The Achievers Journal
Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture

P- ISSN:2454-2296, E-ISSN: 2395-0897, Vol 10, Number 1, 2024 pages 1-18

# Arab Women's Echoes in the Metropolitan Language: A Harmonious Symphony or a Dissonant Dialogue?

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**Article Information**

**Article History:**

**Received:** 17-02- 2024

**Accepted:** 15-04-2024

**Published:** 20-04-2024



## Abstract

*Writing in the language of the former colonizer has greatly sparked critical discourse among postcolonial critics and nationalist ideologues because language has been essential to the postcolonial resistance movement and the foundation of colonialism itself. While some advocate for the imperative rejection of the imperial language as a means of "decolonizing the mind," others argue that by appropriating and reshaping the dominant language, postcolonial writers can challenge Western hegemony over discourse and retrieve the suppressed voices of the formerly colonized. In light of these controversies, the present paper aims to investigate the adoption of the English language as a medium of discourse in contemporary postcolonial literature produced in the liminal sites of diaspora. With a special focus on Arab women's appropriation and abrogation of the English language in their postcolonial fiction, this study seeks to negotiate the linguistic, cultural, and political ramifications of writing in imperial languages. Rather than simply limiting the discussion to the residual ideologies of colonialism and anti-colonialism, this study maintains that Arab women's writing in English serves as a "double critique", critiquing both colonial hegemony that has demonized them and Arab neo-patriarchy that has censored their voices and erased their individual identities.*

**Keywords: language; identity; orientalism; postcolonialism; gender; resistance**

**The Achievers Journal: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture (2024), 10(1), 1-18**



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## Introduction

Arab Women's writing in English has long been a topic of debate and controversy in postcolonial and cultural studies more particularly. One key question that arises in this discussion is whether women's writing in English is complicit with the problematic aspects of Orientalism, or if it serves as a form of resistance against erasure and oppression. On one hand, some argue that postcolonial women's writing in English, particularly from the Arab world, has often perpetuated Orientalist narratives about the Orient and reinforced the power dynamics of colonialism. This is because the language of English is historically associated with the language of the colonizer, and the literary tradition of English is dominated by the perspectives and experiences of the Western world. On the other hand, others argue that women's writing in English can also serve as a form of resistance against erasure and oppression. By employing the language of the colonizer, these women are reclaiming control of their narrative and asserting their own unique voices and perspectives. Through their writing, they challenge the dominant Orientalist narratives and create space for alternative representations of their individual experiences and cultures. In this way, women's writing in English can be seen as a form of resistance against the erasure of their individual experiences and identities. This debate raises important questions about the role of language and literature in shaping cultural narratives and power dynamics. The question of whether women's writing in English is complicit with Orientalism or if it serves as a form of resistance remains a complex and ongoing one, and requires careful consideration of the intersections of gender, language, and cultural representation.

One notable critic who has strongly spoken out against the use of the colonizer's language is Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. He argues that the use of the colonizer's language reinforces the power dynamics established during colonial rule, and serves to marginalize indigenous languages and cultures. In his book "Decolonising the Mind," Ngugi argues that colonized peoples should reject the languages of their oppressors and write in their own indigenous languages in order to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their independence. He posits that "we as African writers ….by our continuing to write in foreign languages, paying homage to them, are we not on the cultural level continuing that neo-colonial slavish and cringing spirit? What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the

writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?" (Ngugi 26). For him, "African literature can only be written in African languages" (Ngugi 27). However, Chinua Achebe, a prominent Nigerian writer and novelist, has a nuanced perspective on writing in English. While he recognizes the legacy of colonialism and its negative effects on African culture, he also regards writing in English as a tool for African writers to reclaim their own narratives and challenge the dominant European narratives about Africa. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language," Achebe (1991) assumes that writing in English is not a betrayal of African culture but rather an opportunity to subvert and challenge the dominant narratives about Africa. He believes that African writers should take control of the language and use it to express their own unique perspectives. He explains that this would give African literature a distinct voice and help to counteract the negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa that have been prevalent in the Western world. That is, despite English being stigmatized as the language of oppression, English can be also be used as a form of dissonance to challenge this very oppression by transforming it into a dynamic site of resistance against the hegemony of linguistic and cultural imperialism. When adapted to the author's creative needs, English becomes a tool for transmitting alternative cultures and diverse voices, serving as a vital language for counter-discourse and disrupting the dominance of metropolitan discourse conducted in Standard English. As Ashcroft puts it:

> If a language seems to represent 'us' because it is 'ours', what of a colonial language? It is not exactly "ours" but it is not exclusively 'theirs' either: it is 'ours' because we make it ours, and when we do so we choose to identify ourselves in a particular contested, a particular ambivalent space. It is then no longer fully 'theirs' because making it 'ours' we change its form. Quite simply, the post-colonial use of English problematizes all those questions of identity that linger around our possession of a mother tongue. (Ashcroft 96)

In the context of postcolonial immigrant literature, Waïl Hassan explores the literature produced by Arab writers in the English language and highlights their unique positions as cultural translators. He argues that these writers, as members of the Arab-Anglophone diaspora, have the ability

to connect with both their home culture and the culture of the country they have migrated to, thus embodying a hybrid identity that straddles the Orient and the Occident, English and Arabic. He writes:

> By writing in English, Arab immigrant writers have found themselves placed in that position, often expected to interpret their culture for their readers. However, they do not stand outside the 'Orient,' like the European or American Orientalist, since they are of the 'Orient' by virtue of their background; but they are also of the 'Occident' by reason of immigration and acculturation. Therefore, their position represents merger of the two classic stances of the native informant and the foreign expert. Many Arab immigrant writers have seen this position as a privileged one insofar as it affords them a unique insider's perspective not only on the Arab world, but also on their adoptive country. (28-29)

To what extent then do Arab women writers in English comply with or resist the portrayal of orientalist stereotypes in their Anglophone literature? How do Arab women writers use their writing as a form of resistance against cultural erasure and invisibility? How do Arab women writers in English negotiate the complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, and political identities in their works?

## 1. Leila Abouela's *The Translator*

> A common way of challenging the total dominance of a metropolitan code, however, is for the writer to carry over his or her native language and embody [it] within the text written in the metropolitan language. The western reader is thereby forced to decode [the] situational if not [the] denotative meanings. In this way, the reader has to work at decoding cultural difference, and multicultural readings are made possible. (Nash 8).

Aboulela's debut novel, *The Translator* (1999), is set in both Khartoum (Sudan), and Aberdeen (Scotland). The story draws from the author's personal experience of navigating the two worlds of North and South, East and West, Arabic and English. The novel explores themes of cross-cultural mobility, faith, gender, and

cultural translation. At its core, *The Translator* tells the story of two main characters: Sammar, a young Sudanese widow who works as a translator of Arabic and Islamic texts for Rae Isles, a Scottish professor and scholar of Middle Eastern history and politics at a university in Aberdeen. The novel highlights the cultural and linguistic differences between Sammar's Sudanese background and her experiences in Scotland. Aboulela's use of English not only reflects the reality of the globalized world in which individuals from different cultures and backgrounds must navigate, but also speaks to the power dynamics inherent in the use of a language associated with colonialism and Western imperialism. In *The Translator*, Aboulela shows how the mastery of a dominant language can serve as a source of empowerment and agency for individuals from marginalized and ex-colonized territories, but also reveals the complexities and challenges that come with it. The novel engages with the politics of language use and highlights the nuances and significance of communicating and bridging cultural differences between East and West, Christianity and Islam. Overall, Aboulela's novel provides a nuanced exploration of the intersections of language, culture, and identity and the ways in which the use of English as a medium of discourse can both challenge and disrupt power dynamics in postcolonial contexts.

Indeed, Aboulela (2002) utilizes the English language as a tool of resistance against both colonial and ultra-nationalist ideologies. She eloquently states that "write in a western language, publish in the west and you are constantly translating, back and forth – this is like this here but not there. A thing has a high value here, a certain weight, move it to another place and it becomes nothing" (Aboulela 201). As a postcolonial migrant writer, she uses the language of the colonizer to create a space for her own literary voice, in the "in-between space" of diaspora. This strategic use of linguistic hybridity allows her to actively contest the systems that deny her agency and identity as a postcolonial Sudanese woman. In the course of the novel, these 'here' and 'there' can significantly be described in linguistic terms as English and Arabic, the two languages between which Sammar moves. This linguistic hybridity is a source of creative power, which enables the author and her heroine, Sammar, to enter the discourse of power and disturb the hegemonic foundations upon which the linguistic hegemony of imperialism dwells. Bill Ashcroft (2001) writes in this regard "that the colonized can enter into dialogue only when they acquire the

cultural capital of imperial culture to make themselves heard" (Ashcroft 107).

Thus, the choice of language in this context is a political act that determines not only the linguistic form of a text, but also its disruptive dimension to the homogenizing powers of the mainstream culture. With this intention in mind, the author of *The Translator* subverts and reinvents the language of her former colonizer, English, by incorporating native mythos, unique vocabulary, and vivid idiomatic expressions that challenge its linguistic dominance. This is evident through the frequent shifts from English to Arabic, including references to religious texts such as the Quran and authentic 'hadiths', quotes from Arabic poets like Abu Nawas and Tayeb Salih, and colloquial Arabic expressions like common sayings and proverbs. This writing strategy permeates the entire novel. At times, the author and protagonist distance themselves from English by inverting, destroying, and creating new structures that disrupt imperial linguistic norms. However, at other moments, Aboulela's text Arabizes and hybridizes the imperial language in her own creative style.

> When I was in Cairo,' he said, I was often asked, are you English, Inglizi? And I would say, No. Amirikani? No...
>
> 'Scotlandi,' she said.
>
> "You should say, Ana Scotlandi mish Irlandi'
>
> "Tell me before I forget, 'he said, "what does shirk al-asbab mean?" (Aboulela 86)

The spelling of "Amirikani" and "Inglizi" exemplifies the process of hybridization that the English language undergoes in this novel, thereby challenging conventional norms of proper" English.

Besides, code switching, which is not often a neutral act in postcolonial literature, is another technique that is frequently encountered in the disruptive textual and linguistic universe of Aboulela's *The Translator*. This is manifested in the incorporation of the lexical items from the Arabic language into English. Their effect is to twist and distort English with words from the author's indigenous language and culture. The novel shows various uses of code switching ranging from linguistic to cultural and symbolic ones. These include, for instance, terms referring to clothing (jellaba 24), practices of eating (iftar), culinary (falafel 66), 'hallal meat' (66), and religious terminology 'Eid' (65), 'Masha' Allah', (91), Azan (142), 'Wudu' (143),

'Alahakbar', (143), 'tasbeeh' (37). Put in other words, the vehement presence of Islamic lexical terms reveals the author's endeavour to give space to her denied knowledge and culture into the dominant discursive space of the colonizer, thus undoes the inherent power structures of his discourse. This chimes with Chen Kuan-Hsing's view (2004) when he writes that "although the colonizer looks down [on the colonized], the latter can still use the language of the colonizer language to insert denied knowledge and tradition into the dominant discursive space, and in turn the colonizer's unfamiliarity with the whole set of cultural codes puts the colonizer in crisis, and hence undoes his authority" (qtd in Kuwayama 44).

Interestingly, Aboulela's deterritorialization of the English language, her injection of non-English terms and atmospheres and the way she formulates these in unfamiliar ways endows her literary English with distinctiveness. Such a writing strategy creates a sense of alterity and foreignness in the text which is further emphasized in the novel by, for instance, incorporating verses from the Quran: "'Say: I take refuge in the Lord of daybreak. . .', 'Say: I take refuge in the Lord of humans" (Aboulela 102). In addition to locating the narrative in the context of the Islamic religious arena, foreign words are found elsewhere in the novel where the intersection between Arabic and English urge the Western reader to recognize ethnic and cultural differences and seek meaning in plural terms, outside the hegemony of English discursive practices. In writing so, the author engages the Western unilingual reader in an interactive process of meaning-making between Arabic and English.

As such, Aboulela's work transcends the linguistic boundaries of Western discourse by blurring its linguistic lines, creating a space for a hybridized English that reflects the minoritarian consciousness of ex-colonized gendered. Instead of merging indigenous and Western discourse into a homogenous hybrid, she uses the language of the colonizer to integrate traditional Islamic words, customs, and practices, thereby asserting her own Islamic cultural identity. Through this writing approach, the author transforms the language of the colonizer and challenges its implicit power structures, thus creating a hybridized form of English that resists the linguistic power structures of English while allowing space for marginalized voices and cultures to be expressed.

It should be noted that the author and her fictional character embrace a hybrid linguistic identity, but reject assimilation

of their language into dominant English. They frequently intersperse Arabic words and phrases with English to showcase the importance of their native Arabic language as a defining aspect of their identity. In associating Arabic language with her home, Sammar says "Yesterday when I spoke Arabic to Fareed, I felt that home was close" (Aboulela 106). The author also infers Arabic cultural referents, such as "habbahan" and "Kerkedeh", which have no literal English equivalents, to create a sense of untranslatable foreignness in the mind of the European reader. This challenges the Western reader through defamiliarisation, emphasizing cultural differences and resisting the Orientalist view that other cultures are primitive and easily translatable. However, the author seeks to make her Arab and Muslim culture more accessible by accompanying Arabic cultural references with literal translations or explanations in English. For instance, Sammar explains that "shirk al-asbab" means "the polytheism of intermediaries" (Aboulela 86) and provides explanations for core markers of her Islamic identity, such as the term "shahadah": "it is just few words, I bear witness there is no god but Allah and Muhammed is the messenger of Allah" (Aboulela 92). Hence, by "Islamizing" English, this approach not only removes the perceived foreignness and otherness of Islam but also enhances the accessibility and familiarity of its teachings to readers who may not have prior knowledge of the religion.

### 2. Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*

The novel *My Name is Salma* by Fadia Faqir, also known as "The Cry of the Dove" in the United States, follows the story of Salma, a teenage Bedouin shepherdess who leaves her restrictive village in the Levant for England in search of self-awareness and self-assertion. After having a love affair and becoming pregnant, Salma must flee from her brother who intends to kill her to restore the family's honor. With the help of two Christian missionary nuns, she is smuggled to England where she transforms from a traditional woman to a modern one with agency and voice. Throughout the novel, the recurring theme of movement highlights the importance of mobility as a means of resistance, transformation, and personal growth for the marginalized protagonist. The novel portrays how Salma navigates identity, gender, and agency within a patriarchal and racial world, where mobility and relocation offer not complete freedom, but freedoms denied under her native patriarchal structures.

Faqir, a Palestinian-Jordanian writer, has chosen English as her medium of expression to resist both Arab patriarchal

censorship and western Orientalism. Her decision to write in English enables her to subvert the power dynamics of language and offer a platform to express her experiences and perspectives as a marginalized woman in the Arab world. Writing in a language that is not her native tongue affords a level of anonymity and protection from censorship and oppression by the patriarchal Arab society, which often seeks to control women's speech and representation. Furthermore, writing in English allows the author to resist western orientalism by challenging the stereotypical representation of Arab and Muslim women perpetuated by the western hegemonic discourse. Through her writing, the author reclaims her own narrative and presents a nuanced and complex picture of Arab women and their experiences, subverting the western preconceived notions and stereotypes about Arab women and their agencies.

In her essay "Lost in Translation", Faqir (2004) talks about the patriarchal constraints of publishing in the Arab world. She states that "the difficulty of publishing in their own countries and the problems of translation are driving more Arab writers living in the West to adopt the language of the Other'" (Faqir 166). As a result, works that do not align with the ideological framework of censors are often subjected to "ban, burn or confiscate publications if they consider they violate political, moral and/or religious sensitivities" (166). Abdo (2009) argues that writing in English "is itself an act of rebellion against and resistance to the burden of national, cultural, and religious 'authenticity' and loyalty expected of her by her own culture" (Abdo 240). He sees in Faqir's strategy of writing in English a "double agency" (Abdo 240) for he writes that there are multiple reasons why Faqir opts for English rather than Arabic. He quotes Faqir saying that, "Arabic language is misogynist and whenever the gender is not clear the masculine overpowers the feminine‖ and that dominant written Arabic was found to be inadequate to present sexual, religious, and social experiences" (Abdo 240).

Yet, adopting the English language is not necessarily an act of self-betrayal, but it could be a means to raise voices of those doomed "Other", "speechless" and "invisible" in the hegemonic discourses of both western Orientalism and Oriental patriarchy. Nash (2007) notes that Faqir's adoption of English is not a matter of perpetuating Orientalism, but it is done "for tactical reasons, intentionally 'foreignising' it to challenge her readership, rather than recycling Orientalist tropes to titillate them" (Nash 114). Faqir's

postcolonial use of the imperial language is much revealed when she declares that "we master English language and we write back in English; in other words, […] we carve a space for ourselves within it" (Moore 10). Though she adopts English as her linguistic medium, Faqir does not fully discard the Arabic fabric of her own identity. She declares that "my mind speaks English but my heart speaks Arabic" (Bower n.p).

In contrast to the character of Samar in Aboulela's *The Translator*, Salma in Faqir's *My Name is Salma* takes a different approach in her quest for a new sense of self and agency in exile. Salma, a Bedouin shepherd from the village of Hima in the Levant, becomes a refugee after leaving her village due to an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. She therefore takes her fate in her hands and decides to embark on multiple journeys across borders and cultures, from Jordan to Lebanon to England. In England, Salma undergoes multiple transformations as she strives for visibility and integration in an alien space of diaspora. At first, Salma acknowledges the necessity of learning a new language, recognizing that mastering the language of her host country will alleviate her feelings of alienation and marginalization.

Thus, in her pursuit of a superficial "belonging" that she believes is crucial for her integration into mainstream culture, Salma must conceal her foreignness and adopt a new identity and submerge herself in it. She therefore enrolls in an English literary course at the university in order to master the English language and learn how to behave like and English woman to become Sally, her English self. As a result, Salma's hybrid narrative appears to be a product of negotiation, adaptation, and survival, rather than simply a form of Western cultural assimilation. In other words, Salma's process of assimilation and hybridization is deliberate and purposeful. By adapting to the melting pot model of England, Salma emerges as a survivor in diaspora.

Yet, while Salma's journey to redefine her identity may involve processes of hybridization and assimilation, the revival of her indigenous identity with each transformation in time, place, and circumstance is also a hallmark of her resistance strategies in diaspora. Her negotiation and rejection of Western culture in favor of her indigenous identity and Muslim sensibility is demonstrated at numerous points throughout the novel. While, for instance, Miss Asher insists on her to try some wine since it is good wine, Salma rejects the offer saying: "it forbidden in Islam. You lose control and make all kinds of sins" (Faqir 188); and

when Miss Asher insists that there is no association between alcohol and committing sins, Salma refuses saying in her broken English: "I different. I Muslim" (Faqir 188). In a moment that reflects her nostalgia for her Arabic language and identity, Salma "walked to the high street as if drawn by a steel rod to the kebab van parked by the tower. I sat on the bench inhaling the smell of falafel rissoles bubbling away in the hot frying oil and listening to North African Arabic" (Faqir 215). In her early stage when she morphs to English Sal, she says, "I didn't like being called `Sal', which sounded like a man's name in my native language" (Faqir 82). This illustrates that while she endeavors to redefine her identity in diaspora, her mother tongue maintains a notable position in her psyche and often manifests in diverse forms, contexts, and circumstances throughout her life.

Code-switching, particularly lexical borrowing and transferring from Arabic, is a method the novel adopts to dramatize Salma negotiating between two identities, never fully abandoning her mother tongue by incorporating Arabic within the English language. Despite being written in English, the narrative's roots are firmly rooted in Arabic language and identity. About this very point, Faqir comments that:

> One of the things I wanted to do …… was to push the narrative andthe English as far as possible, to Arabize it … to create something similar to what Indian authors have achieved –a hybrid English. Therefore I used the oral tradition and the Qur'an and the Arabian Nights in the storyteller's section as an injection of Arab sensibility. (qted in Moore 7)

Illustrations of this can be found all over the novel. Words like: "Sheikh" (58), "imam" (44), "minaret" (44), "jinni" (266), "gazelle" (31), "rebab" (127), "salaams" (223), "kohl" (242), "madraqa" (14), "kufiyya" (31), "abaya" (106), "falafel" (34), "kebab" (34), "zakat" (197). All of these are utilized to convey the central aspect of the protagonist's connection to her Arab indigenous identity.

### 3. **Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love***

Ahdaf Soueif is a renowned Egyptian-British author and cultural commentator, who was born in Cairo in 1950 to academic parents. Her father, Mustafa Soueif, was a professor of psychology, and her mother, Fatma Mosa, was the first woman lecturer in the English department at Cairo University. Soueif was educated in both Egypt and England, where she

earned a doctorate in linguistics. Currently, she straddles between London and Cairo. Soueif's mother had a deep appreciation for English literature. She believed that true enjoyment of English literature is only possible when one is free from the influence of colonialism and can engage with the culture on equal footing. This perspective has influenced Soueif's own approach to writing and her decision to write in English. Commenting on her career as a writer in English, Soueif states that:

> I start to engage with what's being written about in English, about my part of the world … because of that early education with my mother, I was bilingual and I went into English literature and I ended up living in England and marrying an English writer and poet. And so this position of, in a way belonging to both, but also seeing how each culture regarded the other one and how it related to it and how it dealt with it and how it represented it to itself became a really critical part of my life. (Conversation with Ahdaf Soueif, n.p)

Because of her bilingualism, critics have described Soueif as a "hybrid author," an Arab-Muslim woman whose work is often situated within the paradigms of "contemporary Arab and Muslim literatures produced in English" (Malak 127) and deals with motifs such as representation, migration/exile, and colonial/neo-colonial/postcolonial transitions. Although her English writing primarily targets Western readers, Soueif is aware of the orientalist discourse that influences the translation of Arabic culture into Western languages. Her work, therefore, reflects her aim to challenge and disrupt the dominant narratives of Orientalism.

Hence, Soueif utilizes English as a primary tool for literary expression to bridge the divide between Arab and Western cultures through offering a genuine and accurate representation of Arab women and their culture. By embracing English as her medium of expression, Soueif also takes a stand against colonial power structures and asserts her agency by writing back to the empire, thus reclaiming an identity that has been distorted in the discourse of Orientalism. As Pratt (1992) puts it, Soueif's use of English, the same language used by travel writers to represent the East, allows for the examination of the relationship between colonizers and colonized in terms of "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 7).

Besides, Souief's use of non-English terms and Arab cultural elements in her writing, as Ghazoul (2008) notes, gives her literary English a unique quality and surprises readers with her ability to mold the English language to suit her purposes.

Soueif's *The Map of Love*, first published in 1999, the novel under study, is a multi-generational story that explores the intersections of love, history, and identity through the eyes of two women, one Egyptian and one American. The novel opens in 1999, as the American-born Isabel Parkman visits Egypt for the first time in search of her family's roots. She discovers a collection of letters and diaries written by her great-grandmother, Anna Winterbourne, who lived in Egypt during the early 20th century. Through these letters and diaries, Isabel learns about Anna's experiences and her love affair with an Egyptian nationalist, Sharif Pasha. The novel explores the use of the English language as a means of expression and communication between Eastern and Western cultures. Although it is written in English, the novel incorporates elements of Arabic language and culture to create a rich tapestry of identity, history, and place. The two central characters, Isabel and Amal, represent different generations and cultural backgrounds, and their use of English reflects their experiences and perspectives. Isabel, a British woman, uses English to navigate the cultural and political landscape of turn-of-the-century Egypt, while Amal, an Egyptian-American, uses it to bridge the gap between her dual cultural identities. Through their stories, the novel examines the complexities of language as a tool of cross-cultural communication, expression, and cultural identity.

Indeed, language and translation play a significant role in the story. Massad (1999) notes in a review of Soueif's novels that she performs "fascinating experiments with translation" (Massad 75) by transforming English into Arabic and Arabic into English in unique ways, such as "rendering Arabic phrases into English without any syntactic compromise" (Massad 75) and using etymology to explain Arabic words. According to Soueif herself, her purpose in writing the novel is to "bring to life some of the intricacies of the Arabic language" in English, thus offering an opportunity for others to understand and experience another culture. "In *The Map of Love*," she says, "there is a constant attempt to render Arabic into English, not just to translate phrases, but to render something of the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English. So, there is this question of how to open a window into another culture" (Massad 85).

Interestingly, Soueif's writing style is intentional and aims to challenge the linguistic certainty of English speakers. She explains that:

> because of the specific, peculiar nature of my work in that I'm me and I'm writing in English and a lot of the time I'm writing about an Arab or Egyptian experience and writing through Arab or Egyptian characters—that necessarily involves a sort of translation in the creation of the work. (Guardi 47)

This approach to translation transcends the conventional method and entails utilizing language in a distinctive manner to create an effect in the reader. In other words, the use of "foreignizing" translation in the novel serves multiple purposes: it highlights the theme of translation and the complexities of cultural and linguistic mediation, offers insights into the Arabic language, and maintains these elements consistently throughout the text. Examples of this include proverbs, turns of phrase, dialogue, and Arabic words and phrases, as well as scenes depicting translation and language learning. This is evident in the following scene where the protagonist, Amal, assists a friend who is studying Arabic:

> Everything stems from a root. And the root is mostly made up of three consonants? or two. And then the word takes different forms_ Take the root q-l-b, qalb-Qalb: the heart, the heart that beats, the heart at the heart of things.... Then there's a set number of forms? a template almost? that any root can take. So in the case of "qalb" you get "qalab": to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, make into the opposite; hence "maqlab": a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. "Maqloub": upside-down; "mutaqallib,,: changeable; and "inqilab": a coup ... So at the heart of all things is the germ of their overthrow; the closer you are to the heart, the closer to the reversal- Every time you use a word, it brings with it all the other forms that come from the same root (Soueif 82).

In this passage, the author makes an effort to bring the dynamic of the Arabic language into English through translation. This is achieved by introducing the reader to Arabic names and words, such as proper names, as well as common expressions, such as "baksheesh" and "imshi." Indeed, the author effectively uses Arabic words and expressions to not only provide a sense of authenticity to the novel, but also to delve into the cultural and linguistic complexities and differences of the Arab

world. For instance, the use of "bint" (daughter) highlights the societal norms and expectations surrounding gender roles, and the importance placed on familial relationships in Egyptian culture. Similarly, expressions like "tawakkal ala Allah" (rely on God) reflect the religious beliefs and values that shape the characters' perspectives and attitudes towards life. Also, Arabic lexical items, such as "haramlek," "ruq'a," and "ya," are used to familiarize the reader with the technique of borrowing and incorporating Arabic terms into the text.

Besides, the novel contains numerous references to various aspects of Arabic culture, such as local food, dress, forms of entertainment, and religious traditions. These references include traditional clothing such as the "galabiyya" and "kufiyya", cultural practices like "zagharid", (women's ululations during weddings), "suhur" (a meal consumed during the Islamic month of Ramadan), "sidaq" (money given to a woman as a pledge of marriage), and "Mawwal" (traditional form of musical entertainment consisting of narrative folk song). The inclusion of these cultural references helps to capture the unique customs and traditions of the Egyptian country, therefore, giving readers a sense of the distinctiveness of the culture being depicted.

The novel is equally rich in both folkloric and historical references, covering both old and modern aspects of Egyptian and Middle Eastern history. Two characters, Abuzeid and Antar, for example, are referenced in the text and are known for their bravery and heroic deeds in Arabic folklore. The novel also touches on modern history, including the Palestine issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as political and economic events from the era of British colonization. Despite the presence of these references, the text does not assume prior knowledge on the part of the reader, as the information is explained within the narrative. One example of this can be seen in a conversation about the background of the Suez Canal's construction: "We were a part of a dying Ottoman Empire. Our Khedive Ismail loved modernism and Europe and – le spectacle. He likes the Suez Canal project and so he borrows money …" (Soueif 223). These references add depth to the language, but they are mainly glossed over and require effort from the reader to fully understand. In nutshell, Soueif's use of foreignized language may make the text harder to understand for those unfamiliar with Arabic, but it also creates a challenge

for monocultural readers to enhance their cross-cultural reading experience.

**Conclusion**

Arab women writers Aboulela, Faqir, and Soueif have each adopted English as a means to express their own perspectives and challenge dominant cultural narratives. Their choice to write in English is a strategic one, as it allows them to reach a broad and diverse audience, including those who may not be familiar with Arab and Muslim cultures and experiences. Through their writing, they reclaim English and use it as a tool for resistance and cultural assertion, articulating their own experiences and challenging the linguistic power structures of Western cultural imperialism. However, writing in English is not without its criticisms. Arab women's writing about Arab culture using the language of a former colonizer could be seen as perpetuating Western superiority by exoticizing their own cultural identities. This could lead to accusations that they are writing solely for a Western audience and reinforcing colonial myths about the 'exotic' East. For instance, by narrating controversial and taboo issues in the Arab and Muslim world, such as gender, sexuality, and honour killing, Faqir's Anglophone fiction may face criticism and charges of betraying her culture and exoticizing herself. As Al Maleh notes, Arab writers who write in English may not be shielded from criticism by the physical distance between them and their home countries (Al Maleh 14). Their critics in their home countries may vehemently attack them, accusing them of being disloyal or unpatriotic due to their use of the colonial language and the themes they choose to write about. Nonetheless, both western Orientalism and Arab patriarchy are critiqued evenly in the works of the authors under study. In defending herself against any charge of Orientalizing Arab society, Faqir, for example, writes that "[*My Name is Salma]* is not an Orientalist piece of work. Both countries of origin are criticized evenly" (qtd in Nash 134). Similarly, far from reproducing orientalist tropes about the Orient, Soueif undermines conventional orientalist portrayals of East-West relationships in her novel by reversing power dynamics. Instead of the usual depiction of Western men dominating "Oriental" women, the relationships in the novel feature Egyptian men and Western women, symbolizing a shift in cultural dominance between the West and the Arab world. The women within the harem are conversely portrayed as politically engaged, well-educated, and valued by men. As King puts it "Soueif is a self-conscious sophisticated writer, and

her book [*The Map of Love*] is at times both modeled after and a critique of the 'Oriental tale.' It can be read as literáty criticism, a criticism of Western readings of the Arab world. There is even a passage defending diaspora intellectuals [like Said and Soueif] from claims that they are unrepresentative cosmopolitans who tell an alienated Western intelligentsia what it wants" (qtd in Valassopoulos 31). In *The Translator*, Aboulela challenges power imbalances in Orientalist discourse by portraying the Arab protagonist as a capable cultural translator, able to redefine her identity within the linguistic structures of her former colonizer. This interactive approach to translation blurs the lines of power and knowledge, enabling the formerly colonized subaltern to take an active role in the production of knowledge.

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