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**The Impact of the West and Islam Dualism on the
Identity Construction in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees
Don't Weep* (2014)**

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in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilisation

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Dedication

A journey of discovery!

On the path, many hardships;

Yet, the heart filled with bravery,

All thanks to so many friendships.

Warm thank you to:

The souls who are far away from here,

But to my heart will remain forever near;

The souls who have broken down the barriers

Between US to tenderly call me “DEAR”;

All the ones I have tired with my ideas

And who have helped me fight my fears.

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Abstract

The relationships between the Western and the Islamic civilisations are undermined by a dualistic view held by neo-Orientalists and Occidentalists which consists in separating and rejecting any idea of compatibility between them. However, there are people who attempt in various ways to combat these dualistic attitudes. Literature is among the means available to undertake such a mission for its power to critically portray serious issues. In this respect, the present dissertation investigates how the Jordanian-British writer Fadia Faqir critically portrays the impacts of the West and Islam dualism on the protagonists' identity construction in her novel entitled *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014), as they move between an Islamic country and a Western one. The methodology used is mainly a descriptive and analytical approach relying entirely on the novel as primary source and formulating interpretations based on critical thinking. The work is composed of three chapters whereby the first offers an overview of the dualistic representations of the West and the Islamic world; the second focuses on analysing the male protagonist; and the third chapter is dedicated to the female protagonist. At the end of this dissertation, the analyses have revealed that the West and Islam dualism has greatly impacted their identity construction but they succeeded to solve the crisis that they initially experienced. Based on these considerations, the dissertation concludes that Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* attempts to denounce the West and Islam dualism and to reconcile between the West and the Islamic world.

Key concepts: West and Islam dualism, Orientalism, neo-Orientalism, Occidentalism.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
General Introduction	1
Chapter One:	3
The West and Islam Dualism	3
Introduction	4
1.1. Dualism	4
1.2. Orientalism	5
1.3. Neo-Orientalism	10
1.4. Occidentalism	17
Conclusion	22
Chapter Two:	23
Omar Rahman's Identity Construction	23
Introduction	24
2.1. Amman: The Reasons behind the Departure	24
2.1.1. Omar's Social and Cultural Background	24
2.1.2. Secular and Idealistic Omar	26
2.1.3. Omar's Tripartite Frustration	28
2.1.4. Escapism, Public Guilt and Private Guilt	30
2.2. The Pursuit of Xanadu and Delusions	32
2.2.1. Afghanistan: the Antipodes of Xanadu	36
2.2.2. Metamorphosis: From Healing to Hurting	39
2.2.3. England: the Terrorist Seeking Revenge	40
Conclusion	44
Chapter Three:	45
Najwa's Identity Construction	45
Introduction	46
3.1. Amman: Najwa's Alienation	46
3.1.1. Najwa's Familial Background	46
3.1.1.1. Myth of the Religious Father	46

3.1.1.2. Tyranny of the Secular Mother _____	47
3.1.1.3. The Loving Religious Grandmother _____	49
3.1.2. Najwa’s Social and Cultural Background _____	50
3.2. The Quest for the Father _____	53
3.2.1. Adjustment and Transgression _____	53
3.2.2. The Journey to Afghanistan _____	54
3.2.3. England: Alien Country and Culture _____	58
Conclusion _____	62
General Conclusion _____	63
Works Cited _____	65

General Introduction

There are different attitudes adopted when representing the relationship between the Islamic and the Western world. One of these consists in perceiving it through the lenses of dualism. In other words, one establishes that there is an essentialist distinction that makes them incompatible and hence can lead to eternal enmity between them. This stance is destructive, yet adopted by many agents in the West as well as in the Muslim world. Their separatist views prompt the modern individual to think, speak and act in ways that favour hatred and clashes between people on both sides. The discourse of the West and Islam dualism undermines the various efforts that are made towards the creation of cosmopolitan societies. Some of its dangerous manifestations include conflicts, violence, distrust, hatred, and exclusionary policies. However, there are some people like Fadia Faqir who attempt to denounce the injustices perpetrated because of such dangerous views and to explore ways to reconcile the two worlds.

Fadia Faqir is a Jordanian-British writer born in 1956 in Amman, Jordan. She has been residing in England since 1984. She is the author of several novels including *Nisanit* (1988), *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name Is Salma* (2007), and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). She considers herself as a “mongrel”, that is, she is neither fully Arab nor fully British. This position has some advantages for her in the sense that it allows her to portray, examine and criticise both sources of her identity in most of her fiction. She believes in the power of novels to represent the world and to awaken the readers' awareness about serious issues and injustices that plague their societies. Her interest in the dynamics of the relationship between the Islamic and the Western worlds can, for instance, be demonstrated through her novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep*.

In this novel, indeed, she portrays some problematic issues relating to the political, religious and cultural differences between the Islamic world and the West. Faqir portrays the challenges to effective interactions and coexistence between the two worlds. In order to do so, she depicts the lives of two protagonists who are originally from a Middle-Eastern country, Jordan, but feel compelled to leave their homeland because of various motives. Their journeys evolve through other neighbouring Middle Eastern countries including Pakistan and Afghanistan and eventually lead them to a Western country, notably England. The challenges they encounter along their odysseys and the way they react to them appear to be interesting matters for investigation.

A number of reasons have motivated the writing of this dissertation. One of them is a desire to investigate the hostile views that undermine the relationships between the Islamic and the Western civilisations in the contemporary era marked by globalisation. Another point is an interest in exploring how fiction can portray these current issues and their potential impacts on people's lives. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* portrays the impact of the West and Islam dualism on the identity construction of her protagonists. To reach this goal, the work is guided by a twofold research problem which is the following:

a) How does the West and Islam dualism impact the construction of identity in *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014)?

b) How do the protagonists react to this dualism in the novel?

Although these questions need to be carefully examined before any cogent answers can be attained, some tentative answers can be advanced as follows:

a) In *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, the West and Islam dualism tends to represent a challenge to the protagonists' construction of identity.

b) The protagonists strive to construct their identities in the midst of this dualism.

In order to verify these hypotheses and arrive at satisfactory conclusions, the dissertation needs a clear structure. For this purpose, and taking into consideration the requirements and limitations of a master's dissertation, the work will be structured into three chapters. The first chapter intends to conduct an overview of the concept of the West and Islam dualism in order to understand how it has impacted identity construction. Since there are two protagonists, a female and a male, and two alternated narratives within the novel, each one of them is devoted a separate chapter. Thus, in the second chapter, the analysis focuses on the male protagonist's construction of identity. The choice of beginning with him is mainly based on the consideration that his quest started long before the second protagonist's. Finally, the third chapter consists in analysing the female protagonist's construction of identity. In light of these analyses, conclusions will be reached as far as the discoveries and the validity of the hypotheses formulated to address the central questions of this dissertation are concerned.

Chapter One:
The West and Islam Dualism

Introduction

Basically, the West and Islam dualism has been articulated in two main forms, depending on the entity from which it emanates. These are classified as Orientalism and Occidentalism. The former victimises the Eastern civilisations while the latter is hostile to the Western ones. However, Orientalism has evolved into a new mode labelled neo-Orientalism, which, as it will be demonstrated in the following pages, is nothing but Orientalism in another era, other historical, social and political contexts. Each of them follows an ‘us’ and ‘them’ framework, thus promoting two opposed worlds where the “other” is represented either simply in condescending manner, treated as inferior, or seriously defined as a threat. The subsequent discussion focuses on these brands of the West and Islam dualism, with the purpose of highlighting their contexts of emergence, their evolution, major features and their different effects.

1.1. Dualism

The term dualism refers to duality; the state of being double or having two parts. One of its synonymous terms is dichotomy, which refers to a pair of opposites. In this sense, some illustrations of dualism might include the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s dichotomies in modern linguistics such as signifier and signified for the description of the linguistic sign, langue and parole for the nature of language, diachronic and synchronic for the approach to language study, or paradigmatic and syntagmatic for the relation between linguistic units. Also, Encyclopædia Britannica (2017) defines the term dualism in philosophy as follows: *“The use of two irreducible, heterogeneous principles (sometimes in conflict, sometimes complementary) to analyze the knowing process (epistemological dualism) or to explain all of reality or some broad aspect of it (metaphysical dualism).”* In modern philosophy of mind, dualism is a theory that places mind and matter in an antagonistic relationship. George Stuart Fullerton (1915) maintains: *“The plain man finds himself in a world of physical things and of minds, and it seems to him that his experience directly testifies to the existence of both. This means that the things of which he has experience appear to belong to two distinct classes”* (5-6). Thus, dualism suggests viewing the world (or understanding reality) as consisting of only two distinct classes, which are physical things and minds (or matter and mind) in this case.

Mohammad Samiei (2009) remarks that dualism has been adopted to serve in various contexts throughout the history of thought, *“but generally it shows that in some particular domain, there are two mutually exclusive categories of things or principles”* (6). He

approaches it as “*an ideology that promotes an essentialist distinction between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ and emphasises unconditional superiority of the former and essential inferiority of the latter*” (6). In other words, dualism, applied to human relationships, influences identity construction. The ‘self’ constructs its identity relying on the ‘other’, yet it represents the latter with dominating frameworks, that is to say associating inferior traits to the ‘other’. He then argues that “*dualism was manifested by different ideologies which attempted to justify the domination of others by theorising dualities based on sex, race, nation and class*” (7). In a brief historical review, he identifies the dualisms of gender (masculine and feminine), of race (Black and White, for example), of class (Capital and Labour), of political ideology (Liberal World and Atheistic Communism) among many others.

There is an interesting example of dualism in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*¹. It can be found in a fragment of the speech that Old Major (one of the animal characters in the novel) delivers to his fellow animals before he dies. It reads:

I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal. (Orwell 4)

This is a typical example of ideological dualism and it reveals many of its essential features. For instance, it highlights the construction of collective identities and the sense of eternal enmity. This is done by totalising each category based on an essentialist distinction between “good” and “evil”: “*Whatever goes upon...*” and “[a]ll the habits of Man are evil”. In this case, animal fights against Man for power and domination on the farm, and there is little room for coexistence, to say the least.

1.2. Orientalism

Edward Wadie Said (1935-2003) published a book entitled *Orientalism* (1978) in which he fiercely criticises Western scholarship for its biased study and constructions of the

¹ *Animal Farm* (1945) is a satirical novel that depicts and criticises, in a fable-like style, Communism and totalitarian systems. Its author is the English novelist, essayist and critic George Orwell whose original name is Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950).

Oriental people and their cultures. Indeed, from the late eighteenth century until the twentieth century, Western scholars had been actively generating a diversified body of knowledge about the Orient. Said attempts to highlight the connection between Orientalism – a “*discipline representing institutionalized Western knowledge of the Orient*” (67) – and politics, or more precisely imperialism and colonialism. Also, he investigates its role in the construction of Western identity. In order to do so, he selects a set of diverse texts, including scholarly, literary, journalistic, philological, travel, religious, and political texts (23), which he analyses, highlighting the different ways in which they have treated the Orient as a subject matter and their points of convergence.

Again, before it became a term for describing a complacent and patronizing attitude towards Eastern people, especially after his own harsh criticism, Said shows in his book that Orientalism denoted a field of study based on a geographical, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unit called the Orient. So, it was a profession; its practitioner was called Orientalist no matter what subfield of the vast field he was specialist in or wrote about. This is one reason why Said accuses Orientalism of being eccentric in its attitude (50). The Church Council of Vienne [sic] in 1312 (49-50) is believed to be its origin. It included scholars specialised in Biblical studies, Semitic languages, Islam, or even Chinese studies until the mid-eighteenth century (51). Then, it was progressively modernised, and by the turn of the nineteenth century, the Islamic Orient attracted much of its interests. In fact, until then, the Orient was synonymous for only India and the Bible lands (4). Said contends that “[w]hen the term *Orient* was not simply a synonym for the Asiatic East as a whole, or taken as generally denoting the distant and exotic, it was most rigorously understood as applying to the Islamic Orient” (74-75).

Modern Orientalism dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Europeans enjoyed its monopoly from Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 until the end of World War II. Britain and France were then imperial powers and had either a coloniser-colonised relationship with the Eastern people, or a commercial one. This made them the protagonists of the phenomenon. Thanks to these relations, many European scholars and artists, viz. poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators (3) found an interest in the Orient: “*For decades the Orientalists had spoken about the Orient, they had translated texts, they had explained civilizations, religions, dynasties, cultures, mentalities—as academic objects, screened off from Europe by virtue of their inimitable foreignness*” (222). In other words, Orientalism expressed a thirst for knowledge, from these Westerners,

about the Orient and all that they considered Oriental. It was the holistic science of the Orient, the West's specialised library.

From the mid-twentieth (after the Second World War) until the late twentieth century, the leadership of Orientalism shifted into the hands of the new superpower, the United States of America. This era was marked by the Cold War which was principally an ideological clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. There had also emerged a number of conflicts between Arabs and Israelis. These factors fed the studies and representations of the Muslim world. The Americans imitated Britain and France in systematically studying the societies in the Eastern regions of the globe in order to protect their economic and political interests. The protagonists were predominantly social scientists who interpreted the Islamic Orient following the frameworks of their disciplines. This time, the humanities were neglected in favour of the social sciences; therefore, the Orient became clearly a "*matter for policy*" (290). For this reason, Said blames modern American Orientalism for having "*dehumanised*" the Orient in that it was now viewed only in terms of "*'facts', of which a literary text is perhaps a disturber ... Since an Arab poet or novelist ... writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity ... he effectively disrupts the various patterns ... by which the Orient is represented*" (291). The Oriental languages were studied for specific purposes. American Orientalism benefited from European experience because there were Orientalists like Bernard Lewis² who immigrated in the United States.

According to Said, European and then American Orientalists misrepresented the Orient. Instead of producing objective knowledge and realistic portraits of the Orient, they multiplied stereotypes devaluating the image of the Oriental. They developed biased theories about the Oriental mind, character, despotism, sensuality (203). For the Orientalists, there was a fundamental difference between Orientals and Europeans. This is why Said maintains that Orientalism was based on a dualistic thinking or representation of reality. He actually states: "*Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"*" (2). For instance, he quotes Lord Cromer who once said: "*...I content myself with noting the fact that somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European*" (Said 39). Whereas "[t]he Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different" ... the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal"" (40). In all its aspects, the Orient was

² Bernard Lewis is a prominent British Orientalist, Islamologist, born in 1916 in London, who has been residing in the U.S.A. since 1974.

represented as an inferior entity, i.e. the people, the culture, the language, and so on were seen as 'less than' their European counterparts. Actually, all the peoples living there were totalised to make one; with one culture, one history, etc. Thus, this constructed monolithic Orient became the "*contrasting image, idea, personality, experience*" of Europe and "*one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other*" (Said 2). In other terms, it was part of the process of identity construction. It is in this sense that Said claims that the Orient was a Western creation. Of course, there are a number of reasons that can explain the stereotypical constructions of the Orient by Orientalists.

The corruption of Orientalism can be understood through the lens of the knowledge and power relation and a prevalent ethnocentrism in Western culture. To start with, Said declares that Orientalism emerged from a particular relationship experienced since the mid-eighteenth century between European superpowers, i.e. Britain and France, and the Orient. He identifies two essential features of this relationship as follows: one, in Europe, there was an increasing body of knowledge (scientific and artistic) about the Orient; two, Europe was constantly more powerful and dominated the Orient (39-40). It is the combination of these two elements that gave rise to the Orientalist discourse. The interactions between Europe and the Orient, whether under the form of commercial relations or colonisation, were marked by the domination of the former. Therefore, Orientalism owed its existence and success to this power relation that was favourable to Occidentals. As Said notes, knowledge about the Orient was reinforced by colonisation (39). It is worth noting that the colonial contact increased the demand for knowledge about the Orient in order to allow a successful exercise of power. From this angle, the involvement of Orientalism into political matters becomes more apparent. According to him, this somehow allowed the stereotypical representations of the Orient. He contends that "[k]nowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (40). In fact, he believes that "[t]he Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental"...but also because it could be—that is, submitted to being—made Oriental" (5-6).

Next, Said raises the question about the impartiality and innocence of knowledge produced by Orientalists, who were in majority specialised in the humanities (or human sciences). As a matter of fact, he believes that their circumstances and affiliations within the society suggested an inevitable degree of bias (10). In other words, no production of knowledge in the humanities is pure, or one hundred per cent free from its author's involvement, not mentioning the fact that "*political, institutional and ideological constraints*

act in the same manner on the individual author" (13). For instance, Said considers the Orientalist's origin: the latter was either European (British or French) or American (11). For him, this circumstance, too, is of interest in the sense that "[i]t meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient..." (11). Therefore, what he produces can reflect these facts. Besides, Said objects the tendency to take the humanities for granted, to think that they generate non-political knowledge. He demonstrates how the humanities can be influenced by politics, or simply, how political society interferes in civil society³. As he observes, "...political society in Gramsci's sense reaches into such realms of civil society as the academy and saturates them with significance of direct concern to it" (11). Thus, the more Europeans or Americans had highly political interests in specific regions of the world, like the Orient, the more this was translated into their academic fields, i.e. Orientalism. In short, for Said, Orientalists belonged to imperial powers, countries with specific political interests in the Orient. Since no scholar could avoid being personally involved in his work, Orientalists were involved either as European or American subjects in their representations of the Orient.

A last element explaining the partiality and bias of Orientalism is believed to be ethnocentrism. Said accuses Orientalism of having served ethnocentrism, or Eurocentrism, which constitutes a form of cultural strength. Indeed, he argues that one predominant element in European culture is "*the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures*" (7). Eurocentrism became the predominant cultural form because of a phenomenon called cultural hegemony or leadership⁴. Similarly, as he suggests, Orientalist ideas derive their strength and durability from this phenomenon. Therefore, Eurocentrism and Orientalism were strongly interrelated. Actually, Said mentions "*the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter*" (7). In other words, Orientalism constituted a vehicle for Eurocentric ideas. This helps understand why "[t]he Oriental [was] contained and represented in dominating frameworks" (40). So,

³ This distinction between civil and political society was made by Gramsci. The first is concerned with voluntary affiliations like schools, families, and unions whereas the second comprises state institutions such as the army, the police, and the central bureaucracy. See pages 6-7

⁴ Here, Said draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony which implies that certain cultural forms or ideas predominate over others via a process of consent in civil society, as opposed to political society where influence works via direct domination. Read pages 6-7.

for Said, the problem was cultural. Orientalism was a form of cultural imperialism, as he clearly suggests: “*My idea is that ... it was the culture that created that interest, that acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales to make the Orient the varied and complicated place that it obviously was in the field I call Orientalism*” (12).

All in all, Said’s central thesis is that Orientalism had not been an innocent branch of knowledge of the Orient; it operated as the Occident’s apparatus for “*dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient*” (4). Orientalism had served Western imperialism and colonialism. In addition, Orientalism was guided by dualism. It not only applied a dualistic view on the relation between Orient and Occident, but also and most remarkably “hardened” and “deepened” the distinction throughout its history (42). In this way, Orientalists played an important role in the construction of Western identity. The Orient(al) and the Occident(al), as advocated by Said, were Orientalist constructions. The Orient created was exotic, sensual, uncivilised, despotic, irrational, and inferior whereas the Occident created was the opposite of all these. Four dogmas, dualism being the first and the determining factor of the three other, are central to Orientalism. The second is the preference for abstractions from a classical Orient instead of relying on empirical data collected from modern Orient. Third, the Orient is considered to be eternally the same, static, monolithic and in need of a systematic study from an Occidental perspective. The last dogma consists in viewing the Orient as threat, something the West should contain via specific policies (300-301). Of course, Said himself has been criticised in turn on intellectual, methodological, ideological and personal grounds.⁵

1.3. Neo-Orientalism

American Orientalism, which thrived in the aftermath of World War II, paved the way for a phenomenon that scholars have labelled “neo-Orientalism”. This refers to the paradigm shift in Western modes of representation of the Orient. It can be viewed as an updated version of Orientalism, i.e. presenting a set of new features while preserving some salient traits pertaining to the old version. This idea of ‘continuity within innovation’ is what Ali Behdad and Juliet A. Williams (2012) suggest in the following terms: “*We designate this mode of representation neo rather than new in order to signal the continuity between contemporary and traditional forms of Orientalism which Edward W. Said has carefully mapped.*” In other words, neo-Orientalism continues to embrace the fundamental principles that marked Saidian

⁵ For further details, consult Samiei (2009: 18-21) and Salim Kerboua (2016: 12-16).

Orientalism while bringing its own touch to the matter. So, it is not a brand new mode of representation of the Orient; it is deeply rooted in classical Orientalism.

Neo-Orientalism is based on an essentialist distinction between the West and Islam. Indeed, *“the West and Islam”* is the contemporary phrase used to designate the dualism existing between the Western world and the Muslim world. This highlights the fact that neo-Orientalist discourse mainly attacks the Islamic Orient and Muslims in general rather than dwelling on the traditional and more geography-bound notions of Occident and Orient. According to Moos Olivier (2012), neo-Orientalism problematizes Islam and the interactions between what he calls *“occidentalités”* and *“islamités”*. Briefly, the former refer to the set of notions, like Judeo-Christianism, modernity, emancipation and secularism, which are viewed as proper to the Occidental domain. Similarly, the latter designate the set of attributes, partly fantasised and potentially contradictory and fixed, that form the Islamic domain (2).

Neo-Orientalist discourse is built on some major principles. Behdad and Williams (2012) identify four fundamental points of similarity between neo-Orientalism and traditional Orientalism: it is *“monolithic, totalizing, reliant on a binary logic, and based on an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the Oriental other.”* These resemble more or less the dogmas that Said formulated to describe Orientalism. Samiei (43-45) and also Olivier (3) discuss some of the tenets of neo-Orientalism. The most important elements can be summarised as follows: first, the construction of monolithic entities, or civilisations (i.e. the West and Islam or Western civilisation and the Islamic civilisation); second, the Islamic exceptionalism (i.e. claiming that Islam is stable, the Muslim world is eternally the same, hostile to change, to modernity); third, Islam and the West are incompatible because of their fundamental differences in religion (i.e. Islam is a holistic religion that shapes all other aspects of life in the Muslim world); last but not least, Islam is conflated with violence, as being a threat to the Western civilisation and its cultural values. Therefore, the neo-Orientalist discourse claims to defend the West against an ‘Islamic peril’. Now, one needs to investigate the circumstances that created this topicality of Islam and favoured the emergence of this neo-Orientalist discourse.

Neo-Orientalism is the product of a series of historical events. Olivier (2012) maintains that the collapse of the ideologically-based bipolarity, plus the topicality of Islam, combined with a redeployment and reorganisation of the experts and structures defining and evaluating the threats are the principal elements that have contributed to the rise of the neo-

Orientalist phenomenon (1). Samiei also agrees on these factors. In fact, the collapse of the Communist Soviet Union, symbolically in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, had created a “*threat vacuum*” for the West (Samiei 22), i.e. the absence of, and thus the need for⁶, an enemy. In addition, he elaborates on this topicality of Islam and the elements that made it. In this regard, he mentions the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the place Islam occupies in it, the rise of Islamic political movements in general, and also of modern global terrorist networks which use Islam as their prime motive. Next to these political circumstances, there has been an increasing population of Muslim immigrants in the West. Last but not least, he adds the advent of globalisation, facilitated by the advances in modern communication technologies, which increased interactions and interconnectedness, plus the growing population of Muslim immigrants in the West. These events spotlighted Islam and brought it to the centre of world politics (Samiei 22-23). Consequently, a neo-Orientalist discourse has emerged, examining and judging Islam and Muslims. Ever since its emergence in the late twentieth century, neo-Orientalism has operated under two major paradigms: the “Clash of Civilisations” and the “War on Terror”.

In the Post-Cold War era, there was this idea of “threat vacuum” which preoccupied many U.S. officials in charge of the Defence and Security sectors, political advisors, foreign policymakers, think tanks, and so on. This sounds really awkward because supposedly when there is no threat, people are expected to be cheerful and relieved. Besides, was this not the reason why the United States waged the Cold War against the Soviet Union? Yet, people like Samuel Phillips Huntington (1927-2008)⁷ do not share this view of global politics that the layman seems to cherish. As a political scientist and a member of the John Merrill Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, Huntington developed his “Clash of Civilisations” theory⁸. The latter presents a dualistic description of politics. In fact, for Huntington, global politics is based on rivalry, enmity and conflict, and this, naturally enough, is essential in the process of identity construction. Therefore, if one threat vanishes, another will necessarily emerge. It is this potential threat that he attempts to predict. In this regard, if the Cold War was based on an ideological clash, i.e. Communism vs. Capitalism, the post-Cold War era will be dominated by the “Clash of Civilisations” paradigm.

⁶ This will be more apparent in the discussion on Samuel P. Huntington.

⁷ Samuel P. Huntington is an American political scientist, consultant and commentator who occupied many important functions in the American political sphere. He was particularly influential in foreign policy planning.

⁸ This theory was first published as an essay in a journal called *Foreign Affairs*. It was entitled *The Clash of Civilizations?* (1993). Then, Huntington elaborated his thesis in a book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

Indeed, Huntington declares that “[w]orld politics is entering a new phase” in which “[t]he great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future” (22). In order to demonstrate his theory, he starts by presenting civilisations as the highest cultural entities and identities which are profoundly distinct from one another. Among the key distinctive features, there is religion (24-25). Then, he points to the fact that globalisation has increased cultural (civilisation) consciousness because of a growth of interconnectedness and interactions between people of different civilisations (25). Additionally, he observes a new phenomenon which is the resurgence of religion and new modes of self-definition or identification based on religious parameters. This leads to the creation of global identities or civilisation identities (26).

Another reason for the clash to occur is that the Western civilisation appears to be powerful and superior (militarily or hard power and culturally or soft power) than the rest. This situation is the source of rivalry between the other so-called “backward” civilisations and the West. In other words, Huntington proposes the dualism between the “West and the Rest”, expressed also as “us” versus “them” (26), where “they” constitute a threat to “us”. Equally important is the fact that unlike political and economic divergences, cultural differences are so deeply rooted that their management is really delicate (27). The last reason that he advances is the growing economic regionalism which operates on the line of cultural or civilisation sameness or commonality. This, for him, shows and reinforces civilisation consciousness (27-28). These circumstances will supposedly lead to a clash of civilisations, but who will be the protagonists or belligerents in this war?

Huntington’s analysis focuses on the Islamic-Confucian civilisations; yet, Islam appears as the imminent and most dangerous enemy of the Western civilisation. In other words, Islam is “the threat” in his opinion. Now that he has identified who the enemy is, he warns and encourages the West to take some smart and tough measures to counter the peril and avoid its own decadence. For instance, he recommends that the West produce substantial knowledge about its rivals; it should “develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests” (49). It is not surprising that neo-Orientalism has flourished ever since. Huntington’s neo-Orientalist ideas have reinforced and envenomed the dualism between the West and Islam.

Less than a decade later and as if to corroborate Huntington's theory, in September 11th, 2001, the United States of America was victim of a series of deadly terrorist attacks. The immediate response was a "War on Terror" which consisted in the short term in finding and punishing the criminals who perpetrated these attacks. In the long term, it aimed at containing and eradicating terrorism in general. On September 20th, 2001, former U.S. President George Walker Bush made a speech in which he suggested the idea of a new bipolar world. For Bush, there is an inevitable choice to make regarding whom to side with in this war. He declared: *"Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists"* (qtd in Samiei 5). However, the question remains about the criteria that sanction this distinction, or classification, between the terrorist and the non-terrorist. Samiei observes that *"... such rigid political thinking enabled the US to be the sole judge for determining who is or is not a terrorist, or which regime is authoritarian, and also to be the sole executor of its own verdict"* (5). In this context, neo-Orientalism plays a central role in identifying and constructing this terrorist, this new vicious enemy.

Neo-Orientalism's concern with terrorism is part of its originality. However, its treatment of the issue profoundly affected and devaluated the image of Arabs, Islam and Muslims in general. As Asef Bayat (2015) has interestingly observed, neo-Orientalism goes beyond the traditional representations of Muslim Orientals – i.e., backwardness, historical stability, irrationality, exoticism, and harmlessness – and now labels them as *"threats to the cultural values, civilizational integrity, and the physical well-being of the West."* Indeed, neo-Orientalism pays a special attention to Islam and its civilisation in interpreting and depicting the phenomenon of terrorism. The new discourse is fabricated in ways as to demonstrate that Islam is the source of terrorism. That is why Salim Kerboua (2016) describes this attitude as *"a post 9/11 neo-Orientalism towards Islam and the Arab-Muslim world"* (8).

As far as Dag Tuastad is concerned, he establishes a connection between neo-Orientalism and another concept that he calls "new barbarism". He shows how the former interprets the violence taking place in the Middle East. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict precisely, he maintains that Palestinians are victim of symbolic violence. He means, firstly, that Palestinian resistance organisations are immediately classified as 'terrorists', or stigmatised as agents of irrational violence. Secondly, he denounces the fact that they are represented as "backward" people. In fact, the 'Arab mind' was described by classical Orientalists as irrational and backward. So, the neo-Orientalist discourse establishes an arbitrary link between the manifestations of violence in the region and an imaginary or so-

called irrational 'Arab mind'. It is this mode of thinking that Tuastad designates as new barbarism: "*The 'new barbarism' thesis implies explanations of political violence that omit political and economic interests and contexts when describing violence, and presents violence as a result of traits embedded in local cultures*" (2003). In short, the new barbarism thesis is the discourse which links terrorism to Islamic culture in the context of neo-Orientalism. This, of course, has significant repercussions on the relationships between the Western societies and the Arab-Muslim world.

This offers a fertile soil for Islamophobia to grow. Of course, this phenomenon is not a recent one, but it seems to be taking alarming dimensions under the auspices of the contemporary discourse on Islam. The writer and social critic Munawar A. Anees (201?) deplors the fact that the image of Muslims is associated with and tarnished by terrorism: "*Extrapolating the atrocities committed by the so-called Caliphate installed by a bunch of ISIS terrorists, over 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide now face the daily burden of collective guilt for...many...sordid tales of death and destruction.*" He then adds that although no Islamic teachings approve these criminal attitudes by ISIS, this does not suffice to change anti-Islam mentalities. A number of reasons may explain this irrational fear or hatred of Islam: Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" theory which warns the West against the threat represented by the Islamic civilisation; the psychological effects caused by the atrocities of the 9/11 attacks on the United States; the subsequent "War on Terror" agenda which shares some intimacy with some sources generating a distorted knowledge of Islam and Muslims; and also the rise of a specific type of political violence using Islam as its creed (Kerboua 25).

While Mohammed (2014) emphasises the xenophobic dimension of Islamophobia (qtd in Kerboua 20), Kerboua – who defines it as an "*identity-related social phenomenon*" – goes further to contend that neo-Orientalist Islamophobia is directed towards the Muslim world in general (24). Indeed, he reports that Mohammed (the author) approaches Islamophobia as being purely a society and/or nation related matter which concerns Muslim immigration and presence in Europe, and thus it confronts only this diaspora and its xenophobic promoters there. He also takes into account Guerlain's (2013) hint at the confusion raised by Mohammed's view. Guerlain states that, in this case, one needs to know where the problem lies, that is to say, is it because of their faith, Islam, or their foreignness (Kerboua 24). For Kerboua, neo-Orientalism, if it is not the sole source of Islamophobia, does exacerbate the phenomenon in the sense that it "*represents Islam and Muslims as elements extraneous and irreconcilable to the societies of the Western world*" (24-25). As a matter of fact, recently,

“[h]eated disputes over the construction of a mosque for instance, food preferences, veils, or long skirts, have taken disproportionate dimensions and fuelled the subjective constructions of a threatening Muslim Other” (25). And the list of prejudices can still be prolonged.

Unlike traditional Orientalism, neo-Orientalism does not exist as an academic discipline or as a profession, and its agents in no case would claim overtly the title of neo-Orientalist. Olivier (2) somehow points to this fact: “*Its [neo-Orientalism] protagonists share neither origins, nor objectives, nor political or communal affiliations of any sort. There is no membership card or a vulgate acknowledged by all.*”⁹ The protagonists of neo-Orientalism form a heterogeneous community, i.e. they come from diverse milieux. Asef Bayat (2015) asserts that these include “*think-tank people, politicians, journalists, the Hollywood, sound-bite experts, Christian preachers, and some in academic circles.*” Kerboua (2016), in his turn, highlights the connection between Israel’s worldview and neoconservative neo-Orientalist discourse (14). Thus, the main agents of neo-Orientalism, for him, include right-wing and neoconservative intellectuals and Zionists, i.e. supporters of Israel’s policies towards Palestine (22). Indeed, he states that “*the neoconservative creed, inspired by Lewis ... and Huntington ... has been constructing a neo-Orientalist image of contemporary Muslims not only as backward and inferior but more importantly as violent and threatening*” (9). He also provides a short list of prominent figures from these categories¹⁰, and then adds that neo-Orientalism elides the War on Terror with the conflict between Israel and Palestine while giving an unconditional support to the former to the detriment of the latter (22). In fact, Israel is viewed as being part of the Western identity and it has loyal allies like the United States. Consequently, the Arab-Israeli issue becomes a key element that influences most of the discourse on the Islamic Orient, especially when Arabs and Palestinians are presented as irrational and violent people (19). Next to the neoconservative, the right-wing and the Zionists, Kerboua notices another category of neo-Orientalists formed by some Arabs and former Muslims¹¹.

In this regard, Behdad and Williams (2012) observe that the predominance of North American and Western European agents in the production of this discourse should not occult the various contributions made by Middle Eastern subjects themselves in this fabric. They

⁹ My translation : « Ses protagonistes ne partagent ni origines, ni objectifs, ni affiliations politiques ou communautaires d’aucune sorte. Il n’y a pas de carte de membre ou une vulgate par tous reconnue ».

¹⁰ See page 14.

¹¹ Anees, for instance, enumerates Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Wafa Sultan and Walid Shoebat as former Muslims who have now adopted a neo-Orientalist stance.

consider such actors as *“self-promoting, if not always self-made, immigrants who have capitalized on the post-9/11 thirst for knowledge about Muslim societies to empower themselves and realize their ambitious desires.”* In a study conducted specifically on memoirs written by Iranian female immigrants in the United States such as Azar Nafisi and Roya Hakakian, they analyse some of the key features of neo-Orientalism. First, they suggest that contemporary neo-Orientalists tend to include also both ordinary male and female figures of Middle Eastern origin, contrary to classical Orientalists who were predominantly male European subjects with important intellectual and artistic background. These new agents, they remark, *“use their native subjectivity and new-found agency in the West to render otherwise biased accounts of the region seemly more authoritative and objective.”* In second place, the study reveals that these writers show a strong interest in politics. They are characterised by their political affiliations with the neoconservative branch – Azar Nafisi, for instance – and are fierce detractors of Middle Eastern Islamic governments in their writings. Third pattern, these Iranian authors show an *“ahistorical form of historicism¹²”* in their narratives. In other words, although they give importance to historical changes in their writings, they show a tendency to provide inaccurate account of them; they misrepresent these changes. The fourth feature is the *“journalistic pretense and direct access to truth and the real”* claimed by these authors. This implies that from superficial experiences, they make generalisations about the Muslim world. The last element Behdad and Williams mention about these neo-Orientalists is their treatment of the issue of the veil. As a matter of fact, the veil is interpreted as a symbol of oppression in their writings.

1.4. Occidentalism

Occidentalism is the second type of the West and Islam dualism. It is described as a counter-response to the Western brand of dualism which was discussed earlier under the rubrics of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism, its contemporary version. In fact, some scholars label it as “Orientalism in reverse”; i.e. the same distinction between the ‘self’ and ‘the other’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘good’ and ‘evil’, but this time it is the West that becomes the target and victim of its protagonists. Occidentalism promotes anti-Western ideas; it represents the West as ‘them’, the ‘evil’ or ‘the threat’. It stands against Westernisation, secularisation, and all the ‘negative’ elements of globalisation.

¹² Historicism refers to the view that events, rather than being human-made, are shaped by historical conditions.

Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit investigate its roots and its dogmas in a succinct book entitled *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* first published in 2004. Their historical overview covers the timespan between the nineteenth century until the contemporary era and it analyses the German, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and Middle Eastern versions. It highlights their prejudices against the West and their attempts to purify and safeguard their cultures from the ‘corrupting’ influence of their Western counterpart. They also suggest that modern terrorism, which is a violent and dangerous symptom of Occidentalism, has inherited from this long tradition of anti-Western ideas. For the specific purpose of this dissertation, namely the West and Islam dualism, a close attention is paid to the Middle Eastern version of Occidentalism. Buruma and Margalit (2005) describe the phenomenon of Occidentalism in the following terms: “*The dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies is what we have called Occidentalism*” (5). They contend that “*a distaste for some aspects of modern Western, or American, culture*” becomes a serious issue only from the moment it turns into “*a desire to declare a war on the West*” (5). This war is waged against four elements in Western culture: the Occidental City, the Bourgeois mentality, the mind of the West and the idolatrous West.

To commence, the Occidental City is represented as the “*City of Man*”, a “*modern Babylon*” (46). This city is cosmopolitan, developed and wealthy, with an impressive architecture. However, because it is “*rootless, arrogant, greedy, decadent, frivolous*” (11), it inspires disgust. In other words, the Occidentalists reduce modern Western cities to materialism and hedonism, to a place of spiritual shallowness, devoid of God. Capitalism and mass commerce are blamed for corrupting values in the Western metropolis: “*In the city, conceived as a giant marketplace, everything and everyone is for sale*” because “[m]oney allows people to behave in all manners to which they were not born” (18). Examples of these behaviours include prostitution and sexual freedom. Therefore, the spread of this trading system in a context marked by globalisation is seen by Occidentalists as a threat to their societies’ cultural and spiritual values, as “*a conspiracy to destroy what is profound, authentic, and spiritual*” (32). In this regard, their ultimate aim consists in replacing the corrupted City of Man with the City of God characterised by purity and virtue, spirituality and morals.

Next, Buruma and Margalit claim that “[t]he antiheroic, antiutopian nature of Western liberalism is the greatest enemy of religious radicals, priest-kings, and collective seekers after purity and heroic salvation” (72). This political system allows a bourgeois

mentality to exist. This is something that Occidentalists seem to abhor. In fact, they view the West as “*soft, sickly and sweet, a decadent civilization addicted to pleasure*” (49). In other words, people in the West are merchants addicted to money and comfort, lacking any sense of higher ideals like honour. They are coward and cling only to life, pleasure, and peace. Unlike them, their enemies view themselves as heroes, thirsty for sacrificial death; they derive pleasure from sacrifice because they have the sense of ideals. This celebration of the death cult is very common among modern terrorists who claim to act in the name of Islam. Convinced, or taught so, that they are fighting a ‘holy war’, these people long for martyrdom, for sacrificial death. However, Buruma and Margalit maintain that it is something that shocks many Muslims because it is not an established Islamic tradition. In fact, they highlight this: “*...the Muslim martyr (shahid) is an active warrior... But his or her motives must be pure. It is not glorious to die for selfish reasons, or gratuitously, without any effect on the enemy ...*” (68-69). Occidentalists seek to replace the merchants with the heroes; the thirst for money, comfort, peace, life, with the thirst for heroism, ideals, sacrifice, death. The result is the ceaseless suicide bombings and other self-destroying acts that are frequently reported.

Furthermore, the mind of the West is another target of Occidentalist discourse. The mind of the West is characterised by its rationalism and scientism. By rationalism one refers to the celebration of reason as the highest and sole human faculty that is capable of making sense of everything that exist. Rationalism is closely tied in with scientism which is the belief that all natural phenomena can be explained or solved only by science. This idea neglects any religious belief. In fact, religion is then labelled as merely a system of superstitions (94). This is truly a battlefield between the West and Occidentalists, the clash between science and religion. Since the mind of the West is seen as rational and favourable to science rather than religion, it appears despicable and unattractive to its enemies. It is viewed as a “*higher idiocy*” which is capable of great economic and technological achievements while lacking higher ideals, spirituality and compassion (75). Actually, “[h]edonism and too much reliance on the intellect bar the West from what it needs most, a way to salvation” (81). In other words, the main reasons behind the spiritual emptiness of the Occident are believed to be its thirst for worldly pleasure combined with its excessive rationalism. Buruma and Margalit observe: “*The arrogant West, in Occidental eyes, is guilty of the sin of rationalism, of being arrogant enough to think that reason is the faculty that enables humans to know everything there is to know*” (94-95). Therefore, Occidentalists stand against this excessively rational mind and its faith in science; they see themselves as the guardians and promoters of their

societies' religious or spiritual values. However, what is deplorable is that this defence takes violent dimensions sometimes.

The last hostility central to the Occidentalist creed is based on the assumption that the West, under secularism, is idolatrous. Idolatry in the religious sense designates the worshipping of false divinities, being unfaithful to one's God. This is sometimes interpreted as adultery (103). Buruma and Margalit (101-102) make the distinction between secular and religious Occidentalism though it is not clear cut. Unlike the former, the latter relies more on a Manichaean view of reality, or simply dualism. It takes a universal dimension of "*a holy war against an idea of absolute evil*". Religious Occidentalism wages a war against the West because it represents idolatry through its sheer materialism. The West no longer symbolises the 'death of God', to paraphrase Nietzsche's idea, but stands as a civilisation which has adopted new gods (i.e. materialism as a religion) to compete with what they believe to be the authentic religion. The protagonists of this type of Occidentalism view "*the secularism of the West as ... the idolatrous worship of false gods*" (114). This style of thought is, of course, profoundly dehumanising and pernicious. "*The much more toxic new jahiliyya¹³ is the main target of modern radical Islam, and thus the core of religious Occidentalism*", Buruma and Margalit (115) contend. The authors highlight the fact that "*Islamism is considered the main religious source of Occidentalism in our own time*" (102).

They also suggest that Occidentalism has existed long before Islamism which is but one trend among its multiple forms. Indeed, Islamism has inherited a great deal of the hatred against the West such as the corrupted City of Man, the land of unheroic and hedonistic merchants, with a mind undermined by excessive rationalism and scientism. However, Islamism has brought its own original touch in painting the dehumanising picture of the West: conflating the West with idolatry. In this regard, Buruma and Margalit declare: "*Its depiction of Western civilization as a form of idolatrous barbarism is an original contribution to the rich history of Occidentalism*" (102). The authors further state that political Islamists, who tend to interpret literally the idea of idolatry, have a theological view of contemporary political reality. They portray the situation as follows:

¹³ Jahiliyya is used to refer to the Islamic idea of idolatry. It describes a state of religious ignorance which predominated in the Arab world prior to the revelations of the Prophet. However, the term is being reinterpreted by radical Islamists in the contemporary era to serve their destructive projects.

Muslim countries with secular governments are accused by radical Islamists of idolatry, or *tajhil*. Such accusations begin as religious sermons but are quickly translated into political activism against the agents of idolatry in the Muslim world, usually the people in power, and the main operator behind those agents, the idolatrous West (105).

So, in the eyes of these Occidentalists, Western idolatry is polluting not only their own societies, but also the world in general. As a reaction, they declare war against the West within and outside their borders, and this war is a complex, multifaceted and persistent one.

Another major issue highlighted in the book is the clash between nativists and Westernizers regarding the attitude to adopt vis-à-vis modern Western ideas. As their society have been permeated by foreign values which threaten their own ones, nativists suggest a return to the roots, a cultural revival; they “*dream of going back to the purity of an imaginary past ... the Caliphate united under Islam ...*” (39); they can be considered as conservatives to some extent. As for the second group, its members opt for importing from the West to modernise their societies; yet, they are “*radical modernizers*”, “*iconoclasts who see local tradition as an impediment to radical modernization*” (39). Buruma and Margalit contend that this second group is confronted to a dilemma about what to import from Western culture and what to keep far away from theirs. The secret formula has not always been easy to find be it in theory as in practice. Extreme Occidentalism appears to have emerged because of the failure of resolving this equation. In fact, the authors maintain: “*The most violent forms of Occidentalism, of nativist yearning for purity and destructive loathing of the West, were born from this failure...*” (40).

Buruma and Margalit terminate their discussion on Occidentalism with a number of perspectives. First of all, they admit that there is a worldwide clash but they totally reject the view that it is between the West and Islam, given that the Muslim world will be its main theatre. In fact, they insist on the crucial and prime role Muslims themselves will have to play in countering Occidentalist ideas and their pernicious effects, and thus recommend Western intervention only as a last resort. Also, they acknowledge the complexity of the war at the military level because it is “*against a disparate, worldwide, loosely organized, mostly underground revolutionary movement*” (147). Second, they warn against an intellectual trap which consists in putting everything on the back of Western imperialism, or dwelling on the “*colonial guilt*”. This attitude leads to inaction. Besides, it is an Orientalist attitude in the sense that it tends to deny the first concerned any sense of moral responsibility (148). Third, they dismiss the idea that organised religion is the main source of Occidentalism. Not only

some Occidentalists appear to be secular individuals, but also organised religion can be helpful in finding the right answers to the problem. Indeed, they state: “*In the Middle East, it might offer the only hope of a peaceful way out of our current mess*” (148). Finally, they warn the West against making the same mistakes as the Occidentalists, and exhort Western societies to be open.

Conclusion

This chapter has conducted a review of the concept of the West and Islam dualism. It has found that this view has been articulated under different forms. The first form emerged under the auspices of Orientalism which has marked the Occident-Orient relations between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. It appears to have worked toward constructing and affirming a superior Western identity opposed to an inferior Oriental one, for it conflated difference with weakness, inferiority, threat or evil. This state of affairs paved the way to Western imperialism and colonialism. Then, Orientalism has metamorphosed into a contemporary neo-Orientalism which maintains the essentialist distinction based on new cultural elements. Some of its representatives promote that identity construction necessitates enmity, a friend-foe dualism. Thus, neo-Orientalism believes in a clash of civilisations. On the other hand, Occidentalism is a counter-response used by some agents in the Islamic world, representing the West as a threat to the purity of the Islamic civilisation. Their project of purification is based on a dualistic representation of the Islamic and the Western identities. Occidentalism also encourages an inevitable clash of civilisations. Thus, it appears that the West and Islam dualism exerts a significant impact on the construction of identity, for it creates fixed and collective identities that are supposed to be irreconcilable. The following chapters will therefore investigate the impacts of this dualism on the identity construction of the protagonists of Fadia Faqir’s novel *Willow Trees Don’t Weep* (2014).

Chapter Two:

Omar Rahman's Identity Construction

Introduction

Omar Rahman is the male protagonist in Fadia Faqir's novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). His story is told from his own perspective, i.e. it is a first-person narrative, and it is the content of his diary that the reader is given access to. Faqir juxtaposes Omar's narrative with that of the other female protagonist Najwa – who is actually Omar's daughter – in an alternating way. As he narrates his story from 1986 to 2011, Omar turns from a secular medic residing in Amman, Jordan, to an Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist incarcerated in Frankland Prison in Durham, England. In the course of all these years, a timespan of approximately a quarter of a century, he has been exposed to several clashes which have caused these different psychological transformations, that is to say the shifts operated in his identity. It appears important to retrace his odyssey from Jordan to England to be able to detect the nature of the factors that have influenced his change of identity. This endeavour is meant to highlight the impacts of the West and Islam dualism on his identity construction.

2.1. Amman: The Reasons behind the Departure

2.1.1. Omar's Social and Cultural Background

The first clash which appears important to highlight in Omar's narrative involves him and conservatism. It can be said that his late father epitomised this idea of conservatism. Indeed, it can be guessed from a number of elements that the latter was a conservative and fervent Muslim. When he was still alive, he disagreed with some of Omar's choices which expressed his unconformity vis-à-vis their society's codes. A case in point is when stubborn young Omar chose to study nursing despite his conservative father's disdainful remarks. He recalls: "*My father said before he died, 'How can a man be a mumarida?' adding the /t/ of the feminine marker to the word to exclude his son. 'How can a man tend the sick, a woman?'"*" (18) He says that his reply was a sentence heard on the radio, promoting nursing as an honest profession. Even though this sounded pertinent for him, his father remained hostile to the decision: "*My son! Wiping people's bottoms! Judgement day is nigh!"*" Actually, Omar contends that his choice was motivated by the fact that "*not many women were allowed to become nurses, whores in the eyes of many*" (18). It may be inferred from this quotation that he seems to detach himself from this stereotypical representation of this category of women who work.

In addition, his father strived to transmit his faith to him before he deceased:

[M]y father took me to the mosque during the Eid celebrations...He believed that religion could be transferred from membrane to membrane by osmosis. If you recited the Qur'an throughout the day, chanted, praising prophet [sic] Muhammad, and invoked Allah in a loud voice, your children would one day absorb your beliefs. I knew what he was up to and it annoyed me. Couldn't I make up my own mind? (96)

Omar makes the reader guess that his father wanted to accomplish his paternal duties towards him, educate him the way an ideal Muslim father is supposed to. The most important part of this education, for him, seems the transmission of his beliefs, his faith in Allah to his son Omar. He believed this will guide him successfully in his life here on earth, throughout all the ordeals he might encounter, and then guarantee him life in the hereafter. Yet, Omar wanted to follow his own choices as he expresses it in the following:

When my father said that I would find answers to all my problems in this scripture, I almost burst into laughter. Personal problems: an uptight, frigid wife; economic problems: prospect of no job after graduation; political problems: the sultan ruling supreme. He must be joking. I held up the Qur'an, wrapped in colourful paper, so he could see that I had accepted his gift, but he interpreted my gesture as a desire to uphold the message of Islam and died smiling. (81-82)

It appears from this passage that his father died thinking that his mission was accomplished; that the ancestral tradition of transmitting the legacy (Islam) to the new generation was well performed and received by his son. Nonetheless, it does not seem to be the case. In reality, Omar has put the holy book aside; he has decided to follow his own ethical code to the detriment of his father's memory, of the path he wished for him. Thus, he becomes a secular although the society is predominantly Muslim and conservative.

Interestingly enough, religion seems to occupy a central role in the lives of a vast population within his community. For instance, going to the mosque, reciting the Qur'an, praying regularly five times a day, and celebrating the Eid celebrations (the religious feasts) are part of people's religious practices. Also, the society clings to conservative rules. One instance is what has been mentioned earlier about the reluctance to allowing women to occupy some professions. Even Omar's best friend Hani maintains that "[n]urses have a bad reputation although most of the screwing is done by women teachers" (18). As a remark, Omar's wife is a teacher; this may highlight his anti-conservatism. Another case in point about conservatism is a tradition known as honour killing¹⁴. One day, they received the

¹⁴ This practice can be defined as the act of murdering a family member (or a community member) because the latter has brought dishonour or shame to the family or community in question. Various reasons are behind this practice: refusal of arranged marriage or dressing codes, being involved in a relationship disapproved by the

corpse of a victim of an honour killing as a material for study, as it seems usually the case for them to work on unclaimed dead bodies in their nursing courses. Omar recounts this episode as follows:

A girl was stabbed by her brother and her family didn't want anything to do with the body ... It was of a young woman, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, with multiple stab wounds. The teacher said, 'Obviously a victim of an honour killing.' He spat on the floor. 'Forensics will show that she was a virgin.' (18)

In this quotation, it may be suggested that Omar's teacher's reaction conveys a feeling of disgust for and opposition to such a tradition. Besides, saying that forensics will prove the girl innocent could suggest this idea of the clash between science and religion; forensics representing science and honour killing a conservative practice based on some interpretations of religious principles. It could be advanced that Faqir attempts to highlight and denounce some conservative practices like the ones mentioned above, which undermine the Jordanian society and its efforts to create a truly modern and cosmopolitan habitat.

2.1.2. Secular and Idealistic Omar

It appears that Jordan is not isolated from the rest of the world. In fact, globalisation has opened its doors to the multiple different societies and cultures that exist all over the world including the Western culture in particular. It becomes a colossal enterprise trying to preserve religious identity and cultural integrity in such a context where interconnectedness and interactions keep increasing rapidly. The result is that people are affected in various ways by the changes that occur. The society absorbs some of the changes and at the same time attempts to reject others. But the thing is that this globalisation-filter seems to be too porous to be able to successfully hold back the undesirable aspects or changes. The narrative portrays some of the ways in which the Western world – via its technological products, its scientific ideas and cultural values, and many other commodities – has influenced Omar and his society.

In reality, Western style modernity competes with Jordan's conservative values in the narrative. This situation affects Omar and also his friend. There is, for example, the influence of films in which famous beautiful-blond-haired actresses like Olivia Newton-John and Brigitte Bardot are featured. He is indeed portrayed and rather connoted as an admirer of some cultural forms of the West. Omar is a secular medic who loves Western music including

family member who commits the crime, having extra-marital intercourse, among others reasons. Faqir also tackles this topic in her novel *My Name Is Salma* (2007) in which Salma, the protagonist, flees her country and migrates to Britain in order to escape this punishment because she has conceived of a child outside marriage.

songs such as “Xanadu”, “Blues Forever”, or “Every Breath You Take”.¹⁵ He is really fond of the saxophone (20). In order to understand the degree of influence of the Western culture on him, one needs to consider some of his portraits of Hani, his acolyte.¹⁶ For instance, he recounts that “*Hani recited the lyrics of Olivia Newton-John’s ‘Xanadu’ as if they were a sacred text*” (19). Comparing the song to a sacred text could suggest a profound meaning in the sense that it becomes a sort of religion. This also can suggest the competition between the commodities of modernity and the ancestral values of Jordan. The song “Xanadu”¹⁷ becomes the symbol of his dreams and ideals. In sum, Omar is seduced by what he listens to, watches and reads as well; this nourishes his ideals.

The young and secular Omar becomes a pursuer of ideals; living most of the time in a world of dreams and perfect wishes located in his mind, for the outside world or reality is completely different and painful. This situation infuses him with the desire to create an idealistic society where all the best elements of the cultures he is in contact with could coexist in a peaceful and fruitful relationship. The following is how he describes his ideal project: “*We called our project ‘The cosmopolis we wish for and desire’. It was open, secular, civilised: music, lemon chicken stew, women and free love*” (60). This space that he pursues represents the land of gratified dreams, of everlasting happiness. He desires to establish a society that will represent “Xanadu”, which he acknowledges to be “*an impossible world, a land of ideals, of hope and love. A land that we could only dream of*” (19). He actually dreams of this land and relates it as follows:

I calmed the women of the house and went to sleep, dreaming of an eleventh-century cosmopolis where translators of Greek books were paid their weight in gold. Concubines spoke several languages and wore see-through pants, even to prayer. They would bend down and you would see their rump, dark and inviting.
(60)

This seems to be truly idealistic and impossible for various reasons. His ideal and real worlds collide because they seem incompatible. Indeed, there are disappointing and bitter realities that confront his illusions. These have been superficially mentioned earlier, but will be examined in the following lines. He faces three categories of problems which he expressed as follows: “*Personal problems: an uptight, frigid wife; economic problems: prospect of no job*

¹⁵ Respectively by Olivia Newton-John, Muhal Richard Abrams, and The Police.

¹⁶ As a matter of fact, it could be said that Hani serves as a mirror, perhaps a foil, for Omar’s own traits. However, this is not in all the cases.

¹⁷ Faqir also gives this title to the fourth part of the novel which narrates the protagonist’s experiences in Afghanistan. It represents Omar’s disillusionment in that he finds war instead of his ideal land.

after graduation; political problems: the sultan ruling supreme” (81). These three frustrations contribute to his alienation and show the obstacles to the accomplishment of his desires and wishes epitomised by Xanadu.

2.1.3. Omar’s Tripartite Frustration

Firstly, Omar is married and his wife Raneen is training as a teacher. They first met in a public lecture on medieval love poetry and according to him she was a sweet young woman by then. Then, they got married in May 1981, and had a daughter who is Najwa, the other protagonist who will be the focus of the next chapter. However, Omar’s marital life seems to lack love and complicity, to say the least. It does not provide him with the things that he utterly craves. In fact, his opinion of Raneen is that she is an uptight, frigid and controlling wife who constantly wails: *“Drowns in an inch of water”* (17), he says. He refers to her as the ‘Ministry of the Interior’ and portrays her in the following:

I have a good wife who cooks, cleans, takes care of Najwa, studies for her exam. But she gets flustered sometimes, uptight, and starts dropping pots, spoons, slamming doors. And when this happens I pray for her ice to melt, for her shoulders to unknot, her mouth to untwist itself. When she is angry I find her unattractive like an ugly rock formation. Impenetrable! So I escape her grip to Xanadu whenever possible. (29)

His complaint about his wife’s controlling attitude may suggest an aversion for authoritarianism and a desire for freedom which will be highlighted in other parts. Also, this feeling of not receiving the love he needs pushes him to indulge in some adventures in order to escape his frustration. This idea, too, will be elaborated immediately after the two other points are clarified.

Secondly, Omar has an underprivileged background. Economically speaking, he is discontent; he is poor and thinks that he is doomed to joblessness. One might guess that the rate of unemployment seems to be considerable. There is another important detail that may help highlight Omar’s economic frustration. It is the juxtaposition of west Amman with east Amman; two contrasting sides of the same city, at least based on economic considerations. This can be understood as suggesting utter economic disparity and social injustice. The inhabitants of the east side are poor and underprivileged whereas the west side is the place for the wealthy, a completely different world. Below is an excerpt where Omar describes some striking aspects of west Amman’s prosperity:

We rarely go through the affluent west side. The sprinklers were swirling water over the lawns of large villas. There were drivers, gardeners, maids. Rumour has it that some of the gold in the glass entrance halls is real twenty-four carat. No wonder they have guards. What lies behind the privet hedges, the high metal gates, the closed shutters? Half-naked women? Men in tuxedos smoking cigars?
(20)

In the first part of the novel, 'Behind the Poppy Fields', west Amman recurrently appears in Omar's narrative. Although he explains that he rarely frequents the place, he seems obsessed with it. In fact, he does not really need to go there because it can be seen from a remote distance: "*We sat on the wall overlooking Amman and the royal palaces sprawled at the top of the opposite hill*" (30). This omnipresence and arrogance of west Amman's royal palaces has an ambivalent effect on him: seduction and humiliation. It suggests his dream of economic prosperity and constantly reminds him his miserable condition. A last remark can be that the gap between rich and poor is symbolised by spatial distance between the two sides of the city. Actually, Omar says that "[i]t is a long ride from the east, the poor side, where the riff-raff like us live, all the way to the affluent west side" (31), and there are three hills and a long motorway separating east Amman from west Amman. It takes Omar an hour and a half to cross this distance on foot (58). This economic parameter may explain his anti-capitalism.

Lastly, Omar does not approve the political regime of his country. In fact, he is disappointed because political authority is enforced by the sultan in a way much in line with Hobbesian absolutism¹⁸. The regime seems to restrict his freedom and rights, and to turn a blind eye to the legitimate claims and aspirations of its people. The passage below illustrates the probably frequent battle between the anti-government, pro-reform rallies and the strong police, always eager to crush them:

Back on the bus, I saw a number of police cars at the east gate of the university. A group of demonstrators carried placards saying Democracy now! Free Palestine! Lower the Price of Commodities! The government has raised the price of everything: bread, fuel, rice. A warden diverted the traffic away from the protesters. They were surrounded by riot police, who are chosen from the toughest of tribes. No doubt there will be cracked skulls, broken thumbs and flayed skin.
(20)

The fact that the demonstration is set in front of a university could suggest that the authoritarian regime of Jordan is challenged by educated dissidents who call for change in the

¹⁸ Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). His political philosophy encourages the establishment of an absolute authority enforced by the Leviathan or the monarch. In his book *Leviathan* (1651), the monarch appears like a political, social, and religious monster, i.e. he has absolute rights over almost all aspects of social life. There is no right to revolution. Omar's sultan might appear to him like this Leviathan hence his frustration.

policies of the sultan's government. They seem to be turned towards Western models of government, as signalled by the claim of democracy. Omar and his friend dream of alternative structures of government, where power will not be concentrated in the hands of the few. This system should be better than the flawed form of democracy that existed in ancient Greece, for foreigners and slaves did not have rights, according to Hani (57). In short, he feels that there is a huge gap between his political dreams and the political reality of his country.

2.1.4. Escapism, Public Guilt and Private Guilt

Omar says that he escapes his wife's control to "Xanadu". According to his accounts, this means meeting Hani, his "*partner in crime*", and having some good time together: eating some chicken at the local rotisserie and having a fizzy drink. However, they sometimes indulge in drinking alcohol or going to the nightclub. Hani believes that Western women are frequently in such places. This could therefore be interpreted as a desire for escapism¹⁹. Consider the following episode:

We decided to go to the Privé in west Amman. Hani shrugged off my feeble objection and hailed a taxi. ... It was dark in the club and I could barely see. A whiff of cigarette smoke, perfume and sweat hits you when you enter. Loud music: 'Girls Just Want To Have Fun'. And there was uncovered flesh, yards of it, and women with ample hips swaying on the dance floor. I had died and gone to Muslim paradise, where damsels and houris reclined on sofas. One of them came towards me and asked me to dance ... I wanted to say no, that I was married, and looked to Hani for support. He was nowhere to be seen. I gingerly moved to the dance floor. (31)

This passage could imply that the world Omar discovers in the nightclub appears to him like an ideal earthly space which could even compete with the religious and heavenly ideal space, namely paradise. For him, this could suggest the possibility to create paradise on earth, to establish Xanadu. However, he does not feel free to enjoy the pleasure of being in such a place due to the bonds of culture.

Although they consider themselves as secular and Westernised young men, the consciousness of the cultural and religious norms seems to be constantly in their minds. In the aforementioned quotation, one can find some hints to this aspect through the following phrases: "*my feeble objection*" and "*I wanted to say no*". These are some details which illustrate Omar's relative reluctance to engage into some actions which are prohibited in his

¹⁹ Escapism can be used to designate the tendency to avoid routine or reality by indulging into some matters or situations which provides some spiritual comfort. In other words, it means escaping from one's problems into a world of fantasy, leisure or pleasure.

culture. They can do things in secret; however, they find it difficult to get rid of the unpleasant feeling of guilt and impurity after breaking their cultural laws. Because their society does not tolerate such behaviours, they tend to feel blameworthy each time they break these laws. Therefore, there seems to be a distinction between private guilt and public guilt that needs to be mentioned at this point.

On the one hand, by transgressing their cultural laws, Omar and his friend might be ostracised by their society and become subject to public guilt. For example, he says: “*If we get spotted, we will become pariahs*” (30). Therefore, he needs to be cautious when he wants to drink alcohol, which equals transgression: “*I looked behind me to see if anyone was watching, taking notes, reporting straight back to God, then had a swig. The beer was sweet and sour*” (30). On the other hand, the thought of having transgressed the laws of the community leaves an indelible imprint in their minds. This imprint consists of unpleasant feelings that they experience privately, emanating maybe from the censure of the superego²⁰. Indeed, they have difficulties to cope with this feeling of private guilt or sin. For example, consider the following piece of conversation between Omar and his friend:

‘You know, Omar, when I get drunk I start imagining things: spiders crawling on my scalp, their legs fine and hairy. Perhaps they mix this shit with bleach or arsenic.’ He wiped his mouth with his arm.

‘I don’t see things, but I suddenly panic as if I have been caught out. Perhaps I was a murderer in my previous life. I think I am being watched all the time.’

‘That is because you are being watched!’

‘I keep washing myself, scrubbing my skin, trying to be pure.’

‘It can only be achieved in death.’ (30)

This feeling of guilt and impurity may suggest that Omar and Hani do not feel fully secular and free from their religious ‘selves’. They have fragmented identities. Besides, this feeling of private guilt also occurs after Hani succeeds to have a love affair with an American woman after the nightclub episode. Paradoxically, the satisfaction of his desires does not yield the psychological well-being that was expected before the action. Indeed, after this adventure, Hani feels impure and guilty because he has lost his virginity in illicit circumstances. He is

²⁰ The superego is an element of Sigmund Freud’s tripartite model of the human personality along with the id and the ego. According to the definition provided by Encyclopedia Britannica (2011), “*the superego is the ethical component of the personality and provides the moral standards by which the ego operates. The superego’s criticisms, prohibitions, and inhibitions form a person’s conscience, and its positive aspirations and ideals represent one’s idealized self-image, or “ego ideal.”*”

conscious of having committed the sin of fornication which is punishable by his religious society. He tells Omar: *"I felt so dirty afterwards I scoured my skin with a scrubbing sponge and washing powder. How do you purify yourself?"* (43) Omar advances that Hani's encounter with that woman was *"mechanical rather than romantic"* (57). This may mean that the contact is considered unauthentic because the satisfaction was physical rather than spiritual. It is not an ideal love relationship.

So far, the analysis has tried to highlight the circumstances that characterise Omar's life in Amman in order to find the reasons that have contributed to push him to leave his country. Among the factors revealed, there are the conservatism of his society, his thirst for love, his economic frustration and his political concern about the way his country is ruled. It has been demonstrated that he is an idealistic person who wishes to create a cosmopolitan society open to new forms of culture and where freedom will be enforced. This cosmopolis he wishes and dreams of is labelled Xanadu and he feels obsessed with it. His life is characterised by the pursuit of this land of ideals which he cannot find in Jordan. The aforementioned elements therefore help portray Omar's idealism and his feeling of alienation.

It appears also that he experiences a crisis of identity due to the contrast between his secular ideals (desires and wishes) and the reality of his Islamic conservative society. He does not really love this situation and wants to be someone else. His sense of alienation and fragmentation urges him to escape and create his ideal space Xanadu, where he could become the ideal person he would like to be. Actually, Omar's ideal self can be grasped in the following: *"... Since I read 'Around the World in Eighty Days', I wanted to be Passepartout, a traveller with little luggage, hopping from one train to another, a Thomas Cook, an Ibn Battuta. Where is Xanadu?"* (33) Hani, too, dreams of escaping. This is why he decides to court an American woman because this could offer him an inestimable opportunity. Omar recounts that *"[h]e spoke about his love of American women ... He wants to get married to one of them and leave this country forever. It will be his ticket out, his deliverance from the drudgery and ugliness"* (31). Yet, as mentioned earlier, Hani's adventure results in the unpleasant feeling of impurity which will have great consequences.

2.2. The Pursuit of Xanadu and Delusions

Omar followed some paths in order to achieve his goals, desires and wishes. One of them is mentioned in the following:

We used to be situationists and avid followers of Guy Debord.²¹ We were the avant-garde, the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist. ‘Secular and holders of the mighty pen,’ said Hani. But we were also deluded. How can you stop the advance of capitalism and its degradation of human life and map a different future for yourself? (60)

In this passage, he explains that they used to espouse Situationism which was a form of Marxism. Thus, they adopted Marxist views of economy and politics and blindly believed that they would create the ideal society they wished for, the Xanadu which obsesses their minds. However, he regrets this experience, advancing that it was a utopian path. This might also be interpreted as an allusion to the dualism between Communism and Capitalism. Indeed, Omar’s generation seems to have been marked by ideological clashes between many groups. Situationism is described as an anti-authoritarian movement which shared some Marxist beliefs and opposed both Communism and Capitalism, both considered to be oppressive systems. It can be advanced that Faqir portrays the political and ideological context in which Omar lived. Telling the reader that he used to be Situationist may suggest his neutrality in the ideological clash that opposed the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. Apparently, none of these paths could help him fulfil his dreams and aspirations.

Despite this previous experience of delusion with Situationism, he still refuses to forsake his ideals. At this point, he reflects on the absurdity of the human condition: “*What we desire is unattainable and although we know it, we keep striving for it. Sisyphus, the Greek god, and all that. Xanadu*” (60). He feels that his quest is absurd, purposeless, but still Xanadu or the cosmopolis of his dreams claims him, urges him to resume the Sisyphian task of rolling the boulder up the hill, again and again, tirelessly. He cannot abandon his ideals; he feels that it is his fate to keep on searching for satisfaction.

The second path that is opened to Omar is jihad. He and his friend decide to prioritise the call for global jihad and to travel to Afghanistan to fight alongside the mujahideen against the Soviet invaders. This new option is proposed by Hani. The latter, after his sexual misadventure, gets involved with a study circle run by a banned Islamic political organisation. Probably, Hani wanted to solve his crisis of identity by joining this group. A careful look at his discourse highlights this detail. He tells Omar: “*Our political aim is the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate as a state – having an elected and accountable ruler, an independent*

²¹ Guy Debord (1931-1994) was a French Marxist philosopher, writer and founding member of a movement called the Situationist International (SI) in 1957. This movement criticised the capitalist society and its negative effects including social alienation. *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) is one of Debord’s most popular theoretical books, representative of Situationist ideas.

judiciary ... the role of the caliph is to serve the masses, governing them with justice" (44). It is precisely the use of the possessive pronoun "our" instead of "their" that indicates Hani's new sense of belonging, his identification with the Islamic political organisation.

Yet, Omar attempts to dissuade him: *"You're dreaming. This is far out. You're going to establish a caliphate in this day and age. How?"* (44) He justifies his refusal to follow Hani in the following terms: *"Perhaps because he is single, he is reckless. I, on the other hand, am married with responsibilities and a daughter to feed"* (44). He notices the radical change that operated in his friend's identity: *"I was dumbfounded. Hani the secular sounded like the imam of the Martyr's Mosque. He spewed out nonsense for hours"* (45). This could suggest his hostility to religion because of some religious people who preach utopian things. Afterwards, he reconsiders his position because Hani has been arrested and tortured by the secret police: *"At night, two men came in, broke a bottle and stuck it up my anus, tearing the blastopore and intestines"* (157). He recounts how this event has deeply affected them: *"Since that night, he hasn't been himself ... A house full of music, mirth and lit chandeliers, and then they went in and blew every light bulb, leaving it swamped in darkness"* (97-98). It leaves them hopeless. This traumatic experience is indeed what leads them into the maw of global jihad: *"What he had been through forced us to look at ourselves and our country and re-examine everything"* (80). It is the last straw, as it is said. They feel desperate of living in such miserable conditions, underprivileged, having their dreams crushed, and more shocking, being victimised unjustly the way Hani has been.

This suggests the emergence of Islamic political parties which proposed their political vision to solve the problems faced by the society. Yet, there is a clash between them and the regime in power. It could be suggested that Hani is victim of this clash between the secret police and the banned Islamic political party which may represent this idea of the clash between secular government (supported by the West) and the Islamic revivalists who promote a return to an idealistic past. One should also remark this tendency of the two entities to refuse dialogue. Hani's misadventure may suggest the human rights abuses perpetrated by authoritarian regimes who seek to preserve their power by all means. The interference of foreign entities in the internal affairs could be suggested by the presence of a foreign officer during Hani's interrogation. These circumstances push them to embark on a new idealistic project designed by the promoters of global jihad:

He gave me Abdallah Azzam's²² book, *Join the Caravan*, and I read it in one go. His words – 'Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, and no dialogue' – were repeated in the marketplace, in mosques and houses. He argues that aggressors must be fought wherever they are and that we must rally in defence of Muslim victims, whoever they are. 'We must free Muslim lands from foreign domination, uphold the Muslim faith and create a pioneering vanguard that will form the base for our future.' (80-81)

Analysing this discourse, it appears that it is imbued with a doctrine which can be called Occidentalism. It politicises religious identity to attain specific political ends. It prompts Muslims, without distinction, to wage war against non-Muslims and seculars, mainly the Western world and its representatives in the Muslim world, classifying them all as "evil". Its methods are violent and leave no room for dialogue, thus it is separatist and antihuman. The ultimate aim of this movement is the creation of a pure Islamic state, promoted as the only authentic form of society in contrast to Communist and Capitalist societies, who seem to be the foreign imperial powers. Hani naively believes in its promises: "*We'll start by kicking the Soviets out of Afghanistan*", he proclaims (81). Omar says that it is for the sake of his love for his friend that he joins the movement; he does not want to let him go alone. He feels an "*unexplained compulsion to protect him*" (81) after the treatment he has been victim of.

What appear noteworthy are their idealistic and patriotic traits. They think they can make the world a better place to live in; they want to change things for their country and the region they live in. They already see themselves as freedom fighters and defenders of justice. However, Omar is tormented by this idea of departure. He feels that abandoning his family is cruel, especially his three years old daughter. He desires to reinvent himself, to search for new ways of bettering their lives, but he experiences uncertainty:

Farewell is ... accepting fate. You suddenly let go of the self you knew, the one you had conversations with for years, and welcome a stranger, someone you have never seen before, into your house. Will you and this alien get along as you go on your journey, exploring new maps, searching for new possibilities? And that older self – was it better than this unfamiliar companion? (82)

The path he follows implies a change of identity and it is this change that Omar fears most. The fight against imperialism and oppression as designed by this movement seems to be too

²² Or Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941-1989) was a highly influential Palestinian Sunni Islamic scholar and theologian, and a central figure in preaching for defensive jihad by Muslims to help the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet invaders. He fled the West Bank in 1967, in the Palestinian exodus to Jordan, taking a leading role in the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood. There he adopted the teachings of Sayyed Qutb, most significantly the inevitable *clash of civilizations* between Islam and the non-Islamic world as well as war with all secular states to establish Islamic states (see New World Encyclopedia).

demanding from him. This is why he doubts whether he will be able to cope with his new life and identity. He nevertheless leaves.

2.2.1. Afghanistan: the Antipodes of Xanadu

Once in Afghanistan, they are brought in a mujahideen training camp. Omar says that the modalities of adhesion to the group require from a new recruit a reference letter written by one of his relatives: *“One of Hani’s friends ... wrote us glorious references: They are righteous men, with strong belief in Allah and regular observance of his edicts. Upright and honourable, they came here to help us get rid of the red evil”* (95). However, he feels like an imposter, an outsider to the group because he is actually not a strict believer like the rest. He panics during the prayer because he cannot remember the rituals: *“I realised that I hadn’t prayed since my father took me to the mosque during the Eid celebrations”* (95). Unlike his friend Hani, Omar refuses to become a combatant like the majority despite the methods of pressure and brainwashing exercised by the leaders of the group. Some of these methods are described below:

A brother introduced a video. Muslims, wherever they are in the world, are targeted by the kafirs... The video was a compilation of scenes of Muslim women and children being attacked by Western or Soviet soldiers from Chechnya, Palestine, all the way to Iraq ... Then you hear the serene voice of an imam: ‘Are you going to safeguard the sharaf, the honour of our women? Are you Muslims? We must protect them and establish a caliphate ... It struck me that the video was assembled, montaged and is historically inaccurate, and some of the shots were too dark to decide who was doing what, but most of the recruits stood up and shouted, ‘Allahu akbar!’ (98)

The other recruits follow blindly and are transformed into complete religious extremists and Occidentalists. Their new identity is constructed on a dualistic model which dehumanises and demonises the “other”. However, Omar remains skeptical about the arguments advanced to justify the need to establish the caliphate. He seems indeed able to detect distorted realities and to avoid taking things for granted. He senses that this path cannot constitute a sound ethical code, a basis on which he could build his new identity and quench his thirst for ideals. He does not want to become the kind of person the warlords strive to create. Thus, his battle is to resist radicalisation. It is not easy, yet he does his best to stick to his principles. It might be said that he still believes in his secular cosmopolis which seems incompatible with the caliphate the mujahideen were trying to establish. He explains that his mission in Afghanistan was specific right from the beginning of the adventure; he says:

When Hani and I arrived here, we knew what we were doing: we were fighting the communist Soviets and trying to get them out of the country. I was not and didn't wish to become a combatant like him, no matter how hard the warlords tried. They preached, recommended fasting, gave me tapes to listen to, then I was singled out and ostracised. The answer was no. Curing people, not decimating them, was my calling and I was determined to stick to that. (114)

The promoters of jihad and Omar seem to fight the same enemy but differently. The path of hatred and separatism is what he apparently rejects. Because of his different approach, he feels a sense of not belonging, of alienation amidst believers who adopt extreme views. They exclude him from the group. Nonetheless, he invests his medical skills in the war trying to help without losing his principles. Instead of taking the arms and hurting people, he devotes his time and efforts to providing medical support to the injured. Therefore, he rejects the path of the West and Islam dualism in this case. He is fighting against an oppressor, not a whole civilisation which has its place in his civilised cosmopolis.

The narrative then portrays the turn of events in Afghanistan. Initially waged against foreign oppressors, namely the Soviets, it becomes an internal and long war after the latter were expelled from the country. In fact, soon after the withdrawal of the invaders, the mujahideen split into several groups – because of divergence of opinions and ideologies, but more importantly because of their thirst for power – and start fighting each other. The war is prolonged and gets even worse this time, spreading destruction and grief. Omar witnesses the atrocities of this complex war fought by different groups. His life becomes monotonous and devoid of joy:

For the past seven years, and in this desolate place where nobody dared to go, I have performed thousands of operations, mostly amputations. The xur-xur of the saw cutting through gristle and bone has become the only rhythm in field hospitals. Armies on both sides of the divide plant mines as if they are seeds or candies. The whole terrain is contaminated with exploded and unexploded devices. (115)

Then the situation becomes unbearable for him and he starts blaming himself for having encouraged all the horrors of the war. There was no sign of peace, no dialogue and the belligerents seemed to be playing a game rather than being aware of decimating lives of innocent people and ruining the country. Angry with all these events, he says: *“Tidying up injuries, making them look neat, puts me at the service of this myth-making machine ... Perhaps if we don't clean up the injured, people will wake up to the ugliness of this conflict, this uncivil war”* (115). Therefore, he decides to leave, return to his previous ordinary life, far away from the savagery. Truly, in Afghanistan, Omar realises that he has been deluded,

misled once again. All the promises they were made have evaporated and it is the status quo for many years:

I am thirty-five and have nothing to show for it. Palestine is still occupied and will not be liberated through Kabul, as Sheikh Azzam promised. Two Gulf Wars later and the tyrant is still in power. Afghanistan is falling apart. A drop of acid was squirted in the milk, curdling it. (117)

His adventure proves to be fruitless, utopian and even diminishing him physically as well as morally. He finds himself in a place which is the antipodes of Xanadu. Afghanistan has become a country torn by war and the place of competition between the world leading powers: *“Since the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan has become the playing field of all the world’s intelligence services: Mukhabarat, Mossad, MI6, CIA. They spy on each other, pull strings, plan entrapments, ambush and assassinate their opponents”* (140). This is another reality that the reader discovers through Omar’s accounts of the war. It is a bitter disillusionment for him: *“We decided to leave – fight the injustice in our countries, starting here. How misguided we were!”* (157) He realises indeed that all their sacrifices have been brought to nought. One must rather say his sacrifices because Hani has divergent interpretations of things: *“Hani sat opposite me, bursting with pride. ‘We couldn’t have achieved this if we’d stayed at home.’”* (141) Omar is shocked by the fact that his friend finds satisfaction in the middle of chaos and cruelty: *“Do you call this devastation glory?”* (141)

Actually, Hani is now a distinguished mujahideen nicknamed *“Sinan”* whose bravery has won him the favours of the warlords; his new ideal is to die a martyr.²³ His self-worth has been enhanced. He has found his place within the system, partly due to indoctrination. His path, however, will prove fatal for him, for it results in his horrible death. Omar on the contrary cannot enjoy this life. Although his title of *“doktor”* has won him respect and honour, he cannot stand the war. He feels deeply concerned about the incessant killing of innocents, the countless injured, in addition to the destruction of the land and other things. However, he aborts his decision to leave because he unexpectedly falls in love and gets married to an Afghani widow. This new relationship revives him, comforts him in the midst of the surrounding desolation: *“Gratified, I reclined on her mattress a crowned king”* (143). He finds love but the environment still lacks other elements of his Xanadu. He names their daughter Amani to express his many aspirations, his quest for the cosmopolis he wishes to create; however, it is undermined by the war:

²³ Understand here the idea of the death cult which has been mentioned in the previous chapter, under the section devoted to Occidentalism.

I called you Amani – ‘wishes’ – because I had many dreams. If only we were able to create the cosmopolis we had desired. We searched for Xanadu, a place where nobody dared to go, far and wide. We found it inside our heads, then were claimed by it. If only the world was a better place... (247).

2.2.2. Metamorphosis: From Healing to Hurting

In 2001, Hani is killed in the Taliban massacre at Mazar-e-Sharif, after having masterminded a strong rebellion. In fact, they had negotiated a ceasefire which was not respected: “*Apparently the Americans wanted to question them about terror networks, so they were transferred to Qala-i-Jangi fortress. They were betrayed*” (154). This event suggests the complications brought in the war by the American invasion of Afghanistan under their agenda of the War on Terror following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Omar goes there to search for Hani’s body amidst many other hundreds, and he finds it in a horrible state:

I laid Hani on the table, washed his body with iodine and began assessing his injuries: fractured skull, gouged-out eyes, extracted teeth, stab wounds everywhere, slashed stomach, severed penis, broken knees, extracted toenails. I pushed his bowels, stomach, entrails and colon into place and stitched up his belly ... His lips were stretched in a triumphant smile. He had achieved the martyrdom he had craved for so long. He believed that paradise was his final home and that seven beautiful hours would receive him at the other end. (157-158)

This extremely traumatic experience causes another important reactive move. He had joined the movement in Afghanistan because of Hani; he wanted to protect him. However, he fails in his mission, for he loses him. This tragic situation corrupts his principles and morality. He hears the funeral *Fatiha* verse from the Qur’an which people recite while he carries Hani’s dead body: “*You alone do we worship and You alone we seek for help. Guide us to the Straight Path. The path of those whom Your blessings are upon, not of those whom You have cursed nor of those who have gone astray*” (157). However, this prayer does not seem to reach his heart, now overwhelmed with grief and despair. He surrenders and becomes a mujahideen although he has been resisting radicalisation.

This transformation is narrated as a metamorphosis whereby he acquires extraordinary sensory capacities comparable to animal attributes. The idea of metamorphosis could suggest that, from this point onwards, Omar is going to be a different person, to say the least. Thus, he turns from healer to killer, deviating from his vocation. His new identity entails violence. Although it is based on an imaginary creature, the metaphor of the werewolf suggests danger, violence, and perhaps ‘inhumanity’. The following is how he depicts his transformation:

My throat was sore, as if feathers were growing inside it ... All that grief! All that desecration! Suddenly my eyesight and hearing sharpened. A sensory metamorphosis. I could hear the rip and chew of the eagles tearing up a corpse somewhere at the top of the mountains. My teeth grew longer and hair sprouted out of my ears. It was like that film, *Wolf*, which someone had smuggled from Pakistan and we watched in the camp in secret. I leapt from one rock to another, sniffing for blood. A werewolf past midnight; I howled. (158-159)

However, it is important to remark that it is not clear whether it is a partial or complete metamorphosis. Neither is it possible from this point to state whether this mutation is reversible or irreversible. A last point that needs to be emphasised is that the metamorphosis is not voluntary, but it has been triggered by Hani's horrible death combined with the traumatic experiences of the war: "*I have tried to resist becoming a combatant but unfortunately I've located myself in the middle of this war and, like a hyena, it is claiming me*" (158). To put things simply, Omar becomes a mujahideen out of disillusionment, grief and despair. His change of identity occurs in reaction to the cruelty of the world in which he finds himself. It is due to the awareness of the impossibility of Xanadu, his cosmopolis: "*It was no longer that imagined space, cosmology, that we had dreamt of. Was it the Promised Land, a dome of pleasure, or hell on earth and this desecration?*" (155). The death of his friend may symbolise the collapse of this ideal space of hope, dreams, love, etc.

2.2.3. England: the Terrorist Seeking Revenge

The werewolf travels to the West, precisely in England, United Kingdom. He abandons his second family in a cold-hearted manner: "*Whatever you do, don't turn your head!*" *I walked off. My second abandonment was easier, for I am a man with a mission now*" (177). Contrary to his first abandonment or departure from Amman, Omar does not agonise this time; he leaves convinced of the righteousness of his choice and determined to accomplish his new mission. He arrives in England to perform a harmful and destructive mission, but what he notices first of all is the change of environment: "*What shocked me most when I arrived was the absence of the sound of explosions and weeping ... Here I can suddenly hear the silence I have been craving*" (176). In fact, it is a peaceful place, far away from the battlefields of Afghanistan. He contrasts the things he sees in London with the ones he saw in Afghanistan. For instance, consider the following: "*The doctor is young – barely thirty – yet he is one of the world's top specialists ... His eyes are knowledgeable, but innocent and untainted, unlike mine, which have witnessed the horrors of war*" (177). This could suggest that he sees in the English doctor the person he could have been if only the circumstances had been different, if only they could create the cosmopolis they wished for.

Another contrast that Omar notes is the abundance. He highlights this aspect by juxtaposing Afghanistan with London:

A whole panorama of London spread out in front of me as far as the horizon. Afghanistan is poor and rudimentary compared to this. Lit-up skyscrapers; mud huts with no electricity or running water. Five different types of juice in a corner shop; no juice. Different kinds of vegetables imported from all over the world; perhaps some tomatoes and eggs. Schools with swimming pools; no schools or just a madrasa in the mosque, if the children are lucky. Shops dedicated to just shoes; stealing the shoes of dead soldiers and stuffing them with newspaper to fit you. Hospitals like spaceships; no hospitals or hygiene, and basic surgical tools. Whoever divided this loaf did not have one fair bone in their body. (179)

For him, there is a shocking economic disparity between the two places. Omar has witnessed how the war has devastated Afghanistan and hardened the living conditions of its ordinary people. London could have rivalled with Xanadu were it not for the fact that it symbolised injustice, humiliation, and the source of the atrocities he has witnessed in Afghanistan. Looking at London with the eyes of an extremist and an avenger, Omar fails to consider any beauty in the place. Everything seems to intensify his anger and desire for revenge.

He performs his mission. He practices what he used to abhor, i.e. radicalising people: *“My job was to isolate, convert, radicalise”* (239). Driven by hatred and a strong desire for revenge, he abandons the principles that used to guide him and embodies his new self. He turns from a pacific man into a criminal. He brainwashes young Muslims and masterminds deadly terrorist attacks to satisfy his desire for retribution. He thinks that victimising the English will appease his soul, attenuate his grief, or compensate his losses. However, the satisfaction of this desire for vengeance results in confusing feelings:

A mixture of feelings: exhilaration followed by sadness, then fear followed by anger. I am elated that some of the hell they have dropped on us in Afghanistan has been transposed. You cannot turn a blind eye to an atrocity taking place miles and miles away, thinking that it will not be visited upon you. Natural laws of extension. Sad that the young man had to die. Afraid of the random arrests of the innocent and guilty. Muslims will be ostracised, whether they live in so-called Islamic countries or in the kafir West. Angry because the world, its politics, the mess I find myself in, has conspired against me and brought me so far, all the way from healing to hurting. I have forsaken everything for my beliefs. (194)

From this passage, one can perceive that Omar cannot derive full satisfaction from what he has done and he feels imprisoned in a stranger self, a person he was not and did not wish to be; it is not his ideal self. He is victim of the complex politics of the region which seem to be highly characterised by the ideological fights under the paradigm of the West and Islam

dualism. This is what has fabricated the web in which he finds himself caught. Besides, he reveals a bitter truth which characterises the modern world. This consists in the stigmatisation and hatred of Muslims in general for the crimes committed by a few extremist individuals; the amalgamation of a complex system of beliefs with individual actions of violence.

2.2.4. Time for Rebirth

Omar's rebirth comes thanks to his arrest before he could leave England. This occurs like an opportunity because it prevents him from going back into the world of global jihad, particularly since his sentence is not capital punishment. Indeed, Omar is sentenced to one life imprisonment, which can be interpreted as a second chance for him to re-examine his past life and see where he is at the present. The prison environment becomes the place where Omar will be able to find himself. However, in the beginning, he goes through a traumatic experience after being violated by a prison guard:

When he stuck his finger inside my rectum, I knew exactly how Hani, may Allah bless his soul, had felt. It was worse for him because they penetrated him with a broken Pepsi bottle. The prison officer twisted his finger, probed, then fisted me...I bled for days after that. (212)

This vile act from the prison officer gets Omar to feel profound compassion for his late friend and he seems to understand the reason behind the latter's subsequent transformation and radicalisation. It can be remarked that abusive treatment has the power to radically change an individual because it causes psychological traumatism. This is what has driven them out of their homeland. In this sense, Omar declares: *"When you're violated, you lose the self you are familiar with, the one you have conversed with for years, and a stranger knocks on your door and moves in with you"* (212). In addition to that, he has to face Islamophobic provocations: *"I tried to settle in, but there was always the hell of other people. White prisoners taunted me. 'Towel-head Muslim! Carpet-kisser! Sheep-shagger! Wife-beater!'* They bumped into me 'accidentally' and ridiculed the way I prayed" (213). This environment is inconvenient and cannot help him in his introspection.

After being physically aggressed, Omar is taken to hospital. There he remembers and longs for the self he used to be and tries to share this truth about his past identity with the nurse who is taking care of him, but she refuses to believe him: *"Never"*; *"You don't strike me as an angel of mercy"*; *"You have inflicted so much suffering on so many innocent people"* (213). In reaction to her accusations he puts the blame on her people, accusing them of being *"guilty by association"* (214). It can be said that Omar craves comprehension and

compassion, but the nurse does not give him this precious help because she does not know what he has gone through, what has transformed him. His present status of criminal seems to prevail, to erase all the good in his past. The nurse relies on her stereotypical representations. It could be argued that the nurse does not admit that identity could be changed and hence try to listen to Omar and understand perhaps how he has come to this stage. Afterwards, he is transferred in another prison in Durham. What he sees there shocks him. Some radical Muslim inmates mistreat the non-Muslim detainees.

They have no principles. They've decided that, A: they are Muslim and B: they want to convert every prisoner to Islam. They began harassing those who ate bacon or undressed in the showers. I watched them bully young inmates. 'You'll burn in hell because your wife is not a Muslim.' Brainwashing young men used to be my job, but suddenly I can see how ugly it is when it's done by others. To be bullied into religion is not our way. But why did I agree to do it? (238-239)

The above passage illustrates how the dualistic representations are transferred even into the world of prison. Actually, this situation serves as a mirror for Omar, who can now see in the others the reflection of the self he has become. Consequently, it triggers self-examination, introspection, and regrets. He realises that he has gone astray from the principles of his religion and his own dreams. Therefore, he decides to fight this injustice by threatening the gang leader. In fact, Omar does this especially to protect Ed (Edward), a young Englishman and fellow inmate he has befriended in Frankland Prison. He notices that he is changing back to the good-hearted man he used to be before his metamorphosis. Then he tries to dissuade Ed from converting to Islam, but the young Englishman is determined to do so:

And when he read, 'Never let your enmity for anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Always be just: that is closest to being God-fearing', he decided to convert. I need to get to know the self that advised Ed strongly not to do so. It goes against everything I stood for only seven years ago ... Old age equals palpitations and doubt. And, before I knew it, Ed had recited the shahada and became a Muslim. I am too tired to present coherent counter-arguments against religion. (239)

This verse that Ed reads seems to convey the same message as the funeral *Fatiha* verse mentioned earlier especially when one considers the notions of "*Straight Path*" in that earlier verse and "*sin of deviating from justice*" in this one. Perhaps, by trying to dissuade Ed, Omar thinks he is protecting him from falling in the trap of religious extremism and hatred. Yet, Ed has fallen in love with Islam and it might be said that his conversion constitutes an answer to his own crisis of identity. Thus it can be said that Omar has helped Edward in reinventing his identity.

The encounter is mutually beneficial in the sense that it helps Omar as well to heal internally, to rediscover his real self. It can be said that in the quest for identity, one needs help from other people. Besides, help should come in a form of unconditional positive regard, respecting the dignity of the other person. This seems to be what helps him in his rebirth. There is also the environment of peace and tranquillity. Slowly, he begins to feel compassion for Ed and for the English people:

I came to this country to punish the English for the death and destruction their army had visited on Afghanistan. A taste of their own bitter medicine. Yet...yet...Ed – white, ex-criminal – was like a son to me. I am fed, clothed, nursed by the English. Some are even kind to me, despite my dark deeds (248).

He can see them as human beings worthy of respect and compassion again. Omar reflects on his identity: *“What makes us who we are? Events and people around us? Are we born flawed? Did I change? From a naïve young man to a medic, then a wolf, who cannot howl at the moon anymore”* (246). The answer to what determined his personality or his identity might then come from the considerations of all the circumstances that he has been through. It can be advanced that he finds who he wants to be in the end because, after meeting his daughter Najwa, he declares: *“I want to be a healer again”* (270). From this, it is obvious that he rejects the dualistic way of perceiving the world and discovers that his quest for identity is not over because identity is not fixed and it is subject to change depending on many circumstances.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has permitted to identify the main reasons behind the male protagonist's departure from Jordan, his homeland. Firstly, they reveal a direct cause which is jihad. Omar has travelled with his friend to Afghanistan in order to help the jihad fighters in their war against the Soviet invaders. Secondly, he leaves his country because of personal, economic and political problems. Last but not least, Omar leaves Amman because he experiences a crisis of identity and an urge to construct a new and balanced identity for himself and to fulfil his dreams. However, having located himself in an atmosphere marked by hatred and war all created and driven by a dualistic worldview, his identity is shaped in a way that contradicts his wishes and his principles. Indeed, his second departure, i.e. from Afghanistan to England as a terrorist has been the result of the chaos he experienced in that part of the world. Eventually, his stay in this new environment helps him construct a new and healthier identity and find some meaning to the world around him as he repents dualism.

Chapter Three:
Najwa's Identity Construction

Introduction

Najwa is the second and the female protagonist of *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. Her narrative is the principal one. Told from a first-person point of view, the narrative depicts her internal and external battles to find her place in the world. Her point of departure is Amman, the capital of Jordan. This chapter retraces and examines her odyssey from her Middle-Eastern homeland all the way to a foreign and Western country, namely England. The present analysis intends to detect the indicators of the West and Islam dualism in her narrative and to clarify the determinants of her quest for identity all along her odyssey. This endeavour may prove useful in verifying the hypotheses that have been formulated to address the core problem of this dissertation, notably the impact of the West and Islam dualism on the protagonists' construction of identity.

3.1. Amman: Najwa's Alienation

Najwa is twenty seven years old when she narrates her story. She resides in east Amman which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is less prosperous than the west side of the city. She experiences a feeling of alienation which has to be demonstrated and whose causes are to be investigated throughout the following lines. In order to do so, two elements are taken into account, notably the familial background and the social and cultural environment.

3.1.1. Najwa's Familial Background

3.1.1.1. Myth of the Religious Father

Najwa's familial background is characterised by the myth of her religious father. Omar, her father, has abandoned her at an early age; she was just three years old. Ever since that time, he has been away from them. She grew up in his absence and the only memory that she has of him is even unclear in her mind:

My father, Omar Rahman, who walked on us when I was three, loomed large in the past, a featureless dark shadow, without eyes, lips or voice. I remember very little: his strong, bushy hair, a scar at the end of his left eyebrow, the warmth of his bony fingers claspng my ribcage before flinging me up in the air. (6)

Omar became a myth for her, i.e. she does not know her father. His disappearance has had a great impact on her life, as it has contributed to her alienation. This idea will be clarified further under the other subsequent points. From this point, it may be interesting to retain

Omar's abandonment as the trigger for the majority, if not all, of the ordeals she will have to endure in her very modest life.

In order to construct her own identity, she needs first of all to demystify him, to know who he was and who he is presently. She has no souvenir from him. He is a missing piece in her past, a void, and hence her feeling of incompleteness. This is also why her grandmother tells her in one passage: "*The past might make you whole*" (28). To become whole, she must find him and ask him the many questions that the many years of absence have generated. Najwa actually interrogates herself about her father's identity and the real motives behind his disappearance because she has heard different opinions about him.

Raneen, her mother, kept talking about Omar as a traitor and disloyal husband who rejected his family for the cause of religion. For this reason Najwa feels that her father did not love her enough. Zainab, her grandmother, told her that her father was a good man, a student of nursing who abandoned his vocation and went to kill people. This adds another dimension to the picture that she tries to draw about Omar. The latter exists in her mind as a fundamentalist father and this image haunts her. Yet, he remains a myth for her. Najwa feels the need to find the truth for herself; to demystify her absent father. How can Omar be defined? What drove him away? She interrogates herself whether he is a murderer, a wife-killer, a revolutionary, or a chaser of dreams and wider horizons (65-66). This constitutes the thrust of her journey which takes her from Jordan to England via Pakistan and Afghanistan.

3.1.1.2. Tyranny of the Secular Mother

Another determinant factor that has contributed to the creation of Najwa's sense of alienation and otherness in the midst of her society is undoubtedly her late mother's tyranny. In fact, Raneen played a central and authoritarian role in breeding and educating her after the father's abandonment. The way she educated her contributed greatly to make her different vis-à-vis Amman's conservative society. After her husband's desertion, Raneen took her parental responsibilities towards her daughter. She educated her not in the way that would suit exactly their society's conventions, but in a completely unconventional way instead. In fact, she refused to let her daughter become a Muslim, forcing her to follow the path of secularism like herself.

Raneen was devastated by the desertion of her husband Omar. She could neither forgive nor forget him; she loved and hated him at the same time. Yet, her hatred for religion

surpassed everything. Raneen's hatred and fear of religion derived from her conclusion and belief that her husband had forsaken them because of his faith. She insisted on this point so much and wanted Najwa to believe her explanation as the only truth about Omar's disappearance: *"It's this ugly thing called religion. Allah is more important to him than us"* (11); *"Omar loved Allah, that's all!"* (16). Because of that, she declared war on religion. She stopped wearing the veil, cut her hair (7) and implemented her rigid secularisation programme which consisted of the following principles: *"No religious words, deeds, texts, symbols, jewellery or dress in this house!"* (9) It was more like a witch-hunt. As a token of vengeance, she burns all the books that belonged to Omar. These include titles like *"The Islamic Caliphate, The Glorious Ottoman Empire, Overcoming the Fear of Death, Islamic Jihad, A for Allah, The Ideal Muslim Father and Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan"* (8-9). She considered them as *"filth"*. It seemed important for her to destroy these books because they drove her husband away from her and she tried by all means to protect her daughter. She categorically forbade Najwa to go to religious places, i.e. the mosque, to avoid having any contact with the religious leaders: *"I lost my husband to religion, and I have no intention of offering my daughter on a plate to the nasty sheikhs. My name wouldn't be Raneen if I allowed that!"* (24) Religion had become a threat in Raneen's eyes; something she wants to protect herself from and contain outside the frontiers of her territory: the familial house. It could be argued that she becomes Islamophobic.

As a consequence, Najwa became an odd person in Amman's conservative society. Since her childhood, she has been alienated because of her mother's dictatorship and unconventional prescriptions. She could not fully enjoy that important stage in her development:

I knew I was different. I was not allowed to cover my head, wear a long school uniform or trousers, recite the Qur'an, participate in the Ramadan procession or wear prayer clothes and go to the mosque in the evening with the other children ... I would stand by the iron gate ... The house was 'secular' ... I stood out as if I had a birth defect with my unruly hair, western clothes and uncovered legs. (9)

Raneen even imposed on Najwa her own dreams; she mapped her daughter's future without consulting her. Najwa had no say in the crucial decisions concerning her projects. She relates: *"My mother wanted me to study French at college, 'because it's the most secular country on earth', but it was not on offer ... she decided that I would train as a tourist guide and work in one of the hotels by the Dead Sea, the most cosmopolitan and secular of environments"* (9-10). Although she did not approve her choices, Najwa submitted to her mother's regime: *"I*

saw myself as different from what she had planned or envisaged for me, but I was her only child, what was left for her, so I kept my mouth shut and went to college” (10). Her life continued on this very note until Raneen’s recent decease.

3.1.1.3. The Loving Religious Grandmother

Zainab, Najwa’s Palestinian grandmother, has secretly managed to educate her according to the cultural and religious norms of their society. She and Najwa are victims of Raneen’s tyrannical secularism; she could not practice her faith freely, afraid of her controlling daughter. Zainab emphasises the male-female relationships because gender roles are strictly distributed and transgressing the lines is intolerable in Amman. Najwa has to navigate between two codes. For example, while working in a hotel in west Amman, she faces this dilemma regarding how to behave in front of males. Her boss asks her to do things that her grandmother would object to: *“Look up when you’re speaking to guests!” It was hard because my grandmother had cautioned me against looking men in the eye*” (14).

After Raneen’s death, Zainab feels free to inculcate Najwa with the norms of their society. The grandmother does it with love and tenderness unlike her late daughter who had imposed tyrannical secularism in the house at the expense of familial love. The relationship between Najwa and her grandmother is, actually, characterised by mutual love and compassion. She finds in her grandmother the unconditional positive regard, to use Rogerian²⁴ terms, that her absent father Omar, her late mother Raneen, and her conservative society could not provide her with. Zainab tells Najwa in one passage: *“Your father has absconded, granted, but your grandmother loves you”* (89). It can be said that in the eyes of her grandmother, the power of love surpasses anything else like the divergences in matters of faith. Besides, Zainab is a true believer and she is the representative of religion, of wisdom in the household. Despite Raneen’s disdain and rejection of her faith, Zainab never stopped loving her and supporting her through all the ordeals she had experienced until her death. She even ignores Raneen’s wishes and organises an Islamic funeral for her.

The analysis of Najwa’s familial background seems to reveal an atmosphere of conflict which appears to be occurring between secularism and religion. The protagonists of this clash involve her tyrannical secular mother on one side and the religious father (although

²⁴ Carl Rogers (1902-1987), an American humanistic psychologist who claimed that for a person to achieve self-actualisation and their full potential in life, they must have unconditional positive regard – i.e. love, respect, tolerance, with no strings attached – from their parents during their childhood and from other people in their social environment as they develop.

described as a myth) and the religious grandmother on the other side. Raneen's extreme secularism and her tendency to admire secular Western countries, to impose her values on the rest of the family, and to despise religious people without any distinction creates a dualistic environment. Indeed, this clash between secularism and religious fundamentalism could in this case suggest the idea of the West and Islam dualism, the West represented by secularism and Islam by religion.

3.1.2. Najwa's Social and Cultural Background

From her descriptions and perceptions, it can be inferred that Amman's society is an Islamic conservative society and it is patriarchal, i.e. male-dominated. The absence of her father has had considerable impacts on her life. For instance, she states that they never received guests: "... *no one visited us. No male guardian, no honour, no status in this neighbourhood*" (5). In addition, it destroys her marriage prospects. In fact, because of the absence of a male relative in their family, their neighbour's son was not allowed to marry her. His father did not approve: "*Najwa is not marriage material ... because, rumour has it, her father is a drug baron somewhere on the borders of China. Also, brought up in a house without men, she wouldn't know how to show my son respect and tend him*" (10). This broke her heart.

Also, because of the patriarchal rules of the society, soon after her mother's decease, Najwa is urged to leave and search for her father. Her grandmother wisely advises her to do so. The reason is that she cannot live alone in Amman without a male guardian: "... *Chaste women don't live on their own. Tongues will wag. You'll be ostracised, habibti. And you have no relatives. As they say, 'Better a man's shadow than that of a wall.'*" (6) It can be interpreted that the fact of being a single woman with no male relative in addition to being secular cannot guarantee a respectable status for Najwa in her Islamic conservative society. It is as if the society is telling her that she is not a Muslim woman and so there is no place for her within its fabric. In other words, she is identified as an alien, an outcast who does not fulfil the requirements of the Muslim identity. However, this does not mean that she cannot achieve this identity and get integrated. On the contrary, she can still become a Muslim woman provided that she gathers the necessary conditions.

In her unhappy situation, Najwa states: "*I had no option but to find my father*" (23). The conservative and patriarchal codes of her society tend to impose Omar, the male figure, as a determinant of her identity. He is part of the conditions that the society requires from her

before she could be positively regarded, acknowledged and respected as a worthy human being and treated as a full member of the community, i.e. as a Muslim woman. Therefore, she has to strive in order to find him if she wants to live peacefully and be integrated in Amman's community. Besides, without a male guardian, Najwa feels unprotected; she feels that people objectify her and view her like a property without an owner. In this regard, she states: "... *being the daughter of an absent father, they saw me as common land, without fence or borders*" (15). She is confronted to the gazes of men. For example, in one scene she is ogled by a taxi driver (15); in another, there is a man who takes her for a prostitute in disguise (26). Najwa interprets those gazes in relation to her lack of a male guardian. She longs for her father's strong grip which may be interpreted as referring to the protection which she has been deprived of for so long: "*You used to hold me tight and fling me up in the air. Your hands were large, your fingers strong around my waist*" (34).

She feels entrapped in a labyrinth of alienation created by her father's early abandonment, her mother's tyranny followed by her death, and the society's rigid patriarchal rules which use the religious argument to claim legitimacy. Her childhood experiences have negatively marked her in the sense that she did not receive parental love. After her mother's death, she feels isolated, for she has no other relative except her old grandmother who constantly tells her that her life is reaching its decline. She has neither friends nor any other connection within her society because she is different. This feeling of loneliness has a strong psychological impact on her and it may be argued that it makes her feel unhuman. For example, this idea can be interpreted in light of what the Identity and Passport Service guard says to her. Indeed, when Najwa explains to him that she does not have a male relative who could accompany her to apply for a passport, the man replies: "*I don't believe you. Did you grow out of a tree?*" (51)

Also, her sense of loneliness seems to deprive her of the ability to manifest her emotions and feelings. She does not even seem to be sure of what she feels or has to feel about her parents. At her mother's funeral, for instance, she expresses her emotional emptiness: "*No tears from me, Najwa, daughter of Raneen and Omar Rahman and granddaughter of Zainab! I stood there a cripple, unable to grieve for you, my so-called father, or for her*" (4). As a matter of fact, she feels unable to cry most of the time and keeps craving tears; she describes herself as being dry-eyed. It might be advanced that this emotional emptiness, too, makes her feel like an abnormal person, unhuman or simply an alien. She desperately comes to the thought that she might have not been desired when she

was conceived: *“Was I conceived by mistake or design? Did my parents want me?”* (26) It seems essential for her identity construction to have the assurance of parental love. However, the only parental positive regard and love that remains central for her to gain is the paternal one, for her mother is dead and her grandmother seems too old to live for a longer time. This might show the importance of her mission to find Omar. He can be qualified as the *sine qua non* condition to her quest for identity.

She seems to have always wanted to escape the reality of her miserable condition, but had no opportunity of exit. She remarks: *“I was not a bird and could neither fly nor say goodbye. Although I was free to breathe, walk, work, I felt like a prisoner, condemned to my life”* (5). She just has her basic needs satisfied. One reason that used to impeach her was her mother. Another reason can be her total lack of male relatives. Still another appears to be poverty; she is economically disadvantaged. In order to detect this aspect, one can consider her admiration for the west side of the city. It has been said earlier that Najwa lives in east Amman, which is the poor side between the two that constitute the city. In one passage she relates: *“Heading to town in a public taxi service, I looked at the lush gardens and lattice windows of the royal palaces on the opposite hill. Would they be swaying their hips to the sound of music?”* (20)

Since finding her father constitutes an imperative, she gets the opportunity to leave the country. However, as she explains, Zainab and she resort to selling the family’s jewellery in order to afford the travel for her (25). A last barrier is formed by some patriarchal rules. For instance, it is difficult to get a passport unaccompanied by a male guardian. She has to write a statement pledging that she is single before she could be delivered one, and it is a victory for her when she succeeds: *“... suddenly, as if by magic, the country became larger than our house, garden and my college. I could cross its borders, take a taxi for hours or board a plane ... I went to the nearest kiosk and bought a bottle of fizzy drink to celebrate”* (52).

Najwa starts her quest for her father only after her mother’s death simply because she would not have permitted that. Since the latter is no longer alive, she has to unveil all the things that she had been concealing about Omar: *“A few weeks after the death of my mother, the imposer of rules and regulations, I had been free to search the house for clues, photos, documents – anything that would help me construct a father”* (34). She discovers photographs of Omar when he was still a young Westernised and secular medic and a jazz-lover. These provide her with some ideas about his physical appearance, but this is insufficient. Finding

Omar's whereabouts is not an easy mission. Najwa has been living a life of confinement for so many years, stuck in poor east Amman, rarely going even to the west side; with the routine movement principally between home and college. This time, she has to leave her cocoon and explore the much larger outside world, with its complexities and diverse realities, in search for her adventurous father, who represents a missing part in completing her Muslim identity. Where to start with? She realises the difficulty of the quest: "*The world was a maze and I didn't know where to enter it, how to navigate it and whether I would find a way out*" (23). Thus, the need to get some information and help about her father's location brings her into contact with different people and confronts her with many challenges.

3.2. The Quest for the Father

3.2.1. Adjustment and Transgression

The people Najwa encounters make her discover certain aspects of the identity she is supposed to construct in order to integrate the community. Indeed, she has more contact with the religion, traditions and customs of her society. Thus, she attempts to accommodate, to adjust to the codes of the community although that means transgressing her late mother's laws. She discovers the role of the dressing codes in shaping her identity. She starts wearing the Islamic dress but feels uncomfortable because she is not used to it: "*How do veiled women function under those? Honestly! And the heat is overbearing*" (27). Besides, she feels that it does not protect her from predatory men – as Zainab and Raneen qualify them. She experiences this in one scene where a man in a car stops next to her to court her. She guesses: "*He thought I was a prostitute in disguise. Some wore the Islamic dress to hide their identity*" (26). Although she talks about other people, it can be observed that she is doing the same thing; she is hiding her identity as well. Consider, for example, when she says in one passage: "*My grandmother's yashmak, which I wore to disguise myself, kept slipping back and I pulled it down over my hairline. I never wore a veil and was not used to its tightness*" (21-22). She dresses in Islamic clothes such as the abaya; she also enters a mosque and meets an imam: "*I took off my shoes and placed the sole of my foot gingerly on the threshold of a mosque for the first time*" (38). All these are things that her mother had strived to keep her away from, but which she tries to adjust to.

It is however difficult for her to abide by all the norms of the society. Indeed, she breaks not only Raneen's secular commandments, but also several of the social and religious codes. For example, she enters an internet café to search for information about a location in

Afghanistan; ignoring the restriction placed on women. She says: *“I went to the local internet café, a space out of bounds for chaste women ...”* (49). For her, *“[b]reaking the rules of the community was easy”* (49). During the preparations for the uncertain journey, Najwa transgresses three norms: *“The journey hadn’t started yet and three rules were broken already: I’d been into a male-only internet café, got a passport without my male guardian’s permission and drunk in public”* (49). It might be said that her journey highlights a paradox. While she is trying to find her father so that she can fulfil a condition of membership of her community, she also notices that she is not supposed to travel unescorted by a male guardian.

While Zainab leaves to accomplish her pilgrimage to Mecca, Najwa embarks on her own voyage to find not only her father, but also herself, her identity. The search for the father seems to be a quest for identity. She leaves Amman with a sense of not belonging that she puts as follows: *“A line in the sand dividing the world into two had been drawn. On one side lived honourable women, those protected by their fathers or husbands, and on the other loose women like me”* (68-69). This suggests a binary representation of identities. Najwa suggests that she does not fulfil the criterion that would make her an honourable woman in the eyes of the society. Her journey is the quest for this criterion although it necessarily involves transgressions.

3.2.2. The Journey to Afghanistan

In order to travel to Afghanistan, Najwa goes to Peshawar, Pakistan to get some help, following the recommendation of Hani’s parents. They told her that her father was a mujahid fighting for Islam in the mountains of Afghanistan. She learnt that he helped Hani die as a martyr in Mazar six years ago, and then disappeared. What seems important to note is that she has to adjust to the values of this new place; she *“must hide her flesh! Never look men in the eye: an open invitation to trouble”* (64), as she was told before she travelled to this region. She feels apprehensive about what might happen to her if she does not follow these rules: *“What would happen if I raised my eyelids? What would they do to me?”* (64) Away from her home and with no one to protect her, she has to abide by these rules. Thus, she pretends to be a true worshipper in some situations like when she goes to a mosque in search for Abu-Bakr, the man who is supposed to help her travel to Afghanistan:

I went to the toilet, washed my private parts in cold water, went out, then stood by the row of taps. Hands under the running water, I pretended that I was doing my ablutions. I washed my arms, sniffed some water in and out of my nostrils and gargled the way my grandmother used to in secret, afraid to be spotted by her daughter. (77-78)

She also reads a verse from the Qur'an and recalls reading the holy book at school for her Islamic Religion course, for her mother had prohibited any manifestations of religion. The verse reads: "*Have we not expanded thee thy breast? And removed from thee thy burden, which did gall thy back? And raised high thy esteem in which thou art held? So verily, with every difficulty, there is relief...*" (79). She finds these words soothing and thinks that they could have relieved her mother if only she had read them; however, Raneen was completely intransigent.

Despite her efforts to disguise herself as a Muslim woman, they discover that she does not know how to pray. For this reason, she is viewed as not trustworthy. She learns something new about Omar thanks to Abu-Bakr (a former companion of Omar in a mujahideen training camp) who tells her that her father was not a pious Muslim because he did not pray regularly. Najwa seems to take her father's defence and to criticise the mujahideen for practising two things that she finds contradictory: worshipping God and killing people. She argues: "*Why pray, then train to shoot?*" (94) Abu-Bakr maintains that they are compelled to do so "[b]ecause the world is full of kafirs, like [her], who are killing Muslims wherever they find them" (94). She is shocked because she is classified with non-Muslims and with wrong doers and criminals just because she does not know how to pray. For Najwa, being a non-believer should not be a crime or a sin, but for this mujahid "[i]t should be" (94). However, since she is looking for help, she controls her anger and adopts a religious register as a means to entreat him: "*May paradise be your daughters' final abode!*" (94) She eventually gets the help she needs.

For the passage to Afghanistan, Abu-Bakr advises her to disguise her identity: "*Whatever happens, don't say a word! Pretend to be extremely pious and refrain from shaking hands or speaking*" (101). She has to do so because "[s]trict Muslims believe that a woman's voice is awra and must be kept hidden" (101). Yet, on the road, Najwa's strong secular education gets the upper hand on her behaviour. She transgresses the rule when she voices her desire for biscuits. Despite the driver's objection, she insists and he finally accepts to satisfy her desire: "*'Yes'. I broke the rule twice. He swore and stopped the car*" (109). Najwa's acquaintance with her father's religion increases as she travels across regions where

religious identity tends to be predominant. She notices some of the habits: *“Since I’d arrived here, I hadn’t seen a single woman eat in public. It must be frowned upon”* (103).

As she travels across these regions, Najwa attempts to accommodate although it seems to be out of fear. By wearing Islamic garments, keeping her voice secret or refraining from shaking hands and lowering her gaze, she succeeds to disguise herself and to forge an identity that is supposed to be that of a Muslim woman. However, there are limits to her disguise. Indeed, she realises that from appearances she may look like a Muslim; yet, with regard to practising certain fundamental rituals like praying, she cannot pretend. For this reason, she cannot really feel like a member of the Muslim community. When she is asked in one passage where she comes from and whether she is an Arab, Najwa answers without any difficulty. In other words, it seems easy to affirm her national and ethnic identities. However, when the woman asks her whether she is a Muslim or not, she remains perplexed: *“I had never been asked this question before, so I hesitated. What was I? A believer or a non-believer? Did I have faith? Was being secular a sin? Was it imposed on me by my late mother?”* (138) Relying on this detail, it could be said that her quest consists in finding herself; family and religion appear to be her drives on her arduous journey.

Najwa takes many risks in order to find her father. The journey to Afghanistan brings her into a war zone. She witnesses the destructive effects of the conflict which undermines people’s daily lives in the region. She sees foreign soldiers like the Americans, who she likens to insects, patrolling in a place where they probably feel alien and unable to pacify for many years. She travels alone with a man in the desert and feels apprehensive:

I tensed up. As the light dimmed, it dawned on me that I was in the middle of deserted fields, alone with a strange man in a foreign country, which I’d entered on a forged visa, without any knowledge of the native tongue ... And what if he stopped the car and had his way with me? If I cried out, would anyone hear me or come to my rescue? (121-122)

However, the driver makes her feel comfortable and secure by initiating a conversation with her. He reveals a surprising fact about her father by telling her that Omar is a doctor and a good person who saves lives. One should notice that this goes against the prescription according to which she is supposed to keep her voice secret, but the driver does not seem to find it inconvenient anymore. Eventually, he drives her safe to her destination.

Arriving in Kunduz, Afghanistan, Najwa expects to meet her father at last. However, the imminence of the first encounter makes her feel anxious because she does not know how

he would react to her presence: *“Would my father rush out, open armed, to greet me? Or would he be angry with his daughter for breaking all Islamic rules and travelling alone in the company of strange men?”* (123) In other words, which of the religious or paternal love would prevail? Najwa is constantly torn between the tender childhood memory of a loving and protective father and the fear and anguish regarding the kind of man and father Omar might have become. Instead of finding her father, she discovers the latter’s second family: her stepmother Gulnar and her half-sister Amani.

She finds it difficult to accept the reality of their existence. It probably makes her feel that they stole or kept him away from them, enjoying all the advantages of his presence while she was abandoned, fatherless and with a sick mother. Although Gulnar hosts her, takes care of her and treats her like her own daughter, with much love and generosity, Najwa remains on the defensive. The warm and tender mother and daughter relationship between Gulnar and Amani makes her feel jealous because she did not have this privilege. She explains: *“Throughout my childhood and adulthood I had to soothe my mother, watch over her, lure her away from killing herself. My parents were absent: my father was away and my mother was drugged most of the time”* (153).

She is hostile to accepting them as relatives because she feels that her father has betrayed them – Raneen, Zainab and her – with this alternative family. Yet, when she thinks of her religious grandmother’s education she feels that she is being wrong in her attitude. As a matter of fact, she tries to imagine what Zainab would have said to her in such a circumstance: *“I didn’t bring you up to be cruel, Najwa. That family has taken good care of you, housed you, fed you. Is this how you repay them? She is your half-sister? God is compassionate and all-forgiving”* (153). When she decides to behave nicely to Amani, it is too late, for the latter dies after their location was bombed by a drone. Najwa experiences the atrocities of the war that is a violent manifestation of the West and Islam dualism. Her quest for identity is marked by a series of dislocations. She cannot stay in one place for a long time because she does not find Omar in the places she visits. She learns that her father travelled to the West. She leaves Kunduz horrified by the death of her half-sister Amani. Gulnar goes insane after this tragic and traumatic event. Again, she is unable to shed tears. She continues her quest, travelling to England this time.

At times and in front of the hardships, Najwa considers abandoning and returning home to live with her grandmother. Indeed, she travels through dangerous places, taking

enormous risks. However, she cannot go back after all the sacrifices she has done. She needs to find her father, the missing part in her past and present. Finding Omar is an imperative for her. He is part of her identity, and he is supposed to provide her with the protection, status and other things that she cannot enjoy back in Amman without him or a male guardian. Besides, she feels different from her grandmother Zainab. In one passage indeed she remarks: *“Unlike me, my grandmother knew who she was, where she came from and what she believed in”* (138). This quotation illustrates her permanent and unsolved quest. She still cannot find herself. This is accentuated by her dislocation, i.e. she is migrating from one place to another, on a continuing quest outside her country. She feels that the only solution is to continue, as Zainab told her in Amman: *“The past might make you whole”* (28). Omar represents this past; the father who was absent, whom she never heard of.

3.2.3. England: Alien Country and Culture

Najwa’s journey to London brings her into contact with a new culture, notably the Western culture. Right on the airplane, she decides to adapt to this new environment and culture. She removes her veil and tries to behave like a secular woman: *“I took off my veil, folded it up and put it in my duffelbag. My mother would have been proud, but would my father, whoever and wherever he was?”* (165) She feels torn between her mother’s secularism and her father’s religion because whenever she transgresses a religious principle she thinks of her secular mother’s approval while doubting her religious father’s reaction. Conversely, abiding by the religious principles of her father makes her imagine the torment it might cause to her mother. The clash between secularism and religion takes place in her psyche. She struggles to find peace in her mind and construct a balanced identity. She moves from a region of the world where she used to disguise her identity, i.e. pretending to be a Muslim, to another region where she is supposed to behave like a secular. She feels that she has to look frivolous: *“I must stand like a woman without a care in the world and keep smiling for the security cameras screwed to the ceilings”* (169).

She arrives in London and wants to integrate this new society, to find her place within this new Western environment. She says: *“My mission was to melt into this city like a grain of sugar in hot tea”* (176). Yet, this appears to be a difficult project for her. Everything seems unfamiliar; she has no friend, no relative: *“Alone in London, without any leads, contacts or friends, I sipped the tasteless liquid”* (181). Najwa experiences the condition of being an immigrant in London. She says: *“... here I was alone in this big city on a forged visa”* (182).

She feels alien in this environment and wonders why people gaze at her the weird way they do: *“Was it the colour of my hair, eyes or skin that made me look different? Perhaps it was the way I skulked, as if guilty until proven innocent. Did they all know that my father was a convicted criminal?”* (230)

One peculiarity of her experiences in England is the degree of freedom that she feels regarding the way she should lead her life. Truly, she has to decide what to do, what to wear, what to eat, in short how to behave all by her own. However, she still feels restricted by her parents’ views although they are absent. For example, this idea appears in the following passage when Najwa is tormented about the dressing code she should opt for as she is preparing to meet her father for the first time:

When the day I had waited for since I was three arrived, I didn’t know what to do with myself. My father must be a strict Muslim and wouldn’t approve of uncovered hair, make-up, a low-cut top or tight jeans. But my mother’s ghost skulking in the room would be offended if I changed my secular appearance and hid my arms. My reflection in the mirror – gaunt, pale, with dry lips – stood between my parents’ apparitions. I resented them both. (240)

This quotation illustrates her feeling of loss between the apparently contradictory worldviews of her absent parents who continue to haunt her way of life in almost every context. This appears to restrict her freedom and she has to learn how to liberate herself from this conflict taking place inside her psyche. Najwa says that she resents her parents because she feels angry with the kind of life she has, a life governed by dualistic experiences and principles. It can also be added that in her attempt to fully embrace that freedom, she commits some mistakes. For instance, she loses her virginity, for she consents to having her first sexual experience with Andy, an Englishman she has met on the airplane. The latter abandons her after he learns that she carried secret information from Afghanistan to a terrorist group active on the English soil. She did it inadvertently, yet this makes her an accomplice in the eyes of Andy who abandons her without further considerations.

She discovers that her father is incarcerated in a high security prison in Durham, England, for having conducted terrorist activities. This discovery shocks her in the sense that it makes her think of the impossibility for her to see him and get the knowledge that could either free her or imprison her forever. Also important is the thought or fear of returning home without a male guardian who will protect her and help her regain her lost honour in her society. She enumerates the identities that her father has accumulated during his adventures: *“You were also a criminal; an abandoner, traitor, deserter of wife and child, saviour, fighter*

and convict... the nearness, that embrace I had craved all my life was not possible. Here we were. All the histories, politics and laws of the world had conspired against me, us” (219). The circumstances that Najwa refers to may be said to have been occasioned by the dualism between the West and Islam. Somehow, her understanding of her father’s desertion undergoes some interesting changes. She starts feeling compassion for him although it is not that clear yet. Indeed, this interpretation is based on her saying that the aforementioned circumstances have conspired against them all.

In the course of her journey, Najwa did not have the opportunity to engage in a constructive dialog with the people she has encountered. In England, she is presented this opportunity. She discusses about faith with Edward (Ed), a former inmate who met Omar during his years of detention. As seen in the previous chapter, Ed converted to Islam in prison thanks to Omar. He tells Najwa about the positive change he feels in his life since his conversion to the Islamic religion. It is a total surprise for her to learn that there are secular people who renounce their secular life for a religious one; her mother had given her the impression that the ideal life could only be found in secularism. She says: *“I was shocked. My mother’s words were imprinted in me. Why would anyone convert to Islam? Why would anyone tie themselves in the knots of religion? Wear a veil! Pray five times a day! Fast during Ramadan!”* (224). What her mother told her about religion is that it deprives religious people of their freedom and renders them inferior vis-à-vis secular people who are viewed as superior and enlightened: *“My mother said that religious people are backward. They believe in magic rather than scientific facts. We came into being by chance”* (224), she tells Ed. Najwa reveals how strong the influence of her secular mother has limited her views on religion and religious people. This worldview is apparently tainted with dualistic traits and one can sense the clash between science and religion that is one of the central aspects of the West and Islam dualism.

Najwa also experiences a sense of private guilt at some moments:

I had held my mother responsible for your departure, had hated her and hadn’t even cried at her funeral; I had left my grandmother behind; I had allowed my half-sister’s lover to kiss me and had given my stepmother a hard time. What if I was guilty of unspeakable crimes? I felt dirty. How could I let Andy, an infidel, touch me without a marriage contract? I must have a venereal disease. Some days I felt I was so contagious I could infect people at the other end of the phone. (251)

She feels that she has transgressed the laws of the religion of her father and grandmother and this keeps turning in her mind. She therefore feels that she is not a pure Muslim woman. This feeling of impurity makes her feel that she cannot be part of the community of believers

anymore and even feel lost without redemption: *“What would a strip of bacon add to my sins? I’d travelled miles and miles on my own, had wine and allowed a strange man to touch me”* (220). Then, she tries to confide in her grandmother, to tell her that she has transgressed a number of important Islamic principles: *“Grandma, I did some awful things”* (254). To her astonishment, Zainab tells her that *“[n]o one is squeaky clean”* (254). In other words, she should not dwell on her mistakes and transgressions because they are part of human’s nature which is characterised by imperfection. This seems to have a liberating effect on her from her feeling of impurity and guilt. It strengthens her somehow.

She wants to create her own existential space; a space where she will be able to feel normal, find security and achieve a balanced identity. Najwa’s desire for balance in her life can be illustrated by a recurrent physical behaviour which she experiences in several scenes. She describes it as follows: *“I shifted my weight from one foot to the other”* (37). Another indicator of this need for balance in her life concerns her feeling for her father, as she conveys in the following: *“I wavered between love and hate”* (269). She is torn between opposite feelings towards her father who had abandoned her for so many years. In some situations like the following, she tends to be resentful towards her father after all that he did to them: *“Then I remembered you, my traitor father; I imagined finding you and spitting on your very face and the thought suddenly stiffened my spine”* (169). In other contexts, Najwa feels inclined to show compassion for Omar; she wants to love him and forgive him. A last aspect of her desire for balance may be related to her being caught between secularism and religion, and she does not seem to know where to stand or which place she should occupy: *“I stood still, suspended between my mother’s science and my father’s magic”* (243). She wants to straddle both sides.

What disrupted the family is this idea of dualism between the Western and the Islamic worlds. It can be argued that Omar’s abandonment for jihad is at the origin of her troubles, her identity crisis. It has indeed led the mother to adopt an extreme secular way of life which greatly impacted Najwa’s life, her dreams and her identity. It also urged her to leave her country and to travel to dangerous places and face several obstacles. It raised her awareness of her fragmented identity and the feeling of crisis intensified. All these constitute her plight and the puzzle that she tries to order and solve. Raneen wanted her to live abroad, in a secular country like France, far away from her origins, country, culture, and so on. However, Najwa wants to be different from that. She has her own stance which is to give importance to some elements of her roots as well as incorporating new cultural elements in the formation of her identity. She proclaims in one passage: *“Whatever happens to me, I will never turn against*

my country” (134). For this same reason, after finding her father, who symbolises her missing past, Najwa succeeds to actualise herself, i.e. to construct a positive self-concept. She discovers that her father is virtuous deep inside of himself. Only the circumstances have made him the man he has become. She is able to feel compassion for both her father and mother, for she seems to understand that they have all been the victims of the circumstances of the world they live in. For instance, she declares that *“I must go back to sweep my mother’s grave”* (276). It could be advanced that Najwa returns home liberated from her emotional emptiness, her anger and hatred, and free from her crisis and able to accept her peculiar identity.

Conclusion

Najwa’s narrative illustrates her battles to find who she is, to understand the reasons behind her alienation and to find her place in the world she is living in. The impact of the West and Islam dualism on her identity construction has been analysed through the retracing of her journey from Amman, Jordan to England. All along her journey, one of her constant battles appears to have been against her mother’s extreme secularism and her father’s fundamentalism which has been interpreted as the close manifestations of the dualistic world around her. These two factors have influenced her sense of identity and urged her towards the construction of a balanced one. On the one hand, her mother’s revengeful secularism left no room for the construction of an identity which could incorporate some elements of the Islamic identity. On the other hand, the thought of her religious father and the need to find him puts her into psychological troubles as she seems constantly aware of the contradictions between his principles and her mother’s. Her feeling of alienation and crisis of identity result from this internal tension that she is able to overcome only after she had undertaken the enlightening odyssey which took her from an Eastern and Islamic culture to a Western and secular culture. Beyond the fact that she succeeds to find her father and understand the motives of his departure, Najwa’s complex journey allowed her to get more familiar with both worlds and learn how to reconcile them and construct a balanced identity for herself.

General Conclusion

All along the three chapters that constituted this work, the aim has been to investigate the impacts of the West and Islam dualism on the construction of identity. In the first chapter, a review of the concept has revealed that the fierce proponents of this worldview have used it to construct two different identities, notably the Western and the Islamic identities. From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism, then to Occidentalism, dualism has constituted the lens through which different people have viewed difference or otherness in the context of the relations between the Western and the Islamic civilisations. It has been found that based on dualistic models, their representations of 'the other' have produced racial and cultural prejudices and tend to encourage hostility and hatred between the two camps defined. The clash of civilisations is their most perverse and violent prediction about this relationship in the contemporary world.

In the second chapter, the analysis has centred upon the identity construction of Omar Rahman who is the male protagonist. It has been found that he felt alienated and experienced a crisis of identity as he wanted to escape and create his own space where he could find himself. The cosmopolis he wishes and desires for is a space where his secular and idealistic self would fit; where there would be no oppression, no social and economic alienation, and no restrictions on love life. The paths he chooses in order to create his ideal space leads him into a completely opposite world where he felt more alienated than in his previous life and country. The result is his metamorphosis into a terrorist. He loses the self he was and welcomes an alien self with which he hardly copes. Indeed, he is victim of the dualistic clashes and his dreams are crushed in the midst of this world. His pursuit of Xanadu, the land of his ideals, prompts him into a world of hatred and darkness. Eventually, he discovers that his call is to be a healer as he expresses it to his daughter.

As for the third chapter, it focused on Najwa's identity construction, which also starts with a feeling of alienation and a crisis of identity. It appeared from the analysis that her father's absence has greatly impacted her life in that it pushed the mother to hate religion and to impose an extreme version of secularism on Najwa. Living in a society predominantly regulated by Islamic and patriarchal rules, the absence of Omar has ripped Najwa of her honour in the eyes of many people in her society. For the latter, not having a male relative to control her life equalled Najwa's being a loose woman devoid of virtues. Aware of this fact, she therefore embarks on an adventure to find her father, the guarantee of her honour and

identity as a Muslim woman. It is found that she experiences a sense of alienation and crisis of identity and hence struggles to construct her identity torn between secularism and religion. This is interpreted as an attempt to reconcile between the West and Islam. Based on these considerations, the dissertation concludes that Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* denounces the West and Islam dualism and promotes reconciliation and coexistence between the two worlds despite the present and continuous obstacles that rise against it.

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