OBJECTS IN THE ORIENT: WOMEN'S BODIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN RECENT BOOKS OF EXPATRIATE EXPERIENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UAE.

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis defines a micro-movement of literature characterised by a period of hopeful curiosity that occurred in western novels of expatriate experience set within Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and published from 2012-2014. The micro-movement, which begins with the optimism of the Arab Spring, closes with the rise of ISIS. The thesis explains how the five texts under consideration: Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King*, Joseph O'Neill's *The Dog*, Garry Craig Powell's *Stoning the Devil*, Kim Barnes's *In The Kingdom of Men*, and Keija Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* contain specific commonalities. Namely, each work has a dissatisfied narrator who is seeking purpose. Adrift in a foreign landscape, each expatriate narrator uses the bodies of women as a kind of anchor. The women's bodies become sites of identity making, either as mirrors to reflect back the enlarged figure of the protagonist or as a window through which to explore gender identity. This is done through sexual objectification in *The Dog*. The authors of *A Hologram for a King, Stoning the Devil,* and *In the Kingdom of Men* consciously or unconsciously present Orientalist attitudes as an attempt to bolster their own identity. When these attempts at female subjugation falter, as in *The Dog*, *A Hologram for the King, The Ruins of Us,* and *Stoning the Devil*, the narrators experience minor epiphanies. *In the Kingdom of Men* sees the male gaze appropriated by a female narrator and applied to other women in a queer reading of the text, or reflexively on to self. The thesis argues that the micro-movement is defined by the attitudes each author demonstrates about the Gulf, that it is a site for the exploration of gender identity.

For Fred.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will focus on five books of literature: *Stoning the Devil* by Garry Craig Powell, *A Hologram for the King* by Dave Eggers, *The Dog* by Joseph O'Neill*, In the Kingdom of Men* by Kim Barnes*,* and *The Ruins of Us* by Keija Parssinen*.* These novels were all published between 2012-2014 and are also all set in either Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. The books relate the experiences of western expatriates, a term which I will use throughout this thesis to refer to a particular social group: usually, but not always, men, who have temporarily relocated to Saudi Arabia or the UAE from the UK or the US for employment. Each book contains at least one western expatriate narrator who is grappling with his or her identity, a struggle that is played out within a landscape somewhat alien to the narrator. In each work women's bodies are foundational as a point of reference in the creation or re-creation of identities of male and female western expatriate narrators. As such, each of these works of literature exists within the trend of American/British global or transnational fiction and are also stylistically related as concerning "mimetic verisimilitude, a display of historical awareness" (T. Savvas And C. K. Coffman 196) and sometimes referred to as Post-Post Modernism or New Sincerity.

The main argument of this thesis is that there exists a micro-movement of literature published between 2012 and 2014 and set in either Saudi Arabia or the UAE. This micro-movement is transnational, but is centred upon the collapse of identity of the western, usually male, usually white protagonist, and their struggle to create or recreate a sense of self and identity. This thesis is not the first critical response to recognize the micro-movement: in "Kafka on the Gulf: Male Identity, Space, and Globalization" in

Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* and in Arnon Grunberg's *The Man Without Illness*", Stephan Besser and Yra Van Dijk highlight the overt similarities between these two books, one written in English and one in Dutch, but which each feature "Western(ized) middle-class men who are sent on business assignments to the Middle-East" (1). Crucially, both works also document the failure of the protagonists in "attempts to secure a contract" (1). The novels, written without collaboration between the authors, have eerily similar themes, which are also evident within the other novels selected for this thesis. In particular, the two works discuss the disillusion and identity collapse of the narrator, an idea that is paralleled in each of the works chosen for this thesis. Besser and Van Dijk's article usefully argues for the similarities between these two works, arguing that male identity is at the centre of each, but does not venture beyond this comparison. This thesis expands on what Besser and Van Dijk noticed, and explores *A Hologram for the King* and four additional works that are each set within the Gulf and published between 2012 and 2014. This thesis argues for the existence of a micro-movement of literature that discusses gendered identity.

While Besser and Van Dijk only argue for the commonalities in the experiences of transnational businessmen, I am arguing that the micro-movement also contains the stories of western expatriate women. Like the expatriate businessmen, these female expatriates, who relocate for love not business, feel a significant loss of identity. The central commonality of this micro-movement is the idea that in the Gulf traditional gendered identity collapses. The micro-movement is essentially a movement of expatriate

literature that is centred on failure, loss, and the crumbling identities of the central protagonists.

This literature is also about existence in a liminal space; temporality and temporary experiences mean a slipping foundation for identity. Crucially, while the setting of the Gulf is an impermanent place of residence for the narrators of novels within the micro-movement, it is necessary. Each narrator has, to a certain extent, been rejected from his or her country of origin. As Besser and Van Dijk argue, in *A Hologram for the King* and *The Man Without Illness*, there is "no home to return to for these…protagonists, no stable centre of meaning that anchors their identities, and no position of political and economic dominance" (7). This loss of home has occurred usually due to loss of means of income or loss of relationship, and it means that often the narrator arrives in the Gulf bereft and searching. The Gulf, therefore, takes on a mythic 'frontier' quality. However, the region does not provide the solution for these lost narrators; instead the Gulf brings out their uselessness and rejects their foreignness. The western expatriate can never truly become part of the society or closed culture of the Gulf, and at the end of each of the books discussed in this thesis, the central expatriate narrator is left at a loss with where to go next, both physically and psychologically. With neither a homeland nor a second culture to become adopted into, the western expatriate narrator is left still searching.

As demonstrated in this thesis, the micro-movement of expatriate literature set in the Gulf interrogates the conventional gendered identities of the protagonists of the books. The Middle East is a particularly complex region for the UK or US expatriate to enter, as the systems of colonial imperialism, the Gulf Wars, the War on Terror, and

Islamophobia leave a legacy. Therefore, the setting of each book is significant, as is its time of publication.

In terms of a theoretical framework, this thesis will rely heavily on Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Published in 1976, this work is still relevant as it deals explicitly with the fantasy of the Orient that these characters seem to believe in, and which the authors of these novels seem to at times adopt and at times to interrogate. To a certain extent, these books, as I will go on to prove, all contain orientalist elements, especially in the very manner of their construction as stories of the Gulf are once more told by western authors. However, as mentioned above, the defining characteristic of this micro-movement is the failure of the central western protagonist. These novels therefore frequently focus on the flaws and obsolescence of Orientalist mentalities, although it should be stated outright that there are still problematic elements which indulge rather than interrogate Orientalist fantasies. The experiences of the flawed Western protagonists show the authors' awareness of the limitations of the western understanding of the east and suggest that the construction of western society and western identity is flawed as it is built on a foundation of difference from the east. Other critical theories considered in this thesis discuss particularly the role of Arab women in the construct of the orient. Here, Lila Abu-Lughod's "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving" and Meyda Yeğenoğlu's *Veiled Fantasies* is particularly useful.

The unifying principle of these works is that each variously presents or posits a post-Orientalist world, either directly as a result of the author's interrogation of orientalist tropes or in the outdated qualities of the author's indulgence in such tropes. Besser and

Van Dijk claim that in *A Hologram for the King*, Eggers is really proposing the idea that "the global future is not white or male at all, but seems to belong to people like Zahra" (17), the alluring Saudi doctor who attends to Alan. To an extent, each work discussed in this thesis makes the same claim; each novel rings the death knell of the dominance of the western expatriate and the heralding of an ambiguous, more pluralistic future. In *The Dog*, this means the complete mental collapse of the narrator, while in both *In the Kingdom of Men* and *Stoning the Devil* it involves a kind of penance and imprisonment. However, in both *The Ruins of Us* and *A Hologram for the King*, there is the possibility of evolution and change, as discussed further below in detail.

The study of these five novels is significant because of the very temporary nature of this micro-movement. The flurry of novels set within the Gulf containing flawed and often bumbling western narrators only lasted two short years, from 2012-2014, which may account for the lack of critical attention paid to these books. In essence, the period of hopeful curiosity, as I have coined it, is a time in which gendered systems of power and conventions of masculinity are interrogated, with a somewhat positive outlook. This period is book-ended by the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS. These books all interrogate western conceptions of the Gulf within a specific period predating the rise of ISIS and are influenced by the context in which they were written. Of particular importance to the works in this thesis are the global recession, the Arab Spring, and the changing, modern conceptions of masculinity. Crucially, while written by authors from the UK, continental Europe and the US, the majority of the novels have American protagonists; only Powell's

Colin is British, while the author wrote the book while living in the US. The US-Middle East relationship, therefore, is of tantamount importance to this thesis.

At the time when American masculinity is in crisis, authors are searching for a place where masculinity, and to a certain extent femininity, can be redefined, a situation where it might still have promise. The Gulf at this moment in time becomes a place of possibility. This is no longer an image of the Orient as timeless and backward. Instead, the Gulf, with its endless wealth and promise, becomes the place where newness might emerge and therefore a crucible in which new formations of gender and sexuality might emerge. However, in each of these works, this newness is opened up, interrogated, and questioned. The authors are as interested in the emergence of change in a place as they are in the failure of the place to achieve change. This thesis will demonstrate how each work strips away the identity and power of the western narrator, leaving the future to be claimed by someone else, to be shared with someone else, or to collapse.

I: DEFINING A MICRO MOVEMENT

This chapter will serve as a longer introduction to the Gulf, as it is important to set up the ethnographical premise as well as to define the stylistic characteristics of the movement in order to introduce the novels and how they present the realities of the Gulf. The first section of this chapter will provide synopses of the novels, while the second section is concerned with exploring the significance of place and time for these books. The third section will investigate the sociology of the western expatriate in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The last section will set up the theoretical arguments concerning looking upon women's bodies which will be important in subsequent chapters.

Garry Craig Powell's 2012 *Stoning the Devil* has no critical scholarship written about it, despite the fact that it is a highly ambitious, provocative, and often eloquently crafted piece of literature and was longlisted for both the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and the Edge Hill Short Story Prize in 2013 (Bionote). The work has been reviewed by George Singleton, who states, "These characters have needs and dreams. They have their share of existential moments…". It's been reviewed also by Naomi Shihab Nye, who states the work "…travel[s] to the dark side of human behaviour without losing essential tenderness or desire for meaning and connection".

Stoning the Devil is a novel-in-stories that weaves together the experiences of different characters through multiple narrators. The multiperspectivity of the work exemplifies the melting pot of nationalities that is the UAE. The work begins with the epistolary titular tale, which is written as a series of letters from Badria, a young Emirati girl, to her cousin Alia. In the letters Badria describes how her father raped her while the

family was on vacation in Oman, and how her recent trip to Saudi to perform Hajj included both the reconstruction of her hymen and the murder of her father. The story is brusque and unsettling, and sets the tone for the rest of the work. Badria's story is one of ferocity and perseverance. As Cooke and Mendoza write in their review of the book, "Badria returns in the stories of other characters and we observe how trauma shapes her life and guides her interactions". Badria's survival and resilience is arguably the most hopeful message of Powell's work, as she guides and inspires another struggling female, Randa, in the final story, "No Free Lunch". The work closes with Randa proudly deserting boyfriend Khalifa, her head held high as "Badria had taught her " (146). In this final tale, Badria is a soldier. Hers is the future being heralded in, and the potential of the Gulf lies almost entirely in her and Randa's hands.

While Badria's arc, to quote Suzanne Heagy in "Hell on Earth", "offers some hope for the violent and misogynistic culture represented", the story of the western expatriate, Colin, in *Stoning the Devil* demonstrates the failings of a man to understand women. His narrative is of a man floundering, seeking, and failing. In trying to reclaim his masculinity, he becomes complicit in forms of misogyny. It is this narrative arc that is of central importance to this thesis. Colin is a British expatriate, who moves to Lebanon to work in the refugee camps erected for Palestinians fleeing Israeli occupation. There, Colin meets Fayruz, whom he later marries, and the couple and their two daughters soon relocate to Al Ain, perhaps the least known of the United Arab Emirates, where Colin begins work as an English teacher in a university for Emirati women. A number of Powell's stories centre on Colin's relationships with the female characters. In particular,

Colin's story focuses on his flawed relationship with his wife, and, as the blog *JoV's Book Pyramid* describes, in his behaviour Colin "exoticizes and patronises the locals, unaware of his latent racism". His Orientalist attitude is what leads to the collapse of his identity and power.

In the second of Powell's stories, entitled "A Woman's Weapon", Colin and his wife, Fayruz, bicker about their relationship while leaving a screening of Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo.* Their relationship is defined by his desire to both rescue her and be rescued by her. This conflict runs central to the stories in *Stoning the Devil,* as does Colin's relationships with the other women in the book. While Randa's rather positive narration closes the work, the reader is left with the shocking image from the penultimate story, "The Arab Mind", in which Colin, desperate after a horrible argument with Fayruz, tries half-heartedly to kill himself. The reader sees him, naked and dishevelled, with a noose around his neck. In this scene, Powell paints the failed western expatriate worker, casting him as a bumbling buffoon, self-aware yet romantic and foolish, an entitled and deeply flawed interloper. Colin's narrative is defined by his inability to understand his Arab wife and his clumsy and heavy-handed treatment of his half-Arab daughters. As Jov states, it is Colin's "latent racism" that defines him.

Powell's literary reputation is somewhat limited, and most of his presence online is the result of self-promotion. He has 'lived experience', working as an English teacher within the Gulf, and indeed, his character, Colin, is somewhat of an avatar for Powell himself. Powell has not published any major works since the novel-in-stories and currently resides in Arkansas, where he teaches creative writing. His novel-in-stories is

lived experience in that he proclaims that in his story a notorious Dubai bar, “Trader Vic’s becomes Lord Jim’s and the girl becomes a Polish actress turned waitress who has lost her job and is trying to muster the courage to sell herself for the first time, to an Englishman named Colin (not my alter ego, obviously!)” (The Undercover Soundtrack).

Like *Stoning the Devil*, *A Hologram for the King* by Dave Eggers tackles a central relationship between a western male and Arab female that is rife with exoticism. Eggers’s narrator, Alan Clay, is an ineffectual father and washed-up businessman who finds himself somewhat adrift in Saudi Arabia, not unlike Colin in the UAE in *Stoning the Devil.* He is formless and malleable as his surname suggests. Alan has taken a job in Saudi with the intention of redeeming both his business and personal reputation through selling a mysterious ‘hologram’ technology to the king.

As with Powell’s work, literary criticism on *A Hologram for the King* is limited, despite Eggers’s much greater literary profile. There are reviews of the book in the major newspapers of the UK and US, one rather brief review in *Transnational Literature* by Martina Sciolino, and two comparative pieces of literary criticism in academic journals. Most reviewers argue that *A Hologram for the King* is primarily concerned with business. In *The New York Times*, Pico Iyer refers to the book as a kind of “Death of a Globalized Salesman”, and in *The Globe and Mail*, Cynthia MacDonald refers to Alan as “Willy Loman without the unbridled joy”. Critical scholars agree, although with caveats. In “Typical Eggers: transnationalism and American in Dave Eggers’s ‘globally-minded literature’”, Bran Nicols claims that *A Hologram for the King* is part of an ‘American Quartet’ which criticizes globalization, while in “Kafka on the Gulf” Besser and Van Dijk

argue that Eggers's novel criticizes global economic relations. However, underlying the criticism of globalized business is a systematic critique of modern American masculinity, with Alan desperate to leave behind the "crushing vise of his life in America" (Eggers 15), or what Bessar and Van Dijk call "growing alienation and fear of Western masculinity" (2).

Alan has arrived in Saudi Arabia fleeing a string of failures, many of them economic. Alan's former company, a bicycle manufacturing company called Schwinn, has collapsed due to a more globalized market and the outsourcing of manufacturing. His financial ruin damages both his relationships and his identity. His daughter, Kit, has been forced to drop out of university because Alan could not afford to pay her tuition, much to the irritation of his ex-wife, Ruby. While in Saudi Arabia, Alan goes over letters from Kit in his mind, while recalling personal and professional failures. Compared to *Stoning the Devil*, the plot in *A Hologram for the King* is relatively sparse. While waiting for King Abdullah to arrive, Alan remains in an uncomfortable stasis, appearing to his team to be entirely unqualified and seen committing a number of personal and professional *faux pas*. He appears to be serving some kind of punishment or self-exile in Saudi Arabia. Cynthia MacDonald calls the experience of reading the novel, "like being boiled in a pot of water where the temperature goes up by one degree every 10 minutes" (MacDonald).

While the above critics agree that Eggers's novel is a discussion of a "flailing American businessman" (Iyer) with Alan representing "American industrialism that has literally lost its place in the world's economy" (Sciolino), much of the novel is centred on Alan's relationships with women, and his ruminations on these relationships. Alan's

psychological ailments soon manifest as a cyst growing on his back that he can no longer ignore. He goes to a local hospital where he meets Dr Zahra Hakem, who alleviates Alan's worries and excises his cyst. During this time, Alan also meets Hanne, a Finnish expatriate who tries, and fails, to seduce Alan by giving him *siddiqi*, a locally made alcohol, taking him to Bacchanalian embassy parties, and finally by taking a bath with him. Alan rejects Hanne and pursues Zahra instead. Eventually, Zahra brings Alan to her beach house, seducing him by swimming in the Red Sea, its natural beauty paralleling Zahra's own. While the two fail to successfully make love, Alan feels redeemed to an extent by Zahra's affection for him, although the future of their relationship is left ambiguous.

Nicols argues that "*A Hologram for the King* turns out to be a touching transnational love story" (11), but I am more inclined to believe that, instead, the work proclaims Alan's obsolescence. The epigraph to the novel, taken from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, states, "It is not every day that we are needed". Alan is not needed, not by his family, by his company, not by Hanne, but especially not by the magnificent Zahra next to whom Alan feels like "a less necessary species" (287). Alan needs Zahra, and at the end of the novel she has to go "to Paris for a few weeks" (303), while Alan is left asking Karim al-Ahmed, the manager of KAEC, hopefully and pathetically, if "you think there's any reason for me to stay?" (312). It is clear that Zahra has direction and purpose, while Alan has none.

Aside from the 2013 dystopian novel, *The Circle*, much of Eggers's literary work investigates global narrative. In a review for *The Guardian* of Eggers's 2018 novel, *The*

Monk of Mokha, Tim Adams claims that Eggers " is on a mission to use the platform he has created as a writer/activist to give direct voice to the marginalised or unheard". Indeed, after Eggers' debut memoir, the 2000 *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius,* Eggers quickly switched focus. In 2006 *What is the What* was a novel based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese boy who immigrated to Atlanta in the U.S. In 2009, Eggers published *Zeitoun*, a non-fiction literary work that tells the story of Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a Syrian American. 2018's *The Monk of Mokha* tells of a Yemeni immigrant living in the US. Indeed, it is clear that Eggers has frequently focussed on the narratives of immigrants to the US, with a particular focus on those from East Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, *A Hologram for the King* seems a kind of departure from Eggers's usual themes, choosing to discuss instead the American identity displaced overseas. Given Eggers's literary history, it would be safe to speculate that he is entirely aware of the Orientalist traditions at play in literature about the Middle East. In choosing his bumbling narrator, Alan, Eggers provides space for the common limiting tropes of Orientalist writers to be interrogated.

Joseph O'Neill's 2014 novel, *The Dog*, is very easily paralleled to Eggers's work in that both novels focus on the central western expatriate character and his infatuation with a woman. Unlike Alan of *A Hologram for the King*, who is a newcomer to the Gulf, the protagonist of *The Dog*, X, is already immersed in his life in Dubai when the novel opens. Like Alan of *Hologram for the King*, however, X is under-employed, working as a 'Family Officer' for the Batros family, but really taking care of Sandro Batros's son, Alain. This job is far less glamorous and with far less responsibility than X's previous job

as a lawyer in New York. Paralleling the banality of his work, X's life in Dubai seems to have progressed relatively without incident until the arrival of Mrs Ted Wilson, the estranged wife of X's friend-but-really-acquaintance, Ted. X becomes infatuated with this woman, who has come to Dubai searching for her estranged husband. With the arrival of Mrs Ted Wilson, X embarks on or deepens an existential and moral search for his own identity. As in *A Hologram for the King*, the plot is secondary to the existential and moral searching of the narrator that is brought out due to the fixation on a woman.

As a narrator, X is humorous, infuriating, and bombastic. Critics call X "deliberately pedantic" (Osborne), or more negatively, as exhibiting "wordy, baroque nerdiness" (Collins). In "deliberately convoluted sentences" (Liu, 'The Dog'), the reader learns of X's biography, which is not dissimilar from Alan's. X was in a nine-year relationship in New York with his colleague, Jenn, who was more successful than he. Her desire for a baby instigated their breakup, as X was unable or unwilling to continue with the process of *in vitro* fertilization. Once Jenn had left him, X felt disgraced in his work. He was also left financially crippled, which he attributes to Jenn but does not blame her for. The job in Dubai was to serve as an escape for him: again, a kind of punishment of self-exile. He was no longer needed in New York nor did he, without his wealth, reputation or relationship, really have any anchor to the place. Adrift without an identity, X relocated to Dubai.

Once in Dubai, X lives a rather depressing existence, and his impact upon others seems inconsequential. While X is part of Dubai's social scene, going diving and attending brunches, he has very few close friends. The majority of his time is spent alone

or with sex-workers. The novel, therefore, has very few plot points: instead X ruminates at length about the failures of his relationship with Jenn but also contemplates larger themes of the corruption of Western desire through anecdotes about Donald Trump's wedding. In style, the novel is a postmodern stream of consciousness work. Thematically, it is a tale of lost expatriate identity.

The Dog culminates in the breakdown of the narrator, which is more crippling than Alan's wonderings, but not so dramatic as Colin's attempted suicide. After travelling to New York, X returns to Dubai and is promptly fired from his job. He has been made the scapegoat for an investigation into the Bartros family's finances, but his termination is blamed on suggested sexual misconduct involving the son, Alain. This accusation has no merit, but serves to further humiliate and emasculate X. At the end of the novel, X is wildly debating a move to the Comoros and recollecting meeting Conrad Black and his wife at Donald Trump's wedding, all the while staring at the white vista of the walls of his room. X is immobilized by the shattering of his tenuous temporary identity and left without recourse. In X, O'Neill creates, as John Freeman states for *The Boston Globe*, a man, "trying to outrace his sense of responsibility by moving to a culture where responsibility is always passed along through a series of 21st century transactions". At the end of the novel, he cannot race any longer, and rather than confront his responsibility, he is left in a manic state of cognitive dissonance. As the most recent publication (2014), *The Dog* seems to shut down the period of hopeful curiosity with this character left completely hopeless.

Joseph O'Neill is half Irish and half Turkish, but has lived in the US since 1998 and is now an American citizen. In his childhood he travelled extensively, living in Turkey, Mozambique and Iran (Banville). As a Third-Culture Kid, O'Neill simultaneously has a connection with all places and no place; an "elective statelessness" (White), as is documented in his interview with Lee: "I've moved around so much and lived in so many different places that I don't really belong to a particular place, and so I have little option but to seek out dramatic situations that I might have a chance of understanding." (Lee). His understanding of Dubai is of its "post-modern, affectless" (Mahoney) quality. Christina Mahoney points out that O'Neill's strength is in his ability to "insert[…] a large pin into the balloon of pretension that buoys up many novels aspiring to 'globality'", as in his observations of the mosaic city, the hierarchy of nationalities, and in the multi-ethnic Emirates flight attendants. O'Neill's literary history further investigates the lived experience of global citizens, as demonstrated in the 2008 novel *Netherland*. In his 2018 collection of short stories, *Good Trouble,* O'Neill's primary focus is the interrogation of masculinities, as is argued by Benjamin Evans in *The Guardian*, who states the "offbeat premise provides the springboard for a dive into the expectations of men as friends, husbands, mentors and fathers". It is clear then that *The Dog* is the link between these works, the exploration of failed expatriate masculinity. It explores O'Neill's premise that "a lot of Western people living in Dubai are running from something" (East).

The above three books, *Stoning the Devil, A Hologram for the King* and *The Dog* are written by male authors and, with the exception of *Stoning the Devil*, deal exclusively

with male perspectives. But female authors also set their novels in the Gulf, using the setting to explore female experiences. Keija Parssinen's 2012 novel, *The Ruins of Us,* ostensibly tackles the collapse of the marriage between the American expatriate, Rosalie, and her Saudi husband Abdullah, which is instigated by Abdullah's decision to take a second wife. The novel also explores the experiences of Abdullah's best friend, the lonely expatriate Dan Coleman. As Rosalie's marriage to Abdullah begins to disintegrate, she comes to rely more and more on Dan and the two engage in a mild romance. Dan, like Alan and X, is both exiled and searching. He is an American expatriate who is divorced from a woman with whom he is still in love. His children are somewhat estranged from him and he barely speaks to his daughter. He becomes infatuated with Rosalie and relishes her dependence on him, which makes him feel needed and as if he is whole again.

Unlike *A Hologram for the King* and *The Dog, The Ruins of Us* is not a slow-paced and meditative text. Instead of a centralized internal conflict, the novel relates the very real conflicts between characters with differing ideologies and, finally, the conflict between the central characters and their environment. The taboo of the relationship between Rosalie and Dan provokes ire from Rosalie and Abdullah's fundamentalist son, Faisal. Faisal, with the assistance of his friend Majid, kidnaps both his mother and her 'lover' and sequesters them in the desert, where they slowly deteriorate until they are near death. Physical violence results in Majid's death. Finally, Abdullah rescues Dan and Rosalie, proving himself dominant over Dan. Faisal is sent away to Italy and Dan,

shamed and at a loss, returns to Texas. The novel ends with an awkward handshake between Dan and Faisal at the airport.

Rosalie is, at the close of the novel, still in Saudi Arabia, but planning her move to a new place, perhaps an island. Like the other narrators in these books, Rosalie is left at the close of the narrative without a permanent home and without a coherent identity, whereas Dan, unlike X and Alan, has chosen to return to face responsibility and possibly reunite with his wife in the US. Parssinen's novel, according to S. Kirk Walsh in *The Boston Globe*, "coalesces around Abdullah and Rosalie" (K. Walsh) and focuses much more on the themes of family, sacrifice, and cultural distance than it does on the ennui surrounding the western expatriate. While Dan's story is a backdrop, it is the Al-Bayani family – Rosalie, Abdullah, Faisal, and Mariam – that Parssinen, and her few critics, feel constitute the crux of the novel. However, for the purposes of this thesis, parallels will be drawn between both Dan and Rosalie and between Alan, X, and Colin.

Parssinen spent twelve years as a child in Saudi Arabia before relocating to Austin, Texas. Her vision of Saudi Arabia is much more romanticized and domesticated (Slate) than that of the other authors. She has "fond memories of the place" (Ellington) and her father worked successfully for the Arabian-American Oil Company but she acknowledges that she is "still an outsider, writing about a culture she hasn't seen since she was a child"(Aton), and so writing the novel was a "way to bring Arabia back to life" (Clark). As of 2018, she is working on another novel set in Saudi Arabia. For Parssinen, more than any author in this section, her work under discussion relies upon deep sentimentality and connection to the particular region.

Like Parssinen's novel, Kim Barnes's 2012 work, *In the Kingdom of Men*, discusses the experience of an expatriate woman. In many ways, the novel could be re-titled "the education of Mrs Gin" (35), to quote the sage domestic worker Yash, a vital confidant for Gin in the novel. Or it could be termed a document of "Gin's many transgressions" to quote Juliet Lapidos in *The New York Times*. The novel is set in the 1960s, and it is told entirely from the perspective of Gin, and therefore centres, with even more constancy than *The Ruins of Us*, upon the female expatriate experience. Like the other narrators, Gin is in a kind of exile. She lived in crippling poverty during her childhood in Oklahoma, and her decision to escape by way of Mason McPhee leads to her becoming pregnant with his child and marrying him. When Gin miscarries, Mason accepts a job in the oil fields of Dhahran on the East coast of Saudi Arabia and the couple relocate. Gin is cooped up in the ARAMCO compound while Mason is away at work for long stretches of time. In this domestic vacuum, Gin reinvents herself by modelling herself on the women around her: the western expatriates, Linda and Ruthie, and the exotic Bedouin woman, Nadia. Gin is also introduced to and soon becomes infatuated with Abdullah, an intriguing, handsome, young Bedouin working with Mason.

Life on the ARAMCO compound is claustrophobic and oppressive, and Gin's days of boredom are punctuated by excessive drinking, elaborately themed parties, and extravagant meals prepared by Yash. The monotony contrasts with the dangerous background of explosions on the oil field, the unrelenting heat of the desert, and the Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt. Like Alan of *A Hologram for a King*, most of Gin's life is spent waiting; in Gin's case waiting for her husband to return. It is a situation that

Gin soon begins to resent. She starts to idealize the Bedouin lifestyle and to dream of the possibilities of a home without walls. Meanwhile, Mason has uncovered a conspiracy within his company that makes him a target. When Nadia, the Bedouin woman, is found dead, Mason vanishes, and Gin boards a plane to Italy. The novel closes with her solitary and anonymous life in Italy as a portrait photographer. She, like the male narrators in *A Hologram for the King*, *The Dog,* or *Stoning the Devil*, is left in a kind of stasis; her immobility caused by the collapse of her identity.

Critics are divided on Barnes's work. In *The New York Times*, Lapidos calls the work a "feminist *bildungsroman*" about more than just "an Okie who causes trouble in a foreign land" but regrets Barnes's capacity for "trite[ness]". Carolyn See argues in *The Washington Post* that *In the Kingdom of Men* is "a culturally complex story about American venality and greed". In any case, Gin's meditations on life in a literal kingdom of men combine disillusion with Orientalism. In many ways, this novel is the most indulgent of Orientalist fantasies, and the least critical in its view of Arab women.

Barnes is known for her literary work that discusses life in America and in particular the experiences of women. *In the Kingdom of Men* is a bit of an anomaly since "after writing four books set in Idaho, Barnes settled on Saudi Arabia" (Bauer). The choice is also interesting since Barnes has no direct experience with the region. Instead, the novel is based on the second-hand memories of her aunt and uncle, who lived in Saudi Arabia when Barnes was a child, and would visit, "bringing with them exotic gifts" (Disneyland). Barnes admits she did "rely on the eyes and ears of the people who were there" (Bauer) and "watched *Lawrence of Arabia* multiple times" (Disneyland). In her

research it appears that Barnes did not interview any Arabs, rather choosing to exclusively consult expatriate sources, "interview[ing] families in the tightly knit Aramco community" (Bauer). I would argue that Barnes's work, which took her over five years to research and write, nevertheless does not interrogate the Orientalist ideas it presents. Unlike the other works in this thesis, Barnes often appears to deploy limited orientalist tropes.

These works have been chosen for the ways in which they explore the expatriate experience within Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Each main character – Colin, Alan, X, Dan, Rosalie, and Gin – grapples with his or her identity as an expatriate, or as Collins states in a review of *The Dog* for *The Guardian*, as a "lonely fish out of water". While other English language works of fiction set in Saudi Arabia or Dubai were published within the same time period, such as Ameera Al Hakawati's *Desperate in Dubai*, Zvezdana Rahkovich's *Dubai Wives*, and Zoe Ferraris's *City of Veils,* all published in 2011, they do not focus on the loneliness and existential crisis facing the western expatriate, preferring to tell stories of cultural conflict through either Saudi narrators or narrators from other Arab nations. It is clear, however, from the proliferation of literature over a very small time period, that there is a small movement in literature centred on stories set in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The works discussed in this thesis are part of their own micro-movement. Their thematic links suggest that the Gulf provides a unique and successful mirror for the western expatriate protagonist and forces interrogation into gendered identities.

The prevalence of works of literature set in Saudi Arabia and the UAE suggests that the region served, during the micro-movement, as metaphor for a particular experience. In a 2012 interview with Stephen Elliott at *Rumpus*, Eggers claimed that his novel "isn't really about Saudi Arabia. It takes place there, but it could be any place where American multinationals might be doing business like this". For Eggers, Saudi Arabia is one more outpost in an increasingly globalized world, and his critics agree that his novel is a commentary on the "the death of the globalized salesman" (Iyer). But this begs the question: why not set the novel in Singapore, Hong Kong, or any other international city? For Eggers, Saudi Arabia lends itself particularly well to the mood of loneliness and ineffectuality explored in his novel, which contains the paradox of simultaneous banality and foreignness. While Eggers may claim his setting is relatively inconsequential, reviewers of his work disagree. The Gulf region alone, as this thesis will demonstrate, is able to represent Alan's expatriate melancholy.

Eggers, in the same *Rumpus* interview, goes on to state that Jeddah was an ideal setting due to its "blank landscape, with relatively few buildings and characters" (Elliott), while in the novel Alan claims that his hotel "could have been in Arizona, in Orlando, anywhere" (21). The blankness and inconsequence of the landscape lends itself well to the "weightlessness" (21) that Alan feels. Max Liu, writing for *The Independent* comments that Eggers's "prose [is] as stark and as luminous as its Saudi Arabian setting" (Liu, 'Hologram'). The landscape is a reflection of Alan's state of mind, which is emphasized further with Eggers's use of mimesis. The locations, both the port city of Jeddah and the strange and surreal but real-life King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC)

are essentially monotone spaces: the buildings sand-coloured, the people clothed in uniform. The dullness of the setting allows for the few characters--Alan, Hanne, Zahra, and Yussef--to be highlighted.

KAEC provides the ideal setting for Alan's tale, described by Eggers as "a city that may or may not come to be" (Elliott). It is an odd, arrested space, holding great promise for the future, but delivering on nothing. In KAEC, Eggers finds a parallel for Alan's state of mind, a wasteland of possibility that may or may not come to fruition. Unlike Dubai, which is established as a megacity of international trade and commerce, Jeddah, and Saudi Arabia generally, is still an emerging market and has an element of the promise of the frontier. It is an essentially empty arena in which Alan may find himself.

While Iyer may have agreed with Eggers on his themes of globalization and the collapse of industry, in *The New York Times* he argues for the very pertinence of Eggers's setting, claiming that the "vast empty spaces of the desert stand, of course, for the holographic projections that now determine Alan's and America's destiny" (Iyer).
In "Kafka on the Gulf ", Besser and Van Dijk invoke Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari's concepts of deterritorialization to explain the ennui felt by Alan in a fiction of globalization. Deterritorialization is the idea that the boundaries and relevance of places have been diminished. In *A Hologram for the King*, much of the action takes place in liminal spaces, such as in King Abdullah Economic City, or in Alan's inconsequential and impersonal hotel room, or even in Hanne's empty villa and antiseptic bathroom. By utilizing the concept of deterritorialization, Besser and Dijk essentially argue that the real

work of the novel, *A Hologram for the King,* takes place within blurred spatial boundaries, an allegory for a psychological place of disorientation and meaninglessness.

While the city might reinforce blankness and inconsequence for the expatriate characters, the natural beauty of the Red Sea and the tranquillity of the mountains serve to demonstrate the ease of the two Saudi characters, Zahra and Yussef. Alan and Hanne are at odds with their environment, weakened by the oppressive heat, but Zahra frolics in the sea and Yussef is at ease in the mountains. As Iyer writes, Saudi "is the perfect Other that constantly confounds and defeats its New World Visitors" (Iyer). The landscape, its foreignness, impenetrability, harshness, and paradoxical nature, unsettle the western expatriate while simultaneously reinforcing the authenticity of the Arab locals.

Theo Tait, in a review for *The Guardian*, states, "Setting the story in KAEC was a stroke of genius. It's an Ozymandias-like folly, a desert mirage" It's where "lone and level lands stretch far away" (Shelley). The setting, therefore, is essential to the understanding of the novel as it speaks to a particular kind of isolation for the western expatriate. Only in the mirage of KAEC, itself as unreal as the hologram technology Alan is selling, can his hopes of redemption seem possible. The setting, therefore, is the very reflection of Alan's desperate hopes.

This sense of isolation is paralleled in Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* in the experiences of the male narrator, Dan. Like Alan, Dan is destabilized by his environment. He lives in the decaying Prairie Vista apartments, but "if it weren't for the call to prayer, I'd think I was in Cleveland" (757). However, while the city may have the calming banality of an American city, the very real threat of violence lurks behind the placidity.

While Dan's apartment complex is decrepit enough to be inconsequential, radicals attack the neighbouring compound, Palm Court. The inhabitants are given a "jihadi smile – the toothless, bloody grin that gaped at the base of the throat" (758). Therefore, while Dan may feel comfortable enough in his decaying apartment, he can never fully relax, and he is always going to be a foreigner and so a potential target.

In *In the Kingdom of Men,* the Saudi Arabian setting has similar complexity, combining the "sudden emptiness" (29) of the desert, the manicured lawns and palatial villas of Abqaiq, and the threat of exploding oil rigs and religious violence. *In the Kingdom of Men* functions somewhat differently than the other novels because Gin finds a sense of belonging in "Arabia ", as she calls it. Gin finds the "desert familiar" (27), finds solace in the undulating dunes, especially in contrast to the isolation and unfamiliarity of her compound and the luxuries contained in her house. Gin's story is somewhat different from the tales of the Western expatriate men, each of whom are coping with isolation within a globalized world. Instead of distance, foreignness and stasis, Gin finds her own growth, and maybe even her identity, in the landscape.

The landscape is also crucial for O'Neill's *The Dog* as seen in the parallels drawn between the narrator's experience and the work surrounding him. In this novel, Dubai provides the perfect arena of anonymity that X is seeking to escape responsibility. The city is teeming with expatriates and yet X doesn't really know anyone beyond a handful of people with whom he has superficial relationships. The city seems both glittering and empty, particularly of morality, a paradox that suits X perfectly. In a review for *The Guardian*, Robert Collins criticizes O'Neill's decision to set his tale of existential

reflection in Dubai claiming, “Dubai, superwealth, megacity anomie – they’re just too easy a clutch of targets for [O’Neill’s] talents”. The lack of morality and abundant wealth seem, for Collins, too neat a parallel for X’s depravity and lack of responsibility.

O’Neill uses ironic naming to allude to the particular isolation of expatriates. X lives in an apartment building called “The Situation” which is part of “Privilege Bay”. He lives, essentially, in a glass cage, high above the city. He frequents hotels and malls, yet has no real connection to the environment, the locals, or the land. Dubai is colourless, indistinct, clinical, banal in its wealth, its “undeclared mission is to make itself indistinguishable from its airport” (57), a temporary, inconsequential place.

Dubai is a metaphor for X’s lack of direction. It is the land of “signs to nowhere” (28) that cause any journey to “fizzle out in sand” (28). It is also the land of unfulfilled promise. The luxurious and extortionate apartment block that X lives in was built on the premise that the tallest residential building in the world, “The Astrominium”, would soon be built next door. However, the financial crisis of Dubai halted the idea, and now “Privilege Bay” lies next to a construction site, with the largest man-made hole in the world that contains only a small concrete platform. The barrenness is similar to that of Eggers's KAEC. X keeps “waiting for construction crews to come in and take the project – which I have called Project X – forward to the next stage; it never happens” (24). X has chosen to name this failing project after himself, and, like Alan, his surroundings become a parallel for his own state of mind.

Powell’s *Stoning the Devil* offers a complementary interpretation of the UAE. The setting of the novel-in-stories parallels and seems to reflect the guilt and conflict felt by

the main expatriate character, Colin. A central feature of the landscape is the bar, Lord Jim's. Powell is heavy-handed with his references to colonialism, as is demonstrated in this thesis, and Lord Jim's is no doubt a reference to Joseph Conrad's novel of the same name. Powell uses this intertextual link to highlight Colin's guilt, particularly surrounding his wife, Fayruz.

Powell's work highlights the failure and isolation felt by many of the characters. Colin is an English teacher at "one of the worst universities in the world" (42). He is out of place and overwhelmed, almost suffocated by his difference and by his guilt, as demonstrated in the chapter, "Sentence", which describes the execution of three prisoners. Although the narrator of this section is unnamed, it is presumably Colin, the rather closed-minded expatriate who still sees the *thobes* as nightshirts "even after eight years in the Gulf" (62). The eight-page story is delivered in a single sentence, noting the violence, oppression, ecstasy, and the overpowering smells and sights of the mosque courtyard while yearning for his "apartment, where air conditioning and my books awaited me" (62). Powell paints, in this chapter, Colin's landscape of the mind: conflicted, overwhelmed with beauty, yearning to belong but retaining an academic distance.

The settings of these works provide parallels for the western expatriate facing a crisis of identity. The defining qualities of the different locations are their unfinished, undefined, and indistinguishable future. There still remains the promise of the dream, although there is a certain melancholy and emptiness to that promise. The western expatriate men are at a loss in their environment, using the various construction sites as

sites for their own attempted identity construction, while the female western expatriates find promise in the natural setting. I strongly disagree with Eggers's claim that the setting of his novel could be 'anyplace', and would argue that the locale could only be Saudi Arabia. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE offer a unique landscape that is a study in contrasts: foreign and familiar, bleak but mysterious, empty yet full of promise. Furthermore, as evidenced in Powell's work, the region has a significant legacy with colonialism and particularly the colonization of women. As evidenced in Parssinen's work, there is always in this region the threat of combat with the West, while in O'Neill's work there is the potential for catastrophic failure and immobility.

THE GULF IN CONTEXT

The period in which these books were published is significant, due to their proximity to the Arab Spring. In the years that followed the widespread rebellions and revolutions that began with Tunisia in 2010 much of the Middle East and Northern Africa seemed tipped for transformation. To borrow Eggers's words, the region became a place that "may or may not come to be" (Elliott), a place of potential. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, there seemed a genuine sense of hope for democracy and liberation within the Gulf. There were optimistic visions of the future of Arab women in particular. The micro-movement of expatriate literature set in the Gulf was dependent upon this period of hopeful curiosity. In order to establish this period, I will first explore the geopolitical events and popular media representations of the Gulf leading up to the period of 2012-2014. Then I will explore how hopeful curiosity is manifested within the books,

before turning to the ambiguity in masculinity that is created by pluralistic power and its relation to a specific time.

Representations of the Gulf in the early years of the twenty-first century were of course defined by the events of 11 September 2001 and the actions of Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. In many ways, interest in the Gulf region was created by a backlash against stereotypes and Islamophobia that dominated the early 2000s. In many ways, 9/11 was a paradigm shift for Americans, Muslims, Saudis, and for foreign policy. Immediately following the events, there was a backlash against Muslim-Americans. Film and television villains began to develop Arabic accents and soon there was an outright categorization of Arabs as terrorists, as documented in Jack Shaheen's 2006 *Reel Bad Arabs*.

Peter Berg's 2007 film *The Kingdom* is an excellent representative of attitudes towards the Gulf Region during the period preceding the period of hopeful curiosity. The film is loosely based on the 1996 bombing of a Khobar housing complex and the 2003 bombing of a Riyadh compound. The film was met with mixed reviews, but the majority of critics agree that the representation of Arab men and women, and Saudi nationals in particular, is offensive. The film uses a 'token good guy', as Sharif Nashashibi highlights in his "One Good Arab" critique for *The Guardian.* Overwhelmingly, however, the tone of the film is exceptionally negative. Little to no attempt is made to understand the local women and, aside from Colonel Faris Al-Ghazi who is the 'token good guy', heavy handed, stereotypical Orientalism is used, to the detriment of the film. The film is

indicative of the attitude of the West towards the Gulf region in the years following 9/11, an attitude characterized by distrust, suspicion and fear. *The Kingdom* depicts the heroic voyages of American FBI agents to a hostile and barbaric land and is quite the opposite of the experience depicted by O'Neill, Parssinen, Eggers and Powell. The film characterizes the immediacy of the threat felt after 9/11, defines the early 2000s' treatment of the Gulf in popular media, and has created an enduring representation of Muslims. It is this background of Islamophobia and villainization that was transformed by the Arab Spring.

Perceptions of the Gulf region were altered with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, which began in December of 2010, bringing "optimism and excitement…hope that democratic revolutions would bring freedom and economic growth to a long-troubled region" (Malcom). The Arab Spring began with a symbol of desperation: the self-immolation of street trader Mohamed Bouaziz who could not tolerate his abject poverty. This action was the spark for the region, and the West watched with fear, intrigue, and excitement as regimes across North Africa began to experience rebellion and revolution. The world watched as Libya's Gaddafi toppled, and as Hosni Mubarak succumbed to the wishes of the people of Egypt. Reports of revolution dominated the Western Media and finally there was solidarity with the people of the Middle East. The wave of revolution spread through into the Sinai Peninsula, but, to the West, it appeared to burn out in Syria without crossing into the Gulf and, most notably, without traversing into arguably the most conservative of all Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia.

That is not to say that Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the Gulf, did not feel the spirit of revolution. While the reigning monarch at the time of the Arab Spring, King Abdullah

bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, had a reputation for being progressive and liberal, his bite-sized changes were not enough for the unsatisfied youth population of Saudi Arabia. Indeed from 2011-2012, the country was like a cinder-box waiting for a spark. Shia Muslims in the Eastern provinces began demonstrating for the release of nine men held for years without trial (Almahad) and demanding equal access to jobs and religious freedom (Sullivan).

Media interest in Saudi Arabia during the Arab Spring, and indeed most of the hopeful curiosity felt by media outlets about the kingdom, centred upon the reforms for women. The majority of attention from western media focused on the plight of women, and particularly the right of women to drive, which served and serves as a lightning rod for activists, feminists, and dissenters. It is perhaps the most cited example of Saudi fundamentalism. Manal Al-Sharif led the Woman's Right to Drive campaign, which, much like the protests in Tunisia, was born out of social media, particularly Facebook. She rose to Internet fame with her TED talk (Sharif). A soft-spoken but eloquent, divorced, Saudi mother, Sharif became the face of a revolution after being jailed for nine days for driving in the Kingdom. On 17 June 2011, three weeks after her release from jail, Sharif and others led a mass demonstration urging women to drive in protest of the restrictive laws. No women were arrested as a result of the protest and to the world it seemed that Saudi Arabia, and Saudi Arabian women in particular, were experiencing their own 'spring' of freedom.

Other changes in Saudi Arabia suggested an improvement in the situation for women. In 2011, following the #women2drive movement, King Abdullah announced that

women would have the right to vote in the 2015 municipal elections. There were also publicized steps taken towards equality for women. The most publicized step Abdullah made for Saudi women was the participation of the first Saudi women in the Olympics, which occurred in London 2012 with the participation of Sarah Attar and Wojdan Shaherkani. The coverage of the Saudi Olympians was historic: newspapers globally reported on the standing ovation received by Sarah Attar, who finished a half-minute behind her all of her competitors for the 800m dash (Pells and Graham). Support for Saudi women, therefore, seemed at an all-time high in 2011 and 2012.

2011 also saw the capture and execution of Osama Bin Laden. Suddenly, the West, and the US in particular, seemed to have emerged as the victor with its War on Terror. US President Barack Obama called his death, "the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat Al Qaeda" (Walsh, Nick). With the leader of terrorism and scourge of the free world safely executed, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf appeared less and less treacherous. The Gulf was primed for Western expansion and ready to create a new identity; creating a new appeal for foreign investment. 2011, therefore, brought with it an increasing positivity in the Middle East (particularly in Saudi Arabia) and with it a hopeful curiosity about the region and a significant increase in media representation of the Gulf.

2011 became the year of great hope for the Middle East. With this spirit of optimism came the commercial success of the unlikely film, *Salmon Fishing in Yemen* (dir. Lasse Hallström). The British romantic comedy, based on a 2007 novel of the same name, tells the story of a Yemeni Sheik and his quest to bring the sport of salmon fishing

to Yemen. Starring famous UK actors Ewan McGregor and Emily Blunt, the film was designed to portray the humanism and beauty of the Middle East, even in light of terrorist threats. The Sheik's dream is presented as ludicrous, romantic, and idealistic. While he comes under attack from terrorist organizations and the infrastructure to support the salmon is destroyed, the film is overwhelmingly "saccharine", as Rick Groen states in his review for *The Globe and Mail,* or, if the viewer takes the leap of faith, "sugary goodness". The film ends with the shot of a salmon jumping in the river, indicating that there remained hope and that some salmon have survived.

The film is not, of course, an accurate depiction of Yemeni culture, but rather a conglomeration of palatable and familiar tropes about the Middle East. The film was filmed in Morocco rather than Yemen, and depicts a culture quite different from Yemeni culture. Shatha Al-Harazi, in an article titled "The Film that has Yemen in the title" summarizes these inconsistencies: the film uses the cultural dress of the Saudis and the Arabic accent of the Egyptians (Al-Haraz). The article also documents the reactions of Yemenis to the film. Some Yemeni viewers slated the film for a glaringly offensive depiction of Yemen, with "Yemenis as savages who look at westerners as enemies" (Al-Haraz), while other viewers lamented the cultural inconsistencies. Still other viewers saw the film as positive, stating it contributed to foreign interest in Yemen.

At the time of the film's release, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office had issued a red warning over Yemen discouraging visitors entirely (There's No Salmon), and yet the film's portrayal of Yemen is of a beautiful, if misunderstood, country. Despite the official governmental warnings, the film was so impactful that it changed public

perception of the Middle Eastern country. The Yemen Tourism promotion board, prompted by the "surge in visitors" (There's No Salmon) to the website, even had to release a statement saying that, unfortunately, there are no opportunities for tourists to catch salmon in Yemen, "but there are excellent sea fishing opportunities" (There's No Salmon), according to spokesman Benjamin Carey. This surge of interest is indicative of a hopeful curiosity surrounding the region, even if that hopeful curiosity is born out of cultural inaccuracies and cinematic fantasy.

Another example of the changing attitudes of the West towards the Gulf is the commercial success of 2011's *Sex and the City 2* (dir. Michael Patrick King). This film tells the story of four American women, Carrie, Miranda, Samantha, and Charlotte, who journey to the unlikely location of Abu Dhabi. Scriptwriters claimed to have chosen Abu Dhabi to offset the recession, as it would have been in bad taste to flaunt the extravagant lifestyles of the four women in the faces of movie-goers struggling with the US's financial collapse. Instead of portraying the girls as 'recessionistas' (women who are still fashionable on a limited budget) in New York, it was easier to move the whole operation to a fantastical version of Abu Dhabi. There, an Arab Sheikh, looking to recruit Samantha, pays for an opulent hotel and extravagant excursions for the group. While the women might have to put up with a few unusual customs, they are never in danger of terrorism. Instead, Abu Dhabi's fault is that it is not a haven for sexual indiscretion: the dream of Abu Dhabi is shattered with Samantha's arrest for public fornication. The portrayal of Arab women is not that of oppressive, beaten women or mothers of terrorists. Carrie and her American friends watch the Arab women with fascination, their voyeurism

disparaging and unabashed. In one scene, the girls gaze upon a woman with a *niquab* eating French fries. The Arab women depicted are a grotesque parallel of the American women: they beg for designer clothes and hormone injections. The women sing a strange rendition of "I Am Woman, Hear me Roar" and proclaim, "It's like they don't want them [the women] to have a voice" (*Sex and the City 2*). The flawed film still showcases an extravagant and exotic lifestyle and, while casting America as the perfect foil--the land of the free, displays at least an element of curiosity about the region. Abu Dhabi is "just peachy when it's a fantasy land" (Ali).

In the novels considered in this thesis, a similar optimism is demonstrated, particularly in the representation of women and women's rights. In *A Hologram for the King,* the overall representation of the Gulf is positive, both in the way Alan sees women, and in his belief in the project of King Abdullah Economic City, a megacity whose first stage of completion was scheduled for 2010. While Alan first sees the women in burqas as "shadows" (30), he becomes more hopeful and positive when he is told that at "KAEC, women will have more freedoms" (39). While the Saudi taxi driver, Yousef, is sceptical, "Alan wanted to believe that this kind of thing, a city rising from dust" (39). He holds hope in the success of KAEC, despite the financial difficulties of Emaar, despite the disbelief of those around him, and despite the lack of actual physical progress being made. KAEC therefore becomes the allegory for the great hope, the promise of Saudi Arabia, and its stalled construction a representation of Alan's own stasis.

In *The Dog,* the hope represented seems to have waned. Like *A Hologram for the King, The Dog* is dominated by construction sites and unfulfilled promise, and, coming

on the heels of the very real financial crisis in Dubai, these projects have little chance of completion. The only structure standing at the site of the Astrominium, "the world's tallest residential tower" (23) is a "concrete X that leans onto a cuboid concrete frame"(24), but that too is stalled, with the empty promise that building will begin soon. X, unlike Alan, does not fully believe in the dream, but he is curious as to what it will bring..

In *The Kingdom of Men,* hope is represented in Gin and Mason's idealism, and Gin's infatuation with the Bedouin. As stated previously, in *Stoning the Devil* hope does not lie with the foreign expatriate, who is regulated to a prison of marriage, but rather with the panache of the Arab women, particularly Badria and Randa. While less explicit in terms of direct references to time or place, these books do demonstrate a hopeful curiosity about the Gulf and particularly about the plight of women.

As already shown, there are a number of historical events, such as the presence of Saudi women in the Olympics that would have prompted foreign interest in the region. However, this period of hopeful curiosity also took place at a time in which there was a global contemporary crisis of identity, particularly concerning western masculinities, and the Gulf then became a place in which the battle for masculinity, which may have been lost in the West, could be refought.

There is a long lineage of masculinity being equated with corporate or business success. Men are often defined by their status as breadwinner. In these novels, the men face the crisis of lost industry. In *Gendering the Recession,* Diane Negra argues that "the corporate environment is both a site of power and authority and fundamentally

incompatible with American manhood" (Negra 16). This paradox creates a dissonance within the American man because of the desire to be defined by economic prowess and the shallowness and insufficiency that result from such a definition. This is previously evidenced through machismo of the 1980s and 1990s, and in particular in the vitriolic lunacy of Patrick Bateman from Bret Easton Elis's 1991 *American Psycho* and Tyler Durden in Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 *Fight Club*. For X, the parallels to Bateman and Durden are clear: both Bateman and X abuse women and sex-workers, while both X and Durden live fractured lives, largely in their own heads. The financial largess provided by the Gulf only causes X to be more anti-social. In this case, O' Neill's work, once more, tends to be less hopeful than that of his contemporaries. Instead of offering financial reprieve, X is only optimistic about the Gulf because of the anonymity it could provide him.

However, the dissatisfaction in economic masculinity merely begins there. With the most recent global recession, economic masculinity is even more problematic. Diane Negra asserts that all labour is "becoming feminized – which is to say insecure, flexible, invisible, and/or poorly paid" (7). Men are fighting, but failing, to keep their status as 'breadwinners'. In *A Hologram for the King,* Alan is made obsolete and is massively in debt. He sees the opportunity to sell the hologram technology to the king as a way to rid himself of debts, and cannot return home after he was unable to secure the contract. In *The Ruins of Us*, Dan was unable to find employment in the US and is underemployed in Saudi Arabia. Only X is wealthy, although he finds this wealth meaningless. They have lost the little positive identification that remained available to them. For many men, the

move to the Middle East is an attempt to earn an inflated salary that will result in the resumption of their own masculinity. Both Dan and Alan relocate with this in mind, striving to earn enough money to repurchase their manhood.

These novels seem particularly to be using the idea of potential in the region during the early 2010s as a place to think about gender and sexuality, which is done particularly through gazing and the male gaze. While the Middle East, and particularly the Gulf region, provoked a hopeful curiosity beginning in 2011, caused perhaps by the promise of the Arab Spring and demonstrated by films and literature about the region, the window of optimism seems to have come to a close because no revolution actually took place in the Gulf, and certainly not in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Instead, public discontent was squashed either by monetary payoffs, by imprisonment, or by death (Al-Jazeera). The 2017 inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States categorically closed interest in the Middle East and the Gulf, with Trump soon creating a "Database of Muslims" (Abramson) and a "total and complete shutdown of Muslim immigration following San Bernando attacks" (Pilkington). Hopeful curiosity has been replaced with a stark suspicion, fear and paranoia.

I would argue that *Stoning the Devil, A Hologram for the King, The Ruins of Us, In the Kingdom of Men* and *The Dog* would seem anachronistic if published now. Indeed, their representation of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular seems to belong to a different era. Joseph O'Neill's *The Dog*, in particular, seems to almost straddle optimism and cynicism in its representation and is one of the last examples of American storylines in literature or media set in the Gulf. There are very few films set in the Middle East post

2014. Instead, notable representations of the Arab world include Clint Eastwood's 2014 patriotic film *American Sniper,* set in the US and Iraq*,* and Eastwood's film on the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, *The 15:17 to Paris*, which takes place in France and Morocco. Literature set in the Arab World post 2014 also tends to take place outside of the Gulf, as is done in Derek Miller's 2017 *The Girl in Green,* a novel set in Iraq which discusses the fall-out from war, or in the many narratives surrounding the refugee crisis, such as Moshin Hamid's 2017 *Exit West*. Other novels focus on Syria, such as the historical fiction *Daughter of Sand and Stone* by Libbie Hawker published in 2015. These narratives are not the thoughtful ruminations on a hopeful place for western expatriates; rather they are novels that deal explicitly with violence--war, terrorism, and/or struggle.

The setting of the Gulf States, as already demonstrated, creates a liminal space that has possibility and potential. The period from 2012-2014 similarly is a period of potential. This particular place and time enable these discussions around western masculinity, orientalism, and objectification to occur and result in the creation of a micro-movement of hopeful expatriate literature concerning the gendered identities of western protagonists. It is a time defined by hopeful curiosity about the Gulf, and the collapse of western conceptions of masculinities. In short, this particular time and place is the breeding grounds for literature that questions the positioning of western expatriate men and women within a burgeoning power of the Arab world.

While the previous sections of this chapter have looked both at the geography of setting for its importance and the sociocultural events surrounding the publication of the books in question, this section will now investigate the particulars of the demographic

discussed within these books, the western expatriate. The context of these books is best assessed from a sociological perspective, and in particular through the work of University of Sussex geographer, Katie Walsh, who in a series of publications has focussed on the British diaspora to Dubai, which has proven invaluable for this thesis. Walsh's investigation into the heterosexual sexual and domestic lives of British nationals in Dubai has provided the thematic framework for a particular type of expatriate experience. In this section, I use Walsh's research to define a particular kind of mentality that exists within male western expatriates, which encompasses feelings of superiority, fear, temporariness, and alienation.

The population of GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries is disproportionately composed of expatriates, although the majority of western expatriates settle in the Emirates, and in particular, in Dubai or Abu Dhabi. The Dubai vital statistics website states that the population is composed of 222,875 Emiratis and 2,223,800 non-Emiratis (Dubai Vital Statistics). Of this non-Emirati population, western expatriates are actually a very small proportion, and, as mentioned earlier, they are set up in a binary with the "foreign workers", which is a more derogatory moniker given to migrants who have come from particularly India and Pakistan. Western expatriate is a self-constructed and accepted designation for expatriates living within the Middle East that creates a social group to the exclusion of the foreign workers and the local Arab population, while also enforcing the connotation of western expansion steeped in traditions of UK imperialism of the past. This contributes to the implicit feelings of superiority felt by many western expatriates.

To a certain extent, the term 'western expatriate' almost always connotes a male. While many women are employed in the Gulf, particularly in teaching and nursing, the ratio of male to female expatriates is unbalanced. In 2016, men made up 63% of the western expatriate population in the UAE and 76% in Saudi (Expats). The majority of western expatriate women are in the UAE and Saudi Arabia as what Katie Walsh refers to as "trailing spouses" (Emotion and Migration 46): unemployed women who follow their high-earning spouses. There is a significant population of single white British or American females who typically work in either teaching or nursing, but these women tend to be a more transient population than the western male expatriates. Furthermore, in terms of literary representation, these women are portrayed by a particular brand of Gulf "Chick Lit" such as *Desperate in Dubai*. While it would be of value to investigate the literature focused on the single white expatriate female, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is valuable in the present context to investigate the demographics of married female expatriates.

To define the male expatriate experience in Dubai is to define a specific type of financial and existential malaise. While the median age of expatriates in Dubai is twenty-seven (Pearson), within the demographic of western male expatriates, there are two distinct types of male: the single young man who comes to seek his fortune and leapfrog into an early advancement of his career, aged roughly twenty-four to thirty-five (Walsh It Got Very Debauched 513), and the "downturn dodger", a term I have coined to refer to a man of 35-60 who is attempting not to jump-start his career but to revitalize it. Walsh documents this particular demographic in "Migrant Masculinities". Some move to the

UAE “out of desperation” like 62-year-old Brendan Doris, who relocated from Ireland (Khaleeli). In the books studied in this thesis, the majority of male narrators are in at least their mid or late forties, as made clear by their adult-age children. X is in a slightly different demographic than the other male narrators of these books, being in his mid-30s.

While western expatriates make up a very small percentage of the population of Gulf countries, their position is an entitled one within a very specific hierarchy. In *The Telegraph,* Justin Harper writes:

> a Western expat in Saudi Arabia is paid on average six per cent more than an Arab expat and almost 30 per cent more than an Asian one. Westerners sit top of the tree in all Gulf countries, while Asian expats are the lowest paid across the region.

This article quotes Singapore-based Achieve Group CEO, Joshua Yim, stating that this ascribing of superiority to white males is a hangover from colonial days, with Westerners as the colony’s master. This structure is reinforced by the mutually exclusive identification of the different groups. The foreign workers often work in service or domestic industries, as janitorial staff, servers or secretaries. Often, the majority of those they serve are western expatriates. This leads to a culture of entitlement in the western expatriate that is exacerbated by an influx of wealth and access to such services as inexpensive cleaning and nanny services. It is very common for expatriates to employ domestic help (Cleaning and Maids) and it is a rarity for single expatriate men to live without domestic assistance, as evidenced in X’s narrative of Dubai. Since the majority, if not all, of domestic labour is female, this also sets up a power relationship between western expatriates and foreign females that rests on and reinforces western male dominance. The western expatriate experience is one of isolation and privilege.

Most downturn dodgers are middle class and upper-middle class, with jobs in construction, finance or teaching. Hailing from middle management at home or following recent layoffs in professions most deeply affected by the recession, these men seek recuperation of masculinity through financial success. They may have left behind wives or ex-wives (they may be recently separated or divorced), as is the case with the majority of male narrators studied in this thesis, or have brought their trailing spouses with them. Alan in *A Hologram for the King* is an almost perfect example of the downturn dodger. Alan travels to Saudi Arabia after the financial collapse of his bicycle company, Schwinn, in order to sell an ambiguous hologram technology to the King. All the male western expatriate narrators in the four novels of the five studied are, to some extent, downturn dodgers.

Immigration to the Gulf region has been significantly affected by the global economic crisis. After the collapse of the US housing market, specific industries faced large-scale layoffs in the USA in "construction, financial services, manufacturing and travel-related services" (Martin P). These markets were booming in the Gulf at the time of economic collapse in the USA and UK and provided jobs for recently unemployed American and British businessmen. Those who came to the Gulf in 2011-2012 avoided the recession by accepting life in the Gulf. They are financially rewarded: 89% of western Gulf expatriates say they have more disposable income in the Gulf than in their countries of origin (BQ Magazine), and often do far less work. Expatriates also are often underemployed in their work and given positions as figureheads of companies.

In *A Hologram for the King*, Alan flees the collapse of Schwinn to sell Hologram technology in Saudi Arabia, which amounts to a lot of waiting around. *The Dog*'s X, a fairly high-profile lawyer, is employed as a glorified child-minder in Dubai, while Colin of *Stoning the Devil,* once an idealistic aid worker, is now a lacklustre English professor at "the worst university in the world" (188), and Dan in *The Ruins of Us* is employed unsuccessfully in an indistinct company. In each case, the western expatriate experience is defined by an increase in financial gains and possibly even a more impressive title, and yet in each case the work being done is of little to no consequence.

Furthermore, while financial freedom is promised with relocation to the Gulf, the fear of failure of realizing this dream is omnipresent. While Saudi Arabia has remained relatively wealthy throughout the recession, Dubai and the Emirates faced their own recessions. The collapse of oil prices affected the demographics of expatriates to a certain extent, but the attempts at diversification by the UAE and Saudi Arabia have proved effective. In Dubai, ambitious projects such as Dubailand have been indefinitely halted, while other construction projects such the Mall of the World have been delayed. This is referenced in O'Neill's work, *The Dog*, with the revelation that the neighbouring apartment complex "The Inspiration" would remain a construction pit, and therefore be an eyesore, metaphorically reflecting the indistinct and impermanent nature of an identity forged within Dubai's landscape. Therefore, while the Gulf promised an escape from the recession, the fantasy is soon shattered. This fracture is evident as each protagonist experiences less than the promised dream.

The experience of a western expatriate in Dubai is, according to Walsh, an experience of living in "an in-between, inter-cultural space" ("British Expatriate Belongings" 125). In 2013, the average length of an expatriate stay in Dubai was 8.7 years (Al Awad), which, while a substantial length of time, is still not a permanent move. Male expatriate workers in the Gulf do not easily feel connected to their temporary homes and jobs, and attempt to create a sense of belonging through domestic acts, such as watering plants, or repainting a kitchen (Walsh, "Migrant Masculinities" 525) or through a series of objects, as catalogued in "British Expatriate Belongings". Since Emirati and Saudi nationality is impossible for expatriates to secure, the expatriate will always retain the identity of a foreigner.

While western expatriates are often motivated to relocate to the UAE due to reduced employment opportunities in the US and UK, there is also increased competition from foreign nationals, a fear expressed in *A Hologram for the King* when Alan's company is undercut and outbid by a group of Chinese businessmen. This contributes to the anxieties of the British expatriate, and when unexpected layoffs or redundancies occur (Kovessy), expatriates often have to leave their residences rapidly or face problems with immigration. Therefore, there is both a reluctance to set down roots and an impossibility of doing so. Without gainful employment, an expatriate will have no choice but to leave the region. Every employee is now replaceable and there is a very quick turnaround in staff (Education in the Middle East). Collapse in oil prices has exacerbated this phenomenon and added to the fear of sudden dismissal. In *The Dog,* O'Neill makes

references to abandoned luxury cars left to accumulate dust and sand when their owners flee to their countries of origin.

In both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, western expatriates live mostly in isolated and homogeneous compounds, where there exist micro-communities, particularly for married couples or families. Barnes's Ginnie and Mason live in such a compound, as does Powell's Colin. Conversely, the "business man", such as Alan or X is solitary and has a lack of interaction with social groups; his habitat is often a bland if luxurious apartment or hotel suite. Social interactions are defined by impermanence and inconsequence, often centred on drinking culture. Dubai provides an impermanent life of excess through its access to financial wealth and extravagant nightlife, and this is paralleled in Saudi Arabia. While little concrete data is available for illicit activities in Saudi Arabia, in Walsh's work in particular, and on social blogs such as *Blue Abaya* (Alho) or *Susie in Arabia* (Khalil*),* there is evidence of a particularly debauched lifestyle within the expatriate circles centred on embassy or consulate events or house parties in extravagant compounds where western women have no problem getting invited (Wild Parties). These events serve homemade alcohol, either hard liquor or wine, which is of varying strength and taste. Expatriates may make drinking a sort of hobby and it is not uncommon for expatriate men to develop into alcoholics (Walsh, "It Got Very Debauched"). While alcohol is still technically illegal in Saudi Arabia and drinking or distributing alcohol is punishable by severe sentences, such as the 2015 imprisonment and flogging of Australian expatriate Peter Mutty (Bens), most authorities turn a blind eye towards the activities of expatriates, ignoring the subversive drinking culture as long as it does not involve Saudis, and Saudi

women in particular (Cacciottolo). This situation is explored in Eggers's work, in which Alan visits an embassy party and is confronted with a Bacchanalian subculture. Once more, the western expatriate is placed in a privileged and isolated society, which may account for the propensity of such expatriates to develop a superiority complex, particularly in dealing with foreign women, both the Arab women and the Eastern European women mentioned in the novels.

Walsh's article "It Got Very Debauched, Very Dubai!" highlights the night-time revelry prevalent in Dubai, particularly for young single expatriates. She comments that an abundance of social interactions are fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption: "Drunken performances of heterosexuality by single Britons in Dubai seem not to have attracted the attention of the English-language media" (Walsh). Walsh points out that there is a greater interest among UK expatriates in going out for entertainment in Dubai than in corresponding groups in the UK, which is perhaps due to the increased income of the expatriate subject. Drinking is the favoured pastime of a significant number of expatriates. This social habit is demonstrated in the literary works here studied: the champagne-fuelled brunches in O'Neill's *The Dog* and in the dominance of the bar Lord Jim's in Powell's *Stoning the Devil.* This drinking culture is paralleled in Saudi, but perhaps the pattern is even more prevalent due to the extreme lack of available recreational activities in a country where even movie theatres are banned. This lifestyle is by no means healthy and the level of consumption of alcohol is associated with excess and debauchery. Walsh argues that for those expatriates living this way, connections with

each other can be tenuous as most friendships and other social groups are usually centred on the excessive consumption of alcohol.

Walsh also points out that many of the interactions between men and women in Dubai are characterized by anonymity and temporariness. In a number of interviews with single females, Walsh uncovered issues of fidelity: men have sex with girls in Dubai but have serious relationships at home ("It Got Very Debauched") often with a long-term girlfriend or wife. For single male Britons, the majority of encounters with the opposite sex that Walsh examined did not lead to the beginning of relationships but took place in isolated, alcohol-fuelled incidences. Walsh concludes that the transnational character of the city and its transient population precludes the possibility of establishing long-term committed relationships and that the very culture of the western expatriate is defined by temporary excess. Walsh argues that prostitution in Dubai's nightlife is the extreme of casual and transient sexual relationship. In her research, Walsh also notes the disparity and difference between the lives of British male singletons in Dubai and married counterparts, who do not even frequent the same establishments. The single, transient nature of the country is perhaps demonstrated best in the obsession that O'Neill's X has for Mrs Ted Wilson, the only demonstration of fidelity in an environment characterized by carelessness and disposability. In *The Ruins of Us*, Abdullah and Dan visit Bahrain, an island kingdom often frequented by Saudi nationals and expatriates vacationing away from the Kingdom's stringent laws surrounding alcohol. In a bar in Bahrain, Dan is disgusted by the behaviour of two young Arab women who are flirting brazenly with Abdullah. Like X, Dan appears critical of promiscuity engaged in by those around him.

The majority of books in this thesis discuss the single male expatriate experience, with only Barnes's work negotiating the role of a trailing spouse. However, the behaviours of single Western expatriate women are significant for their impact on expatriate men. Significantly, single female Britons in Dubai seem to mimic traditionally 'male' behaviour on a night out, engaging in temporary flirtations or affairs, but not considering long-term futures with any one person they meet. Walsh, in her interviews with single British females, uncovers their awareness of their own promiscuity and its attached loneliness while demonstrating reluctance to stop such behaviour. While both male and female "Western Expatriates" desire more significant connections, Walsh argues that the nature of Dubai as a "landscape of desire" precludes this possibility, and as a result, males and females are left estranged and isolated from each other. This reality is evidenced throughout Eggers, Powell, Parssinen, Barnes and O'Neill's novels.

Married couples demonstrate a similar lack of satisfaction in their relationships. As Walsh notes in "Migrant Masculinities and Domestic Space", the relocation to Dubai often means a dramatic shift in power dynamics within a marriage. Often, expatriate males are the lead migrants, and their wives are trailing spouses, who often do not work. Walsh describes these spouses as being 'redomesticated', with the marriage now becoming more traditional and in alignment with traditional gender roles. The trailing spouses are no longer equal partnerships in their marriages, and therefore they often turn to female relationships within a compound setting in order to receive company and support that is no longer found within their marriage. This is evident for Barnes's Gin, who develops close relationships with Linda and Ruthie, while becoming further

estranged from her husband and remaining so up to his death. It is slightly different for Rosalie, who exists outside of expatriate circles, save for Dan, and whose marriage to a Saudi exempts her from compound life. In Powell's *Stoning the Devil,* sisters-in-law Fayruz and Nadia develop a close relationship during times of drinking gin at Lord Jim's, while in *In the Kingdom of Men*, Gin and Ruthie drink all manner of alcohol while their husbands are away on the oil rig.

In Walsh's work, there are anecdotal responses from British married women who lament the absence of their husbands and spousal disengagement from the familial home. There is also an added pressure on the economic earning power of the expatriate male in Dubai due to the hierarchy of earning. Salaries are scrutinized in social groups: the greater the earning power, the higher the masculinity. The lead expatriate's purchase of material goods transforms objects into props for the assertion of masculine identity while the trailing spouse in essence becomes another symbol of wealth. However, these goods are often placed exclusively within a feminine space, the domesticated home, and the husband may feel a lack of connection with the home, his earnings and his spouse. With expatriate men becoming more and more alienated from their domesticated homes, they also become alienated from the projections of their masculinity. Since the domestic space is now incongruent with their masculine identity, they, like their spouses, turn to social groups in order to affirm their identity. For expatriate men, this results in a ritual of male bonding and, commonly, drinking, and may lead to temporary relationships with women as a way to reaffirm dominance. This spousal estrangement is evident in Powell's work in the boredom and discontent that Fayruz feels, in Colin's disengagement from the family

home and casual use of sex-workers and mistresses, and in the alcohol-ridden disillusion felt by both. In *In the Kingdom of Men*, spousal estrangement is exemplified by the numerous 'double-dates' with Mason and Gin and Lucky and Ruthie, in which the latter couple acts as a buffer for the latter. The presence of Lucky and Ruthie eases the process of Mason's reintroduction to married life. These outings, often centred on alcohol consumption, take the pressure off the marriage.

The above sections demonstrate the significance of expatriate novels about the Gulf in both place and time, while also defining what it means to be a western expatriate either as the lead migrant or as the trailing spouse. I have demonstrated the existence of a micro-period referred to as the period of hopeful curiosity. The aim of this next section is to set up a theoretical framework for thinking about the gender relations within this period of hopeful curiosity and in particular to discuss how the viewing of female bodies is used in the creation or recreation of identity for western expatriates.

THE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN AS MIRRORS

As I have previously stated, the narrators of these books are all seeking an affirmation of their own identity. I would claim that each narrator attempts to use gazing and othering of women in particular as a way to reaffirm, or recast, his or her own identity. In the books studied within this thesis, the main characters find themselves in Saudi Arabia or the UAE with their identities fractured or stripped away. Alan and Dan are both struggling financially and both are divorced, Colin is emasculated and underemployed, X has been humiliated and ostracized, Rosalie has felt the collapse of her marriage, and Gin has been confronted with her infertility. Each narrator is searching for

a new purpose or new identity. While Colin, Rosalie, and Gin are married, they feel increasingly distant from their spouses as the books progress. Alan, Dan, and X are entirely alone for long periods. Without familiar social mirrors, within a somewhat alien landscape, and with a relatively blank slate, the characters need an anchor to which to tie meaning. Women's bodies become the site of this identity seeking, which will be demonstrated in this section. These novels seem particularly to use the idea of potential in the early 2010s as an opening to think about gender and sexuality, shown mostly through gazing and specifically through the male gaze.

In each of the books in this thesis, the identity of the characters is in part created through looking upon women's bodies. Mulvey's concept of *the male gaze* is instrumental for this argument. While Mulvey founded her theories in critiquing cinema in 1975, I believe they are still pertinent even to the study of literature in the 2010s due to the significance of looking and how this relates to both ownership and identity. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Mulvey defines the male gaze as a particular phenomenon in cinema in which both male actors and the audience gaze upon the bodies of women and objectify them. For Mulvey, the male gaze is symbolic of female oppression, and, at its core, both dismissive of women and indicative of "the way the unconscious of the patriarchal society has structured the film form" (803). To contextualize her argument, Mulvey invokes Sigmund Freud's castration complex to create a "political means of psychoanalysis". For Mulvey, the male gaze ultimately speaks of the deep insecurity of the subject, who in gazing upon the object (the female) is able to reassert his own masculinity and therefore his identity and dominance over the

female. This deep insecurity of the subject is evident in each of the narrators, who are somewhat adrift and needing to tie their identity, and to a certain extent, their idea of superiority, to something. Mulvey would call this an attempt to escape castration anxiety, which can be accomplished by "the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery) counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object"(454). In essence, castration anxiety can be evaded by a process either of uncovering or objectifying the female body and enacting punishments upon it. Here Mulvey's word 'investigating' could refer to the removal of veils, which is particularly pertinent for this discussion in the way in which Alan in particular is desirous to undress Zahra.

While Mulvey's work is reflective of a particular place and time in gender relations, the male gaze still exists as seen in popular media today. Critics such as Kelly Oliver have argued that it is more dominant and prevalent in contemporary films than ever before, citing the widespread availability of pornography and social media culture as contributing factors. Oliver states that pornography use is so prevalent, particularly by young males, that most male-female encounters are coloured by objectification. This is also reflected in the literature I explore, particularly in *The Dog* through X's insatiable appetite for pornography and dismissal of most women within his life. Thus the male gaze has evolved and arguably become more nebulous and widespread.

The male gaze, under Mulvey's conception, limits, defines and categorizes an object. Mulvey asserts that the male gaze relies on the medium of cinema, stating that "only in film" (454) do such opportunities for male gazing and audience identification

and participation arise. Elizabeth Grosz echoes many of Mulvey's ideas in *Volatile Bodies* (1994), arguing that the body, and particularly the female body, is a site of battle for establishing gender order. She argues that a woman's body will always be "a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power" (19). However, while Mulvey explored the use of the body in cinema, Grosz explores the use of the female body in literature and art, and comments upon its significance as a "signifying medium" (Grosz 13). The male narrators of *Stoning the Devil, A Hologram for the King, The Dog, In the Kingdom of Men* and *The Ruins of Us* are obsessed with looking, and particularly on looking upon female bodies. Colin gazes' upon Fayruz and Kamila, Alan gazes upon Zahra and Hanne, X looks upon sex-workers, pornography, and Mrs Ted Wilson, while Dan gazes upon Rosalie. These women are all described as appealing to the male gaze; to quote Mulvey, they "displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (453-453).

Judith Butler has a complementary theory to Mulvey's male gaze, as put forward in her introduction to *Frames of War,* which is unified in the manner in which it discusses objectification. This work opens with Butler's central thesis, that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" (1). For Butler, there is a crucial distinction between apprehension (the lesser) and recognition, a term which for Butler ultimately signifies 'personhood'. Apprehending a life "can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition" (Butler 5). To apprehend a life is to look upon it without fully understanding the nature of the look or the nature of the life. Recognition, on the other hand, is, according to Hegel's *Phenomenology of*

Spirit, a reciprocal relationship between two subjects, in which each subject is able to determine its worth in comparison to the other. The frame of the male gaze is static and domineering: it is subjugation, which is what Butler terms 'apprehension'. Therefore, the male gaze becomes a frame – a way of seeing which denies the personhood of the object with the effect of making the subject more dominant. In all the novels in this thesis, gazing is used to create objects as sexual or Oriental to the reader In this way, the subject (generator) of the gaze, adrift and emasculated, is using the potential of the Gulf, its promise, as a space in which to gaze upon objects so as to create or recreate an identity.

The discussion of the male gaze and the apprehension or recognition of a body will become the subject of the second chapter of this thesis, which is concerned with the way that these novels use the Gulf as an arena in which hegemonic masculinity can be enacted. However, as much as these works discuss the idea of objectification and the promise it holds for the main characters, they are much more concerned with the uselessness of these tropes. In these novels, objectification is presented as a temporary, desperate attempt to create or recreate a gendered identity. At the end of these novels, the objectification of women is no longer sustainable. Faced with the recognition of an object, the male narrators are forced either to adapt or to languish.

Mulvey discusses another alternative, which is the "turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (451). This will be discussed further in the third chapter of the thesis. As such, the bumbling narrators cast the Arab women in these novels as fetish objects in an attempt to prop up their own identity. The women's veils become loaded cultural and gendered symbols, representative

of a type of exoticism. They appear to the narrators to need saving. They frolic in watery grottos. However, this fetishized representation is interrogated, to some extent, by each of the authors. Alan's attempts to orientalise Zahra in *A Hologram for the King* are laughable. Colin is demonstrably punished for his attempt to orientalise Fayruz in *Stoning the Devil*. However, in the case of the female Orientalist, Gin, the trope is much less interrogated. Nadia, even in death, is an exotic sexualized symbol in *In the Kingdom of Men*.

As such, each of the novels engage with the idea of Orientalism, with, at the hands of Eggers and Powell, some thoughtfulness. The authors are demonstrating that the Gulf, or the Orient, has previously existed as a site of imperialist orientalist fantasy through the objectification of female bodies. In this new era of hopeful curiosity, however, the orientalised Arab women are able to speak back to that stereotype (albeit through Western authors). As such, it appears that both Eggers and Powell are using female bodies to demonstrate the promise of a new era of gender relations in the Gulf.

The female major characters in these books also seem, to a certain extent, to appropriate the male gaze, which is discussed in the fourth chapter. In *In the Kingdom of Men*, Gin's gaze lingers on both her close friends and her adversaries. In this case, the gaze is tied up with creation of a social group, defined by its subscription to a particular type of femininity. The gaze is also used in *The Ruins of Us*, and there becomes part of a paradoxical competitive and admiring gaze. Crucially though, in these cases, beauty and sexuality become wrapped up in a woman's understanding of power relationships within a female community. This kind of gazing is particularly relevant to the Gulf due to the

strict gender segregation that results in incredibly close female friendships, which often serve as stand-ins to heterosexual relationships. This is particularly true when the woman is, as Gin and her friends are, a trailing spouse, whose working husband is relatively absent. The male gaze therefore is somewhat appropriated by a female subject; sexuality and sexual allure become currency of power and identity in a homogeneous female environment.

The fourth chapter of this thesis explores the queer gaze, highlighting the way in which Gin gazes rather longingly at the bodies of her friends and of Nadia. This section of the thesis is prompted by the idea that the Gulf, and in particular, the compound, provides a kind of promise as a "queer time and space", removed from heteronormative milestones and pressures. Within this window of relative sexual freedom, Gin has intimate access to a number of women, all of whom she seems to lust after with varying effect. The women's bodies therefore become, rather than mirrors as they are for the male narrators, windows through which Gin can explore her burgeoning sexuality. The queer gaze, therefore, is contingent upon Gin's position within such a "queer time and space" to quote Halberstam as the Gulf.

The study of female bodies and the gazing upon female bodies by both men and women is related to gender politics and power balance. As Grosz states, "Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities' ' (19). The gazing upon women in the five books in this thesis is almost unilaterally an attempt on behalf of the narrator to comfortably situate himself or herself in a power order or to demonstrate a certain kind of identity. Crucially, however,

none of these gazes are successful in outlining a new identity for either the male or female characters. At the close of each work, the western expatriate narrator remains at somewhat of a loss, with varying degrees of punishment or promise. The fate of each narrator is tied up, it seems, with their understanding of their own obsolescence, particularly concerning the gaze. Powell's Colin, who has orientalised his wife and children, is left with a noose around his neck; O'Neill's X, who has mastered the art of objectification, is left completely immobilized; while more optimistically Egger's Alan still awaits the King and Parsinnen's Dan returns to Texas and to his wife.

It is important to consider the significance of the publication of these books within a feminist context. The books are all published on the cusp of fourth-wave feminism, which seeks to build on the intersectional ideology of third-wave feminism. The fourth-wave of feminism consists largely of young, technologically-able women operating in western countries. In short, the fourth-wave could be represented by the daughters of the male characters in these books. The daughters' criticisms of their fathers are therefore all the more timely, their fathers' out-dated objectification and orientalism all the more troubling, and the aging western expatriate all the more obsolete. In reading the bodies of women, these protagonists have tried to hold on to their hegemonic power, but as has been shown, they have to adapt and change to survive in a future that does not fully belong to them.

This thesis is in part a discussion of how identity is constructed through gender and gazing, but it is about more than a convergence of contemporary terms of masculinities and discursive history surrounding orientalism for these books also examine

the material reality of the type of communities these novels are about. The authors of these books speak to a particular gestalt contained in two years in two countries: the idea of western expatriate masculinity as being out-dated and silly at best, damaging and imprisoning at the worst. In shutting down the obsolescent narrators, the books also speak to potential. The Gulf, during this micro-movement is a region of promise, a place where a new gendered future could still come into being. As Besser and Van Dijk claim, “the global future is not white or male”. By shutting down the outdated tropes of objectification and orientalism, the authors of these books present a space for a potential pluralistic, and arguably more equitable, future.

II: OBJECTIFICATION: WOMEN, MIRRORS, AND EPIPHANIES

In order to begin an investigation into objectification within these novels of expatriate experience, it is important to understand the critical framework of masculine hegemony. Antonio Gramsci's ideas of hegemony were reinterpreted by R.W. Connell and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill to apply to masculinity. The two theorists used Gramsci's philosophy, taken from his *Prison Notebooks*, to explain the dominance of a certain brand of masculinity in Western culture. While masculinities can be defined by the power relation of one masculinity to another, in essence masculinities are at their crux forged through gender dominion. R.W. Connell states in "The History of Masculinity" that, "to speak of masculinities is to speak about gender relations. Masculinities are not equivalent to men; they concern the position of men in a gender order" (186). The existence of masculinity therefore depends upon the subjugation of women and the subjugation of feminine behaviours.

Connell popularized the term hegemonic masculinity so as to refer to "a form of masculinity that gains ascendancy at a time or in a place and to which other forms are subordinate" (Benyon 162). For Connell, hegemonic masculinity depends upon the subservience of women. What emerges is a pyramidal hierarchy with the 'model' of hegemonic masculinity at the top, followed by other masculinities and, lastly, by women. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally inspired by male anxiety and the men are aspiring to emulate a model of masculinity and machismo that, while changeable depending upon the cultural climate, normally rests in physical strength and earning ability. Misogyny and homophobia, therefore, are products of the anxiety of a

subordinate masculinity, the man who is seeking to attain a higher position within the hierarchy by distinguishing himself from the lower tiers of the pyramid in order to create an identity that is agreeable to him.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf elucidates the role that women play in hegemonic masculinity, stating that "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice his natural size" (loc 27548). The dominance over women, therefore, is essential to a man's promotion within the pyramidal hegemony of masculinity. By denigrating the female, the man is able to enlarge his image, and therefore to gain traction in ascending the pyramidal structure. As Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Women Born*, "the woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected" (14). Therefore, it is crucial for the man to turn a woman into a static, reflective object. Through the mistreatment of women, man can become a master. By buying, overpowering, controlling, or rejecting a woman-as-object, man can alter his reflection, and therefore attempt to transform his own identity.

To make a woman into a mirror she must be unmade as a person, which means essentially that she must simply become the physical space her flesh takes up: she must become an object. Martha Nussbaum's *Objectification* outlines the criteria for objectification, delineating "Instrumentality, Denial of autonomy, Inertness, Fungibility, Violability, Ownership and Denial of subjectivity". For the purposes of this investigation, it is important to unpack each of Nussbaum's criteria.

Instrumentality is the idea that women's bodies can be used as utensils to accomplish a specific aim, and as such, their value lies in their ability to accomplish the

aim identified by the user. A woman's body, therefore, is merely a vehicle for male desire, and the components of her sexuality are simply a means to the ultimate end, which is ejaculation. Denial of autonomy refers to the denial of any ownership of a person-as-object over his/her own desires. Inertness refers to the lack of movement or motion of a person-as-object, as if only coming to life at the hands of the subject. Fungibility refers to the idea that one person-as-object is interchangeable for another; that objects can be substituted and are therefore never unique. Violability refers to the idea that a person-as-object can easily have harm inflicted upon it, that they can be smashed-into with no consequence; that they are not grievable. The term Ownership implies that a subject will be able to purchase a person-as-object body and therefore controlit. The last category, Denial of subjectivity, implies that a person-as-object has no unique perspective, but rather is effaced. The object does not have its own motivations or own feelings, but rather is dependent upon the subject. These criteria contribute to and create the objectification of women.

In *Sexual Solipsism*, Rae Langton added three more features to Nussbaum's list, which results in ten components of objectification:

8. *reduction to body*: the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts;
9. *reduction to appearance*: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses;
10. *silencing*: the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak

While the criteria for objectification are delineated, there are overlaps and commonalities in their application. In each of these criteria, the woman-as-object is denied personhood and is thus dehumanized.

In Andrea Dworkin's polemic, *Pornography,* she sums up as so: "Male supremacy depends on the ability of men to view women as sexual objects" (203). Through the criteria described by Nussbaum and Langton, the woman-as-object ceases to be a person and becomes simply an extension of male desire. Women's bodies therefore become the site for identity reconstruction.

It is necessary to examine Nussbaum and Langton's criteria in order to examine the methods, and ends, of female sexual objectification. The ten criteria can be grouped into three categories with overlapping criteria, the first being objectification or the reduction of women to her sexual parts. The second grouping refers to the effacing of women's individuality and encompasses the silencing of her voice and movement to create a fungible instrument, which I will call effacement. The third grouping concerns a man's mastery over woman, which is evident in the devaluation or boycott of bodies while encompassing the links between objectification and capitalism. These three groupings will be discussed in the first section of this chapter.

While these three groupings are an avenue to discuss the objectification of women's bodies within the literature discussed and the way in which objectifying female bodies can bolster the identity of the subject, there are moments where the objectification of women's bodies fails. Daughters are particularly problematic for the objectifying male. In addition, sometimes the object in question speaks, fights back, or somehow resists sexual

objectification. In this case, the subject of the gaze (the one doing the gazing) experiences a kind of mild 'epiphany' concerning the gender order and their own identity within it, although often this can contribute to the collapse or immobility of the central narrator. These considerations make up the second section of this chapter, which is concerned with problematizing sexual objects.

Sexual objectification is particularly important for the understanding of the works under study as it is related to power dynamics and hegemonic masculinity. As demonstrated previously, the men in these novels are rendered in some way impotent, through devalued employment or sexual or romantic humiliation. As such, each grapple with reasserting himself using the outdated tropes of hegemonic masculinity. Crucially, these tropes are made in the text as mostly ridiculous, and as a result, the characters frequently interrogate the tropes of objectification. In the case of *The Dog*, which dominates the analysis in this chapter, objectification is pursued *ad nauseum*, so that the narrator becomes both morally repulsive and desperately pathetic. His treatment of women is therefore a parallel to his state of mind – his objectification of women represents his desire to cling to his failing masculinity, while his eventual epiphany demonstrates the (limited) growth he has made and his own irrelevance. Similarly, in *The Ruins of Us*, *Stoning the Devil* and *A Hologram for the King*, men use the bodies of women as anchors for a faltering identity, facing a mild epiphany when this anchoring, due to their own outdated conception of women, fails. As such, the novels in this section largely interrogate the tropes of sexual objectification, demonstrating the changing landscape of gender politics on a global scale.

In “It Got Very Debauched”, Walsh argues that the Gulf, but Dubai in particular, is a nexus of what she terms “transient heterosexuality” (508), which means “frequent sexual encounters with successive partners” (508). For Walsh, this is due to the fact that Dubai has become a “landscape of desire” (508) as a result of its qualities of a “holiday-like space” (508). Walsh’s study documents the many single Britons who use their move to the Gulf as an opportunity to “escape domesticated intimacy” (509), which fact is crucial to this thesis as each male narrator is fleeing a failed relationship. Most of the protagonists of these novels are single, existing outside what Walsh deems the “particular performance of heterosexuality caught up with notions of family, home and domesticity” (509). Only Colin is married, but his philandering with students and prostitutes exists outside the spheres of domesticity. In this thesis, X in particular acts out what Walsh determines, a “transgressive sexuality” (508) due to his sex addiction, while Colin’s need for approval results in him seeking affection from his students and a sex-worker. The other narrators, Alan and Dan, are far less transgressive in their sexuality, although Dan does commit the taboo of lusting after his best friend’s wife.

The setting of the Gulf as a particular place and the particular time of 2012-2014 are also paralleled in the presentation of sexual objectification in these books. In each novel, the protagonist is a kind of obsolete character: an outdated ‘type’ of man who perhaps embodies the qualities of hegemonic masculinity from a previous time. In each of the works, this outdated brand of masculinity is interrogated, and to a certain extent, dismantled, demonstrating that the global future does not lie in the hands of middle-aged white men but instead lies perhaps in the hands of those previously objectified.

SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION

Joseph O'Neill's narrator, X, is arguably a likeable, although somewhat pedantic, narrator. He frequently makes the reader laugh. He seems to be kind to the boy he looks after and seems decent enough to his fellow man, yet has one glaring flaw--his relationship with women. He is a misogynist, which appears at odds with his humanitarian efforts, and as such, his obsession with pornography and prostitution is incredibly jarring for the reader and is indicative of a cognitive dissonance prevalent in the minds of the contemporary man who, like Dubai, has the façade of respectability but in reality is beset with a host of corruptions.

In the novel, X is one of few Americans in Dubai, a place that "a person usually needs a special incentive to be – or, perhaps, more accurately, to not be elsewhere" (3). X is in self-imposed exile. He is fleeing the emasculation he faced in New York. X is made impotent as a result of the dissolution of his and Jenn's relationship. He is ridiculed at work by other women in the company, and when he walks into a room, he is often met with "sudden scattering of women and the stifling of their laughter" (17). The men employed at the office choose to ostracize X, giving him a "hostile look" (16) or worse, and they treat him with "weirdly chirpy and compliant standoffishness that is usually reserved for crazy neighbors, bores, people with halitosis, etc." (221). Crucially, this behaviour is not explicitly damaging to his employment or social life. Instead, X's reputation is explicitly tarnished, which he cannot abide. When X types his own name into a search engine, the suggested searches next to his name include:

attorney
sexual harassment
embezzlement
tiny cock

X believes Jenn is responsible for this personal and Internet defamation, but will not report her to his employer. In addition to this, X is stripped of his financial and material capital as Jenn has emptied their mutual bank accounts and disposed of all his possessions.

X relocates to Dubai because he "yearned for a remote solitary fate causing shame and inconvenience to no one, for a life neither in the right nor the wrong" (8). This quote epitomizes the expatriate experience. He moves because he seeks anonymity and a reprieve from the shame of the embarrassment felt in New York. In Dubai, X inhabits a transitional state, existing outside the confines of his home society. In his anonymity, he is safe from blame because by knowing no one, he can do harm to no one. Yet X does do harm, especially with his consumption of women. He participates in objectification, abuse, and the commodification of women. X uses women's bodies for sexual ends, and arguably to dominate and humiliate as Jenn did him, but he also uses them to reflect himself back as an honourable and ethical man. This requires acrobatics of his mind to preserve his mantra of "live-and-let-live" (89) and "Do no harm" (99).

I would argue that the sexual objectification that is so prevalent in *The Dog* is reflective of the fundamental inadequacies that X himself feels. X is a foreign worker, paid for a degrading job, with the façade of a much more successful life. Like the women

he objectifies, X has been objectified in his work role, which is perhaps why he is much more explicit in his objectification of women. His boss does not mince words, explaining to X, "You have one function. You know what that function is? It is to make sure nobody steals" (99). As such, it seems that X has been reduced to the sum of his parts, becoming, in a globalized consumer world, merely a tool. In a review for *The Washington Post*, Ron Charles slates the obvious essentialism plaguing X, claiming, "the narrator's name has been radically attenuated, reduced to the single letter X [which is] a symbol of evaporated identity". As X's identity has been evaporated, he feels panic and crisis. As an expatriate, he is in a strange temporality, a transitory space, and with nothing to tie his identity to (with employment and relationships asunder) he looks to women. In sexually objectifying them, his own figure is magnified to "twice his natural size" (Woolf loc 27548). In order to demonstrate the idea that women's bodies are used as mirrors for X, I will first discuss his addiction to pornography before moving on to his use of sex-workers. In the case of both, X is able to depersonalize the encounters to both protect his identity and to use the bodies of women to reassert his own authority.

X actively protects himself from any intimacy, which also accounts for his insatiable objectification. He has never had a female visitor to his apartment (before Mrs Ted Wilson arrives), to the extreme that he even refuses to allow a maid service to enter his apartment because of the connection such a situation would require. He has only met the wife of his best friend, Ollie, once, on the occasion of a happenstance encounter at Dubai Mall. While he thinks of her as "very pretty…good-natured and reasonable" (154), he has avoided going to Ollie's house. X exists in a type of social vacuum wherein

women tend to function solely as the extensions of males. This may be another way in which he protects his own fragile masculinity; with the damage from Jenn still quite recent, X is vulnerable to pain. As such, he sexually objectifies women in pornography and through sex-workers.

By viewing female bodies being acted upon, often with violence, X is able to embody the subject of the pornography and, through viewing the pornography, he is acting upon the object in question. The common viewpoint of pornography takes the perspective of the male subject; the viewer therefore can enact the sexual domination through the screen time. Fundamentally, the male gaze is reductive, as Mulvey outlines in citing the movies *Psycho* and *Rear Window*, with the woman's body fragmented so she becomes simply the sum of her body parts. By viewing women as objects, X is no longer an object himself, but rather, as a voyeur, a powerful subject.

Sexual objectification results in erasure of a woman's identity (as has occurred for X) and the definition of her as an instrument (as X is merely an instrument). As a sexual tool, a woman is not a unique entity, but rather has the identity of other and similar objects. Therefore, she is interchangeable with other women, and specifically she, as a body, is interchangeable with other women's bodies; one instrument is as good as another for achieving sexual domination. He discusses his pornography in terms of genre, describing the "porno twist, tweak or twang" (135) in relation to the type of woman depicted in the different genres. Therefore, the women are reduced to just their category, which is often a vulgar label. X himself, through the shortening of his name, has become just a category – a "type" of expatriate worker, and as such, he inflicts the same

objectification onto the bodies of women.

X begins to list the genres of pornography, beginning euphemistically enough with “Asian babes” (135). His delineation of genre soon progresses and he begins to describe the type of pornography through the two acronyms “MILFs, BBWs” (135). The labelling here is a conscious method to depersonalize the women in question. In this case, X assumes the readers’ familiarity with these two rather niche terms which mean “Mothers I’d Like to Fuck” and “Big Beautiful Women” respectively, reinforcing the casualness of his disregard of them in his ruminating as if these genres of women are widely known. This demonstrates how out of touch with reality he is, and how myopic his vision of women has become. The reader becomes aware of the callousness of his treatment of others, which is symptomatic of a globalized capitalist culture, but more so, of an anonymous mega-city like Dubai. The sheer volume of X’s itemized list is overwhelming to the reader. It also implies that X’s obsession with pornography is not necessarily motivated by an elevated libido, but rather fuelled by some greater obsession that is tantamount to collection, and he himself the collector of objects. In owning these images, X can own women himself and thereby alleviate the emotional damage he felt with the disillusion of his prior relationship. As the bodies of women are degraded, so X is elevated as the owner of them all.

The genres listed by X are darkly amusing for their specificity. This combined with the laughable and anticlimactic genre “brunettes” combines to create a shared experience with the reader, who is somehow made complicit through X’s elaborate list.

At the close of X's catalogue of pornography is arguably the most disturbing genre of pornography, as here the reader is forced to experience a surge of guilt and revulsion as X describes the "phase of jerking off" to images of women "being penetrated by enormous dildos attached to what were called fucking machines". The grotesqueness of the pornography is inescapable for the reader, as a result of the novelty and horror of the image of a "fucking machine", and by laughing along with X, the reader is thereby made complicit in the degradation of women.

In *Pornland: How Pornography has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, Carol Dines argues that the overabundance of pornography and the ease of its accessibility has resulted in desensitization to violence and barbarous acts. Viewers become desperate to find more and more violent or humiliating scenes of pornography. X's catalogue of pornography describes exactly this. His perusal of pornography has resulted in an addiction, and in order to achieve gratification he constantly seeks the newest and most extreme type of image. X is chasing the thrill of pornography. As a result of growing up in a pornography-saturated culture, X is aroused only by what is new and different. His objectification of women, therefore, is also the result of an overbearing consumer culture obsessed with purchase and novelty. As such, O'Neill is arguably satirizing the experience of the isolated transnational worker in Dubai, although perhaps any mega-city would do. In this case, X, devoid of any meaningful relationships, turns to pornography as a way to bolster his self-esteem, and he soon becomes a callous addict.

In *Feminism Unmodified*, Catherine MacKinnon argues that pornography is tantamount to political action against women. For MacKinnon, the use of pornography is perverse because of how it speaks of gender dynamics. She writes:

> Male power makes authoritative a way of seeing and treating women, so that when a man looks at a pornographic picture – pornographic meaning the woman is a thing to be acted upon, a sexual object, a sexual thing – the viewing itself is an act, an act of male supremacy.
>
> 88

For MacKinnon, pornography is designed to objectify women and to assert the domination of men through viewing it. By viewing pornography, therefore, the male viewer experiences dominance over sex objects depicted. For X, underemployed and humiliated, this sexual supremacy is a way easily to access power. In watching a woman be penetrated, he is associating with the penetrator, and therefore dominating the woman in question. X's pornography habits, however, are made repulsive by the sheer magnitude, both of genres and of consumption. This speaks to an incredible need to reassert his own identity and a feeling of powerlessness that is reflective of the expatriate experience – isolated and underemployed with few meaningful relationships to turn to.

In addition to his repulsively voracious appetite for pornography, O'Neill makes X even more depraved with an addiction to sex with sex workers. X purchases women "about twice a month" (88) for the cost of "an upfront fee of five hundred USD…plus the cost of the room" (88). Even with such a high volume, X would "happily increase the frequency" (88), but suffers from the problem of supply. His pimp, Mila, cannot find enough women to satiate his needs, which could influence the number of hours he spends looking at pornography. He does not appear to prefer either means to achieve the goal, for

both groups of women — the live and the pictured— are objectified and reduced to the sum of their parts. However, in casting X as an insatiable consumer of women, O'Neill is commenting upon the condition of the male expatriate, who exists outside of cultural norms with an abundance of money at his disposal, but no real relationships or hobbies to ground him. X, who cannot be satisfied, represents both the consummate consumer and the emotionally damaged man who cannot be healed.

In the other novels to be discussed in this chapter, the objectification of women does not occur to such an extreme. I would postulate that the reason for this is due to the nature of the postmodern anti-hero represented in *The Dog* and the way in which *The Dog* discusses particulars about Dubai. X is quite obviously the titular Dog, and his doghouse is Dubai, despite the city's stringent rules against dogs and X's own building having a policy against dogs. X really exists within "the sandy waste areas on the outskirts of the city where unleashed dogs are unofficially tolerated" (88). His story therefore, is a satirical exploration of the extent of the desperation in maintaining hegemonic masculinity in a period of late capitalism. X is depraved in his treatment of women, which is a reflection of his own damaged masculinity.

Another component of objectification is the transformation of women into static and faceless objects, taking away their individual qualities and turning the women into objects and thus contributing to their effacement. A woman thus becomes inert and silent. She cannot voice her resistance to being transformed into an object. In this state, the woman serves as a canvas that is prone to substitution. She is fungible in that, as an inert and silent object, she becomes a conduit for another woman. Such is the case when the

dominion of one woman's body is used as a site to avenge an original trauma, as can be the case with transference.

However, this "magic and delicious power" (Woolf loc 27548). of women requires that the woman become like a 'looking-glass' or a mirrored object to reflect the subject, but amplified and enlarged, back to him. It therefore requires the objectification of the woman, for she must be silenced, as "if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished" (Woolf loc 27548). Making "mute" is the first step in effacing a woman. Once she is silenced and flattened, she can become a surrogate for another woman or other women.

In *The Dog,* X silences both the women he watches in sex acts and the sex-workers he frequents. While X refers to the catalogue of women and types of pornography he has viewed, he does not allow them to speak, save in the gang rape he views in which the victim is crying, which will be discussed further below. The sex-workers, too, are not given voice, with the notable exception of Oksana, also discussed below. Instead, they are voiceless, formless wisps within the novel. In one case, X has a companion who he refers to as a "merry Kyrgyz" (89) with a "sweet Chinese face" (89). The sex-worker is "very talkative" but completely incomprehensible to X, due to the fact she speaks no English. While she babbles, X is safe to disregard anything she says, thereby effacing her. As such, he is able to keep her as an object devoid of feelings and thought.

X's preference for sex-workers or pornography is egalitarian: "I am very flexible about the physical type of the lady in question and have never turned my nose up at

anyone on the arbitrary grounds such as not liking this or that about her physical appearance" (78). Here, X's gaze on women is unique. Rather than focus upon the eroticism of each specific woman, highlighting her body or sexuality, as is the case in other literature from this region, X instead denies the women he employs of any individuality. The women in question are merely receptacles of his desire and sometimes, although not always, his semen; his feelings do not go any deeper, except wishing that there were more of these experiences. Furthermore, X does not choose the women he engages in sexual behaviour with, but rather Mila acts as a go-between in order to select and deliver X's sexual partners, claiming that "Surprise better" (88). Therefore, the twice-monthly visitors to X are tarred with the same brush – they are a parade of faceless, nameless women. When X looks upon them, he makes no judgment, but instead sees them as a collection of tools, who may even fill in for each other in order that his needs are met. The streams of women, therefore, have only their difference in common, and X expresses no specific qualification necessary in his women except for "niceness". This is interesting because it speaks more generally about the legitimization of prostitution and the industry's re-branding as a service industry. By choosing these 'nice' women, X is framing prostitution in a way that ignores human trafficking, slavery and the more gruesome details of prostitution, such as rape and violence. While the objectifying male gaze on these women is kept static, the 'niceness' of her personality disaffirms any blame being laid on X.

After a night with a "nice woman", X "will Google the place a given girl says she's from and I will learn a little about the world" (84). In this way, X claims he has

learnt the geographic locations of many Eastern European cities, naming Yerevan among others. In a review for *The Spectator,* Whynn Weldon attributes X's obsession with sex-workers as a search for connection, stating that X's post-coital ritual of looking up "satellite images of Soviet housing complexes and empty, burnt-out gas stations" is really a method to use "technology and money, hoping he can somehow connect to the emotional lives of these women". X, however, claims that "Absolutely the last thing I want to get into with them is their backstory" (84). What then drives his obsession to look up images of soviet-style buildings? It might be an attempt at romantic intrigue, or simply an activity to fill the hours of boredom at X's work. In any case, this follow-up Googling is a moment in which X strives to "flatten" the women who service him into one-dimensional objects, and yet he cannot help himself from learning more about them.

The images that X finds can be "icons of personal desolation" (84), which suggest, through their bleakness, that the situation of the sex-workers is anything but nice. As such, X has to put in an "effort of reasoning" (84) in order to prevent the women from morphing into distressed damsels, in the vein of *Rapunzel* or *The Little Mermaid*. In order to avoid furthering his masochistic guilt, X has to remind himself of the lie he half-believes--that the women he employs come from a "special class, namely tourists who chose to fund their vacation or other financial objectives" (84) through sex. Therefore, even when confronted with the desolation, poverty and despair of the female sex-workers, X is determined to silence them, effacing their experiences to expunge his own guilt.

While X silences the woman from Kyrgyzstan, he also uses the sexual encounter to think instead of another woman. While he cannot relax and is distracted when with the "merry" sex-worker, his mind lingers on his encounter with Mrs Ted Wilson. While the sex-worker in question is performing fellatio, X begins to write a letter to Mrs Ted Wilson in his mind: "Dear Mrs Wilson, [he] conceptually wrote while the Kyrgyz sucked [his cock]" (90). He becomes so wrapped up in the letter, despite the oral sex, that he removes himself to email Mrs Ted Wilson. The narrative abandons the sex-worker here, and X begins to speak instead of his attempts to meet Mrs Ted Wilson. As such, Mrs Ted Wilson is effaced, her purpose as a sexual object affirmed and yet simultaneously discarded.

Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* seeks to understand how human lives are perceived by others. Often, the way that people perceive others is done through a frame, which limits the object to certain parameters that the viewer imposes. Butler states that in visual art, a "frame functions as an editorial embellishment" (8) stating what it is that needs to be seen, limiting and defining what is to be viewed. In a modern art gallery, the delineation of an artwork is often made through a frame. The frame is a signifier to the viewer of what needs to be seen. Similarly, the frames of people are the editorial embellishments of the viewer, who can pick and choose which aspects of a life he or she wishes to acknowledge and which to exclude. On television, a news reporter can frame his or her shot in different ways in order to provide different responses from the audience, using the background, the music or even the language in framing. Rather than providing a full picture, a frame fixes and strictly defines the view allowed to the

audience. Butler relies on the casualties of war as her example of the distinction in framing. Some of the casualties are 'grievable', and some are not; some lives are made human and some are merely 'apprehended'. Media dictate "the cries we hear and those we cannot" (51), communicating to the audience which lives are 'grievable' and which are not. The newscaster decides which lives are grievable, and this notion is communicated to the audience. This establishes a social norm, which is soon absorbed by the viewers in the way they perceive others. An example of this would be the ability of some people to ignore human suffering if it is that of an 'other'. Emotional proximity determines whether someone is to be identified with or not; whether they are worth grieving and, indeed, whether they are even deemed a human life.

Butler notes that a frame defines the limits to which we can absorb people, stating that the frame is actually protective of our prior beliefs: "Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things" (9). If we recognize the suffering of an 'other' we may also have to recognize our own culpability in that suffering. By framing other lives as non-grievable, we are able to preserve a sense of identity. Such is the case in relation to women involved in pornography or prostitution. Their lives are deemed not grievable, and therefore there is no damage done in perceiving them as objects. They are not human beings, only flesh and orifices, and treating them as such, denying them personhood, means they can be transformed into mirrors for the subject without guilt. The male gaze denies grievability through objectification, and women's bodies can

therefore reflect the subject's amplified reflection back at him, thereby reaffirming and reconstructing his masculinity.

X emphasizes that the women in the pornography films he watches are able to be smashed into. This is particularly evident in the catalogue of pornography and demonstrated with the use of 'fucking machines' and 'bottle-fuckers' to refer to the pornography genres. In these cases, the callous treatment and violent overtones of the pornography help to solidify X's position in a hegemonic order; he exerts power over women-as-object through participating vicariously in the violence. In these cases, X is apprehending the lives of the women. By denying them grievability and continuing to perpetuate violence, he maintains the frame of them as objects.

Such outright effacement and silencing do not occur in the other texts so explicitly. In Garry Craig Powell's novel-in-stories, *Stoning the Devil,* the ruined white male expatriate, Colin, also maintains a relationship with a sex-worker, and yet while the services offered are the same, the treatment of her is entirely different. Firstly, she is named – Kamila – and given not only speech but also narrative power. Furthermore, Kamila is a clearly reluctant sex-worker, and at times is entirely disgusted by Colin, insulting or repelling him. Colin lets his sentimentality and displeasure with his wife colour his feelings towards Kamila and deludes himself into feeling a kind of love towards her, telling himself "it was more than sex" (123) and proclaiming that he was seeking "love and passion" (123) while telling Kamila he missed her. In this case, Colin is framing Kamila to navigate his own identity and cast him not as a john, or a man of power, but as a lover. This is clearly the opposite of X's goal, despite the similarities of

the delusions. X is striving to assert his redemption more than anything, while Colin is simply looking for a way to enact justice upon his wife.

While the treatment of women in *The Dog* turns them into instruments, in other works, women become surrogates for each other. This occurs in *The Ruins of Us*. In this novel, the failed expatriate, Dan, appears to lust after the wife of his long-term friend, Abdullah. However, while Dan's affections are enacted on the body of Rosalie, his real desires are for his own ex-wife, Carolyn. When Dan sees Rosalie for the first time in many years, he admires her, noting her hair cascading on her shoulders. He lingers, however, on her breasts, the way it is clear "she wasn't wearing a bra" and "the way her breasts gently sloped downwards" (loc 514). The sight of her body brings out a wanting in him, a wanting that is not brought upon by Rosalie *per se* but "more for the familiarity of a robed female body than for the breasts themselves" (loc 514). Rosalie's body, and Dan's desire for it, serves as a surrogate not only for his feelings of desire for his wife, but for his desire to return to a time when his life contained both love and pride. Rosalie herself is thereby effaced to be explored as a symbol representing Dan's other desires. His desire for her is not rooted in pure passion, but rather in the feeling of missing his own wife, Carolyn, and their domestic intimacy. Dan "still wished for Carolyn something fierce: on stars, on wishbones, on birthdays, before sleep, in prayerful whispers" (1753). In Rosalie's body, he is reminded of Carolyn, which in turn makes him even more infuriated by Abdullah's decision to tarnish his relationship with Rosalie by taking another wife.

Dan and Carolyn's long-standing friendship with Rosalie and Abdullah is another motivating factor for the ease of his transference of emotion. He himself proclaims, "Rosie was perfect: tough but compassionate. She knew Carolyn and he knew Abdullah. They would be each other's confessor" (loc 1821). He looks at Rosalie therefore, not for whom she might be as a person, but rather uses her to take on the role of a confidant and stand-in to hear his complaints and woes about his estranged wife. I would argue that this transference is indicative of Dan's character in that he has been unable to recognize the personhood of either his estranged wife or Rosalie. By making the women fungible, Dan reveals a weak misogyny, a fear of real connection with a woman, and the need to use a woman as an instrument to fulfil a need.

In his pursuit of Rosalie, Dan is also using her as a token within a hegemonic battle with Abdullah. Abdullah is dynamic, powerful, and charismatic, with money that will not stop reproducing itself. He and Rosalie had a stable marriage until it is revealed that Abdullah has also married Isra . In contrast, Dan lives in a decaying apartment block, has strained relationships with his two children, and often appears dishevelled and impoverished. As Abdullah states, "I am Abdullah al-Baylani, the friend of kings, and you are Dan Coleman" (loc 2803). Perhaps Dan's interest in Rosalie could be seen then as a competitive grab in a time of vulnerability, and Rosalie, while seen as a sexual object is not a woman at all but rather a symbol of masculine power.

Dan's professions of love are rather underwhelming. He states that he "felt a spark of caring for a woman other than Carolyn, and he was grateful to Rosalie for it" (loc 3185). In many ways, Rosalie begins to represent a prize that will redeem Dan from his

failures. After briefly kissing Rosalie and hearing her laments about Abdullah, Dan decides he must work to save Rosalie from her dissolving marriage. He procures the necessary documents for Rosalie to leave the Kingdom and join him in Corsica. He forges Abdullah's signature on Rosalie's exit permit and secures a plane ticket for her. In this act, Dan is more decisive and inspiring than he had been throughout his marriage to Carolyn, with whom he always felt insecure, particularly when he was unable to find a job in the US. Abdullah spits out that Carolyn sees Dan as a "beggar" (loc 2298). With the action of saving Rosalie, Dan is a hero, a saviour, someone worthy of admiration in a way that he could not be to Carolyn, or indeed, to Abdullah. His attempt to save her is arguably less about her than it is about himself, and the power he might gain by being cast in such a role.

Within *The Dog*, X also effaces a woman to turn her into a surrogate for his ex-wife, Jenn. At the centre of *The Dog*, and at the centre of the narrator's relative epiphany, is the character of Mrs Ted Wilson, who has come to Dubai to search for her estranged husband. Mrs Ted Wilson has been discarded by her husband, who has entered in a polygamous marriage with a Filipino woman, now the new Mrs Ted Wilson. Clearly, this arrangement concerns the effacing and silencing of Mrs Ted Wilson (I) by her husband, and her subsequent fungibility with Mrs Ted Wilson (II). X becomes infatuated with this scenario – the idea that one woman can be completely effaced by another, and it is this fungibility that leads to X's eventual epiphany. However, X himself is guilty of effacing Mrs Ted Wilson, silencing her and effacing her, only to replace her with his ex, Jenn, and Lucy Vodden.

At the beginning of the novel, Mrs Ted Wilson comes knocking on X's door, essentially beginning the self-reflection and eventual breakdown he goes through. X mistakes Mrs Ted Wilson for Lucy Vodden, who is famous for inspiring the Beatles' song, *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*. When X is first informed of the death of Lucy Vodden, he relates, "I Googled [her] and came face-to-face with a very lovely, smiling woman in her forties with blonde shoulder-length hair, whom for a moment I fell in love with" (42). When Mrs Ted Wilson answers the door, X confuses one woman "with another woman in her forties with blonde shoulder-length hair". X clearly romanticizes the photograph of Lucy Vodden, who lost her life to lupus at the age of 47. He sees her as a muse whose potential is unfulfilled and her death as a tragedy. X is affected by nostalgia and captivated by a woman who serves as a muse.

X's interest in Mrs Ted Wilson is also due to her sadness, which adds to her similarities to Lucy Vodden. Both are tragic cases in X's mind. When Mrs Ted Wilson stops crying, "She dabbed away her tears and her resemblance to poor Lucy Vodden" (42). The raw emotion is appealing to X, who clearly does not experience such in his relationships with sex-workers nor in his frequent use of pornography. While sex-workers such as the "Merry Kyrgyz" or the catalogue of female pornography genres are interchangeable and fungible for serving as sexual instruments, Mrs Ted Wilson and Lucy Vodden are fungible in their victimhood, which in turn, causes them to be surrogates for X's feelings towards Jenn, who X also sees as a victim.

X is explicit in the ways in which he substitutes Mrs Ted Wilson for Jenn, especially as Mrs Ted Wilson ceases to play the victim and begins to take on a more

aggressive role. In the absence of Jenn, X projects his need to be heard upon Mrs Ted Wilson. Mrs Ted Wilson has been scorned and humiliated through her husband's polygamy and secrecy, while Jenn was left devastated when X abandoned their attempts at procreation, refusing to ejaculate in order to prepare for IVF. She lambasts X by saying "You ran away…Everybody out here is on the run. You're all runners" (47). Once Mrs Ted Wilson is no longer a surrogate for the tragic Lucy Vodden, she becomes a surrogate for the humiliated Jenn, and in this moment, when X took "Mrs Ted Wilson to be none other than Jenn, who was no longer available for answering. I actually had the notion to tell this woman my story – to have my say at long last" (48). While watching Mrs Ted Wilson crying, X becomes incensed. In that "cracked, treacherous moment" he desires to tell her everything, but does not. He cannot conquer the accusatory notions that remind him of Jenn, and as a result, he hurls a plastic jar of lentils at the wall.

After the outburst, X's obsession with Mrs Ted Wilson only grows. In his mind's eye he journeys with her "into her own home, and into her bedroom, and into the shower, and watched her" (202). In his fantasy, however, while he clearly imagines her naked and bathing, he does not seem to linger on nudity or the profane, but instead is interested more in the "everyday, out-in-the-open stuff" (202). The fantasy, therefore, might be perpetuated by her naked body, but is really driven by X's deep-seated loneliness and his desire to replace the void left by Jenn. In this case, X's effacement and 'effacing' of Mrs Ted Wilson is entirely similar to Dan's 'effacing' of Rosalie. In each case, the narrator really desires to recapture lost intimacy through the effacement of the body of another woman, which is both indicative of what they have lost as emasculated men, but also

indicative of their outdated coping strategies, trying to reassert themselves in the hegemonic order.

Other elements of objectification of females result in the man's mastery. In denying a woman's autonomy and in exerting dominance over a woman's body, the man thereby achieves an element of mastery over a woman and thereby elevates his position of power through her subordination. Dworkin identifies the relationship between sexuality and ownership in *Intercourse*, proclaiming, "Being owned and being fucked are or have been virtually synonymous experiences in the lives of women. He owns you — he fucks you. The fucking conveys the quality of ownership — he owns you inside out" (45). In his pursuit of sex-workers, X literally owns the women he purchases, while, in having intercourse with them, he exerts the power of this mastery. He gains social capital by the mastery of a woman who is desired by many. By taking possession of the woman, he will therefore take possession away from a competitor and succeed him in a hegemonic order. In this case, the woman becomes the bargaining chip for power between men in a power struggle. Meanwhile, a woman's body becomes degraded, a woman's personality depersonalized so that she can become a distorting mirror.

Ownership can function either as outright purchase as in the case of prostitution or the purchase of pornography, or in the exertion of control over the woman-as-object. This also comes about through the rejection of a woman's body. While not identified by Nussbaum or Langton, turning the woman into an undesirable or abject object also results in the man's mastery and domination over her because it demonstrates the ways in which the male subject is able to decide the value of the woman-as-object.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva explores the notion of the abject, clarifying that "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (Kristeva 1). In the case of women's bodies, abjection as objectification often occurs when the man denigrates the female body, deeming it irrelevant and contrary, proclaiming it as "disturb[ing] identity, system, order" (13). Such is the case in *A Hologram for the King* and *The Ruins of Us* in which women's bodies are seen as too overtly sexual and therefore threatening to the male narrators.

Alan has been conditioned to view sexual encounters as repulsive and disgusting, as a result of his ex-wife Ruby's proclamation that she would not want to have sex that no one would watch. He himself has been degraded as a sexual object, and his only recourse therefore becomes the rejection of other would-be sexual objects. Their denigration results in his elevation – their bodies becoming a mirror to reflect an enlarged Alan back to him. Alan attends a debauched and raucous party that flouts all the gender orders he believes relevant in Saudi Arabia. At this party, men and women mingle, become intoxicated, engage in sexual encounters and display their bodies. In the presence of such a spectacle, Alan is taken aback, shocked, and, to a certain extent, horrified by the overt sexuality he sees on display. He wonders at the westernization of the party, questioning, "What about the woman with the cleavage" (142), who seemed hired to walk around the party "with no other plan or purpose" (142). While Alan seems to linger on the spectacle of the curvaceous woman, he is perplexed by the discordance of her presence within the Kingdom, wondering, "Such things were done in New York and Vegas, but here?" (142). In this way, it almost appears as if Alan has sought refuge from extreme sexuality and

found comfort in the puritanical regime of Saudi Arabia until, of course, he is confronted with this display. By denigrating this scene, he places himself as superior to what he perceives as vulgar displays of sexuality.

A similar dismissal of women's bodies as abject occurs in *The Ruins of Us*. In this case, Alan's monastic code of conduct is paralleled in Dan's. In the novel, Dan and Abdullah journey to Bahrain in part to allow Abdullah some time away from the marital discomforts caused by the revelation of his second marriage. Dan, who has been somewhat enamoured of Rosalie since their first meeting, is inherently protective of her personhood. In contrast, Dan is critical of the women he and Abdullah meet in Bahrain, immediately assessing their respectability, desirability and appropriateness before dismissing them. As Berger writes, "Men survey women before treating them" (342) and so it is with Dan, who uses the Bahrain women's overt sexuality to classify them as wanton, and therefore himself as morally superior to their seduction.

Crucially, Dan does not immediately denigrate the women he watches. First, he watches Fathima dance and notices, "An Olympic-quality undulator, she moved effortlessly, her body gamine and beautiful in its iterations" (loc. 705) and the reader's eyes occupy Dan's to gaze upon the sensual movements. However, like Alan, after this initial viewing Dan's appraisal is unapologetically dismissive: "He wasn't interested though. Not really" (loc 705). Fathima is therefore approved of to a certain extent, she is attractive and desirable but not suitable for Dan's specific tastes. He does not deem her behaviour appropriate, due to his own internal moral compass: "Dan felt a sense of superiority to all the men out there who had affairs, married and remarried like it was a

sport" (loc 705). He sees Fathima's transparency in dancing, that she is performing for the male gaze and attempting to sell herself for a financial boon. The beauty of the dancer makes Dan all the more noble for resisting, not interested in any sport even if it is "Olympic-quality".

Later, however, Dan makes more disparaging observations of the women vying for attention. He sees a woman intent on talking with Abdullah, who has perhaps managed to create a reputation for himself as a result of his marriage to Isra. While Dan praised the gamine undulator, he has little time for this woman, commenting, "She had a mouth like a split-open black plum, and she wore a long, midnight-blue dress that tied in a halter somewhere behind the masses of hair that she pushed out of her face. He was annoyed with his friend, his bald desires" (loc. 715). The outright sexualization ignites Dan's indignation because his classification of the woman does not cohere with his self-classification. In his survey of her, he has deemed her unrespectable. The woman, therefore, and Abdullah's engagement with her, becomes a lightning rod for the differences between Dan and Abdullah: in designating her as inappropriate, he deems his friend's behaviour as similarly inappropriate. Again, as with the attempt to possess Rosalie, Dan has used women for markers in the hegemonic order. By rejecting these women's attempts at seduction, Dan is able to elevate his own identity.

In this section, I hope to have demonstrated the many ways in which the men in the novels from this region objectify women's bodies. In all cases, the sexual objectification is not concerned primarily with desire, but rather with asserting power or dominance. In these novels, men turn women into objects that can be used, as is the case of X in *The*

Dog. Men also efface women by stripping them of their individuality and are therefore only able to engage with them as interchangeable instruments, as is done in *The Dog* and *The Ruins of Us*. Finally, men are able to boycott women's bodies, and in rejecting and denigrating them for their overt sexuality, are able to gain power over the women.

Why do these novels need to be set in the Gulf? In each example I have provided, the male narrator is fleeing an emasculating experience and, to a certain extent, has fled to the Gulf to lick his wounds and hopefully rebuild. In each novel, masculinity is in crisis. The male narrators, therefore, try to rebuild their identity through gender dynamics, objectifying, substituting, or rejecting female bodies. However, as I will demonstrate, these misogynistic attempts at identity construction are interrogated, to varying degrees, by each author, who presents the reader with a flawed male narrator who operates under an anachronistic hegemonic masculinity. The Gulf provides the space for these men to experiment with behaviours delineated above, as meaningful relationships are for the narrators scarce.

PROBLEMATIZING OBJECTS AND EPIPHANY

While the previous section of the dissertation discussed the ways in which the authors of these works use objectification to demonstrate the weaknesses of their characters, this section is primarily concerned with the ways in which the authors problematize the internalized misogyny of their male narrators. That is, this section is about the problem "objects" the men encounter, and how those problem objects have been placed by the author to lead to a mild epiphany for each of the narrators.

In the novels by Eggers, Parssinen, and Powell, daughters play the role of judge or confidant, categorically denying objectification by very definition. In *A Hologram for the King*, Alan writes long convoluted letters to his daughter Kit, treading lightly in order to please her without disparaging her mother, because "the greatest tragedy about Ruby was that talking about her made him sound like a bastard" (99). Part of the appeal of Saudi Arabia lies in its opportunity for wealth, for what it could mean for Kit, who has been forced to drop out of university since Alan can no longer pay her tuition. Alan fantasizes about staying in Saudi Arabia, "assum[ing] a new name…[sending] Kit money somehow" (16). In a way, Kit becomes the central woman in Alan's life, and his dealings with other women are clouded by his desire for Kit's approval. However, Kit also serves as a problem object, placed by Eggers to highlight Alan's problematic objectification of women.

Throughout the novel, Alan has a consistent fear of sexualizing Kit. In the beginning of chapter IV, Alan is relieved that his daughter is not continuing school because he finds Kit's roommate needlessly inquisitive and her suggestions that Kit has been sexually abused disturbing. He claims that she is a "noticer", and that she has noticed small bruises on his daughter's collarbone, noticed the way her voice is high and girl-like, as if to suggest an arrested development. This suggests that Alan could be an abuser, which would explain his wife's disapproval of his physical affection towards Kit, the way that even "When she was fourteen he still wanted to bury his nose in her neck, smell her skin" (160). However, in this moment, Alan seems aware that his physical affections could be misconstrued as incestuous, but that he loves his daughter far too

much to refrain. He does not see her as a sexual object, and when confronted with a photograph of Kit and her friends, he notices that, “she was still utterly a child, with a cherubic face that would remain young longer than was anyone’s right” (98). While protective of his close and deep relationship with Kit, Alan is wary of being accused, which would be the ultimate destruction of identity and reputation. Similarly, Kit represents an object which, in contrast to her friends, cannot and should not be objectified, demonstrating his ability to give personhood to a woman.

In *The Ruins of Us,* Dan is similarly afraid of his daughter Eleanor’s impending sexuality, which is categorically announced with her engagement. When Eleanor phones Dan, his assistant Yaser misconstrues the message, thinking the caller might be “some piece of ass out in Bahrain” (loc 1836). Dan is aghast at this notion and at the sexualization of his daughter. This reference also links to Fathima, the undulating woman performing for Dan and Abdullah in Dubai. The association of these images explains Dan’s disgust with the women dancing. It also implies that in this temporality, “transient sexuality”, to use Walsh’s term, is the norm.

However, *The Ruins of Us* is less about discovery of oneself than it is about the endurance and damage to marriage. Therefore, Eleanor is only temporarily a “problem object”. When Dan returns the call, he is confronted both by a male voice and the sound of “rustling bed sheets”. This auditory image is disconcerting for Dan with its association of carnality, but more so due to its domesticity. Eleanor then announces her engagement and “his stomach fell away, far from his center, and his heart continued to test its

casements" (loc 1881). Dan is afraid for his daughter, wishing to protect her from the damage of marriage.

In *Stoning the Devil,* arguably the most acerbic of these texts, Colin is made a complete buffoon in the eyes of his daughters. While Colin is a prolific philanderer, he is wary of his daughters' sexualization, noting that his older daughter's voice was thick and husky with cigarette smoke, which has connotations of late nights and possible promiscuity. He is also ashamed to realize that the sex-worker Kamila was near the same age as his daughter Maryam. In recognizing his daughters' sexual existence, Colin becomes closer to realizing his own depravity.

As the previous section noted, a woman's body that is made into an instrument, a woman denied voice and therefore autonomy, held rigid and static is interchangeable with other women and can be beaten, can be owned, and cannot be unique. If these criteria are met, the subject of the objectifying gaze will receive his enlarged image reflected back to him, as is the case in many situations in these works. However, at certain points within these novels, the women in question cease to be objects and become people. For X, the moment of epiphany occurs when he realizes the grievability of women, which is instigated through the meeting with Mrs Ted Wilson, and then manifests itself through the figures of a pornographic actress and of a sex-worker named Oksana. In his interactions with these three women, the frame he has built surrounding women, objectifying them, silencing them, and exerting violence over them, is forced to shift. As a result, X loses the markers of his own identity within a hegemonic order.

Mrs Ted Wilson enters the narrative of *The Dog* with the introduction, "You can't

keep the world at bay. Exhibit A: Mrs Ted Wilson" (38). Mrs Ted Wilson arrives seeking her husband, who failed to turn up to collect her from the airport. Mrs Ted Wilson is the first "female visitor" to have "crossed [X's] threshold" (42). Her tale of tragedy and disillusion at the hands of a bigamist husband is ostensibly the plot of the novel, with X's obsession with her becoming the driving factor for his declining grip on reality. His curiosity about her, "especially with her being a damsel, and in distress" (44) is arguably the culmination of his desire to allow someone to enter his life, someone who might soothe and salve his unbearable loneliness. However, as X says, "curiosity killed the cat" (44), and X's unhealthy interest in Mrs Ted Wilson, and particularly in her tragedy, soon results in the reframing of his identity and subsequently his complete mental breakdown. In essence, Mrs Ted Wilson's entrance into X's life is responsible for breaking his carefully constructed mental acrobatics and rationalization. Because her life and the loss of her husband to another woman is for him grievable, X is forced to re-evaluate the way he treats the other women in his life.

X's reasoning surrounding both sex-workers and pornography is centred on the idea of choice and the idea of enjoyment as defined by this rather ill man. This attitude does not allow for the construct of grievability. By insisting that woman-as-object acts through choice and joyfully, X is able to rationalize his treatment of women. In order to understand X's epiphany, it is important to examine the mental acrobatics that X has to exert in order to rationalize his objectification of women's bodies with his assumed moral code. X's relationship with women is a paradoxical *tour de force*. He simultaneously uses their bodies with distance, vulgarity, and violence, while proclaiming his honourable

notions and while simultaneously rejecting intimacy. In this way, X is able to construct an identity that encapsulates all that he has been denied. He is able to assert his dominance over women, while retaining his 'ethical' virtue and while also avoiding any intimacy.

Before X moved to Dubai, he did watch 'dirty movies' but he did not engage in pornography in the same quantity nor of the same graphic quality as in Dubai. In the US, he had a "preference for husband-and-wife porno acts…who gave the impression…of offering up their intimate doings for money-making reasons, certainly, but on a voluntary and fun and expressly 'amateur basis'" (26); pornography of people who voluntary offered up their own tapes presumably for their own sexual gratification as much as the viewer's. Thus, the beginning of X's career as a consumer of pornography begins grounded in this idea of choice and desire that exists within loving relationships. While X uses women's bodies, he continues to seek this idea of choice, joy and desire throughout his addiction to pornography.

The rationalization and justification for pornography continues, even while X lists his catalogue of women. Within the list, many terms, such as "cuties" (166) and "beauties" (166) are euphemistic, while others, such as "bottle-fuckers" (166) are violent. The perusal of "fucking machines" raises questions about the abject. And yet, X is able to equate all the genres of pornography he has listed and, presumably, is able to achieve universal arousal. Even when in the most humiliating and degrading positions – being penetrated by enormous dildos – the women are ascribed both choice and desire, with X insisting that the women are "consenting and professional". The women in question

therefore are both objectified and apprehended (she is not grievable), but the whole encounter retains a glossy veneer and, to him, a seeming innocence. Meanwhile, X is able to demonstrate wilful ignorance in order to preserve his frame of women by insisting on its being their choice and desire. Even in pictured humiliating situations, X ignores any systems of oppression through social or economic or even political structures that could account for the women's involvement in pornography. He does not deem their lives grievable, both because he casts them as objects and because of his insistence on pornography being their choice. This frame, however, is not tenable.

X experiences a moment of epiphany when he is confronted with a violent piece of pornography. In this instance, the woman he sees in the pornographic clip ceases to be an object and becomes a person: she becomes grievable through the depiction of her rape. X describes the moment at great length, but still takes mental strides to distance himself from culpability. He claims he "was watching a woman and four men doing various things. It was all proceeding as one might expect, until one of the men punched the woman in the face" (135). The moment of violence, therefore, is cast as a surprise for X, despite his prowess in navigating the different genres of pornography, and despite his apparent half-interest in pornography that is both violent and demeaning to women. X describes the escalating acts of violence in a way that suggests that the moment has simply gotten out of hand. After the woman was punched by one man, "another pulled on her ponytail so that she could be punched again in the face, which she was, by the other men, and the female performer was crying and bleeding at the mouth and trying not to be punched". In this statement, X still asserts that the woman in question is a performer, and

therefore the violence is not real. He also states, “the crime victim, as I believe her to be, was an actor, as were the other actors in the filmed events: they, too, were actors: I’d seen the performance of a crime”, as if to justify his own arousal. The implication also lies in the idea the violence being acted upon the woman has simply escalated beyond control: “in the blink of an eye the fake orgy had turned into a gang sexual assault”.

The quotation details the moment in which X realizes that the person he is watching on screen is just that, a person. However, his reaction is still problematic. X describes that scene with pity, but lingers on the actions of the punch. He describes her bleeding and crying, but does not deny his arousal at such an event, proclaiming, “I was about to ejaculate, there was no stopping that” (167), and again negating his own culpability. He claims his innocence by stating, “I couldn’t stop the movie, my hands were full” (167), and rationalized that at least he “turn[ed] my eyes away from the screen” (167). He is still instrumental in climaxing through his “jerking”, despite his apparent abhorrence of the act. He is cognizant, however, despite his attempts at rationalization: “I know what I did. I saw the rape happen and used my seeing of it for my own sexual benefit” (167). He understands the damage done to the woman and his own culpability in using the clip for sexual benefit. In this moment, X moves away from objectification. The screams and cries of the woman on the tape have made her grievable.

In language almost parallel to that of Butler, X explains his moment of epiphany:

> I see that the female actor ceased to pretend to be an actor. She reverted to naturality with the first or second punch; and it seems clear that after that reversion she did not consent to being punched repeatedly in the face and having sexual interactions,

> vaginal and oral and anal, with the men punching her. It follows that the female actor was not an actor pretending to be raped. She was a person being raped.
>
> 136

The idea of acting and performance has allowed X the distance to extricate himself from culpability, paralleled in his notion of "consenting and professional woman" who fornicate with "fucking machines". However, in this moment of rape, X sees extreme violence being enacted upon the woman in question, and the abject grotesquery becomes too much to bear. In ceasing to be an object, she is no longer apprehended but recognized. She has somehow 'earned' her personhood through a violent act.

The consequences of this sexual assault arousal are dire for X: "And I cannot jerk off anymore because I'm afraid that, if I do, I will see the female person being punched and I will want to see that" (167). His culpability in the rape is tantamount to his rejection of the objectification of women. He therefore realizes that these lives are grievable, recognizing personhood, and in so doing, he realizes his own inadequacies and his own reprehensible attitude and dubious morality. He cannot use his artificial rationalizations to maintain his manufactured persona of a doer of no harm, and cannot buoy his own identity by using women as a mirror.

X's careful glossing of pornography is reflected in his rationalization surrounding prostitution. He strives to distance himself from the repugnant qualities of prostitution through a series of wilful acts designed to establish the illusion of choice and agency. To procure sex-workers, X texts Mila, a Belarusian sex-worker-cum-pimp who arranges for a woman to meet him at the Unique, a five-star hotel. X pays for any room service,

usually Veuve Clicquot. He does not exchange money directly with the sex-worker, but pays Mila instead, therefore separating the act from the transaction and so while exerting ownership over a woman he does not participate in the drudgery of prostitution. The fantasy remains secure: he is not a john preying on underprivileged and vulnerable women, participating in the exploitation of women, but rather is a lover of women, bankrolling "holidaymaking part-time hot women of the night" (88).

In addition to using such euphemisms, X believes that the exchange of sex for money is simply a "benign circulation or trickle-down of my wealth" (88), harming no one, a "win-win" (88) situation. He erases his own culpability through wilful blindness, believing the women enjoy being with him. The reality of the situation of the sex-workers is far from X's whitewashed view. X paradoxically wishes to do right by the women he uses and even goes so far as to come up with a list of ethical proclamations about the people he is complicit in mistreating, including the following:

4. The concept of personhood is a valid basis for an ethics
5. The personhood of all persons is equal

To soothe his ethical quandaries, X sets up a payment scheme in which 37% of his salary goes to Human Rights Charities, thereby acquitting him of guilt. As a result, he is not required to "know the details" (78) of the lives of those suffering. This treatment of poor parallels the ways in which X treats women. He believes all women are consenting, but does not seek to understand the financial reasons or systematic inequalities that might

result in a woman turning to prostitution.

After being confronted with the gang-rape pornography, X's frame of women is altered, until it is finally broken by his encounter with a sex-worker named Oksana. The distinction between X's perception of other sex-workers he has hired and of Oksana is obvious as soon as X arrives in the expensive hotel room. The former girls were always dressed up in formal or semi-formal wear. Oksana is wearing gym clothes. As soon as X enters, Oksana asks him if he wants to fuck and then rolls her eyes when he replies that he would like a drink. X considers leaving immediately. Oksana is not 'nice' like his other girls, and "If she doesn't want to be in the room, neither do I" (loc 3039). However, X still contemplates having sex until Oksana asks him for 200 dollars. She claims that Mila will not pay her, and that she had been promised 200, despite the fact that X will pay Mila 1000. At this point, the encounter becomes impossible for X. His illusion of prostitution is shattered when he realizes that Mila is pocketing most of the money and that the whole idea of a glamorous date had been a farce. He pays Oksana, but leaves without having sex with her. As he leaves, he realizes, "The Mila connection can no longer be" (3056). Here, as with the woman in the gang rape clip, Oksana's suffering is what changes X's frame of her. He now perceives her as a grievable life, which causes his persona to crumble.

The recognition of women is the weak epiphany at the end of *The Dog*. Once X's crime is identified, his punishment ensues. X becomes the scapegoat for the Batros's dealings. He is terminated from his position and faces possible arrest, as the Dubai police are interested in his possible sexual abuse (and, anti-climatically, his tutoring) of Alain

Batros. The smoking gun is the illicit sexual material X has accessed, “an unauthorized virtual network…[and] pornographic websites" (232). At this accusation, X is silent. The pseudonym he uses at the hotels he frequents with sex-workers, “Godfrey Pardew”, is used as further evidence. In short, X could face conviction for years for such actions and activities. While his associate Watson suggests he leave the country, X remains inert and lethargic in his extravagant armchair. He knows that he cannot deny the pornography or the prostitution. He is guilty of these actions and therefore, according to a character trial, would be guilty of more considerable crimes. By extension, he feels a deep-seated and disorienting shame.

The trope of a weak epiphany is central to the genre of expatriate literature. The Western male expatriate of these novels seeks the same solace sought by those who came before him, who “went abroad to seek what they could not find in the United States: a way to cope” (Skahill 3). Its literary lineage is perhaps best summed up by *Not Constantinople* author Nicholas Bredie:

> It’s a kind of genre, the expatriate story. You read enough of them and things like travel, romance, intrigue, and a privileged male protagonist ‘living all he can’ seem to reoccur. What befalls this guy can really vary: happy self-actualization a la *Chan Newsome* or *Midnight in Paris*, total loss as in *Tender is the Night* or *Let it Come Down*, or what I’d term the Spanish solution, the sort of mild melancholy epiphany you get at the end of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Leaving the Atocha Station*. This might be the most satisfying outcome.

Expatriate literature is therefore a quest for masculinity by the narrator, seeking the first ending mentioned above of self-actualization, wary of the total loss in achieving that, and usually ending up with his ‘mild melancholy epiphany’ described by Bredie. While the

endings of the novel might differ, the foundations are almost identical: the rich white male cannot cope with his life ‘at home’ in the US or UK due to either the loss of his fortune or his woman. He is emasculated and at the bottom of the hegemonic order. He therefore seeks a new frontier to reclaim his masculinity, to revingorate his phallus, to find redemption. He stumbles into an expatriate life and, finding neither glory nor reward, he is forced to find a new construct for his masculinity and therefore his eyes hit upon the female bodies surrounding him.

To conclude, the frame X uses to conceive of sex-workers and pornography is initially objectification, emphasized by its adherence to Nussbaum’s taxonomy of objectification and in particular, of fungibility. It is clear that X did not perceive women as grievable, meaning he was only capable of apprehending them. However, after meeting Mrs Ted Wilson, viewing the gang rape of the pornography actress, and the confrontation with Oksana, his framing of women is shaken. The suffering of these three women shatters his delusions about pornography and prostitution, and he is no longer able to see sex-workers as “holiday-making women of the night”, but instead as victims of dirty pimps. The personhood formerly denied women is now given to them. As a result, he is forced to confront his own identity. When his frame of women collapsed, so did X’s tenuous vision of himself. Once he viewed women as grievable, he was no longer able to distance himself from the trauma inflicted on them. He becomes guilty as a result. Once his fantasy collapses, so do his identity and his conception of both Dubai and the US. The frames he uses are no longer relevant, but, in a way, X himself is no longer

relevant. As his identity has shattered, there is now no room for him in the liminal space of Dubai. He must now seek out a new space in which to explore his identity.

The trope of a mild epiphany and the end of an expatriate adventure permeate the other books discussed in this chapter. In *A Hologram for the King,* Alan, despite rejecting sexuality and Hanne's proffered body, becomes enamoured of Zahra, the Saudi doctor. This novel embraces another common trope in expatriate literature, that of Orientalism, to be addressed in the next chapter. Alan's mild epiphany is simply that he remains in Saudi Arabia because "otherwise who would be here when the King came again?" (312), but ostensibly because he has entered into a relationship with Zahra. *Stoning the Devil*'s Colin, is left humiliated at the hands of a woman as a "moldy lion in a menagerie" (128) subject to the taunts of his wife. Meanwhile, Dan of *The Ruins of Us* is emasculated by Rosalie's husband, Abdullah. Dan has failed in every way to save Rosalie, but hope lies in the promise of his wife Carolyn's welcome awaiting him at home in the US. Therefore, while the endings of these novels differ in the final resting locations of their narrators, with Alan, Colin, and X staying in Saudi Arabia, Al Ain, and Dubai respectively, while Dan returns to the US, all are forced to in some way confront their failings. In each case, the confrontation is a result of the male narrator's inability to maintain his hegemonic order over women. The authors have used the Gulf as a liminal space in which "transgressive sexuality" can be acted out before the experiment fails, and the men must either change (Dan), resign themselves to failure (Colin), collapse (X) or wait (Alan). None of these outcomes are particularly transformative, but in each the narrator has recognized, at the very least, his own failings.

O'Neill's *The Dog* clearly dominates this chapter both for its quality and quantity of explicit sexual objectification of women. Much of the novel is spent on the parenthetical musings and wonderings of the narrator who seems hell-bent on assuaging his guilt. In "Nothing Happened", Jonathon Lee makes the comparison between O'Neill's novel and Joseph Heller's *Something Happened*. In Heller's novel, Bob Slocum is terrorized by guilt caused by his role in the mercy killing of his son. O'Neill is flattered by the comparison to Heller's work, and expands on it: "I think there's a sense in which *The Dog*, like *Something Happened*, traces the consequences of a crime that cannot be fully identified. Why's he in the doghouse? Why does he feel like a dog? He doesn't even know." O'Neill goes on to say, "He's sensitive to an idea that it's shameful simply to be who he is, a person who needs to go to work, to take orders and sign documents, interact with others, take a shit" (Lee). While in this quotation O'Neill does not highlight X's relationship with women as the key point of the novel, the breakup with Jenn is the fundamental impetus for X's flight to Dubai and consequential existential guilt.

In the four books under discussion in this section--*The Dog*, *Stoning the Devil*, *The Ruins of Us* and *A Hologram for the King*--male narrators objectify female bodies, minimizing women's personhood in order to bolster their own identities, identities that are wrapped up in notions of masculinities. This trope is not novel in and of itself, but is unique for its particularity within a specific community of western expatriates who are coping within a social vacuum, existing outside of traditional social mores, and operating with transgressive sexuality outside of a delineated domestic sphere. Furthermore, the

novels, all of which examine to some extent transnational business and financially driven migrations, interrogate the objectification, commodification and boycott of women's bodies. The novels, however, make their more significant contribution to the understanding of gender order in the ways that their narrators are made grotesque or ridiculous in their objectification (occasionally, their boycott) of women, and in the ways the authors place problem objects, namely daughters, to interrogate the protagonist understanding of gender order. Each character considered here experiences a mild epiphany concerning gender relations and masculine hegemony. However, the books do not offer solutions to the problems they pose. Instead, the novels give us flawed characters who are grappling to find themselves in a transnational world. Their narrators' stories tell us that sexual objectification is flawed and unsustainable, that, as for these men, it is outdated. But the authors do not offer any alternative other than a quiet stasis, leaving the reader wondering what will come next? What would a post-objectification world look like?

III: THE ARAB WOMAN: INTERROGATING THE TROPES OF ORIENTALISM

While the previous chapter concluded with the ways in which the failed objectification of women results in a watershed moment for the male narrators, this chapter will focus upon the sustained interrogation of orientalism throughout the books studied. In order to accomplish this aim, I will first define orientalism by making a distinction between Edward Said's definition of the term, which I will refer to as 'discursive orientalism', and the artistic traditions of orientalism (or artistic orientalism), both of which are crucial for our understanding of the literature in question. The introduction will then establish why the bodies of women are so important as anchors for both artistic and discursive orientalism. Finally, this introduction will demonstrate the ways in which the depiction of women is a crucial site for the interrogation of orientalist ideas, with reference to both *Stoning the Devil* and *A Hologram for the King*.

Edward Said wrote *Orientalism* in 1978 to expose and complicate the patronizing gaze of the West (which Said defines as the Occident) upon the Orient, which Said considers broadly as North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Said's 'Orient' is a very general term to encompass a number of different cultures, nationalities, and people. In this thesis, my scope is firmly within the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The binary of Occident and Orient is not dissimilar in function from the subject and the object within the context of objectification, and indeed, orientalism shares much with the idea of objectification. Furthermore, while there are many iterations of orientalism, as put forward by Said and his contemporaries and his critics, I will only be exploring the role of orientalism as it relates to gender.

In 1978, Said defined orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3) that extends to philosophic, literary, artistic, political and economic methods of representing or relating. Orientalism is all encompassing but ultimately limiting. 'The Orient' itself is not a physical place but rather an idea that was created by the Occident, a conception which allows it to be owned and dominated. The Occident therefore subjugates the Orient; the relationship is, to quote Said, "of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). The Occident, by acting as author of the Orient, is made superior to the Orient. This is Said's orientalism, which I refer to as discursive orientalism. It is an ideology and philosophical conception based on invention and ownership.

Said invokes Michel Foucault's concept of discourse to describe the system responsible for creating the Orient. According to Foucault, discourse is not simply a way of thinking or producing meaning, but rather the very body of knowledge ("The Order of Discourse"). Within a discourse, only certain knowledge is possible. Discourses give currency to the truth and they decree what is true or false in a particular field. Ideas beyond a discourse are impossible. Such is Said's conception of orientalism: the "mythic Orient" has been created and produced by the west, and the construction of the Orient decrees the possibility of only orientalist knowledge.

Said defines the Orient as a "mythical" place, existing only in the gaze of the West; a dreamy invention of "romance [and] exotic beings" (1). As a result, most images of the Orient are created with questionable veracity but rather with reference to the illusory construct. These become the symbols used in artistic orientalism, which become tools

with which to enforce discursive orientalism. In terms of literature and art, artistic orientalism refers to manufactured ideas or symbols about the Middle East, which are often conflated with stereotypical representations or romanticized and exoticized images. These symbols then become part of the established discourse when they are made the only possible knowledge on that subject. Said states that in film, the "audience is watching a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient" (690). Such too, is the case in literature, wherein an artistic representation of a person, which has been informed by the common symbols of romanticism or exoticism, often becomes a collective symbol for not only one culture, but also the Orient more generally. In literature, too, tropes are repeated, and as such, artistic Orientalism can lead into discursive orientalism.

Orientalism as an artistic tradition is represented in Said's work through his investigations of literature, and through the cover art, particularly of the first edition, which uses part of Jean Leon Gerome's 1880 painting, *The Snake Charmer*. The painting is rife with symbols of artistic Orientalism, which I think it is important to unpack. The painting depicts a young naked boy performing with a large snake wrapped around his body, while a group of men with diverse cultural clothing look on, playing different musical instruments. The choice of artwork is significant for Said in that it shows the undercurrent of sexuality present within orientalism, while it also uses hyperrealism to depict a highly unrealistic scene, as argued in Linda Nochin's polemic "The Imaginary Orient". The artwork promotes a fantastical version of the Middle East inspired by Gerome's own visit to Constantinople, but incorporates symbols, garments, and practices

of the Middle East, India, and Northern Africa. As J.H. Plumb describes in a review of Said's book in *The New York Times*, the painting "is the West's crude vision of the Orient — a mixture of barbarity and luxury, of military ferocity and unspeakable depravity, all bathed in a twilight glow of exoticism". This definition is crucial for the understanding of the artistic traditions of orientalism and could be applied to other famous orientalist paintings, such as Gerome's veiled beauty in *Femme Circassienne Violee* or his imprisoned beauty awaiting rescue in the 1866 painting *The Slave Market*; or it could be applied to the scene of sensuality depicted in Jean-Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath.* These artistic symbols of Orientalism reflected the discourse at the time – that the Orient was a place for mad sexuality and lust.

Why is it important to distinguish between discursive orientalism and artistic orientalism? Both in essence are an exercise in limiting the Orient to a narrative or to a series of symbols. However, discursive orientalism is ultimately oppressive and domineering, and it is concerned with what the Orient can and, crucially, cannot be, whereas artistic orientalism is less so. Artistic Orientalism is ultimately more of a studied case of symbology and fantastical representation; the incorporation of tropes, ideas, or images that refer to the Orient but do not adhere to the notion that nothing can exist outside of orientalist fantasy. As a discourse, orientalism is the work of the Occident to incorporate the Orient into its own self-knowledge and therefore, to define the Orient. Said himself does not see any distinction between these two approaches to orientalism, because for him each is as "damaging" as the other. However, the symbols of artistic orientalism can be, and indeed are often, invoked in order to challenge discursive

orientalism, as is the case in the literature examined in this thesis. As I will prove in the chapters following, both Dave Eggers and Garry Craig Powell use the (western) symbology of the Orient in order to explore the horrible limitations of orientalism as a discourse.

While artistic orientalism as defined by symbols and style remains somewhat static in its construction--images of veils, nudity, and harems prevailing--discursive orientalism has altered as the Western perception of the Orient changes. In his "Preface to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary", Said states that "Orientalism is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history…neither the Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability" (3). While artistic orientalism remains relatively fixed as a movement in history, discursive orientalism has evolved as society has altered and with it so have representations in media, which often use the tropes of artistic orientalism that are informed by aspects of discursive orientalism.

Jack Shaheen's 2001 book and 2006 documentary of the same name, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (dir. Jeremy Earp*),* describe the overwhelmingly negative stereotypical representations of Arabs in western film. In some ways, Shaheen's conceptions of orientalism as it applies to women are almost analogous to the tropes described by Said. While Said argues that literary depiction of the Orient, as represented by Flaubert, is full of "harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys" (190), Shaheen comments similarly that Arab women appear in film as "bosomy belly dancers leering out from diaphanous veils" (loc 852). While the women, according to both Shaheen and Said, remain consistently sexualized, the actual construct of the

Orient is different for Said and Shaheen. Said's 1978 *Orientalism* describes the dominant view of the Orient as backward and is able to be dominated. While both Shaheen and Said see women as sexualized, Shaheen's understanding of women's sexuality in orientalist films is that it is fundamentally threatening, as the women are "leering", versus Said's more innocent understanding of them "dancing". Therefore, while the sexualized image of woman is still employed as a symbol of artistic orientalism, the negative narrative adds a different nuance as sexuality becomes menacing.

Therefore, while the symbols used in works discussed above---veils, harems, and oppressed women – endure, the tone of these symbols has changed. Before the Arab Spring, I would argue that these images were more vilified – the sexuality had an edge. The micro-movement, however, exists within a brief window of potential – the time between the Arab spring but before the rise of ISIS, which has since coloured the representations of Arab women to make them more threatening; to turn them into terrorists. The micro-movement is defined by its "hopeful curiosity" and its potential. Therefore, while the authors of the works discussed in this thesis might use static symbols of Orientalism to portray the women, the discursive Orientalism that had previously accompanied these images is questioned, and instead, the cultural attitudes of hope and curiosity accompany these images, creating, in a sense, a new discourse around the Orient – one that is defined by promise.

Literary history has many occasions where, to quote Said, "the orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient" (682). To a certain extent, this remains true of the works in this thesis, all which see western authors writing about the

Orient. Therefore, the lineage of Orientalism cannot be ignored – these works are Orientalist in that the mouthpiece of the Arab woman still remains the Western man. However, what is crucial is that in each of these works, the authors highlight the symbols and imagery historically used to describe Arab women and then problematize it. The symbols are rendered ridiculous or laughable in some cases. Once the symbols and imagery of artistic Orientalism is interrogated, so too is discursive Orientalism. In these novels the male protagonist who serves as a representation for antiquated ideas of the Orient becomes bumbling and hapless. The women described, however, are vibrant and multi-dimensional and, crucially, actively respond to attempts to Orientalize them. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how these contemporary writers use the artistic traditions of the orientalist painters as problematized tropes in order to interrogate ideas of the Orient.

As artistic Orientalism is primarily concerned with artistry and visual representation, I have chosen to use these paintings in order to demonstrate the visual symbols of artistic orientalism that are often a source of imagery within the literature. *Stoning the Devil* and *A Hologram for a King* each contain analogous symbols to Gerome's paintings --veiling, watery seductions, and oppressed women awaiting a white saviour. Each of the paintings will be examined for their symbolism and as pieces of high orientalist art in the sections of this chapter which deal with the literary interpretation of such orientalist symbols. I will discuss veils, the harem/hamam within the section "The Veil and Hamam as Erotic Tropes" and discuss the white saviour in the section "Orientalism and Power". In these sections, I will demonstrate how the interrogation of static symbology has led to a new discourse.

It is now necessary to establish why these elements of orientalism are often so female-centred. In *Orientalism*, Said explains the patronizing gaze of the West upon the East, exploring the idea that the West is always masculinized in representation and the East is always feminized as an "other", which is subjugated while simultaneously being made erotic. As Said states, there is "uniform association of the Orient with sex" (188). Indeed, Said establishes the idea of orientalism using Gustave Flaubert's accounts of Kuchuk Hanem, an Egyptian courtesan who served as inspiration for the description of Salome's dance in "Heroidas" from Flaubert's *Three Tales*. This character of Salome later inspired Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, and his Salome danced the dance of the seven veils, an early precursor of modern striptease. Said asserts that Flaubert not only possessed Hanem physically but that he spoke for her, defining her only by her sexuality. Her wantonness then became a model for supposed excessive sexual desires of all oriental women, thus becoming discursive. If orientalism equates the countries of the Orient with sex, then Arab women become the physical manifestation of Orientalism. The women are symbols of "untiring sensuality [and] unlimited desire" (188), and this motif dominates both orientalist literature and art, and artistic and discursive Orientalism.

If Hanem became, as Said insists, the model for oriental women, this model was based on the domination of a white male gazing upon an Arab woman who is performing for him. Through this difference and assertion of power, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1). Therefore, a western man gazing at Arab women creates the foundation for orientalism, and for Said, an integral part of European identity. Her 'otherness', which refers to her

deemed unbridled sexuality, is contrasted with the propriety of the west. This view is supported by the examples that Said uses to further his arguments, such as Gerard Nerval's travel account "Vaisseau d'Orient". Said argues that Nerval's tale is centred on a fugitive woman, and that "Vaisseau d'Orient" itself "refers enigmatically either to the woman as the vessel carrying the Orient, or to Nerval's own vessel for the Orient" (184) In this example, the oriental woman is the manifestation of Nerval's "dream quest", and the ideology of the Orient is contained in her body. Her othered, sexualized body is representative of the fantasy of orientalism. By gazing upon her, the image of the proper western gentleman, and indeed the West itself, is redrawn and is more definite in its boundaries as it exists in contrast to this other. Therefore, the woman in the Orient, becomes, through sexual objectification, a mirror that presents the subject of the gaze, enhanced, back to him. The orientalisation of the woman is a way to anchor identity.

These male writers resort to orientalising women in a bid to create or recreate a new identity for themselves. Said states that orientalism results in the West's construction of the East as a 'mirror'. To accomplish this, he borrows from Jacques Lacan's terminology in describing the "other". In brief, Lacan describes how the process of "othering" is essential for the creation of identity in human development. In the "Mirror Stage", infants between six and eighteen months learn to first identify themselves in the mirror and then separate themselves from the image they see reflected back at them. In the case of orientalism, the mirror is created by "othering" the Orient, which can then reflect back the enlarged figure of the West. This, in turn, makes the concept of orientalism not dissimilar from sexual objectification. In each case, the subject uses a method of

apprehension, to borrow from Butler's terminology, in order to limit or flatten the person or people (or culture) to be gazed upon. In most artistic orientalism, only overt sexuality is depicted, while systems of governance, commerce, or even religion are usually ignored. This furthers the myth of the sexuality of the Orient. Women in both artistic and discursive orientalism are rarely multi-dimensional; the women depicted are never working or tending to children, instead they are idle and disrobed. Once the object of the gaze has been turned into an object or a myth, the real identity of the object is removed. As a result, the subject of the gaze finds it much easier to understand his or her own role as superior to the object. The Orient, therefore, like the bodies of women in the works of fiction analysed, becomes a distorting mirror. In the case of orientalism, however, women are often also the focus and therefore are doubly othered. The societies of the Orient are sexualized, but women's bodies become the site of sexuality.

There is a distinct current of female sexuality and wantonness pervading the depiction of the Orient through both artistic orientalism and discursive orientalism. This overt sexuality is at odds with the society of the Occident at the time of creation of these books and artworks, at least for Gerome and Flaubert. Flaubert was writing and Gerome was painting in the late nineteenth century at the height of the Orientalist movement when repressive attitudes towards sexuality pervaded Europe. Puritan ideas of sexuality were cultivated through widespread ignorance and embarrassment (Victoria and Albert). In *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault describes this as "the monotonous nights" where "silence became the law", but that crucially this repression was only "theoretical" and that Victorians actually experienced a flourishing discussion of sexuality and sexual practices.

Orientalism is essential in maintaining this tension of outward sexual propriety and secret indulgence. The West preserves its sexual restraint by gazing upon scenes depicting a fantasy of the lecherous Middle East, becoming tantalized by the scenes, while simultaneously able to see themselves as superior, more refined, and more ethical because of the distinction between the two societies (one real and one imagined). Thus western society can retain its façade of puritanism through the sexual outlet of the imagined "Orient" and experience a kind of socially appropriate sexual catharsis through sexual voyeurism. Western men can fantasize about the overt sexuality of the women of the Orient, especially through art images of the harem, without damaging the social norms of western society. The West is distanced from these images of sexuality, set far afield as they are. The difference portrayed between an imagined Orient and Europe helps to reaffirm sexually conservative social mores at home.

This undercurrent of sexuality is abundant in artistic representations of Orientalism. While Gerome's *The Snake Charmer* depicts a male youth, in his other paintings such as *The Slave Market, The Dance of Almeh, The Moorish Bath,* and *The Grand Bath at Bursa,* females are the focal point. In *The Slave Market*, the focal point is the exposed flesh of the female body so the gaze of the viewer lingers on the form of the female body. With the erotic depiction of a slave buyer probing the naked female's mouth to feel her teeth, Gerome is able to create distance from the lasciviousness of the scene through the erotic and exotic Arab backdrop, while suggesting the penetrative control of the West. He is also able to depict wantonness and sexual indulgence by separating the ideas from European society, setting them in an "other" space. Such sexually charged scenes would

be offensive if set in Western culture. This is the artistic tradition of orientalism used as an avenue for the exploration of sexuality, done in a way to titillate the viewer while still promoting superior western propriety. *The Slave Market* utilizes artistic traditions of orientalism to construct and maintain discursive orientalism, creating a narrative of wild sexuality and a lack of propriety and order. This is crucial because it demonstrates that the Orient has historically been an arena where questions about gender and sexuality can be explored. In the height of artistic orientalism, this was a site where unbridled sexuality could be suggested. In the novels of the micro-movement, the Gulf, which is the legacy of the Orient, becomes a site where questions of lust and impotence can be explored. Where the orientalism of this era differs from historical orientalism is that, for the micro-movement, social mores at "home" are not thereby consolidated. Instead, the movement shows the collapse of gendered ideas that open up the potential for a new future.

While I have discussed the role of women's sexuality in the depiction of orientalism, it is also important to discuss the role of the white western narrator in relation to the body of woman, a role in which he casts himself as a white saviour. It would be remiss to discuss the enduring tropes of orientalism without referring to T.E. Lawrence, whose blue-eyed presence is an enduring motif throughout contemporary orientalist books and post-orientalist books. Throughout the literature studied in this thesis, his figure looms large. This is demonstrative of an awareness throughout the literature of the region for the particular legacy of Lawrence, the legacy of the "white male adventurer as the protagonist of the Arab struggle" (New Statesman). The 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* starring Peter O'Toole depicts, according to photographer Tom Hunter, a "beautiful white

man with blue eyes [who] becomes the Madonna of the Desert, and everyone else are his understudies" (New Statesman). The film fantasy of Lawrence of Arabia is entirely orientalist, containing castles, Bedouins, the romance of the desert, of a white person fighting for the Arab cause, surrounded by adventure and mystery. It is arguably this man on whom the male protagonists in these novels model themselves – the blue-eyed rescuer. Again, this artistic trope, that of the man as saviour, is problematized, allowing the authors to reveal the problems with discursive Orientalism that confine Arab women.

In response to Said's *Orientalism,* many Arab writers have written in a way that returns the gaze onto the subject, such as Fatima Mernissi in *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. They have entered into the discourse, and therefore been active in combating the tropes imposed upon them by the West. Cultural critics such as Lila Abu-Lughod have specifically explored the idea of the "oppressed woman" in the Middle East in *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?,* suggesting that Arab women are more complex than the Western conception of them. Indeed, Abu-Lughod's work is reflective of the ways in which Arab women specifically have become a vehicle for Islamaphobia, and the rights of women have become the channel through which generalized fear against Islam is expressed (786).

In contemporary literature, orientalist tropes are expressly outdated, especially considering the tendency of the media to depict decrepit sandstone buildings and chipped Arabesque tile when confronted by the vast, often overwhelming modernity of megacities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, or Jeddah. The romanticism of Bedouin life and Arabian Nights are still attempted pictures of the East despite settings of such cosmopolitan

metropolises. While *In the Kingdom of Men* neatly avoids this by setting the novel in the 1960s, and therefore just at the beginning of the oil boom, the other books discussed in this section, *Stoning the Devil* and *A Hologram for the King,* grapple with the attempts of their narrators to wash an Orientalist glaze over a modern city. Such is the case in *Stoning the Devil* and Colin's dealings with his Palestinian refugee wife and his Emirati students, and with Alan from *A Hologram for the King* and the worldly Zahra.

The attempts of the narrators to categorize the Arab women they meet according to orientalist stereotypes is reflective of their own cognitive dissonance. As this thesis will show, the western narrators of these books strive to imprint their orientalist fantasies upon the bodies of the Arab women they encounter in order to turn the women into complicit mirrors which then project the gazers' Lawrentian persona back at them. *Stoning the Devil* and *A Hologram for the King* are staunchly self-reflective: the orientalist fantasy never fully takes hold. Instead, the characters and the reader are confronted with an idea of the "Orient" which resolutely resists classification. In this way the authors demonstrate the complexity of the Arab world and Arab women more specifically while also demonstrating the foibles and failures of Western masculinity in trying to construct and live out a myth of the white-man adventurer.

What makes the use of orientalism different from the instances of sexual objectification is that there is no 'epiphany' or break in which the frames of personhood slip. Rather, the literature discussed in this section constantly interrogates discursive orientalism through the manipulation of orientalist artistic traditions. The artistic elements of Orientalism – the pervasive symbols and imagery – are reinterpreted by these

novels to represent the spirit, or discourse, of the time. In a kind of desperation to establish their own dominance, the expatriates orientalise the Arab women, but Eggers and Powell make this orientalising through symbology absurd. By rendering antiquated images of artistic orientalism ridiculous, the limiting discourse is also made ridiculous, and its place, the authors make the case for hopeful curiosity about Arab women, and by extension, the region itself. The collapse of these symbols is significant for the discourse of potential it opens up. I would argue that this micro-movement has since been shut down, and these static artistic images and symbols since linked to a discourse of fear with the rise of ISIS.

THE VEIL AND HAMAM AS EROTIC TROPES

This section of the thesis will discuss the veil as an erotic symbol within the lineage of Orientalism and the cultural geography of the contemporary Gulf. The veil is a heavily loaded cultural and orientalist symbol. To this end, I first wish to explore what exactly is meant by "The Veil" as an orientalist symbol before examining briefly the depiction of the veil in the height of orientalism in the nineteenth century. I will then establish the contemporary depictions of the veil before beginning my reading of the literature in question. I will lead the discussion of the symbol of the veil with Dave Eggers's *A Hologram for the King*, while also making reference to Joseph O'Neill's *The Dog*. I will establish the ways in which the idea of veiling is used as a symbol for the disparate stereotypes of the Arab woman as either a wanton maiden begging for exposure or a combative figure to be feared.

In Qatar, the Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Bahrain and Kuwait, it is expected that Muslim females will veil with a full *abaya, hijab* or *niquab.* The "veil" is a symbol of religious piety but also of a culture. Different nationalities will wear the *hijab* in different ways. It is an expression of identity while remaining a symbol of religious adherence. In Saudi Arabia, *hijab* is law, even for foreigners, and it would be unusual for any man to see a woman in public without at least a veil over her hair. In the contemporary Gulf societies, however, the veil is far less ubiquitous than is suggested in the media. In essence, most Gulf States do not adhere to the monolithic black and white uniforms for men and women that are so often depicted in media representations of the Middle East.

The veil has a long tradition as an orientalist trope, and in order to demonstrate this it is important first to establish the artistic traditions of orientalism through the books of Flaubert, as discussed in Said's *Orientalism*, and the work of the painter Jean Leon Gerome, whose work was used as the cover art for the 1978 publication of Said's book. This will help establish a baseline for the particular type of orientalism to which Said is referring, before moving on to more contemporary examples of the veil as fetish.

While in Muslim societies the connotation of the veil has been of religious piety, in the Occident's construction of the Orient the veil comes to connote sexual openness and sexual desire. At some stage in the Occident's knowledge of the veil, the veil ceased to be an opaque symbol of religious piety and identity, and became the diaphanous method of sexual allure that is prevalent in media depictions of the "Orient", and this transformation hinges on the character of Salome. In *Orientalism*, Said spends some time establishing Kuchuk Hanem as the inspiration for orientalism through Flaubert's writings. Indeed,

Flaubert was inspired by Hanem and another dancer/sex-worker, Azzizah, in creating the character of Salome in “Heroidas” from *Three Tales,* who performs the ‘bridge dance’ or dances on her hands (Neginsky). It has been suggested that this version of Salome also inspired Arthur O’Shaughnessy’s poem, “The Daughter of Heroidas”, and Oscar Wilde’s translation of the French play *Salome,* and with it, the creation of the infamous “Dance of the Seven Veils” (Wilde) which, while not described within the play, is argued to have been the world’s first strip-tease when performed in public. Salome emerged as the leading highly-sexualized orientalist figure (Caddy), which led to Salomania, with women in diaphanous skirts performing unbridled, almost cathartic expressions of hypersexuality (Schweitzer). In essence, Kuchuk Hanem, as Flaubert’s muse, was immortalized as Salome in *Three Tales* in 1877, and by 1891 Salome had become an exotic, highly sexualized dancer notable for her veil. This demonstrates that the artistic lineage of the veil was linked to a discourse centred on sexuality.

The creation of the trope of the sexualized, veiled Arab woman is also perpetuated by visual art and the Orientalist depictions of veiled female bodies. Gerome’s 1875 *Femme Circassian Violee* depicts a beautiful veiled woman. She is wearing lustrous robes of blue and gold, which open at the chest to reveal underclothing and hint at the swell of a breast. She holds a staff, which she strokes with her finger. Her face is covered by a greenish-black diaphanous veil, adorned with jewels. She stares into the eyes of the viewer and her red barely parted lips are illuminated with a highlight. Gerome was inspired by his trips to Constantinople and the unique clothing of the women he met (“The Spectacular Art of

Jean Leon Gerome"). The interplay of covered and uncovered flesh is crucial here, as there is the contrast of the pale exposed chest flesh with the veil.

The more contemporary work of the photographer Sebastian Farmborough also explores the idea of the veil, and highlights, within context, this white male obsession with veiling in the Middle East and in particular in Saudi Arabia. His set of photographs, titled 2008 *An Emerging Mystery*, depicts a woman wearing *niquab* in mildly suggestive scenes. In one image, a woman in *niqaub* and *abaya* is standing in the water. She gazes at the viewer, as if inviting the viewer to join her. Another image shows a woman's eyes gazing up at the viewer from behind an arabesque lattice. In all cases, the Saudi woman is sexualized and seen as an exotic and unknown entity, characterized by the veil fetish. The implication in Farmborough's work is the artist's desire to know the flesh hidden behind the veil, to know the women, who he states "fascinate me" (The National), which is a transgression of a religious boundary – the Muslim woman's veil. This is evidence of the enduring discourse about Arab women and sexuality, although it also suggests a change in tone, a need to dominate, to unveil, and to discover. The depictions of covered women being dominated, rather than sexuality offered up, is perhaps indicative of a more aggressive sexuality on the part of the Occident rather than the Orient as was previously constructed.

This desire for transgression, the dominance over veiled women, extends to pornography. The most popular actress of this type of pornography is Mia Khalifa, a Lebanese non-Muslim, whose most famous video depicts her performing fellatio while wearing hijab. Mira Aboulezz believes that "the abundant eroticism from which Mia

profits comes from the idea of 'conquering' the mysterious, strange, different, exotic brown woman" (Aboulezz), in essence echoing what Farmborough has stated about his photography, that the desire to know an unknown is an act of power over the orient. Of course, in the case of pornography, the dominance is more explicitly sexual, yet in keeping with the order of white man above brown woman. This again, is reflective of a discourse of dominance and of sexual domination and ownership.

The appeal of the veil lies in the idea of penetrating what should not be penetrated as a reaction to the frustrating way in which it limits the male gaze (Yengenoglu). The veil serves to conceal, and therefore encourages the West's desire to uncover, to discover, and ultimately to control (Yegenoglu) because the veil both conceals and reveals the woman's body, eroticizing and fetishizing her cultural difference. The veil is sexualized by European male fantasies (Huddleston) to the extent that veil/*hijab* pornography has become a genre in and of itself. The veil, and the idea of unwrapping, of penetrating the forbidden and the unknown, distorts and amplifies the sexuality and sensuality of the Oriental woman. It is also wrapped up in systems of power – the Occident's deep desire to penetrate and dominate the Orient.

In Eggers's *A Hologram for a King,* Alan has a fixation on the veil and the hair which escapes the veil. This is the artistic image that most strictly adheres to orientalist stereotypes. Eggers uses the veil as a symbol for the unknown, for sexuality and for the exotic, which has been done by previous generations in aligning the veil, as a symbol of artistic orientalism, with a particular discourse surrounding Arab women. I would argue that in this symbolic representation of the veil, Eggers is at his least critical, and Alan

continues to linger on the veil. However, that is not to say that Eggers does not complicate the trope. While Alan tries to use the veil to exoticize Zahra, she herself resists it, particularly through her casual disrobing. Furthermore, the extreme sexualization of Arab women is categorically interrogated by Alan's impotence. This then is a resistance of the established discourse that equates Arab women with unbridled sexuality. By inverting this trope, Eggers therefore provides the opportunity for a different discourse to emerge.

When Alan first meets Zahra in the hospital in Jeddah, she is no more than "a shadow" (149). He immediately casts his eyes over her and is drawn almost immediately to her veil, stating that "Her hijab was worn tight, obscuring her hair but for one strand that had escaped and was flowing recklessly down her cheek" (150). Her veil, and the exposed hair, communicates a tension between piety and sexuality. She is initially seen by Alan as a woman oppressed by her veil, but one who desperately wants to be 'unveiled'. Eggers draws attention to the 'recklessness' of her hair, connoting a certain disregard for necessary virtue. The strand is caressing her cheek, as a lover might, and the image is immediately appealing to Alan, who simultaneously desires her and wants to rescue her. Alan acknowledges that he "felt wrong looking at her. He wanted too much from her" (151). Here, Eggers capitalizes on the mystery of a veiled woman and the taboo attached to her, an orientalist fantasy of libido mixed with constraint. In this moment, he echoes Farmborough's articulated desire to dominate what is hidden. Here, the taboo is what interests him.

The first meeting introduces the motif of "escaping hair", which serves as a symbol for Zahra's increasing sexual availability as interpreted by Alan. The tendril demonstrates, for him, a wantonness, which is ready to be capitalized on --if only there was a man, a Western man, to liberate her from her pious ways. This description of Zahra highlights Alan's orientalist objectification. She appeals to him because of her exoticism: she is the picture of a forbidden fruit begging to be plucked, and therefore, at least at this stage, she is merely for him an object that stands in for a cultural fantasy.

Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* discusses notions of the appeal of the exotic. He argues that the exotic is not "found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them" (Huggan 13). That is to say, the perception of the exotic paradoxically denotes both mystery and ownership. Alan's mode of perceiving Zahra, his frame, is through this type of exoticism that is exemplified by the veil. Zahra is, at least initially, appealing to Alan because he is looking for mystery.

Later, when Alan and Zahra meet again on the way to Obhur, he notices immediately that her hair is covered with only a loose scarf as opposed to the tight hijab of the first meeting. The looseness of the scarf becomes a symbol of Zahra's perceived sexual eagerness. But Zahra's hair also becomes symbolic of her emerging personhood. When Zahra parts the curtains of her hair, "revealing her face anew" (285), a shift occurs in Alan's frame of her. Zahra speaks freely, telling Alan about her education, her experimentations with drugs, even her former boyfriends. Alan becomes intimidated by

her and feels “like a less necessary species” (287). With this line, Eggers has demonstrated that the limited model of Zahra as a sexualized object is far too simplistic; Zahra, not Alan, is the complicated one. While he had used the slipping veil to connote her sexuality, in parting her hair, Zahra has claimed her personhood. In this way, the trope begins to be interrogated.

Zahra is almost incomprehensible to Alan. He sees her as someone who, although forbidden to him, could be a fountain of sexual satisfaction; in other words, as an Orientalist paradigm explored by Said as “a male-power fantasy…express[ing] unlimited sensuality” (207). She fulfils the requirements for an orientalist fantasy: she is Arab, she wears a veil, and she has a sexual relationship with the white male narrator. However, the frame of orientalism is complicated. Zahra is also older, a mother, well-travelled, and a doctor. Her veil does not symbolize oppression. Zahra, therefore, is soon recast, not as a *hijabi* sex goddess, but rather is given her ‘personhood’, to link back to Butler. Alan has merely apprehended her as an Orientalist object, but in this scene, she is recognized. This, again, chips away at the discourse of sexuality surrounding Oriental women.

Finally, I would argue that Alan’s enchantment with Zahra’s veil is almost satirical due to his naiveté and the archetypal nature of his image of the single tendril of hair that signals her ‘willingness’. This motif is skilfully developed and is demonstrative of the author’s own awareness of the dangers of orientalist tropes. Eggers’s textual representation of artistic, visual orientalist tropes highlights the ignorance and misconceptions of the narrator, rather than promoting orientalist fantasy. Alan is pathetically helpless, harmlessly failing at nearly every aspect of his life, romantic,

familial, and professional. His naiveté is more charmingly endearing than oppressive and offensive, although this is perhaps because of Zahra's own enjoyment of Alan's ignorance. It is more of a parody of Orientalism than an actual representation of objectification, which is what distinguishes it from Farmborough's work. It is a far more nuanced discussion of a transcultural relationship in a post-orientalist world, and reveals the obsolescence of outdated discourses surrounding Oriental women. In this way, Eggers demonstrates the prevailing attitude of the time – that of hopeful curiosity.

Literature is a place where tropes may be questioned, although the trope of the veiled woman remains commonplace in books showing less critical awareness of orientalism. . In reality, the veiled seductress akin to Salome simply does not exist. When the trope of the veil is used in literature, therefore, it must be reformed to comply with a post-orientalist world. The veil is a worn-out symbol for orientalism, and can be subverted in these texts to symbolize female agency, as is the case of *A Hologram for the King*. In this novel, while veil fetish may be the original appeal for Alan, Zahra, soon claims her 'personhood'. The discursive orientalism is altered through the manipulation of an artistic trope.

In O'Neill's *The Dog,* the case is somewhat different*:* the veil frames a woman to show her strength and dominance, but also her threat. While in the pornography that X consumes almost every subgenre of woman is listed, the mention of veils or Arab women is conspicuously absent. I would argue that this omission reflects O'Neill's theme of isolation: the disengagement with the setting and the local population means X is truly untethered. X is not part of the city, and unlike Eggers's Alan, he makes no real

connection with the land and the people. While Alan at least experiences meaningful experiences through his relationship with Zahra, X is anonymous in a dreamscape. When the reality of Dubai is mentioned, it is not authentic or sensuous, as it is for Alan, but menacing or grotesque. Furthermore, *The Dog*, as the most recent novel discussed in this thesis, almost straddles the micro-movement and the period immediately following. As such, the veiled women in *The Dog* are, to a certain extent, threatening in a way that they are not in the other novels. This demonstrates again that the discourse is changing.

The only interaction between X and Arab women occurs as X is walking through the mall with his friend's wife, when "there stormed…a group of black-robed and black-gloved and black-masked women… like a black wave through the tables" (154). The women are an unidentifiable yet formidable force, almost as if part of a nightmare. X's paranoia about their power is significant. The women are not alluring but terrifying to X: "they are coming to get him" (154). This image relates to the threatening sexuality referred to by Shaheen in *Reel Bad Arabs*. The implication here may be that X deserves to be punished by these women for his lack of morality. They become combatants against moral decay and indeed, against western dominance. Their presence, therefore, is in direct opposition to the trope of the veil signifying wantonness or powerlessness. In this manner, O'Neill has consciously nodded to the obsolescence of orientalist sexual fantasy, but arguably replaced it with a similarly damaging discourse.

Crucially, this moment of fear caused by the masked and gloved female form immediately turns to a comment upon the sexuality of the women whose bodies are shielded by the *abaya* and *niqaub*. Because X has visibly expressed his fears, his

companion Lynn urges him to imagine these women naked. The implication being made is that when women are naked they are stripped of power and therefore objectified. The male gaze, as implicated by Lynn in her advice to X, can immediately make the women impotent. X responds:

> I forced out a culpable little laugh. More than once I've had pipedreams involving women precisely like these women (i.e., dressed in attire designed as a powerful antidote to nudity but counterproductively causing in me precisely the effect of mentally undressing them), and I had the crazy thought that Lynn had X-ray powers that had opened a window onto my revolting life.
>
> 154

Here, elements of orientalism appear, although O'Neill has presented them in an oblique way. X's account of his sexual arousal is described entirely in brackets. The desire for these women is almost assumed, but is also of little importance to the story, which remains instead concerned with the white male expatriate at the centre of it.

In this passage, veil fetish is demonstrated to be 'matter of fact', with the bracketed aside stating and taking for granted the notion, recalling Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, stating that to make something forbidden is to actually make it more desirable and more perverse. The women are desirable only because they are veiled, not because they exude any explicit sexuality. Instead, the desire to de-robe them is really a desire to dominate them, and therefore could essentially serve as an extension of orientalism or colonialism. O'Neill has his narrator grapple with this clichéd idea solely within the aside to emphasize the tiredness of the trope.

This passage also shows X's inability to 'own' Arab women, which is in contrast to his ownership of females through pornography and prostitution. The veil has served its

true purpose and made the orientalist male gaze impossible. X may use pornography of every sub-genre and niche, but he does not use pornography of Arab women. He may fornicate with women of every country in Asia and Eastern Europe, but he has not even attempted to have sex with an Arab woman. While it seems 'everyone' (in X's milieu) is for sale in Dubai, these women may very well emphatically not be. They are threatening because they are contrary to X's depravity.

To conclude, orientalism has a long history with the veil, using it as a symbol for both exotic sexual wantonness and sexual oppression. Orientalist ideas about the veil are inescapable even in a contemporary world as is demonstrated by Jean-Leon Gerome, Khalifa, and Farmborough. In *A Hologram for the King* and *The Dog*, artistic orientalist tropes are used, but women are framed in different ways, and thus the discourse is altered. While Alan initially fetishizes Zahra for her veil, she takes control of her narrative, and Alan's buffoonery suggests Eggers's interrogation of previous discourses of Orientalism. By making the discourse absurd, Eggers creates potential for a new, more nuanced understanding of Arab women, and by extension the Middle East. In *The Dog*, veiled women are the only women exempt from the direct sexually objectifying male gaze, and although they become a monolithic wave of blackness, they have strength for the way they unsettle the often reprehensible male narrator. They are not given personhood, but unlike most women in the novel, they cannot be owned. This again, indicates the way in which the discourse of Arab women, and the Arab world, is subject to change while the tropes remain the same. O'Neill's women are terrifying, which is reflective of the rising threat of the Arab world in 2014.

Like the veil, the concepts of the *hamam* and *harem* have been taken up by orientalists and transformed into entirely different entities. In Arabic, the word *hamam* means 'wash' and can be used for 'toilet' within the Gulf dialect. In Turkish, however, the word *hamam* refers to a communal bathhouse, which is a gender-segregated space similar to that of a Roman bath or a Japanese bathhouse. The bathhouse was and is part of Turkish culture and, like the veil, linked to religion as ablutions are required before prayer. The word *harem* in Arabic refers to the women's quarters of the house, a place inadmissible to men. A *hamam* would be part of the harem, a bathing area for women alone.

The concept of the *harem* in particular has become fodder for orientalist fantasies and myths, most likely due to the Imperial *harem* of the Ottoman Empire, which was an elaborate dwelling housing the female relatives of the Sultan, as well as female domestic servants and also concubines. The word *harem* has been conflated to bring to mind images of lascivious women in elaborate Arabesque brothels. This is pure orientalist fantasy. The harem was more often used to keep women and men chaste, and yet the invasion of a woman's space, be it within the *hamam* or *harem* setting, became a clichéd device within orientalism.

In *Orientalism*, Said again uses the example of Kuchuk Hanem to demonstrate how orientalism has created the image of the hypersexual Arab woman, described by Gustave Flaubert as displaying "luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality" (187) and therefore creating "a uniform association between the Orient and sex" (187). In *Imperial Fictions*, Rana Kabbani concurs that the mythical Orient is defined by "lascivious

sensuality" (24). Indeed, high Orientalist paintings depicted fleshy females in highly 'exoticized' settings, focusing particularly on the *harem* and the *hamam*, as depicted in Jean-Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* or in Gerome's *The Moorish Bath*. The 'oriental sex slave' idea reveals a Western obsession to view the East as 'sexually free' in contrast with the Victorian repression of sexuality. Pictorial and literary representations exalt women in diaphanous veils who beckon from *hamams*, inviting the gaze of Western men; odalisques recline on ottomans and divans, caressing their own flesh.

As Carl Ernst writes in *Following Muhammed: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, this representation is a fantasy: "there are countless harem scenes filled with dozens of women in the bath…they reduced Muslim women to the status of a plaything". Ernst also states that the orientalist fantasy confused the *hamam*, or the bath, with the *harem,* or gender-segregated space, perhaps furthered by myths of the Sultan's legendary Imperial harem. Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* yokes together the concepts of *harem* (women's space) and *hamam* (bath) to depict the seeming sexual availability of bathing women within an Arab world. This becomes a widespread fantasy or motif in artistic orientalism and informs prevailing western representations of Arab women, thereby adding to the discourse of Arab sexuality and penetrability.

While Ingres's painting depicts a bathhouse/brothel crowded with mostly white women reclining in orgasmic ecstasy, the sole bather was actually a more popular subject. In *The Moorish Bath,* Jean-Leon Gerome portrays two women within the *hamam*, one with incredibly pale skin and one with black skin. The pale-skinned woman is turned piously away from the viewer, her nude body curled up amongst the vibrant Arabesque

tiles. The black woman seated to her left has her breasts displayed for the viewer and an elaborate necklace hanging around her neck to highlight her nipples. She holds a bronze bowl of water that is tilted to fall down the spine and towards the buttocks of the white woman. The scene is titillating and erotic and holds all the symbols of artistic orientalism. The tiles are rich in colour and design, the water clear and inviting, the background fabrics sumptuous and luxurious, and a hookah pipe is apparent in the background. The scene also appears to demonstrate the inherent piety of the white woman, who is afraid of her burgeoning sexuality, while the black woman occupies the role of servant in preparing the white woman for an imminent sexual encounter (Willette).

These examples of the artistic traditions of Orientalism demonstrate the damaging effects of the *harem/hamam* trope in discursive Orientalism. I have already demonstrated the tendency of Orientalism to promote the eroticism of specifically Arab women through veil fetish. The *harem/hamam* trope also transforms a cultural tradition intended to ensure the chastity of the society into a vulnerable penetrable position, offering up women for the voyeurism of the male viewer. The trope has persisted and pervades popular culture to this day. I have already discussed Farmborough's photography in terms of the veil fetish, but the photographs also align themselves with the trope of the *harem/hamam*. In "Emerging Mystery 1" a woman fully clad in *niquab* stares out from the sea, and in "Pakinam" a woman appears to be resting on the land jutting out to sea and looking dreamily upwards as if about to fall asleep. These images are evidence for the recurring motif of placing Arab women near water with their bodies displayed for male audiences.

The *harem/hamam* is a motif also used in *A Hologram for the King*. In the novel, the bumbling Alan is, rather inexplicably, alluring to two women: Saudi Zahra, and Finnish Hanne, who Eggers sets up as foils for each other. In order to discuss the ways in which Eggers utilizes the Orientalist trope of the *harem/hamam*, it is important to discuss the distinctions between two almost parallel scenes. It is Hanne's clinical depiction within the *harem/hamam* that reinforces the exoticism of Zahra's seduction. I will now show how the seductions run parallel to each other, with the aim of demonstrating Eggers's ability to highlight the absurdity of appropriated orientalist tropes. Eggers also interrogates the trope by attributing a practical functionality to Zahra's seduction. Furthermore, the failed sexual copulation problematizes the whole scene.

Blonde and blue-eyed, Hanne is dissimilar to Alan's wife Ruby, who is petite with tightly coiled hair, and to Zahra, who is small and dark. Hanne develops a romantic interest in Alan, which is really more a resignation: Alan realizes when Hanne first tries to kiss him at a party that "She'd thought she was doing him a favour tonight" (177). Despite his own disinterest, Alan accepts her invitation to Hanne's house, where the situation becomes increasingly awkward for both parties. Hanne, becoming frustrated with Alan's disinterest, suggests that the two take a bath. When Alan is reluctant, Hanne urges him to "pretend it is a hot tub" (174). It is in this moment that Hanne's desperation is fully realized as in the description of the scene she alludes to a trope of artistic orientalism.

The scene that follows plays out as a parody of an orientalist painting. While Hanne has invoked an orientalist tradition, through the use of the bath, her imitation is

desperate and her sexuality inauthentic. There is none of the coyness or sensuality of a *hamam* as depicted by the Orientalist painters. In essence, Hanne's attempts to seduce Alan lack the soul or intimacy of Zahra's. Her *harem/hamam* fantasy is artifice. Hanne is an expatriate, a divorcee, and a Northern European, and she here behaves in an antiseptic, clinical, and too familiar way. Saudi Zahra, on the other hand, is the original article, the true exotic other. Her seduction of Alan takes place in the beautiful waters of Obhur, a coastal town near Jeddah. In contrast to the disinterest that plagues the time with Hanne, Zahra's encounter seems an awakening for Alan, although this is later complicated, as will be seen.

Hanne's attempted seduction of Alan hinges on the bath and the fantasy of the 'hot-tub', itself a modern interpretation of the *hamam*. Hanne tries to set up a romantic environment but fails. She sets up candles in the bathroom and fills the tub with dishwasher soap bubbles, which Alan describes as "anemic". They last only a few minutes, a little like the lustre of the scene. Alan cannot feel arousal in this state, within the "quiet water" (177) of Hanne's bathtub. In contrast to the antiseptic bathroom, the Red Sea in which Zahra seduces Alan is "gloriously alive" (294). Alan is overwhelmed by the beauty of the scene, finding "too many colors, the shapes irrational…the water inky…the bottom unseeable" (294). The place is far more beautiful and complex than anything Alan has come across before and he is duly taken aback. While Hanne is an antiseptic artifice, Zahra is an explosion of colour.

Hanne also seems ill at ease in her seduction scene. When Hanne enters the bath she does so, "gingerly…seeming not at all familiar with it" (175). Once inside the bath,

she sits statically, without “any idea of what to do next” (175). In contrast, Zahra enters the water as a “bright, blinding, huge” (293) shape that Alan cannot immediately identify. She is immediately active, swimming and chasing fish. Alan is forced to chase her, and in doing so, becomes a player in a game she has created. The scene is immediately alive with action. In contrast, Hanne has to ask Alan to participate, even begging him to. Zahra seems to be the incarnate fantasy of artistic orientalism, albeit modernized. Hanne cannot wield the orientalist tropes, which seem in her articulation of them clunky and laughable.

The bodies of the two women are also compared in the two scenes. When Alan watches Hanne enter the bath, he thinks, “she was lovely, her shape generous, her skin pale, freckled, her back sunburned” (175). He flies through the praise of her body while only resting on general elements, her skin or her sunburn, not highlighting specific regions of her body. In contrast to this, Alan’s eyes linger, chase, and exalt Zahra’s body, to the extent that it is made supernatural. As she flies into the water after him, Alan realizes that “He had never seen anything more beautiful than her hips rising and falling, her legs kicking, her naked torso undulating” (294). As he swims, he sees her breasts “descending from her, glowing” (294). She is a vision, but a slow, delicious, and tantalizing fantasy of a body being hidden and revealed for Alan and Alan alone. Hanne’s body, in contrast, was presented in an almost perfunctory way, Alan simply stating, “so they were naked” (175).

Hanne’s body connotes domesticity and obligation. Calling Hanne’s shape ‘generous’ casts her as a maternal figure. Throughout the novel, Hanne helps Alan. She provides him with information about the King’s whereabouts and provides him with

siddiqi to help him sleep. These maternal overtones contribute to the asexuality of the encounter. Alan associates Hanne with banality. Hanne "was now soaping his knee, softly, as if polishing a banister" (176). Later, when Hanne leans against Alan, he describes the experience as "not unlike a dentist's lead bib" (178). In contrast, Zahra is compared to an exotic fish, her swimming undulating and seductive, her sexual moves aggressive and complete, as demonstrated when "she grabbed him" (296).

Both women also invoke the use of taboo to further their allure, and once more, this idea is unsuccessful in Hanne's hands and profoundly sensual in Zahra's. Hanne tells Alan of a recent trip she took to a beach in which she wore a bikini. She emphasizes the taboo of her wearing a bikini, stating "I shouldn't have…it was haram to be out there with so little on" (174). Hanne is using this anecdote to demonstrate to Alan her "wildness" or her provocative willingness to disobey social convention. In contrast, Zahra, an actual flesh and blood Saudi woman, not only snorkels directly in front of Alan, but in an even more risqué move, wears not a bikini, but men's swimming trunks. She does this so that if someone sees them snorkelling, "they'll think it's two men. Just two backs uncovered, wearing men's trunks" (194). Again, with these parallel incidents, Eggers shows the reader that Zahra's actions are more impactful than Hanne's because of their authenticity. Hanne imitates orientalist conventions, while Zahra effortlessly embodies them, even when they are modernized.

In many ways, the similarities between these scenes sets up the idea that the Orient, which is represented by Zahra, is much more authentic and therefore preferable to the clinically vapid Occident, which might serve as a critique of Western culture and the

soullessness of the expatriate experience. In doing this, Eggers does not seem to be critiquing orientalist tropes so much as updating them for a globalized, transnational world. Zahra is still painted as the exotic, highly sexualized and eager maiden. Arguably, in this sense, Eggers is reinforcing orientalist tropes by making the authentic brown woman an image of sexuality.

However, in some ways, Eggers complicates the trope of the *harem/hamam*. Zahra is also, to a certain extent, the author of her own orientalism. In the veil section, I demonstrated how she reclaimed the narrative surrounding the limited symbol. In the *harem/hamam*, too, Zahra controls and even plays with the concepts of her own orientalisation. Eggers uses the loaded verb "undulating", which has connotations of belly dancing and Orientalism. However, by using this verb to refer to Zahra swimming, Eggers is, to an extent, subverting the trope. Zahra is performing for the male eye, and indeed "she had some idea of how good she was, how much she pleased him" (295). She is the one with the agency to control the situation. Eggers here emphatically casts the Arab woman as performing a kind of self-orientalising, as if she knows exactly how to appeal to Alan's desires based, not on Kuchek's unbridled and indiscriminate sexuality, but on the skilful highlight of specifically orientalist motifs.

Furthermore, the 'costume' of a man's swimming trunks could not be further from the gossamer veils and belly dancing chains depicted in Ingres's paintings or worn in Salome's dance. Zahra's attire is both practical and seductive. She is manipulating the strict rules, judgment and restrictions of her society in order to tantalize Alan, by using the guise of male shorts to reveal her body. Furthermore, while this scene has all the

hallmarks of artistic orientalism – the taboo of woman naked or nearly so, the exotic fish, and a woman bathing – Zahra is a mature woman in her 40s and not the nymph of artistic orientalism. The scene has elements of high artistic orientalism but denies discursive orientalism because Zahra is practical and real, not simply a hyper-sexualized fantasy of a white male.

Eggers also complicates the orientalist trope of the harem/hamam by making Alan essentially impotent. While Alan feels only "stirrings" with Hanne and is unable to become aroused enough for an erection, he is only marginally more successful with Zahra. Despite Said claiming in *Orientalism* that the East has a particular "feminine penetrability", Alan cannot penetrate Zahra and when "he was ready, she was not" (300). Despite this, he is not distracted but rather is "so consumed with wanting her, enjoying her flesh, her mouth and breath and voice, that no other thoughts had entered his head" (300). To Eggers's credit, he does not follow the trope of the overly sexualized Arab woman demonstrating the unilateral power of unbridled sexuality to heal the white male. Instead, as a post-orientalist novelist, Eggers suggests a solution and then problematizes it. There is no climax or moment of epiphany, but rather the understanding of two tired "prizefighters" who lean against each other for support. Eggers insists on nuance in representing both of these characters, and no neat ending will heal what ails either of them.

POWER AND ORIENTALISM

Said's Orient itself has a "feminine penetrability" (206), but is also silent and malleable, much like Flaubert's Hanem. The symbol, therefore, for Orientalism, is that of

the passive Arab woman, inferior in every way to the white male conqueror. Said argues that within literature, "women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy" (207), victims of both patriarchal hegemony and of limited power within fundamentalist regimes. In orientalist literature, Arab society is defined in contrast to European rationality as "irrational, depraved (fallen)" (Said 40). Therefore, the white orientalists are often cast as saviours; their dominance is disguised as emancipation. In short, the white orientalist almost always rescues the dusky maiden from her barbarous husband. This suggests that the infantilization of Arab women is part of discursive orientalism in which the narrative surrounding Arab women shows them as if incapable of saving themselves.

While the infantilization of Arab women is part of discursive orientalism, it is also prevalent in artistic orientalism. This cliché is even evident in works that strive to represent an accurate image of the Orient. In Lord Byron's highly orientalist poem, *The Giaour,* the female Arab heroine, Leila, "is but dust/ A soulless toy for tyrant's lust" (518-519). She is a sexual captive of the "stern" (544) Hassan. In contrast to Hassan, the unnamed *giaour* (slang for 'infidel') is young and pale but full of passion. While Giaour tries to rescue his beloved Leila, Hassan has her thrown in the sea as punishment for her infidelity, and Giaour avenges her death by slaying Hassan.

The myth of the oppressed woman is pervasive in contemporary media to a greater degree since the advent of Muslim militant extremist attacks. In television shows such as *Homeland,* and in films such as *The Kingdom*, Arab women are drawn with the same heavy-handed brush: they are ignorant, unidentifiable black shapes under the threat of

constant oppression from husbands, fathers, and sons. In these popular representations, the Arab women are pitiful and interchangeable. Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arabs* makes the argument that women are "humiliated, demonized and eroticized" (loc 852). In essence, they are cast as oppressed women, terrorists, or sluts. They are represented as dancers in diaphanous veils or as "shapeless Bundles of Black…trekking silently behind their unshaven mates" and "they are never in the workplace" (Shaheen loc 866). Worse than not being given work, women are often given no agency, no dialogue, and no self-representation. Like Flaubert's Hanem, who "never represented her emotions, presence, or history," (Said 406) the representations of Arab women in fiction are communicated by white Western men.

The oppressed woman is a common trope in western news coverage and political debate. In particular, the veil has become an issue which allows the misinformed to debate the gender structures of the Arab world, as it endures for many of the west as a symbol of how women have lost or given up their autonomy to comply with strict gender stereotypes. This was seen in the 2015 Conservative Canadian Electoral Campaign in which the conservative former Prime Minister referred to the practice of veiling as "rooted in a culture that is anti-woman" (Chase). In *Veiled Fantasies*, Meyda Yegenoglu argues that the veil is an obsession for European men because they wish to 'liberate' the backward Orient and 'unmask' the woman beneath the veil. Media concentration on the restriction of female movement in Saudi Arabia further perpetuates the stereotype that all Arab women are prisoners under demonic Arab men, and that the West, and Western men in particular, are obliged to liberate Arab women.

Contemporary popular literature echoes the idea that Oriental women are typecast as oppressed. There is a niche market for romance novels which centre upon the idea of a white 'sex slave' who is abducted by a brutish, albeit sexy, Arab male, only to be rescued by a white male at the close of the novel. This is seen in N.G. Osbourne's *Resilience,* from the *Refuge* trilogy, in which the oppressed woman, Noor, first has to flee from Afghanistan only to be sold in marriage to a prince in Riyadh. Her knight in shining armour is none other than the all-American Charlie Matthews, a man who comments upon the *niquab,* "Who'd put a woman in such a thing?" (14). Charlie eventually rescues Noor from The Prince – an unnamed polygamous and brutish man who beats her, withholds her passport, and works for Al Queda, and thus effectively encompasses the negative stereotypes of Arab males. Charlie sacrifices his own freedom so that Noor can board a plane to the US, and "his [Charlie's] love is the only thing she is sure of" (loc 2445). The trope of Arab woman as victim of a domineering Arab male is evidenced in *Harem: A Superheroine in Peril* by Dangerguy*, The Genie's Secret by* Robert Jeschonek, and *Imprisoned in the Desert Palace by* S.M Shemwell, to name a few examples.

The white male as hero trope is obviously evident in the enduring popularity of the mythic Lawrence of Arabia blue-eyed saviour of the Middle East as portrayed on screen by Peter O'Toole. The image is so pervasive it has even dominated popular culture and pornography. In her analysis of Khalifa's *hijabi* pornography, Aboulezz alludes to a Lawrentian saviour mentality, stating that the fantasy of a veiled woman is the "ultimate exertion of power… Tents full of veiled brown women, waiting to be ravished. Oppressed and in need of saving. Cue the white man. The hero of every story. The

conqueror." (Aboulezz). The conquering male is able to free the Arab woman and ensure her safety, while of course enjoying her sexually.

In *A Hologram for a King*, none of these sexist tropes of orientalism have traction. Eggers actively responds to these orientalist tropes and highlights the ineffectiveness of them, complicating a common literary trope in order to make a new discourse. In his novel, the Arab heroine Zahra is far more self-possessed than the white hero. Alan first encounters Zahra when he is forced to make a trip to the hospital, where she works as a medical doctor. Alan is presented with Dr Hakem, critically a non-feminized name, and is immediately made more aware of his own ignorance of the culture he is in as "his guidebook had been incorrect" (149) about the segregation of female doctors. When Alan speaks, Zahra interrupts, asking blunt questions and delivering matter-of-fact answers to Alan's increasingly frenzied conjectures. Alan is suffering from a cyst on his neck, which he believes to be cancer. Dr Hakem is assertive, authoritarian, and even motherly, coaxing and reassuring; the cyst is inconsequential and benign. For Eggers, the Arab woman is the voice of rationality, and critically her knowledge has nothing to do with "Eastern wisdom" or "witchcraft" but rather is allied with Western medicine.

Dr Hakem's surgical removal of the cyst plaguing Alan is his moment of *anagnorisis*. In the moments of the operation, Alan has an epiphany and resolves to be a better man. He remembers the strength of his mother, imagines his own funeral--"They would say he liked long walks on the beach" (271)--and thinks of his daughter. Throughout this stream-of-consciousness, Dr Hakem is working away at Alan's cyst. The cyst becomes symbolic for the failed masculinity that Alan carries with him: his regrets as

a father, as a husband, and as a businessman. Dr Hakem is able to remove the cyst that plagues him, and in doing so, symbolically removes his feelings of corruption, bitterness, and inadequacy. It is a kind of exorcism: Dr Hakem works away at the cyst while Alan works through his emotions.

This does not stop Alan from insinuating that Zahra is naive, different than he, or oppressed. Zahra deflects each attempt to describe her as such. When Alan asks, "What do you think our kids would make of [our] relationship?" (291) she asks him to clarify if he means their cultural difference. He responds in the affirmative and Zahra immediately shuts him down: "Please. We're separated by the thinnest filament…I won't let us play those games. It's so tiresome. Leave that to the undergraduates" (291). She refuses to indulge Alan's fantasy that she is an exotic "other" and that their children might be horrified by their relationship. She is self-reflexive enough to understand the irrelevance of the underlying orientalist fetishes behind Alan's musings. Zahra's comments convey the reality of a post-orientalist world, while Eggers communicates to the reader through Alan the out-dated tropes of "otherness". Instead of focusing on the things that Zahra and Alan share, namely damage and sexual impotence, Alan focuses on things that could separate them in an Orientalist framework, which is then made ridiculous in Zahra's response. In this way, Eggers moves towards a potentially more nuanced understanding of Arab women.

Alan makes a great *faux pas* when he asks the cosmopolitan Zahra if she has "seen snow" (292). Perhaps Alan is attempting to establish his superior worldliness, but the effect borders on the offensive for Zahra, who says he is "oblivious" and that not only did

she study medicine in Switzerland, but she has "skied dozens of times" (292). Alan apologizes and Zahra forgives him for casting her as a cloistered woman. Alan's naiveté is more charmingly endearing than oppressive and offensive, although this is perhaps because of Zahra's own enjoyment of Alan's ignorance. The reader, whose sympathies lie with Alan, is given a moment of absolution in his buffoonery. The reader laughs dismissively with Zahra, and therefore the culpability of the reader's own ignorance is diminished.

Despite Eggers's nuanced creation of Zahra and the apparent message of a post-orientalist world, Eggers casts his male protagonist as weak and begging for salvation. He looks for redemption through Zahra. Alan "looked at Zahra again, into her dark eyes that forgave him and brightened when they saw him smile" (300). This forgiveness, here referring to an unsuccessful sexual encounter, seems to be Alan's primary motivation for relocating to Saudi Arabia. He needs absolution. He feels guilt for his broken marriage, his relationship with his daughter, and for the death of his friend. Zahra exorcises his "American corruption" and has now forgiven him for his ineffectiveness, a feat which Ruby, his ex-wife, and Hanne were unable to do. She rescues him not because of any exotic or mystic power, but rather through her understanding. She sees Alan's damage and in it she recognizes her own. Eggers subverts the stereotype of the oppressed woman and instead shows Zahra as a fully rounded individual, cognizant of her own exoticism and capable of rescuing Alan.

After a lacklustre sexual encounter, Zahra and Alan drink wine and share stories. He tells her a story about his father and she, with his permission, laughs at the end,

proclaiming that she "find [s] all of it…all of the world and sky — very, very sad" (307). It is left ambiguous at the novel's end whether or not Alan and Zahra continue their relationship, but this ending is a crucial nod to the collapse of Orientalism. Zahra will not be Alan's panacea, nor will he be hers. Instead the relationship is realistically imperfect, the two characters understandably melancholic. Zahra's words bring the chapter to a close, and with it the end of Alan's narrative, which concludes two pages later. Her voice therefore is given the authority to communicate the tone of the novel. Eggers lets Zahra, not Alan, speak for the damages done by globalization and toxic masculinity.

In *Stoning the Devil,* Garry Colin Powell provides another avenue to explore the changing discourse of Arab women with the character of Fayruz. Powell's whole novel is extremely referential, but in particular, the novel alludes to two texts: *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Lord Jim.* The latter provides the name for the seedy bar in the unnamed Emirate, seemingly Al Ain, in which most of the debauched action of the novel-in-stories occurs. It is where Colin meets Kamila, the sex-worker, and where Fayruz, Colin's Palestinian wife, goes to drunkenly escape Colin. The legacy of orientalism hangs heavy over the whole story, but is centrally explained through Fayruz and Colin's complicated marriage and the ways in which Fayruz resists being saved in order to emerge as a combatant woman.

Colin, a British teacher of English, went to Lebanon originally as part of a saviour narrative. He wanted to do right as an aid worker. His life's trajectories are formed by the "haunting theme from Lawrence of Arabia", the film that he watched countless times as a child, the film that inspired him to travel to Lebanon in the first place. He was idealistic,

and when he met the “thin and solemn” (119) Fayruz, whose brother had been murdered and who was pregnant and alone, he married her. The relationship, however, is fraught for many reasons, but mostly because of Colin’s inherent racism and Fayruz’s exceptional anger. This is not the happy ending where the Arab woman is saved by the white man. Instead, Powell gives us two deeply flawed individuals whose differences have made their lives impossible.

In the story “Unveiled”, Colin and Fayruz argue after leaving the cinema, where they watched the 1985 Woody Allen classic, *The Purple Rose of Cairo.* Allen’s movie employs the ‘film-within-a-film’ device, with *The Purple Rose of Cairo* also being the name of a fictitious film within the story. The film within the film teems with Orientalist stereotypes and centres upon an explorer who searches for the secrets of the Orient. Powell’s allusion is demonstrative of his own self-awareness in terms of cultural appropriation and orientalism and he is cognizant of the idea and use of frames. The choice to begin this pivotal scene with the old movie speaks also of the psyches of his characters. The parallel is made between Fayruz and the characters and events of the film-within-a-film. Colin, Fayruz’s husband, is unable to think of her as anything more than a fantasy, and as a result, lives in a relative dream world. She represents an ‘other’ for him that he, through marriage, has saved. He frames her as the damsel needing rescue from the atrocities of war, but Fayruz refuses to be cast as such. The first dialogue given in Powell’s story reveals Colin defending himself: “That’s not what I’m saying” (18). This trope of misunderstanding is repeated throughout the novel, as evidenced in the chapter “The Arab Mind” in which Colin mutters to his daughters, “that’s the Arab mind

for you". It is clear from these misunderstandings that Colin's references, through the allusions to director Woody Allen and to the author of the controversial book *The Arab Mind*, Raphael Patai, are severely outdated and offensive to the Arab women in his life, namely his wife and daughters.

Throughout the story "A Woman's Weapon", Colin struggles with his identity as a hero, which changes as his conception of Fayruz begins to place her outside of the frame of a damsel. While Fayruz recognizes what Colin has done for her, rescuing her from the refugee camp in Lebanon, paying for her abortion and consequently marrying her, she realizes his limitations. While Colin has been "a loving father and a good provider" (87)", he cannot save her, both as a result of his own failings, and her own trauma, as "since her brother Saad was killed, she'd been unable to give herself to anyone" (87). The reality of trauma is too much, and while Colin may have meant well in his relationship with Fayruz, he cannot fully understand her, help her, or even co-exist with her. Fayruz is angry and bitter, proclaiming, "You can't face the boredom, the mediocrity, the ugliness of your existence." She goes on, exasperated, "You should try living in Sabra" (87), the refugee camp in Palestine where he first met her. This reference again implies that Colin is, like Alan, a less necessary species.

Colin is entirely self-aware of his limitations as Fayruz's partner, despite his inability to change the dynamic of their relationship: "She's right… An aid worker is like an actor. He needs the limelight, has to be loved, a hero – that's why he does it" (338). This self-awareness in Colin's narrative serves exceptionally well to highlight the failure of Orientalist tropes. It is clear from this passage that the motivations of aid workers and

others from the West, of figures such as Lawrence of Arabia, are not spurred by altruism but rather they are motivated by a desire to enlarge their egos, and through 'rescuing' others they wish to elevate themselves. Colin's need to be loved, his need for the limelight, is precisely why his relationship with Fayruz is so tormented. She feels he does not really see her, as he is so busy trying to prove himself. He cannot understand her as anything other than an object of his own ego, and Powell is thereby able to interrogate prevailing discourse about Arab women, and by extension, the Middle East.

In the story "The Arab Mind", the tensions between Colin and Fayruz escalate to breaking point. When Fayruz returns in the small hours of the morning, Colin is incensed, especially when she rejects his sexual advances. He pushes her and her head hits the marble floor. She runs to a neighbour's house and Colin decides, rather half-heartedly, to kill himself, wondering if "He had been her rescuer then, saving her from the war. How had he become this vile person?" (22). He still believes himself to have done right by Fayruz. Colin's neighbour, Tom, comes to check on him and finds him naked with a noose around his neck. Colin "was cold and his penis had shrunk" (215). Here is the physical manifestation of his emasculation. Colin has not saved Fayruz, and once this is clear, his phallus cannot survive.

Powell's continual reference to orientalism and the male gaze shows the particular paradox of orientalist object and subject. This is clarified even more with Fayruz's statements. When Colin and his wife are fighting, she rages at him, "I was a refugee, a Palestinian. I seemed exotic to you. I was your escape…You probably think you saved me, bringing me here" (19 -20). This paradox reflects the master-slave dialectic. Colin

believes himself to be saving Fayruz, but really the reverse is true. In being framed as an object for saving, Fayruz reaffirms for Colin his masculinity, but Fayruz's aggressive tone implicates Colin as being anything but a saviour. It also shows that his own sense of identity is construed on the idea of saving. Here, however, the colonial man actually serves to torment and stifle the 'Arab Woman'. The 'escape' for Colin is in the liberation that comes from being able to save Fayruz.

Colin, as a saviour, is entirely a failure. In "The Arab Mind" Fayruz awakes from a nightmare and "stands before the mirror in a black chiffon nightdress" (22). She is hallucinating, remembering the terrors of war:

> Colin even knows what she sees as she stares at the glass: Her throat slashed, blood bubbling from the wound. It's what she sees every night, ever since the massacre in the camp. The horror will keep her awake for hours. He won't be able to console her. He hasn't saved her, he realizes, she was right about that as well.
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> 22

Colin sees himself as a failure because he has been unable to save his wife. This vision of her demonstrates to Colin that he has failed as a man. He realizes that Fayruz is too damaged, too strong, too different from him, and that he, despite his good intentions, is too weak. The failed orientalist fantasy of the white saviour reveals that Colin has a failed masculinity.

Colin has many encounters with different women. He tries to save his wife, his students, and also the sex-worker he meets. Here, it is his gaze on Fayruz that makes him cognizant of his own failures. Powell has crafted the collapse of the orientalist fantasy of

the white saviour to interrogate the narrative and comment upon the flaws in discursive orientalism.

In contrast to *A Hologram for the King* and *Stoning the Devil*, Barnes's *In the Kingdom of Men* focuses on a female main character in Saudi Arabia. In this novel, Barnes shows little self-awareness of the problematic Orientalist fantasies present within the book, and instead it works uncritically with the very tropes the other authors in this thesis question and interrogate. Gin's Indian "houseboy", Yash, often the most cognizant voice in the novel, is particularly instructive for Gin in combating the prevailing stereotypes of the Arabs and critically questioning Arab Orientalist fantasies. When Gin laments her confinement in the house, Yash tells her not to complain or yearn for adventure. At this, Gin responds she wants to be like Lawrence of Arabia. At this, Yash explains, "It's like an illness among the white men of some privilege. T.E. Lawrence, Sir Wilfred Thesiger. They see themselves as golden-haired gods, I suppose" (142). At this point, Barnes is at her most reflective on Orientalism. She has shown Gin's fascination with "Arabia", a concept steeped in perfume, incense, and stallions, while having demonstrated Gin's naiveté. Crucially, in the quotation above, Yash attributes the "sickness" of Orientalism to white men, which rather exonerates Gin from any culpability. Instead of being a victim of the illness of Orientalism, Gin is able to continue her fantasy, stating, "I just love learning new things" (142). Protected by this exoneration, Gin, as I will demonstrate in the final chapter, categorically orientalises Nadia, a local Bedouin and the sister of Abdullah.

The second chapter of this thesis discussed the ways in which sexual objectification is used by the western narrators of discussed texts in order to limit and, to use Butler's terminology, apprehend women, with the intended outcome of bolstering the identity and self-esteem of the western narrator. In this manner, sexual objectification and orientalism often overlap. Both orientalism and objectification are techniques to still and silence women, to apprehend them and to deny them recognition. However, while objectification is fuelled by misogyny, orientalism is fuelled by the legacy of imperialism. Both, however, rely on sexuality to limit the subject. When women are recognized, not merely apprehended, both orientalism and objectification fail. As the narratives constructed about women based on their bodies are deconstructed, the men who construct these conceptions of realities are forced to adapt and change.

The authors discussed in this section cannot possibly ignore the clichés and tropes of both discursive and artistic Orientalism. While Barnes largely repeats the clichéd symbols of Orientalism, Eggers and Powell interrogate them. O'Neill's relationship with Orientalism seems, in a way, to close down the period of hopeful curiosity as it largely ignores Arab women except to present them as threatening.

In *A Hologram for the King*, Zahra's veil is part of the lineage of artistic Orientalism, as is demonstrated in Said's *Orientalism*. However, with Zahra's dynamism, functionality, and Alan's impotence, the discourse of sexuality is complicated, making room for a new discourse, perhaps a more nuanced one, to briefly emerge. Further artistic symbols of orientalism are interrogated in *A Hologram for the King*, when the *hamam*-inspired seductions initiated by a white woman and by an Arab woman are contrasted.

Eggers uses the symbology of the *harem/hamam* to demonstrate the dearth of meaning, substance, and culture of the West in comparison to a more 'authentic' experience in the Middle East through the splendour of Zahra's seduction. However, Eggers goes on to complicate this idea through the failed copulation to show that this Orientalist fantasy is flawed and outdated; that contemporary literature must move on from the antiquated discourse on Arab women and the Middle East.

The next section of this chapter interrogates the myth of the white male saviour in the Middle East. Discursive Orientalism has presented the Arab woman as one oppressed by a barbaric culture. This section showed how both Eggers's Alan and Powell's Colin feel an obligation to try to rescue Zahra and Fayruz respectively, and how these attempts at rescue fail. Both Zahra and Fayruz are too multidimensional to be rescued. In Zahra's case, she is accomplished and sophisticated in contrast to Alan, who is both a business failure and somewhat of a buffoon. Fayruz, conversely, is both too damaged by her time in a refugee camp and too strong to be rescued by her ineffectual husband. Colin's identity, which has been built on his work in aid, collapses when confronted with Fayruz's dominance, strength, and pain. Both men, in trying to save powerful and psychologically dynamic women, end up looking foolish.

While the micro-movement defined in this thesis has complicated ideas of sexual objectification, as demonstrated primarily in *The Dog*, the literature of this time similarly examines artistic tropes of orientalism to highlight the obsolescence of the discursive orientalism of previous generations. Eggers and Powell in their novels confront the legacy of Orientalism, and particularly its application to women. Their work is reflective

of the spirit of the micro-movement, and in their descriptions of Arab women, they open a window of hopeful curiosity.

IV: IN A QUEER TIME AND PLACE

As I have previously stated, Kim Barnes's *In The Kingdom of Men* is the clear outlier among the texts chosen for this thesis. Unlike the other works, *In The Kingdom of Men* is told solely from the perspective of a female narrator, and as such, does not directly grapple with the troublesome expatriate masculinities that seem to haunt the male narrators. But that is not to say that Barnes's Gin does not negotiate a gendered identity. Gin is on a process of self-discovery in Saudi Arabia, and finds herself questioning her identity, and in particular, the relation of her identity to her sexuality which hinges on her appreciation of the bodies of other women. This chapter will provide a queer reading of Barnes's novel with the goal of outlining the ways in which the Gulf provides a window of opportunity for Gin's sexual fluidity due to its unique gendered norms. As I will demonstrate throughout, Orientalism is also crucial for a queer reading of this text.

Barnes's work is also unique in its setting, both in time and place. While the other works of this thesis are set in the first or second decade of the twenty-first century, Barnes's novel is historical fiction, set in the 1960s. As such, the novel has distinct gender politics. Gin originates from a very conservative background in Oklahoma that is fraught with sexual repression. The timeline of the novel, which includes the Six-Days War, is set firmly in 1967 and therefore runs parallel with the sexual revolution in the US. The birth control pill became legal in 1960 and with it came the sexual revolution, which, while absent from Gin's childhood flashbacks, was no doubt a contributing factor to the sexual

freedom of Ruthie, and to an even greater extent, to Linda. However, the sexual revolution brought more than the discussion of the female orgasm and birth control. It was also transformative for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community in the USA. The nation's first gay pride parade took place in a 15-car motorcade in Los Angeles in 1966, while homophobic propaganda plagued the nation, as in the CBS special *The Homosexuals* aired in 1967. Against this contextual background, Gin begins to explore her own sexuality, both with heterosexual acts with her husband and longings for Abdullah, but also in the way she engages with the three most significant females currently in her life: Ruthie, Linda, and Nadia.

The setting of Barnes's novel is also distinct from the other works as it is set primarily in a small ARAMCO compound in Dhahran, on the eastern coast of the country,and not in a mega-city like Dubai or a migrant and transitory city like Jeddah. Indeed the city of Dharan has very little importance for Gin. Instead it is the walls of the compound, the cookie-cutter houses strung around the swimming pool, and Gin's own palimpsest home which serve as the major setting for her self-discovery. The compound, characterised by artifice and constraint, is contrasted with the desert, which serves as an orientalist symbol for Gin's desires for freedom and for escape.

In addition to these factors, Gin is also significantly younger than the other protagonists discussed in this thesis. She is only 19, and therefore more than 20 years younger than her closest allies in the novels. Her youth is significant for what it means for her sexual identity and her identity generally. Unlike the other characters, who are wrestling to reclaim some lost idea of themselves, Gin is naively discovering herself for

the first time. I would argue that this is significant in her treatment, therefore, of other women's bodies. She is not desperately seeking to regain control, but rather is discovering and appreciating. Her gaze upon other women's bodies, therefore, is less bound up with power dynamics than it is about the discovery of her own identity.

While the previous paragraphs have set up the ways in which Gin's story is separate from the micro-movement of hopeful curiosity that I have defined, I believe that the work still lies within the parameters of the micro-movement, although the comparisons between it and other works might be subtler than the obvious comparisons between the male-centred novels. In *In the Kingdom of Men*, Barnes provides us with an expatriate narrator who has, to a certain extent, fled the USA. Gin is searching, like the other narrators, to find herself, and uses the bodies of other women, both western and Arab, as objects of desire. She navigates her own cognitive dissonance in these relationships, seeing in the women only what she wishes to see and skirting the desire that runs through her encounters with other women, and choosing to ignore, or arguably displace, her overt desire for Nadia. At the end of the novel, like the other narrators, Gin's struggling and contradictory identity becomes unravelled and she enters another, liminal space.

In this chapter, I wish to chart Gin's relationships with other women. In Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men the author* introduces the idea of "Romantic Friendships" but, given insistence on the asexual nature of these relationships, I will adapt the term to "Sexual Friendships" to include the sexual feelings that Gin feels for her friends, Ruthie and Linda. "The Other Desire", which will focus on Gin's orientalist

lust for Nadia. Barnes does not give Gin any reflection on her apparent desire for her friends and for Nadia, but this queer reading will chart the ways in which Gin moves towards a more fluid sexual identity, only to shut down this exploration at the end. In a sense, the period in Saudi Arabia is Gin's own hopeful curiosity into her own sexuality; a window which is closed due to the political chaos at the end of the novel.

SEXUAL FRIENDSHIPS

Barnes's novel is set in the 1960s and therefore is coloured by the gender politics of the time. The novel sets up a heteronormative ideal in the way in which Gin 'escapes' Oklahoma through marrying Mason McPhee, but then chips away at this ideal. When Gin and Mason enter Saudi Arabia they leave behind the heteronormative, conservative politics of the USA and enter a more fluid temporality.

In *In a Queer Time and Space*, Jack Halberstam argues that queer realities are an "outcome of strange temporalities" (1), that is to say, unusual or liminal times or places. For Gin, Saudi Arabia is a 'strange temporality', being outside of anything she has experienced before. The journey to Saudi Arabia was disorienting and confusing, and upon landing, the landscape is harsh and unyielding. Gin, who has struggled with poverty and oppressive guardians her entire life, is suddenly a woman of leisure, with no one to answer to. The compound in particular is a liminal space. Not only is it neither of Saudi Arabia nor apart from it, but it is an artificial reconstruction of an American suburb, each house a palimpsest of the previous occupants' lives, with strange social events and gatherings. Meanwhile, Mason is gone for long periods of time, leaving Gin, to an extent, the master of her own domain. However, Gin is also idle and, as she is urged to stay

within the compound, she is as if in a place of confinement, and one not unlike a beautiful prison or cage.

Halberstam goes on to use the terms “queer time and queer space” as “specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frame of bourgeois reproduction and family” (6). I believe this idea is particularly relevant to an understanding of expatriate life because, for Gin, the time and space of compound existence is a temporary suspension of social norms. Gin enters a gender-segregated space when Mason begins working. Up until this point in their relationship, their lives have been inexorably entangled. Once they arrive at the ARAMCO compound, Mason and Gin are separated: Mason leaves for weeks at a time, and Gin is left in the company of almost exclusively women. The familial structure, therefore, is suspended, as Halberstam states. Therefore, Gin’s time in the ARAMCO compound is “queer time” within “queer space”. It is a gender-segregated space where norms have been suspended. Within this arena, Gin’s queerness can flourish.

In addition to the physical separation of wife from husband, Gin, due to her miscarriage and the resulting trauma, has now permanently become childless, and therefore entered a realm outside the “temporal frame of bourgeois reproduction and family” (6). As demonstrated above, this state of childlessness results in Gin and Mason departing from the typical trajectory of their peers. In addition to this, she is able to occupy a “queer space” because she does not need to fulfill what Halberstam calls family time – the period of “normative scheduling of daily life that accompanies raising a

child" (12). Instead, Gin is at liberty to do as she pleases. She has an abundance of free time and little to occupy herself with, except her female friends.

Gin's freedom is paradoxically within a place of confinement, the compound. In "The Golden Cage: Western Women in the Compound in Muslim Countries", Roni Berger conducts a qualitative study of virtual communities to understand "the lived experience of western women in compounds" (1). In this study, Berger finds that many women experience dissatisfaction within the compound. This dissatisfaction is, for many women, based on their own disempowerment and lack of purpose. Within a traditional gendered sphere, Gin's major responsibilities would surround housekeeping and tending to her husband and children. With her infertility and absent husband, Gin has only in a traditional sense, housework to rely upon. However, even that minor duty is taken away from her with Yash, her domestic worker. He cooks and cleans for her. As such, Gin has no secure role, and so feels disempowered. In Berger's study she found that many expatriate women use coping mechanisms such as alcohol to dispel their dissatisfaction. Berger has also noted that many expatriate women engage in transgressive inter-gender relations and close female relationships to replace the family they have left behind.

In the compound, and within Saudi Arabia, Gin is confined to having only female relationships, both practically-– because all the men are often away at work –-and legally because mixing with men apart from her own husband is not allowed in Saudi Arabian law. While formal social events are often mixed-gender, most day-to-day living involves females only. As such, Gin is in a kind of prison and her relationships with her female friends could be compared to those "temporary affections" (Diamond) that sprout up in

confinement, which have sometimes been referred to as “erotic plasticity” (Fletcher). These relationships are often seen as “fillers” for the absence of men. Margaret Mead, quoted in Freedman’s work, “believed that women's relatively benign institutional homosexuality was a temporary substitute for heterosexual relationships” (404).

Halberstam’s notion of a “queer time and space” is also related to the Saudi Arabian compound that is designed to mimic a resort, and its female inhabitants are put in the position of leisure. In “Geographies of the Heart” Katie Walsh comments upon how Dubai in particular creates a fantasy of “being ‘away from home’, where the person is removed from everyday rules of behaviour” (Walsh 510). The sensation of holiday-making and temporality makes a person more likely to take risks, particularly sexual risks.

I have argued how Gin’s position within the Saudi Arabian compound is within “A Queer Time and Space”. I now will explore her relationships with the other western women, which I will argue are distinct from her relationship with Nadia. In many ways related to Gin’s relationships with Linda and Ruthie, Barnes is discussing a very contemporary phenomenon, that of the “Girl Crush”, named by *The New York Times* as a *“*fervent infatuation [in which] the feelings it triggers – excitement, nervousness, a sense of novelty—are very much like those that accompany a new romance” (Rosenbloom). Gin skirts the periphery of heterosexuality through her “girl crushes” on Ruthie and Linda. Her admiration and desire for them is negotiated through the lens of her own self-identification as a heterosexual.

In “Heterosexual Women, Please Stop Using the Term ‘Girl Crush’” for *Jane* magazine Marissa-Higgins defines the “girl crush” as a homosexual crush that is explained by heteronormative behaviour:

> It is said by a woman, who is most likely cis-gender and heterosexual, to or about another woman, who is most likely cis-gender and heterosexual. Often this declaration of a “girl crush” is accompanied by a conventionally attractive photo of said woman – even more often than not, this attractive photo involves the “girl crush” in a state of semi-undress and in a provocative position.

The article goes on to say: “I think what most women really, *really* mean when they say they have a “girl crush” is this: You admire this woman”. Higgins, however, also highlights the way that a “Girl Crush” hones in on sexuality as a site of admiration. Why does the woman in question need to be posed provocatively or in a state of undress if the only emotion proclaimed is heteronormative admiration? While I do not deny the homophobic undertones of the expression “Girl Crush” or even the less diminutive “Woman Crush”, I do not agree with Higgins that the emotion expressed is pure admiration or desire to emulate. As *Seventeen* magazine states: “Lesson: Girl crushes can be confusing and consuming, but are still important and **can** teach us a lot about our sexuality, friendships, and communication” (Bennet). For Gin, her admiration could be an expression of her sexual exploration.

The “girl crush” may be sexual in nature, or may simply be the admiration of one woman for the alpha woman. In *The Cultural Politics of South Africa*, Henriette Gunkel explores “mummy-baby” relationships, which are a common behavioural pattern in female mammals. An older woman will ‘adopt” a younger girl and educate her on the correct methods of behaviour. In Gunkel’s exploration, which focused on all-girls’

schools in South Africa, the system was not unlike the old British boarding school practice of "fagging", in which an older boy would adopt a younger one as a sort of *protégé*, servant, or pet. As with "fagging", some of the relationships between women would become sexual, while some would not. It seems, to restate *Seventeen* magazine, that girl crushes are "confusing" and may connote sexual desire or platonic admiration. In either form, however, the crux of the girl crush often lies in the physical attributes and beauty of the object of the crush. It may also be that "girl crushes" exist on the periphery of heterosexual relationships.

In "I'm Straight but I Kissed a Girl" Lisa Diamond comments on how these relationships are often labelled with the problematic term "heteroflexibility". She states, "such depictions can have the effect of trivializing and depoliticizing same-sex sexuality by portraying it as a fashionable 'add on' to otherwise conventional heterosexuality" (Diamond 105). As such, the temporary eroticism of another woman becomes a side-note to heteronormativity, shutting down the narrative of queerness. However, I believe that this temporary eroticism is not a simple add-on or substitution for heterosexual relationships. While Gin's relationships with Ruthie and Linda may have something of admiration, or of Gunkel's "mummy-baby" relationship, they are not merely relationships of convenience or substitution. Instead, they are, to use the terms of Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality", woman-centred experiences that exist within a lesbian continuum of relationships.

Rich's essay explores the notion that the default position of sexuality within literature is heterosexual. Rich states that in much literature, lesbianism is "rendered

invisible" (2) through the erasure of female choice; women are pressured into the institution of marriage by societal pressures and as such, their sexual identity becomes confined within a heterosexual frame. Readings of literature often rely on what Virginia Blain, in "Queer Empathy", calls "certain habituated reading practices" (1) which cause the critic to "read 'straight' when it might be more appropriate to read 'bent'" (1). In this section, I argue that Barnes's *In the Kingdom of Men* delivers a narrator who is interrogating her own sexuality and exploring the periphery of queerness. Gin's female gaze upon her female friends is 'bent', to borrow Blain's terminology. As I will demonstrate, Gin's exaltation of her friends, Ruthie and Linda, depicts a woman within a queer space negotiating her own desire.

In "Compulsory Heterosexuality", Rich argues that heterosexual marriage is, historically, an economic and social necessity, and that while heterosexual sex can be fulfilling within a relationship, as it is for Gin, "sexuality [has] not been tamed or contained within it" (Rich 25). In short, while Gin's sexuality may appear to be heterosexual, her desires could lie elsewhere. As Blain writes in "Queer Empathy", it is "only by exploring the edges of a territory, where definition falls under challenge, that one begins to perceive some of the truly ambiguous effects" (1). Gin's relationships with Ruthie and Linda exist at the periphery of this territory. They occupy queer time and queer space and are demonstrative of her sexual exploration and, arguably, her queerness.

Gin's sexual curiosity lies at the periphery of queerness, and has emerged as a result of her journey into a "queer time and place". Saudi Arabia is a sexually conservative country. Gender segregation is practiced at all levels of society, with

education, employment, and social interaction occurring within gendered spaces. The intent is to preserve the conservative ideals of Sharia Law (R. Berger). However, the result of this strict gender segregation is often an increased LGBTQ presence, which is often attributed to relationships of necessity, akin to prison relationships between women. In *Stoning the Devil*, Powell's Badria engages in same sex relationships, while her cousin, Alia, is tempted by Badria's body simply because she wants to be touched. In the Arabic novel, *The Others*, by Seba Al-Herz, the unnamed narrator is seduced by her teacher Dalia, although she goes on to have a fulfilling relationship with a man. In Sulaiman Addonia's *The Consequences of Love*, queer relationships between a Sudanese expatriate and his boss are seen as a relationship of convenience or of necessity. Like the unnamed narrator in *The Others,* the narrator of *The Consequences of Love* finds happiness in a heterosexual relationship. Thus, the literature of the region negotiates the boundaries and liminal spaces in queerness and heterosexuality. Only the work of Zainab Hifny, sadly not translated, explores homosexuality (Alsayegh).

In "The Golden Cage: Western Women in the Compound in Muslim Countries", Roni Berger conducts a qualitative study of virtual communities to understand "the lived experience of western women in compounds" (1). Berger's study included mostly married women, who were the "trailing spouses" of working husbands. In her analysis of women's responses, Berger notes that many cite their close female friendships as the most important mechanism for coping, stating that "mutual help and intensive close relationships with other women in the compound" (48) often replaced an absent spouse. In "Transnational Domestic Lives", Walsh similarly argues that female friendships

"become exaggerated away from home" (14). Indeed, this emotional connection and dependence can be seen in the relationship between Gin and Ruthie, who both reside in the compound. While the men are away working in the oil fields, the women become temporary spouses for each other, stepping in to fulfill the emotional void left by their departed husbands. While the men are away, "it is the women who make life endurable for each other, give physical affection without causing pain, share, advise, and stick by each other" (Rich 27).) While Gin and Ruthie begin to depend upon each other, the relationship between the two is not merely an exaggerated female friendship. Instead, at least for Gin, the relationship has an erotic charge to it.

In *Surpassing the Love of Men,* Faderman explores the friendships between women in the Victorian period, focusing with some detail on the relationship between Emily Dickinson and Sue Gilbert, described as a particular kind of female friendship. Exploring the boundaries of heteronormative and homosexual relationships, Faderman does not cast relationships such as Dickinson and Gilbert's as lesbian; instead she argues that they would lie on a continuum of appreciation. Stating, "it was unlikely that even their sensuality, which included kissing, caressing and fondling, would become genital" (80), Faderman argues that women could demonstrate "their physical appreciation of each other" (80) without it being overtly sexual. And later, "If we consider the possibility that all women [...] exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not" (45). Female relationships, therefore, are relationships of mutual admiration and affection but exist within a continuum of sexuality. Gin frequently

demonstrates her physical appreciation for Ruthie, through the exaltation of her body and through their frequent physical proximity.

The term "Romantic Relationships" refers to asexual unions between women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that were the result of circumstance; as Leila Rupp writes in *Sapphistries*, "Because middle-class society tended to separate female and male social worlds, it seemed natural that women would find their soul mates among other women" (3). However, I would argue that the feelings Gin has for Ruthie and Linda do not simply involve love and commitment, but rather, sexual desire, and therefore exist along Rich's continuum of lesbian experience. As such, I have laid out the theoretical framework to explore Gin's relationships with Ruthie and Linda. As I will go on to demonstrate, each of these relationships occupies a certain place on the continuum, from admiration to eros. In Gin's relationship with Ruthie, Gin is admiring, oblivious to the similarities between Candy Fullerton, a compound wife who is loathed and Ruthie. While the relationship strays into the sexual, as demonstrated below, it also contains elements of platonic admiration. I would argue that Gin's relationship with Linda exists further along the spectrum towards sexual desire.

Gin meets Ruthie at the Oil Exhibit building with the other welcoming committee members only moments after she meets Candy, and the contrast between the two, Ruthie as friend and Candy as a foe, is immediately revealed in the way Gin responds to their physicality. All women have their husbands' professions in common, while Candy and Ruthie both have school-age sons. However, while Gin is instantly wary of Candy, she warms immediately to Ruthie, whose easy familiarity (touching Gin on the back, hooking

her arm) contrasts to Candy's "hand, sharp as a hatchet" (45). As with Candy, Gin begins her evaluation of Ruthie based on her physical appearance and the clothes she is wearing. However, unlike with Candy, the appraisal of Ruthie begins with her rolling "dark eyes" (46). This gaze suggests that Gin has not just apprehended Ruthie but has recognized her; finding commonality with her dark eyes. This is further evident with Gin's catalogue of Ruthie's stylistic choices; her "Brunette bouffant, blue eyeshadow, pearly lipstick, a tartan skirt and cap-sleeved pullover – she was nearing forty" (46). While Ruthie is the same age as Candy, she is not temperamentally of her generation, and instead, she "had the electric air of a teenager" (46). While Candy strives to remain youthful and desirable, Ruthie simply embodies it. Her makeup is perhaps as heavy as Candy's, but instead of caking distastefully in the corners of her mouth, her lipstick is described as "pearly". Her bouffant is stylish for the time. While her personal style may be as artificial as Candy's, she is not described as violently trying to conform her body to fit into a certain shape, to be a certain way. Instead, she is described as effortlessly embodying sexuality while remaining true to her husband, perhaps in a way that Gin wishes she could. Conveniently, Gin does not associate her with motherhood and "forget[s] Ruthie had a son, that she lived every day with his absence" (311), as Gin herself lived with a similar loss –her miscarriage. While Candy, aging and full of pretence is abject, Ruthie is revered, celebrated and admired for her youthfulness.

Throughout the novel, Ruthie serves as Gin's guide to compound life. Under Ruthie's tutelage, Gin begins her "education": learning to drink, smoke cigarettes, and, through Ruthie's tutelage, to perform fellatio. Ruthie assists Gin in cutting her hair, getting a job,

and questioning her attraction to men besides her husband. Ruthie occupies the role of a big sister, or "mummy" as Gunkel might argue, for Gin. Indeed, when Ruthie is sent off to Rome, Gin's centre falls away and she is left without guidance.

However, while Gin's relationship with Ruthie is one of admiration, there are sexual elements to it, which are exemplified through the way in which Gin gazes upon Ruthie. Therefore, while Ruthie may be a "mummy" she is also desired. When the two women take a boat ride with their husbands, Gin's gaze lingers on Ruthie's body, admiring the way she "stretched and stepped out of her capris, exposing her racy black bikini, brass rings at her hips and between her breasts" (127). Gin's eyes absorb the lines of Ruthie's body, her womanliness and her sex appeal, pausing at erotic zones, her hips and her chest. In admiring Ruthie's body, Gin is free to explore her own sexuality, and the periphery of queerness.

Ruthie's body is also symbolic of Ruthie's abstract qualities. Ruthie carries herself with ease and grace, lacking the insecurities that Gin possesses. In this moment on the boat, Ruthie is languorous and feline, stretching and displaying her body, while Gin still feels shame about hers, and when removing her clothes in front of Lucky, Ruthie's husband, she "blushed, too shy to strip down in front of him" (127). While the gaze on Ruthie may be homosexual in some element, there is also admiration of sexuality within it, which complicates the gaze. The ambiguity lies in the fact that Gin might want to both be Ruthie, and to be with Ruthie.

In the novel, there are moments in which Gin appears to be somewhat of a voyeur, gazing upon Ruthie, as demonstrated above. However, there are also moments where

Ruthie is complicit in her own sexualization, and in which Gin's gaze upon her feels invited. The climax of this sexual tension occurs when Ruthie, again in the role of "mummy", educates Gin about oral sex. Using an empty bottle of moonshine, Ruthie, simulates fellatio in front of Gin:

> Ruthie picked up the empty booze bottle. 'Watch.' She closed her eyes and let the glass slide in, then bobbed her head up and down, and I saw the pink of her tongue flick along the underside, circle the neck. When she licked her lips and winked at me, I barked out a laugh.
>
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The language in this section is particularly full of homoerotic imagery, as Barnes highlights Gin's curiosity, arousal, and discomfort. Gin stares at Ruthie's tongue and mouth. Lingering on the movements of the tongue, the use of the adjective 'pink' seems to point to the idea that the movement of Ruthie's tongue arouses Gin.

Ruthie's wink implies awareness of the power of her sexuality, as if she had invited Gin's gaze upon her and expected Gin's arousal. This could be because she had anticipated Gin's discomfort due to her consistent naiveté regarding all things sexual, or it could be because Ruthie has seen Gin's eyes lingering on her body and is similarly aroused by the attention she receives. Unlike Gin, she is not uncomfortable in the moment, but entirely at ease, taking the time to lick her lips and wink. This may suggest that Ruthie, who is a veteran compound wife, is used to the intimate and sometimes sexually charged female relationships that occur in such closed communities. In this atmosphere, there is the possibility of a more sexual encounter, if the women were not interrupted.

The scene allows for a strong queer reading in Gin's clear arousal by Ruthie, but also involves notably heteronormative expression. First, it is a simulation of a sexual act on a man that is causing the arousal, which means that Gin may be actually aroused by Ruthie or simply substituting herself for Ruthie and Mason's penis for the bottle of moonshine. Furthermore, Gin, while aroused by the scene, is also uncomfortable and hot. She is unfamiliar with Ruthie's explicit eroticism but no less curious. The 'barked out laugh' demonstrates this discomfort, as if she is caught out in the awkward moment of being attracted to her friend. The bark also demonstrates her shame at her own arousal, which reinforces heteronormativity by shutting down the sexually charged moment. It is a heated moment for the two women, who are at this moment separated from their husbands. The sexual atmosphere is further broken when Lucky and Mason barge in, understandably confused by what they enter into. Heteronormativity is reinforced by this experiment. Later, Gin performs fellatio, still a controversial sex act in the USA, on her husband and is aroused by her own power. Barnes, therefore, seems to play with the periphery of heterosexual friendships and imply that there is an element of queerness, or heteroflexibility, within Gin and Ruthie's relationship.

While Gin has adopted Ruthie as a kind of "mummy", she never has the same dynamic with Linda, despite her also being somewhat older and decidedly more experienced. Instead, Gin routinely gazes upon Linda and sexualizes her body. It is clear that Gin wants to be Linda: she admires Linda for her complete financial and sexual freedom, but close reading suggests that Gin also wants to be *with* Linda.

Gin's initial surveying appraisal of Linda is centred on the physical representations of her femininity. As with Candy and Ruthie, Gin is quick to notice Linda's shoes and her hair. She sees "a tall woman about [Ruthie's] age, dressed in a nurse's uniform-- platinum hair pinned into a beehive beneath her pointed cap, a way of switching her hips that made her sturdy white shoes bap like a rumba" (74). Gin's eyes move from Linda's hair down to her hips, down to her feet. Her uniform sets her apart from other women, her pointed cap representing her strength while her "sturdy white shoes" represent her practicality. Despite the uniform, Linda is sexualized: both by her platinum hair and the way she moves her body, moving her hips and her feet fluidly and musically. The image is of a woman completely comfortable in her own company who is full of laughter. Gin's gaze on Linda predates any interaction with her, and Barnes's choice to mention Gin's admiration of Linda's hips makes the initial gazing open for a queer reading.

Gin's admiration of Linda's body is constant throughout the novel. When Gin goes to the pool with Ruthie and Linda, she moves past the abject bodies of the young mothers and her gaze zeroes in on Linda, who is "all legs and décolletage", an image of sexual appeal and desire. Linda has what Berger would call "glamour", in a way that the other women in this novel do not. She has an easy grace with "her beehive perfectly coiffed" (83) and her body long and lean. While Gin is trapped by her own piety and lack of self-confidence, Linda's sexuality is matter-of-fact, alluring but not desperate.

Gin's admiration of Linda's body becomes even more heightened with the accidental nudity that occurs when Linda "flipped to her back, her top falling away to reveal a full breast and a pink nipple" (85). The description is overtly sexual through the fullness of

the breast and the pinkness of the nipple, which mirrors Ruthie's pink tongue licking the bottle. While Gin may not lust consistently after Ruthie, she seems consistently attracted to Linda's body, noticing its lushness and desirability. It could be argued that she is sexually aroused by Linda's body for what it represents — a body not bound by constraints of appropriateness — but also because of its outright desirability and her own homosexual leanings. Gin is attracted to Linda, but perhaps cannot yet fully comprehend her own feelings. She, like the other protagonists discussed in this thesis, experiences cognitive dissonance in a foreign landscape, but unlike the male narrators discussed in this chapter, her identity seems to be insecure due to her questioning her sexuality.

The novel ends with a heteronormative seal. After Mason's disappearance and presumed death, Gin is exiled to Italy. There she yearns for Mason, hoping that one day she will look up and see "her lost love, that faint scar, those blue, blue eyes" (310) and imagines that Linda and Carlo have married and had children, a rather bucolic ending to their tumultuous love affair. Furthermore, this is a complete denial of the sexual desire that Gin felt in looking upon Linda. In a sense, now that Gin is physically removed from the "queer time and space" of the ARAMCO compound, she can no longer indulge her homosexual desires.

In this section, I have demonstrated the heteroflexibility in Gin's relationships with both Ruthie and Linda, as existing on a spectrum of homosexuality, which to quote Rich may be "primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life" (21). There are no sex acts between women in this novel, and instead Barnes delivers intense female friendships that contain sexual admiration and, I would

argue, longing on Gin's behalf. These relationships occur within "the queer time and place" that exists within the ARAMCO compound; a gender-segregated place, and for Gin, a place outside the heteronormative patterns of family time. Paradoxically, as repressive and traditional the Saudi Arabian government may be, in this space at least, Gin is free to journey into the peripheries of her relationships with Ruthie and Linda, moving from admiration into desire. This opportunity is also in accordance with the notion of the micro-movement of 'hopeful curiosity' as a time for opening the narratives surrounding conventional gender relations and subverting 'compulsory heterosexuality', to borrow Rich's phrasing. While Barnes's work shuts down explicit readings of homosexuality, there is evidence that Gin has begun to be aware of alternative sexual possibilities, particularly through the "bark" she lets out when watching Ruthie simulate fellatio. This possibility for lesbian encounters is an aspect of the period of hopeful curiosity, providing narratives for those who are not male.

In comparison to the other works studied in this dissertation, Gin does not objectify the bodies of the women she gazes upon in order to determine her own position within a hegemonic order. She does not use their bodies only as mirrors. Instead, Gin uses the bodies of the women as windows into her own sexuality and sexual freedom. The setting of a religiously conservative country and strictly anti-LGBTQ+ community is paradoxical, as is Gin's ability to find herself within this foreign landscape in contrast with the male narrators discussed in this thesis.

THE OTHER DESIRE

For this chapter, it is essential to understand the ways in which orientalism and works to provide space for queer experiences and to provide the distance needed to undermine those queer experiences. This section is called “The Other Desire” because it argues that Gin’s sexual desire for Nadia can only occur in a liminal space, and that she is only able to cast these experiences as non-sexual due to Nadia’s classification as an “other”. Therefore, for this queer reading of *In the Kingdom of Men*, we must return to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to explore the way in which, by establishing Nadia as an “other”, Gin can safely explore the limits of her sexual desire for women. Gin feels comfortable as the subject of the gaze is the object--here, Nadia--is “othered”. I will demonstrate how “queer space” and orientalism create an outlet for Gin to explore her sexual desire for another woman.

In “It Got Very Debauched, Very Dubai!”, Katie Walsh explores the phenomena of fluid sexuality in the Gulf States as a result of the temporality of the region. She states, “performances of sexual freedom or experiments in sexuality have consistently been associated with liminal spaces: generated by the carnivalesque, [or] symbolised by ‘Other’ places, particularly the ‘East’” (Walsh 4). I have already noted one of Gin’s liminal spaces, which is the compound. This chapter will now turn to the second of Gin’s liminal spaces, which is the beach by the sea, itself a transitory space between land and water. As Walsh states, the exploration of fluid sexuality requires the removal from “normal” places or a removal to “queer spaces”. While I have argued previously that the

compound creates a “queer space” for its removal from gender and cultural norms, I will now show how the beach becomes a liminal space for Gin to interact with Nadia.

While the previous section of this chapter discussed western female relationships as operating within the “queer time and space” of the compound, the encounter between Nadia and Gin is somewhat different as it occurs in a Bedouin camp and against the nearby seascape. However, while the compound exists outside the conventional heteronormative “family time” and is a gender-segregated space, this scene exists within its own version of “queer time and space”. The scene takes place amongst the sand dunes and the ocean, outside the space of convention. Furthermore, the scene occurs during “queer time” as it is separate from the usual schedules of either woman -- Gin and her party (Mason, Lucky, and Ruthie) have been gallivanting in the desert when they had to be rescued by Abdullah and brought to the Bedouin camp. Furthermore, the women are unable to communicate with each other, as Nadia speaks little English, and Gin speaks little Arabic. The encounter is, for all intents and purposes, fantastical in its nature so that it appears almost imaginary. The two women are isolated from their social groups and there are no bystanders or witnesses to the scene, which contributes both to its intimacy and to the illusory nature of the scene.

The greatest contribution to the creation of a liminal space, the beach, allows Barnes to recast the entire experience as a kind of dreamscape. When Gin first meets Nadia she becomes immediately entranced, seduced by the languorous scene in the Bedouin tent. After asking to touch Gin’s hair, Nadia begins to comb through Gin’s hair while singing in a rhythmic lullaby. Gin, usually eager to distance herself from motherhood, holds

Nadia's young child in her lap and is lulled into submission by the "thin bangles of gold tinkling at [Nadia's] wrists" (176) and intrigued by the "small circle of ink like a single black coin tattooed into her palm" (176). Nadia's lullabies have a kind of hypnotic effect on Gin. While Ruthie falls asleep, Gin instead enters a dream-reality in her encounter with Nadia. By creating this seduction, Barnes makes it clear that Gin has entered a kind of alternative realm, a liminal, queer space existing outside her cultural norms. Barnes therefore provides Gin with the option of lesbian desire, but also to diminish her desires as a kind of dream. The scene that follows could be entirely a dream that Gin had while lulled by the soporific atmosphere of the camp.

Barnes also creates a "queer time and space" through the naturalistic and supernatural elements of the scene that follows. While Gin remains on the sand dunes, Nadia swims naked in the ocean. Like Zahra, Nadia is almost an exotic fish. As Alan looked for the supernatural glowing orbs that were Zahra's breasts, so Gin watches for Nadia, whose physicality, like Zahra's, begins to blend in with the naturalism of the scene. Nadia, in a sense, becomes the ocean she bathes in, and Gin watches, "sure that a rising swell was the round of her shoulder, a ripple the dark fan of her hair" (179). She scans the ocean looking for Nadia, who, like a dream-vision, has melted into the nature surrounding her. Barnes chooses to represent Nadia as almost at one with the ocean, as if her body is part of it. In the dream-like atmosphere of the scene, Barnes has created both a liminal space (the dream/the beach) and a mist that distances Gin from overt homosexual desire. Nadia's scene is romantic and alluring, but also supernatural and disorienting. Therefore, while space is provided for Gin to express desire, the form here distances Gin from her

desires.

Barnes uses other strategies to distance Gin from an overt homosexual experience. The words Barnes uses here are feminine and sexualized – the "swell" and "the round" are words that are associated with breasts and buttocks, while the "dark fan of her hair" could refer to pubic hair. But, while Barnes suggests the eroticism of the scene through these allusions to female body parts, they are veiled and euphemistic.

While I have demonstrated how the creation of a liminal dreamscape allows for Gin's sexual exploration and paradoxically creates distance from overt homosexuality, the same is true in the way that Gin others Nadia through her orientalist attitudes. Gin's treatment of Nadia is pure Orientalist fantasy, bridging both discursive and artistic elements of Orientalism. First, the scene has all the hallmarks of high artistic Orientalism, in the tradition of the orientalist painters previously mentioned. Nadia is a silent, cavorting, unveiled water nymph. While Dave Eggers disrupts similar tropes to create a more pluralistic and representative Zahra, Barnes has no qualms in stereotyping Nadia as a fetishized object. Perhaps the orientalism is disguised due to the same-sex relationship, or hidden somewhat within the setting, but Barnes has still delivered a highly problematic vision of a naked Arab woman performing (it appears) for western eyes.

While Gin is able to gaze with eroticism upon Nadia due to her immersion in a "queer time and space", here the desert of Saudi Arabia, Barnes also uses Gin's position in the Orient as a representative of colonialism and therefore power, as a way to hedge the desire that Gin feels for Nadia. In "Imperial Eyes" Katerina von Hammerstein refers to an "Imperial Gaze": the intersection of "gaze, visuality, and racial difference" (298). Gin, as

the white woman, is in the representative position of colonialism, and Nadia, as the "other" body, is in the position of the colonized. Nadia is a kind of human exhibition for Gin to gaze upon and exalt, and therefore Gin's clear sexual desire can be mitigated as orientalist voyeurism. Gin does not have to confront her desire. In gazing upon Nadia's body, Gin notices her racial difference, and in this way her body is cast as a curiosity and oddity, and not a site for lesbian desire.

The first demonstration of Gin's orientalist sentiment towards Nadia comes when she meets Nadia and her mother Fatima at the family home of the Bedouins after Gin and her party of expatriates have got stuck in the desert. The men are grouped together, and Gin and her friend Ruthie are sent to the women's quarters. Gin notes, "two women emerged, covered head to wrist in black scarves" (176) and then goes on to detail Fatima's "black hair reddened with henna that rouged her temples, kohl-lined eyes, a faded blue script of tattoos along her forehead and chin, fingernails stained with dye" (176). These particular markers, the henna, the kohl, and the script of tattoos are all key to orientalism, as is the mystery shrouding Fatima, whose silence and difference renders her an exotic object. The women immediately become a type of oddity for Gin to consume, a spectacle on which to gorge. While the vision is not explicitly sexual yet, Barnes has shown us the stereotypes and hallmarks of difference and exoticism. Henna, rouge, and kohl all set Nadia and her mother apart from Gin and Ruthie.

Nadia's "otherness" also becomes a kind of excuse for her strange behaviour. Nadia leads Gin down to the sea to swim, leaving behind the other women at the camp. Once at the sea, Nadia removes her scarf and her clothes before diving naked into the sea.

The behaviour is incredibly intimate, and yet, what could be read as a homosexual seduction is excused as the intimate relations between women who live largely without men, as Nadia resides within a Bedouin camp with her mother and her child. Because of the gender-segregated space, the behaviour is read as cultural rather than erotic, as intimate rather than sexual. Barnes shows the reader two women enraptured with each other, presents the reader with the nudity and exaltation of the female body, yet uses Nadia's difference – her "otherness" – to hedge the behaviour.

As with Zahra in *A Hologram for the King*, Barnes's Nadia performs a subtle strip tease for her western audience. Like Alan, Gin is enraptured by the gradual removal of clothing. First, Nadia "took off her scarf and pulled her hair free of its braids" (176). In this cultural atmosphere, as I have already argued, exposed hair is a meaningful symbol, and in revealing her hair to Gin, Nadia has intimated a familiar relationship with her. The removal of the scarf suggests the removal of restrictions, and the pulling free of the hair suggests Nadia's own sexual freedom. While this occurs, Gin watches, silently and transfixed, her imperial eyes taking in the symbols of Nadia's cultural difference: the veil, the braids, and her long dark hair. Nadia's body is erotic, but its difference distances the experience from homosexual desire.

While the symbols of orientalism cast Nadia as an "other", so does her sexuality. Like Zahra, Nadia is the instigator of a sexually-charged encounter. She seems self-possessed and entirely aware of the sexual power she holds. She is the seductress and Gin the blissful accomplice. When Nadia takes Gin's "hands and led me deeper" (178), Gin is only too happy to oblige. The reader is presented with Nadia as the sexual aggressor,

pursuing Gin, and therefore Gin's sexual attraction to Nadia could be explained away as a response to the predatory sexuality of an "other". This is not dissimilar from the reports of lesbianism in US prisons in the 1920s, where within homosexual female relationships "black women [were seen] as aggressors and white women as 'temporary partners'" (Freedman 397). Queerness, therefore, becomes wrapped up in race in the way that aggressiveness is assigned to people of colour and accidental queerness is assigned to white people. If a queer subtext is established, it is still Nadia who dominates and instigates--the true lesbian--whereas Gin, while excited and invigorated, is still more of a witness to otherness than an active participant.

There are moments where Barnes's evasion of overt homosexuality is less pronounced than others. When Nadia emerges from the ocean, she is fully naked. Gin, perched on the sand dune, gazes upon Nadia's naked body, and her eyes, roving over her nudity, come to rest on "her breasts round with milk" (179). While this image is arguably tempered by Gin's complex relationship with motherhood, as detailed in the previous chapter, the sensuousness of Barnes's prose gives the reader Nadia's majestic form illuminated by moonlight. It is at once fantastical and sexual. On seeing this, Gin "let[s] out a breath" (178) which is akin to the "bark" she let out after viewing Ruthie's simulated fellatio, although the "bark" appears to imply much more discomfort. Here, Gin's orgasmic exhale is demonstrative of her appreciation and sexual desire for Nadia. The sexuality of this scene cannot be denied.

It is clear that the memory of this scene lingers with Gin, as it is arguably the most romantic and sexualized moment she has had with another woman. In Nadia, we see

Gin's fascination and romanticism of the Bedouin lifestyle combined with the sexual desire she feels for other women. Barnes, in her historical novel, has created the high Orientalist fantasy of an oppressed young Arab woman, who is victim to her overbearing husband, presenting herself for western eyes. The only distance from this is Gin's naiveté and the fact that the novel, as historical fiction, could be designed to reflect the orientalist attitudes of another time. But why has Barnes given Gin this opportunity to gaze upon Nadia and feel attraction? I would argue that Barnes is perhaps suggesting that there is more to the intimate lives of Arab women than that which is depicted in mass media. However, rather than give the reader a thoughtful, speaking Arab woman to demonstrate the deepness of an internal life, Barnes has instead relied on tired tropes. In addition, Barnes seems afraid of the conclusions she has drawn surrounding female identity and queerness, and appears to quickly backtrack from her position.

The shutting down of queerness in the novel is made final by Nadia's death when she is murdered by Ali Reza to cover-up an embezzlement scandal. However, even after Nadia's death, her body is sexualized. Gin pictures her corpse as in a scene akin to torture pornography, first beginning with the memory of her erotic encounter and remembering "Nadia moving so easily through the water, her face sheened by moonlight" (292). This image is more romanticised then eroticized, but this quickly changes when Gin imagines her dead, "her body pounding against the pilings, her clothes torn away" (292). Here Barnes's language is clear in its eroticism, through the double entendre and violence of the body "pounding" against the pilings, and through the girl's clothing which has been violently torn away. This phenomenon of voyeuristic pleasure at the corpse of a woman is

well-documented in critical theory, for example in the work of Alice Brolin in *Dead Girls* and T Van Rensburg in "Uneasy Bodies", but the pleasure taken in this is almost always attributed to a male viewing audience. Here, Gin imagines, within two sentences, both the romantic intimate encounter with Nadia, and the image of her desecrated, nearly naked corpse. This image might imply self-loathing for her own heteroflexible self. While Ruthie also dies in the novel, her death in a plane crash is not described with the same sexual imagery. Only Nadia, for whom Gin arguably feels the sincerest desire, is punished after death, her naked body humiliated in Gin's fantasy.

To conclude this section, it is fair to say that *In the Kingdom of Men is* indeed the outlier of the series of novels discussed in this thesis, first because it is historical fiction, and second because it is the only novel to be told solely from a female viewpoint. However, I find that this novel is still contained inside the micro-movement that I have defined due to the many shared characteristics it has with the other novels. The narrator, Gin, is like Alan, Dan, Colin, and X, a western expatriate adrift in a foreign landscape. Like these other characters, she is socially isolated, being confined to particular spaces. However, while Alan, Dan, Colin, and X have some freedom to roam their particular localities, Gin is more confined within hers. Her gender results in her admission to the "queer space" of the compound, while her infertility results in her admission to "queer time" outside the space of the time usually reserved for families. As such, Gin is able to explore homosexuality as she negotiates t her sexual identity. This identity seeking is situated on the bodies of women as Gin both explores and denies her own homosexual impulses.

I have completed a queer reading of this text in order to demonstrate another kind of gazing that function within the literature of this particular time and place. Gin, who operates within a queer time and space, gazes with sexual desire on the bodies of other women, but not with the intent of objectifying them as is done in the novels in which men gaze upon women and examined in the chapter on Sexual Objectification. In Barnes's work, while bodies are reduced sometimes to their sexual parts, this is a temporary state, and the personhood of the Western women is never denied. Nor is the gaze on Nadia, solely orientalist in the traditional sense, due to the power dynamics of gender. Neither is she gazing upon them in a competitive way in order to establish dominance over other women, behaviour that will be explored in the next chapter. Instead the gaze is sexual desire and recognition of the strengths or being of other women.

This section coheres with the subject of the thesis as it demonstrates another kind of gazing within the micro-movement of literature in the period of hopeful curiosity, although it presents a different message through its female-centeredness and its genre. While the other authors in this thesis consciously grapple with objectification and orientalism as a way to interrogate current ideas and positions, Barnes does not. Instead, Barnes uses the bodies of women as sites for exploration of Gin's sexuality and identity, but in doing so, conforms to outdated orientalist tropes and heteronormative ideas. Gin never directly questions her sexuality, which is to Barnes's discredit because there is ample evidence for sexual fluidity. Instead, the bodies of women briefly hint at a suppressed sexuality that is never allowed to flourish. That being said, I believe that Barnes's work is still emblematic of a "hopeful curiosity" in its general themes, trying to

demonstrate the corruption of western industry in the Middle East and the trapped lives of lonely expatriates within it.

Similarly, as in the other novels, *In the Kingdom of Men* focuses on the identity quest of the central narrator who is in a liminal space. Like the other narrators, Gin is trying to ground her identity on the bodies of women, whether through admiration, sexual friendships or overt desire. She does not, however, desire to establish a hegemonic order over the women, but rather uses the bodies of these women to explore the periphery of her heterosexual identity. While Barnes denies the reader the epiphany of sexual awakening, the subtle quest for Gin's queerness interrogates some gender norms, demonstrating that, even for presumed heterosexuals, desire can occur within "queer time and place".

V: THE FEMALE GAZE: SEXUALITY, COMPETITION, AND POWER

In previous chapters, I have argued how male narrators use objectification and orientalism as ways to anchor their identity because they have become disenfranchised from their usual structures of identity formation. I have also argued how, in *In The Kingdom of Men*, Gin explores her queer sexuality most demonstrably through the 'othering' of Nadia, who becomes a somewhat comfortable sexual object for Gin as she is orientalised. These chapters share the idea of sexual desire, which is absent from this chapter. This chapter will instead focus on how the bodies of women are used as identity makers for other women and on the ways that a woman's body helps her to forge her own identity within platonic relationships. In short, this chapter is concerned with the process of how the gaze can work when a woman uses the bodies of other women to form her own identity, and how the reflective gaze can work when a woman gazes upon her own body. While the way of looking within this chapter is essentially platonic, it is still tied up in sexuality, competition, and power. To a certain extent, however, both these types of gazes have certain commonalities with the structures of objectification and orientalism, in that they somewhat diminish an object to enlarge the subject. While the gendered hierarchy present in the chapters which discuss male characters is absent in this chapter, the thematic idea, that the bodies of women are used to create mirrors for lost western expatriates, remains the same.

Chapters two and three argued that the Gulf provides a location in which gender order can be questioned; that the period of hopeful curiosity that defines this micro-movement is rooted in the collapse of antiquated notions of objectification and

orientalism. These experiences reflect dominant social narratives concerned with gender hegemony, and by extension, the hegemony of the Occident over the Orient. In the case of the female narrators discussed in this thesis, the period of hopeful curiosity is much more personal. Rather than questioning a gender order, the Gulf provides a unique set of parameters for the female narrators that require them to question their identity or provide space for them to experiment with the power of their sexuality. The discussion of a female gaze is also inherently linked to the region of the Gulf because of the particular gendered spaces it provides. In the Gulf, expatriate women are often segregated from men, particularly due to the fact that most heterosexual couples relocate to the Gulf for a man's work. The woman therefore, becomes a trailing spouse. In this climate, female friendships become particularly close, as is documented in the work of Walsh and Berger. These relationships, particularly in the absence of familial ties, become sites where identity is created. There is a particular kind of female hegemony that is established, with the most attractive and desirable women at the top. The systems of power, however, are constantly negotiated through the expression and evaluation of female beauty and sexuality.

This chapter is also linked to the idea of a micro-movement in the way that it discusses the Gulf as a unique place to build a gender identity, as existing outside of heteronormative temporal realities, as documented in the previous chapter with the work of Halberstam. Therefore, the friendships that exist within this region are unique. The Gulf provides a space in which to think about gendered identity in a new way. The ways in which women look at each other in this section is still somewhat limiting, but the ways

in which women positively appropriate the male gaze to look at their own bodies is, to a certain extent, liberating. The Gulf, therefore, can provide the space for potentially new ways to think about femininity through the exploration of the process of gazing upon women's bodies.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the ways in which women use a *surveying* gaze in order to classify their peers and therefore assert their own identity. The focus of the chapter then shifts to explore the ways that women use this surveying gaze upon themselves. This terminology is taken from John Berger's *The Ways of Seeing* and his investigation into the representation of women in visual art. The chapter will also make reference to the "quick up-down" which Naomi Wolf uses to refer to a subverted evaluative gaze, and the distinction between apprehension and recognition as outlined in Judith Butler's *Frames of War* chapter "Precarious Life, Grievable Life". For Butler, apprehension is accomplished through 'frames' that serve to distance "personhood" in opposition to recognition. In terms of a female gaze, the paradox lies in the female subject's ability to identify with the object of the gaze: that is, to recognize the object but simultaneously merely apprehend the object as a series of coded norms rather than recognize the object as having 'personhood'. These three kinds of classification through looking or gazing are crucial for the understanding of the way in which women look upon and use other women's bodies, and their own, as mirrors for identity.

In the process of identity making, I have used the following subcategories: the competitive gaze, the in-group gaze, and the abject gaze. That is not to say that these categories of female classification are exhaustive, but rather that they embody the main

components of female identity-making: that which is separate from me, that which is too near to me, and that which I aspire to be. By classifying women in such a way through the continued looking upon bodies, the identity of the subject can be created which is both part of a social framework and separate from it.

When the subject-as-object gazes upon itself, be it through the use of mirrors, the reflected gaze of another subject, or the imagined gaze of a universal spectator, the subject-as-object is attempting to self-code and self-categorize. This chapter will explore the dissonance which runs through self-objectification, especially when the male gaze is unwanted or, in the case of Kamila, the sex-worker in *Stoning the Devil*, both desired and rejected, while exploring the methods of work it takes to self-code a body that lacks conformity to conventional attraction. Finally, through reading the scopophilic narcissism of Gin, the chapter explores the way in which sexual awakening can result in a new sense of self. In essence, the common thread running through this chapter is the way in which the female gaze is used to classify oneself in relation to the body of another, or indeed, to one's own body.

At the crux of the method of classification of women is the concept of surveying, which for Berger, is dependent upon a binary split within a woman's self. In *The Ways of Seeing*, Berger argues:

> One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

Berger argues that in surveying herself as an object, the female subject appropriates a masculine action. Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" identifies a similarly dichotomous structure: "Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look". While Mulvey does not address notions of a female gaze, and beyond a heterosexual gaze the notion is little explored in academia, for Berger it is enough to say that women embody a male surveyor's gaze when looking upon themselves. However, there is little written on the ways in which women then turn this appropriated gaze upon each other, perhaps in order to establish themselves within a hierarchy in a manner similar to Dan, whose classification of the women in question was really a classification of himself and his moral superiority to his friend Abdullah. In essence, the surveying gaze is really a function of the hegemony of social relations.

The female gaze, therefore, is as Berger describes: a method of surveying in which the female subject has appropriated a male gaze through her own self-classification, and has then applied that gaze upon the females she encounters. In essence, the female subject uses a surveying gaze upon the female objects she encounters. However, rather than the gaze simply signifying sexual desire or objectification, the surveying gaze seeks to evaluate the object in order to establish the identity of the subject. In the case of the female surveying gaze, this is done most often through an evaluation of the body, as the body is the locus for a woman's self-worth. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir writes at length about the lamentable position of women as a result of patriarchal structures, providing an historical account of the disadvantages of womanhood and arguing against the "othering" of women. In this work, de Beauvoir

outlines the fundamental issue surrounding women, their bodies, and their identity: “The woman, on the other hand, knows that when people look at her they do not distinguish her from her appearance: she is judged, respected or desired in relation to how she looks” (de Beauvoir 604). Looks and beauty are one locus for feminine worth. Rather than being a part of a woman’s makeup, de Beauvoir argues that they are the entirety of what it means to be female.

De Beauvoir outlines three actions: judgment, respect, or desire, all of which occur in relation to a woman’s looks. While de Beauvoir’s work was written with a male subject or gazer in mind, these actions could equally apply to female subjects of the evaluating gaze. The gaze is by nature classifying: the element of judgment is intrinsic. The respect the gaze allows is designated by the perceived and appropriated measure of how desirable an object might be to a male subject, whose gaze has been appropriated. In *The Beauty Myth,* Naomi Wolf best describes the gaze:

> The look with which strange women sometimes appraise one another says it all: a quick up-and-down, curvy and wary it takes in the picture but leaves out the person; the shoes, the muscle tone, the makeup, are noted accurately, but the eyes glance off one another. Women can tend to resent each other if they look too ‘good’ and dismiss one another if they look too ‘bad’.
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The quote demonstrates the particular qualities of a gaze of classification. Without acknowledgment of the person behind the props, without recognition, in Butler’s terms, the gaze of a female upon another female is simply an assessment of the sum of her parts – an apprehension of the way she has coded herself for presumably male consumption. But the female surveyors use the same hallmarks that males use for desire in order to

decide if the woman object in question belongs in her in-group or not. If she is too "good" she may be a threat, not just for mating purposes, but also in terms of her success. If she is too "bad", she is outside the in-group and therefore her body becomes a minefield for "body snarking" (Goodman) or cruel denigrations centred upon the cast-off woman's appearance. The woman is a competitor or an abject object.

Wolf's work also demonstrates the ways in which capitalism can be tied up in this gaze of classification: women will look at those hallmarks of status, "shoes" for example, hone in on the physical attributes of a woman such as "muscle tone", or the skill or artistry in which a woman presents herself through "the makeup". By rating all these parts, the woman, through this surveying gaze comes to a classification of the gazed-upon woman. While de Beauvoir identified women's appearance as the marker of their worth, I would argue that, with late capitalism especially, there is an increased focus on clothing, purses and shoes as identifiable markers of worth. In *Meat Market,* Laurie Penny supports this and updates it for a more contemporary, consumerist culture, stating, "the trade in female flesh as sexual and social capital and demonstrates how women are alienated from their sexual bodies and required to purchase the fundamentals of their own gender" (Penny 2). Essentially, the sum of a woman becomes what she can buy to code herself and femininity becomes, for Penny, literally branded onto women. Paradoxically, while the quest for beauty is desirable in a friend, this recognition turns to abjection if the object in question is too 'desperate', and especially if the object in question is sluttish, aging, or overweight.

In the question of the surveying gaze, there is no winning unless the subject of the gaze has somehow recognized themselves in the object and established commonality with the woman in question. According to sociologists, this is often dependent upon the relative attractiveness between the subject and the object. Women tend to befriend women who are of equal levels of attraction and define their own worth by evaluating the worth of others.

Crucially for Wolf's gaze, the eyes of the subject and object "glance off" one another, which suggests that the personal characteristics or qualities of the one being gazed upon are not taken into consideration, as they might be if commonality or admiration is established: that is, if the woman object in question is part of a in-group. The object knows that she is being appraised and may be exerting her own form of appraisal and evaluation, of surveying and classification. For Wolf, the 'glancing off' of the eyes implies that the gaze will remain in the realm of Butler's apprehension. Only when the eyes meet, confront, and recognize can a friendship or romantic relationship begin.

The identity of a woman is tied up with her position in society, which is, more often than not, dependent upon her desirability or her beauty. "Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another" (13), writes Wolf and goes on to state that the Beauty Myth "encourages women's wariness of one another on the basis of their appearance" (75). "The unknown woman…is unapproachable; under suspicion before she opens her mouth because she's Another Woman, and beauty thinking encourages women to approach each other as possible adversaries until they know they are friends" (75), Wolf goes on. But what does

it mean to “know they are friends”? The transition from adversary to friend, from apprehension to recognition, seems to depend upon the exploration of commonalities, be it similar levels of attractiveness, or self-deprecation, as Wolf states.

Thus far, this introduction has sought to explore the evaluative gaze and the way it functions for surveying females. In essence, the gaze classifies women into desirables and undesirables, in the same manner that the male gaze might categorize women based upon their sex appeal. The gaze, however, is not simply a parroted male gaze. Instead, the female surveying gaze casts females into a continuum. Females might, if they are seen as “too good” cast the objects of the gaze as competition, and therefore direct their hate upon them, as is the case with Rosalie and Isra in *The Ruins of Us*, where the central female relationship is based on competition for Abdullah. Another outcome of the female gaze could be the denigration of the object of the gaze to the status of abject, as is the case for Candy Fullerton in *In The Kingdom of Men,* whose sexual desperation and aging body is abhorred by the young Gin. Positive outcomes could include the recognition of an in-group and therefore the celebration of common femininity.

THE EVALUATING GAZE: DETERMINING POSITION IN A SOCIAL ORDER

In order to understand the competition that exists between women, it is valuable to explore the premise set up by Berger in *Ways of Seeing.* Berger sets up notions of looked-at-ness very carefully. He begins with an exploration of the oil painting *Vanity*, the central panel from *Triptych of Earthly Vanity and Divine Salvation* painted by Memling (1435-1494) in 1485. The painting depicts a beautiful naked woman with long, flowing

hair, sensuous curves and the rounded stomach that was desired at this time. In her hand she holds a mirror, which reflects her face back at her. With her hand on her hip, she casts an admiring gaze into her reflection and purses her red lips. The painting, part of a larger series, was intended to condemn vanity. In "Nothing Good without Pain", Megan Piorko writes,

> The mirror in the Vanitas panel is a complex element. It simultaneously signals the sin of Vanity, seductive and faulty self-knowledge resulting from original sin, and the duty of all Christians to gain spiritual self-knowledge as a condition of forming and reforming their souls
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Berger notes the hypocrisy in the judgment of a woman who has been painted for the pleasure of the viewer: the body is not corrupted or abhorrent, but rather indelibly desirable. However, the charge of the painting runs deeper than that. Berger argues, "The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman conniving in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (388). *Vanity* is an image within a continuum of images in which women are charged with self-gazing and self-objectification.

The mirror in *Vanity* only reflects back the face of the maiden, but the painter has reproduced the entirety of the maiden's body, while positioning her with her hand upon her hip in a manner that reads like judgment of her own body which cannot be contained within the mirror, but which, unlike the face, is available for scrutiny without a mirror. The woman takes pleasure in her body and this is reflected in her sensualized stance and the way her cascading hair brushes her thighs and buttocks. The charge against women is made: not only are women impossibly vain creatures, but also they are guilty of crimes of

seduction, both through original sin and through faulty self-knowledge. Vanity, for Berger, makes women complicit in an objectifying male gaze, a surveying of themselves.

Berger continues his argument for female complicity with the exploration of the painting *The Judgment of Paris* by Lucas Cranach the Elder painted in 1530. The painting depicts Paris dressed in a suit of armour gazing up upon Minerva, Juno, and Venus, three goddesses of the Roman Parthenon. The god, Mercury, stands nearby holding the coveted prize, which is a golden orb, more commonly depicted as an apple. As Berger writes, "Paris awards the apple to the woman he finds most beautiful. Thus, beauty becomes competitive" (394). While Berger leaves off analysing the painting here, it is valuable to examine the work further for the purposes of this thesis, particularly in the way the painting depicts gazing.

Paris is situated below the three women, who are turned at various angles to demonstrate a 360-degree view of a woman. Their bodies and faces are almost interchangeable as if they all represent the same woman. Only Venus's free flowing hair separates her from the other two goddesses. Paris gazes up at Venus, transfixed. She does not meet his gaze but rather looks at her prize held in her hand. Minerva and Juno avert their gazes, with Juno staring past the spectator while Minerva gazes up at Cupid above them. In other depictions of the same story, the women are even more similar to each other, but their stances are parallel to this painting; that is how they display their beauty for appraisal, twisting and moving to give the male spectators (Paris, Mercury, and Paris's horse) the best possible view of their assets. They appear to relish in the male gaze and perform to compete for it.

Crucially then, the painting is demonstrative of what sociologists refer to as intrasexual competition (KA Rosevall et al.); that is, female competition for a male mate. Female aggression amongst a variety of mammals is linked to this notion that women compete for access to "high-quality" mates (Rosevall). In essence, then, female competition is rooted upon gazing, and upon the surveying gaze in particular, as with Wolf's "up-down" look. In some versions of *The Judgment of Paris* this look is explicit, as in Lucas Cranach the Elder's 1530 piece in which both Minerva and Juno look listlessly upon Venus, not meeting her gaze but taking in her body parts – her neck, the swell of her breast, and so forth.

In contemporary terms, this female competition and aggression manifests itself as "cattiness" and "bodysnarking". In an article titled "Why Women Compete with Each Other" in *The New York Times,* Emily Gordon argues, as Berger does inadvertently, that female aggression is linked to the systems of the patriarchy, stating, "In short: When our value is tied to the people who can impregnate us, we turn on each other" (New York Times). Gordon makes use of a 2013 study by Tracy Vaillancourt which found that "women by and large express *indirect* aggression toward other women, and that aggression is a combination of "self-promotion," making themselves look more attractive and "derogation of rivals…being catty about other women". In most cases, this is done through comments about the body. Throughout this part of the thesis, I will return to the idea of "self-promotion" and "derogation of rivals" as elements of the surveying gaze. However, I would like to introduce the argument that in the case of competition for a

single male, there can also be the inverse behaviour wherein women compliment or exalt their rivals in order to establish their own identity as worthy of respect.

If a female has been cast aside then an acknowledgement of her rival's beauty can serve to bolster her own status. Apprehension leads to aggression, but recognition leads to peace. Therefore, the surveying gaze need not scathe and abhor, but may celebrate as a method of gaining status. Juno and Minerva are ill equipped to compete in a beauty pageant with the goddess of love and beauty, but their worth is not diminished by the exaltation of her beauty. Instead, the stock of Juno and Minerva rises in being considered potential rivals for such a paragon of sensuality. A worthy rival in female competition for beauty is therefore worthy of praise.

In Parssinen's *The Ruins of Us* there is a traditional intrasexual competition, which is made unique in the context because it discusses polygamy, which is a common practice in the region. The focus of Rosalie's classification lies in her understanding of one particular woman – her husband's new wife, Isra. After twenty-seven years of marriage, she is confronted with the harsh truth that her husband has entered into a (perfectly legal) polygamous second marriage with a much younger woman. Initially, Rosalie is shocked and furious. She cannot comprehend how her husband could have broken the bonds of their marriage by taking another wife. She also feels a fool for her ignorance on the matter, which is compounded by the method of discovery.

The realization of her husband's second marriage can be paralleled to *The Judgment of Paris* in the way it incorporates a prize and implies a losing party. Rosalie's husband, Abdullah, does not admit to the marriage, nor does Isra inform her, but rather Rosalie

learns about the marriage from a jeweller who indelicately inquires after a pendant he prepared for Abdullah's wife on the occasion of their wedding anniversary. Rosalie realizes immediately that the onyx, which looks "too gothic" (loc 93) against her pale skin, is not for her. Although she was unaware she was competing for her husband's affections, the realization that she has a rival is debilitating and cataclysmic; it is the "ruin" the novel is named after.

While the revelation of Abdullah's second marriage is cataclysmic for Rosalie, his infidelity is not. Rosalie was aware of "the affairs that had eaten at her insides like a parasite" (loc l98) but had "granted him his other indiscretions, moving beyond them in a way that made her proud" (loc 98). She was able to do so because the affairs were inconsequential and insignificant in comparison to her and Abdullah's marriage. The adversaries in question were not *real* adversaries because they were not worthy rivals, but rather passing indiscretions, minor inconveniences. Rosalie disparages these women within the text by first equating them with opportunists: "…money that would not stop reproducing itself. Women noticed those things. They appreciated those things. And Abdullah had trouble denying himself" (loc 167) and dismissing them as "trifles" (loc 105) that could not satisfy Abdullah's "hungering heart" (loc 105). As Rosalie states, "At the end of the day he had belonged to her, their marriage a place they could retreat to, a bond that had set her apart from the unknown others" (loc 139). Isra becomes a threat because she has made a partnership with Abdullah that threatens the sanctity of Rosalie's relationship with her husband

The reader can make the connection, therefore, between these trifles that Rosalie refers to and two women that Dan and Abdullah meet in Bahrain, who are dancing, flirting, and vying for Abdullah's attention. These women are beautiful, but singular-minded. They are using their bodies as currency in an exchange for some of Abdullah's wealth or power. These women, therefore, are disdained by Dan, Rosalie, and even Abdullah, who flees their clutches in Bahrain. Dalliance in infidelity is, for Rosalie, a necessary evil in her marriage to a rich and powerful man. His enjoyment of flirtations and affairs does not, however, impinge on her status as his wife, and therefore, while distressing, these infidelities are not grounds for dissolution in the way of Abdullah's taking a second wife. Conversely, she actually gains status in the way that she dismisses them as insignificant. She is 'proud' of the way she has moved on from them, as if her role as a woman is somehow strengthened by her ability to disregard rivals for her husband's attention.

Rosalie refers to Abdullah's marital indiscretions as taking place with "unknown others", not even worthy of a second thought, an investigation, or a gaze. However, while she could establish her victory in this interaction with the other women never ascending to the position of wife, within a polygamous relationship, the women are, under the eyes of God and the law, equal. The Quran decrees that a man with more than one wife is required to treat each equally (Al-Umm, 5/110). As such, Rosalie had had a secure position until this point, and has not questioned the physicality or sexual power of the other women. With Isra, however, Rosalie immediately begins to speculate on her appearance. Crucially, this is where Rosalie's imagination breaks from the stereotypical

female evaluating gaze. She does not focus on the disembodied parts of her competitor. Indeed, her wonderment is not even focused on the body of her competitor, avoiding such vulgarities as wondering about her breasts or her legs, which might be the obvious starting point for competition with a younger woman. Instead, Rosalie wonders, “What was the woman’s face like?” (loc 159). By centring her concern upon the face of the woman, Rosalie has immediately indicated her recognition of Isra as a worthy rival, in contrast to her dismissal and mere apprehension of Abdullah’s other dalliances. The face is the centre of Butler’s idea of ‘personhood’, and by speculating on this factor, not the disembodied appraisal, Rosalie has recognized Isra’s worth.

The marriage of Rosalie and Abdullah is long-standing. They have two children together. Furthermore, Rosalie abandoned all of her family and friends in the US and gave up her culture to move to Saudi Arabia to be with Abdullah. She has struggled through social isolation and marginalization in a foreign land. The sacrifices she has made for the marriage, combined with the longevity of the marriage, require her to invest personhood into the woman who is responsible for the “ruin” of it.

Rosalie does feel aggression, however, and is not immediately calmed by her recognition of Isra’s personhood. While Isra remains in the realm of her imagination, Rosalie’s ire grows, as does her desire to see her rival. She ambushes Isra at her home with a hysterical and inane request for figs. The meeting, which is inelegant and tense, is significant in the way it communicates Rosalie’s appreciation of Isra’s beauty. Instead of Wolf’s head-to-toe glance and a perfunctory survey, Rosalie hones in on Isra’s face and hair. What she praises is highly significant: “That beautiful, calm face, elegant in its

lines" (loc 442) and "The sweep of black hair" (loc 442). At that moment, Isra is everything Rosalie, whose impulsive visit is a series of missteps, is not. Her beauty is in calmness, while Rosalie's has always been in her fire, her passion, and her flaming red hair. Isra's face is elegant and composed, her hair contained. She is Rosalie's antithesis.

While Isra's face is significant for the qualities it contains, there is no dissection of the elements that make it beautiful or calm, no discussion of parts such as eyes, nose, or lips. Instead the face is left whole and signifying the whole personhood of Isra, the complete recognition of her qualities as a real human entity deserving of empathy and respect. The only part that is dissected is Isra's hair. In contrast to Rosalie's fiery red hair, an emblem of her difference, Isra has a "sweep of black hair" (loc 442). While Rosalie's hair, now greying, has to be dyed artificially back to its youthful vibrancy, Isra's is natural. The black hair, a usual trait of those of Arab descent, implies coherence with the landscape and culture that evades Rosalie, who is always set apart by her hair and what it implies about her. Furthermore, Isra's black hair is contained and sophisticated, unlike Rosalie's wild red hair, just as Isra is contained and content with her lot as the second wife while Rosalie is mad with grief and anger.

Instead of using the surveying gaze to degrade a rival, as put forward by Wolf, Gordon and Vaillancourt, Rosalie looks upon her rival as an equal. In choosing not to dissect Isra's body and instead focus on the qualities of her face and hair, Rosalie has recognized her personhood and moved away from objectification. She actually praises Isra, particularly for the qualities that she herself lacks, such as serenity and calmness. This is made more complicated by ethnicity. Rosalie's appeal has always been in her

difference: as a white redheaded American, she has always stood out. In order to marry her, Abdullah had to fight his family. Isra is clearly younger than Rosalie, but what is more, she is an Arab. As a Palestinian refugee, she has at least some cultural similarities with Abdullah, who claims, "with Rosalie, I always felt like I was lacking some sort of understanding" (loc 586). Rosalie has become irrelevant, and the American exoticism has become stale. In this way, the novel relates to the micro-movement, for it envisages the way in which the future no longer belongs to white Americans.

ABJECTION AND GENDER IDENTITY

In contrast to the previous section, which focused on the motivations for valuing and recognizing a female adversary as a method for self-classification, here I shall focus on the rationale behind classifying others as abject through the evaluating gaze. In order to begin the discussion, therefore, it is important to understand the notion of the abject and the purpose it serves within a sphere of female competition. The abject is the cast-off, the disdained, the horrifying, the necessarily different – an opposition to the cultivated identity of the subject.

Julia Kristeva uses "abjection" in "Powers of Horror" to refer to the human reaction of horror or disgust that occurs with the breakdown in boundary between the Self and the Other, to apply a distinction between what is human and therefore civilized and what is animal and therefore profane. As Kristeva states, "The 'abject' is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that the 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence" (Kristeva 2). In

essence, the abject is horror and disgust of that which is ambiguous and questions the established order of things. Repulsion towards the abject lies in the fact that it still remains a part of the subject who casts it off. Kristeva uses the example of the human corpse: the abject is the horror of death, which itself is an inevitability of human life. In fearing corpses, we fear our own fate, and horror and rejection of a corpse is our attempt to draw the distinction between humanity and death. The corpse is “the border of my condition as a living being” (Kristeva 3).

The abject has a vile quality that must be distinguished from the subject:

> "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it. "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who is only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself with the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself.
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Therefore, classifying the abject is really an exercise in self-classification. Kristeva outlines the way bodily fluids are expelled from the body; the abject waste leaves the body that is then purified. Jane Ussher elaborates on our need for “cleanliness” of the female body and the purification rituals which are associated with a female nude, particularly in visual art, such as depilatory processes and the sanitization of female bodies. The lack of fecundity or menstruation in portrayals of female bodies is evidence of a desire to cure the abject.

In her exploration of the abject, Kristeva hones in upon the maternal figure as the locus of horror according to historical and religious discourse. The mother is an abject body that must be rejected in order for the child to establish a new symbolic order; however, the mother is reluctant to loosen her hold upon the child. The mother is

associated with faecal matter, with grotesque sexuality, and with menstruation. Menstrual blood "stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference" (71).

In "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", Barbara Creed argues for a cross-cultural "Monstrous-feminine" based on the mother. She critiques Kristeva's explanation of the Biblical monstrous feminine and focuses the locus of horror on the figure of the mother, whose body is the site of the abject. Like Kristeva, she examines the role of menstrual blood and points to the film *Carrie*, and the intermingling of pigs' blood and female blood as the monstrous. Creed argues that in *Carrie*, "the mother speaks for the symbolic, identifying with an order which has defined women's sexuality as the source of all evil and menstruation as the sign of sin" (9). In the film *Alien,* the figure of the monstrous-feminine mother is omnipresent, while numerous iterations of the monstrous-feminine mother exist throughout horror films. As Kristeva puts it, the abject is the desire "to vomit the mother" in order to purge oneself of an ambiguous, disturbing order.

The complicated relationship Gin has with other females in *In The Kingdom of Men* appears to be at least partly due to the idea of the abject, and particularly abject motherhood. *In The Kingdom of Men* reveals Gin's origin story in the first chapter in what amounts to a sad treatise of the family she lost before arriving into her grandfather's care. Her father was killed in the military; her mother wasted away from disease. Gin describes it quite bluntly, explaining that "the cancer came up through my mother's bones

like it had been biding its time, took what smile she had left, took her teeth and blanched her skin to parchment" (6). While Gin does not linger on the monstrosity of her mother's diseased body, the experience would have been traumatic, especially for such a young child to experience. Her mother's toothless, almost transparent body is an example of the monstrous-feminine, the abject mother who rather than being a maternal benevolent force, comes to embody the most abject of Kristeva's examples: the corpse.

The references to motherhood throughout the novel are tainted with the abject, and particularly with the equation of motherhood with death: the mystery at the centre of the novel concerns the perpetrator of Nadia's murder. The death of the mother, however, occurs time and time again throughout the novel. Gin speaks of the women at her church who " ate with babies nursing at their breasts and whispered their hushed stories of hard births and tumorous wombs" (9) as if to foreshadow her own miscarriage.

The abjection of motherhood is also crucially linked to the expatriate communities of the Gulf, because they can exist outside of a heteronormative space. This is a space where the social norms, the markers of heteronormative progression such as motherhood and children may be made irrelevant. Gin's infertility, therefore, can become a non-issue within this climate, which provides her with a window to explore female friendship without feeling the hurt of her own lost motherhood.

Nadia is an exemption to this, for Gin's orientalising of her body clouds the notion of the abject. Instead of disgust, Nadia's body is desirable for its association with motherhood, for its "breasts round with milk" (187). However, even Nadia's motherhood can stir a negative reaction in Gin. When Gin is holding the toddler in her hands she

"studied the baby's round face, ears pierced with lapis, dark lashes and rosebud lips" (177), but soon became overwhelmed and "shivered and handed her back to Nadia, my chest aching" (177).

Gin's miscarriage, the impetus for her and Mason to leave the U.S. to journey to Saudi Arabia, reveals the monstrous-feminine. Gin "woke to the sheets slick and cool beneath me, the pain gripping my back, the ache in my thighs…the doctor scraped and pulled…something had been wrong for the baby to die like that" (22). This quote reflects the oozing, horrific female genitals as described by Kristeva, in the expulsion of the abject child. The procedure Gin undergoes is described with violence, with Gin gripping while the doctor scrapes and pulls. The nurse's statement that the baby was in some way malformed or somehow wrong is supposed to soothe Gin, but instead makes clearer the link to the monstrous. The child, and therefore Gin as a mother, is an abhorrent case, an outlier to the 'natural' order.

What then does this have to do with the female surveying gaze and classification more generally? The abjection of motherhood has entered Gin's psyche. Clearly, she is still traumatized by the loss of her miscarriage. While the abject is founded in the gaze, looking upon the 'sight' of her own dying mother, the gaze also reveals the abject. Gin strives to separate herself from mothers, except for Nadia where Gin's obvious lust and orientalism blocks the abject. However, the abject colours Gin's identity, requiring her to step outside of traditional heteronormative spaces, finding comfort in the company of other childless women, or women whose children have left home.

When Gin comes to the pool, she surveys the occupants, looking for Linda and Ruthie. She is immediately admiring of their physicality, but in order to reach them she needs to pass by a group of children in the shallow end of the pool. As she does so,

> A few of the young mothers raised their faces to see who I was, then dropped back to their magazines. I smiled down as I walked by, the knot in my stomach bunching. I counted the months, as I had done so many times before. Come June, my son would have been born.
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> 83

This quote demonstrates the ways in which Gin's eyes, to quote Wolf, "glance" off the eyes of the young mothers at the pool. She has apprehended them, but cannot recognize them because of the abjection of motherhood. Her smile, directed downward, is a forced, painful motion, inspired only by the pressure to smile at laughing children. The 'bunching' that Gin feels in her stomach could be uterine contractions, a common after-effect of labour, but are most likely a psychosomatic response to being confronted with motherhood in its abjection. The use of 'faces' here rather than eyes is significant. The meeting of the eyes would connote recognition, but the mothers cannot recognize Gin either, as she is not one of their own but rather belongs to a different group.

The majority of wives on the compound are either far older matrons, or they are, as mentioned above, young mothers themselves. Gin, who is far too young to be a matron, will always be childless and therefore cannot engage with the young mothers. Her gaze skims over women who might be her peers as these women, such as the ones she sees by the pool, often have young children or, like the girl she encounters at the library, are still in school and dismissive of married life. Gin feels "in-between, somehow, out of rhythm with the world" (57) and in trying to find her place in the world she uses the classification

of other women, particularly through their physical appearance, to determine who she will be.

The friends that Gin chooses, Ruthie and Linda, are anomalies in the life of the ARAMCO compound. Linda, who eventually becomes the target of Gin's girl crush, is a single woman working as a nurse. Ruthie, on the other hand, is married to Lucky, who works with Gin's husband, Mason. While Ruthie and Lucky have a child together, he is away at boarding school and therefore an invisible entity. By Gin's admission, "too often, I forget that Ruthie [has] a son" (311). She creates an in-group that is founded on the rejection of motherhood, which situation would arguably be different in a different social context. Gin, Linda, and Ruthie become a clique that is founded on principles of beauty, desirability, and open-minded sexuality.

Gin's notion of abject motherhood is tied to the shame installed in her by her grandfather. After her son's stillbirth, she was convinced of divine retribution and judgment: "I could no longer bear children, I thought, this is the punishment my grandfather promised me" (23). Indeed, throughout the novel, Gin's grandfather is a voice in her ear, speaking of sin and shame and making sexuality abject, horrifying, and threatening. Perhaps this is the reason for Gin's embrace of all things sexual, her desire to be 'liberated', to separate herself from her upbringing. However, the equation of sex with shame remains omnipresent throughout the novel.

It is clear that Gin's grandfather believes in the monstrous-feminine and the notion of original sin. Gin's grandfather abhors female sexuality. When he picks Gin up from the orphanage in which she has been placed, he immediately strips her of all vestiges of

feminine identity, taking away “My doll, my mother’s rhinestone tiara, her wedding ring – all worldly, my grandfather said, the devil’s tricks and trinkets” (7). These objects are associated with sin because they explore femininity and female vanity. Female sexuality and vanity become the work of Satan, and Gin soon learns “that [she] was the daughter of Eve, a danger to myself, a temptation to those around me” (10). This abjection of sexuality colours Gin’s experiences, but here, in the Gulf, she begins to embrace her own sexuality. The region holds potential and promise for her outside of the ordinary gender norms.

The notion of the monstrous-feminine abject ooze is also referenced in Gin’s upbringing. Her grandfather refuses to take her shopping for Gin’s “unmentionables – soft-cupped brassieres, panties, sanitary belts and napkins” (10), and instead, Gin must purchase them with the help of a teacher. Immediately, then, menstruation and breasts are designated to the realm of the obscene, the secret, and the abhorrent. At the cusp of puberty, Gin stands in the mirror wearing the objects of her femininity and is “confounded by the hooks and straps, ashamed that [her] grandfather would no longer meet [her] eyes” (11). To be female then is to be sinful, to be shamed. However, in the Gulf, these attitudes toward shame dissipate. Gin begins to experiment sexually, as discussed above. She begins dressing provocatively, and even performs oral sex on her husband. Gin’s sexuality burgeons and grows within the compound. In this way, the Gulf provides a unique space for her own expression.

In *Bodies*, Susie Orbach discusses the ways in which feminine identity is founded on the competition over physical attraction, especially through the coding of the female body and an emphasis on looks:

> Of course, girls don't only seek this recognition from boys. They seek it from girls. As a gaggle of girls make their Saturday night preparations in front of the mirror, they advise one another on outfits, hair, make-up, shoes, bags, jewellery, perfume: the external accoutrements of femininity. They are making personal the exigencies of visual culture. With energy and excitement, they enlist one another to overcome the insecurities that have been imprinted on their body sense.
>
> 1576

Orbach argues, like Berger, that to be female is to live in an unequivocally visual culture. Berger's statement that "woman connive[s] in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" is echoed in Orbach's quote, although she identifies a particular element not discussed by Berger: the idea of insecurity. For Orbach, the construction of feminine identity is a process based on an inherent lack (a symptom perhaps of Freudian castration anxiety). A woman becomes accustomed to thinking of herself as a "sight", and therefore develops insecurities when the sight of her body is not recognized by others. Therefore, in her friendships, she manipulates the visuals of her body to perform a sexuality that will be recognized by her peers.

It is important here to understand the unique cultural context of Gin's interactions and friendships with women in her social set. All the western women in *In the Kingdom of Men* live within the same tiny compound. Their husbands all work on the oil rigs and are therefore gone for two weeks at a time. In the meantime, the women are discouraged from leaving the compound and therefore have little option but to spend their time together. The strict gender norms reinforce Gin's isolation and therefore reliance on other

women within Barnes's setting of Saudi Arabia in the 1960s.This phenomenon is also seen in contemporary geographical studies: in "Geographies of the Heart in Transnational Spaces", Walsh observes these uniquely pressured female intimacies through the case of Janet, who had relocated to Dubai with her husband, but who was spending increasing amounts of time alone and therefore began to join a number of women's organizations to "counteract her isolation" (434). The female friendships Janet made in Dubai were far more intimate than those in her country of origin, which Walsh asserts is due to the fact that "they found themselves without familial support" (440). Gin and Ruthie are similarly isolated in their small compound. Without children, husband, or extended family, they have no one else to depend on than themselves.

There is a particular pressure on trailing spouses to fit into the unique cultural space of a compound. As I have stated, with a spouse absent for large periods of time, the women who are left at home create exceptionally close relationships to one another, to the extent that they become stand-ins for spouses themselves. When Mason returns from his first two weeks away, he interrupts Ruthie, Linda, and Gin. His wife is uncomfortable around the man she described as her "anchor" (52), relying on Ruthie for advice on how to navigate the relationship: "it's the transitions that are the hardest" (100). The female friendships are therefore more than platonic: they take on familial and spousal elements. While the relationships are extraordinarily intimate, they are often fraught with competition and in-fighting, due to the pressurized environment and the few outlets for boredom or anger. As a result of isolation, the women develop a complex hierarchy based on alliances and tribalism.

Gin takes stock of the physical appearance of the women she meets in order to forge a complex hierarchical structure that is based on desirability. To an extent, the rejection of certain women is also based upon notions of the abject. For Butler,

> The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.
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In essence, the "unlivable" zone is that of sexual repugnancy, which is centred upon the body. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz mirrors these claims, stating, "one body (in the West, the white, youthful, able, male body) takes on the function of model or ideal" (45). Gin may not be male, but she is white, able, and particularly youthful. She is sexually desirable with very little effort, and does not have to manipulate her body in desperate attempts to gather male attention.

Also discussed by Orbach, though not by Berger, is the consumerism that is required to maintain femininity, and particularly, the accoutrements of femininity which could be read as markers of sexuality, such as "hair, make-up, shoes". Laurie Penny writes in *Meat Market*, "But what is girlhood, after all, but shoes, clothes and conspicuous consumption?" (Penny 36). In the gazes that Gin gives the other women in *In The Kingdom of Men*, clothing is central, as it is in the work of Naomi Wolf, whose evaluative gaze takes in "the shoes, the muscle tone, the makeup" (1161) but leaves out the person. Therefore, the ranking of female power is determined from the combination of a woman's body and its conformation to an ideal, and the coding and dressing of that body, all of which reads as sexuality. In classifying other women, therefore, Gin has appropriated the

masculine evaluative gaze. The survey of a woman's body is enough to judge if she will be a member of the in-group, or tribe, or part of the abject.

This judgment occurs when Gin encounters Candy Fullerton, the wife of her husband's boss. Candy's first entrance into the novel is disembodied, as she is identified by her "feet [,] swollen in the clench of high heels". Here, Gin's gaze upon Candy begins, as with Wolf's surveying gaze, with a quick movement up from feet to eyes. The desperate hold that Candy has upon her youth is highlighted through the violence of the "clench" of high heels, and the way that Candy "minced" up to Gin, which refer back to an abject, aging body. After Gin's eyes rove to the top of Candy's body, Gin notices, "A fall of blond hair framed her heart-shaped face. I'd thought she might be my age until I saw the heavy makeup caking the corners of her mouth" (45). The quote demonstrates how Gin was initially curious about Candy when she believed she was closer to her own age, and at first praises Candy for her traditionally beautiful features, such as her blond hair and her heart-shaped face. Gin is ultimately disparaging of Candy's abilities as a woman, here demonstrated by her unsuccessful makeup, and in line with Wolf's conceptions of evaluation Candy's desperation reads to Gin as abhorrent.

Candy's clothing also becomes a marker of her worth. After a day of drinking, Gin, her friend Ruthie and their husbands are dragged to meet the Emir of Saudi Arabia. Gin and Ruthie, quite intoxicated, are wearing formal gowns chosen as dress-up costumes. In contrast, Candy is wearing a "pillbox hat, box jacket, A-line skirt – prim and proper as a Sunday school teacher" (97). Candy, clearly wearing the appropriate clothing for the occasion, is demeaned by the pretence of it, the idea that she could possibly dress the part

of a neat, obedient wife. She is depicted as “scowling” (97) at her son. When she sees Ruthie and Gin in their ridiculous outfits, her “eyes widened in disbelief” (97). Here, Gin’s view of Candy is of a desperate and superficial social climber, whose appropriate attire is somehow less authentic than Gin and Ruthie’s alcohol-fuelled costume choices. Again, it seems that Gin’s artifice is highlighted through the symbols of womanhood, initially makeup and now her clothing. Ironically, Gin is perhaps the most prudish of the women, including Candy, yet she passes judgment on Candy for appearing to be respectable.

Every time Gin casts her eyes upon Candy, she is desperate to code her as something other, as a separate and entirely disparate entity from Gin. This is evident through their mutual appraisal in the bathroom at the Beachcomber’s Ball when both women gaze into the mirror at each other. All of the imagery that Gin uses to describe Candy connotes her lack of fertility, her age, and her apparent desperate desire for youth. This is accomplished through the use of arid images, such as Gin “dried [her] hands and tried not to look at the swell of [Candy’s] breasts pinched beneath the hard husks of coconut” (101). The hard husks are evidence of Candy’s barrenness, as is the “dry rustle of her skirt” (101), especially when contrasted with the “swell of breasts” and “scarlet panties”. Candy is conscious in displaying her aging body, while Gin presents herself as reluctant to show off her own youthful body. As with the account of Candy’s shoes in Gin’s initial encounter with her, the language used to describe Candy’s clothing is violent – the breasts are “pinched” as the feet were “swollen”. Under Gin’s gaze, therefore, Candy is desperate to code her body as something it is not, and it is her fraudulent

sexuality and artifice that is, for Gin, the most disturbing of her traits. Candy represents an identity that Gin cannot embrace, that of a petty, unfaithful, and superficial compound wife. Through her gaze, therefore, she is desperate to draw distinctions between Candy and herself, despite the fact that she embraces or indeed demonstrates many of Candy's qualities. This is the rejection of the abject.

THE REFLEXIVE GAZE: WOMEN, SEX, AND SELF

What then, of self-gazing? Surely if a woman is applying a male gaze to the bodies of other women in an effort to discern their value, it logically follows that she will turn the gaze upon herself. The process is called the reflexive gaze, and, I will argue, is part of the construction of female identity within these novels. As Simone de Beauvoir famously claimed, "one is not born, but becomes, a woman", which is interpreted by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* as "gender is an aspect of identity that is gradually acquired" (1). Womanhood is an active process of evaluation, correction, and coding, by which I mean the manipulation of the body to conform to external criteria of womanhood, which are, in the contemporary sphere, rooted in sex appeal.

Through having her own body constantly evaluated and coded for sexuality through objectification and the male gaze, a woman internalizes the process. Then, through looking at and evaluating other women's bodies and the messages and meanings provided there, a woman learns how to code her own body, attempting to be more successful and dominant than the bodies she denigrates. The body, therefore, comes to

take on meaning through a series of wilful acts, which Butler calls ‘performance’, and which I refer to as ‘coding’. To be female is to code the canvas of your body for sexual appeal. The coding of the body and its interpretation will create identity that will then be offered up for the apprehension or recognition of the real or imagined viewer.

Berger argues that women have internalized the male surveying gaze, which now colours their actions, as a result of cultural conditioning:

> A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.
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> 335

Berger asserts that viewership is inescapable. It colours every woman’s every action, from movement to mourning. He mentions the factors that contribute these: referring to them as “teachings” and “persuasions”, which constitute the imposed visual culture surrounding a woman. Essentially, a woman internalizes the way she is looked upon by men, appropriating the male gaze and applying it to herself. She imagines a male viewer surveying all of her actions and assigning worth based on the beauty with which she executes the action. She therefore structures her behaviours to please this imagined viewer and manipulates her body to be surveyed, becoming both the viewed object and the viewing subject.

It is crucial here to comment on the nature of bodies and sexuality in terms of evaluation. Often, when a woman appraises her body, she does not apply the criteria of a

specific man but rather looks at the ‘desirability’ of her body and its value to a male or female audience who might evaluate it. As Berger states,

> It is true that sometimes a painting includes a male lover. But the woman’s attention is very rarely directed towards him. Often, she looks away from him or she looks out of the picture towards the one who considers himself her true lover – the spectator-owner.
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> 447

While Berger is perhaps speaking of the painter’s or viewer of the painting’s gaze in particular, this looking outwards is significant of the understanding of female coded bodies. The woman, in looking outwards and not at her lover, is not dependent upon a specific relational worth, but rather wishes to see her worth reflected back to her in a way that might confirm her identity, which might establish her success in the application of criteria to her body. This gaze is a “meta-surveying” gaze, in which the woman is both the object and the surveyor, while the intended audience is left ambiguous.

Berger’s attestations have to be updated for a contemporary audience that has an even greater visual culture than previous generations. Laurie Penny argues that the surveying glance is no longer an evaluation of beauty alone: what was once a beauty economy has now become a sex economy due to the proliferation of social media and pornography. But women are also coding themselves explicitly sexually. This is echoed and argued by Kelly Oliver, who asserts that “women and girls post selfies on Facebook and other social media sites mimicking the poses we’ve come to associate with those desired by the male gaze”. The male gaze, appropriated by a female subject and applied to her own body, is now wrapped up in erotic appeal. When a woman moves or mourns, she consciously codes her body for sex appeal and does it in order to please the imagined male viewer. In

imagining the gaze upon herself, she is constantly evaluating, correcting, and coding her body for sex in an attempt to please the imagined male viewer who might assign her value.

Woman, therefore, is both the subject and object of the male gaze. In this sense, she is dissonant. In imagining the surveyor, she becomes the surveyor, either imagining the gaze upon her or literally gazing upon herself, perhaps in a mirror, or perhaps at her objectified body studied part by part. This viewing is done in order to appraise her own body through imagined male eyes. In her depersonalized fantasies, she watches herself perform actions. To a certain extent, she may also be exerting an element of misogyny against herself as she can only objectify her body: she can see the sum of her parts, her intimized body, her limbs and sexual organs, and the worth of her face, but remains outside herself. As the dissonant subject/object of the gaze, woman may only apprehend herself. The nature of surveying means she cannot recognize herself or give herself personhood. She can only evaluate her sex appeal. Her identity, therefore, is dissonant: she cannot be both a person and an object.

As Butler writes in “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*”, “The body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture and choice, and ‘existing’ in one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms” (2). To ‘exist’ therefore is to redefine the canvas of the body for the interpretation of others. This is accomplished through constant coding of the body and consistent self-appraisal that makes the quality of the gaze very distinct.

In *Ways of Seeing,* John Berger's interpretation of *Vanity* describes a specific female gaze upon herself. The naked nymph in *Vanity* gazes at herself with desire and approval. But the gaze described in this section is not so overwhelmingly positive, although certainly there are positive elements. There is something darker than just the mere exaltation of sexuality: instead the reflexive gaze colludes sexuality with power, often using self-objectification and the temporary suppression of personhood to have power over another.

To be a woman is to have an intrinsic contradiction, an indivisible dualism centred upon sight; women "consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman" (Berger 335), wherein one's "own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another" (Berger 342). Identity and power, therefore, are contingent on pleasing the male gaze for which the body is coded. The gaze a woman applies to herself is the application of specific criteria of sex appeal provided by years of cultural conditioning. The sexual worth of her body can often give her power, even if the power requires a temporary suspension of her personhood.

This accounts for the long mirror gazes that dominate *In the Kingdom of Men,* the rebellious sexual coding in *The Ruins of Us,* and the specific coding of the body as protection that occurs in *Stoning the Devil.* The three women of these novels are all, to a certain extent, stripped of their identities and left powerless. Gin, who has lost a baby and moved to a foreign land, is isolated in her compound. Rosalie has lost the stability of her marriage. Kamila, the most desperate of all the women, has turned to prostitution to earn

enough money to return to Poland. The women all require power, and even if it is only a temporary solution, they each use the reflexive gaze to turn themselves into objects in order to gain a modicum of power. For Gin and Rosalie, self-objectification through the reflexive gaze is part of a process. However, for Kamila, the extremity of her situation requires her to immediately become an object.

In The Kingdom of Men is essentially the story of Gin's self-discovery, the awakening of her morality and sexuality, and ultimately the collapse of her identity exploration. As shown above, Gin spends a significant portion of the novel gazing at the bodies of other women, either through orientalising them or by classifying them as desirable or not to suit her own conception of self. While Gin looks at the women around her, she compiles their strengths, particularly those of Linda and Ruthie, and makes her own new identity a pastiche of their actions. She borrows behaviour from Ruthie, through learned fellatio, and symbols of femininity from Linda, through borrowed earrings. With the sex appeal of these two women present in her mind, Gin tries to assert her own power by copying such sex appeal. She therefore spends a large portion of the novel coding and classifying herself, using her sexual worth to create identity and power within a foreign landscape. The quality of the gaze evolves until it reaches a zenith of sexuality.

As Gin looks upon herself in *In the Kingdom of Men*, she experiments with different identities, the first being that of a conventionally popular woman, whose social capital is grounded in her beauty. Gin is painfully shy about her body at the pool, resisting turning her body so as not to expose the backs of her legs and her buttocks. Ruthie is scornful of her shyness and seems determined to transform the wallflower. With

Linda's help, Ruthie performs a makeover on Gin while Gin gazes into the mirror. "Ruthie helped me with my makeup while Linda pinned my hair. When I looked in the mirror, I hardly recognized the woman there; head into a chignon, face full of colour, like the prom queen I'd never been" (88). Crucially here, Gin is classifying her own face in the mirror and is particularly focused on the hallmarks of female outward identity such as the chignon hairstyle and the makeup. While the description does not dwell on Gin's sexuality, it is important because it reveals the ways that Gin has now been coded as a particular type of woman, a confident woman who might be admired by her peers. This is the first iteration of the reflexive gaze.

The reference to prom queen is important here. The woman that Gin admires in this particular mirror is not flagrantly sexy, but rather the benevolent, elected heroine of a high school with a sophisticated and demure chignon and "colour" on her face. Through the workings of Ruthie and Linda, Gin is able to see herself as beautiful but also respected. There is nostalgia in this gaze, and an acknowledgement of Gin's previous shortcomings as an unaccepted woman, separate from the bonding between women. Saudi Arabia has allowed her this. Through the enforced separation of men and women, Gin has re-entered a juvenile world, a girlhood to replace the one she never had. In this world, her peers, who transform her into a sight worthy of admiration and recognition so that Gin might better see herself, recognize her. This mirror gaze, therefore, is Gin's confrontation with the worth decided by Ruthie and Linda, who have coded her body, due to its attractiveness, as possessing cultural worth.

Gin is confronted with another version of herself at the Beachcomber's Ball and at this stage, the reflexive gaze becomes more sexualized. Gin, ever the *ingénue*, is dressed in the same prom-inspired style as if she were to attend the ball, a bold style she is only able to adopt after having recognized her worth through her mirror gaze. However, this identity is valuable only for its social capital within a hierarchy of women, and her prom queen look will not add to the social capital that Ruthie and Gin gain by keeping company with such a pretty young woman. As with the prom-queen look, Gin's body is ambushed by the application of coding by Ruthie, this time in the form of a "shipwrecked woman" for the costume ball. While Ruthie is aware of the power of the coding of Gin's body, Gin is ignorant of it. She trusts Ruthie to code her with an identity comparable to the "prom-queen", so that she may receive esteem in gazing upon herself.

Again, Gin has difficulty recognizing herself, but this is a new role, less familiar even than that of the prom queen. In the bathroom, Gin "stood in front of the mirror, unable to recognize myself, my hair in waves, the flower at my ear, my shoulders bare" (111). Ruthie has made her into a fantasy of availability and desperation. Gin's eyes take in the relaxed sexuality of her 'costume', coded through the tousled hair, the vaginal flower symbolism, and of course, the nakedness of her shoulders. The look is overwhelmingly sexual, and is arguably designed by Ruthie to ensure the male gaze remains upon the group of women. By increasing Gin's sexual appeal, Ruthie has sought to bring up her own stock in the eyes of the intended viewer, which, unlike "the prom-queen", is unequivocally male. Significantly though, Gin is beginning to realize the

power she holds as a sexual symbol, recognizing her own worth in her ability to appeal to a male gaze.

However, the gaze Gin casts upon the sexualization of her own body also contains elements of abjection and internalized misogyny. At the Beachcomber's Ball, Gin feels more victimized by the male gaze, and, like Dan in *The Ruins of Us*, somewhat indignant at "bald sexual desires", despite the fact that her body has been coded for male consumption through the shredding of her dress to look like a shipwrecked woman. While she recognizes the power she yields as a sexual object, she is uncomfortable when gazed upon by men at the party, whose "eyes settled on my breasts" (177). While Gin has recognized her power through the reflexive gaze, she is left vulnerable to losing power when her coded body is interpreted by a male subject.

Gin leaves the party early, seemingly disgusted by the behaviour of the other lonely expatriate compound wives. She disentangles herself from Ruthie and Linda's company. She is soon confronted by Pat, who, intoxicated and feeling led on by Gin's behaviour, proceeds to force himself upon her. This incident serves to demonstrate the consequences of inviting the male gaze. While nothing happens to Gin, who is rescued by the entirely safe and paternal Burt Crane, the encounter scares her. When she returns,

> I stripped off my dress and stepped into the shower, lathering the smoke from my hair, scrubbing my face clean, but I couldn't get rid of the damp feel of Pat's breath at my neck, the voice in my head telling me that I had no business going out without my husband, smoking and drinking and dressed like a tramp.

Gin cannot decode her body fast enough, and is upset at the reaction her body has provoked from male viewers, which is dissonant with the identity she is trying to communicate.

While Gin has celebrated elements of Ruthie and Linda's sexuality and the identity of their bodies and therefore selves, she has not, as yet, taken any action to code her own body.. In this way, Gin's body is actually coded *for* her, either by men, such as her grandfather and Mason, who purchased her a new wardrobe before their move to Saudi Arabia, or by women, as in the actions of Ruthie and Linda. Gin's education, therefore, begins with forced costumes of supposed worth: the revered prom-queen or the shipwrecked woman. While Gin relishes the designation of prom-queen and the female recognition she is so desirous of, she recoils from the costume and role of the shipwrecked woman. She finds bald sexuality abject, the wanton coding of her body deplorable, and the resulting male advances humiliating. However, now that Gin has experimented with the construction and communication of her identity through her body, she is able to claim agency and create her own coding. She is able to learn which classifications she desires, and which she does not, and therefore, through the evaluation of the reflexive gaze, Gin can now correct the coding of her body.

At times in the novel, Gin relishes her overt sexuality and actively codes her body to achieve it. Gin takes great pains to make her body a sexualized object, and enjoys looking upon it as a sexual object. She "painted my toenails Jungle Red. I couldn't quit looking at them, pleased by the bright flash of color. I pulled on the bikini and appraised myself in the mirror, turning to see my naked shoulders, the bare expanse of each leg" (82). In this

scene, Gin has appropriated a male gaze and applies it to her body with exaltation. Gin watches herself perform in isolation, without mention of her husband. She is 'trying on' sexuality by trying on the bikini, and in this moment is finally liberated from the sexual repression that so dominated her upbringing. She has classified herself as a universally attractive body (meaning not for a specific surveyor) through this particular coding, and is enjoying the way she feels in gazing upon herself. While the gaze is explicitly sexual, given the descriptive words "naked" and "bare", the actual quality of the gaze is closer to a surveying gaze than the appropriated male gaze, which can signal arousal or possession. Importantly, this gaze is celebratory. As with the "prom-queen" look, Gin is pleased with the identity communicated by her body. She is able to recognize her worth through reflexive gazing.

Gin relishes the way she feels in looking at her sexually coded body, and does not imagine a man looking upon her until she puts on her lipstick. Then she "leaned in until my breath fogged the mirror, and pressed my lips to the glass" (82) and imagines Yash erasing the mark she leaves behind. While in the context of cleaning this fantasy makes sense, Yash is in every way an entirely inappropriate and therefore abstract target for Gin's sexual fantasies. In this case, he becomes a stand-in for the male gaze within a safe and antiseptic environment. There are no moments of sexuality between Gin and Yash, but in imagining his response to her sexuality, she has an identity of worth conferred upon her. She has therefore turned the reflexive gaze, for the first time, into the conferring of her own power as a sexual object over the implied male subject.

The final iteration of the Gin's reflexive gaze is the most wrapped up in power and represents the conclusion of her education, appropriation and pastiche behaviour. Throughout the novel, Gin becomes emboldened by the approving gazes upon her body, and as I have tracked, relishes her own sexuality more. She has also become increasingly disenfranchised, isolated, and distant from her husband. In some ways, her sexual identity begins to supplant other aspects of herself. As such, Gin conflates her sexual desirability with power. When her husband returns home from the oil fields, Gin is waiting for him, and while her husband arouses her, she finds her own sexual power more thrilling, proclaiming: "I couldn't keep my eyes from that woman whose hair fringed her shoulders, her lips stained with color, and the man behind her, his head thrown back, his neck exposed, his body arching upward as though he were the one being taken" (125). In this scene, Gin as a sexual object has power over the typical male subject. Because she is a desirable body that has been coded specifically for sexual consumption, she has strength. However, there is also an element of dissonance in this scene, through the overt objectification. "That woman" who has all the power in this circumstance and is able to dominate her husband is somehow separate and new from the Gin that existed previously. It is not herself that she looks upon, but an imagined, more powerful version of herself, who is able to dominate and use her body as a weapon, but who also might have given up her personhood to do so.

In *The Ruins of Us*, Rosalie similarly relishes the male gaze as she begins to lose power, trading her own personhood for the temporary power provided in becoming a desirable sexual object. While Rosalie does not participate in the same mirror gazing as

Gin does, she does code herself for specific viewing with an emphasis on her sexuality. She does not linger, as Gin does, so much on the reflexive gaze without a male audience, but rather anticipates, imagines, and celebrates the reaction her sexuality will achieve in the eyes of men. The reflexive gazing therefore is implied through Rosalie's ability to see herself reflected in the eyes of those watching her, first in the form of her female friend, then in the eyes of Dan, and finally in the eyes of the strangers watching her.

After Rosalie learns about Abdullah's marriage to Isra, she succumbs to grief and rage. Her ally, Lamees, coaxes her out of the house with the promise of their usual exercise around the mall. Here, Rosalie anticipates and imagines the gaze upon her, and therefore codes herself for viewership very carefully: "She was wearing her abaya with the silver embroidery because Lamees said it made her look regal, and she was in desperate need of queenliness tonight" (loc 277). As with Gin, Rosalie codes herself with the armour of clothing and becomes, like Gin and with the help of her peers, a queen for the evening. She classifies herself as such, like Gin, in order to claim some power over her situation.

This reflexivity is not sexual as yet, but soon Rosalie, who is desperate to feel powerful again after the sobering revelation of her husband's marriage, begins to trade in the currency of sexual approval, finding power when men find her attractive. As Rosalie walks through the mall, she is self-conscious of her abaya and hijab slipping. While "Usually, for modesty's sake, she would tug at the runaway folds of the robe, but tonight, she didn't mind the eyes of men watching her from the coffee stands" (loc 296). She

classifies herself in such a way as to invite the stares of males, accepting their male gaze as evidence of her worth at a time when she feels powerless.

Rosalie and Dan's relationship is built on the notion that each is a stand-in for an absent other; the relationship is centred on the idea that each has lost something they are trying to gain back. While Rosalie has lost herself, when she is with Dan, she is given memories of her former power, particularly through his way of looking: "The way he had looked at her with a kind of boyish reverence. On that dune she had remembered what it was like to be adored, and it was a powerful feeling" (loc 2231). Abdullah has fallen out of love with her, and Rosalie realizes that as a woman in her particular time and place, her power had come from being adored. She relishes the moment with Dan, gaining power from his glances, and realizes she can use the weapon of her sexuality to not necessarily get back at Abdullah, but to at least challenge him. Her evolution therefore mirrors Gin, beginning first with queenliness, moving to the understanding of sexuality as a kind of power, then shifting to the use of sexual allure as a kind of weapon.

When Rosalie, Abdullah, and Dan visit Bahrain together, Rosalie is quick to use her own sexual capital to move against Abdullah. At a time when Rosalie felt powerless and without agency, she releases her sexual power to challenge Abdullah: "She undid the tuck she had created on the side of her head. She pulled off the scarf, her red hair wild with static beneath it. Through the mirror, she saw the barbers staring at her" (loc 2211). The mirror in this scene contributes to the conscious self-reflexivity of Rosalie's gazing. She has anticipated and imagined the reaction her sexuality will have, and here she can watch

herself as an object being gazed upon. Like Gin, Rosalie has traded in her personhood for this temporary moment of dominance.

The distinction between Powell's Kamila and the other female western expatriates discussed in this thesis is that Kamila begins her tale already devoid of any power, unlike Gin and Rosalie, who at least have financial freedom. As such, her experience with the reflexive gaze is not an evolution from queenliness to sexual weaponry. When the reader is first introduced to Kamila she is attempting sex-work for the first time. She has been subjected to misogyny and objectification since her arrival in Dubai, and has already been assumed to be a prostitute due to her nationality. Kamila is embittered. "Kamila's Price" sees her attempting to regain control over the coding of her body during this first foray into prostitution.

In the opening scene of the story, Kamila gazes upon her body, which has been coded for male consumption, in an elevator mirror, "apprais[ing] broad face, high cheekbones, slightly slanting eyes, and froth of flaxen hair. Because she was blonde, Andrzej said, she could charge an Arab a thousand" (24). As with Gin and Rosalie, Kamila's worth is summed up in her sexuality, and, like Rosalie, specifically for her hair. As a sex-worker, Kamila is given a numerical value based on her body. This scene demonstrates the reflexive gaze in Kamila's awareness of her body and hair as a commodity. By selling herself, Kamila is trying to reclaim power that has been stripped from her.

Kamila tries to take ownership of the situation despite her coding, in order to give herself autonomy. Recognizing the male gaze empowers her to a certain extent, or at least provides the illusion of power, from the beginning, Kamila is determined to make the

deal on her own terms. She chooses Colin, inviting his gaze upon her with a "sultry, swishing walk" (30). Like Gin, Kamila experiences a particular kind of depersonalization. Whereas Gin saw the woman in the mirror as something 'other', Kamila sees herself as an ethereal being, akin to a mermaid. She notices, "the half-moons of her breasts turned turquoise, violet, indigo" (25). Indeed, "in her long grey skirt she even lacked legs" (25). In becoming a sexual object, Kamila has suspended her personhood, which is evidenced both in her reflexive gazing and transformation into a supernatural being, and the way she lies to Colin. Kamila is trying to gain power through her sexuality, but it means she can no longer be herself.

Kamila's story reflects the seedy underbelly of the UAE's glitz. Unlike Gin or Rosalie, she has no connections to other people, no stability or friendship (save with her pimp) to return to in times of powerlessness. Instead, she has to struggle to find power on her own, and with little recourse her only trade is her sexuality. In her story, Powell creates a tragic, desperate individual, who is battling to gain even a semblance of power.

Gin, Rosalie, and Kamila are all mirror-gazers, trying to assert their power through their sexual worth. The distinctions lie in power dynamics. For Gin, the continued appraisal of others has led her to absorb qualities such as nobility and sexuality in order to perform them. When she becomes "that woman" in the mirror, it is in a time of powerlessness, but it is also in a sense a playful way for her to explore her strength and dominance. Rosalie, conversely, has forgotten or lost her worth as a result of Abdullah's marriage. Her flirtations with Dan and the exposure of her hair in the mall are moments when she is reminded of her own worth through the approval of her sexuality from her

viewers. Her self-reflexive gaze in the barbershop in Bahrain, on the other hand, is mutiny against her husband. She is using her body as a weapon to reclaim her power and the self-reflexive gaze is demonstrative of this assertion of power. Kamila, on the other hand, begins in a place of absolute desperation. She has experienced sexual objectification, but unlike Gin and Rosalie, did not receive any power from it. In her role as sex-worker, Kamila is determined to regain power and her own identity, and therefore she has to create a hardened sexual identity. This is accomplished by her overt depersonalization, as she becomes a supernatural being.

In these novels, the female expatriate characters experiment with their own sexual objectification through the reflexive gaze, working to code their bodies for real or imagined male viewers. In all these cases, however, the female narrators capitalize on their sexual worth to the greatest degree in times of desperation or identity loss. They can only access it in what has been called “bottom power” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *We Should All Be Feminists*. “Bottom power” is the temporary dominance given to women who use their sexuality to make small gains or create upset. In these works, the reflexive gaze is presented as a continuum that includes the limiting and self-objectifying gaze. As demonstrated, for Gin and Rosalie this self-objectification is part of a continuum that includes more positive conceptions of self, usually motivated by female friendships. Paradoxically, when Gin and Rosalie are at the height of their reflexive awareness of their sex appeal they feel the most powerful, but are also the most desperate. However, for Kamila, this trajectory does not exist: she has already reached the zenith of her desperation. Her self-objectification through the reflexive gaze is a kind of protection: in

becoming an object of sexuality, she ceases to be the person she was. This split in identity means that she might still be able to return to her original self.

This chapter of the thesis looked specifically at the ways in which women use other women's bodies and their own bodies in order to create identity through systems of power and hegemony. As an immigrant to Saudi Arabia more than an expatriate, Rosalie in *In the Ruins of Us* is perhaps unique in this thesis, and therefore is able to gaze and recognize from a more stable place. She is able to see Isra as a person because she feels as if she belongs in the culture. However, while Rosalie may feel more tethered to the landscape than Gin or Kamila, she still becomes unsettled when her marriage to Abdullah begins to collapse. As a Saudi wife, Rosalie had made herself unavailable for men, and had no need for validation of her beauty except through her husband's praise. With the revelation of Isra, however, Rosalie loses her grip on her own identity. She begins to see her worth in the value given to her beauty and sexuality, until she takes ownership of this reflexive gaze and becomes paradoxically powerful as an object.

This section was dominated by the narrative of Gin from *In The Kingdom of Men*, the only work within this thesis to speak only from the perspective of an expatriate female. Unlike Rosalie, Gin is very much a recent transplant to Saudi Arabia. She is immediately immersed in the claustrophobic community of expatriate wives and, with no children or connection to the land, Gin is required to use the evaluating gaze to understand her role in the community and define herself for others and herself. Instead of aligning herself with the compound mothers or with Candy Fullerton, Gin creates a social group of women whose qualities she admires: the dominant and sometimes brash Ruthie

and the fiercely independent and gracefully alluring Linda. The moments of admiration are often centred on their physical appearances, and there is a description of secondary sex characteristics of these women often in some state of undress. The novel charts Gin achieving power, authority, and independence. Gaining these qualities demands her sexualization and requires her reflexive gaze.

Kamila's story is markedly different from that of the two American expatriates, Rosalie and Gin, mostly due to her nationality and her marital status. As a single Polish immigrant now engaged as a sex-worker, Kamila does not experience the same kind of power as Rosalie or Gin. She does not have money, nor does she have any support system to speak of, save her pimp. While she still is a western expatriate, she is from a poor country and cannot raise the required funds to return home. She wilfully codes her body in an attempt to escape the dissonance of her ethics with what she is doing. By her bravado and her reflexive gaze, she is able to convince herself she is in control when really she is powerless. Interestingly, Powell chooses not to allow Kamila the narrative power to describe her own rape and torture at the hands of a group of young Emirati men, but rather gives this story to Tyrone, the Sri Lankan hotel clerk.

The female protagonists of these books have different experiences from the expatriate businessmen who were the focus of the second and third. While the men used women as disposable objects in the chapters on sexual objectification and orientalism, in this chapter we see women grappling with their identities through the establishment of systems of hegemony in their peer group, with their adversaries, and with men. I argue that for women, the Gulf provides a personal window of opportunity and the exploration

of identity, whereas for men, the Gulf provokes questions concerning the treatment of women more generally as a kind of metaphor for the Occident's experience with the Gulf. The surveying gaze serves to establish the position of a woman within a system of other women, whereas the reflexive gaze serves to establish the position of a woman in her relationships with men. Both are identity-seeking gazes, and both are rooted in a particular kind of opportunity provided within the Gulf.

CONCLUSION

Overall this thesis has demonstrated that there was an observable micro-movement in Anglo-American literature that relates the experiences of western expatriates within the Gulf. This micro-movement existed from 2012-2014 in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia and literature of this time shares particular commonalities in relation to gender identity. Besser and Van Dijk comment upon the uncanny similarities between Eggers's *A Hologram for the King* and Grunburg's *The Man Without Illness*, claiming that the books of Eggers and Grunburg are part of a "larger literary trend that includes work such as Flemish writer Tom Lanoye's 2013 novel *Gelukkige slaven (Happy Slaves*)" (1). These "globally-minded novels" (Nicols 16) speak of a need for men and women to escape America to create or recreate gendered identities. As such, the Gulf becomes an arena in which to challenge established notions about masculinity, gender relations, and sexuality more generally.

In Powell's *Stoning the Devil*, Colin asks, "Why had no western fiction writers taken on the Gulf? Were they afraid of looking in the mirror?" (121). Colin's statement is ironic because of the influx of writers consciously selecting the Gulf to explore and attempt to explain their own failings, and in essence, to interrogate the mirror. The male protagonists in these novels attempt to create and recreate masculine identity through outdated methods – objectification and orientalism – in an attempt to fortify their own identities. These attempts are desperate temporary measures, and render the men ridiculous and obsolete. The mirror of the Gulf, under Colin's eyes, exposes the true nature of the western male expatriate who has tried to build an identity based on

Lawrentian myths and solidified by the subjugation of women. The Gulf, as a mirror, reveals internalized misogyny and Orientalist fantasy. It therefore becomes a place where new questions about gender identity must be asked.

Powell's Colin is confronted, through the mirror of the Gulf, with his own absurdity. In *Stoning the Devil,* Colin has objectified and dismissed his wife and daughters in an attempt to gain some kind of gendered power. At the end of the novel, however, Colin is "the mouldy lion in the menagerie" (129), his fate pathetic. Powell gives power instead to the female characters: the blazing combative Fayruz, and Badria and Randa with their bright futures. Powell therefore argues that while the time of the mouldy expatriate comes to a close, the potential for a more pluralistic future, particularly for Arab women, is opened up. The novel speaks of the potential of the region as a site for new gendered identity to be explored. In *The Ruins of Us*, Parsinnen's Dan experiences a mild epiphany about the treatment of women, realizing that he cannot act as a saviour to Rosalie. He returns, chastened, to the US where his ex-wife Carolyn will pick him up from the airport. Dan has learned from his attempt to objectify Rosalie, and the novel ends with a spirit of optimism, suggesting that Dan has grown to be a finer man in the Gulf, and can now return to enact a new kind of masculinity. These two novels show that the mirror of the Gulf has resulted in a shift in power and gender dynamics for these western expatriate narrators.

A Hologram for the King has the most overtly positive outcome for its expatriate narrator as Alan chooses to remain in Saudi Arabia. While Alan was not successful selling the hologram technology to the king, he is told there might be reason for him to

stay on at KAEC. He was also not able to consummate his relationship with Zahra, who has left for Paris, yet he is optimistic about their relationship. While his fate is left ambiguous, he is optimistic, and crucially, left to explore a new version of masculinity within the Gulf. In this novel, Eggers's Zahra is dynamic and worldly, but she does not eclipse Alan's quiet self-discovery. Eggers leaves the reader with a narrator who still has potential to create a different gender identity within the Gulf.

The most negative ending occurs in the latest novel, O'Neill's *The Dog.* Throughout the novel, X performs ethical contortions, trying to absolve his guilt surrounding the mistreatment of women. Once he has had his minor epiphany and is able to recognize the sex-workers he employs as people, his identity as a "good guy" is untenable. The novel closes with X in stasis: while immobilized in his expensive apartment he has wild fantasies of moving to the Comoros. Therefore, while this novel ends with the dissolution of antiquated gender hierarchies, it does not offer a glimpse at a future without them. O'Neill argues that the time for men like X has come to an end, but pessimistically cannot argue for the birth of any new future. This pessimism is linked to the publication date: the novel was published just as the period of hopeful curiosity began to close, and therefore it contains far less of the spirit of optimism or potential than the other novels.

These novels speak about how traditional gender hierarchies as a method to build identity are no longer viable. In these books, the men and women fail when they do not recognize others but rather rely on out-dated stereotypes or a sense of superiority. The unsuccessful attempts at objectification and orientalism result in identity collapse

followed by varying degrees of self-growth for the protagonist. This reflects the hopeful curiosity of the micro-movement as it speaks to how gender relations need to become more nuanced. As such, these authors are arguing that misogynistic constructs of identity should and will collapse in the modern world, and that the future will belong to those who can adapt.

These works also demonstrate how tropes of orientalism as a method of categorization are no longer viable. As with objectification as a method to construct identity, the male narrators in these books orientalise female bodies to build up their own conceptions of self, relying on Lawrentian myths and the sexualization of the Orient more generally. But these methods fail. The white western narrators, who are striving to use women as mirrors to reclaim masculinity, are instead confronted with their own latent racism and inferiority. The rejection of these male narrators by their host countries could be called awakening: it pushes the idea that "the global future is not white or male at all, but seems to belong to people like Zahra" (Besser and Van Dijk 17). This view is echoed more darkly in the other books: the triumph of Oksana in *The Dog*, Colin's admission in *Stoning the Devil* that Fayruz's ending is the "triumph of the antagonist over the protagonist" (129), and through the ferocity of Badria and Randa in *Stoning the Devil's* final story. It seems the future belongs to the women who have previously been objectified or orientalised. Again, this is aligned with the period of hopeful curiosity; these examples hint that the Gulf might be a place where not only gender order, but also orientalism, is questioned.

Crucially, the male protagonists of these novels either return home or stay as they are, having experienced, to a certain degree, a newfound awareness of gender relations and the western relationship with the Gulf. Their experience is a generalized one: through the interactions with specific females, they have questioned their own identities, found them wanting, and are now in a position to change. For the female protagonists, however, the potential provided for the Gulf is much more personal and far more temporary. In these novels, the Gulf offers the possibility of new identity to these women, but this possibility is short-lived and they are left directionless.

In *The Ruins of Us*, rather than stay in Saudi Arabia or return to the United States, Rosalie has chosen to depart to a third, liminal space. While her self-sexualization was a temporary measure for her own identity in a time of crisis, it has collapsed. Parsinnen leaves us with Rosalie's optimism that maybe she will find contentment away from the Gulf, beyond the antiquated expectations of her gender identity and free from the expectations of a gendered society. This is similar to what happens to Gin at the end of *In the Kingdom of Men*. Gin is put on a plane to Italy and chooses to stay in this liminal space, wandering the city and taking photographs. However, unlike Rosalie, Gin's fate is less optimistic. It is a lonely, sexless, and almost repentant fate. For Gin, Saudi Arabia had provided a place where her gender identity and queerness might be explored and examined. At the close of the novel, this opportunity is categorically shut down, as Gin's fantasies even take on a heteronormative gloss. As such, the Gulf provided a chance for self-exploration that has since closed; the personal journey has ended.

The micro-movement of Anglo-Literature set in the Gulf from 2012-2014 is concerned with the future of western, and particularly American, gender identities. These books all subscribe to the micro-movement of hopeful curiosity because they are all concerned with the potential of the Gulf to question gendered identity. In these works, each protagonist is, to varying degrees, made aware of his or her use of obsolete tropes that reduce and limit women. I conclude that therefore these authors argue, to varying extents, for the recognition of other people as people, not objects. Their novels suggest that the Gulf is a site where this transformation from object to person can occur; a place where gendered identity and hegemony can be interrogated and a new, potentially more nuanced future can emerge. Published during such a short period, the books of this micro-movement occupy a liminal space in an analogous way to their protagonists. The novels, and the movement itself, represents a historical period of transition, when the future of both gendered identities and the Gulf was full of possibility, or to quote Eggers, a place that "may or may not come to be" (Elliott).

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