

The Representation of Islam in Contemporary Arab Immigrant Drama

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Abstract: The image of Islam has not always been reflected objectively, especially by Western authors and media writers due to sly hidden political agendas. These hidden agendas clearly spring from the white man's persistent endeavors to place himself as the eternal superior race. Also, such 'subordinating' attempts aim at the exploitation of the Arabic Islamic region for the eventual acquisition of Arabic resources, mainly oil. As a result, some Arabic Muslim writers have made it their duty to echo a more credible portrayal of Islam. Their attempts to do so are carried out by tackling every-day heated issues and occurrences taking place on the streets of the USA and the UK, all under the umbrella of Islam. With that being said, this article sheds light on such devilish attempts by drawing a comparison between three contemporary plays authored by Arab immigrant writers living in the West. The plays under consideration are: *Roar* (2005) by Palestinian-American playwright Betty Shamieh, *Good Muslim Boy* (2015) by Iraqi-Australian playwright Osamah Sami and *Back of the Throat* (2017) by Egyptian-American playwright Yussef El Guindi.

Keywords: Islam, immigrant, East, West, drama, Islamophobia, hegemony.

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If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. (Bhabha 40)

For Islam, almost no positive view can be tracked throughout history. Islam has been considered by the West as a hostile religion. More so, it has been considered as a threat to neighboring monarchs ever since its emergence more than 1.500 years ago. The dichotomy between Christianity and Islam has caused great wars and bloodshed over the years, for example the Crusaders, a series of religious wars between Western Christianity and West Asian Muslims. Such bloody wars caused the death of over 1.7 million people from both sides. Hence, Western thought and ideology has made it its persistent duty to douse Islam out of existence ever since. Despite both sides causing great havoc and bloodshed, Islam has, incredibly, always been depicted as the enemy. Enas Jawad asserts that “the rise of Islam has simply been oppositional to Christianity, and thus it considers Islam as having the initiative of hostility and vulgarity” (Jawad 224, 228). Also, French-Catholic historian Jacques Ellul threatened that “whether one likes it or not, Islam regards itself as having a universal vocation and proclaims itself to be the only true religion to which everyone must adhere. We should have no illusions about the matter; no part of the world is excluded” (Ellul 28)

Historically speaking, drama seems to have no essential place in ancient Arabic literature, a literature which was exclusive only to poems, short stories and, on a more limited sense, novels. In his article entitled ‘Original or Western Imitation: The Case of Arab Theatre’, Abdulaziz H. Alabdullah argues that “The 19th century marked the birth of modern Arab theatre and the beginning of a period of interplay between Arabic drama and Western drama” (Alabdullah 749). In the same article Alabdullah also adds that “some scholars argue that the Arabs were first exposed to the theatre as a modern literary genre during the military expedition led by Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt from 1798 to 1801, when some French amateurs entertained the French troops in Cairo by performing some plays” (Alabdullah 749). Alabdullah does not stop there, but in addition presents a counter argument that says that “others see modern Arab theatre as part of a continuum, emphasizing the existence of some elements of dramatic manifestations in Arab literary heritage” (Alabdullah 749). Shmuel Moreh, a former professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, on the other hand has produced evidence in his book entitled *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arabic World* that “the Arabs did know the theatre in the early years of Islam, but has suggested that their attitude towards such an art as live theatre might have been influenced profoundly by the negative approach of Christian and Jewish religious authorities before Islam, who had rejected drama and considered it a vulgar and anti-religious genre” (Moreh 210).

In any case, the Arabic theater in the West has gained great momentum since the second half of the twentieth century. This is due to the great increase of Arab immigration to America and Britain. Relatively speaking, one should also keep in mind that Islam is the third largest religion in the United States after Christianity and Judaism and the second largest in Britain (Pew 1). Another source also adds that “Muslim Americans are a diverse and growing population, currently estimated at 3.45 million people of all ages. It comprises 0.9% of the population, compared with 70.6% who follow Christianity. American Muslims come from various backgrounds and, according to a 2009 Gallup poll, are one of the most racially diverse religious groups in the United States.” (Gallup)

In addition to what has been said, one should remember that most Western citizens do not really differentiate between being an Arab and being a Muslim; for them, culturally, religiously and ethnically speaking, every Arab is a Muslim and vice versa. Also, for these people Islam is more of an ethnicity than a religious belief. Hence, this paper explores the presentation of Arabs/Muslims on the Western stage through the eyes of the Arabs themselves with special emphasis on the following plays: *Roar* by the Palestinian-American playwright Betty Shamieh published in 2005, *Good Muslim Boy* by Iraqi-Australian playwright Osamah Sami published in 2015, *Back of the Throat* by Egyptian-American playwright Yussef El Guindi published in 2017 and *The Al-Hamlet Summit* by British-Kuwaiti playwright Sulayman Al-Bassam published in 2006.

Roar tells the story of a Palestinian-American family living in Detroit in the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991. Karema and Ahmad, just like the case is with many immigrants spend long hours working in their liquor store. Their 15-year old daughter, Irene, spends her life practicing her Western music as she aspires to be a famous singer one day. When her maternal aunt Hala arrives from Kuwait many secrets are revealed and confronted.

In her play *Roar*, Betty Shamieh seems to concentrate on the idea of religion as an ethnicity, not as an authentic holy belief. Hence why the Arabic major characters in the play, Ahmed, a Muslim, Karema, a Christian, and Hala, also a Christian, find it very difficult to gain belongingness and acceptance in Detroit, USA simply because, for Americans, they're all Muslims. This is uttered very sharply in words such as “I just don't like America” (Shamieh 53) and “I miss Arabic food” (Shamieh 68).

Shamieh does not stop there; she also goes to the extent of following the trend of other immigrant writers by displaying ‘very bad’ representatives of Arabs in the West; Ahmed is a Muslim but also owns a liquor store, which goes against basic Muslim preaching. His wife Karema, a Christian, is very narrow-minded and bossy towards her husband, sister and daughter. Hala, Karema's sister, is also a not so good representative of Arabs as she will do anything in return for money, including prostitution. Irene, Ahmed and Karema's daughter who belongs to the third-generation immigrants, expresses her extreme hatred towards anything Arabic or Islamic, including the Arabic language. This makes Betty Shamieh, just like Ayub Khan-Din and Ayad Akhtar, complicit in confirming negative stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims and presenting them to the West.

Shamieh starts her play off by presenting the family as they are quarreling about Irene's future. Again, such a trend of picturing Arabs and Muslims as troublesome is very recurrent in Western immigrant Muslim drama to the extent that people might actually believe that all Arabs and Muslims function in this problematic way. Plus, the family utters foul words and shows no respect to its individuals. Phrases such as "Mom, it's none of your business" (Shamieh 5) and "Irene's response is to slam the door in her mother's face" (Shamieh 5) seem to foreground such notions of disrespect and loss of temper, ones which are often utilized by Orientalists to describe the Orients.

This play, just like the vast majority of immigrant literature, portrays multiple generations of immigrants. Despite the absence of the first generation of immigrants, the common phenomenon is also re-confirmed in which the second generation is longing to belong, but they can't do so, neither physically nor mentally due to exterior conditions that they themselves cannot control. In addition to that, the third generation is completely integrated into the Western society and its vices. This is clear when Karema, a member of the second-generation immigrants says that "I've been wanting to take Irene to Palestine, and we'll stop by Jordan first". Irene, a third-generation immigrant, perceiving herself as totally American, very disrespectfully replies "Hell no" (Shamieh 52). Other quotes such as "no one likes Jordan. It's a place you end up in, not a place you go to" (Shamieh 51) and "who in America has heard of a Palestinian anything?" (Shamieh 6) only reflect how hatred towards Arabism and Islam has not only infiltrated into the Western mind, but, unfortunately, into the minds of the third generation Arabs themselves. Furthermore, Shamieh is well-aware of the West's negative vision towards Islam. Hence Abe, Ahmed's brother, has converted to Judaism so as to be accepted by the West. For him, just like in other similar immigrant literature, to hide your Islamic identity will raise the chances of success and prosperity in a Western environment. This makes such an argument valid when we compare Ahmed's status quo to Abe's; Ahmad, an explicitly proclaimed Muslim is not doing economically as well as his brother Abe who owns a music record company and seems very prosperous. In one instance Ahmed sharply declares that "American women think all Arab [Muslim] men are dirty" (Shamieh 4). This proves that Arabs and Muslims are not only hated, but they are a people who lack hygiene, hence should be avoided and not dealt with, neither personally nor economically. What makes this argument even stronger is the fact that Ahmed and his wife Abe who have been living in the USA for more than fifteen years don't actually have any friends. Irene is very frightened to face the American people to the extent that she keeps to herself all the time always keeping herself busy at work as a means of distraction from her alienated reality. Effectively, one could not really guess Shamieh's intentions in depicting the characters' actions in such a conservative way. Whether she's putting the blame on the American society for shutting Arab Muslims out or she's putting the blame on the immigrants themselves for always avoiding attempts at integrating themselves into American everyday life is not quite clear. But one could guess that, by taking the negative actions and characteristics of the characters mentioned in the play into account, the immigrants are to blame as they are depicted as people as who deserve to be loathed and averted from.

Shamieh is obviously a well-knowledgeable writer due to her 'imitation' of other Muslim immigrant writers by sticking to the employment of Western Orientalism in her play. Hala confesses in one quote that "it's nice to know that American men appreciate my charms as much as Arabs" (Shamieh 7). This selection of the term 'charms', synonymous with the Orientalist word 'exoticism' is not used haphazardly; quite the contrary as it further foregrounds the way that Western people view the East, i.e, only superficially and imaginably. They don't really study it as it really is. In other words, they are exoticized by it. Shamieh is parodying this in the previous quotation depicting Easterners, including Muslims, as people who look exotic and different and this is the only attraction they deserve. This argument could be further foregrounded when we read a quote uttered by Hala when she says: "They're [the Kuwaitis] are ignorant" (Shamieh 25). Shamieh therefore does not only express the hatred of Westerners towards Arabs, but also projects a sense of self-loathing practiced by Arabs and Muslims themselves.

Shamieh takes the extra mile when she describes the Arab Muslim man as one who should be judged by "how quickly he is ready to get undressed" (Shamieh 9) Again, Shamieh resorts to and applies invented Western Orientalist features as being 'oversexed' is one of the key characteristics often labelled on the Orient. Here, one could argue that Shamieh could simply be parodying Orientalism because "Orientalism carries within it the stamp of a problematic European [American] attitude towards Islam" (Said 74). One should also not be surprised by such practices because, again, as Said puts it "Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter few surprises." (Said 95). Said in this regard has his say on whoever foregrounds the discipline of Orientalism in his book's afterword when he says that "To criticize *Orientalism* {Said's book and not the Western discipline} is in effect to be a supporter of Islamism or Muslim fundamentalism." (Said - Afterword) Shamieh seems complicit in further worsening the image of Islam in the West by simply being supporters of Western Orientalism and at the same time a critic of Said's book. Said in his study of Orientalism also differentiates between the terms 'origins' and 'beginnings'. The first term simply describes one's biological birth. For example, when one is born an Arab, just like the case is for all the characters in Shamieh's play, he'll always stay an Arab because Arabism is deeply integrated in his blood. In other words, nobody has the chance to change his origins. Shamieh also has her say on this matter when Hala says that "you look like an Arab. You've got to live like one" (Shamieh 13). However, Said introduces the term 'beginnings' to Said has argued in his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* that a "beginning is the first step in the intentional production of meaning, where intention is defined as an intellectual appetite to do something in a specific way. The consciousness of beginning, he continues, projects the task in a particular way, that is, it provides the created inclusiveness within which the work develops" (Said 12).

This production of meaning could refer to a religious belief or an ideology, i.e., a non-biological aspect. In relation to this, one should critically ask the question concerning why Abe chose to convert to Judaism and not to Christianity in the USA, which is a Christian country. Statistics say that the percentage of Jews in the USA does not exceed 2%. So, in terms of numbers, they are a minority. Still, this does not stop Abe from converting into one. Could he have chosen to do so because being a Jew is more advantageous and economically lucrative than being a Muslim, or even a Christian? This could be a very reasonable argument as Abe is a very prosperous man after coming to the USA with nothing but the clothes on his back.

Objectively speaking however, Shamieh gives some glimmer of hope for erasing typical stereotypes and achieving reconciliation and equality of all religions and races. For example, Ahmed, who clearly does not like living in America, looks for an escape. In his opinion, music can unify peoples and religions due to its [music's] commonality between all people. He says "I hope this music caught your heart off-guard and held it, so that your mind could wander to a place where you could love anyone, whether Muslim, Jew, or Christian, in this land that belongs to us all and that one day soon we will learn to share" (Shamieh 21) This clearly echoes Shamieh's opinion that no physical geographical land will ever equally embrace people of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. For her, people could only be on spiritually speaking, through music. Whether Shamieh is being optimistic here or pessimistic is not clear. However, she should be faced with the question of how can such a 'utopia' be achieved if immigrants, like yourself, contribute in spreading, disseminating and magnifying such negative stereotypes about Arabs and Islam?

All in all, Shamieh portrays a very darksome image of both Islam and Arabism. As Edward Said puts it in *Orientalism* that "the Arab and Islamic world remains a second-order power in terms of the production of global culture, knowledge and scholarship" (Said 323). Unfortunately, Shamieh embodies this notion in her play and she follows the trend of many other immigrant writers in degrading and 'backstabbing' their own people. In this play, Shamieh has done nothing but confirm the negative Orientalist stereotypes attributed to the East. Characteristics such as backwardness, over-sexism, inaccuracy, submissiveness and despotism are very recurrent to the extent that the West have actually started to believe such characteristics.

Osamah Sami's *Good Muslim Boy* discusses Islam and its representation on the Western stage but from a different lens. Most of the events in the play take place in Iran but still such text was addressed to a Western audience. This semiautobiographical play tells the story of Osamah, a half-Iraqi half-Iranian half-Australian man, who lives in both Iran and Australia during the 1990 Gulf War and its aftermath. The plot of the play shifts distinctively between experiences of Iranian trauma and Australian tranquility. What makes this play different from other immigrant plays is the fact that it ends happily. Other immigrant plays end with a quarrel, a fight or at least, with no obvious non-reconciliation.

One should keep in mind that Iran's Islamic socio-political system is very different from all other Islamic countries. It could be described as the most Islamically conservative country on the planet, even more than Saudi Arabia. By contrast, Australia, a Western country by affiliation, is far more liberal. Although the overall percentage of Muslims in Australia does not exceed 2.6% of the total population, still Arab Muslim immigration to it is on the rise. Reasons for this are no different from conventional reasons of immigration, i.e, in search of better opportunities and life standards. In the play entitled *Good Muslim Boy* the case is different. Osamah and his family's initial reason for leaving Iran was the Irani-Iraqi war. More importantly, they left that bloody setting in an escape from extreme religious confining habitat. Osamah's story echoes the stories of approximately 95.000 others who followed in his family's footsteps.

The fact that *Good Muslim Boy* ends happily with the reconciliation between father and son does not completely dismiss the fact that Sami, again like most other immigrant authors, confirms stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims. Like in Shamieh's *Roar*, Sami adheres to Orientalist stereotypes and turns them into a subject of humor and ridicule. Unlike Shamieh however who is obviously more inclined to the West, one does feel a sense of balance between his representation of Muslims as an embodiment of Orientalist characteristics and contrarily, his representation of Muslims as victims and subjects of racism. Also, Shamieh presents conflicts within Islam and its opposition to Christianity; Sami, however, presents the bloody war between Ayatollah and Saddam Hussein and the Sunni-Shiite war in what could be named as a an Islamic 'civil war'.

In his play, Sami tries to define what a good Muslim boy is. A traditional description of a good Muslim boy is that he's one who prays, fasts, contributes to charity, does not lie and steal and more importantly, one who respects his elders. Ironically, Osamah, the Muslim protagonist, is not a highly committed Muslim; he looks at girls, buys drugs, masturbates, fakes a medical degree and even plays the role of a gay character in a play. Still, he prays and contributes to charity. Nevertheless, this 'bildungsroman-play' follows the life of Osama from childhood till maturity, from vice to virtue. Only at the end do we realize what a good Muslim boy is like for Sami.

Sami boldly puts special emphasis on the very rigid Iranian-Islamic political system. Impartially speaking, his depiction seems very realistic. This is a plus on Sami's behalf. However, one should criticize Sami for not differentiating between this humanly implemented enclosed Iranian-Islamic system and what an authentic Islamic political system would be like because most of the practices shown in the play are presented and carried out in the name of Islam. As a result, Sami does not put enough effort to separate between Islam and a humanly designed traditional restrictive mentality, again, carried out in the name of Islam. Namely, the play draws a contrast between a Muslim conservative bureaucratic Iran and a Christian liberal democratic Australia. For one who is not aware of the dictates of Islam he would automatically infer that what the Iranian system is carrying out is what Islam really preaches, which is not the case.

In the prologue of the play Osamah is told by his father that he's been advised by other Muslim elders to disown his own son and send him to Iran to face the death penalty because he played the role of a homosexual character in one of the plays. This sets the atmosphere for the very restrictive mood that the play will take place in mainly, Iran. Osamah, well-knowledgeable of Islamic preaching is not surprised at this bit of news and therefore does not react.

The play does not stop there but continues on very boldly by showing the divide amongst Muslims. For instance, on page one of the play Sami utters the quote "Dad was an Iraqi, therefore, I was an Arab, therefore, the neighborhood [Iranian] hated us" (Sami 1) It is true that the Iraqi-Iranian war began due to border issues in the early 1980's, still, this war took a different cover later on and was labelled as being religious between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Sami in this context is also sure to mention that this 'Islamic' war is so tense to the extent that brothers from each side fight and kill each other under the name of Islam without any hesitation. Sami says: "my dad, the Iraqi, was fighting for the Iranians-but his brothers, my uncles, fought for Iraq" (Sami 1) Such acts reflect the very stiff mentality of Muslims at that time. For them, religion, whether their affiliation was Sunni or Shiite, supersedes family. This is not a deviation from Orientalism as it is the personification of hardheadedness. The following short dialogue between Osamah and his mother reflects the profound hatred between different sects of Muslims; Osamah tells his mother that "Iran is the good side". She replies: "Yes, you know this, Osamah". Osamah continues: "And the people who fight them are evil. How evil?" His mom responds: "Enough that they'll all go to hell" (Sami 3).

As mentioned earlier, Sami confirms Orientalist stereotypes disseminated by Orientalists. This is clearly spotted when Osamah's mother takes him to a fortuneteller to foretell his future. For a Western reader, this only adds the notion of 'exoticism' to a place that has always been exoticized in the first place in the Western mentality. Such acts, consulting fortunetellers in this context, are not acceptable in Islam. Viewing this act from a psychological lens, this might be explained as an act carried out in search of hope in a place where dreams and ambitions are always shattered by internal Islamic divisions, wars and continuous havoc. The representation of exoticism, conventionally practiced by the West against the East, is also seen in a reverse manner, meaning it is exercised by the East against the West; in particular, for people at that time the television was a relatively new invention. So for them, it was out of the ordinary, exotic and imagined. Osamah says: "We stayed up late, mesmerized by the white folks and their mysterious, alien activities." (Sami 5) Terms such as 'mesmerized' and 'mysterious' show this act of 'reverse Orientalism'. All through the play Sami depicts the Islamic-Iranian system as one full of hypocrisy. This does not exclude the normal citizens as they are seen as people who suppress forcefully and fearfully, and not by their own choice, their instinctive desires all because the system wants them to do so and not as a true application of Islam.

For instance, adultery is one of the greatest sins in Islam and even in Christianity and Judaism. Because, according to authentic Islamic dictates, the penalty for the adulterer was to be whipped 100 times, some Muslims have come with what is called 'Nikah Al Mut'ah' or as it is often translated into English as 'temporary marriage'. This simply means that a man and a woman will get married temporarily to satisfy their sexual instincts. This act is described in the play as a 'religious loophole' in Islam, so some Muslims take advantage of it to the extent that it takes the shape of religiously legitimized prostitution as it is carried out in underground brothels. As mentioned earlier, Orientalists describe Orientals as being oversexed. The mentioning of such immoral acts, temporary marriage in this case, only further foregrounds the idea that Arabs and Muslims are indeed oversexed. What proves the idea of presenting Muslims as 'oversexed' further is the mentioning of polygamy, also discussed extensively in Muslim immigrant drama. What this consequently entails is the idea that Muslims are not sexually satisfied with one wife so, they could either practice temporary marriage or they could have four wives at the same time.

In fact, one of the non-Muslim's frequent attacks on prophet Muhammad is the fact that he had multiple wives at the same time. The Koran says "From His signs is that He has created for you spouses from yourselves so that you may get peace [and tranquility] through them; and He placed between you love and mercy. In these are signs for the people who reflect." (The Quran - Surah Al-Room, 30:21). Sayyid Rizvi proposes that "In Islam, the ideal marriage is the monogamous form of marriage. Limited polygyny is a provision approved by Islam for exceptional circumstances only; and that also with many stringent conditions." (Rizvi 1) So, not any Muslim who wants to marry four wives can go ahead and do so; there have to be exceptional circumstances. However, Osamah presents his characters as people who are always ready to practice polygamy without any hesitation and quite willingly, even if there is no humane reason to do so. Images of a "Saudi man accompanied by four wives, all in black hijab, faces covered by the niqab" (Sami 215) are stereotypes that have been repeated over and over again to the extent that most of the West have come to believe and generalize such images. Sami presents a dichotomy with his presentation of Australia, ideologically a Western country, and with his description of it being as a Christian country. The contrast between the dishonorable and dishonest Iranian Muslim soldiers on the one hand and the honest moral "Christian" (Sami 92) Australian police officers uncovers Sami's inclination towards the West more because, again, he does not separate between true Islamic-gear practices and human-gear evil practices carried out by people who call themselves Muslims but have nothing to do with Islam.

Namely, one quote describing Australian police says that “police do not take bribes here, which deeply troubled me ... But this fear was balanced by the fact that they seemed not to stomp on people’s faces. In fact, nobody stomped on anyone, not teachers, not parents. And yet society stayed disciplined regardless.” (Sami 97) A quote like this is a direct attack on the whole Islamic style of life in Iran. The mentioning of ‘teachers’ and ‘parents’ infers that violence is propagandized by the police in the streets, by teachers at schools and most importantly, by parents at home. Since this play is intended for a Western audience and since no distinction is made between Islamic dictates and between Islamic political regimes, then Sami is, like many other immigrants complicit in aggravating the image of Islam even more, this time in Australia.

All things considered, is Osamah Sami’s presentation of Islam credible? In other words, does it reflect the true nature of Islam? Without bias, it isn’t. Being a Muslim, Sami does not put enough effort in the play to make a distinction between the Iranian bureaucratic dictatorial regime that takes Islam as its motto and as a result, manipulates it in whatever way it pleases and between what Islam really preaches. One unmindful of Iran’s very restrictive ‘Islamic’ system and Iran’s religious history might extrapolate the idea that all Muslim countries are just like Iran in replicates its implementation of Islam, which is not the case. One can confidently assert that, in terms of restrictiveness of Islam, no Islamic country comes even close to it.

Another prominent play that discusses the representation of Islam is the 2005 play entitled *Back of the Throat* authored by Egyptian American playwright Yussef El Guindi. A play written in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers in New York, El Guindi describes what it feels like for an Arab citizen to dwell in a setting filled with racism and hatred.

Clearly, out of all the plays under consideration in this paper, El Guindi’s play seems the most realistic and credible. This is due to several reasons; first, El Guindi’s main character Khaled, a middle-aged Arab Muslim, does not practice self-hatred against his own Islamic origins. Put differently, he does not describe his own people, Arab Muslims, negatively, a common occurrence found in other Muslim immigrant plays. Second, El Guindi does not present any of the Orientalists stereotypes pinned on Arabs and Muslims by Western Orientalists such as backwardness, non-patience, violence and over-sexism. On the contrary; Khaled, the protagonist, is a highly educated character who is rational, patient and seemingly very credible. Throughout his interrogation with the American intelligence he wittingly plays the role of a submissive objective individual so as to avoid being accused of anything he did not do, and not due to fear. The whole play takes the shape of a very long interrogation process in which the American intelligence, represented by two agents, tries to get Khaled to admit to something he never did, solely because he is Muslim. Khaled’s case is an analogy of the many Arab Muslim cases in which they are subject to ‘suspicion’ simply because they come from the Middle East, a hap hazardous setting for Westerners.

In his article “Hidden in Plain Sight”, Laurent Bonelli states that since the 9/11 attacks “governments have demonstrated an unswerving determination and have outlined proposals to recognize security forces that are now called upon to cooperate more efficiently in the fight against radical Islam” (Bonelli 100). Jerome P. Bjelopera, a specialist in organized crime and terrorism, also contends that “every day, more than 800,000 police officers collect and document information regarding behaviors, incidents, and other suspicious activity associated with crime, including terrorism” (Bjelopera 3). This logically brings us to the conclusion that, in the age of Islamophobia, every Muslim is put under the microscope of suspicion and Khaled, who always keeps to himself and does nothing illegal, is no exception.

Being the only Muslim character in the play, it is clear that Khaled is not only a subject to both racism and hatred, but he is also the only target of both. Although Khaled admits he’s not a devout Muslim when he says: “I’m not religious myself” (El Guindi 11), for the US government officials, this does not rule out the fact that he must be interrogated with. One should be reminded here that Khaled neither wears a dishdasha nor does he grow a beard. Still, the idea here is that as long as you are a Muslim, even just by name, then it is most likely that you are a terrorist. Another instance that proves that Khaled is not devout is when he says: “I hear it’s [the Koran] a comfort” (El Guindi). The use of the word ‘hear’ here prove that Khaled was born a Muslim, and it wasn’t his choice to be one, hence he doesn’t practice it. Still, he’s a suspect.

El Guindi’s play is the embodiment of how the political biases and prejudices of the Western world could gear the mentality and attitude of the public towards the hatred and expulsion of Islam. Enas Jawad argues that ‘the debut of ISIS has resulted in the formation of two western camps of interpretation emerging not only in the world of international politics but also in the literary interpretation of Islam or Muslim images. Though contrasting in their confirmation of the religious basis underlying the existence of ISIS, as one looks at it as representative of the ‘true face of Islam’, while the other insists on ISIS’s detachment from Islam, reducing it, thus, to a more politically formulated discourse against the West policy in the Middle East; yet, both camps of analysts evoked an orientalist discourse that privileges the Western Knowledge of the East” (Jawad 2). Unfortunately for the West, every Muslim is a potential ISIS member or at least, a terrorist. In such an equation, for the West of course, you can never be impartial; you are either with us or against us, even if you claim to belong to neither camps. In addition to that, an Arab’s dark complexion will pin him down as a potential terrorist even if he has an American citizenship and claims to have American affiliation.

Concerning the choice of terminology employed in this play, the American CIA intelligence members echo this notion. They continuously repeat phrases such as ‘assalamualaikum’, with its English equivalent meaning ‘peace be upon you’ not to call for peace as the phrase connotes, but as a subject of ridicule. In an interview with The New York Times carried out by Dinitia Smith, El Guindi states that. "Friends were questioned, friends of friends. The Patriot Act came in, and suddenly you didn't know what your rights were. You started hearing these stories of people getting stopped for what they were reading at airports, of

the F.B.I. going to galleries and questioning the artist if the exhibit was politically charged" (New York Times / Feb. 2006). Here, one should, briefly at least, shed light on what is called 'The Patriot Act'. It was an act passed in 2001 by the US government to improve the capabilities to detect, in advance, any potential terrorist attack that the US might undergo. This act entitled government officials to cross the line in their interrogations if the one interrogated showed no cooperation. El Guindi indirectly displays that such an act has been misunderstood, or better said, has been misused by government officials; the two government officials in the play start off as being nice and diplomatic. The questions that they raise in the interrogation reflect the notion that they don't really know what they are looking for. As Khaled persists even more on the fact that he'd done nothing more, the government officials lose their temper and physically hurt Khaled. Stage directions direct that "Carl [one of the detectives] kicks Khaled in the groin. Khaled gasps, grabs his testicles, and collapses onto his knees" (El Guindi 41). Carl then says "First off: That has been coming since we got here, because of repeated reference to an innocence that is not yours to claim. If you were innocent, why would I have kicked you? Something you've done has given me good cause to *assume* the worst" (El Guindi 41, 42) The use of the word "assume" by Carl reflects practices carried out by the US governments, much of which were carried out under the name of assumptions and suspicions only, and not due to concrete facts. Carl continues "The responsibility for the kick lies with your unwillingness to *assume* responsibility for the part we know you played. We need to know what that was" (El Guindi 42). Such quotes, again, mirror the fact that the US intelligence don't really know what they are doing. Not only are they not aware of what they are looking for, but by practicing physical violence, they try to force the victim into claiming that he had done something he hadn't, just to get the physical torture over with.

Although the USA's ideology claims to be somewhat humane, the Patriot Act has, not surprisingly, legalized physical violence in interrogations, even if one is just a suspect simply because one is a Muslim or an Arab. Carl reads from this act and says: "Section eight, paragraph two. Willful damage is not permitted but relaxed, consistent pressure on parts of the body that may be deemed sensitive is allowed. As long as the suspect remains conscious and doesn't scream longer than ten seconds at any one time. Some bruising is allowed" (El Guindi 52) In other words, the USA has lost all capabilities of obtaining information that could reveal probable threats that it has resorted to violence simply because it is distrustful of anyone and everyone who is a Muslim.

In the end of the play, El Guindi proposes that the only way we can understand each other is by comprehending each other's languages, both literally and metaphorically. As for, El Guindi's other character and mouthpiece declares that "I will make them speak their own language differently. I will have them speak words they never spoke before [meaning words of tolerance and tranquility]. And soon my language will also fall on their heads [The language of racism and hatred]. Like theirs fall on others. Exploding on our brains 'til we can't even dream in peace" (El Guindi 50). Ending the play on such a note reflects El Guindi's, and indeed other

Muslim's mentality of persistence. This perseverance towards dialogue and establishing links of reciprocal understanding is what will eventually end this tension between Islam on the one hand and the rest of the world on the other.

It is clear then that each playwright has his/her own perspective of the treatment of Muslims in a Western environment. However, they all agree that the image of Islam projected by the West is by no means credible. There is always this mischievous manipulated touch added by the West to reach further material gain and status and the plays in this paper are a case in point.

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