

## Countering Normalized Violence in Aboulela's "The Museum" and El Guindi's "Trading in my Arab"

مواجهة العنف المطبوع في "المتحف" لأبو ليلي و "التجارة في عربيتي" للجندي

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### ABSTRACT

This study is designed to unsettle Eurocentric discourse that justifies violence against Arabs in the West through a careful examination of Leila Aboulela's (2002) "The Museum" and Yousef El Guindi's (2003) "Trading in my Arab." It delves into the issue of structural violence through which reductionist narratives are produced and disseminated via cultural institutions to dehumanize Arabs and normalize discrimination against them. The study draws on Johan Galtung's conception of structural violence and theories of Eurocentric discourse to question the process of knowledge production about colonized nations. It uses an analytical and comparative approach in critiquing Aboulela's and El Guindi's counter-narratives that undermine the West's through revealing the complexity of colonial legacies and attempting to rewrite history, and thereby restoring dignity to violated Arab cultures. The analysis suggests that museums and mass media represented through "The Museum" and "Trading in my Arab" function as a means of oppression utilized by imperialists to ensure their domination over other nations or marginalized groups. It leads to the conclusion that although Eurocentric discourse dehumanizes Arabs and Muslims, their literary production humanizes them again and works to decolonize knowledge about them.

**Keywords:** colonial legacy, Eurocentric, media, museums, Arab, structural violence

### المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحدي الخطاب الأوروبي المركزي الذي يبرر العنف ضد العرب في الغرب من خلال فحص دقيق لـ "المتحف" ليلي أبو ليلي (2002) ويوسف الجندي (2003) "التجارة في عربيتي". إنه يتعمق في قضية العنف المنظم الذي يتم من خلاله إنتاج الروايات الاختزالية ونشرها عبر المؤسسات الثقافية لتجريدهم من إنسانيتهم وتطبيع العنصرية ضدهم. تستند الدراسة إلى مفهوم يوهان غالتونغ للعنف البنوي ونظريات الخطاب الأوروبي المركزي للتشكيك في عملية إنتاج المعرفة حول الدول المستعمرة. وهي تستخدم نهجًا تحليليًا ومقارنًا في نقد الروايات المضادة لأبوليلي والجندي التي تقوض الغرب من خلال الكشف عن تعقيد الموروثات الاستعمارية ومحاولة إعادة كتابة التاريخ، وبالتالي استعادة الكرامة للثقافات العربية المنتهكة. يشير التحليل إلى أن المتاحف ووسائل الإعلام الممثلة من خلال "المتحف" و "التجارة في عربيتي" على التوالي، تعمل كوسيلة للقمع يستخدمها الإمبرياليون لضمان سيطرتهم على الدول الأخرى أو المجموعات المهمشة. ويؤدي إلى استنتاج مفاده أنه على الرغم من أن الخطاب الأوروبي المركزي يجرد العرب والمسلمين من إنسانيتهم، فإن إنتاجهم الأدبي يضيء عليهم طابعًا إنسانيًا مرة أخرى ويعمل على إنهاء استعمار المعرفة عنهم. الكلمات المفتاحية: الإرث الاستعماري، المركز الأوروبي، الإعلام، المتاحف، العنف البنوي.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Aboulela's "The Museum" (2002) is an award-winning story that deals with museums as a site of knowledge production that contributes to the construction of a narrative that serves the West while it misrepresents the Arab's and Muslim's narrative at the same time. In the story, the protagonist, Shadia, who is a university student, visits an African museum in Scotland only to find a distorted version of Africa being memorialized and celebrated through the artifacts displayed, and representing such a version is the type of violence Aboulela criticizes in her work. El Guindi, also an award-winner for his plays, aims at "humanizing the people who are dehumanized in news stories (Golden, 2019). His mission is reflected in "Trading in my Arab" which deals with the West's attack on Arabs' identity and culture, and their everyday struggle with mainstream media (Golden, 2019). El Guindi (2003) condemns Eurocentric discourse that reproduces false information on Arabs and Muslims through "experts" who hold discriminatory views of Arabs.

The argument focuses on comparing the roles of museums and media sources in the process of knowledge production as controlled by Eurocentrism. This control over information invalidates non-Western knowledge, and this is precisely what Aboulela and El Guindi challenge through rewriting the Arab narrative, and thereby contribute to the decolonization of knowledge. The study mainly addresses the issue of violence committed through Eurocentric discourse, then explores the way museums and media contribute to the othering of Arabs, on the one hand, and reinforce the West's dominance, on the other hand. This is done through an analysis of the literary texts under discussion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Structural Violence

Institutionalized violence supported by the dominant culture and system is what Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung (1969) calls structural violence. Structural Violence refers to social systems through which inequality and oppression is maintained and reproduced, and discrimination is even normalized (Galtung, 1969). These injustices are made possible and even justifiable through Eurocentric discourse which treats Arabs in the USA and Europe as an "other" who has been constructed either as a threat, inferior, exotic, or just different (Diez, 2005, p. 628). These are not mere labels attached to a certain group, but contribute to an invented "despised difference" to justify violence and discrimination against them (Qutami, 2011, 159). Structural violence can also be defined as a harm perpetuated against individuals or groups through the normalization of inequalities embedded within political-economic systems (Farmer et al., 2006). Theorists believe that acts of physical violence are harmful, but structural violence is far more dangerous because it usually remains invisible as Melber (2014) points out:

[It] equally effectively produces exclusion, suffering and death by indirect means such as making use of 'othering' (e.g. by means of xenophobia; the granting or denying of citizen rights; defining 'normality' and thereby also 'un-normal' behaviour, i.e. deviation from specific values and norms embodied in a society as acceptable; etc.) (p.197)

These practices of othering, excluding, and stigmatizing a difference are viewed normal because the system allows them (Maurya & Kumar, 2020). Gilligan (1997), a scholar on violence, thinks the invisibility of structural violence makes it extremely destructive as the damage it causes is severe although slow and subtle. It goes unnoticed and it seeps into society as "the way things are done" including decisions about whose voice gets heard or ignored

(Opotow, 2001). It is widely prevalent in various “social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience,” and the resultant discrimination and inequality serve imperialism in its distribution of power and resources as Gilligan (1997) notes. The British empire ensures that such inequalities are maintained to “establish [its] superiority over natives” through utilizing Eurocentric discourse that privileges the mainstream and simultaneously demonizes “the other” (Ilyas, 2020, p. 81).

## 2.2 Eurocentric Discourse

Eurocentric discourse is crucial for the British empire to impose its ideologies and ensure its domination over “the other.” Within Eurocentric discourse, “European civilization is represented as truly human, [and] as the highest point of human achievement” (Hostettler, 2013, p. 49). Its values, beliefs, and culture are regarded superior and set as the standard by which others measure their success. However, Hostettler (2013) finds this assumed universality problematic because it leads to viewing other cultures as “different” which is a label Eurocentrism identifies as an absence, or “a morally negative condition, i.e. not-European” (p. 49).

Being an Arab has often been confused with being a Muslim in the West. Nevertheless, both labels have been looked down upon and equated with backwardness and violence which has resulted in Eurocentric thinkers’ belief that “they have nothing to contribute” to discussions of democracy and human rights, and so ought to be excluded from any global conversation and deserve to be repressed” (Grosfoguel, 2010, p.37). Eurocentric discourse has enabled this “epistemic inferiorization” of Muslim world views making Muslims voiceless under claims of complete incompatibility between Islam and democracy. Accordingly, the serious offences committed against Arabs and Muslims through the media and elsewhere are deemed acceptable and even encouraged, giving racist “experts” the freedom to speak with authority about Islam without necessarily having knowledge of Islamic thought (Grosfoguel, 2010, p.37). Edward Said (1998) tackles the issue of discrimination against Muslims in his seminal book *Covering Islam* and explains that there has been a revival of orientalist ideas that have been previously condemned about Muslims and non- Whites in general. Unfortunately, they have recently been circulated even with more prominence and impunity at a time other cultural groups have been receiving a better treatment. He adds that degrading remarks directed at the Islamic faith have become highly tolerable in the West and whatever is easily expressed about the religion or culture of Muslims cannot be said about Jews, Asians, or Africans in mainstream discussions (p. 23). That is, discrimination against these groups has shifted toward the Arab and Muslim individual and is sensed through various cultural institutions including the media.

## 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study uses an analytical and comparative approach in examining the Arab’s dilemma in Western culture due to Eurocentric discourse. The study, first, looks into the concept of violence and how it is practiced against the Arab “other.” Then, it sheds light on Eurocentric discourse that facilitates the spread of violence and discrimination and even justifies it. In the next section, the roles of museums and mass media as cultural institutions are investigated in terms of shaping public opinion and disseminating messages to a world audience. This is followed by a critical analysis of Aboulela’s “The Museum” and El Guindi’s “Trading in My Arab” through which the use of museums as a tool of oppression is compared to that of media sources in producing biased narratives of Arabs and their cultures. The analysis shows that the way museums and media are utilized to serve the imperial project is in itself a form of violence that is being resisted by Arab writers in the West. The study, finally, suggests that Aboulela’s and El Guindi’s literary work function as counter narratives which unsettle Eurocentric thought and power over knowledge.

## 4. Manifestations of Structural Violence

### 4.1 Museums

Eurocentric discourse views Europe as "the only legitimate tradition of thought able to produce knowledge". This is one type of violence being practiced through selected representations at museums (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 29). Museums have been used by the greatest empires as instruments to influence public opinion and teach people about their nation's powerful position in the world and its superiority over others. Hein (2015) describes museums as "educational institutions" whose original mission is "diffusing knowledge to the entire population" (p. 11). Lord (2006) also points out that museums have been perceived as Enlightenment institutions "whose power to form individuals is exercised through the careful and ordered deployment of knowledge within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored space" (p. 12). Because a museum is a source of valued information, it can dramatically influence the way formerly colonized nations are perceived. Museums play a critical role in disseminating knowledge and information to the masses. According to Coffee (2008), the purpose of museums is "to communicate narratives so they will be adopted broadly" (p. 266). Naturally, those in power benefit from this as it is through this communication that museums usually support certain groups and narratives rather than others (p. 266). Museums are used as a means to reinforce power relations determined by Eurocentric discourse. Binaries of us/them and civilized/ uncivilized created by the Western empire are also perpetuated through the objects displayed at museums that usually celebrate colonization, and people got accustomed to the consequent injustice and it became normalized (Coffee, 2008, p. 267). When this happens, belittling and humiliating "the other" goes unnoticed and so it is continuously repeated leading to further marginalization and oppression.

### 4.2. Media

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) emphasize that "mass media content is a socially created product, not a reflection of an objective reality," and therefore is manipulated by imperialists in their shaping of meanings and perceptions to serve their political agenda (p. 251). Mass media help in presenting various issues and nations from a positive perspective, but can also degrade others and excuse racist rhetoric to support certain political views. Entman (1989) argues that most people have so little knowledge of world issues and such "weakly-anchored beliefs" in the USA that any "information provided by the media can significantly shape their attitudes," and sometimes they do not have strong opinions or "old attitudes to defend" making major media influence a much easier task (p. 351). This can be extremely frustrating for Arab Americans as references to their culture and the Middle East at large constantly appear on the news and impact the way the general public view them and deal with them, especially, those with no knowledge of the Middle East. Entman (1989) further explains that "One way the media wield influence is by omitting or de-emphasizing information, by excluding data about an altered reality that might otherwise disrupt existing support" (p. 367). This process of erasure and exclusion of information constitutes structural violence against Arabs, and involves multiple aggressions such as silencing, othering, demonization, and condemnation.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### 5.1. Violence through Othering

In Aboulela's story, Shadia and several international students suffer from the process of exclusion and othering. That is, they do not feel welcome at the university in spite of its diversity. They hear about a former student from Nigeria who committed suicide, and another Malaysian who experiences violence as his windows got smashed due to xenophobia. Shadia is disappointed in Scotland due to this hostile atmosphere toward outsiders as no efforts are

made at this “international” university to reduce her anxiety or sense of alienation and foreignness. Sadly, when she finds Bryan, her white classmate, kind and responsive to her comments about his hair and earrings, she is shocked. As an African and an “other,” she does not expect her opinions to be acknowledged by someone who represents the mainstream. She expects her views to be dismissed since she is placed by Eurocentric discourse under a category that identifies her as an “undesirable other.” Her initial impression is clear in: “Us and them, she thought. The ones who would do well, the ones who would crawl and sweat and barely pass. Two predetermined groups” (Aboulela, 2002, p. 2).

Later on, Shadia starts to view herself through the eyes of racist westerners. She is frustrated about her hair which was never an issue until that point. She tries to tame her curls but they refuse to be straightened due to the weather in Scotland. This is symbolic of her struggle with her African identity that is rendered “different,” and so is denigrated by Eurocentric discourse. Living in Scotland, she realizes she is an outsider who belongs to a culture that is regarded inferior. When she looks into the mirror, she is not happy with herself because she thinks the mainstream views her like “a person with HIV” (Aboulela, 2002, p. 4). This perception reflects a “double consciousness” and her internalization of colonial discourse and its portrayal of Africa as full of diseases. Double consciousness, a term coined by W. E. Du Bois, refers to the split psyche not only in those who have experienced colonial traumas, but their “descendants” who have been exposed to traumatic conditions of a postcolonial world including genocide, displacement, or war (Ward, 2013, p. 171). Shadia is certainly a descendant suffering from the aftermath of the colonial period. El Guindi’s (2003) “Trading in my Arab” also exposes the struggles of everyday life of first and second- generation Arab immigrants in the USA. The speaker suffers from “double consciousness” as he sees himself through the eyes of the mainstream and understands the negative associations they have attached to his race. This split psyche prevents him from appreciating equally the two sides of his identity. As an Arab- American, one side of the hyphen dislikes the other which creates an internal conflict as it is these two sides combined that truly shape his identity.

Arab- Americans have dealt with violence in the form of racial profiling at their workplaces, in the media, and at airports. Sometimes it was in the form of derogatory phrases used to describe them such as “sleep cells,” “alienated Muslims,” and “homegrown terrorists” (Bayoumi, 2009). This type of violence has disrupted their lives. El Guindi’s speaker experiences trauma caused by similar acts of racism and othering. He expresses his frustration and despair toward his unwelcomed status as an Arab in America post 9/11 and would like to get rid of any markers that reflect his Arabness and connect him with his history or cultural origins. He announces “I would like to put in an application to expunge my history, my records, and any identifying markers that might label me with the “A” word” (p. 9). He is burdened by his ethnicity, and is tired of being labelled and othered as an Arab by American society. He emphasizes that he no longer cares to be an Arab (p. 9). He feels his Arabness is a problem as he is denied the right to be proud of his identity because he comes from a race that is often condemned by Eurocentric discourse.

### ***Violence through a Colonial Legacy Normalized***

Shadia is surprised by the glorification and memorialization of a former colonizer’s achievements under the claims of a “civilizing mission.” This glorification is part of the violence practiced perhaps indirectly by museums, and is demonstrated through a poster on the wall of a victorious Scotland that has had an extraordinary impact on the world. The poster said that Scotland made history during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century by having contributed “many skilled and committed individuals, [and] in serving an empire they gave and received, changed others

and were themselves changed and often returned home with tangible reminders of their experiences" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 15). The poster represents Scotland as a nation that was on a sacred mission during which great and admirable sacrifices were made for others' good interest. Those who served the empire are portrayed as "committed individuals" who took part in a project resembling an exchange program that involved giving and receiving. They are presented as having influenced others while being influenced themselves, and eventually came home with their medals. This representation is far from the truth. It completely ignores the violation of human rights in Africa. The "tangible reminders" supposedly symbolize their positive experience during the colonial period; but they are actual proof of the empire's disgraceful acts of theft and looting. Displaying selected items at the museum that stand for the colonial legacy is a form of structural violence as colonization is celebrated and normalized and implies a "visible continuity" (Parashar and Schulz, 2021). Thus, the natives' pain and subjugation throughout history is being legitimized since the way colonialism is represented shows no sympathy towards the dehumanized Africans, on the contrary, it celebrates its national wealth and victories. (Duncan & Wallach, 2004, p. 267). For instance, the old guns in the poster are meant to glorify the empire's conquest of Africa, but suppress the fact that they are tools of oppression used to disempower the natives.

## 5.2. A Reductionist Narrative

Shadia does not find in the museum anything that represents her culture, the richness of its history, or signs of the great civilization she comes from. "Nothing was of her, nothing belonged to her life at home ... Here was Europe's vision, the clichés about Africa: cold and old" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 15). Sadly, the narrative that has been constructed of her nation was extremely reductionist and even trivialized through images of jungles and animals to admire. The whole experience of colonization and oppression was turned into an exciting adventure in the eyes of the colonizer, and generally inspiring to a western audience. Africa and its people are portrayed being outside history with no touch of civilization to speak of. This condescension with which her culture is treated is an embodiment of violence the empire resorts to so as to instill a sense of inferiority in the natives and give the world the impression they are in need of civilization and western intervention. Shadia finds herself alone with "sketches of jungle animals" and reads a quote by a diplomat in Ethiopia from 1903 expressing great satisfaction with Africa's animals: "*this was the first time since we have started that we have really been in Africa- the real Africa of jungle inhabited only by game, and plains where herds of antelope meet your eye in every direction*" (Aboulela, 2002, p.18).

She later comes across an employee's letter from 1762 to his Scottish employer in which he was appreciated and described as "a good man to love their country so much" (p. 16). Shadia is outraged at the way colonizers portray natives as naïve, innocent, unintelligent, and uncritical to perceive colonization as a sign of love and generosity. Their own image, on the other hand, is that of good men who end up loving her country and forming kind relationships with the natives. This misleading portrayal erases the empire's transgressions in history and its subjugation of Africans to serve its own purposes. Shadia, finally, realizes that the messages conveyed at the museum were not really for individuals like her (p. 16). They were addressing a world whose views of Africa are continuously being shaped by the empire through structural violence. They perpetuated Eurocentric discourse which froze Africa's history in the past and limited an entire region within the confines of the museum hall. Museologists, actually, think this is one of the museum's paradoxes, that it "contains infinite time in a finite space" (Lord, 2006, p.13). This attempt at representing the totality of time in a limited space has been controversial because it does not do cultures and nations justice. Africa's entire history is being (mis)represented within the boundaries of the museum hall; however, this space has failed to

reflect reality in an objective manner that includes both colonization and civilization at the same time. In the story, Shadia looks at the “disconnected objects out of place and time” that have been “preserved in spite of the years” (Aboulela, 2002, p. 15). She expected to see photos of the Nile, minarets, or people like her father, but she found a distorted image of Africa (p. 16). It was more of a western creation than the place she knew and lived in most of her life. The writer’s emphasis on African history that is being decontextualized and rewritten through Western eyes calls for a reconsideration of the museum’s role as a cultural institution that can cause damage to nations and their histories since perceptions of the “other” and meanings, in general, are determined by “institutional practices and power relations” (Abdeen & Abd-Rabbo, 2018).

### ***Media Violence & Sabotaging the Peace***

In “Trading in My Arab,” violence is being committed as the speaker is unable to live up to his full potential because his race is being othered and discriminated against. He is not given the chance to grow or succeed because he is viewed as “irrelevant” or a threat. The speaker asserts he should focus on “graceful matters” like the Scottish or the Finnish but being Arab, “immediately circumscribes your subject matter. Reduces one to a set of mind- numbing themes and arguments” he needs to respond to, “All so terribly reductive that a sudden change in headlines might make you instantly irrelevant, or the opposite, much too current, so that everything you do and say has to be taken into account” (El Guindi, 2003, p.11). His comment reflects the way Eurocentrism sabotages the lives of Arabs by forcing them to face groundless accusations, or constantly prove their humanity which is often under attack. He resents the way his whole life revolves around his identity as an Arab. The speaker realizes that he does not have enough stability in his life that allows him to pursue his dreams due to structural violence practiced through negative images of Arabs via media sources and newspapers. He is aware, as an “other,” he is denied various opportunities and feels threatened by the constant change of events that often lead to further marginalization or criminalization, and never allow him access to a fair chance in life. He wants to be able to watch the news without stressing over the content that may involve his people, or read a newspaper without needing to check the rest of it to make sure that nothing terrible has been said about them (El Guindi, 2003, p.12).

Discrimination in the media is a form of structural violence which Galtung (1969) believes is indirect but still dangerous. That is, no one in particular is held responsible for the harm inflicted upon others because this violence is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (p. 171). The speaker understands he has to pay the price for his “despised difference,” and yet he is not ashamed of his identity (Qutami, 2011, p. 159). He has not internalized Eurocentric discourse or a sense of inferiority, but still wishes to do without any “identifying markers” of his Arabness to fulfil his potential, be able to follow the American dream, and overcome reductive stories that stand in the way of his growth, and from his perspective, “the most reductive story of all” has been the story of the Arab (El Guindi, 2003, p. 12). In addition, the speaker recognizes how detrimental media circulations of Eurocentric discourse are in the impact they have on public opinion. He is disturbed by the power of media in spreading misconceptions of the Arab other and the extent to which it belittles and disrespects his people and culture. He comes to the conclusion that if he has any chance to make it in the American society or attempt to dream of a future, it would be through giving up on his identity that hangs over him like a burden and prevents him from succeeding. He is compelled to let go of his cultural origins because there is no tolerance toward the other within Eurocentric discourse, or appreciation for anything “different.” As Burney (2012) notes, “cultural difference is not accepted as a legitimate reality” (p. 163). European

culture, however, is treated as "a universal reference point, a source of significance, or the locus of explanation" (Hostettler, 2013, p. 49). The speaker is a victim to this racist rhetoric that considers labels such as "Arab" or "Oriental" a problem that needs to be resolved through "elimination ... in ways ranging from Europeanization to extermination" (Hostettler, 2013, p. 49). El Guindi (2003) presents this mindset as traumatizing for Arab Americans because their life and security are under threat due to the media that influences thoughts and views of the world.

### 5.3. *Decolonizing Western Knowledge*

"The Museum" ends with Shadia breaking down in tears; she is shocked by the "Africa" represented in the museum that is nothing like the one she knows and has experienced. She tells Bryan: "They are telling lies in the museum." "Don't believe them. It's all wrong. It's not jungles and antelopes, it's people. We have things like computers and cars" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 18). She demands to be heard, and for her narrative to be considered rather than the West's be treated as the only truth that is beyond questioning. She tries to undo the many years of subjugation, misrepresentations, and erasure of her culture by giving examples and proof of a civilization that existed in her part of the world. She points out that her country used technology and cars and that her father was a physician and the wealthy used golden taps. She, finally, understands that her attempts are in vain. Nothing she could say or do would change decades of institutionalized racism or the imperialist discourse that has spread its poison all over the world. Later on, the narrator makes a comment that shows Bryan's inability to comprehend the magnitude of Shadia's pain caused by the colonial process and he suggests that museums change and so could he not realizing that this was a path way too difficult for her to take. Shadia thinks "If she had been strong, she would have explained, and not tired of explaining. She would have patiently taught him another language ... if she had not been small in the museum" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 19). Her sentiments reveal that colonialism is not an aspect of the past but has left traces in history and culture, and became part of her ongoing struggle although she has not experienced colonization herself. Bryan, however, does not understand the intricacy of Eurocentric discourse or the damaging effect structural violence has on formerly colonized cultures that can go on indefinitely. Being naïve, he believes in the possibility of change in spite of the trauma caused by powerful nations such as his own. He has no insight into the underlying power relations determined by a colonial past that affect his relationship with Shadia. She, on the other hand, has no strength to resist Eurocentric thoughts passed down from generation to generation, or explain it to those who are ignorant of the situation. She is aware that perceptions that took years to form by the empire would take many years to unsettle. She recognizes the challenge and thinks it is an impossible mission to take on especially when she sees Bryan's reaction toward the exhibit at the museum, that "the imperialists who had humiliated her history were heroes in his eyes" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 17). He is totally oblivious to the facts behind Africa's tragic situation withheld from the public while certain aspects of the empire are being highlighted. "He didn't know, he didn't understand. He was all wrong" (Aboulela, 2002, p.18). Shadia's experience at the museum pushes her to remember her position in the world in comparison to Bryan's. She is reminded that the university was just a stepping stone for him to move on to something even better, but she had to fight to get a piece of paper from a British university saying she was awarded a Master's degree in science and thereby it had acknowledged her abilities (Aboulela, 2002, p.17). He did not need his abilities to be acknowledged by anyone, but Shadia, coming from a formerly colonized nation whose knowledge has been perceived inferior to Western knowledge, is in serious need of a Western diploma to secure a better future for herself. He, on the other hand, is unaware of all the privileges his whiteness grants him at the expense of others. Shadia feeling "small" at the museum is a sign that she lost her will to change Bryan's perspective or her position in the



world as an “other” because she realizes that her fight is against a power which entire nations cannot defeat. This inability to take on such a burden by Arabs in the West is also found in El Guindi’s “Trading in My Arab.”

#### *5.4. Unsettling the Process of Knowledge Production*

Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* deals with the way representations of the Orient are often disconnected from reality as its heterogeneity is totally ignored by the West. This has led to the production of a body of knowledge that is highly subjective, but is presented with great authority by Western voices. Building on Said’s argument, Dimitriadis (2006) writes that the result is “the production of ‘expertise’ that appears neutral but is in reality a highly subjective narrative of the Orient created to exercise dominance over it (p. 372). Nonetheless, this knowledge is respected and absorbed by the masses because of the active role Eurocentric discourse has played in shaping views of the world. It has established that the “West” is the only legitimate source of knowledge while non- Western knowledge is portrayed as lacking in rationality and truth (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 29). This attack on the non- western way of thinking is an act of violence that is manifested in the privileged roles Western “experts” are given only to make uninformed assessments of foreign nations. In “The Museum,” Asafa, Shadia’s African friend, reacts to such racist thinking by sarcastically stating: “These people think they own the world” (Aboulela, 2002, p. 3).

Similarly, in “Trading in my Arab,” the speaker comments that these “Middle East experts” are like fake landlords who, ironically, collect rent on a house you actually own. “And then they proceed to evict you and set up shop to organize tours in your own home” (p. 11). Arabs, in this context, lost the right to speak out and be heard, while Westerners speak for them not because of a thorough knowledge of the region, but rather a superior status attached to them merely due to a racist discourse that assigns certain people a prestigious place in the world above others. Westerners are treated as “experts” and can even control Arabs’ destiny while their knowledge of Arab nations and culture is dismissed and voices regarded irrelevant. The speaker is enraged by the fact that the opinions and speeches of Western experts are welcomed by the public regardless of the hateful rhetoric they use. Moreover, they provide information on the Middle East and speak with such great authority even if what they present is more myth than reality as Said (1978) points out. The speaker lashes out in the face of such injustice: “Go be an expert on someone else’s culture” (EL Guindi, 2003, p.11). He is well- aware that statements made by these experts are dangerous and falsely perceived as truth as they represent Western knowledge that no one questions. Therefore, claims of Islamic terrorism, for instance, can be easily believed by the masses who do not care to look for reliable sources of information or even objective views of world events. Unfortunately, the “hate- filled rhetoric” used by experts is justified and reinforced through Eurocentric discourse which makes such violence the norm to which many people have become desensitized.

El Guindi is critical of this troubling state of knowledge, its consumption, and the reductionist narrative created by Eurocentric discourse. That is, in the western narrative, Arabs are depicted as “terrorists,” “exotic,” ignorant, belly dancers, and billionaires among other things (Shaheen, 2001). El Guindi questions the authenticity of the image the West has created of Arabs and reproduced through the media by recreating the Arab narrative, a narrative that invalidates the West’s constructed one and emphasizes Arab contributions to Western civilization and world history. The speaker remarks:

Never mind that the Arabs kept the flame burning and provided their own flourishes of wit and refinement, art and architecture, science and literature, and so on that led to the birth of the consciousness that gave rise to the likes of Marivaux. "With no Arabs, no Age of Enlightenment" (El Guindi, 2003, p. 11)

He resents the exclusion of Arabs' achievements from the process of knowledge production so Arabs would not be able to claim any authority over the West or even a right to be heard. In so doing, El Guindi defies the West's dominance over knowledge and control of the information disseminated worldwide. In response to the West's reductive narrative, El Guindi provides a counter-narrative in which the world is reminded of Arabs' accomplishments in the fields of science, architecture, art, and literature that paved the way for the West's advancement.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The two texts reflect the Arab's struggle with racism, the structural violence embedded in the system, and a Eurocentric discourse that normalizes such oppressive acts and living conditions. In "The Museum," Shadia feels discriminated against through an institution that is visited by thousands every year. She is disturbed by the museum's negative messages about Arabs and Muslims sent to its international audience because they affect public opinion and Arabs' lives all over the world in the same way the speaker in "Trading in My Arab" is troubled by the continuous attacks on Arab identity. He challenges western voices who boast about their "false" knowledge of the Middle East, and yet are aired through the media and treated as an authority on the region. The analysis highlights the flaws within this discourse and foregrounds the writers' contribution to the decolonization of knowledge as they represent narratives of their own which are grounded in history. Finally, it can be said that Aboulela's and El Guindi's literary work serve as an invitation for the previously colonized and the international community to play an active role in disrupting the existing process of knowledge production. This disruption can be done through revealing all the narratives and stories that get suppressed or erased by Eurocentric and hegemonic discourses. In achieving this goal, they resist the single narrative of oppression and dehumanization and offer an alternative narrative of dignity and humanization.

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