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Redefining Islamic Identity: Cosmopolitanism In The Theater Of Tawfiq Al-Hakim And Akbar Ahmed

Gaber Abdelghaffar Abdelrahman Hasaneen

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REDEFINING ISLAMIC IDENTITY: COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE THEATER OF
TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM AND AKBAR AHMED

by

Gaber Abdelghaffar Abdelrahman Hasaneen
Bachelor of Arts, Assiut University, 2000
Master of Arts, Assiut University, 2004

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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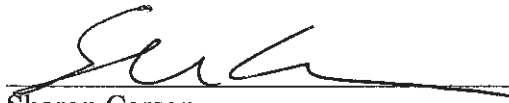
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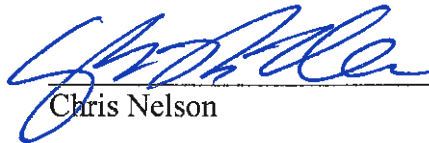
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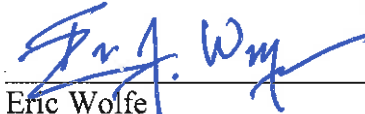
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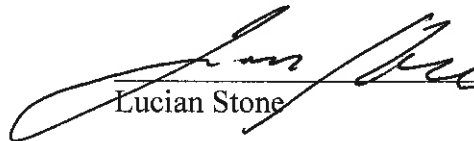
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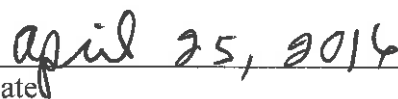


Lucian Stone

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Wayne Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



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04/25/2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
INTRODUCTION	
Partial, Muslim Cosmopolitanism.....	1
CHAPTER	
I. “Wherever My Wife Lives”: Cosmopolitan Answers to Identity Questions.....	13
II Tawfiq Al-Hakim: The National and the Cosmopolitan.....	61
III Akbar Ahmed: The Dilemma of Representation.....	110
CONCLUSION	
Who Is Worthy of Representation?.....	150
WORKS CITED.....	154

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ABSTRACT

The question whether Islam is compatible with American, or generally “Western,” values has now imposed itself on public debates, gaining more urgency and traction with every tragic act of terrorism committed in the name of Islam. In these debates Islamic identity is usually defined in Orientalist terms. Fundamentalist Muslims reiterate Orientalist concepts of who a Muslim is. Orientalist observers on the one hand, and on the other fundamentalist Muslims have defined Islam as the West’s inimical Other, which has made the so-called clash of civilizations sound inevitable.

I argue that cosmopolitan observers challenge these misrepresentations. Representation, particularly self-representation, of the so-called Islamic world requires a thoughtful reading of current events as well as an accurate evaluation of Islam’s historical relationship with other religions and cultures. By examining the concepts of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “partial cosmopolitanism” and Bruce Lawrence’s “Muslim cosmopolitanism” in the theater of Tawfiq Al-Haim and Akbar Ahmed, this study redefines identity contours and suggests an accurate nomenclature regarding Islamic identity.

There is an urgent need to represent the cosmopolitan dimension we encounter when we read writers from different generations and different “Islamic” cultures who illustrate the resources of cosmopolitanism shared across the Islamicate world. Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed are examples for these writers.

O mankind, We have created you male and female,
and appointed you races and tribes, that you may
know one another. (Quran 49:13)

Like a compass I stand firm with one leg on my faith
And roam with the other leg all over the seventy-two
nations. (Jalaluddīn Rumi)

INTRODUCTION

Partial, Muslim Cosmopolitanism

In a new sort of discourse defined by Carl Ernst and Richard Martin in *Rethinking Islamic Studies* as “post-Orientalist,” emerging throughout the last three decades, the study of the Islamicate world in the humanities and social sciences has found in Cosmopolitanism theory an alternative to Orientalism. To be part of this new discourse, studies of literature need to look for works that stress what Bruce Lawrence calls “Muslim Cosmopolitanism” instead of those adapted to the expectations of a biased public affected by mainstream media, especially after 9/11. Though Lawrence does not give an explicit definition of the term, he associates it with “the challenge to redefine Islam apart from both fundamentalists/Islamists and their statist/nationalist opponents..., project[ing] a larger, cosmopolitan canopy for Islam beyond the iterations, at once local and ideological, of several Muslim actors.” Using the word “challenge,” Lawrence echoes Kwame Anthony Appiah that “Cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution

but of the *challenge* [emphasis mine]” (Appiah xv), and states in the case of Muslim Cosmopolitanism what the challenge is: creating a new discourse in the middle of competing representational forms” (Lawrence 306).

It should be noted, however, that as this study adopts cosmopolitanism as a new discourse and argues for tracing its manifestations in the theater of Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed, it is necessary to refer to debates on and critiques of cosmopolitanism. In Critiques like John Gray’s “Easier Said than Done,” Serge Latouche’s *The Westernization of the World: Significance, Scope and Limits of the Drive towards Global Uniformity* (1996), Danilo Zolo’s *Cosmopolis: Prospects for World Government* (1997), Craig Calhoun’s *Cosmopolitanism and Belonging: From European Integration to Global Hopes and Fears* (2006), one finds cosmopolitanism, or the ways it is presented by cosmopolitan writers, is criticized as, at best, elitist and too ideal to put into practice, and, more important, as Western-centric, ultimately a reiteration of orientalism and neocolonialism. Central to critiques of cosmopolitanism are these questions: What does it mean to be cosmopolitan? Where do we locate cosmopolitans in relation to their own local cultures and the world at large?

In “‘Belonging’ in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary” (2003), Calhoun argues that “cosmopolitan liberals often fail to recognize the social conditions of their own discourse, presenting it as freedom from social belonging rather than a special sort of belonging, a view from nowhere or everywhere rather from particular social spaces. The views of cosmopolitan elites express privilege; they are not neutral apprehensions of the whole.” Calhoun also suggests, “an approach that starts with individuals and treats culture as contingent cannot do justice to the legitimate claims made on behalf of ‘communities,’

and the reasons why ‘thick attachments’ to particular solidarities still matter—whether in the forms of nations, ethnicities, local communities, or religions (532). Calhoun does not argue against cosmopolitanism, but objects to the way cosmopolitan writers present it: “Cosmopolitanism need not be presented as the universalistic enemy of particular solidarities, but it often is.” For Calhoun, both extreme cosmopolitans¹ and moderates misrepresent cosmopolitanism: “Nussbaum and other extreme cosmopolitans, and to a lesser extent many of the moderates, present cosmopolitanism first and foremost as a kind of virtuous deracination, a liberation from the possibly illegitimate and in any case blinkering attachments of locality, ethnicity, religion, and nationality.” Thus, Calhoun is concerned with locating cosmopolitans *somewhere* in the world. He contends, “Cosmopolitanism is a presence not an absence, an occupation of particular positions in the world, not a view from nowhere or everywhere” (544).

Calhoun’s is a legitimate concern, and perhaps Appiah’s biggest contribution to cosmopolitan studies is addressing questions about the position of cosmopolitans through the concept of “partiality.” In “Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism” Chike Jeffers explains, “The question of partiality as it relates to cultural cosmopolitanism is whether the cosmopolitan is claiming only that one need not be situated within a single cultural tradition in order to flourish or, more strongly, that one cannot flourish unless one has transcended attachment to a single culture” (490). While this question, as Jeffers observes, may lead to an

¹ Distinctions between different types of cosmopolitanism (institutional and moral, political and cultural, extreme and moderate) need to be considered. For more details on these distinctions see Samuel Scheffler’s “Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism,” Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker’s *Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Canada and the World* (pp 32-35) and Bryan Lueck’s “On Cosmopolitanisms.” Among these distinctions, the one between extreme and moderate cosmopolitans, is crucial to this study. Unlike moderate cosmopolitans, who, like Appiah, stress the importance of one’s obligations to both the local and the universal, extreme cosmopolitans unduly emphasize universal allegiances to the neglect of connections with local cultures.

ambiguous cosmopolitan position— Jeffers finds Waldron’s “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative” an example of this ambiguity— Appiah makes it clear that cosmopolitans do not transcend attachment to a single culture, but, on the contrary, as we will see in this study, maintaining one’s local affiliations is necessary for partial cosmopolitans to hold the possibility for resistance of colonial hegemony. Jeffers finds “promising points in Appiah’s work, at which he can be seen as working toward an anti-Eurocentric form of cosmopolitanism,” but also “problematic points, at which he can be seen as failing to participate in what we might call the decolonization of the ideal of world citizenship” (488-89). The present study does not defend cosmopolitanism in general or Appiah in particular against critiques as such, for these, unlike critiques of orientalism, are more complementary than polemical. But I make use of what Jeffers calls “promising points” to trace cosmopolitanism in the theatre of Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed. One of these points, which, again, lies in Appiah’s “partial cosmopolitanism” is illustrated by Jeffers in the example of Appiah’s father:

In a handwritten draft of the final message he had meant to leave his children, the elder Appiah wrote: “Remember that you are citizens of the world.” The younger Appiah mentions this with the specific intent of presenting his father as a perfect example of the partial cosmopolitan, for the same father who encouraged this feeling of world citizenship in his children also wrote a book entitled *The Autobiography of an African Patriot*, published a newspaper column entitled “Is Ghana Worth Dying For?” (the answer being yes), and was loyal as well to his ethnic group, the Asante, and to his particular matriclan. (501)

The significance of Appiah's father as an example of partial cosmopolitanism, as Jeffers suggests, helps us set the cosmopolitan discourse apart from Western-centrism and allows for a space of resistance as we attempt to draw the position of cosmopolitans.

Similarly, in "Easier Said Than Done", a critical review of Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, John Gray acknowledges the importance of Appiah's partial cosmopolitanism in addressing the "tension" between the universal and the particular elements in the identity of cosmopolitans: "The idea that we have universal moral obligations is not always easily reconciled with the practices and beliefs that give particular human lives their meaning. Appiah recognizes this tension, and writes: 'There will be times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.'" (Gray 26)

As stated earlier, "challenge" is a key word in this study. While Gray sees it as evidence for Appiah's recognition of the tension between two apparently irreconcilable loyalties, I see it as a meeting point between partial cosmopolitanism and Muslim cosmopolitanism, especially when Bruce Lawrence uses the same word to define the latter: the challenge to represent Islam amid several claimants. Another key term in this study is Hodgson's "Islamicate," which also arises from a recognition of a similar tension between the local and the universal and the problematic usage of the word "Islamic" which conceals the tension. By denoting intercultural formulations, the term "Islamicate" is a more accurate description of the cosmopolitan construction of the so-called Islamic civilization. Being aware of these interactions, Lawrence uses Hodgson's term to explain what it means to be a Muslim cosmopolitan: "At the very least, to be Muslim and cosmopolitan is to be

deeply rooted in a mindset and memory that is shaped not only by Islam but also by Muslim networks, the crucial index for the formation of Islamic or *Islamicate* civilization [my emphasis]" (Lawrence, "Rethinking Muslim Cosmopolitanism" 2).

Another observation about cosmopolitanism, as far as the scope of this study is concerned, is the importance of distinctions between cosmopolitanism and other related terms like globalization, humanism, liberalism, universalism, relativism. Gray believes that what distinguishes cosmopolitanism is that same element of "tension" referred to above between the particular and the universal, which, to the credit of partial cosmopolitans, does not allow for seeking "any ultimate consensus":

As a position in ethical theory, cosmopolitanism is distinct from relativism and universalism. It affirms the possibility of mutual understanding between adherents to different moralities but without holding out the promise of any ultimate consensus. There are human universals that make species-wide communication possible—and yet these commonalities do not ground anything like a single universally valid morality or way of life. Clearly this is a position that carries within it a certain tension. (26)

Gray suggests that by recognizing this tension Appiah's partial cosmopolitanism makes the distinction clear between cosmopolitanism and other related concepts. For the purposes of our study, this suggestion indicates that one may not be able to say Muslim universalism, Muslim globalization, Muslim humanism, Muslim liberalism, or Muslim relativism because all these terms that might be mixed up with cosmopolitanism do not allow for the sort of partiality implied in the word "Muslim." Hence the compatibility between Lawrence's Muslim cosmopolitanism and Appiah's partial cosmopolitanism.

This study proposes three research areas that vary considerably in the amount of literature available. One of them is the criticism of Western Orientalist discourse and Eastern “self-orientalization.” One may distinguish additional subdivisions within this first area. While Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is a critique of Orientalism as a Western discipline, Lila Abu-Lughod’s essay “Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies” (2001) criticizes Feminists from the Middle East for their tendency to reiterate the same stereotypical images as created and propagated in Western literature about the Orient. That is to say, Said’s subject is Orientalism in Western literature; Abu-Lughod’s is self-orientalization in Middle Eastern literature. In this same area there is still a critique concerned with “Occidentalism.” For example, Sadiq Jalal Al-‘azm in “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse” criticizes both Islamists and secular nationalists for adopting what he calls “the Islamanic trend.” Al-‘azm devised this neologism, “Islamanic,” to include secular nationalists, among whom Syrian poet Adonis might be the most prominent target of his criticism. Al-‘azm argues that “the analyses, beliefs and ideas produced by the Islamanic trend in defense of its central thesis simply reproduce the whole discredited apparatus of classical Orientalist doctrine concerning the difference between East and West, Islam and Europe.” He adds that “This reiteration occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only reversed to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgements” (Al-‘azm in Macfie, *Orientalism, A Reader* 234).

The second area appropriate to this study is the one that goes beyond criticism of this discourse of Orientalism, self-orientalization and “Orientalism in reverse” and provides an alternative discourse. Examples of this new trend are Carl Ernst and Richard

Martin's *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism* (2011), Hamid Dabashi's *Being a Muslim in the World* (2013), Lucian Stone and Jason B. Mohaghegh's *Iranian Identity and Cosmopolitanism* (2014). All these subscribe to cosmopolitanism as opposed to fundamentalism and Orientalism. This is the trend that this study attempts to be part of its discourse.

The third area is Sufism in literature. In his editor's foreword to Ziad Elmarsafy's *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (2012), Rasheed El-Enany, editor of *Edinburgh Studies in Arabic Literature*, emphasizes the need for more research in this area. For in spite of the substantial influence of Sufism on Arabic literature, "the study of representations of Sufism in Arabic fiction, let alone other genres, has received little scholarly attention and remains a field wide open for future researchers. The vast landscape needs to be surveyed, historical and socio-political connections established, developments delineated, links with world trends identified, and the tools of relevant literary theory brought to bear on all that" (El-Enany in Elmarsafy ix). Standing at the intersection between three research areas, my study contributes to this "endeavor" which El-Enany endorses.

The present study attempts to be part of the cosmopolitan discourse by introducing Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed as two cosmopolitans portraying in their plays shared human values, challenging Orientalist conceptions, regional sensibilities, and the dominant discourse. Besides drama, both of them have written in other genres; Ahmed's theater is even less known than his other writings. Though the present study deals with some of these other writings, like Al-Hakim's novel and Ahmed's poetry, to trace the evolvement of their intellectual careers, we focus on their

drama because the dialogic element allows for expounding more debates and discussing ideas from different perspectives. Al-Hakim is well-known for his drama of ideas, and I argue that Ahmed's theater is similarly an intellectual platform where he attempts to dramatize his own ideas on contemporary crucial issues of "Islamic" identity.

Al-Hakim's and Ahmed's cosmopolitan philosophies have a give-and-take relationship with Sufism. This relationship finds its best expression in the interactions between secular and religious characters in their plays. For example, Ali, the secular character in Ahmed's *Noor* (2007), uses his Sufi brother Abdullah as an exemplar of the religious person without excluding himself from the circle redrawn for a wider definition of Islam that challenges their "jihadist" brother Daoud's definition. For not only does he join the other two Muslim brothers in prayer, but the secular brother sees himself as the true jihadist: "We are struggling to create a modern society with law and order, justice and education for everyone. This is the true *jihad*, my *jihad*" (44). Similarly, the relationship between Shams (the name means "sun" denoting heavenly qualities) and her lover Qamar ("moon," suggesting earthly features) in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Shams Al-Nahār* (*Princess Sunshine*, 1965) is based on exchanging mutual benefits on the way towards *Al-insān Al-kāmil* (the perfect man). I argue that Al-Hakim and Ahmed have faced the challenge of drawing what Lawrence calls "a larger, cosmopolitan canopy of Islam" through this admixture of the secular and the religious in their plays.

Both Al-Hakim and Ahmed find a universal appeal in Sufism as they understand it. For them, though rooted in Islamic tradition, Sufism, like Rumi's compass that fixes one leg to one faith and moves the other around the world, is open to a larger humanist morality. So they employed it as part of a conversation between other competing

representatives of Islam. Designating spirituality “Eastern” can be used as a decolonizing force, an assertion of the difference between two cultures (East and West) and an internalization of some Orientalist ideas about Eastern versus Western values. This is a dominant feature of fundamentalist discourse; you may call it “self-orientalization,” “Orientalism in reverse,” or, as Vincent Cornell named it, “Occidentalism”:

For Muslim fundamentalists such as Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden, the epistemological crisis of Islam is seen as a clash of civilizations defined in terms of law and culture-- a conflict of values between Islam and the West. In such a view religion and culture are conflated. Islam is not only seen as a religious alternative to other faiths, but it is also cast as the cultural antithesis of the West. Similarly Christianity, Judaism, and secularism (no meaningful distinction is made among these categories) are cast as Western cultural villains. This rhetorical strategy, in which the Orientalist dichotomy of “the West versus the rest” is turned against itself, has been called “Occidentalism.” Occidentalism is a critique of Western civilization that utilizes the bipolar model of Orientalism but reverses the polarity such that an idealized image of a spiritual East is valued over a critical image of a materialistic West (Cornell 30-31).

There are two main questions: how do Al-Hakim and Ahmed attempt in their plays to go beyond fundamentalism and what we call Orientalism, while challenging or being challenged by what Cornell describes as an “epistemological crisis” created by the so-called clash of civilizations? And second how do their plays reflect cosmopolitanism in a moderate version called by Appiah “partial cosmopolitanism”? By admitting partisanship and partiality towards one’s homeland culture while having at the same time

“obligations” that surpass this particular culture, cosmopolitanism “sides neither with the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality” (Appiah, xv-xvii).

The plays we present here illustrate human common grounds, indicating a cosmopolitan attitude that goes beyond the geographical and mental dichotomies of East and West. Many of Al-Hakim’s plays— *Ṣalat Almala’ka* (*Angels’ Prayer* 1941) and *Shams Al-Nahār* (*Princess Sunshine* 1965) analyzed in this study as illustrative examples— share with Akbar Ahmed's two plays, *Noor* and *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*, an attempt to display a reconciliatory vision of a cosmopolitan Islam articulated in Sufi terms.

Few studies have introduced Tawfiq Al-Hakim to English readers. William Hutchins’s *Plays, Prefaces & Postscripts of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*, a translation of Al-Hakim’s work in two volumes, and *Tawfiq Al-Hakim, a Reader’s Guide* (2003) have been a great contribution. This study depends on Hutchins’s translation of Al-Hakim’s work, in addition to the original Arabic. M. M. Badawi’s *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* (1987) devotes a considerable part to Al-Hakim’s drama. There have been more recent studies of Al-Hakim’s work that question the relationship between the so-called East and West in his work, focusing mostly on his novels. Rasheed El-Enany’s “Tawfiq Al-Hakim and the West: A New Assessment of the Relationship” is an example. In addition to providing a new perspective from which we look at Al-Hakim’s drama, the present study aims at opening the door for literary studies of Akbar Ahmed’s plays, which belongs to the cultural dialogue that he strongly argues for in Sufi, Cosmopolitan terms as the antithesis to the so-called “clash of civilizations.”

This study contains three chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one, “Wherever My Wife Lives: Cosmopolitan Answers to Identity Questions” examines the complexity of questions about identity. Who are you? Where are you from? Or why are you doing something, assuming you should not do, given who you are, like a woman playing soccer, a man working as a nurse, a Jew supporting the Palestinian cause, etc.? I particularly focus on how identity questions relate to the Muslim identity crisis, arguing that Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s and Akbar Ahmed’s drama of ideas challenges identity markers, refutes the theory of clash of civilizations, and presents Muslim cosmopolitan answers to questions about identity. Chapter Two, “Tawfiq Al-Hakim: The National and the Cosmopolitan,” provides a cosmopolitan reading of Al-Hakim’s drama. I suggest that in some of his plays that are usually underestimated by critics as intellectually naïve there is a cosmopolitan tendency ignored by these critics. Chapter Three, “Akbar Ahmed: The Dilemma of Representation,” similarly deals with Akbar Ahmed’s drama. I argue that, dramatizing the dilemma of self-representation in the Muslim-majority communities, Ahmed highlights a cosmopolitan Muslim voice unheard among louder fundamentalist claimants to the “true” Muslim identity. The conclusion sums up my research findings and provides recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER I

“Wherever my wife lives”: Cosmopolitan Answers to Identity Questions

The following quotation from Anand Giridharadas’ nonfiction *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas* (2014) may help us establish the basis for the arguments made in this chapter about questions of identity as common themes in the theater of both Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed:

“Oh, no. Again, robbing today?” Rais thought. Oh, Texas—it was becoming a major irritation. “I know the drill,” Rais said, “that I have to open the cash register, open the cash, give him the money, and just stay safe.” *Click-whoosh*: the register opened. Rais removed \$150 or so and placed it on the counter. He made the perfunctory noise about please-take-the-money-but-don’t-hurt-me. He knew his lines by heart now; he was getting good.

But in this play the other player seemed not to know his part. The money did not faze him. All he said was “Where are you from?” (Giridharadas, *The True American* 27)

Where are you from? As if it were not unfortunate enough that people like Rais, a Bengali immigrant, are usually asked this question out of a presumably benign curiosity, the question this time is asked by a gunman who does not seem to be just curious. The gunman shoots him in the face, as if he wants to destroy those facial organs that always naturally (but now sadly, fearfully, and silently) tell where Rais is from. Unlike the two south Asian food mart attendants before him, who were killed by the same gunman in different marts,

Rais has miraculously survived. The gunman was Mark Anthony Stroman, a Texan white supremacist. The hate crime was committed in 2001, few days after 9/11.

Rais is the short version of Raisuddin Bhuiyan's first name. Bhuiyan is now a successful IT engineer and a peace activist. What makes him particularly significant is how he tried to save Stroman's life by campaigning against his execution. And after Stroman was executed, Bhuiyan kept communicating with his children. He even supported them financially, asking them to consider him their uncle. "'You may have lost a father,' he said [to Stroman's daughter], 'but you've gained an uncle'" (260). Bhuiyan believes that tolerance is an Islamic value and that Stroman has given him an opportunity to put it into practice.

Here one should not credulously assume that Islam, or any other religion for that matter, could be a fountain of values that a person automatically internalizes. To ask whether it is a religion of tolerance and peace or revenge and war is irrelevant to what religions are about. For both Usama Bin Laden and Raisuddin Bhuiyan are Muslim, as both Mark Stroman and Saint Teresa are Christian. However, the question whether Islam is compatible with American, or generally "Western," values has now imposed itself on public debates, gaining more urgency and traction with every tragic act of terrorism committed in the name of Islam. The latest big terrorist act, as I write, was in Paris, November 13, 2015, followed shortly by another in San Bernardino, California, both committed against innocent people by terrorists guided or inspired by ISIS², reviving the strength of the Islamophobic atmosphere which Rais fully experienced fourteen years ago. The good example of Rais as both a victim and a tolerant Muslim has always been

² Terrorist attacks by ISIS and similar terrorist groups that happen more frequently in the Middle East don't get much attention from the mainstream western media.

overshadowed in the media by the perpetrators of these terrorist attacks, who have come illegitimately and forcefully to be publicly seen as “the true” representatives of Islam. While Rais’s picture has recovered from the deformation of Stroman’s shot, it seems to be impossible to rediscover under heaps of pictures of people like the San Bernardino shooters, Sayed Farouq and his wife, Tashfeen Malik. Unfortunately the latter are more interesting to politicians, media editors, and institutions of power that thrive in the industry of fear. We have seen, as I write, how Donald Trump’s presidential campaign has gained traction from exploiting people’s fear after the latest terrorist acts. In this atmosphere, divisive statements from different ideological standpoints— like the religious Ben Carson’s that he cannot imagine a Muslim president in the white house³, and the atheist Bill Maher’s that Islam is not compatible with American values—gain more public support than reconciliatory ones like Barack Obama’s, or even George W Bush’s, speeches where a clear distinction is made between the majority peaceful Muslims and the very few terrorists. Unfortunately these speeches are labelled by many as a sort of “political correctness,” a label now targeting many efforts to support disempowered minorities. No matter how genuine, these efforts can simply be shunned by political adversaries, who, like most 2016 Republican presidential candidates, aim to gain public support by reiterating how they are “sick of political correctness.”

For the purposes of the present study, it is useful to see how characters— whether real like Bhuiyan and Stroman, or fictional like the characters we will see in the plays of Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed— challenge identity questions such as “who are you”

³ “As if we don’t have one already in the white house!” Remarks Bassem Yousef, a political satirist sometimes called “the Egyptian Jon Stewart.” See Yousef’s hosting introduction to the 2015 International Emmy Awards: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RURwkgJ-3Q>

and “where are you from,” or media controversial questions such as whether Islam is compatible with Western values.

The best answer to identity questions is to leave them open, for not only they are always controversial and contentious, but they assume previously constructed answers that we tend commonsensically to think of as naturally true. Who is the true American in Giridharadas’s *The True American*? Ayad Akhtar, the 2013 Pulitzer winner in drama, rightly concludes,

Bhuiyan, Stroman. Extremes along the continuum of American identity, each an example with much to tell us about who we are. The one, an immigrant who, by dint of pluck and abilities, comes to embody some of the best of our nation’s values, as well as a trace of that unseemly, self-promoting daemon so central to the American self. The other, born and raised in Texas, defined by the narrow creed of his love for motorcycles and guns and naked women, reveals the costs of a nation beholden to ruthless competition and relentless individualism, a society that winnows out the less capable, the more damaged, and where festering rage seeks a violent discharge. Which of these men is the “true American” of the title? That there is no simple answer to that question is Giridharadas’s finest accomplishment.

(Akhtar, *The New York Times*, May 8, 2014)

While Akhtar finds Giridharadas’s finest accomplishment is the blurring of identitarian boundaries, Eboo Patel, an interfaith activist and author of *Acts of Faith* and *Sacred Ground*, maintains,

My one quibble with this book is that Giridharadas, while plumbing the depths of Bhuiyan's Muslim heart, misses a wide-open opportunity to get to the heart of Islam. There are a few beautiful pages about hajj, a reference to the prophet Muhammad's example of mercy and some interesting insights about forgiveness in Muslim law. But there's very little to indicate that mercy is considered the central value of the faith by many scholars of Islam, and that Bhuiyan's decision to forgive Stroman and fight for his life goes right to the core of the tradition. [...] But that's my personal proclivity. This is a book about the many dimensions of America, not the many interpretations of Islam. (Patel, *Washington Post*, May 9, 2014)

In response to Patel's observation that *The True American* is more about America than Islam, Giridharadas jests that he is "not an expert on Islam like Rick Santorum!" I don't claim to be an expert on Islam either, but at least one needs to examine some terms about Islam that are crucial to this study because of their associations with the common understanding of Islam as part and parcel of today's conflict, a conflict that Huntington and others call a "clash of civilizations." While examining some terms that apply to Islam and Muslims, let's think of the question what Islam is and who Muslims are as a framework to a much-needed reassessment of the accuracy and significance of these terms.

What is Islam and Who are Muslims?

Once upon a time there was an uncircumcised American young man who, for some reason, wanted to convert to Islam. He went to a mosque and asked a group of international Muslim students what he should do. As in Islam there did not have to be a sort of clergy to attend for any baptism-like ceremony, which is good, the young man was

told by the group that he needs to do nothing except for saying the shahada. “Repeat after me,” one of them said, “Ashhadu.”... Upon dictating the whole statement they gave him a hug, “Congratulations, brother, now you’re Muslim.” “Oh, is it that simple?” he asked. “Yaah...” one of them hesitantly said, but another, who seems to be more knowledgeable, vehemently objected “no, you have to do all the obligatory *furūd*, pray five times every day, fast during Ramadan days, pay zakat, and do hajj. Don’t eat pork and don’t drink wine. Don’t smoke... wait a minute, are you aah... I don’t know how to say it in English. Can one of you help me? I want to tell him about *tahara*, you know, or specifically *khitān*, because we want to make sure that that part of his penis has been cut off. Did you do that, Brother? If not, you have to do it.”

“Do what, cut part of my penis off? ... I don’t want to be a Muslim, then.”

“This is not that simple, Brother, your head would be cut off if you leave Islam.”

This joke might serve a variety of purposes. You may see one like this among comics in a magazine like *Charlie Hebdo*. Or, worried that “Islam” might come back to threaten his territory, someone like Pat Robertson might present it to his TV audience without any sense of humor as an illustration of what really Islam is and who Muslims are. Similarly, from the other extreme vantage point, the Anjem Choudary, spokesman of MAC (Muslims Against Crusaders, now a banned group in Britain), would not see it as a joke at all, because he believes this is how people should know Islam, no concessions, no compromise, “like it or not,” he would say, “this is who we are.” It is in the interest of both Robertson and Choudary that their like-minded audiences do not realize that the joke is based on the one loud voice among other voices still struggling to be heard. In one of his TV interviews, Choudary argues that while in fact there is only one Islam, which is his

Islam, the idea of Islam being diverse or multidimensional is part of a Western imperialist plan to divide “the Islamic world.”

Choudary’s argument makes perfect sense to his fundamentalist audience, considering the popular imperialist strategy of “divide and conquer.” But contrary to this prevailing conception of what modern imperialism has done in the so-called Islamic world, the imperialist strategy was to unite and totalize rather than to divide what had already been a divided world. That is why in his most recent book, *Being a Muslim in the World*, Hamid Dabashi calls for “de-totalizing the world” (Dabashi 36). Here Dabashi attempts to deconstruct the term “Islamic”:

Let us consider the simple fact that there are more books, essays, and articles in English, French, German, and Italian with the apocryphal “Islam” and “Islamic” in their titles than there are in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu. Very rarely does the term “Islamic” appear in the entire spectrum of pre-modern Arabic, Persian, or Turkish primary sources. The term “Islamic” in fact begins to appear with some degree of frequency in modern Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu only after the Orientalist project had made it hegemonically viable. The colonial power of the French and the British was translated into the positivist power of the Orientalists to brand the object of their study “Islamic.” The missionary zeal of the Christian Orientalists in particular was very conveniently attracted to the clerical institutions and sacred texts. Equally attracted to these texts were Orientalists, with the European project of Enlightenment as their subtextual motivation. This dual attraction to “Islamic societies” is perhaps the only way that one can account for the overwhelming number of texts edited and translated by Orientalists in religious

sciences, whereas the humanist sources (as one specific manifestation of the worldly) did not receive nearly as much attention in critical editions. The point here is not to distinguish the “religious” from the “humanist,” but to point to their dialectical organicity in the intellectual history of Muslims. (37-8)

In fact, what Dabashi calls the “dialectical organicity” between the religious and the humanist is what many Muslims are unable to identify themselves with. While those Muslims need to take advantage of the idea that the so-called “Islamic culture” has always been cosmopolitan, they focus their debate on whether this cosmopolitanism has been theologically acceptable rather than culturally useful. This space of “theocentricity” is where Orientalism meets with Fundamentalism. Muslim Fundamentalism is concerned with keeping the “religious” apart from the “cultural” with a sense of vocation and missionary zeal. So what Muslim fundamentalists are unconsciously touting now is what Orientalists have sold, namely the illusion of a “true” Islam divorced from the world in which, as Dabashi suggests, it has been anthropologically constructed. In *Shattering the Myth, Islam beyond Violence*, Bruce Lawrence contends, “Just as there is no single America or Europe or the West, a seamless caption etching diverse groups and persons with the same values and meanings, so there is no single place or uniform culture called Islam. There is no monolithic Islam” (Lawrence 4).

The “myth” of a true, authentic Islam versus a similarly mythical West creates a common ground where fundamentalists of all sorts clash with each other— for example, Robertson versus Choudary— and with the rest of the world at the same time—the Islamist project of ISIS. It should be noted, however, that as Robertson may not represent all Christian fundamentalism, not all Muslim fundamentalists are like Choudary and ISIS; this

is fundamentalism in its extreme version. That is to say, one ought not to fall into a slippery slope fallacy by claiming there is no difference between ISIS and, for instance, the Nation of Islam, or the Muslim Brotherhood, a revivalist, Islamist, fundamentalist organization founded in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna in Egypt. But it is safe to argue that both are inspired by the same myth, a true, authentic Islam that every Muslim must seek behind heaps of cultural corruption to reach the purity of an early Islam. Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the Muslim Brotherhood's main ideological reference, believes Muslims have relapsed to *Jahiliya*, meaning a state of ignorance associated with the way people used to live before Islam, and suggests a return to an "original" Islam:

If Islam is again to play the role of the leader of man-kind, then it is necessary that the Muslim community be restored to its original form

It is necessary to revive that Muslim community which is buried under the debris of the man-made traditions of several generations, and which is crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs which are not even remotely related to the Islamic teachings, and which, in spite of all this, calls itself 'the world of Islam.' Qutb, *Milestones*, 2)

The relationship between Muslims and others, in which Dabashi detects a "dialectical organicity in the intellectual history of Muslims" suggests for Qutb a point of contention between a divinely revealed Islam and "debris of the man-made traditions of several generations." In Qutb's analysis, Islam has not developed an organic connection with the world, or rather discourages the establishment of such a connection in the first place. Nor has dialectics been its *modus operandi*.

Qutb was a literary critic⁴— the first one to write about Naguib Mahfouz, introducing him to Egyptian readers. His reading of historical narratives, however, has been far from a literary reading that analyzes more deeply the dynamics of human relations. In the fifties, Derrida, Said and Foucault were not available yet, but Hegel’s dialectics or Bakhtin’s dialogism, for example, whether he read them or not, could have been useful in this regard. In both Hegelian dialectics and Bakhtinian dialogics, opposing viewpoints collide but never stop at the stage of collision. But collision seems to be the beginning and end in Qutb’s unilinear analysis of Islam’s encounter with other traditions. The word “debris” (*ḥuṭām*) suggests that traditions other than Islam have been ruined, that is Islam did not assimilate or interact with them, but either destroyed them or they just collapsed for being made by humans, while Islam, “God’s only true religion,” remained as intact as it has always been since the creation of Adam, who was, according to the canonical narrative of the origin of Islam, the first man and the first prophet. The picture of the traditions’ debris as part of Qutb’s reading of this narrative, however, is still ambiguous. How did they collapse? Was it a collision, where a heavenly body fell on a man-made construction? If so— it can be so only if we agree on Qutb’s monoglossic reading of the canonized narrative of Islam’s history—that heavenly body responsible for their fall must be the original Islam which Qutb urges Muslims to find. While even those who agree on Qutb’s reading need to question whether it is still discernable what is

⁴ Qutb is not just a literalist. Literary style is still a feature of his religious interpretation. This is why he has been rejected by Salafi scholars like Al-Albany, Bin Baz, and Al-Hewaini, who represent the Wahhabi school of Salafism. For them, metaphorical expressions are prohibited in theological speech due to their “misleading” connotations. Therefore, one cannot say Usama Bin Laden, ideologically a Wahhabi, was simply inspired by Qutb. For an example of this simplification, see Christiane Amanpour’s CNN documentary *God’s Muslim Warriors: Sayyid Qutb*: <http://www.cnn.com/videos/international/2012/08/21/amanpour-muslim-warriors-b.cnn>.

originally Islamic and what is not under “the debris of other traditions”, a heteroglossic reading of the so-called Islamic history, I argue, would enable us to answer questions about Islamic identity in cosmopolitan rather than fundamentalist terms.

The cosmopolitan here corresponds with Kwame Antony Appiah’s definition of cosmopolitanism in one of its strands as “the recognition that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other’s differences” instead of stressing clash as an inevitable consequence of being different. Appiah calls this dialectical relationship between the local and the universal “partial cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 4).

Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Sayyid Qutb

The case of Qutb is important here because of his inspirational experience with encountering the Other. He travelled to America in 1948 to study literature, but soon found that America and the West in general, though materialistically advanced, can provide nothing significant in the humanities, and it is only Islam that could balance materialism with spirituality. Qutb’s role as a guide to Islamists parallels secular writers who shared similar experience; i.e. measuring their own identity against the West as the Other. Tawfiq Al-Hakim, the subject of the next chapter, was one of these writers. Like Taha Husayen’s *Adeeb* and Yahya Haqqi’s *Qandil umm Hashim*, Al-Hakim’s *‘Usfūr min Al-Sharq* is about an Egyptian, Arab Muslim who travels to a Western country and experiences an identity challenge.

The response to this challenge is similar to Qutb’s in premise and conclusion. In the travel experience of both Muhsin and Qutb we find the premise of difference and the conclusion that we must be better than the Other. Even how we are different and better,

according to both of them, is based on the same ideal of balancing the spiritual and material. This ideal is culturally “Eastern” and religiously “Islamic”.

Qutb and Al-Hakim were friends. When Qutb was in America, Al-Hakim sent him a copy of his play *Al-Malik Ūdīb* (an adaptation of Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*). In response to Al-Hakim’s gift, Qutb writes a letter to Al-Hakim in *Al-Risala* magazine⁵ (5/16/ 1949):

صديقي الكبير الأستاذ توفيق الحكيم شكرًا لك على هديتك الكريمة؛ كتابك الجديد "الملك أوديب"، إنها شيء عزيز ثمين بالقياس إلى هنا في تلك الورشة الضخمة السخيفة التي يسمونها العالم الجديد، لقد استروحت، في كلمة الإهداء "ممن يذكرُك دائمًا"، نسمة رخيمة من روح الشرق الأليف؛ فالذكرى هي خلاصة الروح، وما كان أحوجني هنا إلى تلك النسمة الرخيمة، إنَّ شيئًا واحدًا ينقص هؤلاء الأميركيين- على حين تزخر أمريكا بكل شيء- شيء واحد لا قيمة له عندهم... الروح!.

In spite of Qutb’s appraisal of Al-Hakim’s literary achievement, Qutb wishes Al-Hakim had not travelled to Paris. He believes that Western thought has affected the authenticity of Al-Hakim’s drama, and therefore advises him to return to the original cultural heritage of the East. He warns him against Taha Hussain’s belief in a cultural affinity between Egypt and the Greek, and at the same time praises Naguib Mahfouz’s *Khān Al-Khalīli* and Yahia Haqqi’s *Qandīl umm Hāshim* for being inspired by an authentic Eastern spirit.

Al-Hakim and Qutb were in fact representing two wings of a struggle for identity in post-colonial Egypt. Though one is apparently secular and the other religious, the boundary between them is blurred by a shared concept of the relationship between the East and the West—the overwhelming idea that the West is lacking in “spirit” was a feature of

⁵ Inaugurated in 1933 by Ahmad Hassan Al-Zayyat, *Al-Risala* was dedicated to literary views and debates of the 20th century pioneer Arab writers.

their literary and intellectual ventures. But while Qutb turned to religious radicalism, as his *Milestones* suggests, and was eventually executed in 1966 by Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the abundance of Al-Hakim's production over a long period of time (writing from the twenties to the eighties of the last century) and complexity of his thought, allows us to look at him from a different dimension—the next chapter traces a cosmopolitan tendency in his plays that challenges the binaries of the East and the West, the West and the Rest or, by extension, Islam and the West.

The latter binary, Islam and the West, has now prevailed, at least in mainstream Western media, as presumably the subject of civilizational clash. While Edward Said rightly argues that this is an Orientalist misconception and misplacement of a religion in opposition to a wider culture called the West (Said, *Covering Islam*), the connection between Qutb and Al-Hakim helps us see the native intellectual underpinnings of this binary as the basis of post-colonial identity. In *Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity: Culture and Ideology in India and Egypt*, Anshuman Mondal observes, “The mode of [Al-Hakim's] Easternism anticipated the later ‘Islamic turn’ of Egyptian political discourse” (176). This political discourse culminated in the rise of Mohamed Morsi, one of the Muslim Brotherhood's Qutbist leaders, as the first democratically elected president of Egypt one year after the revolution of January 25, 2011. The revolution was one major event of the so-called Arab Spring. In spite of the Muslim Brotherhood's claim that they were part of the revolution⁶, the election of Morsi was, in fact, an assertion of the same

⁶ The Muslim Brothers' claim is technically true, because they shared in the revolution, but only after there had been clear indicators of its potential success. They hitherto negotiated a deal with Mubarak's regime that would allow him to stay in power. For some commentators, they “hijacked” a revolution that was secularly motivated—the revolution's objectives were *'ish* (bread), *karāma* (dignity), *ḥorriya* (freedom) and *A'dāla idjtmā'īya* (social justice).

ideological and epistemological structures of postcolonial nationalism and Islamism, which may have stifled hopes for real change.

The Arab Spring and the Hope for New Structures

Writing about the Arab Spring on its first, hopeful days, as most notably manifested in the collapse of long-established dictatorships—Bin Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt—Hamid Dabashi draws in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* an optimistic vision he believes the revolutionary events carry not only within the region of their occurrence, but for the whole world:

In understanding what is happening in North Africa and the Middle East, we are running out of metaphors. We need new metaphors. Even the word "revolution" - understood anywhere from Karl Marx to Hannah Arendt - needs rethinking. Such a new language of the revolution will cast the impact of "the Arab Spring" on national and international politics for generations to come. These uprisings have already moved beyond race and religion, sects and ideologies, pro- or anti-Western. The term "West" is more meaningless today than ever before - it has lost its potency, and with it the notion, and the condition, we had code-named postcoloniality. The East, the West, the Oriental, the colonial, the postcolonial - they are no more. What we are witnessing unfold in what used to be called "the Middle East" (and beyond) marks the end of postcolonial ideological formations. [...] As I write, the Arab revolutions, each with a different momentum, are creating a new geography of liberation, which is no longer mapped on colonial or cast upon postcolonial structures of domination; this restructuring points to a far more radical emancipation, not only in these but, by extension, in adjacent societies and in an

open-ended dynamic. This permanent revolutionary mood has already connected the national to the transnational in unexpected and unfolding ways, leading to a reconfigured geopolitics of hope. [...] These variations on the theme of delayed defiance hinge on the idea that the revolutions are simultaneously a rejection not just of the colonial oppression they have inherited but, *a fortiori*, of the postcolonial ideologies that had presented and exhausted themselves as its antithesis in Islamist, nationalist or socialist grand narratives.

The end of “postcolonial ideological formations” and the “reconfigured geopolitics of hope”, seemed plausible in 2011, when Dabashi was writing about the first blooming flowers of the Arab Spring. Now, as I write, all this, unfortunately, looks farfetched, even in terms of aspirational dreams.

Disillusionment rather than hope has taken over. On June 16-17, 2012 the second round of Egyptian presidential elections had only two equally disappointing options left to voters: either Morsi as representative of religious fundamentalism, or Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak’s last prime minister. While many boycotted the second round, some liberal pundits sided with Islamists and voted for Morsi, the one they thought was not quite as bad, so as to prevent the return of Mubarak’s men to power. Those were called by their fellow revolutionaries “the lemon squeezers⁷.” From this point on the curve of expectations went lower and lower. Morsi was elected, but his failure to stand against pressures from both Islamists who were anxious to see “Islamic shari’a” implemented and government institutions that saw Muslim Brothers creeping into positions of power ended up in what some people describe as a second revolution because of the millions of people

⁷ To squeeze lemon on something unacceptable means you ameliorate it so that you might be able to accept it. To take it with a grain of salt may be close but not exactly the same.

who on June 30, 2013 demonstrated against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, while some others focus on the army intervention as an indication that Morsi's rule was brought to end by a military coup rather than a popular revolution. Regardless of who is right and who is wrong, this was the beginning of an unprecedented division in the Egyptian society. Marshal Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi, the Defense Minister, was eventually elected president. Now people have limited their aspirations to stability, the revolutionary objectives of freedom and social justice became a luxury as Egyptians are constantly reminded that they are now better, or rather not so bad as Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, where people paid a higher price for daring to rebel against their rulers.

With maybe Tunisia as the sole exception, the Arab Spring has had disastrous consequences. It resulted in civil wars, terror, and millions of Arab refugees all over the world. Still more millions of people feel they were not so bad before the revolutions as they are right now. But have the revolutions failed to sustain Dabashi's vision of new structures other than the colonial and postcolonial?

The gloomy picture of what may be rightly called "the Arab Fall" does not mean the end of hopes. For under the revolutions' ashes, governments in relatively stable countries like Egypt will always anticipate potential fire. While this may insinuate more security measures into daily life at the expense of liberties, it will urge them to take into account a big sector of people that were hitherto ignored. Those are mostly young people who have been empowered by the social media, by creative means of protest like graffiti and other artistic and literary forms that have been inspired by the revolutions.⁸ In his

⁸ See Eyad Houssami's *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre 2012*.

Rubā'iyat (Quatrains) Salah Jahin 1930-86), one of the most popular Egyptian poets, anticipated this revolutionary spirit that art could resonate about fifty years earlier,

My heart, once a baby rattle, has become a bell أنا قلبي كان شخشيخة أصبح جرس

When I rang it, servants and guards woke up جللت به صحبوا الخدم والحرس

I am the Clown, why did you get up in fear أنا المهرج .. قمتمو ليه خفتو ليه

I have no sword, I ride no horse لا ف إيدي سيف ولا تحت منى فرس

How strange!! عجبي!!

(my translation)

Even if the early spirit of Arab Spring has turned into disillusion and apathy, which might render Dabashi's expectations naïve or at least overambitious, the hope for new structures as alternatives to colonialism and postcolonialism still persists. This hope ought to survive ostensibly frustrating sociopolitical circumstances.

Muslim Cosmopolitanism as a New Structure

Once asked where he was from, Goha⁹ replied “Wherever my wife lives.” Let's have this popular Egyptian proverb in mind while Bryan Lueck is examining in “On Cosmopolitanisms” Diogenes's reply to the same question:

The origins of moral cosmopolitanism can be traced back to the Cynic philosopher

Diogenes, who is responsible for the doctrine's name. Asked where he came from,

Diogenes answered provocatively that he was a *kosmopolitēs*, a citizen of the

⁹ Goha (Juha in standard Arabic) is the Egyptian name given to a popular transnational, multiethnic jokester. He is known in Turkey and Iran as Nasruddin Khoja (or Nasreddin Hodja), in India and Pakistan as Mulla Nasruddin, in Iraq and eastern Africa as Abu Nuwaas. While Nasruddin was a Muslim Sufi master, who lived during the thirteenth century and died near today's Turkish city of Konya, he still seems to be an immortal trickster whose stories are adapted to different cultures and times. Jews, for example, know him as Joha and tell his stories as part of Sephardic folklore (see Matilda Kon-Sarano's *Folktales of Joha, a Jewish Trickster* 2010).

world. In pronouncing himself a citizen of the world, Diogenes articulated what might be called the negative thesis of moral cosmopolitanism: he denied that his identity was bound up with the polis, which was regarded by the most important political thinkers of the time as providing the necessary normative context for the well-lived life. Diogenes denied the normative force of *nomos* or custom, including the norms of political life, emphasizing instead the importance of living in accordance with human nature, which is common to us all. He does not seem to have worked out any determinate conception of the positive obligations we have toward other human beings in virtue of this common nature. (Lueck in Mohaghegh and Stone, *Iranian Identity and Cosmopolitanism* 160-1)

Goha came from his wife's place, somewhere in the world. Like Diogenes's, Goha's answer is "provocatively" cosmopolitan; no one knows where his wife came from. But unlike Diogenes, Goha has a wife that gives his cosmopolitanism a local color, an affiliation to custom— i.e. marriage, family, home, etc., a circle that is smaller than the cosmos, but still inside its big circle. In other words, if Diogenes did not have "any determinate conception of the positive obligations we have toward other human beings," as Lueck suggests, Goha did have that conception, simply because he associated the place he came from with his wife, though we still don't know where he or his wife came from.

Contrary to Diogenes's "rootless cosmopolitanism," Goha's can be described in terms of Lueck's analysis of different sorts of cosmopolitanism as "moral" (takes into account moral codes of particular societies) or "moderate" (does not go to the extreme of ignoring local traditions). This cosmopolitanism is similarly called in Appiah's terms "rooted" or "partial." As Goha's character is at least similar to, if not the same, as that of

the Muslim Sufi master Nasruddin Khoja, and as cosmopolitanism can be, or rather should be, partial, it will be useful to examine Bruce Lawrence's "Muslim Cosmopolitanism" as a new methodological structure in the field of Islamic studies. Lawrence relays how he needed to explain the term, defending its value in both academic and public contexts:

It was three years ago that I first began to think of conjoining 'Muslim' with 'cosmopolitan'. Since then I have defended the term's value to academic audiences in a number of seminars and conferences. But here I want to answer some of the queries raised by my relatives around the dinner table. The objections that they voiced were: 1) no religion can infringe on the 'secular' nature of cosmopolitan identity; 2) every cosmopolitanism is class based and socially restricted; 3) the media has defined Islam as 'terror', and so the decoupling of Islam from terror and relinking it with a perspective at once normative and even 'cosmopolitan' challenges members of Generation Y; 4) Muslims themselves do not universally embrace cosmopolitanism as their preferred identity but 5) even if they did, and also saw it as the basis for future social capital, one would have to find a more catchy way to describe it, perhaps linking it to motifs, moments and heroes of the Islamic past. (Lawrence, *Transcultural Islam Research Network* 9/1/2012: <http://tirnscholars.org/2012/09/01/muslim-cosmopolitanism/>)

Addressing objections to the term "Muslim Cosmopolitanism," Bruce Lawrence suggests that we should go beyond "standard nomenclature," which means to challenge not only labels and stereotypes proliferated about the so-called Muslim world through the media but

also the terminology of Islamic studies. Lawrence defines Muslim Cosmopolitanism as a “trans-cultural arc of an Islam inspired engagement with the inclusive, generous and creative imagining of our common humanity.” Marshall Hodgson’s invention of the word “Islamicate”, as Lawrence observes, contributes to a movement towards a nonstandard nomenclature, and helps us see Muslim Cosmopolitanism as a historical reality rather than an oxymoron. It makes the distinction between religion and culture clear and at the same time draws the lines of convergence between the religion of Islam and the cultures Muslims have interacted with for fourteen centuries. By incorporating both Islam as a religion and the cultures over which Islam has expanded and eventually absorbed, the word “Islamicate” suggests a historical, cosmopolitan construction of Islam.

As Hodgson has found an alternative to the anti-Cosmopolitan term “Islamic,” there have been more attempts to reconsider similarly exclusive terms like “Judeo-Christian” that is used to define the moral, religious values of the West. In “Conservative Ecumenism: Politically Incorrect Meditations on Islam and the West” Antony Sullivan argues that “the civilization of the contemporary West might more accurately be designated as ‘Abrahamic rather than ‘Judeo-Christian.’” He adds,

The latter term excludes Islam from the values that Jews and Christians are presumed to share. In that sense, Judeo-Christian is not only inaccurate but may in fact contribute to polarization between the West and a reinforcement of the stereotype of an alien and homogeneous Muslim enemy. The fact is that the term “Judeo-Christian” is a category invented and widely disseminated only during the past four decades. As late as the 1950s, the operative term for describing the heritage of the West was “Greco-Roman”. Precisely how and why “Judeo-

Christian” came to replace “Greco-Roman” is a story awaiting an author. With more than six million Muslims now [2005] in the United States, as against 5.6 million Jews, and major immigrant Muslim communities in Western Europe, the time may be ripe to rethink how most accurately to describe civilizations and categorise the monotheistic faiths. Most important to keep clearly in mind is that Islam is today fully in and of the West, just as the West has become in and of Islam. (Sullivan in Boase, *Islam and Global Dialogue* 142)

Anti-Cosmopolitan, Exclusive, particularistic terms like “Islamic” and “Judeo-Christian” serve Fundamentalists in both sides of the presumed clash of civilizations. They are the basis of narratives, like that in Sayyid Qutb’s *Ma‘ālim (Milestones)*. In Akbar Ahmed’s *Noor*, as illustrated in chapter three of this study, the character of Daoud represents such a narrative. Fundamentalists attempt to separate the religious from the cultural by asking what is essentially Islamic and what is not. In fact Muslim scholars usually disagree when confronted with this question, because what makes something Islamic or not is not easy to define in purely religious terms. The lack of consensus among religious scholars on answering questions, some of which may even challenge unquestionable tenets like the prohibition of alcohol, indicates that one cannot find theological answers to such questions without attributing some ahistorical values to the temporary, contingent accumulations of Islamicate history. By this essentialist approach, one could tell what is Islamic and what is not by quoting a religious text, or appealing to a certain medieval scholar’s interpretation of that text. The result is a fundamentalist rhetoric that leads to a zero-sum game that some Muslims end up in extremism and terrorism.

In Sufism¹⁰, the mystical tradition of Islam, Muslims could find an alternative to fundamentalist narratives. Great Sufis like Jalaluddīn Rumi and Muḥyiddīn ibn Al-‘Arabi— who, contrary to a today’s prevailing Salafist assumption labelling them heretics, were always part and parcel of Islamic tradition— have exhibited Muslim cosmopolitanism in theological and philosophical ways. In *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn Al-‘Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* William Chittick explains ibn Al-‘Arabi’s position:

If everyone has a belief, can we say that all beliefs are true? Most Muslim theologians would immediately say, “No, only belief in a true religion is a true belief.” The Shaykh [Ibn Al-‘Arabi], however, would not be so precipitous. He would most likely say that the answer depends on what we mean by “true.” If “true” means that knotting corresponds to reality, then of course all beliefs are true, since each belief represents some aspect of reality, however limited and distorted that aspect might be. If a belief did not correspond to reality in some way, it would not exist. Each belief represents the subjective side of an existential state. The fact that someone holds a belief proves that the belief coincides in some manner with the way things are, whether or not the believer’s mind establishes a real contact with what lies outside of itself. Hence, we can reach a preliminary conclusion that all beliefs are true, no matter what their content. (Chittick 139)

When “cosmopolitanism” is added to the word “Muslim,” then, the result should not be understood as an oxymoron, but rather as part of Islamic identity. Lawrence argues that “a Muslim cosmopolitan option is coming increasingly to the fore. Though it has competitors, detractors, dead ends, and detours, as well as no-win options, it remains the best advance

¹⁰ A discussion of Akbar Ahmad’s play *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* in Chapter three of this study provides more details about Sufism and Islam’s relationship with other beliefs.

toward a global future marked by binary striving (different but together) rather than by dyadic defeatism ('my way or the highway')." Lawrence concludes that Muslim Cosmopolitanism is "an idea whose time may have come, or come back, depending on your view of history. One conclusion remains indisputable: cosmopolitanism not fundamentalism and puritanism inflects the brightest Muslim future for the perilous 21st century" (Lawrence, *Transcultural Islam Research Network* 9/1/2012: <http://tirnscholars.org/2012/09/01/muslim-cosmopolitanism/>). The contribution of the Islamicate civilization should not be for Muslims a nostalgic escape from a dire present. For in fact Muslims are still part of the cosmopolitan process, unless we define Muslims as only those we see in the media threatening the world by their *jihad*. The history of the Islamicate world, however, can play an important role as far as Muslim cosmopolitanism is concerned. Lawrence attempts to answer the question of how "the historical background of Islamic civilization informs strategies for implementing Muslim cosmopolitanism in 21st century metacities." While Lawrence depends on history to illustrate his own arguments against the objections of "generation Y" to the term Muslim cosmopolitanism, here we rely on literature produced by Muslim writers whose works of art have reflected Muslim cosmopolitanism.

The Egyptian writer Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898?-1987) and the Pakistani Akbar Ahmed (b. 1943) are presented here in this study as examples of these writers. Though each writes in a different context to a different audience of a different time and place, Al-Hakim and Ahmed have much in common. They are two liberal Muslim intellectuals and playwrights who share similar concerns about the relationship between Islam and other cultures and religions. The differences between them, however, are not less important than

the similarities. For Al-Hakim wrote in Arabic mainly to an Eastern audience, while Ahmed's language is English addressed to the West. Thus my attempt here to trace areas of intersection will provide evidence for the illusory nature of the boundary traditionally set and ostensibly perceived between East and West. In addition, the two writers come from different regions of the Islamic world, and from different time periods, which allows us to see Islam's interaction with different cultures, philosophies and religions over a wide array of time and place.

Debates about the relationship between Islam and other religions and cultures are not new, but there have been historical developments, triggered most notably by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In the 21st century Muslim writers have had to deal with these debates more explicitly, finding themselves, whether they like it or not, on the defensive. So the debate between different versions of Islam on the one hand and between Muslims and non-Muslims on the other is more explicit in Ahmed's plays. His writing projects came to light when the confrontation with fundamentalism has become more urgent due to the historical growth in the public awareness of what is known as "the clash of civilizations." 9/11 has undoubtedly increased the interest of the public in Islam and in its relationship with other religions and cultures. But their knowledge in this regard has been nourished by theories and assumptions that were mostly inaccurate.

Clash of Civilizations

Towards the end of the twentieth century this growth of awareness of a clash between the West and Islam was fostered by the writings of Bernard Lewis, Francis Fukuyama, and Samuel Huntington. Huntington is usually thought to be the first to use the term "clash of civilizations." In fact the term is the title of an article he wrote in 1993. But

it had been used before by Bernard Lewis in his article “The Roots of Muslim Rage” (1990) and even much earlier by Basil Mathews, a Protestant missionary, in his *Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations* (1926). “Like Mathews’ Islam,” Richard Bulliet points out in *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, “Huntington’s Islam is beyond redemption. The book on Islam is closed. The strain of Protestant American thought that both men are heir to, pronounces against Islam the same self-righteous and unequivocal sentence of ‘otherness’ that American Protestants once visited upon Catholics and Jews” (Bulliet 5).

With this “otherness” having shifted to Islam, now the presumed clash has to be between Islam and the West. The two sides are depicted as monoliths. There is no distinction between different versions of Islam, as if it were only represented by Muslim fundamentalists alone, or at least that some inherent element of Islam led inevitably to fundamentalism—as when fundamentalists are called “more Islamic,” or when Donald Trump self-righteously claims, “Islam hates us.” There also seems to be a sort of inimical relationship between “Islamic” and “Western” civilizations, while in fact non-Muslims had been part of the Islamic civilization as Muslims were and are still contributing to the modern Western civilization. In *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (1998), a critique of Huntington’s article, Bassam Tibi, an Arab German political scientist, maintains “we must never lose sight of the distinction between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism,” and warns, “any promotion of hostility to Islam itself in the guise of a clash of civilizations would unwittingly play into the hands of the fundamentalists in their efforts to antagonize the West.” Three years after Tibi’s book was

published, one can read 9/11 as misrepresentation of the cultural relationship between Islam and the west, played into the hands of fundamentalists.

The misconception of the relationship between Islam and the west as a clash of civilizations found more public support through the media after 9/11. So a response of Muslim writers to the question of whether it is true or not that Islam is inimical to other religions and cultures has become more urgent now than it had ever been before. Writing to the contemporary western audience, Ahmed must have been aware of the public concern with the presumed clash of civilizations, especially after 9/11. Ted Merwin observes how this major event had been a turning point in Ahmed's career:

When the Pakistani scholar Akbar Ahmed arrived at American University in August 2001 as the new Ibn Khaldun chairman of Islamic Studies, he thought he knew what work lay ahead: Teach classes, write books and share his deep knowledge of Islamic religion and culture.

A month later, as the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were in ashes and flames, Ahmed quickly realized he had an urgent and timely mission: Bridge the yawning chasm between the West and the Muslim world. (Merwin, *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2007)

So the treatment of Islam in its relationship with other religions in Ahmed's drama is different from Al-Hakim's. Each one of them represents one of two different dramatic approaches to fundamentalism in the Islamicate world. While Ahmed's project in his two plays, *Noor* and *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*, focuses on today's encounter between cosmopolitanism and fundamentalism, even when the setting of one of his two plays is 17th

century Mughal India, and attempts to bring all the nuanced issues of concern in direct confrontation, Al-Hakim's project does not focus on this encounter in his plays, but many of his writings prefigure it. In other words, if Ahmed in his plays mediates in the conflict between fundamentalists and cosmopolitans in such a way that his audience might see the latter as more representative of Islam, Tawfiq Al-Hakim represents Muslim cosmopolitanism not by engaging in a dialogue with fundamentalism, but by exasperating fundamentalists who see a "distorted Islam" in his work. We will come to examples for each one's dramatic approach in the next two chapters, but here it is important to stress my observation that both of them have exhibited a cosmopolitan Muslim response to an assumed clash of civilizations that Huntington predicts "will dominate global politics."

Now Muslim writers need to take Huntington's prediction even more seriously because it seems to have come true. He eerily predicts "the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future." As we have witnessed 9/11 and the American-led coalition wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, some may give Huntington credit for the eerie prophecy, while others would read him as evidence for, or even part of, a conspiracy plotted to control the resources of the middle east, oil in particular, by some circles of power—it is never clear who exactly the plotters are, but they are always super powerful, and it is enough in the conspiracy rhetoric to refer to them as "they". Perhaps an important asset of the conspiracy theory is its refutation of Huntington's argument that clash is now cultural, not economic; it proves that economic resources still play the basic cause of clash. That is to say while cultural fault lines are still used to heat the conflict, economic factors motivate it in the first place. But both Huntigton and conspiracy theorists foster inaccuracy and misrepresentation. They only serve fundamentalist Muslims who sell their ideas on the

basis of both cultural clash and conspiracy. To speak about fault lines between Islam and the West we are in fact drawing these fault lines. They don't really exist unless we talk too much about them stressing what we think to be their fundamental role in shaping world politics.

A Challenge to Identity Markers

Tawfiq Al-Hakim was concerned with cultural differences between the East and the West, but never saw these differences as fault lines. In *'Uşfūr*, for example, the spiritual East and the material West are complementary rather than conflicting entities. Some of Al-Hakim's plays, like *Şalat Al-Malāika (Angels' Prayer)* and *Kul Shai' fī Mahalih (Nothing out of Place)* deconstruct questions about identity that constitute the foundation of Huntington's assertions.¹¹ Huntington maintains,

In the new world order [...] cultural identity is the central factor shaping a country's associations and antagonisms. While a country could avoid Cold War alignment, it cannot lack an identity. The question, 'Which side are you on?' has been replaced by the much more fundamental one, 'Who are you?' (Huntington 125)

If the question "who are you" now incites conflict it is because it is unnecessary and sometimes offensive. When answered by Muslims, this question may yield some answers that might be interpreted as equivalent to "backward," "terrorist," "misogynist," "homophobic," "racist," "dogmatic," etc. What religious or cultural community has no groups or individuals among them that would not be identified as such? A list of traits like these, however, has been ascribed to all Muslims qualifying them to be the antagonists of the modern civilized western world. It serves the interests of Muslim fundamentalists that

¹¹ See more detailed analysis of these two plays in Chapter two.

the dominant public conception of Islam antagonizes Muslims at large, for their ideas thrive only in an environment of hate. In this universal clash, the essentialist, unifying view of Islam parallels an equally misconstrued worldview of a monolithic West.

But Muslims can always challenge identity politics. For example, Layla Shaikley, a member of a recently known group of young American-Muslim hipsters jokingly calling themselves Mipsterz, describes a Mipster as "a young Muslim American just trying to find a space for themselves unapologetically ... reconciling multiple identities and doing it like a rock star" (*CNN*, June 3, 2015). Reconciling multiple identities is what Mipsterz might have done by self-identifying as such. But eventually one does not create his identity. Shaikley still complains that if people hate them it is not because they are hipsters but because they are Muslim. A Mipster's sister, brother, or a friend of his might have tried to reconcile multiple identities but found it more convenient to do it like an ISIS jihadist rather than a rock star. A headline from *the Daily Mail* reads "British rock musician turned ISIS extremist is luring teenage girls to Syria through Twitter with the promise of an 'awesome life' as a Jihadi bride." The latter's picture is more plausible in the public awareness now than the former, for a Muslim cannot be a hipster but can definitely be a terrorist. The British rock musician has become true to his identity, while the Mipster would hardly pass either as a Muslim or as a hipster no matter how she tries to reconcile multiple identities. The importance of the Mipsterz' example, however, lies in their challenging Huntington's implication that the question "who are you" can yield a definite answer.

Muhsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provides a similar example. This novel, written in the monologue style of Albert Camus' *La Chute* (*The Fall*), challenges

our casual identification of who a person is, and the way we usually identify Muslim fundamentalists. The novel opens with its main character, a Princeton graduate called Changez, after he quitted a prestigious job in America and went back to Pakistan, introducing himself to an American at a coffee shop in Lahore:

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a mission, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services.

How did I know you were American? No, not by the color of your skin; we have a range of complexions in this country, and yours occurs often among the people of our northwest frontier. Nor was it your dress that gave you away; a European tourist could as easily have purchased in Des Moines your suit, with its single vent, and your button-down shirt. True, your hair, short-cropped, and your expansive chest—the chest, I would say, of a man who bench-presses regularly, and maxes out well above two-twenty-five—are typical of a certain type of American; but then again, sportsmen and soldiers of all nationalities tend to look alike. Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you, and I do not mean that as an insult, for I see your face has hardened, but merely as an observation. (Hamid 1-2)

Here we find something more than the deception of appearance. Changez looks like an identity expert, like those constant guests in mainstream media who seem to be sure where

to locate boundaries between Islam and the West. In fact Hamid challenges this sort of “expertise” by introducing his hero as such. There are a number of identity markers that, as Changez rightly observes, don’t work in identifying an American. But he seems to fall into the same stereotyping mistake of media experts when he sees the stranger’s nationality in his “bearing.” In fact Neither the American’s bearing nor Changez’s beard is a valid criterion of identification. Both are stereotypes. But it should be noted that Changez’s observation suggests that stereotyping is mutual: If you see me in my beard, I’ll see you in your bearing; if my beard tells you I’m a Muslim fundamentalist who hates America, your bearing tells me you’re an arrogant American who deserves this hatred.

Comparing Changez’s cosmopolitan experience to Al-Hakim’s philosophical take on identity and identification markers, we see that the significance of the theme of identity in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Al-Hakim’s *Şalat Al-Malaika* lies in the challenge to questions usually asked about people’s names, nationalities, and religions, questions that investigate who we are and where we belong. In Al-Hakim’s play, when asked to show his identity, the Angel wonders “Why do you ask me these strange questions...? Everyone is my family, because all the sons of man are my brothers, even you who are judging me. You too are my people. I love all of you. I love mankind.” Though, in Foucauldian terms, the discursive power of these identity questions may be irresistible, the best answer to them, especially if they lead to stigmatizing and dominating certain human groups or waging world wars, come from a Cosmopolitan perspective where these questions do not make sense or they don’t matter, as they don’t make sense to an angel assuming a human personality and they do not matter in the case of a Muslim trying to fit into a community of hipsters.

As it is hard to tell exactly who a Muslim is or is not in terms of our familiar identity markers, the question who “the enemies of Islam” are is not easy to answer. Akbar Ahmed’s *Noor* exhibits a confusion in fundamentalist rhetoric regarding the identity of plotters, kidnappers, invaders, the enemies of Islam. Those are natives and foreigners, locals and strangers. But referring to them, Daoud, the fundamentalist character, draws all these in one brushstroke. He uses “the West”, “the Crusaders”, and “Americans” synonymously to refer to what seem to be phantoms and demons rather than well-identified institutions or political entities. For Daoud, however, the religious identity of America and the West is manifested in the word “crusaders.” It is no wonder, then, that in a similarly fundamentalist counterpart rhetoric, the enemies of America and the West are identified as Muslim jihadists. The real meaning of jihad is absent in the latter rhetoric, as the meaning of crusading is lost in the former. The fact that there have been maleficent crusaders and jihadists must not let us ignore benevolent efforts of both Christians and Muslims who have not yet lost track of the positive meaning of crusading and jihad. When generally identifying Christians as crusaders and Muslims as jihadists, both in the negative sense, we are laying the foundation of the clash of civilization theory. That is to say, theories of an inevitable clash must be based on stereotypes and cultural misconstructions rather than sufficient knowledge of the identities of those who are presumably prone to clash.

In Ahmed’s *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* the challenge to identity markers is manifested in the court scene where Prosecutor Khan investigates Dara’s beliefs on the basis of religious identity assumptions. For example, if Dara is really a Muslim, why does he translate a Hindu text? But Dara’s cosmopolitan concept of religion challenges the

prosecutor's questions by stressing common grounds between Islam and Hinduism that transcend differences of rituals and forms. As the Pakistani Changez loves America, the Mughal prince Dara loves Hinduism; but this love cannot pass, according to dominant cultural assumptions, without investigating the loyalty of both of them to Islam, as if it were part of a Muslim's identity that he or she must hate people from other cultures and religions.

Resisting and challenging questions that investigate one's identity is one important asset of cosmopolitanism. As mentioned earlier, the word cosmopolitanism itself derives from the Greek *kosmopolitês* (citizen of the world) which is the answer given by the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, cynically deconstructing the question where he came from. It is also reported that Plato described Diogenes as a "Socrates gone mad" (Navia 81).

Cynicism and apparent madness are frameworks suitable for expressing a counter discourse. In *Kul shai' fi Mahalih* (Nothing out of Place) Al-Hakim uses cynical characters and employs an ostensible insanity to deconstruct identity formulating questions, like those asked to Diogenes and Goha. The play provides us with an example of challenging the dominant discourse from a cosmopolitan perspective. The mailman never sorts out the mail; he lets anyone take any letter regardless of names and addresses normally identifying communication lines. Once traditional lines of communication are mystified by an apparently insane mailman, there is a hope for a wider network of communication that is not restricted by who we are or where we come from. Perhaps the girl whose letter misses her fiancé will find true love with the stranger who picks up the letter. A question like what would happen if a young *woman*, not a young man, were destined in this weird mailing

process to get the letter may go beyond the scope of this study, and in fact beyond the playwright's imagination too, but the mere fact that one may ask this question shows how far the challenge of the dominant culture can go. The insanity in a counter discourse is in fact its transcendence of the common sense of a dominant discourse.

Sufi literature is full of such transcendence. When Rābi'a Al-'Adawiya (713-801) addresses God, she goes beyond the common sense in the devout worshipper's *du'ā'* objectives, and, for many commentators, violates *adab* (or etiquette) of addressing the Almighty. Contrary to traditional *du'ā'*, she asks God to deprive her of paradise and burn her in the hell so as to show that it is only pure love, not *thāwāb wa 'iqab* (reward and punishment), that makes her worship Him. Similarly, Ibn Mansūr Al-Hallāj (858-922) has been famous, or infamous, for his statement “ana Al-haqq” (I am the Truth), which challenges common theological rhetoric. But more similar to Al-Hakim's play is the story of Al-Khidr, a legendary, mystical figure who in *Sūrat Al-Kahf* (chapter 18 of the Quran) teaches the prophet Moses a lesson in gnosis.¹² Moses endures the trouble of travel for days in order to meet with him in response to God's command that Moses must learn from this particularly knowledgeable man. Once they meet, Al-Khidr warns Moses that their journey of knowledge requires patience beyond Moses's ability to endure, but Moses promises to be patient. Once they set off, Al-Khidr makes a hole in the ship; the impatient Moses reproaches him but is soon reminded to be patient. Then Al-Khidr kills a young boy

¹² The Quran does not refer to Al-Khidr by name, but introduces him as a good man whom Allah has given knowledge of the unknown. In the Islamic tradition, he is a controversial figure; some believe he is a prophet, others regard him as *walī* (friend of God). His story in the Quran provides strong evidence that Sufism is rooted in Islamic tradition. Al-Khidr-like figures can be found in different traditions; examples are Vishnu in Hinduism and John the Baptist in Armenian Christianity. He is also the Green Knight in the medieval romance *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*. By this transcultural personality Al-Khidr exemplifies Muslim cosmopolitanism.

apparently for no reason, which incites Moses's indignation. Moses is given a last chance. They move on to Al-Khidr's last seemingly senseless act. This time is not consistent with the previous two ones; now Al-Khidr seems to be too benevolent. In a village whose people are rude and inhospitable he sets up a wall that was about to fall down. Here the legalist Moses finds his law system broken, and at its heart the idea of punishment and reward brought upside down. His suggestion that Al-Khidr should take a wage for building the wall wastes any other chance for the student to learn anymore from his teacher.

Al-Khidr announces that the journey with Moses is at an end due to the latter's impatience, but he explains each one of the three incidents. His explanation of the seemingly insane, criminal acts that all have been done out of long-sightedness and divine knowledge and wisdom is suitable for the Quran's theological and moral context. But the philosophical implications of the story must have left its impact on Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Kul Shai' fi Mahilih*. The play examines the line between insanity and wisdom and creates a space for thinking beyond the dominant discourse.¹³ The Quranic story of Moses and Al-Khidr allows for this space to be explored on the basis of an Islamic tradition, especially when legalism and fundamentalism constitute the theological and moral foundations of the dominant discourse.

The difference between Moses and Al-Khidr as role models for Muslims raises questions about representation. Now questions about who represents Islam are very important. Though few might be aware that Islam has been hijacked by fundamentalism,

¹³ In his play *Ahl Al-Kahf* (People of the Cave) Al-Hakim draws on the same Quranic chapter. This time he philosophically explores the meaning of Time through a dramatic treatment of the story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus.

there is still a majority public, Muslims and non-Muslims, who sees Islam in the monolithic picture presented in the media.

The Dilemma of Representation: Saladin or Rumi?

As the three brothers in Akbar Ahmed's *Noor* are looking for a way to bring their sister, Noor, back home from kidnappers, Daoud makes fun of his Sufi brother as the former talks with his other brother Ali:

DAOUD Where is our elder brother?

ALI (takes time to reply) He has gone to see how he can bring Noor back.

DAOUD Oh, the Sufi is off to slay the dragon with the sword of love in one hand and the shield of compassion in the other.

ALI He thinks his Sufi master can help.

DAOUD Yes, I can picture his sheikh twirling and whirling in a trance outside the prison camp. I am sure it will melt the hearts of the guards.

We need warriors, not mystics. We need Saladin, not Rumi.

ALI We need both!

Both Akbar Ahmed and Tawfiq Al-Hakim are concerned with leadership as a dilemma of representation, and both share the search for a representative leader with a cosmopolitan stature rooted in an Islamic culture. The historical characters of Saladin and Rumi exemplify a dilemma of representation due to the apparent contrast between the warrior in the former and the peaceful mystic in the latter. Instead of taking both of them as representing two dimensions of Islam, many, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, tend to see them in opposition to one another. This misconception creates a chasm not only within

Muslim communities but also between Muslims and non-Muslims. By stressing warlike aspects of Saladin's personality, fundamentalists like Daoud ignore Saladin's accomplishment of establishing ties of peace and friendship with Christians. When fundamentalists give credit to Saladin and simultaneously discredit Rumi, the assumption that prevails among many Muslims and non-Muslims is that only a warlike personality can represent Islam.

While it is more useful to present the cosmopolitan Saladin as an example for Muslims' benign outreach to the rest of humanity, negative presentations still dominate public awareness of who Muslims are and how they relate to others. Unfortunately, the creepy, Khomeini-like picture of a Muslim leader still persists. For example, among movies depicting Muslim characters, Todd Green in *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (2015) finds only a short list challenging a much longer one "vilifying" Muslims and Islam. One in the short list is Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005). This movie attempts to correct the prevailing stereotypical media image of Islam and Muslims by presenting Saladin as a Muslim leader with a cosmopolitan appeal. Green gives an illustrative account of how Saladin figures in the movie,

Saladin is depicted as a virtuous and respectful leader. When the king of Jerusalem falls ill, Saladin sends his own doctors to attend to the king. And when Saladin finally takes Jerusalem, he finds a large cross on the floor in the king's palace. He picks up the cross and carefully places it back on the altar. During a screening of the movie in Beirut, journalist Robert Fisk observed the following reaction from the audience in response to this scene: "And at this point, the audience rose to their feet and clapped and shouted

their appreciation. They loved this gesture of honor, they wanted Islam to be merciful as well as strong.” The movie definitely acknowledges the violence and brutality committed by both Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, but *Kingdom of Heaven* goes to great lengths not to make Muslims or Islam the scapegoat. (Green 263)

It adds to the significance of Robert Fisk’s report about an audience’s reaction to the movie that it is from Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, a perfect example of a cosmopolitan Arab city where live different Christian¹⁴ sects along with Muslims (Sunni and Shiite) and Druze. The city witnessed a sectarian civil war (1975-90) that must have made its people aware of the importance of religious tolerance. So it is no wonder that the Beirut audience cheered for the example of Saladin as depicted in *Kingdom of Heaven*.

But Saladin’s character still applies to nationalist aspirations and resistance of colonial hegemony. When the word “crusaders” in its historically negative sense is used by Muslims today to describe westerners in general conspiring against Islam, Saladin, is normally invoked because he stood against the Crusaders. Being the historical liberator of Al-masjid Al-Aqsa (Al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem from the Crusaders, Saladin also figures as a model hero for militant resistance groups in the occupied Palestinian territories. One of these, *Alwiyat Al-Nasser Salahuddin* (Al-Nasser Saladin Brigades), makes use of Saladin’s presence in the collective Muslim awareness, as its very name suggests. In *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* Akbar Ahmed observes that “Contemporary Muslims everywhere look for Saladin, [...] ‘Divided Muslim

¹⁴ Lebanon is the only Arab country where Christians are such a substantial minority (more than 40%, the majority of them Maronite Catholics).

peoples yearn for a new Saladin' [...] even Saddam Hussein exploited this yearning by encouraging his press to project him as another Saladin during the Gulf War." This is how Ahmed finds Saladin's image useful in his book about Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan: "My use of Saladin in the sociological imagination is not to be taken literally; it is a metaphor, a cultural construct, an ideal-type. In this manner an analogy can be made between Saladin and Jinnah."

Ahmed's interest in Jinnah is part of his realization of the dilemma of representation and search for a representative Muslim leader. Fundamentalists ask how Jinnah can represent Muslims while he "used to eat pork and drink wine." In an online chat Ahmed was asked this question in 1996 when he was producing a film on Jinnah¹⁵,

I always expect the same old question on Mr Jinnah's eating and drinking habits. I am not in the least bothered about his diet. Firstly that is his private matter. Secondly I cannot judge who is a good Muslim and who is not. Thirdly, I am paying tribute to the scale of his achievement. Fourthly, and for your information this is also part of a regular dis-information campaign started by Mr Chaqla who was Mr Jinnah's assistant in Bombay and sacked by him. He later rose to eminence after Independence in India. Naturally, he went about trying to hurt Mr Jinnah's reputation. I am sure no one asked the makers of the Gandhi film what Gandhiji ate or drank or what his other habits were. (<http://www.rediff.com/chat/akbrchat.htm> 9-11-1996)

Ahmed's response gets into the core of the Muslim identity crisis. For indeed, by stressing particularistic at the expense of cosmopolitan aspects of their faith, Muslims,

¹⁵ *Jinnah* (1998) was written by Akbar Ahmed and directed by Jamil Dehlavi.

unfortunately, have been subtracted from the rest of humanity and objectified as merely a code of dress and a dietary habit. By producing the movie on Jinnah, Ahmed aimed to defend his hero not only against fundamentalist Muslims but also against the way Jinnah was portrayed in Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* (1982), a portrayal that Ahmed considered demeaning and offensive.

Akbar Ahmed's relation to Jinnah can be compared with Tawfiq Al-Hakim's to Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president who came to power after the 1952 revolution against the monarchy in Egypt. Like Jinnah, Nasser could be associated with Saladin. In Egypt, as everywhere else in the Islamic world, Saladin has always been regarded as a typical savior by both Islamists and secular nationalists. It was a happy coincidence for Arab nationalists during the fifties and the sixties of the 20th century that Saladin's title, *Al-Nasser* (supporter, champion, or savior), happened to be the name of their hero. As its title suggests, the famous movie *El-Nasser Salah El-din* (Saladin, or literally Saladin the Savior, 1963) — whose script was written by four Egyptian writers, including Naguib Mahfouz— alludes to a connection between the president and the historical hero.

Like his generation of Egyptian writers, Al-Hakim saw hope in Nasser and the revolutionary spirit of the period. His play *Al-Aydi Al-Nā'ima* (*Tender Hands*, 1954) celebrates the social change brought by the revolution, dramatizing what Hutchins describes as Nasser's optimistic "vision of a new Egyptian society" (79). Later in his essay 'Awdat Al-Wa'i (The Return of Consciousness 1985), however, Al-Hakim relates how he became disillusioned with Nasserism, which accompanied his disillusionment with his own ideas in 'Usfūr min Al-Sharq. Nasser says he was inspired by Al-Hakim's hero in *A'wdat Al-Ruh* (The Return of the Spirit) and 'Usfūr min Al-Sharq. In *Nationalism and Post-*

Colonial Identity Ashuman Mondal reports, “On 28 May 1954, Gamal Abdel-Nasser presented to Al-Hakim an inscribed copy of his own *The Philosophy of the Revolution* which contained these words, ‘To the *reviver of literature, Ustaz Tawfiq al Hakim*, in anticipation of a second, post-revolutionary return of the soul’” (Mondal 199).

Choosing between Rumi and Saladin, Al-Hakim, according to his theory of *Al-ta’aduliya* (“equilibriumism,” or “the art of balance”), would agree with Akbar Ahmed’s statement, “we need both.” As Muslim thinkers Al-Hakim and Ahmed share the idea of balancing what can be described as dimensions of Islam. Both compared Mohammed with Jesus arguing the former managed to strike a balance between a spiritual example and a worldly triumphant leader. In *Jinnah, Pakistan, and Islamic Identity* Ahmed suggests that Muslim leaders like Saladin and Jinnah modeled themselves on Prophet Mohammed’s character which have incorporated material success in spiritual leadership:

Saladin and Jinnah both tried to echo the ultimate leadership model for Muslims: that of the holy Prophet. Unlike Jesus Christ, who was crucified before his followers established the Christian religion and who never sought to gain material power on earth, the holy prophet not only introduced a new religion and saw it spread throughout the land, but ended his days as the head of a new Islamic state. That, for every Muslim, would be the ideal: triumph and success here on earth; the balance between *din* (religion) and *dunya* (the world). (Ahmed xviii)

According to Hutchins’ reading of Al-Hakim’s theology, Al-Hakim agrees with Ahmed, “Balancing the spiritual and the material aspects of human life, he (Mohammed) functioned as a model for everyone else” (Hutchins 222).

Even if Saladin were really that particularistic example chosen by Daoud, contrasting him with Rumi, the question of which one should represent Muslims is another identity question that requires a Cosmopolitan answer like Ahmed's: "we need both." For replacing Saladin as a national hero with Rumi as a Cosmopolitan suggests a relapse to the same exclusive discourse adopted by Daoud. In other words, Saladin is still needed in the new discourse because, as Appiah suspects, "celebrations of the 'Cosmopolitan' can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority toward the putative provincial" (Appiah xiii). Saladin provides an example of the putative provincial not because he really belongs to this category—he may not—but because his warrior-like character fits in a particularistic, fundamentalist, confrontational discourse, which makes it easy to employ him in Muslim confrontations with Jews and Christians as well as sectarian disputes within Islam itself. While Rumi cannot be characterized in a fundamentalist rhetoric as anything but heretical deviation from an exclusivist version of Islam, Saladin is still the prototype of the national hero in both secular and religious versions of nationalism.

Part of the fundamentalist rhetoric is to stigmatize Sufism as insane and impracticable. Daoud mocks the whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi order by fetishizing twirling and whirling, one of their famous practices, as if this is all what they do or could do. Even the most extremist among fundamentalist scholars, however, cannot ignore the role Sufis played in resisting colonization during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Omar Al-Mokhtar (1858-1931), leader of the Libyan resistance to Italian colonization, belonged to the Senusi Sufi order. Similarly, 'Abd el-Karim El-Khattabi of Morocco (1883-1963) and 'Abd Al-Qādir ibn Muhyiddīn (1808-88) of Algeria were leaders of the native struggles against the French occupation, also belonged to Sufi orders.

The latter, well-known as ‘Abd Al-Qādir Al-Jazāiri or Emir (prince) ‘Abd Al-Qādir¹⁶, is worth giving more space here as a perfect example of a Muslim cosmopolitan leader that we ought to consider when we look for a representative of Islam. In addition to his heroic resistance to French colonization, he also dealt with his Christian opponents in such a manner that won the admiration of the whole world at that time. In one particular incident during his exile in Syria ‘Abd Al-Qādir rescued a number of French nuns from a brutal attempt at abduction (*Brave Hearts...*) This example of jihad as administered by this great Algerian Sufi puts to shame the kind of jihad sponsored by Boko Haram, an ISIS affiliated terrorist group based in Nigeria, who recently abducted more than two hundred schoolgirls.

In their *The Compassionate Warrior: Abd El-Kader of Algeria* Elsa Marston and Barbara Petzen tell about how Emir ‘Abd Al-Qādir was regarded by leaders of the world:

While Abd el-Kader was trying to retreat from worldly concerns, the world was eager to shower him with honors. Napoleon III promptly sent him a medal for the highest honor that France could bestow, the Legion of Honor. Other countries followed suit, and medals came from Russia, Prussia, Greece, the Pope, and even the Ottoman Sultan. In several of his photographs, Abd el-Kader displays all these large medals on a sash across his body. The American government sent him a pair of custom-made gold-inlaid Colt pistols—a gesture that appears ironic at that time when the Emir was trying to put violence behind him. (Marston and Petzen120)

Still more significant in cosmopolitan terms is the role ‘Abd Al-Qādir played in convincing Khedive Said (ruler of Egypt from 1863 to 1895), of the benefits of Ferdinand De Lesseps’

¹⁶ The American town Elkader in Iowa was named after him, an illustration of “our shared values” (Samuel Freedman, *The New York Times*, May 3, 2013).

project of the Suez Canal. Marston and Petzen explain what the Suez Canal meant to ‘Abd Al-Qādir:

The whole Suez Canal project had a much more profound meaning for Abd el-Kader than just a triumph of modern engineering. This long-dreamed-of achievement now made it possible for ships to go from Europe to India and other points east without having to voyage all the way around Africa. Thus it was both a passageway and a bridge. It brought places close together by connecting the great oceans and seas of the world; it linked East and West, along with the peoples and cultures of those worlds. Whether speaking to groups of engineers or the Canal Company’s shareholders, Abd el-Kader always discussed the Suez Canal in spiritual terms, calling it “inspired by God.” So important was the project to him in this sense, that on his return from double pilgrimage to Mecca he made a point of stopping in Egypt at the construction site. (123)

‘Abd Al-Qādir’s Sufi vision of a connected world of different cultures through the Suez Canal exhibits a cosmopolitan spirit of a Muslim hero, a modern version of Saladin.

Empowering the Idea: Court Scenes in the Drama of Ideas

Upon describing how “rapturous” the ovation for Muntadar Al-Zeidi after his famous shoe throwing at George W Bush in 2008 during a press conference in Iraq, Margaret Litvin observes: “The hearing, if not the shoe, scored a resounding hit” (Litvin 159). In fact, such hearings as that held for Al-Zeidi would not fail to make a hit as a theatrical performance. It is an opportunity for the oppressed to be heard and the popular judgment, often unlike the official one, is expected to lean in various degrees to the

defendant. There may have been many historical antecedents for such scenes. One prominent example for our purpose here is the historical trial of Mansur Al-Hallaj (d. 922). As displayed in Salah Abdel-Şabūr's *Ma'sāt Al-Hallāj* (Tragedy of Al-Hallaj, 1966), a courtroom scene is a logical device for representing a conflict of ideas. Al-Hallaj is a controversial Christ-like Sufi master who was crucified not only for uttering apparently "blasphemous" statements like "ana Al-Haqq" (I am the Truth), but also for standing against social injustices. Theatre has captured several historical moments of similar trials since Plato's *Apology* where Socrates, like Al-Hallaj, played the role of the defendant.

Notwithstanding its anti-Semitic theme, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* includes the most famous courtroom scene in the history of drama. In response to Shakespeare's play, British dramatist Arnold Wesker wrote *Shylock* (1976) in defense of the merchant of Venice, Shylock; here the contract's penalty clause is Shylock's way to mock Venetian law, which Wesker believes was biased against Jews. Several other modern legal plays have dramatized historical trials. For example, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's *Inherit the Wind* (1955, later made into a film) draws on the conflict between scientific theories and religious fundamentalism in the 1925 "monkey trial" of John T. Scopes, a teacher from Tennessee, who dared to teach Darwin's theory of evolution. Thus the plaintiff here is essentially the same as in *Al-Hallāj*. Another example is Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* (1960), which deals with Sir Thomas More's stance against King Henry VIII, and his eventual trial. This play is different from the other examples due to the reversal of roles. Unlike the plaintiff and the defendant in *Al-Hallāj*, the plaintiff here, though still an institution of power (the king), acts as a violator rather than protector of the norms, while the defendant (More) sides with dogma and tradition.

Like Abdel-Şabūr's *Al-Hallāj*, Akbar Ahmed's *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*, as we shall see, employs a court scene to commemorate a Sufi figure who confronts an accusation of blasphemy and needs to use logic, philosophy and theology to defend himself. But Ahmed's theatre is closer to Tawfiq Al-Hakim's theatre of ideas. "Maybe our defeat is the victory of our ideas." Dara has to say these words to his son who has been brought to despair by the defeat of his father in the historical battle of Samugarh (1658). But the ideas of Dara that he hopes to triumph in the end have been powerfully expressed in the trial scene set just before this dialogue with his son. The main idea that attains victory in a sort of public ovation similar to that shown by Al-Zeidi's court audience is Dara's Cosmopolitan Sufi concept of Islam expressed in his humanist approach to other Indian religions and philosophies.

Likewise, all discriminating pointers launched in the trial of the Angel in Al-Hakim's *Angels' Prayer* are rendered pointless by the Angel's exclamatory remarks illustrated above. No human identity marker makes sense to the Angel. Neither does divinity as marker of his own identity. This is why he does not tell the prosecutors who he is. For even divinity points to a sort of difference that can plague the very idea of religion itself when believers take it self-righteously in their relationship with others outside their religious group.

Unlike Tawfiq Al-Hakim, "Father of Arabic drama," Ahmed began writing plays late in his life. So, while Al-Hakim is best known as a playwright, Ahmed is better known for his scholarly writings and public work. Both of them, however, have used their plays as intellectual platforms mainly discussing ideas rather than performing actions on the stage. Ahmed's plays are similar to many of Al-Hakim's plays described by critics as "drama of

ideas.” The theatre of this drama is intellectual rather than physical. The audience is engaged by dialogues that bring controversial issues of public concern to debate on the stage. Among modern western writers George Bernard Shaw is best-known for this theatrical style. In Al-Hakim’s preface to his *King Oedipus* he argues that “it is the play’s subject which determines the type of theater. If the play is based on the motion of human beings, its place is the material theater. If it is based on the motion of thought, its place is the mental theater” (Al-Hakim, translated by Hutchins 284).

One dominant feature of the mental theatre is the employment of characters as abstract ideas and concepts. Shahrazad in Al-Hakim’s *Shahrazad* is Truth, a mirror that is, in Appiah’s words, “shattered”¹⁷ by relativity: “each shard [...] reflects one part of a complex truth from its own particular angle” (Appiah 8). Similarly, the character of Noor in Akbar Ahmed’s *Noor* is also a contested image of Truth.

There is still the significant difference between Ahmed’s and Al-Hakim’s dramatic treatment of cosmopolitan versus fundamentalist concepts of Islam. Ahmed wrote his plays in the post 9/11 era, after the confrontation between Islam and the West had come to a dramatic surge. Therefore intellectual dialogues in his plays are represented by different Islamic trends. The fundamentalist thesis is present in Ahmed’s two plays. We know how fundamentalists think and what their grievances and aspirations are.

Unlike Ahmed, Al-Hakim, presents only the side of the cosmopolitan Muslim philosopher that is busy with existential issues of universal appeal. Dealing with these issues, Al-Hakim provokes fundamentalists without having them in his work. This applies to his drama as well as his other writings. For example, in his short story “Al-Shāhīd” (The

¹⁷ “The Shattered Mirror” is the title of the first chapter of Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers.*,

Martyr), published in the collection *Arini Allah* (Show Me God, 1954), Al-Hakim portrays Satan as repenting and offering a deal to representatives of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (the Pope, a rabbi, and the grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar respectively). But his offer to repent is rejected by all of them on the basis that his repentance would destroy the foundations of their professions, the same justification given by the Grand Inquisitor to Jesus Christ in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Like Dostoevsky's Jesus, Al-Hakim's Satan has to be bound for his space in people's religious imaginary in order for religious industries to prosper, or at least to keep going. Reading Al-Hakim from a fundamentalist perspective, religious scholars, who never find it hard to assume the role of literary critics, focus on Satan's failure, and criticize Al-Hakim's suggestion that this raises Satan to the status of a martyr.

The next chapter is devoted to Tawfiq Al-Hakim's plays. I will attempt to trace cosmopolitan tendencies in some of them so as to provide a new reading of an Arab, Muslim intellectual and playwright.

CHAPTER II

Tawfiq Al-Hakim: The National and the Cosmopolitan

Tawfiq Al-Hakim and the Development of Arab Theatre

Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898- 1987) contributed to the development of Arab literature in more than one literary genre, particularly theatre. He wrote more than eighty plays. Critics describe him as “father” and “founder” of Arab Drama. The Encyclopedia Britannica seems justified to introduce him as “founder of contemporary Egyptian drama and a leading figure in modern Arabic literature” (*Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 2012). William Hutchins in his *Plays, Prefaces & Postscripts of Tawfiq Al-Hakim* introduces him as the single dramatist behind contemporary Egyptian theatre tradition, and Richard Long concludes his *Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Playwright of Egypt* asserting the absence of any “indigenous” predecessors to Al-Hakim’s drama.

Though Al-Hakim has undoubtedly been a major figure in the development of the Egyptian theatre, M. M. Badawi in his *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* aptly calls for a more accurate assessment of Al-Hakim’s contribution. Badawi contends that “Al-Hakim the dramatist belongs very much to his period and it is only when we place him in his context that we can reach a just appraisal of the extent of his contribution” (Badawi 8). Without underestimating Al-Hakim’s role in developing modern Egyptian theatre, Badawi refers to those who shared in this process of development. From Al-

Hakim's predecessors Badawi singles out Muhammad Taymur (1891-1921) and draws an illuminating comparison between the two dramatists:

In many respects Al-Hakim seems to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished predecessor, Muhammad Taymur [...] Like Taymur, he fell under the spell of the theatre while still a student in Egypt. They each went later to France to pursue their higher legal studies, but instead of law they devoted most of their energy to the study of the French stage. In France their interest in drama was further developed, their taste refined, their ideas sharpened, their views of what Egyptian drama should be like formed. Of course, Al-Hakim was much more sophisticated [...]. Nevertheless, in their different ways, after their return to Egypt they were both intent on writing serious specifically Egyptian drama which rose above the level of the popular theatre. (Badawi 9)

Al-Hakim did not work alone, and, more important, he did not start from scratch. There was an indigenous theatrical tradition in Egypt prior to Al-Hakim's work. But when Taymur and Al-Hakim started to write serious drama the dominant theatrical forms drew heavily on songs accompanied by music and dance. Marvin Carlson observes that it was an artistic norm responding to what appealed to the public at that time that the theatre had to entertain the audience by music and songs. He comments on the music and songs added in staging an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus* written in the same period by Najib Al-Haddad,

A modern reader might assume that these [songs and dances] were added in an attempt to replicate the choric odes of the original Greek, but such a project would have surely been the concern of Al-Hadad himself, a leading

literary scholar, and not the emendation of actors seeking a popular success. Clearly this material was added in fact to make the rather alien literary drama more accessible to a public familiar with staged song and dance but not yet with the spoken theatre. This practice is often seen in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arabic adaptations of Western dramas as well as original works. (Carlson 3)

To appeal to an audience that wanted and expected to find in the theatre the songs and dances of such artists as the renowned Salama Hijazi troupe, the songs and dances had to outweigh the literary aspects in a theatrical performance. The musical adaptation was more suitable for the Egyptian audience at that time. This was actually true about the Egyptian theatre, and extended all throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Theatre was thought of as a means of entertainment dominated by musical and farcical elements. Al-Hakim's early work came as part of this tradition. Badawi tells us that *Aminusa* (1922), one of Al-Hakim's earliest plays, was in the form of an operetta, a musical theatre genre that suited the prevailing taste of the time. Badawi also observes that Al-Hakim's turn from musical theatre was gradual and seeds of his social and political concerns could be even traced in his early work in spite of its dominating farcical and musical forms (Badawi 10-12).

Ahl Al-Kahf (*The Sleepers in the Cave* 1933) marks Al-Hakim's substantive break with the Egyptian theatrical tradition. Although it was not a success at the popular level simply because it didn't meet the expectations of an audience used to farcical theatre, *Ahl Al-Kahf* was really a great event for a generation of intellectuals longing for raising

the status of Arabic literature to the level of European literatures¹⁸. Badawi demonstrates that the play was “a great literary success” celebrated by the leading literary figures at that time, most notably by “the dean of Arabic literature,” Taha Husayn (1889-1973).

Reviewing the play, Husayn describes it as “an important event, not in modern Arabic literature alone, but in the whole of Arabic literature [...]. It is the first work in Arabic literature which may be probably called drama... and may be described as having raised the status of Arabic literature, making it possible to stand comparison with modern and ancient European literatures” (Husayn in Badawi 27).

Like Al-Hakim, Husayn studied in France and shared the literary aspirations of the Egyptian mid-century intellectual elite. There is a significant intellectual difference, however, between Husayn and Al-Hakim when it comes to ideas of westernization and the relations between the East and the West. Husayn resolves a potential conflict with the West traceable in Al-Hakim’s thought by associating Egypt culturally and historically with Western rather than Eastern civilization. In this he shows skepticism for what Pierre Cachia in *Taha Husyan: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* aptly describes as “the prevailing black-and-white fiction of a materialistic West and a spiritual and moral East” (Cachia 92). Unlike Husayn, Al-Hakim might have ostensibly “subscribed” to that fiction. But Al-Hakim’s attitude to the relationship between the East and the West is more complex than mere subscription to that fiction.

The East and the West: A Cosmopolitan Vision

¹⁸ An example of this tendency of Al-Hakim’s generation of Egyptian intellectuals can be seen in Mahmoud Abbas al-‘Aqqad’s criticism of Ahmed Shawqi’s poetry for what Al-‘Aqqad considered failure to come up to the level of great European, particularly French, poetry of the early 20th century.

This chapter focuses on Al-Hakim's portrayal of the relationship between what he calls the East and the West in his drama. When critics deal with this theme, they don't examine it in his plays and usually trace it in his novels, analyzing Al-Hakim's thoughts on the differences between the East and the West and showing how he favors the former for its ability to balance the material and the spiritual needs of human life. I argue that Al-Hakim's drama provides us with a universally humanist vision of a world that combines seemingly conflicting but actually integrated values. Analyzing some of Al-Hakim's plays here, I also argue that his vision can be described in cosmopolitan terms, using Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of "partial cosmopolitanism."

Al-Hakim's novel *'Usfūr min Al-Sharq (A Sparrow from the East)*, was published in 1938, five years after Al-Hakim's *'Awdat Al-Rūh (Return of the Spirit)*. Both are autobiographical novels, sharing the character of the hero, Muhsin, as representative of the writer's youthful stage of his life. The events of *'Usfūr* take place in 1920s when Muhsin, like Tawfiq Al-Hakim himself, traveled to France to study law. There in Paris Muhsin lives with a French working-class family: the young couple, André and his wife Germaine, their little child and André's mother. The contrast between Muhsin's character and André's illustrates the former's spirituality as culturally gained from the fact that he comes from an Eastern society. Unlike André's Western pragmatism, Muhsin's ideas about art and religion are shown as belonging to a culture that highlights spirituality. When both are in a church attending a funeral, Muhsin finds in the place and the occasion a spiritual value André seems unable to appreciate. Muhsin naively glorifies love, and so he doesn't make sense of André's opinion that he can gain a girl's love by buying her a bottle of perfume. Similarly, the Parisian girl, Susie, with whom Muhsin falls in love reveals how, like André,

she holds for love a much lower regard than he feels and understands it from his home culture. After the bitter experience of an unrequited love with Suzie, Muhsin finds solace in the company of Ivanovic, a Russian émigré, who, though an unbeliever, believes in the importance of belief in heaven which he believes can be found only in the East. Muhsin listens to the dying Russian launching a harsh attack on Western civilization favoring the East for its ability to live in two worlds, Earth and Heaven. The novel ends with the death of Ivan without being informed by Muhsin, who has decided not to disillusion him, that now the East is no longer as he imagines. Ivan, who never visited the East, does not know what Muhsin knows that the East has lost its identity in favor of Western fashion.

Later, in what seems to be another turning point in his career Al-Hakim writes “*Tabi ‘atuna Nahwa Al-Shabāb*” (Our Obligations Towards Young People), an article first published in 1949. He tries in this article to do what he calls “correction of mistakes in my writings.” One of these mistakes he finds in his two novels ‘*Awdat Al-Rūh* (*Return of the Spirit*, 1933) and ‘*Usfūr min Al-Sharq* (*Sparrow from the East*, 1938). He argues that his ideas in these novels about eastern spirituality versus western materialism are harmful and dangerous:

Many young people today travel to Western countries to study. They get shocked by another way of life and a foreign culture. Therefore they think and feel the same way as Muhsin did in *Usfūr min Al-Sharq* when he went to the West twenty five years ago. Like him they see that a dollar has replaced the heart in the chest of an American; they go astray looking for “the spirit,” controlled by one idea: the spirituality of the east [...]. Then they follow the other Muhsin in ‘*Awdat Al-Ruh*, digging for the spring of their cultural and spiritual heritage that

existed for thousands of years before in the conscience of Egypt, in its countryside, in its honest people; and, like him, they take pride in the history and civilization of the Egyptian people.

Is it good to leave these young people with those feelings and these thoughts? Or is it good to ask them now not to glorify their past too much, and not to let Muhsin's inferiority complex overwhelm them due to the fear of being invaded by the dominant western culture, but to courageously drink from every spring, take from every heritage in order to enrich their souls and broaden their horizons.

I said this to a knowledgeable writer; he said: "We are not following these words of yours. We would rather believe in the honest Muhsin, who expresses our real feelings!"

I said with a smile: "You don't believe me and believe two ridiculous books." (My translation from *Yaqzat Al-Fikr* 103-4)

Finding himself in the character of Muhsin, Al-Hakim's friend here represents "Occidentalism", or "Orientalism in reverse".¹⁹ The "we" and "our" used by Al-Hakim's friend indicates his concern for the collective identity as Eastern, Egyptian, Arab, or Muslim, showing how this identity overwhelms the individual who happens to be ascribed

¹⁹ Vincet Cornell defines Occidentalism as "a critique of Western civilization that utilizes the bipolar model of Orientalism but reverses the polarity such that an idealized image of a spiritual East is valued over a critical image of a materialistic West" (Cornell 31). "Orientalism in Reverse" is a term similar to Occidentalism, used by Syrian intellectual Sadiq Jalal al-'Azam to describe both secular Arab nationalism and Islamist revival movements (see al-'Azam's article "Orientalism and Orientalism in reverse" 1980).

as such. The problem with this thought is for Al-Hakim, eleven years after he wrote 'Usfūr, that it "makes youth take eastern spirituality and the residue of Egyptian civilization as prisons and fortresses isolating them from the world's thought and preventing them from contributing powerfully and courageously to humanist intellectual activity without fearfully seeing western culture or foreign civilization as monsters easily kidnapping their spirit..." (104-5) Al-Hakim now considers how dangerous it is to turn cultural differences into barriers to entry into what he calls intellectual activity. He also describes this activity as *insani* (humanist). Now for him, those whom he thinks have modelled themselves on the hero of his novel are like bigots, imprisoned in their own culture and in need to get out, to be open to humanist thought. Al-Hakim's criticism of 'Usfūr's occidentalist sensibilities may show him in agreement with Cornell and Boroujerdi in rejecting the East-West binary opposition as formulated by Middle Eastern writers.

However, Al-Hakim's modified position on the relationship between the East and the West is still not clear. And even worse, his attempt to make it clear brings him into self-contradiction. For him, as he goes on to explain, engaging in world of thought is still like a battle where the picture of a monstrous West is still there:

Our spirit is so powerful and deep that no civilization can dominate. So why all the fear of confrontation? Every story writer likes to write under the title "an Egyptian story," makes sure that all the incidents take place in local settings, and paints it all heavily with local colors. For he wants to convince himself that he is making a national art with an authentic Egyptian spirit. This is all a sort of inferiority complex-- this fear is unjustifiable. The authentic Egyptian spirit is

able to leave its impact on any subject it touches, even in a foreign atmosphere... Don't think like Muhsin. That was the mentality of a young man from the Egyptian revolution [1919] and the national revival. Now we have been revived. Go to work. Face the world with a "humanist" mentality unfettered by any *na'ra* [Rasheed el-Enany translates it as "bias", el-Enany 105, but Arabic dictionaries define it as an expression of arrogance, conceit, and fanaticism, and associate it with localism: tribalism, nationalism, etc.]. Broaden your horizons and don't worry about your spirit. (My translation, Al-Hakim 105)

Unfortunately, Al-Hakim's assertions reinforce cultural conflicts. They only give confidence to one side that is thought to be inferior to the other. Now the change is not really in Al-Hakim's ideas, but in the state of affairs in Egypt as he now naively sees it. We were in the process of revival; now we have been revived, and thus we are no longer the weak side of the conflict. This is more like psychological coaching before a wrestling match than a call for friendly cultural integration: the message is "do not fear your opponent, he cannot beat you as he used to do eleven years ago because now you can see how strong you are." He does not realize how naive it is to say we have been revived, especially when three years later the Egyptian 1952 revolution took place. Nationalist rhetoric urges him to use the pronouns "we" and "our" in the same way his friend uses them, leaving the same chasm open and the potentials for conflict high between his own cultural group and the other.

Many of Al-Hakim's plays, however, reflect his belief in Humanistic thought. And even his early novels could show him as a humanist writer. Therefore I don't take his article as retraction of old ideas, as el-Enany does in his "Tawfiq Al-Hakim and the West:

A New Assessment of the Relationship,” or as a genuine assertion of them. For in “Tabi’atuna” as in many other articles compiled together and published in 1986 under the title *Yaqzat Al-Fikr* he adopts a nationalist rhetoric to appeal to his readers. Nationalism was the dominant discourse at that time and he wanted to be part of it. Through these journalistic articles that, unlike his novels and plays, were in the hands of a much broader public he could secure a wide readership. So self-contradiction here is the result of adopting a discourse that does not match his beliefs. This is where I agree with el-Enany’s conclusion:

This ambivalence of attitude, this tense tug-of war, this love-hate relationship is not idiosyncratic of Hakim. It is perhaps symptomatic of the relationship between East and West since Napoleon landed in Egypt in 1798. And while expressions of this symptom will continue after Hakim in the post-colonial period, I do not wish to make the claim that the East’s perception of the West has been static. In history nothing is static. Changes in perceptions and attitudes will occur from generation to generation and in response to the changing historical and political conditions. (El-Enany 175)

El-Enany rightly observes that Al-Hakim does not really consider that the relationship between East and West should be based on conflict, and suggests that any features of conflict we see in Al-Hakim’s work should not be taken as arising from Al-Hakim’s real convictions. This conclusion needs to be pushed one step further towards the question that we attempt here: if it is “not idiosyncratic of Hakim” to highlight cultural conflict, where can we see in his work a cosmopolitan attitude that does not give way to the orientalist conceptions or the nationalist ideas that might have appealed to his audience? El-Enany

tells us that Al-Hakim said in an interview in 1965: ““The notion that the East was and still is spiritual only, and the West was and still is materialistic only is one that overlooks the truth”” (175). Where we can see this attitude in Al-Hakim’s plays is thus more important than a search for change in his position that comes through his articles or interviews where he comments on his own work. His works themselves are more reliable than his comments on them. Realizing how Al-Hakim usually responded to the readings of his works, we can find one way to go beyond El-Enany’s simple account of a writer changing his ideas. It might be easier for Al-Hakim to say his ideas were wrong than suggesting a different reading. Unlike Naguib Mahfouz, who asks us to read *Awlād Ḥaratina* in a way different from the unpopular popular reading that brought him into troubles with religious institutions and public audience²⁰, Al-Hakim, instead of arguing he could be read differently, simply says he was wrong. It should be noted that Al-Hakim accepted being read wrong as long as that wrong reading had made him popular. He liked being described as a misogynist because this made him more interesting even to the female audience he was presumably on bad terms with. He also enjoyed being labeled a miser though it started only as a joke by his friend Kamal el-Mallakh. Similarly, as M. M. Badawi notices, he went along with the title given to him as “the father of the Arab Theatre.” Badawi maintains that “this exaggerated view of Al-Hakim’s was to some extent encouraged by the author himself, at least in some of his pronouncements” (Badawi 8).

Accordingly, it is pointless to refer to Al-Hakim’s retraction of old ideas as genuine or to focus on his own correction of a certain reading of his work that he used to welcome

²⁰ see Mahfouz, interview with Faruq Shousha:
<http://www.medmem.eu/en/notice/ERU00276>.

till he found its serious consequences on the young readers. I call for going beyond all this so as to provide a rereading not only of the novel that Al-Hakim's comments show as if it could be read only in that "harmful" reading, but also of Al-Hakim's whole work. I don't say that other readings of Al-Hakim's novels do not exist, but they are too scarce to change the dominant reading that Al-Hakim himself endorses. Paul Starkey in his *From the Ivory Tower: a Critical Study of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*, argues that all those ideas in 'Usfūr, which Al-Hakim ostensibly tries in his article *Tabi'atuna* to retract, only belong to Ivan, the Russian émigré in 'Usfūr, while Muhsin, who seems to represent Tawfiq Al-Hakim in the novel, is aware of how naive these ideas are. Towards the end of the novel Muhsin finds

Ivan's vision of the East is hopelessly idealistic. As he waits for the Russian to die he cannot help reflecting [...] that European clothes, manners and ideals have become the norm, and that people in the East today have more faith in Western ideas than they have in religion [...]. In view of the close resemblance between the Muhsin of the novel and Al-Hakim of his Paris days, it would be difficult to argue that Al-Hakim's own view of the East/West relationship is to be equated with Ivan's is to be resisted. There is, however, some excuse for this view - for it is only in the last three or four pages that Muhsin dissociates himself from Ivan's analysis. (Starkey 117)

Thus Starkey, who might have not read Al-Hakim's article "Tabi'atuna", would be surprised by what Al-Hakim thinks of in the article as his own old ideas while, according to Starkey's reading, they are simply one of the novel's characters'. Like Starkey, Samar Attar in her *Debunking the Myths of Colonization* contends that "the most devastating

criticism of Europe comes from the Russian émigré rather than from the Egyptian student” (Attar 102). Al-Hakim’s criticism of the East’s emulation of Western culture can be compared to the concept of *Gharbzadegi* (translated as Westoxification or Occidentosis), a Persian neologism devised by the Iranian Jalal Al-e Ahmad in a book of that name, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (1961), to denounce the Western culture’s eroding effects on the Iranian culture. In the end of the novel Al-Hakim draws an image similar to that of *Gharbzadegi*, using the words “poison” and “opium” to suggest the same Western influences (‘*Usfūr* 191). Saman Rejali points out that “Al-Ahmad dissects how the East’s immersion in, and acceptance of, the "Orientalist" content passed on through Western radio, television, films, and newspapers not only deepens its state of Westoxication, but indeed transforms the Easterner’s gaze such that the Eastern subject no longer looks at himself through his own point of view; rather, he adopts the constructed point of view imposed on him by the West’s pervasive influence.” Rejali adds, “With respect to Edward Said’s terminology in *Orientalism*, this process is termed by post-colonial thinkers as ‘self-orientalization’” (Rejali 3).

Like Al-e Ahmad, Al-Hakim focuses more on “self-orientalization” than stressing a chasm disconnecting the East from the West. Due to the contrast between “passionate and imaginative” Egyptians like Muhsin and “callous and realistic” French characters like André, Samar Attar contends that “the hope for any dialogue between the two is very slim” (Attar 92) But why do not we think of it as part of Muhsin “the dreamer[’s]” dream that dialogue could be established in spite of differences on cosmopolitan rather than orientalist/occidental grounds? André and his wife Germaine are realistic and pragmatic; presumably representing the western culture and contrasting Muhsin the dreamer. But

neither the French nor the Egyptian realizes or internalizes the differences between them consciously or subconsciously in terms of superiority or inferiority to the other. The novel could be read as an invitation for cooperation and integration rather than an illustration of conflict between the East and the West. The real conflict is in Muhsin's mind as he looks for his own identity while being exposed to new formations in Paris. His love for Al-Sayeda Zeinab, a grand-daughter of the prophet and well-known saint to whom Al-Hakim dedicates the novel, and the feeders of spiritual aspects of his identity is now being mixed with his love to Parisian cultural venues that are feeding the intellectual side of his growing identity. Working together on shaping Muhsin's personality, Al-Sayeda and the Louvre don't create a conflict. But it might be hard to imagine something other than conflict could result out of their being together, especially for those who believe in Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations." For Muhsin they are different feeders and he doesn't have to choose between them. They are not given to him as options. Nor if they are consumed together does the novel provide any warning against indigestion. They are normal components of a young man exposed to two different cultures. When the Suzie-Muhsin relationship fails in the end, we may take the failure to justify the prevalent reading of the personal story as an illustration of inevitable universal break of bridges between the East and the West. But we need to think of Muhsin and Suzie first as individuals, even if Al-Hakim apparently presents them as representatives of their respective cultures. Muhsin could find a Suzie-like character in Egypt. An Egyptian Suzie is not hard to find either now or in 1920s when Al-Hakim was in Paris.

Al-Hakim's misreading of his own novel is associated with "the clash of civilizations" theory. The idea that there is an authentic East that needs to be sought for

behind heaps of corrupting western influences ignites a feeling of alienation against which Al-Hakim warns readers of his novel. But his suggestion that the spirit of national liberation must have brought the youth back to an authenticity of any sort²¹ and enabled them to be more powerful than his hero limits any change that might be observed in Al-Hakim's attitude to the relationship between the East and the West.

In fact, reading the novel along the lines of cultural clash is still more appealing to Al-Hakim's readers. Almost twenty years ago, as I was an undergraduate student in Egypt, I wrote a paper on *'Usfūr* that very naively goes along with Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations." The professor of Arabic and the two hundred classmates to whom I presented the paper could not have realized how I was repeating Orientalist concepts about the East versus the West. They were just happy because I sided with "the spiritual east."

Towards a Cosmopolitan Reading of Al-Hakim's Work

As we attempt to avoid Orientalism and seek a cosmopolitan interpretation of Tawfiq Al-Hakim's writings, perhaps it is helpful to refer to Edward Said's classification of different sorts of critiques of Orientalism he refers to in his "Orientalism Reconsidered." Said classifies these critiques into three categories: 1- "nativists," who defend native cultures against different forms of colonial hegemony of the dominant Eurocentric representation of Western culture; 2- "nationalists," whose critique of Orientalism derives from commitment to a national cause or a certain "political creed;" 3- "fundamentalists," who "criticize Orientalism for falsifying the nature of Islam." Said finds in these critiques

²¹ An "authentic" Egyptian is contested between Islamic and Pharaonic Egypt. The Biblical and Quranic Pharaoh-Moses story is usually told by Islamists to characterize their conflicts with secular nationalists who affiliate themselves more to the Pharaonic than the Islamic history. Islamist writer Zeinab Al-Ghazali's memoir *Return of the Pharaoh* about Nasser's period exemplifies this trend in the Muslim Brothers' fundamentalist rhetoric.

attempts at providing “the real, true, or authentic Islamic or Arab world” (Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered”). He avoids any claim towards such attempts, and asserts his “critical sense” and “reflective detachment,” even in moments when he has to be partisan and sympathetic. Thus it is not enough to be critical of Orientalism but we need to be aware of our critical perspectives.

But what if all that we find in modern Arabic literature is either Orientalism or criticism of Orientalism through the lens of a nativist, a nationalist, or a fundamentalist perspective? In fact we need to look for something beyond these paradigms in Arabic literature if we share Said’s attempt to find a non-essentialist representation of the “Islamic” or Arab world. This need must urge us to look for works that challenge the dominant fictional narratives of both Orientalists and essentialist critics of Orientalism. Hence it is necessary to provide cosmopolitan readings of characters and incidents in Middle Eastern literature where the focus extends to concerns of larger scale than one’s cultural differences. Many writers from the Middle East have been concerned with the individual in the world society and responded to issues of global concern. Here as we explore themes of peace, love, and freedom in his plays, Tawfiq Al-Hakim figures out as an example of these writers. Among a large number of plays, more than eighty, many contemplate the possibility of achieving peace in a world torn by war, look for common grounds for the human race, and provide hope for humanist communication and cosmopolitan integration instead of conflict associated with cultural differences that are often fictional rather than real. Examples of such plays selected for analysis in the following pages are *Kul Shay’ fī Maḥallih* (1966 *Not a Thing out of Place*), *Salāt Al-Malāika* (1941 *The Angels Prayer*), *Ashwāk Al-Salām* (1957 *Thorns of Peace*), and *Shams*

Al-Nahār (1965 *Princess Sunshine*). Let's examine *Kul Shay' fī Mahallih* first²², because real change starts by challenging the common sense.

Questioning the Common Sense: *Not a Thing out of Place*

Kul Shay' fī Mahallih (1966, *Not a Thing out of Place*) is a one-act play about a village whose inhabitants have chosen to avoid the norms of logic and adopt “irrationality” as a way of life. Al-Hakim illustrates this decision through the characters of the Barber and the Postman. The play opens with the Barber talking with a customer who seems to be a stranger to the village. The Barber compares the customer's head to a watermelon that needs to be split to know how it looks like from inside. Looking at the razor in the Barber's hand, the Customer is scared and runs away half-shaved. Then the Postman comes in to the Barber's with a handful of letters he throws in an old basin on the floor. The Barber and the Postman decide to play a game in which one of them should be a philosopher and the other a donkey, but they quarrel over who will take the role of a donkey after they compare and contrast philosophers with donkeys and agree that “a donkey's got a bigger brain.” They reach this conclusion by simply observing that donkeys neither “shave at a barber's” nor “post a letter” (177-8). Meanwhile a young man, who has been in the village for only two days attending his cousin's wedding, comes in and asks if there is a letter for him.

YOUNG MAN (*to the postman*): Is there a letter for me? My name's ...

POSTMAN (*interrupting him*): There are plenty of letters for you. Just
choose the letter you fancy.

YOUNG MAN: But I want a letter addressed to me [...]

²² I handle the other plays in chronological order.

POSTMAN: You don't know how naïve you're being. In this village, son, we don't have time to deliver letters to people. The whole postbag's in the basket ...

BARBER: In the basin ...

POSTMAN: In the master Barber's basin – and what a blessed and auspicious basin it is! Everyone comes along and simply takes his pick – be it addressed to him, to someone else, it's no concern of ours. The great thing is to get rid of the post day by day. (176)

Still unconvinced, the Young Man does not pick but reluctantly takes one letter the Postman randomly chooses for him. It is from a girl to her fiancé asking him to meet her at the train station; she is coming to the village today in the noon train. The Barber and the Postman urge the Young Man to go to meet the girl as her fiancé, even though he does not know her. The Postman assures him: “You'll recognize her all right if she's pretty.” Resuming their game after the Young Man exits, the two men wonder if he will prove to be a donkey or a philosopher. The Barber thinks if the Young Man “gets off with the lady he'll be a donkey” but the Postman, who seems to know better, objects: “He will be a philosopher, fool!” (179). Then seeing the Young Man coming along with the Young Lady, the Postman exclaims, “She must have turned out to be pretty.” But as a stranger to the village, she is now as bewildered as her “new fiancé” was by this “extraordinary” situation. In turn she needs to be convinced, and now it is the Young Man who is trying to explain how irrational this seemed to him before but now he sees it as normal. He tells her that now they should go to the *ma'zūn* to register their marriage. He asks the Barber and the Postman about the village registrar, “is he like your good selves, with never a thing out

of place” (181)? They tell him he shouldn’t be worried about anything, and they summon the village people to celebrate the wedding. The Young Lady hasn’t agreed yet, but things seem to be getting out of her hands. “Heaven knows how all this is going to end!” She exclaims. The play ends with the villagers shouting, dancing, and chanting:

Dancing to the sound of drum and flute

Into reverse the world we’ll put –

And yet it’s going right we’ll find.

Whether sane or out of mind

It really matters not at all.

Come step it out now, one and all. (trans. Johnson-Davies 184)

In “The Positive Disorder in Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s *Not a Thing out of Place*” Mona Hashish classifies the play as “magic realism” and interprets the chaotic village in postcolonial terms as an attempt by Al-Hakim to act against the colonizer’s logic in order to overcome an inferiority complex:

Jean- Pierre Durix believes that writers from formerly colonized countries bear inferiority complex (sic) and think that the metropolitan European models are the best. In an attempt to overcome the inferiority complex, writers like Tawfiq Al-Hakim appeal to magic realism to confirm their difference and individuality; they brag of their heritage even if it embodies superstitious ideas.

The inaccuracy of this analysis is twofold. First, the play sounds more like the Absurd theatre than magic realism. The ideas in the play seem to be weird and crazy, but not supernatural or superstitious. Second, Al-Hakim brags of nothing about a heritage of any

sort. Nor does the play assert difference. It is, on the contrary, an illustration of the need for transcending differences based on identity markers by ignoring outside defining features and looking deeper into meanings beyond names on a letter or hair on a head. Rejecting logic here cannot be an attempt to show how we are different from European models because this interpretation implies that logic belongs to one culture and what is left to the other is only superstition. In fact the play challenges cultural common sense and suggests that logic is not a static entity naturally endowed to one particular group of people. Things are not naturally in or out of place in the way a particular society usually sees them. When the Young Lady objects that the Young Man is not her fiancé, he tells her that “the most important people in the village have ruled that I am he – so I *am* he.” (181) To see “not a thing out of place” depends on how we are made to see things, and thus our identities are ascribed to us in the same way as the Young Man is now defined in terms of his relationship to the Young Lady. The Barber and the Postman are the most important people in the village because of their respective roles in a process of “identification” that eventually determines what Appiah calls one’s “ascriptive identity” (Appiah and Gutmann 80): the barber plays with the way you look as an individual (i.e. the individual part of your identity) while the postman controls your connection to other people in the society (i.e. the collective identity). The Postman seems to be smarter than the Barber; he controls the game, the Barber seems to follow his logic and trust his judgements. According to Appiah, this is the way collective and individual shapers of identity work; individuals act consciously or unconsciously according to criteria collectively ascribed by society. Social institutions of power represented in the play by the Postman and the Barber are hierarchical; the Postman has the upper hand because his role implies the powerful effects

of our collective identity which controls our assumed individuality. But both of them could undoubtedly play with common sense, change and modify it without resorting to superstitions. In fact they appeal to such human values as love and freedom.

Common sense in the play is challenged by love. There is a potential love story arising from the absurd situation in which the Young Man and the Young Lady find themselves in. It starts with how pretty she is in his eyes. The real fiancé does not show up in the play. But if he showed up he would not necessarily take the letter addressed to him because he is from the village and knows how letters are dealt with. Traditional communication might not yield relationships based on love. The break with tradition in the play is indistinguishable from surpassing logic and common sense, but all lead to and result from love. Breaking the norms of logic and socially acceptable behavior, like taking a letter that is not sent to him and meeting the Young Lady as her fiancé, leads the Young Man to a sort of love that perhaps does not come with established norms. This same love is also the only way for the young couple to make sense of the situation. Perhaps like him, the play seems to suggest, she will see “not a thing out of place.”

Like love, freedom entails getting rid of traditional identifiers ascribed to us in a way concretized in the play by the post office where letters are labeled with names and addresses. The Young Man is told that those identifiers do not matter. What really matters is the cosmopolitan human being. But this human being is traditionally labeled by postmen and modified by barbers, perhaps in all human societies. That is why the Postman and the Barber in *Not a Thing out of Place* don't work as they normally have to. Interpreting their extraordinary handling of their jobs as laziness and irrationality peculiar to the culture of their author provides us with only two parameters limiting our choices for criticism:

writers like Al-Hakim from formerly colonized countries are either criticizing their culture in Orientalist terms or celebrating it from an Occidental perspective. Conversely, by going beyond the Orientalist/Occidental paradigm we can find a different discourse where the focus is not on how one culture is superior or inferior to another. For Al-Hakim, humans seem to need such an extraordinary power to see themselves from outside dominant frameworks of thought and behavior. If the power of madness works in this play to reveal the fallacy of human logic, Al-Hakim resorts in another one-act play, *The Angels Prayer*, to the supernatural power of an angel for the same effect: namely an extraordinary outsider attempts to correct a false human discourse of thought and action. Maybe the difference between the two plays is that *Angels' Prayer* handles war as a specific horrific experience. But the action of war is still inseparable from a dominant discourse of thought that the extraordinary Postman and Barber face in *Not a Thing out of Place*.

Questioning Identity questions: *Angels' Prayer*

Upon his failure to stop the Second World War, an angel in Al-Hakim's *Ṣalat Al-Malā'ka (Angels' Prayer, 1941)* is captured in a chamber where world leaders are dividing shares of power on a world map. Then in the court he is stunned by the questions about his identity:

Angel: My family? Amazing. Why do you ask me these strange questions...? Everyone is my family, because all the sons of man are my brothers, even you who are judging me. You too are my people. I love all of you. I love mankind.

Presiding Judge: How did you enter the leaders' chamber?

Angel: In just the same way I entered this chamber... in the same way
this light enters. (*He points to the rays of sunshine entering through
the window.*)

Amazed at being questioned about his name, family, race, etc, the Angel, in turn, questions humanity as represented by the court judges why we have got to be different and need to identify ourselves in those discriminating terms. With the angel in the world leaders' chamber during the Second World War, light in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Angels' Prayer* is a pacifying cosmopolitan power. It is "the light of the truth" to which this angel, referred to in the first scene as First Angel, tells Second Angel that humans must "open their eyes." First Angel believes "inhabitants of heaven", should "descend" to "inhabitants of earth" to help them see the light of truth. In spite of its apparent theological overtones, the play's opening scene sidelines God while allowing the angels to act as free agents. When First Angel decides to descend to earth responding to "pleas" and "prayers" against war from "the East, the West, and the center of the Earth" it is a voluntary decision. The dialogue between the two angels at the beginning of the play shows a democratic rather than theocratic state. First Angel could vote against a heedless heaven. He disagrees with a majority opinion represented by Second Angel that they "cannot do anything to these people." They don't resort to God, as angels traditionally must do, to decide who is right and who is wrong. Here First Angel not only expresses his opposition to heaven's policy of passivity regarding human sufferings but freely acts on the side of moral humans who wish for peace in all parts of the globe: "And these pleas issuing from noble hearts? Are the gates closed to them? Shouldn't they find a path to our ears and a seat in our spirits? How heaven's inhabitants would be if they reject these pleas, turn away these prayers, and let

them fall back on the heads of their kneeling authors, as cold, hollow echoes. I'm going by myself" (254). This stance taken by the angel makes him look more like an advocate of peace in the UN or of immigration reform in the US Senate than God's agent who responds to commands without a question. The play takes advantage of the religious symbolic value of the angel to advocate peace in a world torn by war, but at the same time adapts his logic and action to secular institutions that together with religion might hopefully be able to effect a peaceful end to a horrific human situation. Peace cannot be miraculously achieved by heavenly intervention, but it needs a humanistic action whose agents in the play are compared to angels of mercy on earth. People who cannot see them are not necessarily *kuffār*, nonbelievers in the traditionally religious sense of the word. Believers may be more likely to wage war than skeptics. The scientist asks the monk: "You men of religion ... have you not been content at times to confer the cloak of sanctity on the massacres of those bloodshedders and tyrants?" (261). But religion still maintains a powerful rhetoric for both warmongers and advocates of peace. So the religiously appealing image of an angel fighting for peace does not lose its appeal in a secular context. The Prometheus-like angel's mission down on earth is indeed a response to a careless Earth rather than a heedless Heaven. Though coming from an angel, the message is mainly humanistic, addressing shared human values of love and peace. Humanity is represented by the character of the young girl who has lost her family in the war and whom the angel entrusts to the monk and the scientist. The angel makes sure that the girl will be safe with them only when he reconciles the conflict between the two men:

Angel: Give me your hand, Monk.

Monk: What are you doing?

Angel: I'll put it in this scientist's hand.

Monk: Yes, put it in his hand. My God in the heavens, I feel my complete faith returning to my heart like the wandering ewe to the fold.

An angel with a religious message should do the opposite; he would take the hand of the scientist to the hand of the monk instead of helping this state of untraditional conversion in which the monk finds faith in the scientist's hand. The monk is presented as a true-to-type man of religion who suspects science and condemns the scientist for being drunk.

Contrasted with the scientist, the latter's character is more complex. Their confrontation takes place in the forest. As we will also see in his *Shams Al-Nahār*, Al-Hakim finds in the wilderness a sort of spirituality suitable for discussing big universal issues. Like the monk before him, while looking for a shelter away from the bombs, the scientist meets with the angel, the young girl, and the monk. As the three persons are standing together, he thinks it is a wedding ceremony. He introduces himself to them as a chemist but more important as "a man of conscience." He tells them his story of expulsion from scientific community due to his drive towards serving humanity by his scientific discoveries. For him science must be dedicated to the service of human welfare instead of war. Defending science against the monk's accusation that scientists think they are "superhuman," he retorts:

No science is superior to humanity. That's always been my creed. I told my colleagues that the day they interrogated me and stripped me of my scientific insignia and titles. They didn't object to serving tyranny. I shouted at them: science must be humane, otherwise it becomes bestial. For what slips from the hand of one falls to the other's claw. There is nothing, and never will be,

anything other than that on this Earth. Oh, you don't see the extent of the power of evil. Do you know how great the expenses of the last great war were? [...] people have not yet dared assume some of these financial burdens for the sake of their own good and happiness. (261-62)

The scientist seems to have a “creed” of his own and doesn't need anything from the monk. With a bottle of wine in his hand and an attitude of irreverence to the monk's “memorized words” about people like him being “guilty of rebellion against the faith” (259), the scientist plays a role similar to that of the shepherd in Rumi's parable “Moses and the Shepherd” (*The Masnavi: Book Two*, trans. Mujaddedi 101-6) as performed by Hoday and the Mastan Group²³. The drunken shepherd talks with a down- to-earth God whom he loves and wishes to serve: “I would sew you a garment, I would comb your hair; I would wash your clothes, pick the lice away from you; [...] I would kiss your hand, massage your feet; [...] I would milk my goats so you may drink.” Overhearing the shepherd's words, Moses warns him against God's retributions for such a blasphemous talk. Then God blames Moses and asks him to find the shepherd and tell him he can worship God in the way he likes. Like the shepherd with his way of serving God, Al-Hakim's scientist wishes to serve humanity in a saintly fashion. Concerned with rules and manners, like Moses, the monk asks the scientist, “Can every drunk with a bottle claim a knowledge of chemistry?”

Scientist: And can every person who carries a bottle be called drunk, Monk?

Monk: Do you want me to call him a saint?

²³ See Hoday and Mastan's performance of Rumi's “Moosa va Shaban” (Moses and the Shepherd): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Adkwu8TjN8> June 21, 2013.

Scientist: If you call me that, you won't be too far wrong, but I'll be satisfied with less than that from you. Call me simply a man of conscience. (259)

The scientist finds himself deserving the title of a saint because he sees God in serving humanity. As the shepherd wants to feed God with the milk from his goats, the scientist invents ways to save humans from hunger, but a tyrant ruler reproaches him "We want your chemistry to change milk into bombs and butter into artillery while you want to transfer the milk and butter to the mouths of stupid fools like yourself, crazy Scientist" (260). In spite of negligible differences between the two cases, there is a similar hindrance to human benevolence. The dogmatic Moses and the tyrant ruler represent fundamentalism and colonialism respectively. As Moses frustrates the shepherd's desire to provide service in the name of his beloved God in Rumi's story, the ruler in the play does not let the scientist serve humanity in the way he wants to. Regardless of the intentions of each one, Moses and the ruler share the same outlook on their targets of criticism. The shepherd and the scientist are naïve givers who don't understand the language of their time and place. Both are outcasts, one banished from the community of believers, the other from the scientific community. There is a system of rules, divine or secular, Moses or the ruler masters and likes to impose on nonconformists. The monk in his religious attire still brings a more obvious parallel with Moses in the poem. But his recognition of the scientist in the end is due to the scientist's strong argument rather than to divine intervention.

Like *Angels' Prayer*, another play called *Ashwāk Al-Salām* (Thorns of Peace, 1957), advocates world peace. Critics underestimated the play's value by focusing on its simple morality and ignoring the intricacy of the play's allegorical structure, which alludes to the mythical formations of East versus West.

Stereotyping the East and the West: *Thorns of Peace*

In his preface to *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack Shaheen contends that “fictional narratives have the capacity to alter reality,” quoting Machiavelli’s cautioning statement: “ ‘The great majority of mankind is often more influenced by things that seem, rather than by things that are.’”(Shaheen xii)

Realizing the influence of stereotypes and the dangers of fictionalized images that are spread like rumors through media systems in the East and the West, Al-Hakim in his *Ashwāk Al-Salām* (Thorns of Peace) allegorically exposes the fictional narrative that is based on the binary oppositions of Eastern and Western values. He diagnoses miscommunication and conflicts between the East and the West as arising from what *seems* to both westerners and easterners to be true about each other.

The play’s structure depends on two inseparable axes where one allegorically supports the other in a way that makes it hard to tell which one makes the main plot. The play’s hero, simply called *Al-Khāṭīb* (Fiancé), is a political activist who travels occasionally to Geneva to share his idealistic concept of peace in international conferences. His struggle to attain peace at the international level is paralleled by a similar conflict at the level of personal affairs. The girl he loves and wants his family’s approval to engage, similarly called *Al-Khāṭība* (Fiancée), happens to be the daughter of the governor of Al-Sharqiya (in the Egyptian Delta, north-east of Cairo) whose name literally means “the eastern.” Because the fiancé’s father is the governor of Al-Gharbiya, another Delta governorate whose name likewise comes from its location north-west of Cairo and means “the western,” the two fathers know each other as colleagues. But their knowledge of each other is based on rumors and preconceived negative pictures rather than real acquaintance.

The fiancé's father tells his wife, *Al-Walida* (Mother), why he cannot approve his son's desire to marry Al-Sharqiya governor's daughter:

Fiancé's Father: That man our son wants to marry his daughter, do you know what sort of man he is?

Mother: I know he is your colleague.

Fiancé's Father: Not enough, he's a brute.

Mother: A brute?

Fiancé's Father: He killed his wife.

Mother: We know she died of heart disease!

Fiancé's Father It is he who killed her. He doubted her behavior, imprisoned her, took her jewelry and money, and tortured her by hunger and deprivation, which weakened her body and heart. He is such a ruthless man.

Mother: Maybe these are all rumors. (Al-Hakim 26-27, my translation)

The father assures the mother that his knowledge is based on facts and concludes that the daughter of such a monster as Al-Sharqiya governor must have been corrupted by her family's environment. On the other side a dialogue between the daughter and her father shows how the fiancé's father is misinformed but also reveals a similarly negative image that Al-Sharqiya governor has formulated about his colleague. He tells his daughter how a licentious womanizer her lover's father is and suspects that "like father, like son" (39).

Thus we may read the governor of Al-Sharqiya (the eastern) and the governor of Al-Gharbiya (the western) as representing the images of a monstrous East and a licentious West respectively. These images are relayed to each side by a media apparatus that is

humorously depicted in Al-Hakim's play through the characters of the two investigators who provide the governors with documented information supporting their suspicions that children are not morally different from their parents. Reluctant to relay his suspicions to his son or daughter before investigating and providing tangible proofs, each father uses the best detective in his governorate to gather information about his son's fiancée, or daughter's fiancé, so that convincing reasons might be ready to support rejecting the marriage proposal. Each detective manages to get information documented by a photograph seemingly proving love betrayal. Now each of the fathers works separately but on the same plan, with documents to help them implant in the two lovers doubts about each other. The shocking new picture fictionalized by the detectives – with no doubt about their good intentions – shockingly replaces the idealistic picture the two lovers used to hold for each other. But it does not take long till the misinformed lovers meet together and eventually find out how the two photographs were taken out of context. Now it is the fathers' turn to overcome their old prejudices and rediscover each other. They are surprised to find that they have much in common. Both of them love flowers. Both are also planning to make it their occupation upon retirement to grow flowers in their gardens. In the end they agree to work together on growing flowers while their children agree to work together on spreading messages of world peace. Like flowers, peace has thorns as the play's title suggests. And as we love flowers, we love peace in spite of its thorns. Al-Hakim shows this as a common inclination of normal people everywhere, and suggests at the same time that there is still the pathological case of warmongers among world leaders who are averse to peace as some people are allergic to flowers.

Unfortunately, in spite of the warm ovation the Fiancé gets from the audience for his paper on peace, the Geneva conference fails due to the insistence of two unnamed world powers – obviously America and the Soviet Union – that each one threatens the other’s strategic interests. This is taken by the Fiancé in a press conference as an indication of world leaders’ aversion to peace in spite of people’s natural inclination exhibited in their warm cheers to speeches about peace.

Fiancé: All peoples want to walk on the way to peace. So they must reach it. This is natural... [... News comes during the press conference telling about the two powers’ warlike attitude to each other...]

Second Journalist: [Shocked by the two powers’ attitude] But all without exception were cheering for peace!

Fiancé: They will always clap for peace. This is something else.

First Journalist: Is it hypocrisy then?

Fiancé: No. Everyone really wants peace. No one rejects peace. [77-83]

Believing that everyone wants peace from the people’s applause, the play’s protagonist reveals one of Al-Hakim’s naïve points; Hitler undoubtedly enjoyed warmer cheers than advocates of peace; and so do warmongers, perhaps all over the world and all throughout the history of mankind. It is true that “people always clap for peace” but they also cheer even more enthusiastically for war.

While we may not take ovation or even the image of flowers as evidence for any natural inclination to peace, let us accept Al-Hakim’s play as an attempt to look for common grounds between fighting camps and to reveal the falsity of preconceived images.

Naiveté usually comes from the illusion of conceiving “the true picture.” It is safe for the playwright, and perhaps it is his strongest point that gives the play a cosmopolitan appeal, to suggest that nothing about the two governors and the societies they represent is really monstrous or licentious as in stereotypical Orientalist/Occidentalism conceptions; but attempting to answer the questions of who in fact they are and what they should do jeopardizes the play’s thematic structure. For the highly expected failure to provide the true picture – if that picture really exists in the first place – makes Al-Hakim’s peace project in *Ashwāk Al-Salām* like substituting an old misconception with a new one equally naïve and superficial albeit with benign intention. The play, however, is still worthy of critical attention, more than just the three lines Muhammad Mustafa Badawi grants it in his chapter on Al-Hakim’s plays: He argues, “*The Thorns of Peace* is a dramatization, both on the international political level and on the level of personal family relations, of the rather naïve notion that only mistrust, the product of mutual ignorance, stands in the way of achieving peace among men and nations” (Badawi 69). Generalizations and quick judgments might be common in survey studies like Badawi’s: we need to go into more details to understand how Al-Hakim dramatizes “mutual ignorance,” for example, and to explain the allegorical employment of names and images before evaluating the play’s intellectual substance and dramatic value.

Though like many of Al-Hakim’s works, *Ashwāk* seems to reveal naiveté in his thought, its thematic importance and the intellectual value it presents is still intact. And by saying it is simply an attempt to solve conflicts and wars by naïve moral prescription we ignore the more sophisticated elements of an intricate dramatic structure. For example, let us think of the fact that the words Al-Khāṭīb and Al-Khāṭība, the names of the play’s main

characters, have two meanings: fiancé/e and orator. In addition to our above reading of the play, we can add a question like this: what happens if we take the Arabic word Al-Khāṭīb/a to mean orator instead of fiancé/e? Would this second meaning of the names yield a different reading of the play? Maybe this new meaning would dissociate the playwright from the play's main characters, thus allowing the audience to expect no more than mere orations satirized in the play for being too idealistic to have any effects on the real world. This is not my reading of the play, and it is not to defend Al-Hakim against accusations of naiveté; but rather a call for more detailed analysis by researchers who are interested in Arabic literature in general and Al-Hakim's dramatic work in particular. The point is to pay more attention to possible readings of his plays, especially those neglected by critics and translators.

Another important question that may enrich the play's thematic value: why do the misconceptions of both governors about each other involve women—one of them is thought to be a woman abuser, the other a womanizer? Of course there is a substantial presence of the woman in Orientalist concepts about the East and Occidental concepts about the West. This explains why it is the governor of Al-Sharqiya who is misconceived as a an abuser of women (this is what the West says happens in the East?), while the governor of Al-Gharbiya as a womanizer (this is what the East thinks a Western man is?) But this question is also very useful when critics disagree about the question whether Al-Hakim is a misogynist (as many of his articles suggest) or not; for again it is the plays rather than the articles that show us more reliably Al-Hakim's attitude to women's issues. While abusing women or regarding them as means for pleasure is shown in the play as an example of a brutal behavior that tarnishes man's reputation, Al-Hakim does not merely

portray the customs of a conservative society. He indirectly handles feminist issues from the perspective of an advocate of peace regarding family and international relations. The daughter/son-mother in law relationship is also subject to stereotypes and preconceived images. Mothers-in-law have been caricatured in popular movies especially those from the fifties and sixties like the popular Egyptian comedian Isma‘il Yasin’s *Ḥamati Malāk* (*My Mother-in-Law is an Angel*), *Ḥamāti Qunbola Zarriya* (*My Mother-in-Law is an Atomic Bomb*) and *Al-Ḥamawat Al-Fātenāt* (*The Charming Mothers-in-Law*). All these movies are nostalgically remembered today for their humorous situations and comic actors and actresses from the so-called *zaman Al-fann Al-jamīl* (art’s Golden Age) in Egypt without realizing their substantial support of the stereotype of the nasty, troublesome, albeit funny, mother-in-law. The popular comedienne Mari Munīb (1905-1969), well-known as the mother-in-law of the Egyptian cinema, usually played the role of the comic oppressor of her daughter/son-in-law.

In *Ashwāk* Al-Hakim deals more seriously with this problematic family relationship. By criticizing the way it has been fictionalized, he alludes to another narrative at the larger world scale. The struggle for dominance in a household where mothers traditionally live with sons or daughters-in-law is not an issue in the cultural East-West conflict as both are equally triggered by misinformation and prejudgments. The heroine challenges the stereotypical *ḥamawāt* (mothers-in-law) picture, providing an example of how hatreds are based on preconceived pictures people are made to believe through fictional narratives defining who we are. Unlike her girlfriends who all talk about their plans to encounter presumably aggressive mothers-in-law, the fiancée wonders why they

exhibit this inimical attitude assuming a hateful picture of *ḥamawat* even before they have one. The Fiancé tells his mother,

The conversation between them was about mothers-in-law. Everyone was showing her plans to subdue her mother-in-law when I heard a quiet voice among them wondering “why this enmity to the mother-in-law? Why does a wife start the relationship with her mother-in-law as if she is dealing with an enemy before she knows her? ... There is no reason for such hatred except for misunderstanding inherited from barbaric ages! Peace with the mother-in-law is possible [...]. With logic and understanding every peace is possible! ... (21)

Overhearing this off-stage conversation, the Fiancé admires her sentiment. Unlike her companions who hold her up as an object of ridicule, he thinks that this is really the girl who can share his global concerns for peace. Both believe their love for each other is based on this shared propositional attitude rather than volatile emotions.

This scene is recapitulated as the Fiancé repeats the words of the Fiancée in Geneva. Thus the play’s audience can always make the connection between the personal implications of the social theme of family relations and the political, cultural “thorns” on the way to peace at the international level. Equally important is the significance of the woman sharing the man ideas and entering his life as an equal through her mental prowess and intellectual competence. Al-Hakim’s positive engagement in issues of great concern to women supports an argument initiated by William Hutchins. Hutchins has made a substantial effort to make Al-Hakim more appealing to Western readers. He devotes an entire chapter in his *Tawfiq Al-Hakim: A Reader’s Guide* (2003) to Al-Hakim’s “Islamic

Feminism.” He attempts to refute a prevailing negative assumption about Al-Hakim’s position on modern debates about women and gender roles:

I considered Tawfiq Al-Hakim a liberal male chauvinist, until I started reading feminist philosophers such as Ann Ferguson and Virginia Held. Based on their work, I now claim to see Al-Hakim as a “proto-feminist, Islamic feminist, or perhaps in Joel Anderson’s vocabulary, “a neotraditionalist,” a term he used for thinkers such as David Blankenhorn when pointing out the curious convergence of their views with those feminists like Held. (Hutchins 195)

Through several examples of works by Al-Hakim that question the status of women in a changing society, Hutchins finds Al-Hakim’s ideas, which might be taken as anti-feminist, should qualify him to enter into a larger and more complicated debate about the future of humankind with gender roles being changed. Though Hutchins provides examples from Al-Hakim’s major plays like *Ahl Al-Kahf*, *Shahrazād*, *Princess Sunshine* and novels like *‘Usfūr min Al-Sharq* and *‘Awdat Al-Rūḥ*, Hutchins depends largely on one of Al-Hakim’s science fiction stories called *Fī Sanat Milyūn (In the Year One Million)* in which Al-Hakim depicts a genderless, fearless, deathless, but loveless society that has dispensed with reproduction thousands of years ago. When the hero, a geologist, finds a skull and knows death, it is the first step to find out love with a person who still has some “marginal” remnants of femininity and who shares with the hero a struggle against an oppressive regime to regain love in human life. Hutchins argues that Al-Hakim’s point is that a mutual sense of fearful “vulnerability” which can be brought only by the existence of death is in fact the basis for the bonding of two loving persons. This is one of the points that, according to Hutchins, brings Al-Hakim closer to debates raised by feminist philosophers

on issues like “androgyny” which Hutchins believes is the subject of Al-Hakim’s criticism, not feminism (202). Hutchins concludes “The light of the feminist social theories of Ann Ferguson, Virginia Held, and Carol Gilligan, curiously makes Tawfiq Al-Hakim seem more contemporary and feminist than anticipated, even to the extent of providing some guidance in judging the merits of their theories” (Hutchins 210).

Hutchins, thus, opens a new perspective from which Al-Hakim could be read anew. Similarly, here we read *Ashwāk* as a cosmopolitan objection to Orientalist stereotyping of the East and the West. Another dimension in Al-Hakim’s plays that needs more critical attention is Sufism. Here we explore this dimension in *Shams Al-Nahār* (*Princess Sunshine*, 1965) to show an example of what we could call, in Appiah’s terms, “partial cosmopolitanism.”

Sufism as an example of “partial cosmopolitanism”: *Princess Sunshine*

Introducing his first volume of *Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq Al-Hakim* (1981) Hutchins provides more illustrative, albeit very brief, reference to the relationship between the play’s heroine, Shams Al-Nahār (princess Sunshine) and her lover, Qamar Al-Zamān (Moonlight): “In ‘Princess Sunshine, the dervish-like Moonlight provides the princess with a short course in Sufi ethics. The play also includes the mystical concept of the perfect man” (Hutchins 1981 p. 4). As Hutchins says in his introduction to *Tawfiq Al-Hakim: A Reader’s Guide* that his book is “an invitation to a dialogue with the works of Tawfiq Al-Hakim rather than a definitive analysis of them” (Hutchins 2003 p. xi), there seems to be nothing to expect more than hints to important themes that require further analysis in response to his invitation.

The play's settings are similar to those of *Alf Leila wa Leila (One Thousand and One Nights)*. The names are taken from characters in that famous collection but the characters themselves keep little connection with the original in those tales. Shams Al-Nahār, the play's heroine, is the name of the heroine of the "Tale of Ali Bakr and Shams Al-Nahār"; Qamar Al-Zamān, the play's hero, is the hero of another tale, "Tale of Qamar Al-Zamān and Princess Budūr." Nothing but the names could be said to have connection to the *Arabian Nights*. There is hardly any similarity between the play's characters and their namesakes. But the names play an important role in giving the play an exotic atmosphere.

Princess Shams Al-Nahār, the youngest of Sultan Nu'mān's three daughters, has stipulated an extraordinary condition for marriage, that is, according to the Sultan's account to his Vizier, "all the men pass below her window and she can choose from among them without distinction" (175). Finding his daughter's condition hard to fulfill, Sultan Nu'mān asks his Vizier to help him find a way to make it more reasonable. The princess refuses the Vizier's suggestion that he sets some criteria of choice in order to exclude the "hoi polloi," correcting their misunderstanding of her condition: "I have determined and remain determined to have the door opened equally to all men. I will receive each one who comes forward to seek my hand. I will converse with him myself and attempt to test his metal" (177). Now the condition is more difficult than they suspected, the Sultan and his Vizier couldn't do anything about it, but they welcome Sunshine's suggestion that anyone who comes to seek the Princess for marriage will be whipped if he fails: "a reasonable condition to check the flow of jokers" (178). After many offstage failures and consequent whiplashes, the Sultan and his Vizier think no one will dare to come anymore, but soon a man comes and meets with the Princess who, in spite of all the man's material attractions

he offers to her, rejects him. After the man is whipped another comes with attractions of a different kind, promising her a happy family life, but he is also rejected and whipped. The third one is Qamar Al-Zamān. Obviously poor and ragged, he is ridiculed by the Vizier and the Sultan. The two men want to whip him before Sunshine tests him. But he insists that he has the right to seek the hands of the Princess because of the indiscriminating announcement they have made and assures them he does not care for being whipped in case of failure. Though they see he is a failure already and address him as vagabond, Shams finds him interesting. She starts by the question she asks all the men before:

Sunshine²⁴: [...] Suppose I become your wife—what will you do with me?”

Moonlight: “What will I do with you? I won’t do anything with you.

You are the one who will act on yourself and for yourself. What are you good at?”

Qamar’s questions seem to be the right way to answer Shams’s questions. She eventually decides to take him as a husband. But, adding more to the chagrin of the Sultan and the Vizier, he refuses to marry the Princess under the pretext that he has not become a human being yet and he wants her to make a man out of him before they marry. He tells her that he is now merely a handful of dust. Convinced of his argument, confident that she will succeed to make him a human being, and also curious to experience a new life, she leaves the castle with him disguised as a man in a soldier’s costume. Soon we find that it is Shams that is being humanized in the sense of Qamar’s understanding of the perfect man, simply

²⁴ This is Hutchins’s translation of the name Shams al-Nahar (Sun of the Day). He also translates Qamar al-Zaman (Moon of the time) into Moonlight. Both are Arabic first names. In the original Arabic, however, the names are abbreviated into Shams (sun) and Qamar (moon).

a liberated, independent, moderate person who cares for others. We know from the very beginning of the play that Shams has the potential to be a perfect human being in this sense. Though nothing is given to us about how she looks or how she is dressed, the dialogue between her father and the Vizier in the opening scene reveals her more fundamental qualities that make her “unique” among girls of her age and position:

Sultan: On what ill-omened night was this daughter born? Years passed and she doesn't wish to get married. Her two sisters have been married in a way fitting the daughters of kings ... to the pick of the princes and the richest of the sultans. But she ... is not tempted by wealth or rank. I don't know, then, what in life does attract her.

Vizier: Princess Sunshine has been this way since she was young, your majesty. Amazing, unique ... She has excelled at horseback riding, sword play, reading books, and prolonged meditation and abstinence to an amazing and dazzling extent ...

Sultan: All this could be endured except that will of hers ... except that condition she stipulates for marriage.

Accordingly, Shams has been already in the practice of liberated thought and action. She also has a strong will of choice that qualifies her for being a teacher herself. All what she needs is to get out of the castle that imprisons her talents and curbs her potentials to benefit other people. There in the wilderness she learns how to make her own food, but more important is a lesson in what Hutchins describes as “Sufi ethics.” The ethics that are taught like self-restraint and *zuhd* (abstinence); the terms that define the play's events like travel, seeking knowledge, leaving the castle as an allusion to spiritual liberation from the body

and man's material existence; the disciple-master relationship between Shams and Qamar; all might give the play a Sufi flavor. But it is hardly possible for the play's dialogic lesson to qualify for a religious discourse to which God is central. In Sufism as an Islamic tradition, God is first and last, the beginning and the end of all human endeavors: "Hua Al-Awal wa Al-Akhir" (Quran: ...). But the discourse to which the play belongs locates the human being in the center. Here humans create one another; even if it is a figurative creation, it is at least an empowerment, an agency attributed to humans rather than God whose role in the play does not go beyond rhetorical expressions like *ma shā'a Allah* and *la ḥawla wala quata illa billāh*. Even these expressions are often spoken by the Sultan, the Vizier, or characters other than Shams and Qamar. These two main characters pronounce philosophical statements in Sufi terms but the larger implications lie in the heart of secular humanism. Let us see this following part of a dialogue in which Qamar teaches Shams a lesson on moderation:

Moonlight: [...] It is not easy for people to check the unruliness of their excessive desires.

Sunshine: What harm is there in excessive desires?

Moonlight: Don't you see the harm? They are squandered resources which should be preserved for something more useful.

Sunshine: Why are you concerned about people and their resources?

Moonlight: I'm a part of them.

Sunshine: How is this feeling that you are a part of people possible when you don't know them?

Moonlight: (*moving his finger*): This finger does not know the rest of the hand, but it feels the pain of the rest. This is a natural thing.

The fingers metaphor echoes the Prophet's saying that believers are like the organs of one body where the pain of one organ is naturally shared by the rest of the body. Al-Hakim moves the saying's significance beyond the community of believers to include people we do not know. Moral values like moderation and self-restraint are used here to serve the purpose of Qamar's cosmopolitan inclination. People that we don't know cannot be within our comfort zones, and to feel their pain the Princess's first step has been to leave the castle, her own comfort zone, behind her back.

The theme of corruption in the play yields a political reading. Corruption, however, is not necessarily political, for the play makes it clear that everyone knows everyone is corrupt and thus justifies his own corruption; it is a state of moral decline all people are blamed for. Qamar's suggestion that the Sultan is not a good ruler because he has not been ruled before (187) may be taken as a statement against monarchy, but the play was written in 1965 when Egypt had been a republic for thirteen years, and there is no point in criticizing the monarchical system of government at that time. Al-Hakim also had been disillusioned with Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime by the time he wrote the play. Elements of corruption as drawn in the play might have characterized Egypt in the sixties and could be taken as criticism against the political system at that time; but this is not what the play is mainly about. For it is still more important than Qamar's comment on the Sultan's rule that Qamar declares his own inability to be a ruler because, he maintains, "[...] it's the excellent follower who makes the excellent leader. I have not yet practiced and been formed enough to be an excellent follower" (187). This self-assessment disqualifies Qamar

not only politically but also religiously. Since he is not an excellent follower, he cannot be a Sufi disciple, the necessary training to be a Sufi master, or even a religious person of any sort, so to speak. But the religious elements play the same role in this play as in *Angels' Prayer*. They serve as the playwright's means to get his points across didactically without suggesting a religious source of morality. Sufism in the play neither motivates an action nor modifies its end.

In the wilderness— usually an area where the human soul is believed to find an outlet away from the confinements of physical comforts and social life, and a fringed space that gives a sense of “spiritual detachment” and voluntary exile—Shams and Qamar overhear a conversation between two men trying to hide a bag of money they have stolen from the treasury. The two men are the inspector and his aide, whose job is, ironically, the protection of the treasury. A sense of duty obliges Shams and Qamar to stop them. Refusing to be bribed into silence, they threaten to report on them. The four persons— Shams is still in the soldier's uniform— act like two teams with a moral gap between them. Since the inspector and his aide claim that corruption is the norm and anyone refusing easy money is an idiot, the play arranges for them to learn the motive behind Shams and Qamar's moral position:

Inspector: Is this credible? You want to return the purse to the treasury
without there being anything in that for you?

Moonlight: You could say we have a motive ...

Inspector: What is it?

Moonlight: Duty.

Inspector: What's that? ... Duty? Who imposed this duty on you?

Sunshine: No One.

Aide: What's this we hear ...

Inspector: Truly ... it is something amazing.

Moonlight: This is something natural.

Inspector: Listen, please ... Say something we can understand. (209)

A more complete answer to the question “who imposed this duty on you?” other than “no one” would help the inspector and his aide understand the motive. A traditionally religious answer to this question would be “God.” Again when Qamar tries to convince the inspector and his aide of the moral gain they will get if they return the money to the treasury he argues that they will find a jewel in their chests. When they ask “who will put it there,” he retorts, “No one.” Shams adds, “It is actually present inside you. [...] But smut, filth, and dust have accumulated around it, so it is dull, hidden, and not giving off light” (212). This image of human goodness as a jewel buried under removable corrupting matters—though vague, puzzling and unconvincing, at least to the two men who still think of Shams and Qamar as lunatics— is traditional. It elaborates on Qamar’s above description of their moral position as “natural,” a word that could be merely an expression of Qamar’s disagreement with the inspector that this position is amazing, simply meaning it is just normal. But the mercurial nature of the word “natural” could have deeper implications when critics write about Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s works trying to dig into his own convictions and philosophical underpinnings. Commenting on Al-Hakim’s *Al-Malik Udīb (King Oedipus*, 1949) Pierre Cachia in his *Overview of Modern Arabic Literature* (1990) suggests that Al-Hakim’s religious views cannot be anything more than “a vague deism” (Cachia 206-7). William Hutchins disagrees,

Although there has clearly been a development in the religious views that permeated his literary works over the years, certain Islamic spiritual ideals remained constant throughout. To recognize the spiritual ideals expressed deny this aspect of his literary works is, in my opinion, to misunderstand them. To recognize the ideals expressed but deny that they are Islamic would be to limit Islam to a rigid fundamentalism and to stereotype one of the world's great religions. (Hutchins 2002, pp 215-16)

As Hutchins criticizes Western criticism, he perceives its affinity with a fundamentalist critique by Faruq Dusuqi, an Egyptian critic who accuses Al-Hakim of “monism, humanism, and Westernism.” According to Hutchins, both types of criticism misrepresent not only Al-Hakim but also Islam itself. Hutchins’s insistence on affiliating Al-Hakim to Islam is indeed akin to recent research on Sufism that redefines it as an Islamic tradition, arguing against Muslim Fundamentalists, who locate Sufism outside its Islamic framework. It is fruitful, however, in Islamic studies to seek an accurate definition of Sufism, but what is the point in attempting to find out whether Al-Hakim is writing from an Islamic perspective? Hutchins’s point is that the Islamic features of Al-Hakim’s spiritual ideals serve as an indication that Islam encompasses a spectrum of traditions wider than what both Orientalists and Fundamentalists think. Though Tetz Rooke concedes that Hutchins’s “perspective is honest,” he warns that “it can easily create the same kind of stereotypes that the author wants to deconstruct. [...] It reduces Arab writers, apparently forever, to the role of representatives of ‘Islamic culture’ implicitly understood as the opposite of ‘Western culture’” (Rooke 117). The question now, which Rooke does not ask,

is, if Hutchins's honest attempt to deconstruct the stereotypes is counterproductive, what is the best approach to the work of Muslim writers like Al-Hakim's? In other words, what should we look for that does not implicitly assert their "otherness"? Like Hutchins, we still need to read Al-Hakim as rooted in the Islamicate culture, and we cannot deny his being a Muslim in theological terms as Fundamentalists do. But we still need to see where the particularly Islamic meets with the cosmopolitan, blurring the boundary between the Muslim and the Other.

Returning to the confrontation Shams and Qamar have with the inspector and his aide, we need to go beyond locating Al-Hakim's morality in certain religious convictions. Let us think of the significance not only of the moral obligation to help arrest criminals but also of where and how the arrest takes place. The importance of the wilderness, the place of the confrontation, lies in its being detached not only spiritually but also geographically and politically. The paradise-like wilderness lies between two kingdoms equally corrupt but does not belong to any of them. We know Shams is from the kingdom of her father, Sultan Nu'mān, and the inspector and his aide are from the other country governed by prince Hamdān. But Qamar is still a mysterious figure though he tells Shams more about himself by the end of the play. The most important aspect about his character is his ability to cross the boundaries between countries. While Shams eventually returns to her country we don't know where he is going after they decide to sacrifice their personal life together for their duties— one for her duty to her country, while the other may go back to the wilderness as a common space, a meeting point for the whole world where he may confront other human violations from a detached perspective.

The attempt of Shams and Qamar to arrest the inspector and his aide comes out of a universal obligation expressed in a spiritual language. To focus on whether it is a deist or a Sufi sort of spirituality, or on whether Al-Hakim is a devout Muslim or not is to stress the means and ignore the more significant end of Al-Hakim's morality. Morality in Al-Hakim's terms must be valued for its cosmopolitan significance regardless of the local color of its language. In the case of Appiah's brand of cosmopolitanism, however, the local color is a necessary component of what he calls "partial cosmopolitanism." He maintains that besides one's loyalty to the human race, "a creed that disdains the partialities of kinfolk and community may have a past, but it has no future" (Appiah xvii-xviii). Thus in Appiah's understanding of cosmopolitanism the local and the human are two faces of one coin. The problem with approaching the work of Arab writers, however, lies in focusing only on one side of the cosmopolitan coin. In our play the relationship between Shams and Qamar may illustrate how Al-Hakim negotiates the boundaries between the local and the human. Shams and Qamar are Arabic words for sun and moon respectively. Qamar is the cosmopolitan character who believes he is just a handful of dust and that Shams will create something out of his nothingness. Though the plot goes in the opposite direction where obviously it is Shams who experiences transformation, it is still Shams that gives life and power to Qamar's human morality. With her in a soldier's dress they are able to arrest the inspector and his aide. Carrying out Qamar's moral principles, Shams changes Prince Hamdān from an apathetic, careless ruler into a caring human being.

Without Shams, Qamar is a useless, cold moralist. She gives her teacher's ideals warmth and practical value, the same effect the sun has on the moon in real life. Qamar always needs a language so that people might make sense of his moral authority. Shams

provides Qamar with a universal language of love and compassion we could read in Sufi terms. Adding this role to Shams's position as a princess with local power, we can see Shams and Qamar moving together as one "partial" cosmopolitan body towards an application of human values debased by carelessness and corruption. The end of the play suggests that Qamar will always go around the world carrying his universally applicable human values. In her turn, Shams, now able to leave the castle of self-centeredness and bigotry of both nationality and social class, will always shape Qamar's moral values and give them a framework, a color relative to the locality where corruption takes place.

In conclusion, there is a traceable cosmopolitan sensibility in Al-Hakim's work as shown in the four plays analyzed above. Unfortunately, this attitude has been ignored by critics who focus on cultural disparity in his work. It is even worse when the focus shifts to an examination of whether Al-Hakim is writing from an Islamic perspective, which inevitably leads to either a fundamentalist or an orientalist reading of his work. Due to his concerns for world peace and human values of justice, love and freedom, Al-Hakim should be read anew. His *Shams Al-Nahār (Princess Sunshine)*, *Ashwāk Al-Salām (Thorns of Peace)*, *Ṣalāt Al-Malā'ika (Angels' Prayer)*, and *Kul Shayi' fī Maḥalih (Not A Thing out of Place)* are not the only examples where we can find an expression of Al-Hakim's cosmopolitan attitude. This chapter is an attempt to open a discussion of his work as part of the world's literary endeavors to shed light on areas of global concern.

Al-Hakim's work came during the past century, before the world witnessed a dramatic turn in the relationship between the West and the Muslim world. This historical turn happened mainly due to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September 11, 2001. With that horrible event, the theory of the clash of civilizations began to seem

valid in the eyes of naïve observers. Building bridges of understanding and questioning prevalent stereotypes has become more urgent than before. Writers from the Islamicate world have undoubtedly shared in this endeavor. The next chapter focuses on the Pakistani Akbar Ahmed (born 1943) as one of those writers.

CHAPTER III

Akbar Ahmed: The Dilemma of Representation

Are Muslim reformers like *Titanic's* Orchestra?

DER SPIEGEL: You make it seem as if your religion weren't changing. The American news magazine *Time* praised Islam's "quiet revolution" in a cover story. And the reformers you call for do exist. One of them is the Iranian thinker Abdolkarim Soroush, who recognizes many paths to the true faith, and another is the recently deceased Egyptian theologian Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

Abdel-Samad: I knew Abu Zayd well, and I respected him. You know that radical judges declared him to be divorced from his wife because of his liberal views, and that he had to flee Egypt and go to the Netherlands. But those kinds of thinkers are the exception. Most so-called reformers of Islam remind me of the band on the *Titanic*, which kept on playing even as the ship was sinking, so as to give the passengers the illusion of normalcy. The underlying problems are not addressed.

By tacitly supporting Thilo Sarrazin, a German politician in the mold of Donald Trump or Silvio Berlusconi, by underestimating the efforts of Muslim reformers, comparing them to *Titanic's* orchestra in this interview with Der Spiegel, and by calling for a "post-Quranic discourse" in his *Der Untergang der Islamischen Welt* (Downfall of the Islamic World, 2010), Hamed Abdel-Samad, an Egyptian-German political scientist, falls into the Orientalist, fundamentalist rhetoric that has drawn a false dichotomy between the so-called

Islamic world and the rest of the world. Even if we assume that we can demarcate an “Islamic world” and metaphorically bring it onto one self-contained ship, we may see in Abdel-Samad’s image an identity crisis. He imagines a sinking world while failing to observe himself as being part of this world, a passenger on that ship. By declaring the “downfall of the Islamic world”, he suggests nothing other than his own rootlessness. Now he cannot claim he has any “obligations,” (a key word in Appiah’s definition of cosmopolitanism), to people whom he thinks are dying anyways, or to a cultural life he believes is inevitably doomed with annihilation.

Abdel-Samad’s experience with different cultures, gained from education in Egypt, Germany and Japan, might have made him a cosmopolitan of some sort. That is, he might be a cosmopolitan in one of two “strands” of cosmopolitanism defined by Appiah: “the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship.” But he does not fit into the other strand: “that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (Appiah xv). For Appiah, the two strands are “intertwine[d]”; failing the second one does not enable us to stand in the position which Appiah defends and calls “partial cosmopolitanism”: It is a moderate position where “we need take sides neither with the nationalist who abandons all foreigners nor with the hard-core cosmopolitan who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality” (Appiah xvii).

If reform has to be from within, not from without, Muslim reformers like those in *Der Spiegel*’s short list should not be regarded as apologists or, in Abdel-

Samad's terms, normalizers. Nor should they be dubbed "kuffār" or "murtaddīn" as in Fundamentalist rhetoric. For Islamic tradition endorses reform. The famous, authentic hadith that is narrated in the 9th-century *Sunan Abi Dāwūd* one of the authoritative compilations of prophet Mohammed's sayings, "Allah will raise for this community at the end of every hundred years the one who will renovate (*yujaddid*) its religion for it" (<http://sunnah.com/abudawud/39>). Fundamentalists see the "Mujaddid" (renovator) in this hadith as one that takes Islam back to a state of "purity," which would mean persons like Sayyid Qutb and Hassan Al-Banna, or even Usama bin Laden and Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi would work as Mujaddidīn. The meaning of the hadith could be best understood, however, as evolution that corresponds to change of life over time. It is a progressive reform rather than a puritan nostalgia. It is, indeed, a dilemma of interpretation and representation that challenges Muslim reformers nowadays. This chapter deals with one of these contemporary Muslim reformers, Akbar Ahmed, focusing on the dramatization of this dilemma in his plays, *Noor* and *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*. I argue that the plays reflect a cosmopolitan Islam rooted in its mystical tradition that is known as Sufism.

Somewhere in Between

Akbar Ahmed (b 1943), former Pakistani Ambassador to Britain (1999-2000), is best known as an anthropologist and a political scientist whose intellectual and academic career has centered on the project of bridging gaps between different cultures. He focuses on the common ground between Islam and other religions and cultures in several books such as *Islam under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World* (2003), *After*

Terror: Promoting Dialogue between Civilizations (2005), *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization* (2007), *Journey into America: The Challenge of Islam* (2010), and *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (2014).

However, few among Ahmed's readers know he is a playwright; his two plays, *Noor* and *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*, will be analyzed here because they provide a useful counterpart with Tawfiq Al-Hakim's plays. What many also don't know about Ahmed is that he is a poet. In his preface to the collection of his poems, *Suspended Somewhere Between* (2011), he says "people often introduce me as anything but a poet" (vii). He has not edited the poems, arguing convincingly that "by editing one's work at a different stage in life we impose unnecessary censorship on someone at a different time and place, and who, in some senses, is no longer the same person" (v). In the first poem in the collection, "Train to Pakistan," Ahmed shares his "first memory" as a little boy escaping with his family at the time of Indian partition (1947). He reflects on how that event has shaped a significant part of his collective identity.

My first memory
shaped me
continues to inform me
and I share it
with an entire subcontinent

A small boy
in a crowded train compartment

bathed in dim yellow light motionless at night

stranded

in the killing fields of the Punjab

Ahmed's memory cannot let such a horrible experience go without leaving an indelible impact on his consciousness. Here is where the collective and the personal interact. Ahmed could flee with his family, due to his mother's intuition as he says, to Pakistan, then a new country:

My parents were escaping

with me

from Delhi

on the slow train

in that hot summer

and heading for

Karachi

to a new country

and a new destiny

My mother had

Insisted

my father not take the previous train

her woman's intuition was right

everyone on that train was slaughtered

[...]

Then comes the moment where young Ahmed captures from a collective experience what then becomes his own diagnosis of humanity plagued by “hatred and anger” and desperately in need to love as a healing power:

and I was not too young
to feel
the searing heat
of the irrational hatred and anger
around me
and what it said
of the desperate need to love and be loved

Eventually Ahmed defines himself in relation to that event. That history stays with him, defining who he has always been:

And I am always
that boy
slightly bewildered and lost
but always wide-eyed
with curiosity
at the colors and peoples
of the world passing around me
and always hopeful
because I know
some higher power
looks over me. (3-4)

Commenting on the tragic incident as narrated in the above poem, Dan Futterman, actor and screenwriter, concludes in his foreword to Ahmed's poetry collection:

India's loss of Ahmed's family was Pakistan's, and our, gain. It placed Ahmed in that painful position—suspended somewhere between homelands, friendships, faiths—but it was a position that afforded the best, perhaps the only, vantage point from which to clearly see the beauty and madness of the world. And it proved to be the ideal place from which to begin his life's work: to try to bridge the gap between cultures, and to introduce one set of people to another. (ii)

For the purpose of this study, it is important to shed more light on the vantage point that Ahmed occupies as an intellectual. There is also a significant reference by Ahmed himself to the meaning of the title he has given to his poetry collection, *Suspended Somewhere Between*. He maintains that it “reflects our situation today as we increasingly appear suspended somewhere between cultures, places, peoples, and periods in time.” He adds that “perhaps there is no better antidote to this predicament than the hope contained in that great line by John Lennon—‘All you need is love’” (vii) Ahmed's phrase “our situation” does not show exactly whose situation it is. The phrase cannot mean us as humans everywhere, for not everyone realizes the “predicament” of suspension. Many people feel secure, or at least think they are, or can be, secure within certain cultural borders. It is, however, a human situation that applies to people in the age of globalization even if they don't realize Ahmed's predicament. But from those experiencing cultural suspension as defined by Ahmed come intellectuals who have trespassed cultural boundaries and found an expression for this human situation. Like Edward Said's concept of exile, suspension implies a sense of detachment in spite of the persistence of old allegiances and

partisanship. Ahmed tinges that sense of detachment with spirituality when he finds in *love* as used in Lennon's song an "antidote" to feelings of doubt, distrust, insecurity, or estrangement that one may find in confronting a culture different from his own.

This sort of detachment describes a position akin to that found by Said in those words by Hugh of St Victor (1096-1141) as cited by the author of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach: "The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land." The one to whom the entire world is a foreign land is, for Said, an exile whose location in many places suggests his dwelling in no place. Explaining Auerbach's quote from Hugh of St Victor, Said says "the more one is able to leave one's cultural home more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment and the generosity necessary for true vision" (*Orientalism* 259). This is also the intellectual's "exilic displacement" as Said sees it in his *Representations of the Intellectual*:

For the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from the usual career, in which "doing well" and following in time-honored footsteps are the main milestones. Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. If you can experience that fate not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own pattern, [...] that is a unique pleasure. Being on the margin, intellectuals could not only have pleasure in what they do, but attain a detached position where a unique perspective (a vantage point for "true vision") from

which they perceive their own and other cultures may be the source of that unique pleasure. The patterns, which Said encourages writers to go beyond and write according to their own patterns, are the familiar, the parochial, the particularistic, all that cannot move writers from narrow perspectives to cosmopolitanism. “Routine” is the word Said associates with writers whom he thinks cannot make that move. In *Covering Islam* he describes an essay by Bernard Lewis as “the product of a mind going over routine things in a lazy, not particularly interesting way” (137). This also arises from Said’s understanding of Foucauldian power as he explains it in his “Foucault and the Imagination of Power”: “Foucault’s perspective [...] is that in the modern period to which he belongs there is an unremitting and unstoppable expansion of power favoring the administrators, managers, and technocrats of what he calls disciplinary society” (*Reflections on Exile* 240-41). In a society like this a critic’s sense of detachment is necessary for what Said calls “true vision.”

Said enjoys, though he describes in a lamentable tone similar to that in Ahmed’s description of cultural suspension, that privileged position of detachment and displacement which may have come from the facts about his own life experience that has located him in no place: “as any real exile will confirm, once you leave your home, wherever you end up you cannot simply take up life and become just another citizen of the new place. Or if you do, there is a great deal of awkwardness involved in the effort, which scarcely seems worth it” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 62).

Exile, detachment, and suspension imply the same position of a vantage point useful to intellectuals and cultural critics like Said and Ahmed. This is also useful for artists. For example, Stephen Dedalus, James Joyce’s alter ego, may exemplify the

privileges of that position in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Not all of us see ourselves as artists or cultural critics. But, in fact, anyone may assume the role of a cultural, social, or religious critic and pass simple judgments on complex situations according to particularistic familiar patterns. Conversely, a cosmopolitan position is very hard to maintain, especially for people like myself whose dwelling has been mostly in one culture. Take, for example, this answer I recently gave to a question about what was going on in Egypt after the Military intervention²⁵— allegedly supporting a popular uprising against President Mohamed Morsi on June, 30, 2013— and the consequent violence: “Now Egypt fights terrorism as it seems to be returning to its mother (the Muslim Brotherhood) raising the Qaida flag in the Egyptian streets and killing soldiers in Sinai.” Looking back at my own words from a more detached position, I see how problematic my assertion was. It was certainly no more than what I heard the mainstream Egyptian media say at that time. Even if we tolerate partisanship, there is still a misrepresentation of the situation. In a clearly divided Egypt, who represents it? What does “Egypt” mean in that statement? And if there are some terrorist groups in the country, does this justify coercive measures against all sorts of opposition? Finding questions makes my case more complex than mere change of political opinion. Dwellers of one culture tend to give bigoted assertions proliferated around them, through certain media apparatus than to question mainstream ideas and

²⁵ I’m saying “coup” not because the White House does not say it, but because many Egyptians believe the army supported a popular uprising. In a lecture she gave in The Middle East Institute and in an interview with PBS, Mona Makram Ebeid, professor of political science in AUC, argues it was not a coup, but rather like a “popular impeachment.” The political conflict in Egypt, however, is still deeper than how we name its events. For many of those who say it was a coup might have found a positive term to designate the military intervention if it had been on the side of whatever political or religious beliefs they hold and espouse. No one, though very few among Egyptian liberals had some doubts, thought of a name to describe the military taking over Mubarak’s regime after the revolution of January 25, 2011, because the military intervention at that time was welcome by the sweeping vast majority of the people.

beliefs, while a sense of detachment enables us to ask questions from a less biased vantage point.

The sociopolitical situation in the Middle East, with all those political and religious conflicts, cannot be fairly analyzed or thoroughly understood from the perspective of dwellers of one culture, while a position between two cultures like Said's and Ahmed's enables intellectuals to fathom the depth of the situation, to acknowledge what they don't or cannot know. Not only the similarity but also the contrast between Ahmed and Said is useful to us here as both men give illuminating concepts of the relationship between the West and the Muslim world. They have been brought up in similar conditions (e.g. in Egypt Said learnt English literature in a Catholic school as Ahmed did in Pakistan), experienced displacement and wrote from a position "suspended in between." This allows us to observe where Ahmed's work departs from Said's. Reviewing Ahmed's *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (2004), anthropologist Michael Fischer finds a difference of emphasis between Ahmed and Said.

Ahmed has usefully focused attention on the pervasive power of the media in the construction of contemporary Islamic debates both on the national and international stage. This is a worthy successor to Edward Said's *Covering Islam*, one that moves the discussion forward into the world of the technological conditions of politics rather than remaining on the level of moralistic complaint. (Michael Fischer 173)

In spite of the similarity between Ahmed's position and Said's, Fischer rightly observes the point where Ahmed sets the methodology of his anthropological work apart from Said's, which qualifies Ahmed's to succeed Said's. Ahmed himself develops his position

from Said's approach to Orientalism more than once in his books. Though he gives credit to Said's efforts in revealing the unfairness of some orientalist perceptions of the Muslim world, he suggests that Said is unfair also in his critique of orientalism, especially when Said, according to Ahmed, does not give credit to the efforts of many orientalists, some of them, like Massignon and Arberry among others, exhibit in their work sympathetic understanding of the Muslim world:

However powerfully Said argues his case, the work of older orientalists was marked by many positive features. These included a lifetime's scholarship, a majestic command of languages, a wide vision and breadth of learning and an association with the established universities. In this category are the well-known names of Hamilton Gibb, Bernard Lewis, Arthur Arberry, Montgomery Watt, Louis Massignon. We must not allow their links of various kinds with the colonial powers and a consciousness of the larger encounter between Islam and Christianity to detract from their contribution. While decrying some of their political assumptions, I, for one, applaud the efforts of the translators of favourites like Al-Beroni, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldun, and nearer home to me in South Asia, Babar and the founder of the Mughal Dynasty. (*Postmodernism and Islam* 180)

Among the orientalists given credit by Ahmed is surprisingly Bernard Lewis, who is frequently the subject of Said's criticism, and whom Ahmed himself criticizes for laying the theoretical foundation for the concept of "clash of civilizations." More than once, however, Ahmed and Lewis were hosted together to debate issues related to the Muslim world after 9/11. In these conversations the two men had more to say in common than their audiences might have expected. Said is hardly mentioned in these conversations— only

once Lewis tacitly alludes to his work when he was defining orientalism. Ahmed, in turn, seems to avoid what he considers faults in Said's criticism of orientalists, particularly Bernard Lewis.

In his *Towards Islamic Anthropology: Definition, Dogma and Directions*, Ahmed describes Said's *Orientalism* as "an indictment of the subject and its practitioners" as it "states explicitly the prejudices and tendentious arguments of the Orientalists." But he criticizes Said's argument for being "too passionate and angry." And to illustrate his point, Ahmed takes Bernard Lewis as an example. Though still critical of Lewis, Ahmed adds that "rather than accusing Bernard Lewis of mental exhaustion, moral bankruptcy, etc. I would have, as an anthropologist, pointed out some of the conceptual weaknesses in his study." Then Ahmed argues that Lewis's "categories of tribe and peasant are seriously at fault [...]. The one is often employed for the other. This to an anthropologist is not a minor slip" (*Towards Islamic Anthropology* 50). Perhaps Ahmed's argument is made no clearer than in *Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity*, a book he edited with Hastings Donnan. In the book's first chapter Ahmed and Donnan draw their anthropological approach to the Muslim world as a point of departure from Said's critique:

The writings of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, or the Mughal emperor Babur come to us only through the painstaking scholarship of Orientalists who spent a life-time deciphering notes in Asian languages and sitting in remote libraries. For them, it was a labour of love. To dismiss their work as simply Orientalism or as an attempt to suppress or subjugate Muslim peoples denies an important truth. Unfortunately, after Edward Said, that is how many Muslim writers do see the work of the Orientalists. If research on contemporary Muslim societies is not to be similarly

dismissed as the most recent manifestation of Orientalism, it is clearly imperative to introduce conceptual innovations which both surmount the limitations of Islamic studies as identified by Said, and transcend the shortcomings of his own analysis. This would seem to be possible only by contextualizing local versions of Islam within global structures. (5)

Even if one disagrees on the statement that it was a labor of love, the work of the Orientalists should be indeed appreciated for the reason given above. But more important is the necessary move that Ahmed and Donnan are taking from both Orientalism and its critiques to a new discourse that culturally, and even geographically, remaps the Muslim world. Cosmopolitanism, indeed, is the key term for what they refer to as “contextualizing local versions of Islam within global structures.” This move is the focus of Carl Ernst and Richard Martin’s *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism* 2010. It is also similar to Bruce Lawrence’s definition of “Muslim Cosmopolitanism” as “the challenge to redefine Islam apart from both fundamentalists/Islamists and their statist/nationalists opponents... , project(ing) a larger, cosmopolitan canopy for Islam beyond the iterations, at once local and ideological, of several Muslim actors” (Lawrence 306). Using the word “challenge” Lawrence agrees with Kwame Anthony Appiah that “Cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge” (Appiah xv), and states in the case of Muslim Cosmopolitanism what the challenge is: creating a new discourse in the middle of competing representational forms.

This new approach has been applied to Ahmed’s anthropological studies. But also Ahmed’s plays, *Noor* and *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*, grant us a literary expression by which we can see Sufism as a version of Islam lending itself to intercultural dialogue. In

Noor, however, Ahmed establishes an important prior dialogue between different versions of Islam within its cultural borders. The main characters are three brothers, each representing one main Islamic version: the Sufi, the fundamentalist, and the liberal.

Noor: A Struggle for a New Expression

The play's events take place during Ramadan, a sacred month for Muslims. The main characters are members of a middle-class Muslim family in an unidentified city that Ahmed says could be part of any Muslim-majority country. Abdullah, a college teacher, Daoud, a medical doctor, and Ali, a lawyer, try, each in a different way, to help free their sister, Noor, a college student, who has been arrested by soldiers in the bazaar. Ali was there with her in the bazaar when both of them were carried off by force, but he was set free after being tortured and humiliated. Noor is still there with those people who are notorious for raping detained girls. Now the family's honor has been tarnished, which brings the family into a tragic situation beyond Noor's safety. Even when Noor comes back home and assures them that she is fine and the honor of the family is intact, Daoud insists on carrying out his plan to take revenge on those who have been attacking the honor of Muslim families.

Though obviously rejecting Daoud's reaction, Ahmed has bestowed on Daoud the qualities of a classical tragic hero. The complexity of this fundamentalist character adds an asset to the play's dramatic structure. He is more knowledgeable and experienced than his two brothers. He knows "Bureaucrats... [...] are useless." (31). "Open your eyes, Ali," he tells his younger brother, "nothing happens around here unless you bribe someone" (55). Daoud is sensitive to injustice. As a child he sided with school kids tormented by a bully. He faced the bully and knocked him down. "I hate bullies. He got away with everything;

no one would stand up to him” (60). There is also a brief reference to a love story between Daoud and a girl named Zeinab (63-64). His compassionate tendencies, however, do not justify the zealot and the bigot in his expression of these tendencies. While he stands for those tormented by bullies, Daoud is unaware that he himself was a bully. Abdullah reminds him of Auntie Fatima’s frequent complaints to their mother that Daoud beat up their cousin Rahman, who is now Noor’s fiancé. But more important is Daoud’s insistence that his way of facing corruption and injustice—in Shakespearian terms, “to take arms against a sea of troubles,” or the biblical justice of “an eye for an eye” (64)—is the only option that could succeed. Abdullah tries to correct him: “Nothing has changed, Daoud [...]. Violence did not work then, and it won’t work now. Did Tariq change his ways because you fought him? No, he didn’t stop tormenting Karim until Ali told your teacher what was going on, and even showed him the cigarettes Tariq kept in his pocket” (61).

Ahmed is keen on drawing Daoud as a human being, suggesting a correction of a dehumanizing picture of Muslim fundamentalists in the media. Even Daoud’s violent response is dramatized as a human reaction to the violation of human rights. Above all, Daoud is a human being who sees his family and the whole community being subjected to violence. For his Sufi brother Abdullah, however, violence is a faulty response to violence. For him, Ali’s way of facing the bully was the best option, and now Ali’s appeal to law and his activism as an advocate of human rights through legitimate channels should also be the best option for the Muslim community. But Daoud considers Ali’s way a weak and ineffective response. Daoud finds evidence to support his position in one of the play’s central events. While the three brothers are discussing Noor’s situation, three fully armed

soldiers burst into the house (43). They are breaking into houses in the neighborhood looking for persons allegedly helping a group of insurgents. The brothers experience the utmost humiliation when their father, old and sick, is forced to lick the dirt off a soldier's boots.

Father: This is unacceptable! Ali, tell them what our rights are!

Ali does not speak

Ali, tell them!

First Soldier: Rights? You have no rights, this is a question of national security. How do we know you're not a motherfucking terrorist?

Father: *(beginning to stand)* Don't abuse me. How can you speak to me in this manner?

First Soldier: *(kicks Father back down to the floor)* Hey. Down on the floor.

Daoud: Don't you dare touch my father. Have you no mercy? He is very ill.

Third Soldier: So you're a doctor, are you? Just follow instructions, so we can do our job and leave. We're keeping the peace around here.

Father: 'Keeping the peace.' You've violated my home, tracked mud onto my carpet –

First Soldier: *(pushing his boot into Father's face)* You're so concerned about mud? Lick it off my boots, then.

Daoud: Father! *(Daoud struggles to rise. The first soldier strikes his head with the butt of his rifle.)* (35-36)

The powerlessness of his two brothers in the face of this humiliation and violation of human rights is, for Daoud, a sufficient proof that he is taking the right course of thought and action. He reproaches both of them, asking Ali, “Where were your elegant legal speeches when they told Father to lick the mud off their boots?” then turning to Abdullah, “And you! What did your saints say to drive them off?” (39-40). Of course, Abdullah and Ali don’t talk because they thought any words or actions by them would worsen the situation, as the resistance by Daoud and his father has obviously shown. But Daoud is anxious to see a positive reaction to violations and insults. A further dishonoring blow to the family, so to speak, comes from their aunt Fatima. She tells them that her son cannot marry Noor now because people say she must have lost her virginity in prison (55-57). In a society where honor is still more valuable than life itself, Daoud’s response, insisting on taking revenge, seems to be reasonable, especially when he believes that other options are deficient. “When it is a matter of honour,” Daoud contends, “people preserve their own at all cost” (25). Daoud’s tragic fault, however, is not only his vengeful attitude, but also his wrong answer to the question: “who are the people responsible for the tragedy?” He identifies those people as “the crusaders,” a term understood by Muslims in a negative sense attached to history. When George W Bush used the same word to describe the American plan to respond to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, “crusader” sounded to many Muslims now the same as it meant in the Middle Ages. Daoud is just one of those Muslims. Explaining the reason behind Noor’s detainment, he argues, “She has already dishonoured herself by being taken to a prison run by male sadists. These crusaders know very well that by dishonouring Noor, they dishonour every one of us” (25).

Here Daoud's mistake is twofold. First, believing Noor has dishonored herself, he blames the victim: "Noor should have been much more responsible. If she were as modest in manner as in dress, we would not be in this situation" (21). Daoud does not take this attitude only from a religious, fundamentalist rhetoric that he has learnt from his affiliation to Sheikh Khaliq's network, but also from a traditional, tribal society that is represented in the play by Auntie Fatima. Having made up her mind to revoke her son's engagement with Noor, she defends her decision by blaming the whole family for allowing Noor to "grow up so freely." She retorts, "The girl is too outspoken, always arguing with people. The neighbours always said that this girl will get in trouble sooner or later. You should have kept her at home so she would be a decent wife" (57). Auntie Fatima speaks from a traditional perspective that is not particularly religious. In fact, Ahmed uses her to suggest the dominance of the tribal over the religious in Muslim communities. For example, anyone with some basic knowledge about fasting in Islam can see her ignorance about the religious ritual when she tells her nephews that "we Muslims must bear the burden of the fast even when we are ill" (55). The Quran and the prophetic tradition explicitly allow the sick not to fast in Ramadan. Where does Auntie Fatima's idea come from, then? Having anthropologically studied Muslim communities, Ahmed may have known that women, especially when they're sisters-in-law living in the same household, usually fast during the days of Ramadan even in cases when they are religiously recommended not to do that. A Muslim woman, for example, may fast during menstruation, which is reported to be prohibited by the Prophet. As a sort of communal support, they share the ritual with those who have to fast. Speaking for Muslims ("we Muslims..."), Auntie Fatima thinks she represents Islam while, religiously speaking, she does not know about one of its basic

tenets. Though Daoud may be more knowledgeable about *fiqh* than Auntie Fatima, both of them agree on blaming Noor for being detained, because they believe she should have been more decent.

Second, Daoud blames the West for any problem, be it of public or of personal concern, in the modern Muslim world. He uses “the West,” “the Crusaders,” and “Americans” synonymously to refer to demons conspiring against Islam. This is common rhetoric in the Muslim world. “Zionists” is usually added to the list of synonyms, maybe more in the Arab world because of the Palestinian cause. Daoud does not mention the word “Zionists.” For though Ahmed sets the play in an unidentified Muslim country, we can identify his characters as closer to the Indian subcontinent, the area where he came from, than other Muslims. For example, their usage of Islamic terminology, though derived from Arabic, is unfamiliar to Arab audiences. The word “sehri” is used instead of the Arabic “sahūr” to refer to the meal Muslims usually have in Ramadan during *sahar* (the last part of the night before dawn). However, when a list of big problems in the Muslim world is cited in the play, the Palestinian cause is not absent. In fact, Ghaza is given a particular place in the tragic scene of the Muslim world as drawn by Daoud while debating with Ali the question of how Muslims should struggle to overcome their problems: “Just look at yesterday’s paper: wedding party massacred in Kandahar, girls’ school in Karbala blown up, genocide in Chechnya ... did you see the photo of the mother holding her dead child in Gaza” (44)? We see Ghaza in a special photo, while the rest of the troubled Muslim world is read to us in a newspaper. There may be photos for the other events, but the Palestinian mother “holding her dead child” must be the cover page. This is not to say that Palestinians are more important than others, or that their suffering should be prior to any other problem

in the world. But this is to show how a legitimate cause is misused by Daoud, who derives his ideas from the fundamentalist rhetoric represented by Bin Laden, who has made it clear that the terrorist attacks on the West will not stop unless Palestinians take their rights. This is part of an audio speech Bin Laden gave in 2008:

The Palestinian cause has been the main factor that, since my early childhood, fueled my desire, and that of the 19 freemen (Sept. 11 bombers), to stand by the oppressed, and punish the oppressive Jews and their allies. [...] We shall continue the fight, Allah willing, against the Israelis and their allies, in order to pursue justice for the oppressed, and we shall not give up one inch of Palestine, as long as there is still a single true Muslim alive.

Even if we doubt that it is really the main cause of the terrorist attacks, this is how the Palestinian cause is manipulated to justify terrorism. Having been inculcated this extremist line of thought, Daoud is apt to take it to Bin Laden's conclusion.

Now, with Noor's crisis, the admixture of the personal and the collective in Daoud's tragically constructed identity motivates him to a terrorist action. But how does Ahmed employ the characters of Abdullah, Ali, and Noor in the tragedy? The three of them work as a team against Daoud's line of thought. Though there is no evidence that they convince him he is wrong: they present to the audience an Islamic Sufi theology that highlights tolerance and even love to all humans on the one hand, and a humanist vision of how Muslims should seek solutions to their problems on the other. Abdullah, the Sufi, and Ali, the human rights lawyer, complement each other. They still hope to bring Daoud to their line, to turn the energy of his zealous compassion with suffering Muslims to a constructive rather than destructive course of action:

Abdullah: Revenge and hatred will not repair our broken hearts. There has been too much rupture. Too many tragedies. Too many tears have been shed. We must feel for the pain of others. I was deeply saddened to hear about the attack on the old Christian church in our city last month. I even heard a rumour that some Christian girls had been molested.

Daoud: Christians molested? This is just propaganda put out by the Crusaders to justify their acts. Brother, you are far too concerned with the suffering of others.

Abdullah: You forget the special regard our holy prophet had for Christians. That is why he sent those persecuted Muslims from Mecca to the Christian kingdom in Africa. These Christians living amongst us are a peaceful minority and deserve our full sympathy.

Ali: (*angry*) Daoud, I would have thought that Noor's disappearance would make you more sympathetic to the things she believes in. I can take pride in saying that she shares my ideas. Noor's ideas about women's rights are inspired by my talks to her about human rights.

Daoud: She does not share your ideas. She is a good and pious Muslim. I've been talking to her, and she will become a doctor, *insh'allah*, and help me with my work. She is dedicated to the cause of Islam. (33)

The religious in Abdullah and the secular in Ali work harmoniously together in a discourse running counter to Daoud's. Abdullah authenticates his position by appealing to a prophetic tradition. Then Ali comes to his aid. Ali finds Abdullah's religious attitude as an expression of our modern ideas about human rights. Or, conversely, Abdullah's words

belong to what Ahmed describes in a prologue to the play as “old ideas [...] struggling to find new expressions” (15). Ali finds in human rights activism that new expression, which he identifies as *jihad*: “We are struggling to create a modern society with law and order, justice and education for everyone. This is the true *jihad*, my *jihad*” (44).

Ali is proud that Noor believes in these ideas too. But Noor is more like a concept than a person—a concept that lies in her very name, which means light. All references to her suggest her personification of the playwright’s concept of what Islam is and how it should be represented. Perhaps this justifies the conflict between Ali and Daoud over which one of them is closer to Noor and thus worthy of representing Islam. Noor the concept, or the concept of Noor, is made more explicit by Abdullah’s Sufi master, Sheikh Muinuddin. Unlike Khaliq— Daoud’s sheikh, who never appears on the stage— Muinuddin shares his theological thought with Abdullah: “Our masters have told us how God created Adam and then, with the birth of Noor-i-Muhammadi, He introduced the notion of sharing His divine mercy and compassion with humanity itself. God is light. Our own Noor is therefore something greater than the physical body. Noor can never be violated because of the purity of her soul” (53). According to the Sufi sheikh, Noor is Islam’s contested outreach to humanity. If some of its physical manifestations have been brought by Daoud’s ideology into conflict with other religions and cultures, the sheikh finds mercy and compassion in its soul as personified in the character of Noor. Unlike Daoud, who is concerned about Noor’s body and obsessed with the girl’s virginity as a fetishization of honor and decent conduct, the sheikh sees in Noor a spiritual power beyond her physical being.

When Noor surprisingly comes home towards the end of the play, we still wonder which of the three brothers' ways has helped her out. But we are just given Noor's reference to her own spiritually resistant power. It is a spiritual power that can stand in opposition not only to the corruption of local regimes and the hegemony of colonial powers, but also to the violent extremist reaction to both. She tells her brothers how her fearless resistance to her detainers forced them to release her. Daoud asks her, "Noor, were you ... Did they molest you?" "The dogs didn't frighten me with their barking." She assures them. "I sang to myself, just as Mother used to sing to me, and they lay down in front of me. God softened their hearts" (69). This peaceful, spiritually powerful reaction to brutal violence is like Mahatma Gandhi's *asantiyagrah* (Sanskrit for "soul force," a non-violent form of resistance). While Daoud still believes Noor is "in pain" and repeats he is willing to "avenge her," Abdullah, believes it is his Sufi sheikh's *salat* and *du'aa* (prayer) that saved his sister. For him, Noor (light) survives due to the spiritual power that is inherent in her soul and suggested by her name. But this power does not come from one single source. Combining *santiyagraha* and *salat* in Noor as a Muslim character, Akbar Ahmed explores the space where Islam extends to other religions and philosophies.

Amid doubts that Daoud is now with his network plotting a terrorist attack somewhere in the city, Noor still hopes that Daoud will not do that. She thinks "he is confused, but his heart is good." The play ends with an epilogue. We see only Noor sitting on a chair beside her father who is lying in bed. With the sound of "gentle flute music" and the light of one candle beside her father's bed, Noor reads from Rumi's poetry:

Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field, I shall
meet you there

Noor stops, and then resumes, slowly.

When the soul lies down in that grass

The world is too full to talk about

This moment thine

This love comes to rest in me

In one wheat grain a thousand sheave stacks

Inside

The needle's eye

A turning night of stars.

Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field,

I shall meet you there. (76)

Ahmed does not show a specific source from which Noor reads Rumi. But she apparently reads, selectively Rumi translations by Coleman Bark in *The Illuminated Rumi* (98-99). She reads selectively, with some changes. For example, she significantly repeats the first long line in the beginning and makes it into two lines in the end. These lines are read to Noor's father, but, in fact, they address her brother Daoud. He is the one who needs to think "beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing." The words "wrong-doing" and "right-doing" are Bark's translation of Rumi's Persian (and also Arabic) "*kufr*" and "*Islam*" respectively (cite the original).

The abduction of Noor (the concept) by Daoud is more serious than the detainment of Noor (the person) by outsiders. Noor's bigger challenge is when she comes home. She could resist the outside kidnappers due to an inner, spiritual power. Now she needs to resist

Daoud by resorting to the same spiritual power. But Daoud will not change unless he finds in Rumi the inspiration he finds in Saladin²⁶.

Like the dialogue that Ahmed believes could be established between Islam and other cultures, Ahmed suggests that this culture-specific dialogue in *Noor* should be based on mutual understanding and respect of difference of opinions and attitudes towards the problems of the Muslim world. It is in fact between brothers in the same family. *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* carries Islam in its Sufi version on to a dialogue with other religions.

The Trial of Dara Shikoh: Cosmopolitanism and Religion of Love

In *The Trial of Dara Shikoh* Ahmed resorts to Islamic history, specifically the history of Islam in India, to dramatize cultural and religious interactions between Muslims and people from other cultures and religions. The play captures the historical moment of conflict in the Mughal empire between Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) and his brother Aurangzeb (1618-1707). Like *Noor*, it is a tragedy, but unlike Daoud, the tragic hero this time is presented to us as “fighting a losing battle for his beliefs of universal acceptance and compassion in a world in which he appears lost” (79).

The play’s action starts in 1659. Dara is accused of apostasy. Aurangzeb, now emperor, appoints for his brother’s trial Qazi (judge) Faizul Haq, a fundamentalist scholar who presides over the court. But it is Prosecutor Abdullah Khan who vehemently represents a literalist understanding of Islam. He summons two witnesses: Gopi Lal, a Hindu mystic, and Bahadur Singh, a Sikh religious leader. Ironically, he tries to show the Qazi evidence for Dara’s apostasy in how the representatives of other religions love Dara.

²⁶ Daoud believes that Muslims need Saladin, not Rumi, while his brother Ali objects, “we need both” (44).

The like-minded Qazi is eventually convinced of the Prosecutor's argument and condemns Dara to death.

The play depends on historical accounts about the Mughal Empire from Babur (1483-1530), its founder, to Aurangzeb. There is a significant reference to Dara's father, Shah Jahan, and grandfather, Akbar, as guardians of an inclusive policy that regards Islam as part of a cosmopolitan India where different religions not only socially coexist but theologically and morally share the same vision, which Marshall Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam, Volume 3* describes as "universalist."

The universalist sort of cultural and moral life which Akbar fostered, and which was largely accepted as the basis for court life by Muslim and Hindu officials alike, was not in itself inconsistent with Islam. Indeed, it was cast in Islamicate terms, and attracted its most explicit support chiefly among Muslims rather than among Hindus. But it presupposed an alternative interpretation of Islam, as it bore on life and culture, which excluded the more particulars, communalistic, interpretation of the Islamic mission in the world which had always been held by the Shari'ah-minded. (Hodgson 80)

We can see from Hodgson's description of what he calls "universalism" in India that it was only one side of the Indian culture at that time, referring to the other side as "communal." According to his account of the Indian cultural scene during the Mughal reigns, the universalist policy that was best represented by Dara's grandfather Akbar the Great (1542-1605) had to confront that communal side which tended to align Muslims according to the concept of the Muslim *ummah* (nation). Hodgson maintains, "The problem of the relation

between a non-communal civilization and the Muslim Ummah became sharpest in India, precisely when civilization most tended to transcend communal lines” (83).

From Hodgson’s account of India at the time of the play’s action we can also see the shift from the universalist to the communal taking place as Aurangzeb became emperor in 1658. Hodgson states that though Aurangzeb “did not immediately reverse the general policy of the preceding reigns,” he “was personally of a Shai‘ah minded and communalistic, even rather a bigoted temper” (Hodgson 93). This temper qualifies him to be Dara’s foe in *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*.

It should be noted, however, that the conflict between the two brothers in the play is dramatized in such a way as to make it closer to today’s problems of the Muslim world and Ahmed’s contemporary audience’s concepts of these problems than Hodgson’s historical account of that conflict. The conflict which the play presents to us as if it were between Sufis and Wahhabis today was in fact within Sufism itself. Though not affiliated to a Sufi *tariqa* (order) Aurangzeb was “friendly to the Mujadidi Naqshabandis.” These, according to Hodgson, were followers of Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1625). Sirhindi figures in the play offstage as no different from such Twentieth-Century Islamists as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb or the Indian Abu Al-A‘la Maududi, or even Muhammad Ibn Abdel Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism in the eighteenth century. But, in fact, unlike those reformers who rejected the Sufi path, Sirhindi was a Sufi master, in spite of the other fact that he was “anti-Akbarist” and “anti-universalist.” And, as Hodgson says, “instead of attacking Sufi universalism from the standpoint purely of the Shari‘ah, rejecting all doctrines of the more inward life, [...] he waged his fight within the forms of Sufism itself. He attacked especially the monist doctrines of Ibn-Al-‘Arabi, adopting the alternative proposed by

‘Alauddin Simnani’ (85). The play does not provide us with this complexity in Sirhindi’s character, especially when Dara refers to him as “this particular *mullah*, Ahmed Sirhindi” (99). The emphasis on the word “mullah” produces negative resonance for western audiences who usually hear the word associated with such rigorist, or even extremist, scholars such as Taliban leaders.

Hodgson’s account of Mughal history, however, still provides validity to Ahmed’s choice of the confrontation between a narrow, particularistic, exclusive vision of Islam represented by Aurangzeb and a cosmopolitan concept of religion sponsored by his predecessors, particularly Akbar. The play shows us how Dara supports the survival of Akbar’s policy.

Furthermore, what sometimes seems to be oversimplification in Ahmed’s play is dramatically useful, especially when we know that Ahmed’s concern is more about contemporary issues than the historical details of that period. That is to say, we ought to make the connection between the play’s characters and incidents with contemporary examples. Take, for example, Dara’s translation of the Hindu scriptures Upanishads from Sanskrit to Persian. Prosecutor Khan asks Dara why a Muslim would translate a Hindu text (83). Here one should not fail to relate this question to contemporary public media. In fact Prosecutor Khan’s question is a variant of that of Fox News host Lauren Green who has repeatedly asked why, since he is a Muslim, Reza Aslan, the author of *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, would write a book about Jesus! Green provokingly repeats the question to Aslan after he tells her that he is a professor. She has been the subject of ridicule since then (for instance in Jon Stewart’s *Daily Show*.) In an interview with Aslan, Jon Stewart carried on the Fox News interview to its hilarious conclusion:

"I just want to be clear, you're a Muslim right?" he said, mocking the Fox News host. "Why would you write a book on the founder of Christianity?"

"This is my secret Muslim plan to destroy Christianity," Aslan joked.

Stewart just couldn't help himself:

"I don't know if you remember this-- you went on Fox and that lady was asking you those questions and I was just watching that like, 'OH MY GOD! REZA'S GOING TO STRANGLE THIS PERSON!'" he shouted.

(Taibi, The Huffington Post, 12/12/2013:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/12/reza-aslan-jon-stewart-fox-news-interview-muslim-christianity_n_4433398.html)

For Green, however, Aslan's remark about a secret plan to destroy Christianity, is not a joke, because she believes it is true. Of course she knows Christians wrote books about Muhammad, and perhaps read nothing from them except offensive ones. So she expects a Muslim to write about Jesus the same way Robert Spencer, author of *The Truth about Mohammed: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religions* (2007), writes about Muhammad. In fact this kind of ignorance is twofold; Muslims wouldn't attack Jesus, simply because they believe he is a prophet. But apart from ignorance and more important here as we compare her question to Prosecutor Khan's is the same state of mind which characterizes each one of them within the borders she or he builds around their faith. It is bigotry, but, because it is also a pathological case, we might call it paranoia of the faithful. Similarly, in the play, from the Prosecutor's narrow perspective, the Hindu scriptures are a Hindu's exclusive property, and the founder of Christianity cannot be touched by a non-Christian, each particular faith would be destroyed otherwise.

If the encounter between different religions and cultures is represented by people like Prosecutor Khan and Lauren Green, a clash is inevitable, because they are psychologically unable to yield to the fact that none is superior to the other. Ten years ago a friend of mine was appalled when he saw me reading the Bible, but was soon pleased when I told him I was looking for verses to criticize as enemies of Islam do when they read the Quran. This is indeed one of the consequences of the spread of a universal culture of clash, where believers in a particular religion find nothing but faults in other religions, while finding a common space that unites religions according to a cosmopolitan philosophy like that of Dara Shikoh helps us go beyond contentious areas in intercultural dialogues.

The play makes Dara's philosophy clear as the confrontation between Dara and Prosecutor Khan continues to unfold. When confronted in the court by the Prosecutor's question of how a monotheistic religion like Islam could be equal to a polytheist religion like Hinduism, he argues "The driving force and the overarching idea behind both are the same. Islam and Hinduism meet at the source, and there is much in common. Of course, their history, their rituals, and even their forms are different. The aim of a great religion like Islam, or indeed Hinduism, is to produce pious, compassionate, and concerned individuals" (88-9). Unfortunately, Dara's achievements in keeping on Akbar's legacy are scholarly rather than political. Perhaps this is his tragic flaw. Unlike Aurangzeb, he is more like a scholar than a statesman. Examples of Dara's books are presented in the court as evidence for apostasy:

Prosecutor Khan: Would the accuser verify he is the author of *The Mingling of the Oceans* and *The Great Secret*?

Dara Shikoh: Yes, I'm the author of both.

Prosecutor Khan: Could you explain, as a favour to the court, what you mean by the titles of these two documents? [...]

Dara Shikoh: Both contain my philosophy, which I have developed all my life in order to discover the common sources of our spiritual being, that which transcends particularistic faith and elevates us to the knowledge of the Unknowable and the Unseen. (87-8)

Dara shows us here the motivation behind his projects. He wants to “discover the common sources of our spiritual being, that which transcends particularistic faith and elevates us to the knowledge of the Unknowable and the Unseen.” Is this perennial philosophy? In *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, Frithjof Schuon explains the term "Religio Perennis," in terms similar to Dara's definition of his philosophy:

Truth is one, and it would be vain to refuse to look for it except in one particular place, for the Intellect contains in its substance all that is true, so that truth cannot but be manifested wherever the Intellect is deployed in the atmosphere of a Revelation. Space can be represented by a circle as well as by a cross, a spiral, a star or a square; and just as it is impossible that there should be only one figure to represent the nature of space or of extension, so also it is impossible that there should be only one doctrine giving one account of the Absolute and of the relations between the contingent and the Absolute. [...]. In each Revelation God says "I" while placing Himself extrinsically at a point of view other than that of earlier Revelations, hence the appearance of contradiction on the plane of formal crystallization. (Schuon 138-39)

Here we see Dara's philosophy in Schuon's argument. Dara's term "particularistic faith" can be defined in Schuon's words as refusal to look for Truth except in one particular place. And as Dara's religious philosophy is to transcend particularistic faith, we can define it in terms of *religio perennis*. For both Dara and Schuon distinguish between essence and form, the Absolute and Revelation. The Absolute is one, but manifests, or rather reveals, itself in multiple forms. Hence "Revelation" (texts, rituals, etc.) differs from one tradition to another. Then if Dara's philosophy, as he says, "elevates us to the knowledge of the Unknowable and the Unseen," it lays emphasis on gnosis, which lies in the core of Sufism. Schuon defines gnosis as Ibn Arabi's " 'religion of love', putting accent on the element of 'realization'" (137). Gnosis, on the one hand, is the Greek equivalent of the Arabic *'irfān*, or *ma'rifa*, which denotes in Sufism that kind of knowledge which is granted by direct mystical experience. Another Arabic word that Sufis use to refer to another kind of knowledge that is sought indirectly through books, for example, is *'ilm*, which is usually translated into science or knowledge. Love, on the other hand, is another complicated term that is used in Sufism in different meanings. But the most common Arabic words to suggest love are *maḥabba* and *'ishq*. The sentimental implications of the former and the erotic associations of the latter have misled interpreters of Sufi poetry. In *The Mystics of Islam* A Reynold Nicholson objects that "It has often been misunderstood by European critics, one of whom even now can describe the ecstasies of the Sufis as 'inspired partly by wine and strongly tinged with sensuality.' As regards the whole body of Sufis, the charge is altogether false" (57). Instead of the sentimental and the erotic, it is indeed the Gnostic dimension of love that is stressed by Ibn Arabi and Rumi, from whom Dara derives his philosophy. Nicholson quotes Rumi's lines: "God is the Saqi (cupbearer) and the Wine:/ He

knows what manner of love is mine.” He adds “Ibn Al-‘Arabi declares that no religion is more sublime than a religion of love and longing for God. Love is the essence of all creeds: the true mystic welcomes it whatever guise it may take” (57). Again, this is Dara’s philosophy; but the relationship between gnosis and love as projected in the play still needs to be clarified. To understand this relationship may also help us define Rumi’s “manner of love.” In “Sufism and Islam” William Chittick explains the strong association between gnosis (*irfan*) and love (*maḥabba* or *ishq*):

Many Sufis speak of gnosis as being synonymous with love, but “love” in their vocabulary excludes the sentimental colorings usually associated with this term in current usage. The term love is employed by them because it indicates more clearly than any other word that in gnosis the whole of one’s being “knows” the object and not just the mind; and because love is the most direct reflection in this world, or the truest “symbol” in the traditional sense, of the joy and beatitude of the spiritual world. Moreover, in Sufism, as in other traditions, the instrument of spiritual knowledge or gnosis is the heart, the center of man’s being; gnosis is “existential” rather than purely mental. (22-3)

Ecstasy, or what Chittick refers to as joy and beatitude, is a manifestation of love that comes with the moment of unveiling the divine truth to mystics in a spiritual experience. It is a moment of spiritual knowledge that brings about this state of love called in Arabic *wajd*. Hence the association between gnosis and love. For the etymology of the word *wajd* indicates its relation to the verb *wajad*, which means found or realized. It is this moment of realization that is the focus of Ibn Arabi’s religion of love, as Schuon observed. *Wajd* is

also associated with the noun *wijdan*, which is one of the words used in Arabic to refer to the heart. Perhaps the following verses from Ibn Arabi's *Tarjumān Al-Ashwāq* (Interpreter of Desires) best describe this spiritual experience where love and gnosis are indistinguishable in the theatre of the poet's heart:

O Marvel! a garden amidst the flames.

My heart has become capable of every form:

it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

and a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Kaa'ba,

and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take,

that is my religion and my faith.

This is also Dara's religion. For a theatrical purpose, however, the play tends to simplify the philosophy of Dara. Prosecutor Khan asks him to explain his philosophy in simpler terms, but Dara objects that he has been clear enough. So Prosecutor Khan paraphrases Dara's words in a simple question: "Is it correct to say that the main idea in the books [Dara's books] is to convey the common source, common bonds, and, indeed, common character of Islam and Hinduism? That, in their essence, they are similar - one and the same?" Again, Dara asserts, "In essence, yes" (88). The expression "in essence" might be enough, while Ahmed's audience does not necessarily need to listen to sophisticated definitions of such nuanced spiritual terms like "Essence," "Substance," "Principle," etc. But sometimes one is left insufficiently informed, still needing to know more about Dara's philosophy. When Dara is asked to respond to some verses he wrote in one of his poems ("I know not what I am/ I am not a Christian/ I'm neither Jew/ nor Gabonese nor Muslim")

he only appeals to the authority of Rumi and Ibn Arabi without explaining of their theosophical position: “I have said what I have to say, and yes these are my verses. If I am guilty, then so are Islam’s most celebrated mystic poets, Maulana Rumi and Sheikh Ibn Arabi. I am in good company, and I will happily go to join them” (90). Here one may wonder if Rumi and Ibn Arabi said they are not Muslim, and if they said something like this, what did they mean? Dara’s Muslim audience then is expected to have read Ibn Arabi and Rumi— like the Ibn Arabi’s verses quoted above, for example— but to side with him, they must not misinterpret them. For transcending particularistic beliefs like that of Muslims does not mean disbelieving in a religion like Islam, but rather accepting other beliefs as stemming from the same divine source. This does not mean that one can be a Muslim and a Hindu, for example, at the same time, but one should be neither in a particularistic sense (this is what Dara means by not being Christian, Jew, etc.) while needs to belong to one religion in a cosmopolitan sense. That is, to be like Rumi’s compass:

Like a compass I stand firm with one leg on my faith

And roam with the other leg all over the seventy-two nations.

Responding to another question, however, Dara comes closer to the minds of average Muslims whose response to Dara’s answers, whether approval or disapproval, is shown by courtroom attendees, who might have represented an inconsequential public opinion at that time. But Dara’s answer addresses Ahmed’s present day audience as well. So these attendees are significantly described as young Muslim men (79), the age group which are usually more susceptible to extremist religious ideas and terrorism; so they ought to understand Dara’s opinion on Islam’s relationship with other religions:

Prosecutor Khan: (*looking through his papers*) I have here a phrase attributed to you ... yes, here it is. [...]: ‘Love alone is the ultimate truth, the rest is ritual.’ Did you write this? And if so, what do you mean by it?

Dara Shikoh: The phrase should be self-evident. We are faced with our nature, which is dominated by anger, hatred and jealousy. But we also possess the antidote to these terrible human emotions, and the antidote reflects the divine part of our nature – and that is love. If we can develop this attribute of the divine, we can overcome our base nature. Thus, love is the Ultimate Truth, and the Ultimate Reality.

Prosecutor Khan: And what would you do with rituals like the five daily prayers? Abolish them?

Dara Shikoh: No, not at all. Don’t trivialize the deep human impulse to discover the path of God through worship. That, too, is what the Quran teaches us. Prayer helps us to love; in no case does it hinder or prevent us from reaching out to others.

First and Second Courtroom Attendees mutter in appreciation. (89-90)

This is a lesson that young Muslim men appreciate because it answers an important question regarding Sufism and Islam. Young Muslim people ought to know that Sufism does not ignore regular Islamic practices in order for them to trust the Sufi path of love that Dara explains. Prayers that help Muslims to reach out to others are an embodiment of Rumi’s compass metaphor. And the remedial kind of love that Dara believes to be necessary for Muslims is what Rumi describes in the following verses in *Mathnavi*:

He (alone) whose garment is rent by a (mighty) love is purged of covetousness and
all defect

Hail, O Love that brings us good gain - You are the physician of all our ills.

The remedy of our pride and and vainglory, our Plato, and our Galun (Mathnawi I,
22-24)

This sort of love in Rumi's is what Ahmed understood from John Lennon's "All you need is love," as illustrated earlier.

Ahmed employs other techniques to illustrate the same cosmopolitan concept of religion. The play is embedded by two parallel projects that enrich its artistic value and contribute to the universalist significance of its message. Dara's ring and his father's the Taj Mahal are presented in the play as two artifacts designed to serve the idea of a cosmopolitan unity between religions and cultures. Prosecutor Khan uses Dara's ring as evidence for blasphemy. For Dara has inscribed the names for God in Islam and Hinduism, Allah and Prabhu, together on the ring. To tell the significance of having these "two names on one ring," Dara says, "I believe that God has different names. *Allah* and *Prabhu* are two of His names" (97). Dara's ownership of a ring like this shows him to be the keeper of the Moghal legacy of cosmopolitanism. With this ring on his finger, Dara sums up the legacy of his predecessors, who have sponsored what Hodgson calls "Universalistic tendencies." With these tendencies, particularly Akbar's, Hodgson also observes that "Many Muslims grumbled at Akbar's policies and those of his successors as un-Islamic" (83). Questioning the inscription on Dara's ring, Prosecutor Khan reflects this sort of grumbling, which Dara has to handle by expounding his belief that his predecessors' policies have been rooted in Sufism as Islam's mystical tradition.

Like Dara's ring, though at a larger scale, the Taj Mahal is used in the play as evidence for the Mughal Empire's "universalistic" policy. The Taj had been originally Shah Jahan's private project to memorialize his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. But the play emphasizes its cosmopolitan significance. Here Ahmed uses the same technique he used in the case of the ring: the expounding of a cosmopolitan idea starts with a suggestion from a narrow point of view that is then refuted by an exponent of cosmopolitanism. Now the scene is in the royal palace where Jahanara asks her brother Aurangzeb not to let Dara be executed. Their conversation about Dara leads to the argument about their father and Taj Mahal. Jahanara plays the role that Dara played in the court scene, an exponent of a cosmopolitan India, responding to Aurangzeb's attack on Shah Jahan's monument. Aurangzeb criticizes his father's project, considering it as evidence for reckless extravagance, and wonders how his father was planning to build another Taj: "The extravagance takes my breath away. The treasury can barely sustain one Taj, and my father is dreaming of two." Jahanara replies,

For just one moment, Aurangzeb, set aside your doubts and skepticism. Let your imagination roam free. Think of our father's vision, of two Taj Mahals, one on either side of the river, connected by a delicate marble bridge. Think of the unity of that vision, its form and colour, one Taj representing sublimity, the other passion; one gentility, the other strength. Different worlds, yet connected. It is a breathtaking concept of unity, a spiritual expression of our very humanity. That is why everyone, rich or poor, Hindu or Sikh or Muslim, sees themselves in the Taj Mahal. (109)

Here Jahanara plays a role similar to that of Noor. Both deliver in the final scene the same illuminating message to a fundamentalist brother. Jahanara's "let your imagination roam free" parallels Noor's reading from Rumi as translated by Coleman Barks:

Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field,

I shall meet you there. (76)

There is a field beyond dogma and literalism where sisters ask their brothers to let their imagination roam free. It is a message of acceptance, care, and love that we all need for each other in spite of our differences.

CONCLUSION

Who is Worthy of Representation?

There is behind this research an urgent need to represent the cosmopolitan dimension we encounter when we read writers from different generations and different “Islamic” cultures who illustrate the resources of cosmopolitanism shared across the Islamicate world. This representation has required a thoughtful reading of current events as well as an accurate evaluation of Islam’s historical relationship with other religions and cultures. Cosmopolitanism is not just a condition but a mode of analysis, a space that challenges observers because they cannot see or navigate without a super vantage point that would enable them to understand particularistic perspectives and move beyond them at the same time. What Kwame Anthony Appiah accomplishes under the term partial cosmopolitanism and Bruce Lawrence’s Muslim cosmopolitanism, together with Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism, provides us with an epistemological alternative to Orientalism and a way of perception necessary for reading writers from the Islamicate world. In other words, this study contributes to a cosmopolitan discourse that redefines identity contours and suggests an accurate nomenclature regarding Muslim identity. Orientalist observers (anthropologists, journalists, political scientists, missionaries and government advisers) on the one hand, and on the other fundamentalist Muslims (scholars like Sayyid Qutb and Abu Al-A’la Maududi, political leaders like Hassan Al-Banna and Ayatollah Khomeini, and militant “jihadists” like Usama Bin Laden and Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi), have defined Islam as the West’s inimical Other, which has made the

so-called clash of civilizations sound inevitable. Now we need cosmopolitan observers to challenge all these misrepresentations.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Akbar Ahmed—each belongs to a different time and place of the Islamic world—are examples of writers who challenge the divisive discourse of Orientalism and fundamentalism. Through a cosmopolitan reading of their plays, I pointed out how each one of them portrays a crisis of collective identity. While the questions who I am and who we are are always inseparable as components of one's identity, in moments of crisis the question who *we* are becomes more important not only to us, Jews, Catholics, Muslims, women, blacks, etc., but to those who ask: who are you? “I am a Muslim or a Jew” puts more at stake than “I am father to three or daughter of a poor farmer.” When I first came from Egypt to the States I thought a person's Jewish name could tell me everything about that person. He must be here in the States helping the Zionists who are killing *our* Muslim brothers in Palestine. It took me a while to realize that I am similarly being judged according to identity markers equally repulsive to those who might see me as related to the 9/11 hijackers.

The question how hijackers being cloned with every new act of terror came to represent (“hijack”) Islam is pivotal to the dilemma of representation within Muslim communities. Unfortunately it is true that many Muslims—those who would not hesitate to vote for a Pakistani or an Egyptian Donald Trump, Hugo Chaves, or Silvio Berlusconi—believe these hijackers are doing the right thing. We keep saying Islam is not ISIS, and America is not Donald Trump, but nothing would change if we are still using the same particularistic, essentialist rhetoric to define ourselves: Islam is not ISIS because it is “the religion of peace”; America is not Donald Trump because it is “the land of liberty and

equality.” Questions of identity require answers other than these simplistic assertions. Considering how complex it is to tell who a person is, our answers ought to be expressed in Cosmopolitan terms. To identify a person, or for that person to identify herself, as merely Muslim is not enough. Let’s bring what Hamid Dabashi calls “being a Muslim in the world” to the picture. To be a “Muslim in the world,” evokes Diogenes’ “citizen of the world” as an answer to the question: where are you from? But according to Appiah’s partial cosmopolitanism, one needs to modify Diogenes’ answer to incorporate a sense of belonging to a local culture, which brings to mind Goha’s “wherever my wife lives.”

Perhaps the element of dialogue which is definitive of drama as a literary genre makes it more suitable for bringing questions of identity into debate. Contested representation invokes suspicions and accusations, trials and unfair judgements. That is why a courtroom scene is central to Tawfiq Al-Hakim’s *Angels’ Prayer* and Akbar Ahmed’s *The Trial of Dara Shikoh*. The dialogue between claimants to “the truth” is necessary to show a relative rather than an absolute truth. There might be one side the playwright suggests is right, but the audience are asked less to decide who is right or wrong than to understand each one’s point of view. Assuming what we might see as an ideal feature of cosmopolitanism, the main character in Al-Hakim’s play is not a human being. It is an angel that can tell warmongers who he is only in cosmopolitan terms. Similarly, Dara Shikoh in Ahmed’s play appeals to the cosmopolitan legacy of Sufism, using Rumi and Ibn Al-’Araby in addition to the authority of the Quran and the Sunna to defend himself against blasphemy.

There ought to be more research on the phenomenon of cosmopolitanism as related to the Islamicate world. Literature, particularly theater, the dramatization of those debates

on how one sees himself as related to the Other, is worth pursuing. As we might see in Sam Shepard's *True West* (1980) two brothers blurring the boundaries between American East and West, we may find in the Islamic literature similar, perhaps equally sophisticated, examples where identity of contestants is examined to see which one might be more representative of their culture. Akbar Ahmed's main characters in *Noor* and *Dara Shikoh* are brothers and sisters, each of whom sees Islam from a different perspective. Each one may claim to be true; but due to the present urgent need for reconciliation, for reaching out to others in a world torn by conflict, the one who is more humanistic and more cosmopolitan will be the one more worthy of our attention.

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