

**The cartography of Arabness and Transnational Feminism in
FadiaFaqir's *My Name is Selma* and AhdafSoueif's**

The Map of Love

Dr.KaïdBerrahalFatiha

Maître de Conférences(A)

Université Amar Télidji

Faculté des Lettres et des Langues

Département d'AnglaisLaghouat

Laboratoire : Sciences du Langage

équipe : Analyse du discours littéraire

1. Introduction

In the post 9/11, Arab ethnicity has strongly become an issue of multiple studies; be it literary, sociological, political, and psychological. The responses to that event, that has called into questions many of the assumptions about world relations, and to the ensuing war on terrorism, has indeed pushed the Arab writers, male and female, to engage in their novels with the ongoing discussions of the Arabs' (re) definition of identity in the newly rising context.

To enforce the view of diaspora, the present paper concentrates on Arab British women writers as they pertain to the contexts of arabness and that of feminism in the web of the Arab society where interplay of religion, ideological affiliation, and gender seem to constitute a critical matrix to the study of this literature. Therefore, in the attempt to answer the question how localized experiences of immigration and settlement have influenced Arab British women literary works?

the present work, and through an analogical approach, is structured around a series of experiences availed in the works of FadiaFaqir's *My name is Selma*, and AhdafSoueif's *The Map of Love*. It has to be noted that the term "experience" is in double focus with regards to contemporary discourses on feminism in the Arab world and migration which entails questions about the limits of Western feminism. Through the hybridized nature of these texts, we tend to explore whether the tendency of those writers is to valorize the trans-cultural and cross-ethnic dialogues between the Arabs and the other diasporas, or building on coalitions and alliances with other ethnic groups to resist the Other's identity.

2. Representations of identity in the diasporic discourse

The issue of hybrid identities has strongly become one of the most complicated and complicating themes of Anglophone literatures. In this context of retrospection and experiment the choice of English as a creative medium is in fact fundamental to the renderings of the writers' self-expressions. The rising literatures in English by the non-native users of that language tend to explore how the multiple relationships with otherness, first, reflected through relations between characters of the same race, country or culture, and then through contacts with other races and cultures, lead to the coexistence of often conflicting or contradictory selves within the frames of a single character who is subjected to hybridity.

The 9/11 is one of the stirring historical events in the world that has, in the eve of the 21st century, affected so profoundly many notions related to race relations. Among many, the British writers of Arab descent have been involved in this world dynamics as such counter narratives tend, to varying degrees; emphasize the position of the native in rather a colonial discourse. One of the primary issues that the Arab British writers, male and female, are concerned with is the (re) definition of Arabness in the aftermaths of 9/11. Yet, to enforce the view of the diasporic literature I would engage with the question through the feminist point view aiming therefore to deal with particularly gendered strategies to convey worries of the females by their pairs. The feminist perspective seems to be more informing about this ethnic group whose impediments and burdens are double loaded. It is indeed critical so that we may understand their strife for a cross-cultural relation and a cross-ethnic identification through their position as Arab women and immigrants as well. However, the choice of the Arab British women writers helps to emphasise my hypothesis that the specific conditions of settlement and immigration in Britain have directly influenced and shaped the literature produced there. This contextualizing [¹] is essential because literature is the mirror of its social context. In other words, when writing about a given diaspora one should first investigate the context of the surrounding circumstances. AvtarBrah argues that the concept of diaspora should be understood as 'an ensemble of investigative technologies that historicise trajectories of different diasporas, and analyse their relationality across fields of social relations, subjectivity and identity' (AvtarBrah, 1996: 180). What she terms 'diaspora space' (Brah: 181) may be her greatest contribution to the study of diaspora as she intensely declares:

Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It addresses the global condition of culture, economics and politics as a site of

¹Writings about the literatures of the Arab diasporas in Britain, U.S, or France have shown many differences in terms of the experiences of the characters. For instance Diana Abu Djaber, the Arab American woman writer refutes any will, through her characters, to foreground trans-cultural and cross-ethnic dialogues. They rather would maintain limited relations with the non-Arab characters, use literary strategies to resist stereotypes and misconceptions about Arab American communities in American popular culture. For further elements see AvtarBrah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London & New York: Routledge, 1996. and Elia, Nada, 'The Fourth Language: Subaltern Expression in Djébar's *Fantasia*', in *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, ed. by Lisa Suhair Majaj, Paula W. Sunderman, and Therese Saliba (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2002), pp.183-99

'migrancy' and 'travel' which seriously problematizes the subject position of the native. (ibid, p.181)

Brah's idea focuses on the historical specificities of each diaspora as a prerequisite to the study. The diasporic experience operates within a definite matrix compound of both individual and collective stories. The view therefore leads to a study of identity as Stuart Hall thinks of as "production" within, not outside representation' (Stuart Hall, 1990, p.222). What is scrutinized here is the construction of cultural and social identities embodying the permanently coexisting of a collective self and an individual one. Hall's view deal with the subject through a double layered cultural identity that is according to him 'a sort of collective "one true self"' (ibid, p.223). This means that our cultural identity is shaped by the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. However, the second layer of the cultural identity surpasses the points of similarity to those 'critical points of deep *difference*² which constitute "what we really are"' (ibid, p. 225). The resulting identity is in fact prominent and so compelling through the concomitant connection between the private and the social selves within the folds of a single person. The yoking together of these two, though often conflicting entities, tends to give voice to the concept of the Other.

3. The Other, Otherness and the 'Caliban paradigm'

All literatures written in English by non-native speakers of that language are importantly preoccupied with the concept of the Other, the politics of language being formerly the propriety of the colonizer. However the concept of The Other and Otherness in the Western thought have undergone some important and telling changes in the course of the modern and the postmodern moments. Hillis Miller calls for thinking of two different concepts of Otherness.

On the one hand, the other may be another version of the same, in one way or another assimilable, comprehensible, able to be appropriated and understood. On the other hand, the other may be truly and radically other. In the latter case, the other cannot be turned into some version of the same. It cannot be made transparent to the understanding, thereby dominated and controlled.

(qtd in Salah A. Elewa, 2002, p.5)

Miller's view recalls Stuart Hall's idea of the two positions of the cultural identity. The first position defines the Other in terms of similarity that remain fixed and unchanging so pertaining to the group, the country or the race, whereas the second position acknowledges of the differences that refer to what one really is. In the latter case, the Other can never be assimilated to provide a version of the same³. Yet, the tentative definitions about the Other and Otherness are multiple in accordance with the background theories that inform literatures in English be them colonial or postcolonial. But what pertains to the objectives of this paper is the very pronounced approach by the Arab British women writers at destabilizing the notion of the Other that condemns the less powerful and the less privileged to the margins. Through

²The use of italics in original text.

³ Jacques Derrida's view "Tout autre est tout autre" qtd in Hillis Miller's *Others*, 2000 : 2, and Miller's translation on the same page "Every other is completely other"

the encounters between the Arab characters and the non-Arabs like Selma and the British nun Miss Asher Faqir's *My Name is Selma*; and Anna Winterbourne and her Egyptian husband, or Isabel and her lover Omar al-Ghamrawi, Isabel and her lover's sister Amalin Soueif's *The Map of Love*; and Najwain relation with other muslim but non-Arab women in Aboulela's *Minaret*, depict each side's discovery of the Other within itself. In this frame of binary relationships between those different racialized characters a process of mutually growing sense of fulfillment provides rooms of complementarity and meeting grounds.

In their attempts to write back, these authors straddle two cultures, therefore blending their Arab cultural parameters in their writings. The idea is best described by Edward Saïd through what he termed "voyage in," which represents the writers' conscious efforts to delve into the western discourse, to mix with it and transform it to make their concerns acknowledged. What can be revealed at this level of thought is that literary works as such could not escape the vortex of the Other's language. The experience of border crossing has been very enriching since it helped to highlight many shadowy areas about the once forgotten cultures such as the Arab. One of the main strategies is doubling between the author and the narrator such as Amal and Anna in *The Map of love* through the choice of the name Anna which in Arabic means "I" and "me." The contact of the writers themselves with another culture and another language, in this case Britain and English" has definitely lead to an intense consciousness of Otherness. As Paul Goats argues that standing into two cultures and two languages is leading to doubling:

Stories that deal explicitly with the double seem in the main to be written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures: writers such as Conrad, balancing between Polish, English and French; Hogg and Stevenson, between Scottish and English; Henry James, between 'English' English and American English; or Wide, between English and French. Here the double is the self when it speaks another language. (Goats, 1999, p.2)

At a critical point to discuss this position on two different cultures and two languages these narratives belong to what Mary Louis Pratt calls the narratives of the contact zones. They are the literary works written by non-European writers providing "a site of compromise and resistance, assertin and imitation, hybridity and adaptation." (Mary Louis Pratt, *Criticism in the Contact Zone*, in *Postcolonialism* ed. Diana brydon. Volume V: 1921). Extending further the optimistic tone of Pratt, Ahdaf Soueif puts forward the term the Mezzaterraas "a groundvalued precisely for being a meeting-point for many cultures and traditions" (Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*, 2004, P. 6), she carries on arguing that in the Mezzaterra 'the language, the people, the landscape, the food of one culture [is] constantly reflected off the other' (Soueif, 2004: 8). The construction of the Arab British identity in and through the English language is read in the present paper from a contrapuntal⁴ perspective. In employing the expression of contrapuntal one would think of

⁴Since the nineties the world political order attacked the Mezzaterra space disabling therefore interaction and hybridization between cultures. The appropriation of language then has become a strategy to demystify their culture and Arabness, as a resistance to the homogenizing, assimilative practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This is what has been metaphorized by Leela Ghandi "Caliban Paradigm" which means "learning how to curse in the master's tongue" (Ghandi Leela, 1998: 127)

Edward Said's overlapping ideologies and the crossovers of Western and Arab identities and cultures. The view is well argued for in Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia in *Edward Said*:

Contrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own identity, that text of self that he is continually writing, because it involves continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his worldliness. (2001, p. 91)

The emblematic character of Said's typical identity has opened the gate for the possibility of encounter between the Self and the Other, so that the Arab British writers like Faqir and Soueif inhabit, like Said, what Homi Bhabha called the 'the third space [...] where the negotiation of incommensurable differences create tensions peculiar to borderline existence' (*The Location of Culture*, 1994, P. 31) not to highlight the exotic but to hail the culture's hybridity.

Building on the analytical reading of the works Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Selma*, Leila Aboulela's *The Minaret* and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* this paper is conceived as an attempt to understand the way particular immigration and settlement patterns in Britain have entailed some specific aspects of Arab women's lifelong interactions with the social, political and economic conditions leading to developing idiosyncratic literary productions. The idea of the ethnic literary writing framed by the politics of location seems to be most revealing since loaded with the particularities of Arabness in a given Arab diaspora, that of the Arab women in Britain that may forcefully differ from other Arab diasporas in the Western countries.

Beyond this thematic revolving around the metaphor of cartography in ethnic literary productions, however, the use of English is often seen as a very troubling element in studies as such and especially if conducted from a postcolonial view. The present paper is, indeed, structured around a set of works all written originally in English. In this respect, the language of the dominant culture has become an effective tool for the Arab women writers to better yield their cultural differences, challenging henceforth the view that literature is an elite Western discourse. English seems to have equally absorbed the diasporic experience and acquired a metonymic dimension while considering it as an essential part of the whole diasporist discourse. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue:

Strategies of appropriation are numerous and vary widely in postcolonial literatures, but they are the most powerful and ubiquitous way in which English is transformed by formerly colonized writers. Such strategies enable the writer to gain world audience and yet produce a culturally distinct, culturally appropriate idiom that announces itself as different even though it is 'English'. (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 2002, p. 76)

The passage informs about the strategies of the appropriation of the colonizer's language by a formerly colonized. However, the context of this paper excludes any aspect of

The contrapuntal vision is E. Said's view about the dismissal of "univocal" interpretation of text written by the Arab British or the Arab American writers where attempts of restoring the Mezzaterra would inform about their belief in the open dialogue and bridging the gaps between different cultures.

dialectical discussion about “colonizer” and “colonized”, English is merely called upon as a means of subversion⁵ and resistance. It is, henceforth, a marker of the body of literature written by those writers who are permanently dwelling between Britain and the Arab world, or those whose identity is hybridized running the two cultures.

What motivates the choice of Arab women writers in Britain rather than Arab men is, first, Layla Al Maleh’s description of this literature as “mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character.” (Al Maleh, 2009, p. 13) The tone of Al Maleh seems implicitly rebellious delineating the awareness of Arab women when committed to a struggle of twofold aspects; voicing their feminine experience in contrast to the hegemony of men on the one hand. On the other hand, their strife within the Western academic circles where their works are often confusingly read thorough the long conflicting history of the West and Islam⁶. Their literary writings are indeed manipulated to further enroot the stereotypes about them so that to meet the Western readers expectations.

4. The Arab-British confusion in FadiaFaqir’s *My Name is Selma*

In the largely rising scale of Arab emigration to Great Britain since the second half of the twentieth century, and the success with which authors of the new diaspora have practiced the genre of the novel, the acknowledging of the feminist voices in reporting and further mediating their views about the dialectic of “longing” an “belonging” suggests a challenging (re) definition of concepts such as ‘Arabness’ and ‘feminism’. Major contemporary Arab women writers have convincingly used English to describe both their personal and their ethnic counterparts’ experiences on this side of the continent producing, therefore, a worthwhile reading body of novels that do not only highlight their freeing process from male oppression but suggesting also the need for thinking the relation between diaspora and gender.

My Name is Selma centers on a young shepherdess, who flees her village of Hima in the Levant, and forced to live in Britain to escape the consequences of her illicit pregnancy. Her brother, and in pursuit of redeeming the family honour, decides to kill her after being denounced by the lover. A Lebanese nun, who devotes her life to the rescue of the illicitly pregnant girls whose lives are menaced by their families, decides to smuggle Selma to a convent in Lebanon. Selma, then, is adopted by the British nun Miss Archer. The latter changes the name of Selma to Sally and arranges to send her to Britain. At her arrival there Selma’s identity is questioned by the immigration authorities, and after two-months detention she is finally authorized an entrance to Britain.

⁵Debates over the use of English by ethnics in their literary productions have continuously shown up the complexity of the issue. Such an expression of the particularities of experiences has been the main concern, if not the basic, of postcolonial studies on discourse. yet, For a discussion of how language is used by Arab women writers as a means of subversion, see: Diya M. Abdo, ‘How to Be a Successful Double Agent: (Dis)placement as Strategy in FadiaFaqir’s *Pillars of Salt*’, in *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. by Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 337-69. See also: FadiaFaqir, ‘*Lost in Translation*’, *Index on Censorship*, 33 (2004), 166-70. See also: Wail S. Hassan, ‘*Agency and Translational Literature*’.

⁶The feminist voices in the West claim through their diasporic experiences that their works are particularly misused by the western publishing houses and academic circles leading to misunderstanding in popular culture. AmelAmirah connects Western reception of those works with intention showing that “*the West’s interests in Arab women as part of its interestin and hostility to Islam.*” (Amirah, ***Publishing in the West: Problems andprospects for Arab women Writers***, *Al Jadid Magazine*, 2 (1996) <<http://www.aljadid.com/features/0210amireh.html>> [accessed September, 2011],

The story then develops through depiction of the daily practices of Selma in Britain throughout her various meetings with other women from different ethnic backgrounds. First, the encounter with Parvin, a second generation Asian British on the run from an arranged marriage, provided some enlightening facts about her citizenship in Britain. The process of integration starts when Selma finds work as seamstress at local tailor shop. Second, Selma's meeting with Liz, a descendant of a former imperialist family turned drunkard, and with whom she shares a living when she left the hostel. The following encounter that nourishes the idea of cross-cultural dialogue is her friendship with Gwen, a retired Welsh headmistress. Ultimately she accepts the marriage proposal of her tutor in the Open University but she is shoot dead by her brother upon her return to her home village in the Levant.

The profile of Selma is very challenging as she develops from a Bedouin shepherdess to a successful migrant. Faqir in this novel pushes to the limits the question of the possibilities of integration, especially the abilities of her character as underprivileged Arab woman. At first level, this subject transcends the gender issue to draw our attention to the complexity of the Arabs' situation in Britain through the specificities of Selma's class as poor and marginalized. The most sounding contribution is the attempt to undermine the adopted picture of Arabs as rich investors who live abundantly and affluently in Britain. Camillia El-Solh calls for thinking about the hidden minority of the Arabs in Britain, so she notes

the socio-economically marginalised Arabs who, for lack of viable alternatives, are most likely to end up setting more or less permanently in Britain, however pervasive the myth of return. (CamilliaFawzi El-Solh, 1993, p.78)

Then she maintains that the popular connections of

the term 'Arab' with oil conjures up in the popular Western images of affluence spiced with the exotic, there by overlooking those arabs in Britain who are trapped in menial employment or are subject to the restrictions of their asylum status. (ibid, p.72-73)

The invisibility of the Arab as a racial category results from multiple factors ranging from the displacing association with oil producers to their portrayal by the popular culture as outsiders to the British culture. What most contributed to their marginalization both socially and politically are the mediated articles and writings usually describing them as exotic and a self-contained group. Further political decisions during the Gulf War in 1991 have endorsed restrictions about their acknowledging as a 'racial minority' in the way they are recognized in the U.S for example. The idea echoes the views of El-Solh when she establishes a clear-cut cause and effect relation between the diplomatic affairs between the West and the Arab world.

Selma in Britain helps raising many questions that pertain to the future of Arabs who live there. Her strife with invisibility is in double focus due to the Arabness and the marginalized gender. In the early stages of the novel Selma is indeed invisible:

'Where do you come from?' [...]

'Guess?'

The list, as usual, included every country on earth except my own.

'Nacaragua? France? Portugal? Greece? Surely Russia?'

(FadiaFaqir, *My Name is Selma*, 2007, p.61)

Faqir in this novel tends to give voice to a minority which has long been silenced, and to accentuate the idea of disconnectedness and non-belonging Selma as an uneducated Middle East shepherdess seems to be a very challenging character without alike in the ethnic

literature. The many encounters she goes through with women of other racial background shows out the drawbacks of the experience of domination and marginalization in once a patriarchal system, then in a foreign society, on their own place in society and on their identity. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge that women's common plight all over the globe seems to be an important factor to reduce disconnectedness between them. What is at stake for them, though racially different, is to maintain the foregrounding of trans-cultural and cross-ethnic identifications. The ordeal for Selma, as a representative of Arab refugees and immigrants, vehicles the various strategies that account for their integration. As the present in Britain became so compelling for Selma it soon crowds thought of how to remedy for the effect of the new lifestyle on the sense of Self produced by dislocation. *My Name is Selma* is one of the texts that illustrate female's search for a new identity, demonstrating how their ethnic backgrounds and gender have forced them into such immigration conditions leading inexorably to what Geoffrey Nash calls in his book *The Anglo Arab Encounter*:

The nullification of choice in the context of globalised power systems in which the individual is transplanted across lands and cultures with next to no say in the process or its outcomes.

(2007, p. 127)

Selma's Self becomes a multi-layered composite of the Bedouin Arab and British/Western cultural code consisting a matrix problem that would be resolved only by the 'mimicry' of the Other. The idea of 'mimicry' arises within the postcolonial theory as A. Memmi describes some of the less powerful people's strategies to cope with the masters' world.

Within this frame of the quest for integration it becomes imperative to look closely at the strategies that Selma pursue to alleviate her intolerable experience. The cross-ethnic survival plan is launched through her fertile relationship with Parvin, the South Asian British, who advises her to think of her future as a British citizen and to forget about her home country. Considered as Selma's mentor Parvin speaks out her idea of the lost past in the example below:

'We have to look for jobs,' said Parvin [...]

[...]

'The doctor said too much past,' I said

'Yes, Selma too much past,' she said as if talking to herself

'Too hard though,' I said

'Yes, I know, I know,' she said

(*My Name is Selma*, p.108)

The very sustaining relationship between Selma and Parvin is empowered by a feminist stance as the one provides room for inclusion in the British culture for the other. The very presence and assistance for one another help both to survive the awful experience of exclusion and marginalization. Indeed, the foregrounding of a relationship based on coalition and alliances among the refugees and immigrants of different ethnic backgrounds has enabled them to flourish and triumph,

In the early evening the city belonged to us, the homeless drug addicts, alcoholics and immigrants, to those who were either without a family or were trying to blot out their history. In this space between five and seven we would spread and

conquer like moss that grows between cracks in the pavement. (*My name is Selma*, p.25)

The experience of cultural, political and social marginalization turned the Arabs and non-Arabs characters in the novel to what T. Tammar coined as 'denizens' to show 'that the concept citizen is no longer adequate to describe the sophisticated reality of modern states.' (Agamben, 1995, p. 117-118) Despite Selma's attempts to adapt as Sally and forget Selma are frequently confronted by Liz's and Max's reluctances to accept her as a British citizen. In one instance Selma tries to understand the British politics but Liz does not really help her, rather she pushes her further to the margins asserting her inability to understand an issue as such.

When Selma looks with Max at a picture of Lady Diana wearing a swimming suit, Max reacts aggressively at Selma's admiration 'Sal, You don't know anything about us, the British, do you? [...] I don't blame you, being foreign at all.' (*My Name is Selma*, p.241)

The experience with food is also shaking for Selma's will to ultimately become Sally, 'An immigration officer might decide to use my ability to digest fish as a test for my loyalty to the Queen.' (*My Name is Selma*, p.9)

The novel then depicts the willingness of Selma, as an unprivileged woman of Arab descent, to be an active member of multicultural Britain. However, the constructed Arab British identity is not subjected to homogeneity, and due to stigmatization other Arab characters avoid revealing their identities as Arab like the Algerian waiter who always identify as French.

The ability to make links with other marginalized and excluded women from the mainstream British culture is a marker that is further illustrated in the works of Soueif and Aboulela. Yet, the intersecting frames of the hybrid identity and feminist coalitions are very much a part of these works. Such an overlapping of perspectives provides another useful approach for examining *The Map of Love* and *The Minaret*.

5. The transnational feminist perspectives in A. Soueif's *The Map of Love*

The novel tells the story of Lady Anna Winterborne who travels to Egypt In 1900. She takes the journey hoping to recover from the death of her husband Edward, a soldier who has been in a mission to the Sudan, and who dies soon after his return to London, overwhelmed by feelings of guilt due to his involvement in a massacre of a group of natives. In Egypt Anna falls in love with Sahrif Pasha, an Egyptian nationalist utterly committed to his country's cause. A hundred years later, Isabel Parkrnan, an American divorcee and a descendant of Anna and Sharif, goes to Egypt, taking with her an old family trunk, inside which are found notebooks, diaries and journals which reveal the details of Anna's life and her relationship with Sharif. The letters and diaries are given to the narrator, Amal, who is Anna's great grandniece. The memoirs are quoted extensively and placed in the narrative as a voice distinctly separate from that of the narrator. The text therefore, oscillates between the past and the present, between Anna's life rendered in her diaries, journals, and letters (all italicized in the text) on the one hand, and the narrator's own life and reflections seen against a backdrop of the colonial past represented in and evoked by Anna's memoirs.

The feminist characters that are under scrutiny in this novel apply to the relationship between Anna and Layla at the beginning of the XX century as well as the relationship between Isabel and Amal at the end of the century to highlight the way transnational feminisms as a certain basis for coalition and alliance. The experience of hyphenated identity occurs within the theme of travel, love, marriage, exile, and immigration that Soueif explores throughoutly in this novel. Yet, what is prominent in *The Map of Love* is the setting of the cultural exchanges unusually in Egypt, since Anna and Isabel are the movers to the East from the West, England and America respectively. The matrix therefore provides new arrangements dealing less with Arabness and much more with the interconnected experiences of Western women and the Arab ones. A paramount emphasis would be on the cartography of the feministic discourse that tends to put into question the limits of Western feminism. In fact what would be tackled are not only the Arab characters' strategies to cope with retrospective parameters of a pure Arab identity but even the Western females' adaptation to the new environment. In this context it is prerequisite to know that the process of 'transform[ing] habitation' implies a voyage from 'the intensely personal' to 'the global' (Ashcroft, 2001, p.159) a practice that involves confrontation with boundaries, and, beyond the physical nature of those which demarcate countries one from the other many are social, psychological, as well as ethnic and racial. Therefore, be it integration, assimilation or resistance, it is the nature of the process that would decide about the transformation or the maintaining of the boundaries. Anna's coming to Egypt and Isabel's is a sing of transforming habitation and an act of crossing borders and transforming them 'by seeing the possibilities –the horizon- beyond them.' (Ashcroft, 2001, p.182)

The Map of Love depicts the continuing process of cultural exchange through one of the tenets of feminism and one of its variants, namely the secular feminism. Soueif's interest in promoting her Arab-Islamic culture engages her to explore the intricate relationship between feminism and Islam on the one hand, and the commonalities with the other cultures on the other. Henceforth, Leila Ahmed evokes the idea of 'the two divergent strains of feminism' in the Arab world: namely secular feminism and Islamic feminism. (Leila Ahmed, 1992, p.174) According to her the former has dominated Egypt and the Middle East for most of the XX century connoting the westernizing, secularizing tendencies of the society. The latter, however, remained marginalized until the last decades of the century proceeding through the native, vernacular and Islamic discourse. (ibid, p.174-75) Nevertheless, the overlapping of the two forms should be accounted for due to the inevitable influences on one another. Margot Badran, for instance, argues that both strains exist porously as they 'flo[w] in and out of each other.' (Margot Badran, 2005, p.12)

Like Faqir, Soueif in her novel gives voice to the less privileged, suppressed and marginalized women to speak out their opinions on many domestic and international issues through their interaction with Amal, the upper-middle class protagonist who has just returned to Egypt after a separation from her English husband. Unlike what the title suggests, the novel is not about a regular love, but a large portion informs about the problems of women in Egypt, once being a group that should not apply. While Amal befriends Tawasi, and Tahiyya, the doorman's wife in her building in Cairo, Isabel; an American journalist and Amal's future sister-in-law, sets up a friendly relation with Um Aya, the wife of the museum's doorman. The 'transformation of habitation' occurs therefore through breaking the class barriers and the cultural crossings among those women. From that inception based on the representation of

women of different backgrounds, Soueif seems to contend that the feminist grouping helps bridging the gap between differences. In this frame of ideas space is given to Adrienne Rich's concept of the politics of location in the sense that Western feminism, as a dominant hierarchy or hegemony, would no more apply to the concerns of all women in the world. The localized experiences provide newly spaces circumscribed by adaptation and flexibility of the feminist movements to avoid any deadlock. IenAng argues that the adoption of 'difference seriously necessitates the adoption of a politics of *partiality* rather than a politics of inclusion.' (2003, p.204 *Italics in original*)

The postcolonial view is also a striking feature in these encounters. Anna's stay in Egypt accounts for the cruelty of British colonialism while Isabel's experience demonstrates the destructionist and hypocrite aspect of the American imperialism in the XXcentury. The novelty, however, lies in Soueif's attempt at transforming mutually the colonizer and the colonized. Onomastically speaking, the choices of the names Amal and Anna to mean, respectively hope and I, hint at the possibility of a harmonious coexistence of different cultures or races in the same space through the exemplar experience of Isabel as a new generation of Western women. As Lindsey Moore puts it Soueif 'foregrounds positive affiliations between Egyptians, British and American women intra- and inter-generationally.' (Moore, 2008, p.147)

6. Conclusion

By juxtaposing experiences between women of different backgrounds FadiaFaqir and AhdafSoueif have brought into discussion multiple issues pertaining most and foremost to border crossings. The experience of marginalization though explored differently, in *My Name is Selma* as a connotation of exile from the home country and as a conflict of integration, racism and settlement experience; then through the class belonging in *The Map of Love* where marginalization takes the form of denial of personal and educational development, and also the denial of voice, strikes the idea that difference becomes a site for understanding. In this sense both novels permeate the feminist coalition to debunk the Western hegemonic view of dissection. Throughout such a feminine cacophony Arabness is put under the lens via the Arab female's behaviour with their non-Arab peers, and Feminism and Islam as two transnational movements are also approached by the impact of the localized experiences on shaping their meanings.

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