

The Islamic Other in Post-9/11 America: Reading Resistance in Hamid and Halaby

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Abstract

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on 11th September, 2001, left behind 2977 dead, an altered Manhattan skyline and a changed world order marked by a formidable upsurge of global discourses pertaining to terrorism, multiculturalism, xenophobia, collective memory, and so forth. Indeed, 9/11 inhabits a discursive field of narratives/counter-narratives defying closure. Taking into cognizance this inevitability of myriad discourses, the present paper engages with the politics of the emergence of the discursively constructed Islamic Other in the post-9/11 national imaginary. Using the Foucauldian ideas of Power/Knowledge and “regime of Truth” along with Said’s major premises as are found in the works *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, the paper attempts to debunk the idea that “innocent”, neutral and objective representations in the media have been the norm. It argues that the fanatical, regressive and jihad-driven stereotype of the Islamic Other that gained visibility/ circulation/ legitimisation in the post-9/11 American socio-political culturescape had a Stateist genesis rooted in the reductive, ahistorical, Manichean binary of “us versus them” which essentially constituted the official discourse. It traces the trajectory of the Arab-American experience from initial erasure/ invisibility to hyper-visibility in the post-9/11 years, a time marked by deep fractures in the civil society where xenophobia, racial profiling and jingoistic patriotism became normalised. One way of generating resistance to such workings of power is by launching a counternarrative through the literary text. Consequently, the paper ends with a detailed engagement with two novels, one by Mohsin Hamid and another by Laila Halaby, that resist the official stereotypes/discourses while foregrounding the various registers of Othering in the post-9/11 years.

Keywords: 9/11, Arab-American, Foucault, Islamic Other, Said, stereotypes

On September 11, 2001, two fully fuelled airplanes struck the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, leaving behind 2977 dead, an altered Manhattan skyline and a changed world order. In an extremely well-coordinated terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda, as many as four domestic passenger airliners were hijacked by 19 terrorists on the fateful day and used as missiles to bring down the Twin Towers in a surreal spectacle of bellowing smoke, fire and debris. That same evening, President Bush addressed the nation asserting that “our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts... these acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve” (“Statement”, 2001).

Nine days later addressing a joint session of the Congress, President Bush attempted to impose upon 9/11 discourses the unproblematic Manichaeian binary of “us-versus-them” wherein the United States stood for the success of a democratically elected government that ensured multiple freedoms of religion, speech and dissent. The civilised world could not help but rally to America’s side, for she stood for human freedom and unbounded opportunity. In a binary opposition to the United States was the Islamic Other that stood for all that was anti-civilizational, undemocratic, brutal, oppressive and regressive. The Islamic Other was “the heir to all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century” (“Text”, 2001), who is waiting to destroy “a way of life” and impose upon the world its fascist, radical, totalitarian vision. Interestingly, a nearly identical idea is echoed in The 9/11 Report (2004) three years later, giving evidence of an invariable and official Stateist perspective:

Because the Muslim world has fallen behind the West politically, economically and militarily for the past three centuries, and because few tolerant or secular Muslim democracies provide alternative models for the future, Bin Laden’s message finds receptive ears... The resentment of America and the West is deep, even among leaders of relatively successful Muslim states. (p. 518)

Hence, by dividing the world into two camps, President Bush exhorted all nations that believe in “pluralism, tolerance and freedom” to join in this fight for civilization. In unequivocal words that have now become notoriously familiar, he said that “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (“Text”, 2001).

Ostensibly, when President Bush offered this unimaginative polarity of “us versus them”, he was talking of nation states. However, such a reductive discourse coupled with jingoistic patriotism (“I will not forget this wound to our country”) and revanchist rhetoric (“Our grief has turned into anger and anger to resolution”) had the potential of carving out deep fractures in civil society, where xenophobia, distrust and racial profiling could become the order of the day. And this is exactly what transpired in the post 9/11 era wherein the figure of the Islamic Other was discursively constructed. Such a foreboding narrative was playing to the interests of the State by providing a formula to legitimise the United States’ protracted military adventurism: the narrative, epitomised by the phrase “War on Terror”, served to generate consensus for an attack on Iraq that was based upon the non-existent threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Indeed, the use of fear psychosis, panoptical surveillance and the creation and subsequent consolidation of fissures along racial, religious and ethnic lines within the national consciousness is a deliberately manufactured, state sponsored social attitude calculated to pre-empt any national, cultural or political soul-searching either at the community or at the individual level. The rise of this phenomenon may be profitably analysed using Foucauldian ideas of Power/Knowledge and what he calls the “regime of truth.”

Power/Knowledge and the Foucauldian “Regime of Truth”

Foucault’s observations on the relationship between power and knowledge and the “modes of objectification by which human beings are made subjects” (Smart, 1985, p. 71) is particularly relevant in the post-9/11 era. In essence the creation of “knowledge” about the Islamic Other is intended to gradually translate into “truth” regarding the Arab or the Muslim; it is predicated upon the exercise of “power” which is capable of producing, circulating and legitimizing a particular “discourse” and concurrently eliminating other “discourses” that may be generated. These four terms—“knowledge,” “truth,” “power” and “discourse”—are inextricably interrelated in Foucault’s poststructuralist thought.

In his essay, “Prison Talk”, Foucault (1972) says, “it is impossible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (p. 52). This would imply that on the one hand knowledge is an integral part of the struggle for power, while on the other the very act of producing knowledge is tantamount to laying a claim to power. Hence, Foucault coins the compound “knowledge/power” to indicate the relationship between the two elements. Imbalances of power, whether between institutions or groups of people, will inevitably lead to the production of knowledge about the less powerful/marginalised groups, and this knowledge is produced by those who exercise power and thus wield society’s mechanisms of persuasion. Foucault thus debunks the myth of the dedicated scholars producing “disinterested knowledge”: it is power/knowledge which determines what will be disseminated as knowledge as well as what is worthy of being known. An important implication of this interrelation between knowledge and power is that “what we take to be true or false, indeed the very distinction itself is located within a political field” (Smart, 1985, p. 76). For Foucault knowledge is the product of a certain discourse which has enabled it to be formulated in the first place.

In his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989), Foucault tells us that the term “discourse” refers to “the general domain of all statements, and sometimes as individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (p. 90). Such a “regulated practice” formulates discourse to be the structures/rules that make certain utterances possible and at the same time affords it legitimacy and visibility. Hence discourse may be looked upon as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1989, p. 54). In his interview titled “Truth and Power”, Foucault (1972) views truth as not something transcendental, i.e. “outside power”, but as a “thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power” (p. 131). He then goes on to elaborate on the concept of “regime of truth.” Falling back on the circular relationship between knowledge and power Foucault argues that truth is produced, sustained, circulated, legitimised and regulated by procedures and techniques that are “political”. Alternatively, truth itself reinforces and induces the effects of power. In the words of Foucault:

Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, and the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; that status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1972, p.131)

Hence truth is not universal but contingent and predicated upon the operation of power that endorses its production, circulation and regulation.

If truth can lay claims to no transcendental universality in the post-Foucauldian world, what passes for truth is the group of statements that are sanctioned by “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and false are separated” (Foucault, 1972, p.132). In the post 9/11 era, “this ensemble of rules” or discursive formations regarding the Islamic Other made possible the production and circulation of a homogeneous, non-individuated, fanatical, regressive, terror-affiliated figure of the Muslim. Given the official dissemination of a quasi-xenophobic discourse such a representation found legitimacy in the prevailing “regime of truth.” The national imaginary, already in the grip of a fear psychosis, held on to this representation as an immutable version of “truth,” a “truth” that was at least partially manufactured by the apparatus of the state. As such, the politics surrounding the representation of Muslim or Arab Other is carried out in a discursive field where, as Edward Said observed, “malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West” (1997, p. xii).

Edward Said: Un/Covering Islam

Postcolonial theory in general, and especially in the works of Palestinian-American critic Edward Said (1935-2003), can be productively used to make sense of the politics of representation in the post 9/11 scenario. Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is a devastating critique of how the West “constructs” the Orient, which is more specifically the Islamic Middle East, through the production of knowledge within the framework of a conscious and determined effort at domination. Said examines how the Orient is “constructed” through imaginative representations such as novels, or through purportedly factual narratives such as travelogues and journalistic reports. It is also constructed through claims to knowledge about Oriental historical and cultural specificities as in academic, anthropological, cultural and political tracts. Together, all these writings give birth to a Foucauldian discourse that makes production and articulation of “knowledge” about the Orient possible. Such production of knowledge is not disinterested, but is instrumental in furthering a hegemonic agenda. In the Introduction to *Orientalism*, Said says that

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (p. 3)

In *Covering Islam* (1997), Said foregrounds the politics of representation with respect to the media. With its selective foregrounding and erasures, the media determines how the Western world should view Islam and the Muslim world. In a chapter aptly titled “Knowledge and Power” Said observes that

For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is ‘news’ of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategist, and... the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to Western civilization...[N]egative images of Islam continue to be very much more prevalent than any others, and that such images correspond not to what Islam “is” ...but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be. Those sectors have the power and the will to propagate that particular image of Islam, and this image therefore becomes more prevalent, more present, than all others. (1997, p. 144)

This is the crux of Said's argument, and the intense focus on Islam in the last few decades has had the effect of loading Western consciousness with "speculations about the latest conspiracy to blow up buildings, sabotage commercial airliners, and poison water supplies" (Said, 1997, p. xi). Hence, Islam has come to stand for fundamentalism, oppression of women, and primitive socio-cultural structures, as is evidenced by the beheadings and stoning; it is also anti-intellectual, as seen in numerous cases of book burning; restrictive in matters of personal choice, and a cause of conflict all over the world. The production and proliferation of such a discourse relates to a homogeneous, undifferentiated monolith termed "Islam". But such an entity does not exist: "'Islam' defines a relatively small proportion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world, which numbers a billion people, and includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions, languages and of course, an infinite number of different experiences" (Said, 1997, p. xvi). Local and concrete circumstances wherein certain events transpire are ignored, and situations are removed from their contextual significations when considered within the abstract monolith termed "Islam".

Acknowledging Islam's heterogeneity would open spaces for contesting monolithic interpretations where more nuanced engagements could be methodised. The layered problematisations that might take into cognizance the history, sociology, language and culture associated with Islam and its diversity are inhibited by the enduring impress of that simplistic binary wherein Muslims are represented as a troublesome and often treacherous presence, inimical to the values of individualism and freedom that are cherished in Western democracies.

Insofar as all representation in the post-Foucauldian world can be interpreted as a function of power and therefore never "innocent", it is interesting to see how Muslims are extrapolated from context-specific controversies and painted as "a homogeneous, zombie-like body, incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward worldview" (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p.1). The mainstream media and cultural productions are marked by the ubiquity of such structures of representation and the circulation of various reductive tropes about the Muslim Other. Hence the bearded fanatic, the veiled and hence obviously oppressed woman, the jihad-driven terrorist—these are the stereotypes of the Muslim that are etched permanently on the national consciousness by way of their repeated circulation and endorsement by the prevailing "regime of truth." Unquestionably, the markers of socio-cultural differences like the dress or the body type or even material practices and behaviour come to be construed as "a kind of moral index...cementing the threatening strangeness of the Muslim Other" (Morey & Yaqin, 2011, p. 3). In a wholesale distortion of Islam and its culture in all its diversity these representations tend to be static and homogeneous; the attempt is to "fix" the Other to delimit the potential of its perceived threat. Hence, the reliance on stereotypes as instruments of representation and containment. There is a central ambivalence built into the politics of stereotyping. Stereotypes attempt to stabilise the Other as a category that is the result of thorough analyses and therefore "known". The result is incessant repetition that is marked by an anxiety to arrest the stereotype, to freeze it as it were, to prevent it from metamorphosing. The Islamic Other is a monolithic entity that is totally "knowable" and is hence frozen into certain reductive tropes and stereotypes. However, the ambivalence resulting from the fact that the Other exceeds the stereotypes and has the potential to breach containment necessitates a program of repetition *ad infinitum* (Bhabha, 1994).

From Invisibility to Hyper-Visibility: Socio-Cultural Trajectory of Arab-Americans

It is interesting to note that although the primary marker of identity for Arab-Americans today is the monolithic banner of “Islam,” the Arabs who immigrated to the United States in what is known as the first wave of migration (1880-1945) were predominantly Christians from Syria and Lebanon. The pioneer immigrants had “strong traditional loyalties with little or no concept of social order beyond sect, village of origin, or family (Samhan, 1987, p. 12). These categories of identity were not recognised in the United States, and because they migrated from an Ottoman province (Syria), the U.S. official records classified them as Turks. Furthermore, because Greeks, Albanians, Armenians and other Eastern groups were all categorized as Turks by the state, the Arab identity was at best an ambiguous one where the US government emphasised their non-European origin despite their religious affiliation. However, what is significant is that “most early immigrants were nationally committed to their new home, the United States, even though they remained culturally and socially attached to their homeland” (Naber, 2010, p. 39)

The second wave of immigrants who arrived between 1945 and 1965 included a larger number of Muslim immigrants along with a large number of refugees who had been displaced by the 1948 Palestine War. There was a distinct change in the political allegiance and demographic makeup of this set of immigrants. Firstly, a greater percentage of the immigrants were Muslims. Also, unlike the first wave, the second wave had a larger number of professionals and university students. Furthermore post World War II, with the emergence of political autonomy of several Arab nations, the immigrants’ identification with the category of “Arab” was more pronouncedly political adumbrating new and specific forms of Arab nationalism in the US public space leading to the gradual crystallisation of a distinct Arab-American identity (Naber 2010, p. 40).

The third wave of immigrants followed the “The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965”, also known as the Hart-Celler Act which abolished the quota system based on national origins that had been American immigration policy since the 1920s. War in the Arab world also contributed to the increase in the Arab immigration. Nevertheless, the third wave of Arab immigrants were distinguished by “an intensified political consciousness” (Naber 2010, p. 40) leading to a stronger sense of Arab nationalism and a proportionately weaker civic identification. The Arab- Israeli war of 1967 marked a turning point in the development of a distinct Arab-American identity, fuelled predominantly by a feeling of glaring Arab dispossession. Arabs, Middle Easterners and Muslims generally were made to coalesce into a monolithic category and, according to Naber (2010), the media presented them as “one of the preeminent enemies of the West” (p. 41).

The US alliance with Israel gave Arab Americans their first taste of programmed exclusion leading to the rise of an ethno-political consciousness. On the other side of the divide many Americans of Arab descent, who had previously identified themselves according to their country of origin—or generically as “American” – coalesced, as a political strategy, under the label of Arab-Americans. Consequently, in the post 1960’s a form of anti-Arab racism was gradually entrenched in mainstream American society engendered by the Arab political activity in the United States. This is what Helen Hatab Samhan (1987) calls “political racism that takes prejudice and exclusion out of the arena for personal relations into the arena of public information and public policy” (p. 16). In essence this implied the political activity of Arab Americans was singled out for attacks, and not the individual Arab per se.

Therefore, racism directed against Arab Americans, political or otherwise, served to increase tensions between Arab-Americans and mainstream US culture and, as a consequence, the politically inflected category of Arab-Americans who had hitherto never really figured prominently in the national consciousness gradually gained visibility. Along the political register, the Arab-American identity was conflated with a pro-Palestine and anti-Israel discourse. Along the register of popular visual and media culture the Arab emerged as a monolithic category despite myriad religious, ethnic and regional affiliations. And finally, along the register of religion, Islam was superimposed seamlessly on the Arab American identity, which “fixed” all Arab Americans as Muslims.

Hence, the post-1960’s period saw the creation and gradual entrenchment of borders within the borders of the nation; anti-Arab racism led to “the marginalization of Arabs as it is informed by exclusionary conceptions of Americanness,... the profiling of Arabs based on name, religion or country of origin, and the elimination of civil liberties based on distrust of the entire group rather than on individuals who may merit suspicion” (Salaita, 2006, p. 13). What started as political racism gradually expanded into the larger public sphere. When 9/11 happened, the situation became more vitriolic and oppressive, adding fresh dimensions to the existing situation in three mutually overlapping registers.

Firstly, racism notwithstanding, the peripherality or marginality of the Arab American was substituted by a glaring conspicuousness. An insatiable curiosity about Arabs and Arab Americans was the order of the day with everybody from the lay American to the high-ranking politicians wanting to know about the people who had irrevocably punctured the mythos of American invincibility and altered the American way of life. The media worked overtime disseminating and demystifying the Arab and concurrently Islam to the rest of America and ended up ossifying prevalent derogatory stereotypes. What Nadine Naber (2010) called the “invisibility” of the “ambiguous insiders” was replaced by a hypervisibility that resembles the Foucauldian panoptican gaze of perpetual surveillance and obligation to conform.

Secondly, the explosion of the discourse on Arab Americans in the public sphere, whether it be media or academic, required the Arab Americans to define themselves and “transmit and translate their culture to mainstream Americans” (Salaita, 2012, p. 149). Such a demand carried its own self-defeating pitfalls. Given the circulation of spurious stereotypes in a media-saturated public consciousness, the community was always-already written off as violent, retrogressive and prone to terrorism. Post-9/11, the five million Arab-Americans who were either ignored or outright slandered, were offered unceasing attention and asked to define and redefine themselves on a daily basis so as to scrutinize their assimilation into Americanness. Further, as Steven Salaita (2012) points out, the Arab Americans did not have “a mature scholarly apparatus” (p. 148) before 9/11 that could be profitably used to resist the mainstream definition and activate representational counter discourses. Hence the figure of the Arab was always-already spoken for. Reformulating a self-image was of paramount significance but was essentially lacking:

More than anybody, Arab Americans experienced far-reaching socio-political implications following 9/11 without, unfortunately, generating a corresponding body of internally constructed — i.e., Arab American produced scholarship — to examine the rapid transformations occurring in the community. ...Most importantly, though, Arab Americans did not have a mature scholarly apparatus before 9/11. (Salaita, 2012, p. 148)

Echoing similar reservations, though in a generalised context, Said says that the experts whose field is modern Islam, “worked within an agreed-upon framework for research formed according to notions decidedly not set in the Islamic world (1997, p. 19). This lack is highly problematic, for the Arab American community “continues to enhance its ambivalence by allowing the dominant society to define it and speak on its behalf” (Salaita, 2012, p. 153).

Thirdly, the discourse of what has been labelled by Steven Salaita as “imperative patriotism” (2012, p. 154) saturated public consciousness. Patriotism was to be a manifest signifier of being American, which defines civilizational and ideational progress. President Bush’s artless binary where one is either “with us or against us” is played out in American public space as uncritical patriotism bordering on jingoism. Arab Americans had to be ostensibly patriotic by supporting American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. This patriotism as a marker of assimilation was underscored by xenophobic sentiments that propose the label “American” as a stable, fixed identity rooted in physical and cultural Whiteness and Christianity, an identity for which many immigrants do not qualify. Hence, statements like “If you don’t like America why don’t you just leave” gained circulation, setting the limits of discourse and pre-empting the activation of an alternative discourse. At a popular level it was assumed that “to be a ‘true’ American was to be patriotic and capitalist and less explicitly, Christian and White” (Salaita, 2012, p. 156).

Resistant Voices and Literary Representation: Hamid and Halaby

The politics of representation rest on slippery grounds, always haunted by an anxiety of the anarchic, uncontrolled “spillage” of the Other. Hence, a fundamental ambivalence is instituted by an anxious repetition in order to “fix” the Other continually in place and avoid being subverted by counternarratives, by a “writing back” to the privileged “metropolis” of representation. Diasporic Muslim writers like Laila Halaby and Mohsin Hamid have scripted narratives that resist the Anglo-American conflation of Islam and fundamentalism, foregrounding the Muslim migrant experience in the wake of 9/11 along registers of racism and Islamophobia, foregrounding as well a Third World perspective of how the United States’ monopoly in shaping the destinies of nations has been counterproductive.

Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) is perhaps the first novel that tries to reconfigure 9/11 by locating it in a non-Western field of discourse. It is in the form of a dramatic monologue spoken by the protagonist, Changez, to an un-named American at a tea-stall in a crowded hub of Lahore. The identity of the American and the purpose of his visit remain ambiguous and hence threatening. The novel is the story of Changez’s stay in America first as an international scholarship student and later as a management analyst. Invited into “the ranks of meritocracy” (Hamid, 2007, p. 4) by the pragmatic and effective American system, Changez joins Princeton and excels in that ruthlessly competitive academic milieu. Graduating from Princeton, he is offered a dream position by the extremely coveted valuation firm Underwood Samson and Company. This enables him to penetrate the sphere of the financial elite in the US while his career takes on a steady upward graph. He is determined to “assimilate and claim his own piece of an American dream defined in terms of power, money, and prestige” (Scanlan, 2013, p. 30). On the personal front he falls obsessively in love with Erica, an amazingly stunning lady whom he meets on a holidaying trip to Greece with fellow Princetonians. However, Erica’s perpetual melancholia on account of the loss of her childhood love to cancer dooms the relationship from the start. Meanwhile, 9/11 ushers in an America that overnight turns him from a welcome immigrant protégé into a terrorist suspect on account of his religion and nationality. In a moment of epiphany, he perceives his always-already suspect status in the vast rubric of the American body politic, kindling a sense of lost identity

based on nation and culture. In an act of restored intellectual agency, Changez realises that “America had to be stopped in the interest...of the rest of humanity” (Hamid, 2007, p.168) and returns to Pakistan to take up the job of a radical university lecturer.

The resistance posited by *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) to the all-pervasive US hegemony is operative on various levels of the narrative – structural, thematic, symbolic and even in the name itself. Hamid’s use of the dramatic monologue is a structural trope signifying recovered selfhood through the agency of articulation. It is as if the “Other speaks back” and he speaks back with a vengeance. In a novelistic strategy of dehierarchisation, “the voices of Erica, Jim, Wainwright et al., ...are ventriloquized by Changez” (Morey, 2011, p. 139). Further, the title itself destabilises established understandings of “fundamentalism” and unsettles dominant formulations. It promises the seductive lure of a “confession” along the lines of Ed Husain’s *The Islamist* (2007) where a former radical Islamist has come round to the ways of “civilisation” and “enlightenment”. Changez, who is an epitome of US scholastic and economic elitism, cannot be considered a religious fundamentalist by any stretch of the imagination. During his trainee days in Underwood Samson he was continually exhorted to “focus on the fundamentals” which signified, “a single-minded attention to financial detail” (Hamid, 2007, p. 98) so as to maximise profits. In a playful polysemy, the fundamentalism of the title is linked to the ruthless logic of American acquisitive and interventionist corporate culture. Araujo remarks, “Financial fundamentalism, rather than...Islamic terrorism... moves the novel” (2015, p. 109).

It is in Manila during one of his tours where he heartlessly appraises companies that 9/11 happens, rupturing his newly found authority as an agent of the ubiquitous and omnipotent American financial networks. With remarkable candour he recounts his response as he saw the fall of the Towers: “And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased...that someone so visibly brought America to her knees” (Hamid, 2007, p. 72-73). Indeed, Changez asks his American interlocutor whether he felt no joy at seeing “American munitions laying waste the structure of your enemies?” (Hamid, 2007, p. 73). Hence Hamid embeds 9/11 in a historical past which had its fair share of political culpability and debunks the myth of a national “fall” from innocence. But since 9/11 imposed the regime of “imperative patriotism” necessitating a visible participation in the discourse of shock and anguish, Changez publicly represses being “remarkably pleased.” On his way back to New York his primary identity in the public domain and for the State becomes his religion. He is strip-searched at the Manila airport and made to join the queue for foreigners at New York. His boarding the flight disorients other passengers. He could feel the palpable pressure to define himself, make public his allegiance, be vocal in condemnation and grief: “I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face” (Hamid, 2007, p. 74).

With the coming months the fractures in the social body deepen and America’s rejection of the Other in the form of Changez, whose identity as a Pakistani immigrant Muslim is triply suspect, takes on sinister proportions. The turning point in this unequal narrative of fear and loathing comes when Changez meets Juan-Batista, the chief of a publishing house he has gone to value, at Valparaiso, Chile. In what turns out to be a moment of epiphany, Juan-Batista familiarises Changez with the word “janissary”: “Christian boys...captured by the Ottomans and trained to be soldiers in a Muslim army...They were ferocious and utterly loyal: they had fought to erase their own civilisations, so they had nothing to turn to” (Hamid, 2007, p. 151). Changez realises that he had all along been a janissary to the imperial and financial machinations of the United States, which was presently laying waste to Afghanistan and would have no qualms in destroying his country too.

At a symbolic level, Erica's melancholia and obsession with the death of her high-school lover Chris, leading to her mental collapse and possible suicide, may be read as an allegory of the post-9/11 American nation. Am/Erica is a nation caught up in the ceaseless cycles of melancholia for the loss of a powerful, confident past epitomised in a pre-9/11 state of invincibility and exceptionalism. Erica's retreat into the past "mirrors America's cultural and political retreat into the nations' cherished myths and legends" (Randall, 2011, p. 140). Her ultimate loss of mental equilibrium links up with the imposing of an Agambenian "state of exception" within the borders and irrational aggression without. Erica's rejection of Changez signifies America's insularity towards the Other. In a desperate attempt to break open her impenetrability, Changez suggests that she pretend that he is Chris while making love, suggesting the "demands America makes upon the migrant: to forget the past and become totally immersed in Americanness" (Nash, 2011, p. 110).

Yet another voice of resistance to the post-9/11 culture of instituting fault lines within the nation itself is Laila Halaby's second novel, *Once in a Promised Land* (2007). The novel makes a fictional incursion into the post 9/11 American fractured socio-cultural fabric. Halaby's hybrid location as an Arizona-based writer of Palestinian-Jordanian and white American parentage provides her with the experiential knowledge of both the American and the Arab Muslim cultures, making her novel inhabit a politically inflected "in-between" space after the fall of the Towers. In the preface Halaby adumbrates the conflation of 9/11 and Arab identity which is problematised in the rest of the novel: "Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslim. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center. Nothing and everything" (p. viii). The story revolves around the lives of this Jordanian, childless, professional couple, who belong to the class of fairly assimilated, upwardly mobile immigrants chasing their version of a fantasy-ridden, consumerist American Dream without any identification with the ideology of radical Islam. Jassim is a hydrologist while his wife, Salwa is a banker and a trainee real estate agent. After the terror attacks of September 11 both are impacted by the spurious hypervisibility of their Arab identity. In a blurring of the personal and the political, Jassim kills an American teenager who turns out to be a paranoid Arab-hater leading to an FBI investigation and ultimately the loss of his job, despite his excellent service credentials. Salwa's desire to have a baby against her husband's wishes leads to a miscarriage and, to compensate for the marital estrangement that had been growing for some time, she has a steamy love affair with Jake, a co-worker who, feeling rebuffed in her decision to return to Jordan, assaults her grievously in a drug-induced stupor.

The way markers of Muslim identity stand conflated with threat and suspicion was soon evident when the couple go shopping to a department store shortly after September 11. Amber, the sales clerk, calls security on Jassim, her explanation being, "I thought he looked suspicious" (Halaby, 2007, p. 31). The fact that she is merely performing the Stateist demands of being its eyes and ears shows the measure of her acceptance of the politics of exclusion. It also lends her a feeling of participation in the broader narrative of the war against terror. An analogous political culture is enacted through the surveillance of Jack Franks, a former marine whom Jassim meets during his morning ritual of swimming. Jack acts as a citizen spy for the local FBI office, keeping a tab on Jassim's activities. This epitomises the dangers of conflating patriotism with racial/ethnic profiling that equated Muslim/Arab identity with plausible terrorist actions.

The same undercurrent of Islamophobia runs through the investigations into Jassim's accident conducted by the FBI. The teenager that Jassim hit had his skateboard adorned with vituperative anti-Arab stickers and, though Jassim is cleared of any wrongdoing by the officer

at the spot, the case is reopened to prove that Jassim had intentionally run over the boy in an act of racist rage. The investigation soon focuses on Jassim's professional access to the city's water supply as a hydrologist, leading to an unfounded shadow of suspicion settling over him. Even his progressive, anti-war, anti-Republican boss Marcus capitulates to this construction of Arab terror that grips the popular imaginary, as he was assailed by "that vague doubt that had been lodged way back in his brain" (Halaby, 2007, p. 237).

The same miasma of distrust and suspicion dogs Salwa at her workplace. Her client, who is a native Tusconan, American born and raised, wants to know where she is from and, learning that she is a Palestinian from Jordan, feels she would "feel more comfortable working with someone I can understand better" (Halaby, 2007, p. 114). The discourse of "imperative patriotism" (p. 155) that Salaita (2012) talks about is manifest when Salwa's boss suggests that she mark her car with an American flag decal which "will let them know where you stand" (Halaby, 2007, p. 55). The flag becomes not only a totemic object of American cathexis and a protective patina but also a signifier of self-definition that is being demanded and a signature of Stateist complicity. At a more personal level, Salwa is reminded of how in the American consciousness her identity is simply a function of her ethnicity, with all its stereotypical, malignant connotations, when Jake asks her if she is running back to her "pigsty". The "pigsty" is the Middle East, the "Otherised" space always imagined in negative, regressive terms. The invective he hurls at her while attacking her with a picture frame, "Arab bitch", leaves no doubt about the primary marker around which her identity is constructed for white, Christian America. The novel ends in a note of ambiguity: we are not sure whether Salwa will survive the assault. Katharina Motyl (2011) reads this as "an ambiguous outlook on the future of Arabs in the U.S." (p. 233).

Conclusion

Both Mohsin Hamid and Laila Halaby activate a counter discourse to the discursively created stereotype of the Islamic Other in the post-9/11 America. Neither Changez nor Salwa and Jassim fall into the reductive trope of the "the bearded Muslim fanatic, the oppressed, veiled woman, the duplicitous terrorist who lives among "us" the better to bring about our destruction" (Morley & Yaqin, 2011, p. 2). Such a spurious "framing" was carried along the registers of the political and cultural spheres with the help of the media. Stereotyping and homogenisation of Muslims led to the "production" of a version of "truth" that carried legitimacy and gained circulation. Since the limits of discourse were firmly established by the prevailing "regime of truth", these voices of dissent assume paramount significance. In essence, writers like Hamid and Halaby attempt to subvert and dehierarchise the power structure that persistently create/endorse a discourse where Islam is always portrayed in negative, regressive and spurious terms.

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