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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**New Forms of Exile: Arab Identity in Three
Contemporary Novels**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of
English and Comparative Literature
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Rabab Mohammad Al – Saffar

Under the supervision of
Dr. William Melaney

February / 2015

For Mallak and Baby

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Every word in this thesis marks a significant milestone in my cherished years of exile. Written with care and compassion, it carries all the joy and sadness experienced during the period of its production. Being an exile myself, I would like to pay tribute to the time of home away from home. To my beloved cities of refuge, Cairo, Amman, and Toronto, and in memory of my beloved Baghdad, to which I owe all that I have today. To my beloved father, Mohammad Al-Saffar, who protected us *in exile*, and to my precious most kind-hearted mother, Suzy El- Gohary, who spent all of her years away from *her* family and country in favor for our well-being and best interests. To my dear brothers, Haider, Hussain, Abbas, and sister, Zahra, who have shared my childhood memories of exile, a family joined together by love and the hope of finding a home that would unite us one day. Each and every one of us has lived this time to which I have dedicated my years of study.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of exile in three works of contemporary fiction, particularly in view of how exile comes to be accepted and viewed positively in the lives of the characters depicted. The meaning of exile is not restricted to being forcibly detached from one's home country and thrown into another. Hence, a new form of exile is portrayed in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*, and Bahaa Taher's *Love in Exile*, three novels that present characters who understand the condition of exile in special ways. In these novels, the exile embarks on a unique journey and faces opportunities that open up the possibility of a new life. In each case, the exile must decide whether to merely suffer exile or embrace it. This thesis unveils a new face of exile in arguing that exile can be experienced psychologically as well as physically, while studying images of displacement and the underlying motives that underlie the condition of exile itself.

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Introduction

In an age of disquiet and increasing mobility, many settings and places have become ill-defined and perhaps have lost their significance to those who once looked to them for comfort and a sense of continuity. Edward Said has discussed our unstable modern condition in this way “We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement” (Said, 173). As people depart from their countries, either because they are driven away or feel threatened, they usually have to leave many things behind. They also take part of the land that they left along with them as they continue on life’s journey. Eventually, the land they left becomes poor, and maybe in some sense naked; it ceases to possess the significant features that distinguish it from other lands. In which cases, exile becomes a stance that not only concerns the people who experience it; sometimes it impacts the places that were leave behind, just as it acquires a new meaning in the new place of refuge.

Said also explains that new cultures and identities can arise from a new sense of exile: “Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees” (Said, 173). In spite of the huge obstacles that an exile has to face, many opportunities appear and open up the possibility for a new life away from home, maybe even a better one. The experiences that form the basis for a new identity sometimes allow the exile to embark on a very different life. This thesis examines new meanings of exile that go beyond the fact of leaving a land that either no longer seems to be welcome, even if it does not compel a sharp departure. It unveils a new face of exile, showing that exile is not reducible to a physical movement from a certain place, but rather a state of being that can be experienced anywhere, even in one’s home country. This thesis proposes that exile is a state of being that can be experienced psychologically as well as

physically. It studies images of displacement that are differently experienced and analyzes exile in some of its spiritual modes.

The thesis also looks at the possible benefits of exile as a chance to belong to aspects of life that are not simply defined geographically. It aims at displaying new meanings of belonging, while also paying attention to the advantages that an exile gains from a new culture, as opposed to the disadvantages incurred in the loss of an earlier one. By respectfully calling to mind the original country, the expatriate can learn more about what helped shape his or her being; moreover, as this learning process forward, a new set of experiences can deepen and refresh his or her memories of what came earlier.

History bears witness to prominent figures who have undergone exile. The Dalai Lama has reflected upon his experience of leaving home: “I awaited the day of departure with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation. On the one hand, I was very unhappy at the prospect of abandoning my people. I felt a heavy responsibility towards them. On the other hand I eagerly looked forward to traveling Not only would I now be able to see something of my country, but I would now be able to do so as an ordinary observer, not as Dalai Lama” (Lama 58). The Dalai Lama is, of course, the special case of a religious leader who cannot in good conscience remain in his own country because his spiritual authority has been compromised by political circumstances. But the sense of having somehow become ordinary through exile is a feature that often comes with exile. In such cases, the sense of self-recognition, or identity, becomes less essential than a new relationship to what was once familiar. This feeling can be liberating and even enlightening. Lal Vinay reflects on such an experience in this way: “The exile not only sees with sharpened eyes, but ultimately gives birth to a new form of consciousness, the consciousness of those who are ‘housed’ by virtue of being ‘unhoused’” (Vinay 33).

Exile in the past has been presented differently than it is sometimes presented in contemporary literature. Amit Saha recalls the earlier legacy of exile as political banishment: “Many a Shakespearean play has in it the form of banishment and it dates back even before the time of Pericles of Athens. As for writers of yore, there is Ovid whose hyperbolic lamentation on being exiled from Rome for publishing an obscene poem forms part of his *Tristia I*. There is Virgil whose Aeneas leaves Troy urged by the ghost of his wife thereby displaying the writer’s predicament.” (Saha 187). Exile has begun to assume a somewhat different meaning down through the years. However, exile is not to be confused with expatriation. Edward Said makes a distinction between the expatriate and the exile that is implicit in the following discussion: “Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were not forced to live in France. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions” (Said 181). Expatriation is seen as an honorable state of being that cannot be granted to anyone who leaves their country.

Abdul R. Jan Mohamed reflects on Said’s view of exile by calling attention to the role of the “border intellectual” in producing literary criticism. As a “border intellectual,” Said is responsible for a form of criticism that becomes “a ‘reflection,’ an indirect meditation, on the predicament [of the exile]; and, second, it occupies a specular position in relation to Western culture (Mohamed 223). Edward Said’s notion of a “specular position” points to the psychological impact of exile on the production of literature as well as criticism. Without denying that exile can be a forced condition, this thesis will investigate how “the loss of something left behind forever” can outweigh the benefits that can derive from exile (Said 173). Moreover, in such cases, the virtual possibility of return does not cancel out the pain of exile; it

cannot invalidate the claim that exile remains a psychological reality even after it has lost some of its political implications. On the other hand, the thesis will also discuss how exile can assume the form of a spiritual condition that possesses an inner richness and somehow compensates for a traumatic loss.

In her special study, Asher Milbauer anticipates how “the numerous questions posed by transplantation emerging in the process of my analyses of the fiction and biographical data of Conrad, Nabokov, and I. B. Singer will be applicable not only to these authors but also to the lives and works of other artists, who ‘voluntarily’ or by force have sought refuge and creative freedom outside the boundaries of their homelands” (Milbauer, xiii). Many writers who have been either forced to leave their home country, or have been limited in their access to it, have gained knowledge from this experience. This thesis examines three contemporary writers who have enriched the literature of our age but who remain in dialogue with an older literature that continues to deserve our serious concern:

I’ve come, an exile’s book, sent to this city,
Frightened and tired; kind reader offer me
A calming hand. Don’t fear that I may shame you:
My master’s fate’s not such that he could rightly
Cloak it, poor soul, in any levity. (Ovid, Book – 1.1 – 6)

Chapter 1: Exile in Conflict with Love in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*

In Leila Aboulela's novel, *The Translator*, the main character, Sammar, learns to embrace exile and holds onto her faith and language to form an in-between identity for herself away from Sudan. Sammar is an Arab-Muslim woman who is from Sudan but was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. She works as a translator for a Scottish, Middle-Eastern historian named Rae Isles, who soon becomes her confidant and helps release her feelings of love and exile. Being a Sudanese born in Scotland adds an element of displacement to the tragedy of losing her husband, Tarig, and becoming a widow. Sammar starts to feel exiled in Scotland and loses the sense of belonging to any place. This chapter examines how Sammar works at fusing faith and love to form a new identity. It looks at the way love and faith work against the negative aspects of exile, and end up opening new possibilities for a genuine life *in* exile. This chapter will further explore multiple themes that have contributed to the main theme of exile and suggest new definitions for the word exile itself.

Stages of exile

Sammar goes through numerous stages of exile that affect the way she learns to endure its abnormality. This experience starts with her birth in Aberdeen, a birth in exile, where she is unaware of the complex nature of her identity. This is followed by her first flight to Sudan at the age of seven that puts her in a peculiar state of being, having to cope with her exile *away from* exile and accept her Sudanese identity. Later, the decisive nature of her exile marks her return to Aberdeen with her husband, Tarig. After the death of her husband, Sammar returns to Sudan in pain and loss. Sammar does not last long in Sudan, though; she returns to Scotland, feeling lost and absent from the world around her and unable to distinguish one place from another.

Homecoming is an essential element of exile that can be looked upon with a new perspective in *The Translator*. Edward Said contends, “The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question” (Said, 179). Thus, according to Said, Sammar does not have a defined home to return *to* and does not relate herself to any solid ground. After the loss of her beloved husband, she also loses her connection to the land. Homecoming becomes ironic so that it becomes hard to distinguish her coming home from her leaving home.

Sammar’s first homecoming to Sudan as a young girl is a happy and exciting journey to a place that she has not seen for years and yearns to discover. It is followed by Sammar’s return to Aberdeen with her husband, Tarig, to resume their studies. Her second return to Sudan, later after Tarig's death, is full of grief and a sense of exile. She returns with two heavy burdens, one being her husband’s dead body, and the other being her lively son, Amir. Sammar then returns to Aberdeen for the second time. She chooses to live alone and leaves behind her son in Sudan, and this entails a different state of exile and homecoming. Finally, her last homecoming to Sudan after her quarrel with Rae is a fleeing away from the failures of unfulfilled love.

Sammar does not comply with her maternal duties towards her son Amir. Her abandon of Amir in Sudan and decision to mourn individually could be related to a kind of punishment and also to the act of trying to live on her own: “So we have learned to punish people by keeping them home as well as kicking them out . . . then, when the walls come tumbling down (as, eventually, they always do), the confined will run away in search of freedom, unaware that they have been sent into exile by circumstances” (Gass 92). Sammar unnoticeably inflicts the exile that she herself has experienced upon her son, whom she feels reminds her of Tarig, and punishes him and herself for something that neither of them were responsible for: “If she went

home now, she would bring Amir back with her, if he would agree to come. She would escape from him again” (Aboulela 29).

Loss of motherhood for Sammar is accompanied by loss of identity. Amir stands as an obstacle between herself and her agony: “The child would not let her be, would not let her sink like she wanted to sink, bend double with pain. He demanded her totally” (Aboulela 8). Sammar had to let go of Amir along with all the things she had to discard from her past in order to realize her plan of isolating herself: “Tearing letters, dropping magazines in the bin, a furious dismantling of the life they had lived, the home they made. Only Allah is eternal, only Allah is eternal” (Aboulela 9).

Memory plays an enormous role for an exiled person; it can either be repressed or evoked. Tina Steiner writes, “In Aboulela’s fiction, particularly in her novel, *The Translator*, the alien and fragmented world of exile is countered by nostalgic dreams of rootedness and cultural tradition, which stem from the culture of origin and are fuelled by sensual memories of a youth spent in Sudan” (Steiner 13). The good days had their moment when Sammar was in Sudan with Tarig. The warm memories reside in that part of her mind, whereas the cold and painful memories come to her in a colder part of the world—the place where she gave birth to Amir and lost Tarig.

As memories enter her mind, pain comes into being, but Sammar endures that pain willingly. Leila Aboulela eloquently describes Sammar’s pain and its formation:

Four years ago this mark had crystallised. Grief had formed, taken shape, a diamond shape, its four angles stapled on her forehead, each shoulder, the top of her stomach. She knew it was translucent, she knew that it held a mercurial liquid which flowed up and down slowly when she moved. This diamond shape of grief made sense to her: her forehead—that was where it hurt when she cried, that space behind her eyes; her shoulders—because they curled to carry her heart. And the angle at the top of her stomach—that was where the pain was. (Aboulela 4)

In this description, Aboulela puts into words the physical aspects of Sammar's pain. This pain finds its way into her life, eating away years of youth and becoming Sammar's only hideaway. This pain becomes a life sentence that Sammar pronounces upon herself and serves with pleasure: "She was unable to mother the child. The part of her that did the mothering disappeared. Froth, ugly froth. She said to her son, 'I wish it was you instead. I hate you, I hate you'" (Aboulela 7).

Space and time in relation to exile

Sammar starts to shape a new presence that transforms both space and time, creating a home to belong to, away from all the disappointments of the past. Marguerite Guzman Bouvard describes this state in this way: "In the landscape of the present, the writer recreates a sense of place, makes a universe out of a dark corner" (Bouvard xi). Sammar's state of mind creates space for a new landscape, which becomes her safe haven: "Four years and her soul had dived into the past, nothing in the present could touch it" (Aboulela 29). So in order to resurrect her soul, Sammar needs to delve deep into the past and collect the fragments of a broken self in order to exist in the present.

Sammar cannot easily accept her new situation, yet Rae's increasing presence makes it more bearable. Sammar slips into a sticky love affair with this non-Muslim, Orientalist Rae Isles, which becomes just as problematic as it is uplifting. Rae's presence is the bitter-sweet reality that she can neither fully experience nor easily abandon. Being part of the present, Rae keeps her alive and conscious: "His words were in her mind now, floating, not evaporating away. At night she dreamt no longer of the past but of the rain and grey colours of his city. She dreamt of the present" (Aboulela 67).

Tina Steiner writes, "At first Sammar experiences exile in Scotland very negatively

She is far from her (adopted) family, has lost her husband in such a strange place, and is constantly reminded that she is different, that she somehow does not belong” (Steiner 17). Yet, feelings of loss, pain, and exile are partially cured when she falls in love with Rae, and a new opportunity for living appears: “Sammar felt separate from him, exiled while he was in his homeland, fasting while he was eating turkey and drinking wine. They lived in worlds divided by simple facts—religion, country of origin, race—data that fills forms” (Aboulela 33). The mentioned data that puts every person out of place is precisely what Sammar fights off, or tries to put on her side. Although they may seem to be no more than simple facts, these simple facts are what pull worlds and nations apart.

Feelings of safety and security help to welcome a stranger into another place and landscape when “[o]utside, Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home has come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feeling of home had come here and balanced just for her” (Aboulela 20). This description indicates Sammar's ability to feel at home wherever she felt safe. Sammar's feelings of safety give her warmth and stability, as William Gass suggests: “Alienation is the exile of the emotions of hope, of trust—sent away somewhere so they won't betray us” (Gass 107). Accordingly, Sammar was alienated in the first part of her exile and gradually her experience of new emotions took her a step further, bringing her to a state exile that became acceptable to her.

Love and faith

Sammar does not defy religion and society in her love for Rae; on the contrary, she works at fusing love and faith, and looks forward to Rae's conversion. Kaiama Glover writes: “Sammar and Rae's story is one of division and difference, and of those miraculous places of intersection like love. For both characters, love means having someone to tell their story to, without fear;

it means effacing the boundaries of language, of nation, of religion—all no more than ‘data that fills forms’. In other words, love translates” (Glover 203). Rae’s understanding and flexible nature safeguards Sammar's worries about his conversion to Islam.

The possibility of Rae’s conversion seems unlikely, yet Sammar never gives up on him. She hopes to win Rae as a husband and to convert him to Islam, and thus to bring him in as a believer. Her hopes for Rae’s conversion surpass the hopes of a successful Islamic marriage; for if Rae converts, Sammar would be able to erase the last boundary between herself and her state of exile. Tina Steiner states: “It is at this point in the narrative that the nostalgia for the left-behind places of the exile changes to become a longing for a different life. This new life is centered around faith and Sammar’s union with Rae rather than the absence from home in its geographical sense” (Steiner 20). Thus, both love and faith need to unite for Sammar to possess a home and an identity.

When Sammar talks to Rae, she manages to escape any put downs that may stand in the way of their relationship and succeeds in creating her own reality: “‘I would not mind . . . if you call me in the middle of the night, if you can’t sleep.’ She who had for years hibernated, could now hardly sleep” (Aboulela 54). At this point in their relationship, Sammar starts to outgrow her pain and matures to a new level with Rae. Sammar starts to liberate herself of any undesirable routines from the past and looks at herself with a different perspective: “For years, Sammar had eaten such food, hacking away at the good bits and not questioned what she was doing, as if there were a fog blocking her vision, a dreamy heaviness everywhere. Now she looked around the hospital room and said to herself, ‘I am not like this. I am better than this.’”(Aboulela 65). This realization comes to Sammar when she starts to set a positive image of herself, an image that is closer to her earlier self-image.

The relationship between Sammar and Rae goes through different phases in the novel, starting from a simple work acquaintance and developing into a friendship that grows comfortably to involve deep affection on both sides. Although Sammar and Rae fall in love, they do not immediately establish a transparent relationship but rather grow to love each other more throughout the novel. Rae and Sammar are drawn to one another due to the sense of mutuality they find in one another. They both go through traumatic experiences that are related to people they love who are associated with Africa: “First African night. She spoke first, for like him she was born in this wintery kingdom. Like him Africa was arrived at and loved” (Aboulela 44). Their painful memories are the common ground where they both meet.

Africa holds two contradictory meanings for Sammar and Rae. For Sammar, every return to Africa means going home and being in the light. Africa is her warm and unconcealed refuge; unlike Scotland, it represents her hide-away from people and life: “We’re going home, we’re finished here, we’re going to Africa’s sand, to dissolve in Africa’s sand” (Aboulela 10). In using the metaphor of dissolving, Sammar expresses the idea of merging with her surroundings, not standing out as she would in Scotland. However, when she is in Africa, she starts to face many intrusions from her family in Sudan. So Sammar decides to go back to Scotland and release herself from the nuisance of the familiar public that surrounds her. In considering this entire journey, we might say that Sammar both runs *to* Africa and *from* Africa.

Rae, on the other hand, is in a dissimilar situation when he narrates his miscarried marriage that was followed by the loss of his child in Africa. His first visit to Africa was in search for something new and exotic as well to fulfill his love for the East. This image is distorted by the agonizing loss of his child. Rae returns to his home in Scotland to study Africa's culture, which surprises Sammar: “How can you like a place, visit it again, study its culture and

history when something horrible happened to you there?’ He was quiet. When he spoke, he said, ‘Because it was healthy for me, like medicine. It made me less hard’” (Aboulela 62). Rae uses the same healing technique that Sammar uses for herself when he chooses to endure one agony for the sake of forgetting another one.

Language and culture

Sammar and Rae also share their knowledge and love for a similar culture. They both understand and sympathize with the East with all its complications. Sammar, through her Arab and Muslim identity, promotes her culture, and Rae through his studies and active role in Middle East studies, highly supports it. Sammar uses her power of knowledge in language and Islam to ‘ethically’ lure Rae into the ideal marriage for which she aspires. Sadia Abbas reflects on this notion, stating that “Sammar is the novel’s eponymous translator. She translates Arabic texts for Rae, and the novel implies that she translates Islam into a properly *felt* system of beliefs for him” (Abbas 437). Sammar works at translating a language as well as a culture: “Last night she had stayed up late transforming the Arabic rhetoric into English” (Aboulela 6). Wail Hassan sees this approach as going beyond the novel in the limited sense and embracing translation between cultures: “The novel is about the possibilities and limits of translation as an avenue to cultural communication” (Hassan 304).

Accordingly, Sammar takes on the role of the sincere pastor who works at educating Rae emotionally and faithfully, rather than in a purely scholarly or academic fashion. Sammar works hard at conveying a new face of Islam to Rae. She takes it upon herself as a lawful duty to give a proper image of her culture and religion to someone who knows more than she does about her own culture: “He knew the details of her country’s history more than she did, the correct dates. They both knew the names . . . The Mahdi, Gordon, the Khalifa, Kitchener and Wingate”

(Aboulela 49). And yet, Sammar was not satisfied with the knowledge that Rae possessed; she required more awareness from him, more faith.

Sammar and Rae come closer through this medium of language and culture that both put together. But Aboulela expresses an irony at one point in the novel: “Here in Scotland she was learning more about her own religion, the world was one cohesive place” (Aboulela 105). This implies that leaving home provides a better vision of what home really looks like, a notion that has repeatedly appeared in this novel. Sammar’s union with Rae means so much more than having a partner with whom she can complete her life. It stands for the fusion of East and West together under the canopy of love and faith. But the acceptance of a foreign country as a new home is not easy to achieve in this context. An expatriate needs the proper tools to ensure a healthy entry into a different culture to help overcome the fatigue of the journey. Among these tools are language, faith, knowledge, and a potential to succeed.

Rae’s involvement with Sammar suggests a newly decorated life. He easily enters her life due to his Arab likeness and Middle Eastern similarity. Sammar sees predictability in Rae; he was not like other foreign men, as she explains to Yasmine:

“‘Rae is different,’ Sammar said. Her voice made it sound like a question. ‘In what way?’ ‘He’s sort of familiar, like people from back home.’ ‘He’s an orientalist. It’s an occupational hazard.’ Sammar did not like the word orientalist. Orientalists were bad people who distorted the image of Arabs and Islam. Something from school history or literature, she could not remember”
(Aboulela 21).

Clearly, Sammar detects the Arabic aspect of Rae’s character and puts all her bets on that aspect along with his love for the East. Smyth describes their situation in this way: “Despite Sammar’s evident discomfort, in this moment she holds the possibility that cross-cultural relationships can exist which do not serve to suppress difference—perhaps the Orientalist can be redeemed” (Smyth 170).

Sammar lives on believing this for some time until she faces another reality: “‘But I trust you,’ he said. ‘You make me feel safe. I feel safe when I talk to you’” (Aboulela 50). Rae feels safe with Sammar at least partly because she comes into his life to repair a long-damaged past that is related to where she *comes from*. This notion of rescue is found in Smyth’s anatomy of the novel as well, for he says, “In fact, the novel reverses the conventional rescue narrative and asserts a story in which a brown woman saves a white man from white men (and by white men I mean notions of white masculinity) Sammar does not need a white man to save her. Instead, she saves Rae, both physically and spiritually” (Smyth 177).

However, while he welcomes Sammar into his life, Rae blows a bomb in Sammar’s face that breaks their union and ruins the feelings of safety that they had shared when he conveys to her his true attitudes towards conversion. Not only do his declarations send Sammar away, but they emphasize that he, too, was living out of place, maybe unnoticeably. Sammar’s request clarifies to Rae a state that he was unaware of and brings back painful memories that disturb his pride: “In years to come every arrival to Africa was similarly accompanied by loss or pain, a blow to his pride” (Aboulela 53).

Forgetting himself and how far he has come, Rae is dumbfounded at Sammar’s bold proposal for marriage. Marriage is an issue he has seen coming but has tried to escape. Rae realizes that he can’t go on with this game of exile anymore, and decides to stay behind, to stay objective, and to fit in. Pleading with Rae at the beginning of her declaration, Sammar speaks with love and desperation, “It wasn’t a mistake. I was homesick for the place, how everything looked. But I don’t know what kind of sickness it would be, to be away from you” (Aboulela 123).

As both Sammar and Rae come to this moment of recognition, they detach themselves from their desired dream of union and return to the broken homes from which they came. Sammar sets sail to her swollen-hearted Sudan and Rae clings to his thorny-edged Scotland. Tina Steiner assesses the role of nostalgia in this dislocation: “The contrast in the fiction between a present of dislocation and the memories of a better past allows Aboulela to use nostalgia as a toll to criticize Western culture and as a defense mechanism against acculturation” (Steiner 13). In that sense, the return home means that Sammar and Rae’s separation implies a rejection of change and the acceptance of another culture.

Religion and exile

It may be unacceptable for people to let an intruding culture take over their lives and rewrite their pasts, but religion sometimes enables people to come to terms with the past in ways that are compatible with different cultural values. Culture requires certain features to complete it such as language, customs, place, and formalities. Religion, on the other hand, can go along with many cultures and still sustain feelings of security and stability in its bearer. Ferial Ghazoul writes, “While Aboulela’s protagonists also suffer in a culture that is by no means colour-blind, the author makes it possible to join South and North under the emblem of a universal quest, that of Islamic humanism” (Ghazoul 2).

Cultures often discriminate and distinguish, welcoming some but excluding others, whereas religions have the capacity to forgive, accept, and bring together all the differences of diverse cultures under the name of spirituality and faith. Faqir elaborates on this further, stating, “Leila Aboulela’s halal fiction, which propagates an Islamic world view, is also a good example of transcultural and transnational literature” (Faqir 169). Thus, religion works as a medium of

communication and conversation between cultures, despite its reputation for having the capacity to function differently.

The separation of Sammar and Rae was mainly due to religious differences, not cultural ones. Sammar was born and raised in Scotland, spoke and translated English and adapted to a different culture. Rae as well was more than familiar with Arabic culture: “Rae knew the Sahara, knew that most Arabic names had familiar meanings” (Aboulela 5). Rae was unable to convert at first; he only takes that step later on when he decides to sacrifice his career in favor of faith and love. Thus, faith has a stronger effect on both Sammar and Rae than love. This is clear in the way Sammar steps on her heart and decides to hold onto her faith, rather than her love for Rae when he refuses to convert.

Sammar remembers having existed years before knowing Rae by clinging to her faith and deciding to retain it: “She lived in a room with nothing on the wall, nothing personal, no photographs, no books; just like a hospital room . . . ill, diseased with passivity, time in which she sat doing nothing . . . [d]ays in which the only thing she could rouse herself to do was pray the five prayers. They were the only challenge, the last touch with normality, without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of day and night” (Aboulela 16). Sammar’s faith acts as her connection to the real world in two ways. First, it keeps her aware of time and life during her ordeal, thus keeping her alive. Second, it links her to her true identity when she becomes too involved with Rae, giving signals that reestablish the lines of difference and pull her back into a sharper sense of the real.

Sammar overcomes her fears and worries that she had earlier when she reunites with Rae. Sadia Abbas writes: “Aboulela’s novels, when most committed to religion and to Islam, reveal themselves as most in line with the idea that religion is a brand of sociopsychic tranquilizer”

(Abbas 453). True enough, Aboulela finds mitigating cultural differences by combining them with religion. But as Aboulela experiments with this chemi-cultural reaction, the style of her writing never loses its edge, as Fadia Faqir explains: “Aboulela’s commitment to an Islamic world view does not take away from her lyrical style and her attention to detail. Like the West-Indian born Jean Rhys, on whom she models her work, Aboulela’s writing deals with the theme of a helpless female, an outsider, victimized by her dependence on others for support and protection” (Faqir 170).

As Aboulela takes us into this spiritual journey, she reveals the various ambiguities that lie in the self of a Muslim, Arab, and widowed woman. She interrogates into the self of a bruised identity and charmingly makes us live the experience as well as indulge in the thorny love story of Sammar and Rae. For Wail Hassan, “Aboulela’s fiction is part of the growing corpus of Anglophone Arab fiction” (Hassan 298).

Leila Aboulela writes in English for the same reason that Sammar speaks English. The motive to exist beyond the boundaries of being a foreigner is clear in this attempt on Aboulela's side: “Native speakers often have enormous difficulties writing clearly in their own language, though it comes to them naturally and they use it reflexively. Why, then, one might ask, would a foreigner undertake such a painful and exhaustive endeavor as mastering a new language in order eventually to make it into a medium of his art, a means to reach an audience, an instrument of intellectual survival?” (Milbauer xii). Not only does she defy exile and estrangement, but she challenges the other to exceed and use language as a weapon to defend her culture and speak its rights, to give a voice to the silenced and a home to the lost. Sammar and Rae’s reunion at the end of the novel stands for two cultures accepting each other and allowing for the possibility of cultural repair where two sides can reach a consensus and live together. Sammar represents an

example of a person who has embraced exile after finding love and peace, far from the painful past that marks her experience of her own country.

Chapter 2: Exile as Benefit in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*

In Nadine Gordimer's novel, *The Pickup*, love is a choice that sends the main characters into a peculiar form of exile. It concerns a South African who chooses to desert her family and home for a country that was previously deserted by her destined lover. Usually, love comes unexpectedly, but Julie and Abdu were not looking for love to help them reach a state of distance from things, allowing them to remain the same. Love for them was what would help them overcome failure and disappointment. J. U. Jacobs states that “Gordimer offers a brief narrative reflection on the concept of ‘relocation’ in relation to a sense of self” (Jacobs 124). Noticeably, Gordimer’s novel introduces another kind of exile that takes shape in the love story of Julie and Abdu. This story intriguingly questions whether Julie and Abdu fall in love with one another—or fall in love with a hidden identity that each finds in the other.

Exile and Movement

Julie and Abdu meet in a place of exile, a place that is full of contradictions and mixed identities. In South Africa, Julie has lost her sense of being and her understanding of self. She is torn between two different worlds that refuse one another, that of her father’s rich and prestigious life and the life of her disoriented companions at the El-Ay Café. Jacobs describes Julie’s dilemma that “[h]er father Nigel lives in a house that he had built for his second wife in an affluent suburb, but this is a house that Julie has never lived in. Her mother has also remarried and is living in California, so that Julie is in a sense exiled from both their lives” (Jacobs 127). Julie lives in a psychological state of exile rather than a physical one. She tries to escape this feeling of exile throughout the novel as she moves closer to Abdu and further from her life in South Africa.

Julie meets Abdu, an outsider from the two worlds with which she is struggling. Abdu lives two forms of exile. He lives in physical exile during his stay in South Africa, where he strives to secure a place for himself as legal resident. He has escaped feelings of spiritual exile by abandoning a distant country which is no longer his home, but the result is another kind of exile. William Gass has described this state in these terms: “The expression of ‘spiritual exile’ is a metaphor, of course, but a significant one, since there are a large number of whom exile is only a *‘pro forma’* punishment: they are doing well and have found a happy home in their adoptive country” (Gass 106). Abdu seems to exist in the darkness and shadows of a lost city. The reasons that allow Abdu to live in the dark are stronger than those that would motivate him to return home and live in the light. His spiritual exile implies an internalized exile from his original home.

Nadine Gordimer gives an insightful definition of relocation when she states that “[s]ome of the dictionary definitions of the root word ‘locate’ give away the inexpressible yearning that cannot be explained by ambition, privilege, or even fear of others. Promised land, an Australia, if you like” (Gordimer 48). This precisely shows what Abdu seeks and looks forward to—a land that is unknown to him, where he is a stranger and nobody knows him. His chances of success increase if he can live as a stranger with no past that ties him to the place of his existence, no commitments, and no obligations. However, Thomas Pavel thinks that “[s]uccess and prominence, at the individual level or at the level of a group, increase the chance of being exiled or of being forced to avoid persecution by choosing exile” (Pavel 307).

Personal Benefit and Adventure

Abdu is an example of an individual who escapes harsh circumstances, looking for better living standards and more opportunities outside his own country. He takes with him painful memories

and images of his unfortunate past to help him retain a sense of purpose and achieve his intended mission. Abdu would rather live a degraded life in an established and prominent country than a socially exalted one in a declining and forsaken country. His thoughts and burdens are clear in his head: “There they were. In his mind. His mother for whom he had wanted to save the garage money, bring away from the yoke of family burdens in this dirty place, dirt of the politics of the rich, dirt of poverty” (Gordimer 115). In a sense, Abdu remains loyal to both family and country. His belief that he might be able to save them after he has saved himself reflects an aspect of belonging to his land and people.

The dilemma that Abdu lives is reflected in the situation of many other people as well. Of course, he might be looked at as one of the fortunate ones who managed to escape hell. Paul Surlis relates his own experience in explaining that “[t]he pain and grief our family felt as our brothers left home was an experience of emigration or exile from the perspective of those left behind” (Surlis 204). Surlis places the citizens who remain in the country in a condition of exile and the ones who leave in a state of freedom and liberation. The craving of those who leave for a new and different life makes them curse what they have left behind.

However, Abdu struggles to succeed after leaving. His ambitions and dreams are greater than his discomfort about leaving home. Surlis also speaks of this feeling: “Perhaps among these lowest paid and most oppressed workers ‘the deep unutterable woe which none save exiles feel’ could be encountered if they had the time for sentiment and if they did not know that their fate in their countries of origin might be even worse” (Surlis 206). So perhaps the poor are oppressed economically but do not always experience exile as a personal burden. Surlis adds: “How people experience exile is often influenced by prevailing economic conditions as well as by the race,

educational level and skills of the immigrants” (Surlis 207). These observations seem to apply to Abdu’s case and also to Julie’s intentions of wanting to leave her home.

Julie never did plan her flight with Abdu from the beginning of their acquaintance, but the way that she was drawn to him already implies that she wanted to escape certain social aspects of her life that she found unacceptable. Little did she know that their relationship would give her a new sense of self. Melanie Kantrowitz expresses her pathos in this manner: “*The Pickup* is also about immigrant aspirations, the irony of Julie's rejection of exactly the material success that Abdu longs for” (Kantrowitz 10). Julie rejects the life that was made for her, that is, the artificial society that was indifferent to the world around it. Julie even despises the fact that she comes from a rich family. This is depicted throughout the novel and can be seen in the old car that she drives, the simple apartment that she lives in, and even the kind of friends that she chooses.

As Julie and Abdu become more familiar, they begin to pose a threat to society. Julie’s relationship to Abdu symbolizes her clear rejection of both worlds. She does not choose one of her father’s socially prominent friends or feel affection towards any of the members at the El-Ay Café. The fact that she might favor an outsider over anyone else implies that those people mean little to her, so we learn that “[t]here was talk . . . ‘our girl’s really gone on that oriental prince of hers’” (Gordimer 36). The relationship between Julie and Abdu stands for much more than a mere love story; it represents what Andrew Sullivan describes as an intense cultural conflict: “Julie and Ibrahim (which we eventually find out is his real name)—are clearly ciphers for two cultures in search of each other. This is the famous ‘clash of civilizations’ in human form” (Sullivan 270).

Sullivan uses the term “clash” rather than merger, or meeting, to indicate the conflict that accompanies their encounter. This relationship is largely built on the desire for personal gain. Abdu meets Julie; he does not stalk her nor does he seduce her; moreover, he does not plan for their relationship to take a different turn. Surprisingly, Julie is the one who consistently follows up with Abdu, and this ends in a sexual love affair, eventually leading to a love story. Although Abdu does not begin with the thought of gaining advantages from having a relationship to Julie, he comes to believe that she might be his way out of many calamities that have been wearing him down for so long.

Time and Space

Abdu soon begins to realize the importance of Julie’s presence in his life and stay in South Africa, but what still needs to be questioned are Julie’s intentions in securing this relationship. Julie’s character and status might allow her to obtain any lover she wants, but Julie chooses Abdu and flees away with him, but why? Melanie Kantrowitz also asks the question of what Julie wanted from him and suggests that she might have been after adventure (Kantrowitz 10). This seems to be a convincing argument. What could Julie possibly lose by seeking an adventure with Abdu? Already, she has lost every form of family commitment in her life, and thus has lost part of herself. Once she finally has the chance to make new choices, a new identity begins to form and this leads to a new discovery: “He, her find; it was also this one, to be discovered in herself” (Gordimer 75).

Julie's possession of Abdu gives her feelings of strength and power. She starts to feel responsible and in control of another being; she starts to feel unique. Her role as Abdu's savior takes her and him into another level of belonging. Abdu and Julie start to create their own universe, with its own rules and in another time and space: “That night they made love, the kind

of love-making that is another country, a country of its own, not yours or mine” (Gordimer 96). This state of existing in a *non-existing* world is the optimal state of pleasure they have both been searching for and find in one another. The relationship they enter holds new passports for each of them, new identities, and even more, perhaps an escape from having an identity: “She brings along books as well as food to these hours when they double the disappearance of his identity, they disappear together, this time, in this veld” (Gordimer 34).

Abdu and Julie fall in love in the atmosphere of safety and security that they provide one another. Feelings of serenity help them overcome the bitterness that they knew from the past. The more they cleanse themselves of bitterness, the more they come to feel the need to stay together. Unfortunately, their recovery from anxiety is threatened by the unstable status of Abdu: “To continue in their present state; his situation in itself, alone determined this. He is here, and he is not here. It’s within this condition of existence that they exist as lovers. It is a state of suspension from the pressures of necessity to plan the way others have to plan; look ahead” (Gordimer 37). But Abdu and Julie do not have the luxury of being able to plan ahead and think of the future because of their obligations in the present.

Abdu’s love for Julie is more conditional than the love that Julie has for him. His understanding of their relationship complicates it in the future: “Maybe where he comes from. For the first time, the difference between them, the secret conditioning of their origins, an intriguing special bond in their intimacy against all others, is a difference in a different sense—an opposition” (Gordimer 38). The differences that each of them brings into play soon become a source of interest to each partner, rather than a threat. What Julie looks at with disgust and intolerance, Abdu observes with admiration and respect: “‘Interesting people there. They make a success.’ Those were the words he was for round the room. The wonderful desire drained from

her instantly. ‘They'd stamped on one another's heads to make it’” (Gordimer 51). This suggests why Abdu's materialistic inclinations threaten his relationship with Julie—and also explains why, later on, they would part company.

Love and Identity

It takes Julie a longer time to realize that she, too, is to benefit from her love for Abdu. Andrew Sullivan writes: “The punch line is that Ibrahim, of course, admires the very people Julie is embarrassed by. He is in awe of this white, wealthy, aggressive, international culture. Julie wants out; he wants in” (Sullivan 207). Julie refuses to be part of a superficial community that is built on personal benefit, yet she unintentionally enters a relationship that is heading towards personal advantage. Still, Julie had to follow her instincts since “[i]nside her something struggles against them” (Gordimer 6). Julie’s struggle against her people is one thing that she shares with Abdu; he also struggles with his unwanted identity.

The curse of an unwanted identity can go beyond the borders of a country one leaves behind; in this case, it accompanies Julie and Abdu everywhere they go, causing them shame and disgrace. Mahnaz Afkhami understands that “[t]hose who enter the country as exiles discover that what had been their natural birthright at home will now depend on the decision of an official who may, for any reason at all or none, deny permission, a process from which there is no recourse” (Afkhami 5). Mahnaz describes this case with regard to people who try to come back home. Still the outcome remains in the hands of those in authority to determine who belongs where. For Julie and Abdu, continuity together is what determines their residency.

Jacobs states that “[t]he idea of identity as being based on shared cultural codes that can provide an imaginary cohesiveness is associated with the concept of ‘permanent residence’” (Jacobs 128). As Julie decides to go away with Abdu, little does she know of the cultural

differences she is to face. At one point Julie's choice to go away with Abdu is based mainly on her love for him and her love for the person she is when she is with him. Soon Julie faces the reality of Abdu's cultural obligations and that she has to marry him to be able to go to his country. This involves another choice, another identity, "If you must leave with me then we must marry. I cannot take a woman to my family, with us—like this" (Gordimer 107). So far, Julie is the one with the choices, although Abdu urges her to marry him out of necessity; still he does not choose marriage. Julie then decides to go on with her choice completely. She is in control of the relationship until they leave her country.

Julie's character is presented as determined by her devotion to her lover. Her flight to an underdeveloped country with her lover shows that she is willing to make sacrifices and her willingness to take risks. Julie risks losing her life at home, cutting off family connections and accepting a lower standard of living. Although she assumes this heroic and selfless act, the quest for self underlies this decision. "She was not at home, now, in the El-Ay Café; she had been determined to come here, to this place. It had its rules, as her father's beautiful house and the guests who came there had theirs. She had made her choice; here it was. She was the one with the choices. The freedom of the world was hers" (Gordimer 115). She did not care to abide by the rules of Abdu's culture, as she had earlier abided by the rules of her father's community. At this moment in her life, she shifts from one mode of exile to another. The only difference is that this time she chooses a form of exile that is unlike the emotional and psychological exile that was imposed on her by her family.

Mahnaz Afkhami contends that there is freedom to be found in exile and states that "[p]aradoxically, exile with all its pain and struggle brings an expanded universe that would not have been attainable within the old structures" (Afkhami 15). Julie still believes that there is

much more to discover with Abdu. The idea that she leaves for her own benefit rather than for the benefit of their love is supported at the end of the story when she decides to stay behind rather than leave with Abdu once more. Afkhami goes on to explain advantages of exile: “There is a certain excitement involved in all this. Finding a place to live, learning new routines, looking for a job, establishing new relationships—all within a separate reality, outside the framework of one's customary existence. It is possible to once again ask, ‘What do I want to be?’” (Afkhami 6). Julie’s new exile opens up possibilities for a new sense of personhood.

The relationship between Julie and Abdu goes through various changes in roles. Julie is the one who initiates and manages the continuity of the relationship, then Abdu takes control as their relationship progresses: “He had spoken: with this, a change in their positions was swiftly taken, these were smoothly and firmly reversed, like a shift of gears synchronized under her foot; he was in charge of the acquaintanceship” (Gordimer 17). Thereafter, Julie decides to leave with him, and so she is back in control, but as soon as she enters Abdu’s cultural district, he instantly takes charge of the situation once more: “That was the message of that grasp on her forearm: I am a man. I am the one who is not for you but who possesses you every night: listen to me” (Gordimer 82). The power that Abdu imposes upon Julie is not permanent; he realizes he can only control her for so long. She soon takes over and decides to let him go off by himself and, once again, she is in charge of the choices they make.

Julie makes her choices in order to obtain personal advantages and in view of her love for self-discovery and adventure. Her constant search for the unknown becomes a habit that she grows to love and works to fulfill: “Suddenly an abundance of choices seems available and a variety of life models appears attainable. They compose their identity and arrive at a sense of self and a level of consciousness that is liberating and empowering” (Afkhami 14). The new life that

Julie enters gives her a sense of dominance and uniqueness among others. She is not ordinary anymore; on the contrary, she has become a role model and a mentor. Melanie Kantrowitz adds that “[i]n Abdu's country, a place where women have little freedom or mobility, Julie joins the community of other women, teaching them English, sharing their daily life at market, in the kitchen, befriending their children and, somewhat less persuasively, falling in love with the desert” (Kantrowitz 10). What began as a love story between a woman and man becomes a love story between a woman and the desert.

Society and Landscape

The new self that comes to Julie represents the attainment of a new life, a new birth: “It came to her that she was somehow as strange to herself as she was to them: she was what they saw . . . if she was strangely new to them, she was also strangely new to herself” (Gordimer 117). Describing the case of women who manage to rebuild themselves from the fragments of exile, Mahnaz Afkhami writes that “[i]t is as if each woman has experienced a symbolic death and rebirth and managed to become a better person for it” (Afkhami 14). This illustration is very similar to what Julie experiences as she relocates herself.

As Julie starts to situate herself comfortably in Abdu's landscape, he incongruously starts to fall into the depths of spiritual exile and alienation from his own people and country. The disappointments and failures that he had once escaped now haunt him upon his return to his place of origin: “But for him nothing changed. It is all as it was; everything he had believed he could get away from” (Gordimer 114). Abdu is torn between his love for his people and his hatred for their fate. He despises their way of life and what they represent. He had never realized that he would finally return to what he hated most: “Ibrahim ibn Musa. His face drew up in a grimace of pain and anger at the nature of their existence, but his eyes, black as theirs, swam

tears across this vision of his people” (Gordimer 116). Whether his tears are shed out of sympathy and the strong love he feels towards them, or out of his pathetic return to this dreadful place, is unknown, but, in either case, his tears display the surge of emotions that accompanies his encounter.

Jacobs argues that “[i]n terms of cultural identity, the second half of the narrative mirrors, and reverses, the first half . . . but in the second half of the narrative these contrasted trajectories are reversed; in his home country Ibrahim is presented as being alienated from his culture” (Jacobs 128). This suggests that Abdu feels exiled and alienated when he is home but free and liberated when he is away. Again in an ironic way, Julie, too, shows that she felt lost and disoriented in South Africa and started to feel more secure as she left and started a new life in a distant place. Jacobs alludes to this process in all of its complexity: “Social and cultural identity, Gordimer’s novel teaches us, is a process, not an essence, a changing position and not a permanent frame of reference” (Jacobs 129). The positions and roles that characters assume strongly influence their identity. When Julie marries Abdu, she changes not only her social and marital status but also her identity: “Her husband (another new identity) had to accompany her” (Gordimer 112).

As the two characters go on exploring one another’s world, they reveal what Barbara Temple-Thurston describes in terms of the ideology of nationalism: “Gordimer's considerations of the theoretical notions of nationhood are subtly embedded in the novel and are made manifest through their impact on the lives of the characters” (Temple-Thurston 56). Each character’s reaction to different aspects of society demonstrates his or her feelings towards that culture: “Abdu-Ibrahim beside her turned and folded the pillow over his ear against the muezzin's summons. At noon, afternoon and evening he seemed not to hear it, either, without having to

block his ears” (Gordimer 125). Abdu refuses to accept the calls of his society and culture. Unlike Abdu, Julie more willingly accepts the customs of her adopted society: “Five times each day the voice of the muezzin set the time-frame she had entered, as once, in her tourist travels, she would set her watch to and live a local hour different from the one in the country she left behind” (Gordimer 124).

Gender Roles

Nadine Gordimer does not separate the anxieties that Abdu and Julie undergo from the main plot of the novel or from the world at large. Throughout the narrative, culture, religion, and society influence the characters’ outcomes and resolutions. Gordimer refers to every aspect of life and shows how it impacts the lives of the main characters. Whether they assume an economic, social, political, or even religious form, all the elements needed to maintain a normal and healthy life are mentioned in this novel. Gordimer’s reflections on women are echoed in the gender roles that structure Abdu’s society: “It’s not usual for women to sit down to eat with the men, today was a special exception for the occasion—does she understand. It’s enough, for these people, that she goes about with an uncovered head—that they can tolerate with a white face, maybe” (Gordimer 123).

The marriage of Abdu and Julie on such short council mirrors the kind of society they were on the verge of entering. It becomes clear to the reader, even before learning about Abdu’s family, that any ties between a man and woman other than that of marriage are seen to be unacceptable. Abdu refuses to take Julie with him to his family at first, because he knows the kind of burden that he is to carry in her company with him. He never experiences this burden in her country, since she acts as an independent woman in that context. The worries that he had upon taking her along with him show that he realizes what he is to face. He still hasn’t come to

terms with how he is to deal with her sudden change of roles, from being the strong one to being the weak one.

Julie, on the other hand, tries to mitigate Abdu's worries by encouraging him to abide by all the new rules that pertain to an Arab woman. Julie then becomes accustomed to the role that she assumes. A change of mind on Julie's part intimidates Abdu and puts him in a state of confusion. Abdu doesn't understand why she chooses to come with him in the first place, now that she has decided to stay behind. In truth, what made Abdu seek refuge in his bond with Julie, in trying get permanent residence or secure a travel visa to any other country, is also what made Julie abandon Abdu on her quest for self-discovery. Mahnaz Afkhami offers keen insight into this scenario: "Women feel that to confront the men with their own new sense of liberation is too much of a burden for them to bear" (Afkhami 15).

In the conclusion of the novel, we learn that the two lovers who met during moments of desperation have found comfort and ease in their love for one another. Having crossed to the other side of their exilic states, each was then able to move on in peace, separately, in the direction of the *other*, leaving behind a path they to which each refused to return. Melanie Kantrowitz claims that "[t]hough Gordimer's short fiction has ranged over a variety of landscapes, this is, I think, her only novel to take on another social-political universe" (Kantrowitz 10). The crossing over that each of the characters take symbolizes the exchange of cultures that has taken place between them, on the level of individuals and on the social level.

Finally, we might contend that Nadine Gordimer has managed to illustrate through her writing that, in a world full of contradictions, there is irony in the term exile, especially when people live through the experience of exile on so many levels and in so many shapes. We also understand that exile is not just loss of land or home; it can be loss of self *in* the realm of one's

home. What determines whether exile is a painful or nourishing experience is the element of choice and how we come to terms with it. Thus, in choosing to live in exile, we either gain liberty, or drown in exile's thorny calamities. In either case, Nadine Gordimer presents us with a novel that is rich with meanings and supports the argument that exile is sometimes the best way out. Temple-Thurston notices how "[o]bviously aware of the coterminous rise of European nationalism and the novel of the nineteenth century, Gordimer cautiously probes the role that fiction can play in creating a nation" (Temple-Thurston 55). And so fiction once more succeeds in clarifying even one the most complicated of all process, that of forming a nation.

Chapter 3: Love and Death in Exile in Bahaa Taher's *Love in Exile*

Every human being lives to seek knowledge and enlightenment throughout his or her journey through life. Some gain knowledge through scholarly learning, while others gain it through experience, but writers and poets sometimes stumble on knowledge in unpredictable ways. The narrator in Bahaa Taher's novel, *Love in Exile*, is an Egyptian writer who gains knowledge as he lives in exile. He goes through a journey of self-discovery as he lives the pain as well as the pleasure of being in exile. Writing adds energy and compassion to his innate vitality. Sensitive and aware, he captures every moment and is spurred on by his encounters. The narrator experiences exile, finding a new self and a new love that enriches and elevates his sense of being.

Defeated by the past

Bahaa Taher is able to depict the stages of self-growth that his main character undergoes in his life away from Egypt largely because he himself had lived in exile for much of his life. The narrator, as a victim of his own past, reminisces throughout the narrative over personal losses. The narrator portrays a dysfunctional marriage, the collapse of paternity, and a place and time that are not conducive to writing. These failures burden the narrator and trouble his old age. Bahaa Taher does not provide his protagonist with a name, which creates an atmosphere of repression and also suggests a fear of personal candour.

The past performs two major roles in the narrator's life in exile. First, it acts as the carrier of years that he spent in that country as both a child and an adult. As he grows older, he tries to escape the residual impact that his childhood has had on him. Yet, somehow his exilic state brings back to life unwelcomed images. This is reflected in the narrator's conversation with his friend Ibrahim: "You haven't disturbed me at all. All there is to it is that I am thinking of

something else. I am thinking of that child who pursues us to the end of our days. Isn't there a way to get rid of him?" (Taher 91). Wanting to escape his childhood memories implies a desire to escape from the past, and remembering the past implies homecoming to this child. This is what Michael Seidel describes when he explains that "[f]or the exile, native territory is the product of heightened and sharpened memory, and imagination is, indeed, a special homecoming" (Seidel xi).

The second role that the past performs in the narrator's life is to produce an image of his previous life. His period of exile suggests an escape from a disappointing past. Exile represents a state of triumph over the defeats of the past, a place where he can dwell with no one and come to terms with his broken identity. For the narrator, meeting people from his past is equivalent to meeting witnesses of his previous self. Sometimes by joining with a former companion, the narrator "walked through the streets of the foreign city that had brought us together unexpectedly" at a time when "each of us was trying to overcome his awkwardness" (Taher 23). The awkwardness of his current state can be related to his reunion with his old acquaintance, Ibrahim. The narrator's walk is out of place, undefined, almost misleading, so he would rather tread a path on his own.

In addition to being haunted by his childhood, the narrator also suffers the pain of being an inadequate father. This pain, which is experienced when he lives in Egypt with his family, partly explains the narrator's sense of exile: "That was one of the reasons I left the country. It was difficult for me to be in the same city with my children but apart from them" (Taher 99-100). He loses his sense of fatherhood as he becomes overly preoccupied with his work and detached from his children. Life in exile provides a reasonable justification for his constant absences. He clarifies this issue as he summons up memories of his relationship with his ex-wife,

Manar: “So be it. Where were you? Why didn’t you do something to get closer to them? Weren’t you out all day long at the newspaper or the Arab Socialist Union or abroad? What are you blaming her for exactly?” (Taher 9).

The choice of exile

At one point, the narrator comes to terms with himself and risks death when he decides to leave everything he has fought and lived for: “I ran away from everything that reminded me of my old conflicts and my old self. I’ve accepted also that I am a defeated father who shouldn’t fight to regain what he had already lost” (Taher 194). Solitude serves as the good companion for the narrator’s loss. Once he understands that, as a journalist, he cannot publish the truth, he becomes more determined to leave Egypt: “I knew ahead of time that certain things would be said which, if I were to report, would not be published by my paper in Cairo” (Taher 4). Yet, he apprehends another defeat and another failure, when he apprehends that all of his sacrifices, taken on behalf of his family, had not been worth the effort.

The final demon that lurks from the past to drive the narrator out of his country emerges in his broken marriage with Manar. The character of Manar is always presented to the reader through the eyes of her husband. Her interests and aspirations are always presented as in conflict with what her husband had expected. The lack of concord between them is often implied in their encounters:

So she started gathering a bouquet, arranging it by color. When she was done, she looked at the flowers in her hands and said in a disappointed tone, ‘But they were beautiful in the ground!’ And indeed the little flowers had just died, folding their little petals over their yellow round hearts, their stems lying limp on the sides of her hand. I said to her, ‘I think these wild flowers live only in the ground.’(Taher 6)

This encounter symbolizes Manar’s recognition of uprootness and her rejection of it. Her husband, on the contrary, is presented suggestively as a flower that is to wilt and die. In spite of

the conflicts that the couple face, the narrator remains loyal to his ex-wife. He easily forgives her changing nature and goes on to blame himself for their failed marriage. But he also does not hesitate to leave Egypt and looks forward to his departure: “I didn’t tell Ibrahim that I welcomed the removal to get away from Egypt altogether after the divorce” (Taher 35).

Loss of identity

As the narrator constructs a new identity outside of Egypt, he lets go of worn-out aspects of his past while searching for traces of his old self that he left behind. André Aciman eloquently depicts this notion when he claims that “[t]his wasn’t even my city. Yet I had come here, an exile from Alexandria, doing what all exiles do on impulse, which is to look for their homeland abroad that even if I don’t disappear from a place, places disappear from me” (Aciman 21). The narrator’s constant worry over events in the Middle East and his deep passion for this region contribute to deterioration in his health. He is torn, therefore, between who he was in Egypt and who he had become in the anonymous city, ‘N’. He expresses his dilemma in this way: “I was trying to find the way to a fact that was there the whole time, but to which I was blind: that all the time I have been playing so many roles that I myself, in the midst of all those masks, lost my own real face” (Taher 165).

At the height of this loss of identity, the narrator is acquainted with the young and beautiful Brigitte, an Austrian who has chosen to live in disguise as well. As he starts to get closer to Brigitte, he starts to put together fragments for a new identity. He welcomes the possibility for a new life, a new love, “I say, ‘Look at me. I love you as if I were a boy. My life is over but I love you as if I were beginning that life’” (Taher 162). In spite of the age difference between himself and Brigitte, the narrator loves what she evokes in him at his old age: “I desired

her impotently, like one afraid of incest. She was young and beautiful. I was old, a father and divorced” (Taher 3). Brigitte loves him as well in spite of any differences.

Love in exile

The narrator and Brigitte come closer to one another as they learn more of one another’s distinct past. Brigitte was also frustrated by a difficult past and a failed marriage. She was young but just as desperate as the narrator in his old age. The comfort she found in him initiated a love affair that revealed the hidden truths they both concealed. At first, the two characters take refuge in the mere presence of the other. The narrator contends: “Silence brought us closer” (Taher 3). The two lovers are not only bound by their past but also by their exile: “I was a Cairene whose city had expelled me to exile in the north. She was like me, a foreigner in that country. But she was European and with her passport she considered the whole of Europe her hometown” (Taher 3). This advantage does not alter Brigitte’s place of origin and her sense of being out of place.

Love puts both Brigitte and the narrator back in place and reduces their vulnerability and sense of exile. They construct a place of their own in this strange city and begin to belong to each other. For Michael Seidel, “It is the imagination that relocates or repairs the experience of being exiled, as it were, while still in place” (Seidel xii). They come from two distant worlds that meet in the space of their imagination: “I understood your world, far removed from my world. Perhaps you too could see, as I have, a world far removed from you” (Taher 71). Brigitte not only sees her lover’s world but interprets it unknowingly and enjoys whatever meanings she can derive from it. The narrator explains how they came to understand one another: “[F]rom time to time she would ask me to read her some poetry in Arabic and would listen, fixing her eyes on me and raising her hand if I tried to translate a poem or even just one verse. She would say, ‘What good

would that do? Don't you understand that the more ignorant I am of the words, the more the poetry penetrates me?" (Taher 132).

There is irony in the way the narrator becomes more accepting of his solitude after he meets Brigitte and also in the way that Brigitte finds aspects of herself in the world of her lover. Michael Hanne explains how exile impacts creativity in different ways:

For some writers and creative artists, forced to live away from their place of birth, the first priority is to maintain their original, national, and cultural identity as fully as possible, to construct a home away from home. Their subject matter, their audience, and, in the case of writers, their language, are almost exclusively linked to the place, and, frequently the time, they have been cut off from . . . Others, however, interact vigorously with their new environment, and some go so far as to forge some kind of new, hybrid identity for themselves. (Hanne 8)

The narrator goes through both stages of this description. While he lives through the first part of his exile, trying to maintain whatever remains of his old self, the latter part of his exile merges with his beloved Brigitte's uniqueness, allowing him to form a hybrid identity that embraces both of them.

Freedom in exile

The two characters accommodate themselves to their new identities and their new love story. The strange city becomes the perfect setting for their escapade, where they find peacefulness and privacy. The narrator reveals this as he questions himself: "Where would you like to go?" "Anywhere. I've fallen in love with this little city. I said to myself, here I'll forget the world and the world will forget me" (Taher 271). In this imaginary exchange, the narrator emphasizes his will to disappear. When circumstances become difficult for him, he finds shelter and refuge in the place that he creates for himself and Brigitte, "What a blessing that our cafe is still here! What a blessing that it will give us both shelter! What a blessing to see her there, coming from

the end of the road walking as usual” (Taher 194). Appreciation for the stability that the strange city gives him becomes a source of security for the narrator.

Freedom in exile is one of the main reasons that push some people to leave their homelands. The search for a place where there are no social constraints becomes a strong motive for both Brigitte and the narrator. In rejecting all rigid systems and regimes, the narrator states, “I don’t want to be bound by any place. I wish I could soar above this thick, massive, wall-filled world, and you with me to another world” (Taher 163). As the narrator rises above the world in which he lives, he transcends the conditions that are unacceptable to him. He also wishes to be high enough to see and not be seen by others, except his beloved Brigitte. This kind of modern exile is described by Thomas Pavel: “In modern times, the term [exile] is also applied to those who leave their native land on their own accord, as a precautionary measure against the threat of religious or political persecution” (Pavel 307). Brigitte expresses this threat as well in a dialogue between her and the narrator: “Tell her: Let’s live in another city, let’s try to work far from here. She will tell you: I am tired of running away and ‘they’ are everywhere” (Taher 269). The two characters are surrounded by injustice that derives from both his and her world.

In experiencing the pain of losing a husband and child, Brigitte becomes aware of another kind of loss: “But I had indeed lost my baby. I lost not only the baby, but Albert too. And I lost not only Albert, but myself as well” (Taher 127). When Brigitte discovers the affair between her mother and Dr. Muller, their good family friend and doctor, she feels personally injured. This wound leads to her mistrust of everything that is related to family and home. She chooses to leave her country as a compensation for her many losses. Brigitte does not constrain herself to remain in the city ‘N’; instead, she manages to look for herself wherever she pleases. This becomes evident when she decides to leave the city ‘N’ in search of better opportunities. Brigitte

says, “In every country I have tree friends to whom I go and I share my joy with them and complain to them if I am sad. I think trees understand me, I am sure they do” (Taher 200).

Representations of exile

Bahaa Taher gives other examples of those who have fled their countries in search of justice and freedom. Every exile seeks a place of peace and refuge, ranging from the support of another individual to identity in nationhood. Bahaa Taher’s novel maintains that in misrecognizing the extent to which every Palestinian is an exile, “the purpose was the same every time” and resulted in “wiping out the Palestinians and banishing them from their land, then from any country they seek refuge in” (Taher 255). Thomas Pavel helps explain their condition in maintaining that “exiles never break the psychological link with their point of origin. Among the features of exile must thus be included the coercive nature of the displacement, its religious or political motivation, and the exile’s faith in the possibility of homecoming” (Pavel 306).

The character of Yusuf, the Egyptian writer/waiter, is consistent with Pavel’s description. Yusuf confesses to the narrator, “I demonstrated against Sadat and was sentenced to jail and I ran away from my country and from my family because I thought he was endangering the future of the country” (Taher 192). Yusuf realizes his dilemma and asks this question, “What do I do now? Stay here and live and die a cook and a waiter? Go back home and be unemployed? Here at least I am sending my father some money every month. Emigrate in God’s big world? Where? Would it be different anywhere else? What should I do?” (Taher 191). Yusuf is defeated by economic and political circumstances, and is unable to either go back or move forward.

Another figure that fits Pavel’s description is that of Brigitte’s African ex-husband, Albert: “He also had his own worry: he did not know when he was going back to his country. He had run away from the regime in his country and was pursued by it” (Taher 118). Albert’s

battle with Macias and the corrupt regime in his country send him into self-exile. He is described by Brigitte as losing himself in excessive drinking and failing at the university, then finally giving in to the regime and going back into its dangerous arms.

On the other hand, there is also the character of Pedro Ibanez, the tortured victim from Chile who is set loose onto the streets of the strange city 'N' after a press conference. He seeks refuge from the distress he faced in Chile. Brigitte worries over him: "How long do you think a person can bear the hostile and hateful looks of our affectionate townspeople?" (Taher 101). She is jolted into awareness by the experienced journalist, Bernard, as he clarifies, "Then come with me and I'll introduce you to dozens who are living this way, from Chile and all other countries on earth. They prefer that a thousand times to returning to their countries" (Taher 106). All of these characters demonstrate that each mode of exile can be a choice and not just a punishment. Moreover, these exiles can also be seen as victims of a corrupt world, as the narrator relates, "Back then we, the poor, were just a few souls scattered among the sons of landlords and officials in the city who took pleasure and pride in insulting us" (Taher 73).

Guilt and punishment

The time comes, however, when the narrator decides that he is guilty for all that he has encountered: "You confronted the real war so you rushed to make your separate peace, then you considered yourself a victim and a martyr. A martyr for what? A victim for what, other than your vanity and your weakness and your fond desire to slap the world back?" (Taher 165). He looks at himself with disgrace and chooses to punish himself, instead of viewing himself as a martyr. Deciding that the best way to carry out this punishment is to throw himself into exile, he even confesses: "I considered this solitude part of the punishment time I was doing in exile, though I

didn't know when it would end" (Taher 77). The time he spends in solitude and shame makes him review his life as a whole and in all of its specifics.

Guilt leads to punishment, and punishment leads to solitude and exile. Unexpectedly, exile leads to a softened heart that easily welcomes love: "You said before that you feel guilty especially when you think of Khalid and his innocence. You also know that you can't live without Brigitte. Your sense of guilt is true and your love is true, but the guilt does not cancel the love, and neither does the love cancel out the guilt" (Taher 211). Love does not overjoy the narrator or set him free from his shame. In spite of all the happiness and youth he finds with Brigitte, he continues to reprimand his old self: "I was asking myself, 'Who am I to deserve all this love? Isn't it shameful to feel all this joy at this age, these days, in the midst of that war?'" (Taher 161).

Love is presented as a reward for which the narrator does not feel worthy. It does not conform to the punishment he had assumed would come his way. Now he is destined to live with this love and relive many feelings that had been locked up for many years. He does not find that he is worthy of Brigitte's love for him and even goes on to categorise himself in terms of race and age: "But how could I dare? How, when she's half my age? How, after all I have known of her life? What do I have over Albert? Am I not like him a man of color, a foreigner and an exile? I have no place here or there just as he had none" (Taher 133). Surprisingly, all of the traits that seem to figure in his disgrace are precisely what Brigitte loves about him and lend meaning to their lives together.

The writer in death

The theme of death haunts the novel from the beginning to the end. The narrator calls upon death every now and then, somehow awaiting its arrival at an unexpected time. His desire for death

results from the punishment he forces upon himself: “What does it mean to continue this lie of a life? Who am I? And why don’t I go down right now to the bottom of the river . . . where the moss and weeds and snails and fish would cover me and hide me forever? If only I could totally vanish!” (Taher 44). Supported by the will to disappear from a disappointing life, death seems to be the inevitable outcome of the many failures that burden him.

One of the failures that the narrator faces is related to his ability to write. The fact that he was driven out of Egypt when he lost his ability to write makes him incapable of returning to his old self: “I kept asking myself in surprise whether I was still a journalist with a journalist’s sense after all the years of unemployment in this European city, reporting bad news for a bad newspaper” (Taher 185). This statement suggests that a new identity is accompanied by changes in habit and a transition to a different perspective on life. Little did the narrator realize that in shutting himself up, away from the world in which he once lived, he would eventually come to understand himself in a new way.

The narrator does not try to return to being the writer he was formerly, knowing that a return to the past would reopen the wound that had finally closed. Azade Seyhan writes: “Writers of exile often endeavor to reclaim and preserve cultural legacies destroyed and erased in their own countries by oppressive regimes” (Seyhan 28). This does not clearly describe the situation of the narrator. By writing trivial news reports to please his newspaper, he was somehow able to survive on the margins of writing. But as the events in the Middle East escalated with the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, he soon found that writing had become completely impossible: “I looked at the photo of Khalid and Hanadi on the desk then raised my eyes and looked at the smiling Abd al-Nasser and asked him, ‘What should I write?’” (Taher 145).

When the narrator later becomes acquainted with the Arabian prince through his friend, Yusuf, he soon begins to wonder why the prince takes a great interest in opening a magazine. Provoked to put on his honorable cloak of writing and research, the narrator then says, “Something stronger than me was pushing me in those days to be the journalist who had died and whom I had buried, something that pushed me to research and to find out. I had no choice but to obey” (Taher 186). This becomes the last time he pays tribute to his former self and forgotten profession. The effect of his discovery taints his friendship with Yusuf, again detaching him from his old profession, this time for good. Marguerite Guzman Bouvard reflects:

One can survive war and prison only to be forced into exile, leaving one’s culture behind. The issue is a poignant one for the writer who responds to the peculiarity of language, landscape, and society. Language is the ultimate carrier of the culture and of the soul of a people. It contains a way of seeing, of connecting with others. Preserving this culture presents the exiled writer with a dilemma. (Bouvard ix)

The narrator lives this dilemma that is articulated by Bouvard as he carries within him his culture and language and forges another world in which to live.

The narrator soon becomes overwhelmed with of all the alterations that he has experienced during his life in exile, which has shifted from loss to guilt and punishment, leading to love and finally ending in death. For William Gass, even when life itself is exile, our release from it is not experienced lightly: “It is a blow from which only death will recover us, and when we are told, as we lie dying, that we are going, we may even be ready to welcome the familiar darkness, the comforting ‘*nada*’ of the grand old days when days were nothing but nights” (Gass 90). For the narrator, to welcome death means to give up all the struggles that initiate the desire to express the truth and end with his love for Brigitte. As Brigitte tries to pacify herself and her lover by suggesting suicide, he decides to wait for death to come inevitably, rather than to commit suicide.

The narrator foresees the many generations to come after him, enduring the same fate and following the same path of loss. The strange city 'N' that the writer inhabits will stand witness to many strange faces, some of which learn to change and others that will die trying. Eventually, all will share the same pain and pleasure of being in exile: "As I looked at the city, a quotation that had been haunting me for some time came to me: 'Time will pass and after us will come those who know why we have suffered. They will forget our faces and our voices, but they will not forget our suffering'" (Taher 274). Here the narrator imagines a new time but also foresees the suffering of future generations, while condemning the city in which he has lived.

As the narrator dies, he leaves his legacy of love and exile in a world that is completely unlike his birthplace. He collects his words in his hands and carries his years on his back, but does not glance back upon the traces that he has left behind. He finds refuge and peace in exile, and also in death. As he feels death coming upon him, he welcomes it and does not stave it off. Leaving us with one more question to ponder, we ask ourselves if death pursued him, or was it he pursued death, as he moved toward final certainty:

I am born in unborn cities
But in the night of the autumn of the Arab cities
Broken hearted I die,
I bury my love in Granada
I say:
'Nothing is victorious except love.'
I bury my poetry and die.
On the sidewalks of exile
I arise after death
To be born in unborn cities
And to die.

(Al-Bayati 279)

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to study exile and its different representations as well as to help define the word exile itself. This study has examined fictional characters created by contemporary writers to explore exile as a theme that transcends the fact of geographical departure. In the first chapter, Leila Aboulela presents the character of Sammar in her novel, *The Translator*, as a strong individual who has weaknesses that send her into exile. Sammar manages to find a middle ground between two cultures, thus approximating Michael Seidel's definition: "An exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another" (Seidel ix). Sammar tries to take her culture along with her to Scotland. In doing so, she works at merging two cultures.

This study has also indicated the solidarity that Sammar lives while she isolates herself from her surroundings, even distancing herself from those closest to her. Edward Said writes: "Exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated state of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you" (Said 178). Sammar does not welcome anyone into her life of exile and pain; she only lets in Rae whom she believes knows her well and is very familiar with her culture. Sammar's approach towards Rae reflects her escape from home in favor for a foreigner who *knows* about her home.

Chapter one also traces the stages that Sammar goes through in her life away from Sudan. Sammar starts off in exile, then goes home, only to return to exile once more. No sooner does she start to feel some safety than she is thrown back into the void. This transition is described by Said: "Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered,

contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew” (Said 186). For Said, there is no peace in exile. He suggests that exile is destined to reveal its bitter reality, no matter how long the exile can maintain apparent equanimity. Jan Mohamed ponders this theory, stating, “Perhaps because he senses the reader’s expectations, Said insists several times that relocation *in itself* precipitates the transformation” (Jan Mohamed 222).

Chapter one also discusses why the main character was sent into her exile, while examining how much exile affects her. Jan Mohamed contends: “The nostalgia associated with exile (a nostalgia that is structural rather than idiosyncratic) often makes the individual indifferent to the values and characteristics of the host culture; the exile chooses, if s/he has any choice, to live in a context that is least inhospitable, most like ‘home’” (Jan Mohamed 223). So as Sammar leaves behind her home in Africa, she packs her culture, faith and beliefs before beginning a remarkable expedition.

Chapter two examines how two characters, lost in space and time, manage to rediscover themselves in one another. In Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup*, Julie and Abdu gain benefit when they exile themselves. Edward Said states: “Exile is sometimes better than staying behind or not getting out: but only sometimes” (Said 178). Julie becomes the way out for Abdu just as he becomes the way out for her. This reciprocal advantage acts as the main reason for each of their departures. Amit Saha contends: “Exile appears both as a liberating experience as well as a shocking experience” (Saha 188). True to her experience, Julie liberates herself from the life she has always rejected and embraces a new life with its culture and restrictions. This chapter describes how Julie finds comfort and serenity in her life in the desert.

Marguerite Guzman Bouvard explains: “Often, it is when we journey that we see the most clearly, both the places we have left and the new and strange places of arrival. Moving

between these new strange visions, the writer experiences a unique sense of freedom” (Bouvard x). The freedom that Julie seeks is the same freedom that Abdu experiences when he aspires to move away from his village. Abdu is seen to reject every role that has been foisted upon him by his community, and he tries to flee away from all its complications. Jan Mohamed further elaborates: “The immigrant . . . is not troubled by structural nostalgia because his or her status implies a purposive directedness toward the host culture, which has been deliberately chosen as the new home; most importantly, his or her status implies a voluntary desire to become a full-fledged subject of the new society” (Jan Mohamed 223). Abdu can be seen as an immigrant more than an exile, when he places a purpose ahead of him and works at pursuing it.

Chapter two elaborates the form of modern exile that the two characters share as they pursue and succeed in reaching their goals. Love is one of the tools used to get to their final destination, but it ceases to be a tool as soon as each obtains a specific objective. Nadine Gordimer stresses the notion of gain and loss in her novel and the cultural exchange that occurs between her main characters. Paul Surlis claims: “In retrospect I am extremely glad to have lived in this country. I have had many mind-broadening experiences and opportunities” (Surlis 205). In many ways, this expression sounds similar to what both Julie and Abdu experience in their host countries.

In the final chapter, Bahaa Taher’s *Love in Exile* is presented in ways that recall the previous chapters. The main character in this novel chooses to live in exile after the failures he faces in his country; he benefits from a love story that helps him rediscover himself. This character romanticizes his exilic state and indulges in all the elements of exile. As he isolates himself in a strange country, he remembers his old identity while embracing his new self without merging with the place around him. Jan Mohamed writes:

[T]he specular border intellectual, while perhaps equally familiar with two cultures, finds himself or herself unable or unwilling to be 'at home' in these societies. Caught between several cultures or groups, none of which are deemed sufficiently enabling or productive, the specular intellectual subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them; he or she utilizes his or her interstitial cultural space as a vantage point from which to define, implicitly or explicitly, other, utopian possibilities of group formation. Intellectuals like Edward W. Said, W. E. B. DuBois, Richard Wright, and Neale Hurston occupy the specular site, each in a distinctive way. (219)

In this novel, the main character resists any changes that come his way and welcomes only love, which he finds in the person of young Brigitte. As his love for Brigitte grows, he remembers his youth and love for country. His feelings might remind the contemporary reader of the Dalai Lama's concise expression: "The stars in Tibet shine with a brightness I have not seen anywhere else in the world" (Lama 59).

Such realizations come to the main character late in life when he becomes especially sensitive towards everything around him. He also starts to recollect parts of his former self and open his eyes on new events, thus adding to his critical depth as a writer. Lal Vinay explains: "To be alert, vigilant, critical, contrarian—to be all this is to be always in exile. Only the exile has that awareness with contrapuntal understanding. One might add parenthetically if the intellectual engaged in criticism is always in exile" (Vinay 33). The advantages that one can gain from being in exile are presented in Bahaa Taher's main character.

Is it valid, then, to ask whether someone as prominent as Edward Said really wanted to go back home, or did he find his role as outsider in exile more useful to himself as a critic? Lal Vinay states: "Yet, however much Said might have wanted to reclaim the house where he had been born, he remained uncertain about wanting to be 'completely at home'" (Vinay 32). Was exile from his original place of residence an advantage, and was he better able to express the

condition of exile because he experienced it? Either possibility adds to what this thesis argues and demonstrates, which is that exile can involve knowledge and freedom, and not simply serve as a punishment. Michael Seidel adds: “So many writers, whatever their personal or political traumas, have gained imaginative sustenance from their exile—Ovid, Dante, Swift, Rousseau, Madame de Stael, Hugo, Lawrence, Mann, Brecht—that experiences native to the life of the exile seem almost activated in the life of the artist’s separation as desire, perspective as witness, alienation as new being” (Seidel x).

Exile has been defined historically in largely political terms. However, even though the political point of view is almost always present in traditional literature, this term can acquire significance and additional meaning when it is considered in social, religious and cultural terms as well. This thesis has examined fictional characters in exile; it does not deny the political background that often helps clarify their situation in concrete ways. But it concentrates and sheds light on the literary aspects of texts that give a somewhat new meaning to exile in our own age; it seeks to comprehend exile in relation to various types of experience. Exile as both physical and psychological stands out among similar terms such as dislocation, estrangement, and alienation. We have tried to explain how the self and the body are impacted by exile, thus expanding the meaning of exile in a manner that could enrich literature.

Moreover, in an age full of wars and internal conflicts, the term exile can be used to help people in distress view their condition in a positive way. Hence, in some respects, exile can give people hope for a better future ahead. Readers often assume that exile could only be a state of pain and misery, but our study has taken exile to another level where it is accepted and maybe even welcomed. Those who suffer from loss of home and nationality have been shown to be able to move forward to some form of freedom and to escape from the injustice that they have suffered

in their own countries. Our study does not wish to underestimate the significance of their loss but to indicate how exile sometimes gives hope for a life away from home that can be enduring.

Governments and states sometimes break nations apart and cause internal ruptures that can never be repaired once again. As politics play with people's lives and drives them into increasingly desperate situations, literature works hard at maintaining whatever is left of the human self. Through language and imagination, literature succeeds at building new homes for those who have lost their homes. It sets up new examples and offers possibilities for another life, perhaps in ways that can mend a nation's broken identity. Writers have always been known for their thirst for freedom of expression and for their willingness to break social taboos. Some may accept this trespass, while others may reject it. Many nations today have already experienced this type of transgression, which can be traced through many fictional works.

As this thesis attempts to broaden the meaning of exile, it has tried to release feelings of oppression that have constrained many of those in exile. In this sense, it can be related to the larger world of power that invariably shapes the lives of all exiles, even when the political world is not confronted directly. Hence, a main concern of this thesis has been to reflect upon the real world, while providing insight concerning fictional characters. The advantages that derive from exile can be related to events that occur in the world at large. The attempt to convert our distress, loss, and anger about what the world has done to us allows us to imagine some new form of existence that is compatible with change. Thus, like the characters in fictional works, we as readers can benefit from the literature of exile and can use it to enrich our lives on both the individual and social levels.

Edward Said has stated: "On the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a

predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as ‘good for us’” (Said 174). But as hard as it may seem for us to comprehend, we must try to grasp the meaning of exile as a human experience on the basis of theories that somehow fit our age. André Aciman contends: “Everyone’s exile is different, and every writer has his or her own way of groping in the dark. Some have triumphed over exile. Others even found displacement exciting, invigorating” (Aciman 9). Thus, in whatever form it assumes, exile remains a phenomenon that occurs more and more frequently as new cultures arise in our world, prompting us to better interpret, and ultimately to accept, what cannot be perfectly understood.

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