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Référence électronique

Karine Ancellin, « Hybrid Identities of Characters in Muslim women fiction post 9-11 », *TRANS-* [En ligne], 8 | 2009, mis en ligne le 08 juillet 2009, consulté le 19 novembre 2014. URL : <http://trans.revues.org/344>

Éditeur : Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle

<http://trans.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne sur :

<http://trans.revues.org/344>

Document généré automatiquement le 19 novembre 2014.

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Karine Ancellin

Hybrid Identities of Characters in Muslim women fiction post 9-11

1 This article addresses literary writing by female Muslim authors. Notions of identity, uniformity, and conformity are crucial as to how Muslim women writers depict Muslim characters in the post-9/11 era. In the body of fiction this paper discusses, the characters live out the contradiction of dealing positively with the stigma caused by the New York terrorist attacks, by blurring the line of assimilation and displaying a multifaceted self; to what extent this is successful, and how it can be interpreted in the wider field of Muslim writings, form some of the main areas of my enquiry.

Methodology

2 ‘Muslim literature’, the undertone to this study, has yet to be recognised as a distinct phenomenon. Very few scholars make use of the term, and many authors to whom such a term might be applied are instead referred to as ‘ethnic authors’, ‘migrant fiction’, ‘Arab’ or ‘foreign literature’. Some are described only by nationality. One of the first times the word *Muslim* was used in relation to literature was shortly after 9/11, when Professor Andrea Kempf wrote an article entitled *The rich world of Islam: Muslim fiction*; in so doing, she delineated an innovative area of writing. Professor Kempf’s 2001 article, along with Professor Amin Malak’s work on *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* in 2005, chart a new taxonomy in terms of literary analysis. In an interview with Professor Kempf, she suggested:

Instinctively, I recognized that the authors were not necessarily Arabs or wrote in Arabic. As I said in the article, the authors come from many places: Senegal, Bosnia, Turkey, Albania, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, and Morocco, etc. as well as the Middle East. Many of them do not write in Arabic, but they share a common bond as Muslims¹.

3 In the post-9/11 era, the notion of a ‘Muslim’ stigma becomes increasingly significant in literature. The attacks on the New York twin towers aroused inescapable questions, sharpening Muslim writers’ narratives and altering the ‘name value’ of the author. Debates about Islam erupted in the public sphere. Muslim names were gaining a sort of familiar resonance. They had become less ‘foreign’ and interested more readers. Moreover, a generation of Western-educated Muslim immigrants’ children were coming of age and, regardless of the ‘Muslim’ issue, they were choosing literature as a medium through which to express their artistic creativity. As a consequence of all this, the amount of Muslim-related fiction soared after 9/11 both by non Muslims and by writers with a Muslim ancestry or a Muslim affiliation. Therefore within this abundant production, the primary selection, for the corpus of the research concerned authors with a Muslim name or surname. Most Muslim names have an Arabic root, but using the Arabic criterion would have meant excluding Iranian authors like Azar Nafisi, Farnoosh Moshiri or Azadeh Moaveni² whose characters often attempt to conciliate the Muslim part of their identity with the other core values dominating their lives, thus being at the heart of the subject under study. For that reason the scope of the research encompasses a broad understanding of Islam, occasionally disconnected from its Arabic genealogy. In the process, and again because of the profusion of novels, it appeared relevant to narrow down the scale to *women* writers of Muslim ancestry or bearing a Muslim name or surname, and to investigate what their characters had in common and if they shared comparable motifs in their novels.

The corpus of authors

4 The study is therefore based on a corpus of fifteen novels by female writers of Muslim ancestry published in English, not translated, over a period of time ranging between 2001 and 2008³. Most of the authors are part of the Diaspora but not all, like Kamila Shamsie, who lives and writes in Pakistan though her novels are published in English in London. Some authors have more than one residence, like Elif Shafak who shares her time between Turkey and the US.

Shafaq's *Bastard of Istanbul* in this corpus was initially written in English and then translated into Turkish to be sold in Turkey⁴. Dual residence or frequent travels are often the case with authors such as Randa Abdel-fattah who is from Australia originally from Palestine, Leila Aboulela who lives in the United Arab Emirates originally from Sudan and has spent extensive time in Malaysia. Fadia Faqir and Diana Abu Jaber are from Jordan. They currently live in the UK for the first and the US the latter. The geographic locations of the fifteen authors composing the corpus are very distant geographically from one another, with a dominance of writers from Bangladesh (four novels) and Pakistan (three novels), followed by Iran (three novels). This awkward balance, of the regions the authors relate to in the novels, originates from the date of publication of the novels and bears no relevance in the analysis.

- 5 The time span of the corpus covers a period of seven years following the 9/11 event. This is the reason for which these novels have found a common taxonomy within this corpus, as well as for the complexity of their characters. The geography of the countries the authors connect with come randomly as these authors published their novels during the same period of time. Some novels, like those of Claire Messoud's *The Emperor's children* published in 2006, or Christine Aziz's *Olive readers* in 2005, were not retained in the corpus because apart from the facts that the authors' names, as well as the dates, answered the criteria for the corpus, the characters were in no way associated with Islam or Muslim identity. Eventually the vigilance of the researcher may have just overlooked some novels on no specific account and to these authors I ask to please accept my apologies. The ultimate purpose of the research into the specific novels assembled within the corpus is to elucidate how, within a specific duration – in the wake of a particular event of worldwide significance – women authors of Muslim ancestry, or authors with a kin relationship to Islam, portray their characters in terms of the representations of the self, their joyfulness, sadness, loyalties, betrayals and all the other attributes of identity building.

Understanding Muslim

- 6 There are tensions inherent in identifying a writer purely by the origins of her name. Some writers may have turned away from their religion and might find it offensive to be associated with Islam. This might apply, for example, in Azar Nafisi's case, when teaching English literature became impossible after the Islamic revolution at the University of Tehran. In *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, Nafisi writes:

A stern Ayatollah, a blind and improbable philosopher king, had decided to impose his dream on a country and a people and to re-create us in his own myopic vision. So he had formulated an ideal of me as a Muslim woman, a Muslim woman teacher, and wanted me to look, act and in short live according to that ideal. Laleh and I, in refusing to accept that ideal, were taking not a political stance but an existential one. (Nafisi 2004:165)

- 7 Nafisi's criticism of Islamic practices in Iran triggered fierce academic reactions to her book, such as that of Columbia Professor Hamid Dabashi, who accuses her of being a 'comprador intellectual' in the way she presents Muslims to the West⁵. Thus to comply with the philosophy of writers such as Nafisi, the use of the term 'Muslim' throughout this study is more cultural than political or religious. It is the circulation, the transition, the transmission of pieces of a cultural heritage as expounded by Homi Bhabha that are identified in the narratives as 'Muslim' for the purpose of this research, not the personal involvement of the authors. Bhabha's hybridity concept examines the idea of a whole, and when deconstructed the entity is actually a patchwork of minor pieces of identities that have been carried through time, Bhabha calls it 'the transmission of culture' because it carries one partial relation of a self to a situation, this is what is scrutinized in each novel's characters.

This 'part' culture, this partial culture is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures –at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between' bafflingly both alike and different. (Bhabha 1996:53)

- 8 This is why the geographical significance of each local culture doesn't outweigh the 'Muslim' part of the character in search of her/his identity. Muslim as it is used throughout the study is only the source from which excerpts of culture are drawn to form the identity of the characters,

the ‘Muslim’ criterion links but does not restrict. ‘Hybridity’ has often been misread as ‘exotic’, that is because the most visible part of the identity assumes dominance over the interior one. In this instance writer Monica Ali finds hybridity confining, overemphasizing the Bengali facet of her British identity⁶. She highlights it in *Brick lane*, when the central character Nazneen who has arrived from Bangladesh to settle in London with her ‘arranged marriage’ husband becomes a ‘British Muslim’ amongst others, and because she is more ‘traditional’ Bengali in the way she dresses and speaks, it is assumed that she is more Muslim than British when in the end it is her London born lover, more British than Muslim in behaviour, who falls for Muslim fundamentalism. Moreover Ali as an author is not firmly committed to the area of ‘Muslim women writings’, a point she has made clear by publishing the novel *Alentejo Blue*, a novel set in and around Portugal, although her prior novel predominantly characterised British Muslim identity. Professor Wadud offers a reason to pin down Islam as fertile in self invention after 2001:

I have been engaged in research into and teaching about that legacy – Islam – for more than three decades now. This engagement is especially difficult in the current generation, which happens to be characterized by great contradictions in development articulation, and practical implementation. This generation is also faced with a politicization of Islam in general, exacerbated by diversity, and under heavy pressure from Western ideas of globalization, militarism and the global economy. (Wadud 2006:55)

- 9 Because it has been galvanized in this way, the term Muslim may be polemical. In this research, however, Muslim women writers are simply women writers of Muslim ancestry or kinship, who reflect on Muslim identities through their novels’ characters, even though, like Nafisi, they themselves may not identify with being Muslim on either a religious or a political level. All the while, ‘Muslim’ authors born and brought up in the UK, USA or Australia may be regarded as foreign writers when their names have an Arabic timbre although their pen is definitely English.

Background

- 10 Muslims as characters, and to an even greater extent as writers, did not appear much in literature. They were often confined to a lower status, such as Edward Said’s cultural ‘other’ or Gayatri Spivak’s ‘subaltern’. They were either subjugated or absent from the literary patrimony. While the first successful *Muslim* authors in English were men, like Hanif Kureishi or Khaled Hussein, the roots of Muslim women’s writing in English can be traced back to the start of the twentieth century. In 1909, Rokhaya Sakhawat Hossein (1880–1932) published the very first novel of its kind. Her narrative *Sultana’s Dream* inverted the situation of power between women and men in the State of Bengal. I quote Amin Malak:

The author reverses gender roles and cleverly argues how our world would be a more peaceful and better place to live if only women were to become power wielders and men were secluded, shut indoors, doing household chores. (Malak 2005:30)

- 11 Hossein was not widely published outside her native Bangladesh, but gained worldwide popularity and acknowledgement after 2001⁷ as an early token of Muslim women’s proficiency. Because they were women in patriarchal circumstances, a lot of writings by literate women remained unpublished during their time. These documents were unearthed and served writers later on⁸. Muslim women’s writings have an authentic palimpsest history, to which 9/11 contributed in that Islam and Muslim women became an intriguing topic for non-Muslims. It put Hossein’s novel at the order of the day. Pakistani writer Kamila Shamsie offers the following explanation for this change of attitudes in her novel *Broken Verses*:

‘And then?’
 ‘And then the Towers fell.’
 ‘And you stopped being an individual and started being an entire religion.’ (Shamsie 2005:45)

- 12 In literature the change was not as reactive as in the media. Only after a few years did texts develop in fiction confronting the stigma with self explanatory titles like; *Why I Am a Muslim* by Asma Gull Hasan in 2004, *Londonistan* by Gautam Malkani in 2006, *Unimagined, A*

Muslim Boy Meets the West by Imran Ahmad in 2007⁹. At this same slow pace a subtextual distinction was made between ethnic and Muslim. A character in Kia Abdullah's *Life, Love and Assimilation* describes how the stigma taints their vision of the world, pushing Muslims to the margins:

9/11 was not good publicity for Muslims. It created a palpable tension between us and the rest of the world.

I know that there is general animosity between Asians of different religions but I had never felt it. To me we were all Asians in a predominantly white country and we stuck together. 9/11 changed all that. Sikhs and Hindus became sick of being banded together with Muslims. (Abdullah 2006:53)

- 13 Drawing a clear-cut pre- and post-9/11 line in Muslim women's fiction is not possible, yet a sort of 'shame' related to Islam transpired in the media after 2001 and these writers responded with 'ordinary life' characters in a bid to redress the balance, stressing the human and disengaging 'Muslims' from the Islamist drift ever-present in the media. The women and men in these novels eat, dress, speak and smile, in spite of the ordeal of finding out who they are and where they belong.

Characters

- 14 For the former colonies, it took some time after independence, and a second generation educated abroad to allow the individual to be pulled out of her 'community', to tell her own experience looking inwards and inform others of her very personal perspective. Liberating the masses from feudal exploitation and imperialism was the post colonial priority. Narrating Bangladesh's war for independence in 1971 Tahmina Anam's *Golden Age* takes this stance at the beginning of the novel when the heroine, Rehana, is speaking about the 'wrought' Bengali people invaded by the 'dominating' Pakistani. However, later in the novel she brings out the family ties and friendships which uncover the absurdity of this primarily genuine geopolitical pattern when analyzed at the person level. Rehana's son announces he is joining the resistance:

'I thought you were a pacifist.' She clung to the word. Pacifist. Someone who does not rush off to join a war. Someone who stays behind and doesn't break his mother's heart.

'I really struggled, Ammo, but I realized I don't have a choice.'.....

'This isn't war. It's genocide.'

'Is it Silvi?'

'No, of course not.'

He paused, seemed to hold his breath, then said, 'I can't sit back and do nothing, Ma. Everyone is fighting. Even people who weren't sure, people who wanted to stay with Pakistan.' (Anam 2007:80)

- 15 9/11 brought 'truth' as a keyword in prompting Muslim narratives. Editors in need to fulfil their readership wanted a 'truer', or closer understanding of 'Muslims' and of 'Islam'. Muslim women, tired of misrepresentations, wanted to express their reality without having to side along one or the other camp, secularists or fundamentalists. They inaugurated Muslim feminist characters, a concept which, in earlier times, was thought to be an oxymoron. They stressed the difference between patriarchal traditions and Islam. Nonetheless the 9/11 stigma made the equation more complex stressing the standpoint of the hearer and the standpoint of the teller as elements of distortion. Post modernist critics don't believe in 'facts' and think that the veracity of the story has no impact on the self representation of the author. Fatema Mernissi's *Scheherazade Goes West* demonstrates that this was not germane to Muslim characters during the nineteenth century. This also went in accordance with the work by Professor Edward Saïd, on defining how the concept of "oriental" influenced the position of this 'oriental' within her/his society, and on how it had contributed to the perpetuation of the western domination over Muslims, in their home countries as much as in Europe or America. In the western representations, Scheherazade metamorphoses herself from the prominent law expert she is in the founding mythical texts¹⁰ into that 'oriental' odalisque languidly naked waiting upon men's sexual fantasies in the visions painted by Delacroix and Ingres. Initially she was a political liberator from tyranny:

She saves not only herself but an entire kingdom by slowly changing the mind of the chief decision maker, the King. (Mernissi 2001:49)

- 16 Transposed Sheherazade carries the French vision of the Orient which is, as Mernissi surmises, very distant from its original depiction:

One of the greatest fans of the Orient at that time was none other than the marquise de Pompadour, Louis XV's official mistress, and she was more interested in harem clothes and harem's fashionable luxuries than in women's subversive trends. (Mernissi 2001:63)

- 17 This serves to enhance the idea that some narratives may attempt to convey a specific message on their representation of the self, all the same the message might be understood otherwise. A probing example will be quoted later in this study with Fadia Faqir's novels and the way they were misrepresented in the American edition. The narrator has to have an insight on the reader's mind to convey the message she wishes the reader to understand. This is a step taken by the new generation of writers who have had the advantage of getting to know two or more cultures simultaneously, not one excluding the other or having to take sides. Two narratives in the corpus, Nafisi and Moaveni, speak in the first person from very different standpoints. Azar Nafisi tells the episode of her harrowing move from Iran to the United States without mentioning real names in her book, apart from those of her immediate family. The other names, she explains, are changed for the protection of the people they involve, notably the girls she regrouped in a clandestine class of literature in Teheran.

I told them – the students – I was going to a protest meeting, to oppose the government's attempt to impose the veil on women and its curtailment of women's rights. I had missed some of the large demonstrations against the revolutionary government policies against women and I was determined not to miss any more. (Nafisi 2003:111)

- 18 Nafisi's 'I' character wants to be as 'true' as her intellectual pursuit allows her, but other factors are involved in her narrative, exterior to the elements she has control over, to 'her' self, but included in 'her' existence. The "I" of the autobiographer is as much the individual who seeks to understand the reasons for her actions/decisions beyond her mere acts, as much as the action/decision taker of her time and culture and it is around this second contention that Nafisi is caring to cover up for the names. Living or having lived under authoritarian regimes deters authors from writing about personal experiences and if the author, like Nafisi, attempts to overcome the political pressure, the inhibited auto censorship cannot be surmounted as easily. The process can develop subconsciously, in spite of the author's determination to surpass it.

- 19 Analysing the hybridity of first person characters in the novels could be wrongly understood as being informed on the author's life and personality when it is the text that is the founding element of the criticism. The purpose of this research is to open a very different window from that of the sociological approach which would speak of the authors' experiences and achievements. Sticking to the text reveals the individual artistic approach of the author and, in this, her specificity:

If historians and anthropologists are interested in the texts for their relationship to what lies beyond them in the physical world, literary critics are interested in the texts as texts and their relationship to other texts...What criticism establishes is that autobiography evolves, it develops distinctive subgenres, for example historical, philosophical, and poetic autobiography in one classification (Spengemann 1980). One critical enterprise then is to identify the transformations and when they occur and why. (Watson 2000:13)

- 20 Watson has considered this dilemma in many of the autobiographies he studied when the narrator attempted to answer the question: Is my national identity as Indonesian compatible with my religious identity as Muslim? Nowadays the question wouldn't make sense if posed to Azadeh Moaveni after reading her novel *Lipstick Jihad*. Azadeh is American and Azadeh is Iranian but that doesn't impact directly on her character, she is not choosing between one or the other, rather exposing the way she relates differently to her relatives in America and her relatives in Teheran, both in her 'own' way, embodying her culturally hybrid person. The same 'me' speaks to her friends in California and her friends in Teheran using different grids for the same message. Furthermore the character, described as Azadeh in the novel, evolves,

and her relations both to her mother in the US and her aunt in Teheran change over the course of the two year story of her experience as a correspondent for the Times in Teheran. Both autobiographical characters, in Nafisi and Moaveni, struggle with the intimacy of the “I”. As much as the psychology of the “I” character is investigated in both novels, there are areas of self telling that remain unexplored or that are eluded either deliberately or subconsciously.

A wise voice inside my head told me to be skeptical, but I was so enchanted at the prospect of having a modern mother – already envisioning us stopping at planned parenthood on the way to the mall – that with breathtaking stupidity I told her the truth. Immediately red splotches appeared all over her face, and she began crying, in huge, gulping sobs, emitting string of incoherent denials and interrogations: “*Khak bar saram* (may dirt fall on my head) ... *Vay nay*... You’re too young, why did we ever come to this *mamelekat-e-kharabshodeh* (ruined country) ... When?... For how long?” I had been duped and would pay for it dearly. (Moaveni 2005:24)

- 21 Moaveni crosses barriers in describing relationships with her mother but holds back in the end not to divulge the intimacy of their relationship. After this episode with her mother Moaveni comes to the conclusion: *I decided then and there that Iranianness and I must part*¹¹. Her search for balance being an Iranian American is a priority over allowing the reader to grasp the evolution of the relation to her mother. Along the whole novel the space allocated for her intimacy with her mother is subsidiary in the identification process. In the corpus’ novels it is often that some areas, like the relationship to the parents, are latent, awaiting an impulse against a hazy form of auto censorship or some kind of restriction, to be acknowledged and then penned in the narratives.

Themes

- 22 Displacement is a dominant theme in the novels, and there are often two or more places which hold significance in each narrative. This is what Professor Susan Stanford Friedman calls ‘*new cosmopolitanism*’ as an effect of intensified migration and globalization – thus making diasporics the *avant-garde of the new cosmopolitanism*¹². Since the characters travel extensively they are kaleidoscopic¹³ in their ever-changing loyalties, both to the family-related place and to the place of education or professional fulfilment. Again in *Lipstick Jihad*, Azadeh Moaveni acknowledges a sense of home in both places. Nonetheless, she eventually flees to Lebanon to escape the ‘not here and never there’ and to break out of her spatial self-entanglement.

Today in a quiet space in a country not far from Iran in space, I am finally unpacking the boxes from those two years in Teheran. As I sort through the clothes, peeling veil from veil, it is like tracing the rings of a tree trunk to tell its evolution. (Moaveni, 2005:ix)

- 23 Cosmopolitanism, globalization and the growing numbers of mixed cultures marriages assisted the authors’ texts in working around private loyalties to a particular culture and blend in elements imagined as incompatible like Muslim feminism.
- 24 If not in geography, a displacement occurs in time. These novels offer visions of the past which are alive and lingering, while the present remains difficult to settle into. Time confusion is central to Shafak’s *Bastard of Istanbul*: the heroine, Armanoush, comes from the US to Turkey to find the Armenian side of her family living an existence almost drawn entirely from their past, while her Turkish family is building the future by erasing that same past. Because of her fragmented childhood, Shafak’s heroine, Armanoush had not been able to find a sense of continuity and identity. She had to make a journey to her past to be able to start planning her own life. As the weight of this new revelation dawned on her, it motivated her to type a message on an Armenian forum:

The Janissary’s paradox is torn between two clashing states of existence. On the one hand, the remnants of the past pile up – a womb of tenderness and sorrow, a sense of injustice and discrimination. On the other hand glimmers the promised future – a shelter decorated with trimmings and trappings of success, a sense of safety like you have never had before, the comfort of joining the majority and finally being deemed normal. (Shafak 2007:107)

- 25 Armanoush combines what seemed an irreconcilable generation gap between the old and the new generation, all the more so when they were tainted with the epithet traditional and modern.

- 26 Another theme frequently encountered in these novels is the wearing of the hijab. Its common interpretation as a symbol of oppression has incited Muslim women writers, some hijab-wearing and others not, to 'come out' alongside voices of secular Muslim women who are often identified as the sole representatives of female emancipation in the Muslim world. Most of the female characters in these novels have an issue with the veil, the hijab, a scarf or some kind of head covering, whether it be at the centre of the novel, as it is for Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel's title *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, or addressed in a more intimate manner, as for Farnoosh Moshiri's *Against Gravity*, in which it appears furtively at times of prayer when the heroine is alone and isolated from the American way of life she has entirely complied with, or as much as her refugee status imposes her to (learning the language, putting her daughter in school...).
- 27 Although this hijab dilemma represents only one facet of Najwa's character in Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret*, the story is clearly divided into two separate parts of the heroine's life: before and after she wore the hijab.

Usually the young Muslim girls who have been born and brought up in Britain puzzle me though I admire them. I always find myself trying to understand them. They strike me as being very British, very much at home in London. Some of them wear hijab, some don't. They have individuality and an outspokenness I didn't have when I was their age, but they lack the preciousness and glamour we girls in Khartoum had. (Aboulela 2005:77)

- 28 The glamorous westernized elite girl Najwa who used to spend her life entertaining herself in Khartoum has faded with the coup that got her father hanged. She turns to hijab wearing and Mosque gatherings after her family's dismay in their London exile, after her mother has died of cancer and her brother has been convicted and taken to prison for drug trafficking. Najwa has to do housekeeping for Middle Eastern elite families and she is haunted by the idea someone will discover her former identity the hijab now serves to hide.
- 29 *What cultural choices you have to make each morning!* wonders a New Haven academic in Sara Suleri Goodyear's *A Daughter's Elegy*. The answer comes: *I tried to explain that, as with everyone, it was a matter of pragmatics, such as the weather, or what was clean and readily available and had no further symbolic significance.* (70) Whatever the circumstances, the head covering, as much as the place of residence, remain non-fixed, non-resolved, transitional and transient. The veil slips on and off the 'I', the subject.

Highlighting post 9/11 tropes in Fadia Faqir's *My name is Salma*

- 30 The complex relation between the name and the self unfolds in most Muslim women's narratives. In Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma*, the heroine is obsessed with her name. The onomastic quality of the name identifies the individual with the collective, and it is this communal self that Salma wants to retain:

Despite correcting him several times, 'Salma, Jack, Salma please,' he would forget the next day and call me 'girl' again. But Jack never had anything to remind him because I never received any letters with my Arab name, Salma Ibrahim El-Musa, printed on them. (Faqir 2007:34)

- 31 Salma's name socially contextualizes the character's iridescent self whether its Arabic pronunciation is adopted, as Salma, or its English, as Sally. Becoming Sally, though it is still her, is a wounding metamorphosis. Salma Ibrahim El-Musa is Layla's mother, but her daughter has been grabbed away from her at birth while she was in prison, allowing her to escape to England from the family wrath and honour killing that awaited her for having been raped by a village youth. She flees from Hima to Exeter where she manages to live as the norm sets the standards: with work, husband and baby boy. She finds a liminal space throughout the novel but in the end dies as Salma. She cannot deal with the complexity of being true to both her Arab mother and her British husband. She cannot wipe out the Muslim attributes of her identity. Even though she is successful as Sally, within her inner self the transition is a failure and, rather than breaking away from this, she feels the guilt is hers. She remains Salma though disowned; as she says: *I stained my family's name with mud.* (Faqir 2007:74)

32 In her novel, *the Namesake*, Jumphah Lahiri, stresses the encasing identification of the name. To match the prejudice over his personality Gogol, an Indian student living in New York, is forced to change his name to a traditional Indian name: Nikhil is a tag identity the outside world is throwing upon him at face value. Salma uses the diminutive 'Sal' to avert confusion over the second part of her name, the encasing part. Sal is the interstitial person slipping into being Salma or being Sally. I quote: '*Many names I. Salma and Sal and Sally,*' I said. (Faqir 2007:91)

33 The novel's UK title, *My Name Is Salma*, becomes *The Cry of the Dove* in the US, erasing Salma's name. Would it have been similarly worded if the title had been *My Name Is Elizabeth*? The marketing reasons that co-opted the US title go exactly against the idea of the book, in which the heroine deals with dislocation in an effort to defragment her identity. Salma's character is so strongly imbued with both Levantine and British cultures that it is impossible to narrow reading to any one aspect. Moreover, the fractured structure of the text, with frequent flashbacks taking place within a period of 16 years, mirrors Salma's bewilderment, alternating the joy of belonging with despair over her exclusions, whether in Hima or in Exeter. Salma is ill: '*Too much past*' (Faqir 2007:108) is overwhelming her. She is muted by an overpowering stigma, which incapacitates her. Liz, her landlord, is also haunted by her past, but they are on different sides of the social class scale. Liz longs for her lost powers during colonial India while Sally achieves power over her immigrant condition. Salma has been cut deeply in the arm with a whip by Liz in an alcoholic delirium when she mistook Salma for one of her then servants:

'What happened to your arm?' she asked.

I looked at Liz's dishevelled hair, swollen eyes; her hand pressed to her forehead, her pointed nose and said, 'Nothing.' Standing there in the hall she looked tired, washed out.

'What is wrong with your arm Sal?' 'Nothing a minor accident,' I said. She genuinely couldn't remember last night.

'This late night job you're doing is dangerous,' she said. I knew what Liz was thinking: a lower-class immigrant slut, hustling down the quay, must have been stabbed by her pimp. All that was written on her hangovered face. (Faqir 2007:192)

34 Liz's arrogance mirrors that of Hamdan, the man who raped Salma, yet despite their destructive attitudes these characters also bring solace and happiness to Salma. There is a permanent transition from one self to the other, Muslim and British – both of her identities are victims and both identities are also soothed by the perpetrators. Salma cannot wake up from her life story, and hence from the aftermath of 9/11, as if it had been a dream. There is no way around the post 9/11 stigma on Muslims, just a negotiation taking place involving the affect and the social:

Finally the whirring and vibration of the machine spinning the laundry dry shook the old wooden floor. I wished that I could be put among the washing so I could come out at the other end 'squeaky clean', without dry stains or dark deeds. (Faqir 2007:93)

35 There is no haven, no model person; this new path needs a negotiation involving her affect and her social, her intimate and her communal, her victimized and her sociable self. As she says: '*Salma resisted but Sally must adapt.*' (Faqir 2007:9) Salma and Sally are 'feelings' alternating in the same being.

Conclusion

36 Because the terrorists were men, 9/11 was generally seen as a masculine event; nevertheless, it has refurbished the stigma of Muslim women as abused. The connection of Muslim literature with the west doesn't start with 9/11; rather, these novels take on the legacy of postcolonial and, before that, Oriental, Asian or Arabic literature. Nonetheless, the contemporary Muslim authors have migrated extensively and they have started to break away from this 'otherness' in presenting kaleidoscopic characters, who are Muslim and diverse, flexible and hybrid. These characters challenge the postcolonial self sufficiency of the struggle against imperialism: the heroes and heroines in these novels are very unsure of themselves. The characters unceasingly question their belonging, their nationality, their fragmented history, whether in a western or a home country setting, they have set aside assertiveness for introspection. They are depicted as flexible within the elements of their hybridity.

37 These Muslim women writers have an evocative and elusive talent and have possibly created a Muslim diegesis, which could arguably, represent an original style. Characters are depicted with various types of rhetoric that range from lyrical to humorous, eccentric, dramatic, cutting or intricate in style, using creative loaded tropes and a rich psychological web. Elaborate characters and literary devices such as tales, letters or twofold viewpoints express dissonance and give some of these narratives a sort of 'baroque' flavour. Through the characters the ingenuity of self telling, whether in the first person or in a fictional character, adds a sense of density to the novels that compose this corpus. Thereby the writers have produced new literary tools to address *post*-postcolonial Muslim identity. Secularism and Islam live oscillating lives, functioning in the same first-person character, yet continually battling for superiority. The characterisation expresses the fluidity of the contemporary Muslim identity portrayed in the novels, its dynamic evolving state, and thus the roots of its hybridity. To the rationale of humiliation, these writers offer artistic evasiveness of the characters.

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Annexe

Corpus of novels. Annotated bibliography

Abdel Fatteh, Randa 2005. *Does my head look big in this?* Pan Macmillan, Australia.

Teenager Amel decides to wear the hijab. Amel is an Australian born Muslim with two Palestinian born parents. She is getting back for her second semester at her elite McLeans high school with the hijab on and depicts how the team of professionals, her peer group and her boyfriend react. Amel's viewpoint is the insider's account of the feelings hijab wearing teenage girls experience confronted to various stereotypical situations. Amel mirrors both sides' reactions, the non Muslims as well as the Muslims group reaction. Amel juxtaposes the prejudices she undergoes and their development, with her own prejudices towards the grumpy old Greek lady neighbour with whom she develops a creative relationship. One day she comes to school unaware the Bali nightclub bombings have taken place and she is overwhelmed by how she is expected to answer questions as to why these bombings have taken place.

Abdullah, Kia 2006. *Life, Love & assimilation*. Adlibbed Ltd.

Kieran comes from a large Bengali family where girls come as second best. She is the powerful student in her family and achieves to break off some of the traditions and bad choices that hold her peers in this lower class status. She graduates and falls in love with a young man from Pakistan. With a couple of lies they manage to go together on holiday to Tunisia. At home her brother, who gets away with stealing money and taking drugs, turns delinquent. Although she totally and uncompromisingly rejects her mother, she gives in to her parents' will and agrees to an arranged marriage with the perfect man. It turns out he just wanted her as a cover for his ongoing affair with a white girl his own family isn't prepared to accept.

Abu Jaber, Diana 2003. *Crescent*. W.W.Norton.

Sirine is an Arab American in her thirties from Westwood Los Angeles. She has lived with her uncle after the death of her parents who got killed working for a disaster relief NGO. She is a cook at Um Nadia's café. She will discover her Iraqi father's heritage, and side of her, by falling in love with Han, an Iraqi refugee professor of Middle Eastern literature at the University. Learning Han's story will help settle her own trauma of having lost her parents. The chapters always start with a mirror story, like a Shaharazade tale, of Aunt Camille and her magical quest after her child Abderrahman Saladin, although this opening story has no chronological setting. Sirine's life meanders along her love for Han and the exploration of her Arabic descent, which she puts to effect in her cooking.

Aboulela, Leila 2005. *Minaret*. Bloomsbury.

With her Muslim hijab and down-turned gaze, Najwa is invisible to most eyes, especially to the rich Arab family whose house she tends to in London. However she had started out in life as a careless upper-class Westernized Sudanese, dreaming of a rich husband and of raising a family of her own. A coup kills her post independence elite father and forces the young woman and her family into political exile in London. Her twin brother who has been terribly affected by the downturn in his situation is sent to jail on drug charges. Now hijab wearing Najwa is alone in the world apart from the Muslim sisterhood she finds at the mosque. She lets her love flow for the son of her employer, who could have been a normal suitor while the family was in power in Sudan, but this is London and she is now the cleaning lady.

Ali, Monica 2003. *Brick Lane*. Doubleday publisher.

Nazneen, came to Brick Lane from Bangladesh at the age of eighteen after an arranged marriage to Chanu, who is both self-important and unsuccessful. When she arrives, she cannot speak English, but falls into the role of dutiful wife and mother. Not only is she always an outsider, an immigrant to a foreign land, but her Bangladeshi roots keeps her in a subservient role within her marriage. Her London educated girls help her change her perspective. She becomes the breadwinner of the family home sewing and attempts a love affair. Yet there is always that pull from the homeland. In Bangladesh, her sister, Hasina, also promised to an arranged marriage, had eloped with her lover, spurning this marriage where there is no love.

Ali, Samina 2005. *Madras on rainy days*. Piatkus, London. First edition January 15, 2004.

Divorced parents, displacement and the restriction of liberties are the issues in Layla's eye opening to the two worlds of Hyderabad and America. Layla bears a personality tag from her days in America, though she is trying to fit in the tradition of an arranged marriage. Everywhere she will always be considered an outsider. She is in post pregnancy shatters as she marries Sameer with all the glitter of an Indian Muslim marriage. Her marriage is a sort of rebirth to her indianity, wanting to leave behind her American self. However her husband doesn't agree, though they are related as cousins, he is from a poorer family and marrying Layla is the opportunity to leave India where he feels so uncomfortable. The drama of finding out her husband cannot make love to her though he does really love her in spite of all she has confessed to him about her pre-marriage affair with an American boy unfolds during the height of a Hindu Muslim wave of violence.

Anam Tahmina 2007. *A Golden age*. John Murray.

Rehana Haque a young widow and her children are caught up in Bangladesh's war for independence. East Pakistan is the theatre of heavy fighting after West Pakistan sends troops. A native of Calcutta, Rehana was resettled in Dhaka by her husband and speaks Urdu. Her children that were taken away from her are fervent patriots, joining in student marches and making speeches. As rhetoric becomes revolution, her son joins a guerrilla group and her daughter also leaves to Calcutta to write tracts exposing the atrocities

committed by the Pakistani Army. In each of the characters a complex network of loyalties to the family and the nation unfolds.

Aslam Khan, Uzma 2003. *Trespassing*. Flamingo London.

Dia and Daanish become lovers. The story is their struggle for freedom and passion in a city raven by turmoil. Daanish comes to Karachi for his father's funeral; he is changed by a few years spent in an American university. Dia is the modern daughter of a mother who, as the owner of a silk farm and factory, has achieved a rare degree of freedom among Pakistani women. Their union will rupture the peace of two households and three families, destroying a stable present built on the repression of a bloody past. The old fisherman, Inan Gul works for Dia's mother as a cook and his son Salamaat will follow a tormented path leaving always coming back to cross Dia's. Salamaat's story linked to the spread of fundamentalists intertwines with Dia as their feudal relation cannot be overridden.

Faqir, Fadia 2007. *My name is Salma*. Doubleday-Randomhouse.

Salma has fled Jordan where she is to be killed by her brother because she became pregnant out of wedlock. She will go to prison for protection and there will give birth to a daughter that will be taken away before she can even see her and this will haunt her life throughout. She escapes to England, and after many ordeals achieves a life of local normality with a job and her own family, a university husband and a son, but she cannot cope with the suffering and goes back to find Leyla her lost daughter.

Moaveni, Azadeh 2005. *Lipstick Jihad*. Public Affairs editions, USA.

As far back as she can remember, Azadeh Moaveni has felt at odds with her tangled identity as an Iranian-American. In suburban America, Azadeh lived in two worlds. At home, she was the daughter of the Iranian exile community, serving tea, clinging to tradition, and dreaming of Tehran. Outside, she was a Californian girl who practiced yoga and listened to Madonna. For years, she ignored the tense standoff between her two cultures. But college magnified the clash between Iran and America, and after graduating, she moved to Iran as a journalist. This is the story of her search for identity, between two cultures cleaved apart by a violent history. It is also the story of Iran, a restive land lost in the twilight of its revolution.

Moshiri, Farnoosh 2005. *Against gravity*. Penguin.

Set in Houston in the mid-1980s, *Against Gravity* is a harrowing story of three lives colliding – Madison Kirby, an angry, dying intellectual; Ric Cardinal, a social worker dedicated to helping others but tormented by his own son he cannot save; and Roya, a struggling Iranian immigrant who has travelled for years through the war-torn Middle East to arrive in Texas with the hope to eke out the most tenuous life for herself and her daughter. The authors tells of each character's own life, yet their stories intertwine in a portray of shared struggle and loss emerges.

Nafisi, Azar 2003. *Reading Lolita in Teheran*. Fourth Estate.

Despite the strictures imposed by the regime, Iran's women continue to study and regroup at the author's private house and challenge patriarchal premises. It is around Nabokov's book, *Lolita*, of the child woman abused that the discussions evolve. Mrs Nafisi is a University Professor in Teheran who doesn't want to abide to the new University rules after the revolution, so she is expelled. She then tries to give her classes at home and then has to go in exile with her husband and daughters.

Shafak, Elif 2007. *Bastard of Istanbul*. Viking, Penguin books.

The contradictions in philosophy and lifestyles are paralleled by two young women, Asya from Istanbul and Armanoush an Armenian American. Asya is the bastard living on the edge of nihilism. Armanoush is mentally confined by her Armenian family exiled in the US. The two are attracted by their opposing natures and backgrounds but they have a fundamental dissent, which is their relation to history, Asya is future oriented and as a bastard has no interest in the past and Armanoush lives to elucidate the past. Both are trapped in the victimized position. Asya goes to the Kundera café in Istanbul where they drink and have sex, as Armanoush goes to the Constantinople café, on the internet where they reflect on their Armenian identity.

Shamsie, Kamila 2005. *Broken Verses*. Harcourt.

Fourteen years ago, famous Pakistani activist Samina Akram disappeared. Two years earlier, her lover, Pakistan's greatest poet, was beaten to death by government thugs. In present-day Karachi, her daughter Aasmaani has just discovered a letter in the couple's private code – a letter that could only have been written recently. Aasmaani is thirty, single, drifting from job to job. Always left behind whenever Samina followed the Poet into exile, she had assumed that her mother's disappearance was simply abandonment. Then, while working at Pakistan's first independent TV station, Aasmaani runs into an old friend of Samina's who gives her the first letter, then many more casting light on her mother's past.

Suleri Goodyear, Sara 2003. *Boys will be boys, a daughter's elegy*. University of Chicago.

The author uses her real name to account on her life and relationships within her families, in Wales, the US and mostly in Pakistan. Pip, the father, who the book addresses post mortem is the central character. Sara unravels the intricacy of their lives. Many siblings and friends of the family appear in the book,

some stay from beginning to end, like her brothers and sisters, even if like Ifat they have passed away and others crop up just for the colour they bring to the story, like the film director Hanif Kureishi.

Notes

- 1 I interviewed professor Kempf about her article via email, on 28 June 2008.
 - 2 Azar: is a Farsi name, the word for the ninth month of the Iranian solar – Zoroastrian – calendar; Azadeh: means free in Farsi.
 - 3 Ref. annotated bibliography of the 15 novels constituting the corpus.
 - 4 Shafaq went to trial in Turkey for this novel. Article 301 of the Turkish constitution was used to prosecute the author (insulting Turkishness) for remarks made about the Armenian massacre.
 - 5 Dabashi, Hamid 2006. *Native informers and the making of the American empire*. Al Ahram weekly, published in Cairo 1 - 7 June - Issue No. 797.
 - 6 Monica Ali was interviewed by the researcher at the Jewish book fair in London in March 2008.
 - 7 The South Asian Women's Creative Collective, SAWCC, presented an event around the novel at 'Exit Art', in New York City on August 4th, 2007.
 - 8 Soueif, Ahdaf 1999. In *The map of love*, first written in Arabic, Amal retraces the life of her grand aunt through old letters and uncovers her active Egyptian nationalist identity.
 - 9 These novels were published during the period of time considered by the researcher but are not part of the corpus because they are written by men or in the case of Gull Hasan it is too religious and not around identity.
 - 10 Mernissi 2001. Initially written by an Indian Muslim, Sheikh Ahmad Shirawani, in Calcutta in the 1814. p.56.
 - 11 Moaveni 2005. p. 25.
 - 12 Stanford Friedman 2008. p. 4.
 - 13 Kaleidoscopic is understood as in *Evolution in Plants by Kaleidoscopic Mutation*. In Willis, J. C. 1942. Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences, Volume 131, Issue 863. p. 161.
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Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Karine Ancellin, « Hybrid Identities of Characters in Muslim women fiction post 9-11 », *TRANS-* [En ligne], 8 | 2009, mis en ligne le 08 juillet 2009, consulté le 19 novembre 2014. URL : <http://trans.revues.org/344>

À propos de l'auteur

Karine Ancellin

Karine Ancellin Saleck is a French-American Phd candidate and researcher in literature at the 'Vrije Universiteit of Brussels' in the TALK division of the department of Germanic studies. Her PHD research is on "Hybrid identities of characters in Muslim women's fiction post 9/11" under the supervision of Heidi Magrit Müller. Born and raised in New York she came to Europe to further her studies. She holds a DEA (pre-doctoral studies) and a Masters in English literature and civilization at the University Paris VII, Institut Charles V, Jussieu. She has worked as a journalist in Muslim countries and abroad for 10 years writing on social issues before coming to Brussels in 2000

Droits d'auteur

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Résumés

L'article analyse des romans contemporains publiés en anglais par des femmes auteurs d'origine musulmane. Le corpus de quinze œuvres est centré sur une période de sept ans après le 11 septembre. L'hypothèse de recherche est d'étudier la réinvention des identités, "hybrides". Les personnages mosaïques de ces romans sont en pleine ré-invention de leur être et très fluctuants dans leurs affinités et valeurs humaines. Leurs personnalités ne sont pas affirmées et leurs contours sont flous, comme le voile qui revêt un symbolisme différent dans chaque roman.

The article examines contemporary novels published in English by women of Muslim ancestry. The corpus is constituted of 15 narratives that came out in the seven years that followed 9/11. The research analyses in what way the characters portrayed are reinventing – hybrid – identities. The kaleidoscopic characters are flexible with an ever-changing liminal self invention in their loyalties and less definite in the assertion of who they are, just like the veil that takes on so many shapes and forms in each novel.

El artículo analiza varias novelas contemporáneas, publicadas originalmente en inglés, de autoras de religión musulmana. El corpus de quince obras está limitado a un período de siete años posteriores al 11 de septiembre de 2001. La hipótesis de investigación es la de estudiar la reinención de las identidades, "híbridos". Los personajes mosaicos de estas novelas se encuentran en plena re-inención de su ser, tienen una actitud bastante fluctuante en sus afinidades y valores humanos. Sus personalidades no están delimitadas y sus contornos son vagos, como el velo que reviste un símbolo diferente en cada novela.