab identity, which he inherited from his father, at a dead end. Wikan (1984) suggests that “for a man's honour is dependent also upon the behaviour of his women—or rather, on the repute of his women in the public world of a number of acquaintances, and a host of strangers within which they move” (p. 642).

Muntaha's ideas that contradict Sami's views are essential points that deepen the masculinity crisis for Sami. As mentioned earlier, Sami, who cannot meet the requirements of the Arab patriarchal understanding in which it is crucial to be a provider as a man in the family, cannot also assume a dominant role intellectually, and Muntaha's ideas pose a threat to Sami. Sami, who could not progress in his academic career and could not get a job and earn money, attributes his inability to influence Muntaha to this situation. For example, in their arguments about wearing a hijab, Muntaha says, “Sami Traifi, you aren't a man. You're a contradiction” (p. 72). Muntaha, aware of the illusion of being a part of the Western hegemonic masculinity inherited from Sami's father, wants to break Sami's Mustafa idol in his head. Still, also, she is aware that she is perceived as a threat while doing this.

She knew she was a challenge for him. Just by being herself, a bit Iraqi, she unclothed him of his symbols, stripped the power from the idols which were visible in his flat – the signs of his Arabness, the kuffiyehs and the gellabiyas which he used to impress English people. Seeing him floundering a little, wondering how to talk to her, how to behave, was very flattering. He tried hard. (p.64)

The immigrant male models drawn in Yassin-Kassab's novel are not limited to Mustafa and Sami. Unlike Mustafa and Sami, who turned their backs on and feminized their core cultural values with the hope of becoming a part of Western hegemonic masculinity, immigrant Arab identities, who took a confrontation with Western domination and saw Islam as a means of radicalization, were also elaborated in the novel. The novel, which touches upon the psychological effects of the 1991 Gulf War on Arab immigrants, also includes characters representing the developing and changing Arab immigrant identities in this way. Muntaha's brother Ammar, who comes from an Iraqi immigrant family, is one of these characters. At the beginning of the novel, Ammar, who is trying to struggle with the reflections of the Gulf War in the West, as well as the depression of adolescence, is to develop an identity that is compatible with Western culture and tries to hide its Arab background, just like Sami. “The war had its effect on Ammar too. He went from a lisping Anglo-boy into dungeons and dragons and maths to some kind of counterfeit gangster. Started saying ‘yo’ instead of hello and ‘negative, motherfucker’ instead of no” (p. 65).



However, the end of this effort to keep up does not result in an Islamophobic masculinity crisis like Sami. Unlike Mustafa and Sami, Ammar develops a conservative Muslim identity later in life and creates a male role in the isolated immigrant community. It is easier for Ammar to cling to the masculine domination of Islam than to become a part of Western hegemonic masculinity hopelessly. In this context, Yassin-Kassab also includes details that reflect the patriarchal understanding of Islam. The part that explains how Muntaha and Ammar will share the inheritance after the death of their father, Marwan, also clarifies how Islamic masculine domination works.

Marwan had arranged everything according to the letter of Sunni inheritance law. That is, Hasna took an eighth of his wealth, and the rest was split two to one between Ammar and Muntaha. In the event of Muntaha divorcing, Ammar would become financially responsible for her. Sons inherit twice the share of daughters because sons must provide for their families, while a woman's money remains her own. Islam works when men are noble. (p. 154)

The effort to create independent domination under Western domination inevitably breeds conflict and hatred. On the one hand, Islam, which is feminized as the other, tries to preserve its patriarchal hegemony. On the other hand, Muslim immigrant masculinities also develop a toxic masculinity role at this point. This model, which is dominated by the language of hatred and violence, is remarkable in terms of serving radical Islam. As Rehman points out (2003), "Islam is increasingly viewed as a violent religion, endorsing suicide bombing and terrorism" (p. 218). The role of toxic Islamic masculinity among the reasons for this is an undeniable fact. Ammar is a clear representative of this toxic masculinity in the novel. The reactions of Marwan and Ammar after an argument between Sami and Ammar are essential in exemplifying this hate speech.

'Pimps,' spluttered Marwan. 'Sons of pimps and dogs and whores.' As Sami left the room he heard Ammar's attempt to soothe: 'The Jews, Baba, I know. Don't worry. Justice is coming. Don't worry yourself. God is greater than them'. (p. 80)

Western hegemonic masculinity unequivocally serves colonial needs. Western masculinity strives to embed an understanding of Western norms to dominate the colonized culture and silence possible dissenting voices. As discussed above, the shortest way to this is to marginalize and feminize local cultures. Islam, one of the most prominent symbols of the Global South, is no exception. Although Islam has a patriarchal system in itself, its feminization by Western masculinity causes severe masculinity crises in Islam, glorifying men. These Arab masculinity crises are experienced more visibly, especially in immigrant Arab men, because they strive to be a part of hegemonic masculinity to maintain their superior and provider characteristics in their new society.

Mustafa's experiences as an immigrant are characterized by feelings of isolation, alienation, and homesickness. He struggles to adapt to life in the UK and find a sense of belonging in his new home. He also deals with discrimination and racism, and has to confront the stereotypes and prejudices that people have about Arab men.

The novel also explores the theme of masculinity and how it is affected by Mustafa's experiences as an immigrant. His sense of masculinity is deeply rooted in his Arab culture and tradition, where men are expected to be strong and protectors for their families. As an immigrant, he struggles with the feeling that he has failed to live up to these expectations, as he is not able to provide for his family in the way he would like to.

Mustafa's experiences of displacement and dislocation also affect his sense of identity. He is caught between two cultures, unable to fully embrace either one. This leads to a sense of confusion and uncertainty about who he is and where he belongs.

Overall, the novel offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of the experiences of immigrant Arab men, highlighting the ways in which their lives are shaped by issues of identity, masculinity, and belonging. The characters Mustafa and Sami created in the novel successfully exemplify the situations mentioned above. Feminizing Islam through mimicry and displaying an Islamophobic attitude, Mustafa acts with the hope of being a part of hegemonic masculinity and the power it brings. Whether Mustafa has achieved his goal becomes secondary as his son Sami inherits his father's masculinity crises and identity confusion. But Sami's unsustainable mimicry effort and his changing attitude towards Islam towards the novel's end answer the question. One of the critical points here is the effect of the Arab masculinity crises and the feminization of Islam mentioned in the novel on strengthening radical Islam and fuelling the Oriental-Occidental conflict. When evaluated in this context, the works of Eastern-origin authors such as Yassin-Kassab that emphasize immigrant masculinity crises are precious in addressing the source of disputes stemming from gender roles in Western society and making the problems more visible. In addition, critical masculinity studies, which are essential in providing a different perspective on Islamophobia and immigrant hatred, which are increasingly felt in Western societies, stand out as a discipline worth studying in the future as it offers alternative explanations for immigrant identity crises.

### References

- Aboim, S. & Vasconcelos, P. (2014). Displacement and Subalternity: Masculinities, Racialisation and the Feminisation of the Other. *All Equally Real: Femininities and Masculinities Today*, pp. 267–277., [https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848883178\\_026](https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848883178_026).
- Bosch-Vilarrubias, M. (2016). *Post-9/11 Representations of Arab Men by Arab American Women Writers: Affirmation and Resistance*. Peter Lang.
- Connell, R. W., Hearn, J., & Kimmel, M. S. (2005). *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Donaldson, M, et al. (2009). Men, Migration and Hegemonic Masculinity. *Migrant Men Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience*, Routledge, New York, pp. 210–217.
- Inhorn, M. C. (2012). *The new Arab man: Emergent masculinities, technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kabesh, A.T. (2013). *Postcolonial Masculinities: Emotions, Histories and Ethics* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315601632>
- Nyawalo, M. & Asante, M. K. (2011). Postcolonial Masculinity And Commodity Culture In Kenya. In R. L. Jackson & M. Balaji (Eds.), *Global Masculinities And Manhood* (Pp. 124–140). University Of Illinois Press.
- Prianti, D.D. (2019). The Identity Politics of Masculinity as a Colonial Legacy, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 40:6, 700-719, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2019.1675612>
- Rehman, J. (2003). Islamophobia after 9/11: International Terrorism, Sharia and Muslim Minorities in Europe – The Case of the United Kingdom, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online*, 3(1), 217-235. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/221161104X00129>
- Wikan, U. (1984). Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair.
- Yassin-Kassab, R. (2008). *The Road from Damascus*. Hamish Hamilton.