



The Plight of Arab Americans in Youssef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat*: The Intersection of Islamophobia, Orientalism, and Nationalism

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مأزق العرب الأمريكيين في خلف الحلق ليوسف الجندي: دراسة في تداخل الاسلاموفوبيا، والاستشراق والقومية

المستخلص: يتناول هذا المقال مسرحية خلف الحلق (2005) للكاتب يوسف الجندي بوصفها تجسيداً حياً لمعاناة العرب الأمريكيين، الناتجة عن التداخل المعقد بين الإسلاموفوبيا، والاستشراق والنزعة القومية الأميركية. إذ تكشف المسرحية عن الأشكال المختلفة من التحيز والعنصرية التي يتعرض لها العرب في الولايات المتحدة، نتيجة الصور النمطية المغلوطة التي تُروّج عن ثقافتهم ودينهم. ويهدف المقال بشكل أساسي إلى تحليل كيفية توظيف الجندي للصور الاستشراقية في إبراز مشاعر العداء القومي والديني، وكيف تسهم هذه المشاعر في ترسيخ حالة من الشقاء المستمر للعرب الأمريكيين. ففي هذا السياق، لا يُقدّم خالد الشخصية الرئيسية في المسرحية كمجرد شخصية درامية، بل كأداة نقدية تسلط الضوء على الواقع القاسي الذي يعيشه كثير من العرب الأمريكيين في ظل السياسات التمييزية. سنباشق المقال هذا الموضوع من خلال محورين رئيسيين: الأول يُعنى باستعراض نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، مع التركيز على أفكار إدوارد سعيد حول الاستشراق؛ أما المحور الثاني، فيه يتم إلقاء الضوء على كيف تناولت المسرحية معاناة الشخصيات من التحيز والعنصرية ضد العرب في الولايات المتحدة في ضوء هذه النظرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استشراق- الإسلاموفوبيا- العنصرية- العرب الأمريكيين

Abstract: This article explores how Youssef El Guindi's *Back of the Throat* (2005) illustrates the plight of Arab Americans due to the interplay of Islamophobia, Orientalism, and nationalism, which in turn results in various forms of prejudice and racism against Arab Americans in the United States. The primary goal is to explore how Orientalist tropes shaped the Islamophobic and nationalist sentiments targeting Arab Americans, which steer them into perennial wretchedness by delineating an unrealistic portrayal of their culture and religion. In other words, El Guindi uses Khaled not only as a character but also as a useful critical tool to explore how the US government treats Arab Americans by drawing attention to the harsh realities faced by many people like Khaled. This article will be organized into two sections: the first will explore postcolonial theory, drawing on Edward Said's insights on Orientalism, while the second will analyze the play through this theoretical lens.

Keywords: Orientalism, Islamophobia, Racism, Arab Americans

Introduction

After the events of September 11, 2001, the Arab and Islamic communities became the pivotal point of discussions on “otherness” but unfortunately, these discussions were only aimed at condemning and classifying them as criminals. Arab Americans have been classified, in particular, unfairly as the enemies of Western society since that fateful day. It is a construct of Western narratives and colonial doctrines that have been carefully constructed to support hostile feelings and actions toward Muslims and their religion. Since colonial times, Muslims have been systematically portrayed as “fanatical, violent, and lacking in tolerance” (Altwaiji 313). However, neo-orientalist rhetoric, which presents to both large and small screens a more refined portrayal of the East, its territory, inhabitants and faith, has shaped the contemporary perception of Muslims. The perception of the Orient and its inhabitants is distorted by neo-Orientalist entertainment (Sayed 63). In this regard, neo-Orientalism places Muslims in opposition to Western civilization as “others” and associates them with terrorism.

In the post-9/11 period, there was a steep rise in hate crimes against Muslims, which showed deep-rooted hatred in the narratives propagated by Orientalists about Muslims (Love 92). Though Arabs and Muslims were already victims of profiling and discrimination even before these attacks, the situation worsened exponentially in scale and gravity afterward. Muslims were unduly blamed and kept under watch leading to further isolation through exclusion from various social structures, which in turn amplified the marginalization that Islamophobia had already rooted within American public sentiments. This, in turn, led to the emergence of many Arab writers, including Youssef El-Guindi, who introduced a new wave of Arab drama exploring the impact of Western biases on Arab Americans, especially post-9/11.

Youssef El-Guindi's *Back of the Throat* (2005) is one of the important plays that explores the rise of Islamophobia and racism in the post-9/11. The play centers on Khaled, an Arab American Muslim writer accused of terrorist ties. Two U.S. agents, Bartlett and Carl, visit his apartment to interrogate him turning the session into an invasive search for evidence based on his supposed connection to a fellow Arab named Asfoor. Matters worsen with the involvement of Beth, Khaled's ex-girlfriend, whose statements fuel the

agents' suspicions. Shelly, a librarian, and Jean, a dancer, both accuse Khaled of engaging in suspicious activities. Despite Khaled's efforts to prove his innocence, the interrogation escalates into verbal and physical violence. Having provided a synopsis of the play, this article studies the influence of Orientalism on the rise of Islamophobia and nationalist sentiments, which have intensified racism towards Arab Americans. These themes are analyzed within the context of *Back of the Throat* (2005).

The Conceptual Framework

The process of forming Arab and Muslim identity in the modern age has undergone an important transformation, where identity has ceased to be a constant reality and has become a concept that changes according to people's interactions with different cultures and situations, as Zuriet and Lyausheva (2019) explain that under contemporary circumstances, the identity structure has experienced significant erosion, resulting in a loss of its homogeneity and stability (P. 1). This led to failure to appreciate and respect the rich historical and cultural foundations of the Arab and Muslim communities. In this context, Said's theory of Orientalism offers a helpful analysis of the Western misrepresentation and essentialization of the Eastern world. He argued that Orientalism, a pattern of making generalizations about the East, in short, is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, P. 3). Orientalists regard Eastern culture as inferior to Western civilization, and this reinforces the dominance of European concepts regarding the East, which themselves reinforce European superiority over Oriental primitiveness (Said, 1978, P. 7). Said asserts that, the West has taken it upon itself to represent and build the East, shaping it into a comprehensive image that corresponds to their own desires. This means that the East is a system of depictions shaped by political influences that introduced the Orient to Western education, Western awareness and subsequently, Western imperialism (Said, 1978, P. 202-203). In this vein, Said illustrates how Western culture strengthens its control over the East by formulating a stereotype that serves Western interests.

Islamophobia is defined as an irrational fear of Muslims, othering and the overgeneralization of diverse Muslim communities. It can be viewed as a modern manifestation of Orientalism. The Orient, according to Edward Said

(1978), serves as a stage on which will be figures whose purpose is to symbolize the greater entirety from which they originate (P. 63). The Orientalist oversimplifies the complex cultures of the Orient and constructs them as a set of stereotypes. The status of the Orient and Islam has been reduced and put “out of reach of everyone except the Western expert” (Said, 1978, P. 283). Orientalism lays the groundwork for Islamophobic and nationalist attitudes toward Arab Americans following the events of 9/11. Differences in national, religious, and cultural or ethnic backgrounds have resulted in the emergence of a “us” vs. “them” mentality. While this dynamic is central to U.S. nationalism and Islamophobia, Edward Said’s concept of Europe as a shared concept distinguishing ‘us’ Europeans from ‘them’ non-Europeans (Said, 1978 P. 7). He reveals that such divisive thinking has a long history beyond the U.S. This European framing echoes the fundamental sentiments of nationalism and Islamophobia in the American context.

The interplay of Orientalist tropes, Islamophobia, and nationalist sentiment within the political and social dynamics of the United States encourages fear of Arab Americans and depicts them as outsiders and less American than the European and Christian majority. The root of this “Orientalist fear” (Semmerling, 2008, P. 207) is the “lasting trauma” of “the Ottoman peril” which “lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger” (Said, 1978, P. 59). The essentializing tendencies and purposes of the Orientalist legacy have shaped the “adversarial relationship today between the West and the Muslim world” (El Younssi, 2022, P. 226). As Orientalism perceives and see the Orient, which includes the Arab and Muslim world, as a monolithic entity threatening Western values like liberalism and tolerance, the nationalist backlash after 9/11 views Arab Americans as a threat to American identity and security.

In her study of how the image of Muslim “Other” is constructed in contemporary British and American literature, Oana-Celia Gheorghiu coined the term “extreme otherness” to describe a real and present state of affairs, particularly at the social and political levels. She accentuates that “extreme otherness” refers to the extent to which a particular "Other" is seen as distinct and frequently, more threatening than other Others (2018, P. 161). The phrase the Muslim menace, taken from Edward Said's introduction to the third edition of *Orientalism* (2003), is employed to highlight this

constructed and exaggerated image of the Muslim “Other.” The focus of this study is to identify how this image is represented in *Back of the Throat*. According to Gheorghiu, in today’s global stage, any discourse on the otherness of Muslims compared to the mainly Christian West is probably to involve concepts like terrorism and religious fundamentalism. She draws attention to the challenge of creating such discourse without falling into the biased views of “Orientalism,” as defined by Edward Said, where the West stereotypes and dominates the East.

Gheorghiu further elucidates Said’s views on how European representations of Orientalism have maintained a consistent discourse over centuries. With minimal changes aside from the shift in dominance from Britain and France to America. According to Gheorghiu, this shift has placed Arab Muslims at the center of American media. Gheorghiu agrees with Said that while the core discourse of Orientalism remains “unaltered,” there is now a focus on the Arab Muslim, partly rooted in the transfer of anti-Semitic sentiments to Arabs. This shift reflects a legacy of Western mistrust of the “Oriental” because both Muslims and Jews share Semitic roots. Gheorghiu asserts that this Western distrust of Muslim Arabs, especially after 9/11, illustrates long-standing racist stereotypes: a significant factor in Westerners' skepticism toward Muslim Arabs is a racist response from Americans (and/or Europeans) rooted in centuries of negative stereotypes (2018, P. 167). In this regard, Said acknowledges that this xenophobia lumps together Islam with terrorism, Arabs with violence, or the East with oppression (1978, P. 168).

Literature Review

Many academic studies have provided critical analysis of *Back of the Throat*. For instance, Khaled Sirwah (2020) contends that the real goal of El Guindi in *Back of the Throat* is to show “the American traumatization of Arab/Muslim Americans as due to the West's very old view of the latter as inferior/uncivilized and hence stereotyping them as terrorists” (P. 318). Furthermore, the study explores how the trauma experienced by American survivors was transmitted to their victims (Arab and Muslim Americans) through inhumane practices. The reason was post-traumatic stress disorder due to the sudden and negative impact of the events that occurred after

September 11. Similarly, in another article titled “The Traumatized Self in Youssef El-Guindi’s *Back of the Throat*” by Rana Ghanem (2019), she touches on the theory of trauma in “*Back of the Throat*.” She claims that El Guindi clearly represented the “traumas of American discrimination for Arab- Americans as a hateful and destructive minority” (P. 15). She also demonstrates how Western prejudices can traumatize Arab Americans in the play, which is represented by the severe mistreatment that Khaled was subjected to by the two agents. Both studies present important and valuable aspects regarding the problem of Islamophobia in America.

Moreover, Al-Amro et al. (2021) conducted a study of the play *Back of the Throat* by focusing on depicting “the violence and stereotype as core themes in the play” (P. 8796) and its association with the real conflicts faced by Muslims in the United States. The study analyzed the use of dramatic techniques in the play, including flashbacks and depictions of violence, and examined how these elements impacted the characters. Therefore, the findings of this study are consistent with some of our arguments in this article about the prevailing issues related to discrimination and violence targeting Muslims in American society. In contrast, Suaad Al Qahtani (2018) in her research “post-9/11 Arab American Drama: Voices of Resistance in *Back of the Throat* and *Browntown*,” affirms that El Guindi’s plays serve as a realistic representation of the lives of Arab Americans and a reflection of El Guindi’s experiences in the post-September 11 era. Al Qahtani explores how Arab American playwrights use their works to challenge and dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims in America. As a result, these playwrights “attempted to replace the stereotypical monolithic perception of Arabs/Muslims with a more humanized portrait” (P. 394). Al Qahtani explores the plight of Arab Americans in the play through their resilience and resistance against racial stereotypes and Islamophobia. She vividly portrays the concerns and difficulties faced by Arab Americans in the United States.

Salavatis Konstantinos (2017) also addressed racial and religious stereotypes against Arab Americans in *Back of the Throat*, along with the impact of the September 11 attacks, and the alarming increase in hate crimes against Muslim and Arab communities. He draws on Said’s theory of colonial domination on “the other” and Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the “Subaltern.”

He argued that the Western representation of the “other” is a major topic in the play. Ahmed Mohammed’s analysis (2011) of *Back of the Throat* also deals with “the problem of being associated with ... terrorist attacks by virtue of ethnicity and religion” after September 11 (P. 168). Mohammed’s article supports El Guindi's main argument that Arab Americans are more likely to experience violence and discrimination due to their race and religious beliefs, while also being constantly under threat from the government. Arab drama has played a crucial role in debunking misconceptions about Arabs and Muslims in America by addressing important issues such as identity, race and belonging.

Discussion

Yussef El Guindi was born in Egypt, and brought up in London, and now resides in Seattle, where he has established himself as a prominent playwright. His plays frequently center on Arab American or immigrant characters grappling with issues like immigration, displacement and finding their place in society. Some of his notable works include *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes* (2008), *10 Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (2005), *Back of the Throat* (2005) and *Language Rooms* (2010). El Guindi has received many awards for his exceptional talent, one of the most prestigious being the American Theater Critics Association Award for his play *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2011). His works are featured in theaters throughout the country, with ACT Theatre in Seattle hosting several of them. Furthermore, *Back of the Throat* won the 2004 Northwest Playwright's Competition and was also a nominee for the 2006 Steinberg/New Play Award by the American Theater Critics Association. Additionally, it was named the *Seattle Times* Best New Play in 2005. *Back of the Throat* reflects themes of social fear, racism, and the conflicts that Arab Americans faced after September 11 events.

Through the character of Khaled, El Guindi creates an image of Arab Americans as an estranged and outcast race that is not fully accepted in American societies, despite the fact that they consider America to be their homeland. Moreover, many Arabs have little knowledge about their Islamic and Arabic heritage because they were born and raised in American society. Thus, El Guindi’s plays primarily revolve around the experiences of Arab

Americans, which dramatically influenced his work, especially after September 11. In *Back of the Throat*, El Guindi depicts the hardships of Arab American's lives to convey their sorry plight. According to Bartlett, "If I hear another immigrant spew back to me [obscenity] about rights, I will... vomit.... You come here with [obscenity], from shit countries, knowing nothing about anything" (El Guindi, 2005, P. 27). This quote demonstrates the negative bias towards immigrants from the Middle East, which is closely tied to the phenomenon of Orientalism. This phenomenon has historically portrayed Eastern cultures as inferior, strange and incompatible with Western values. Notable among them are tolerance, liberalism and democracy, which are asserted as global standards for progress and enlightenment. Such view fuels bias, discrimination, and hatred towards foreigners and individuals of Middle Eastern origin. That said, Bartlett displayed bias and hostility towards immigrants from the East.

Said argues that the Western world constructed a reductionist view of the East as a single, primitive entity characterized by "backwardness" (Said, 1978, P. 205). He explains, this principle was shaped by the experiences of numerous Europeans, all focusing on fundamental elements of the East, such as the Eastern character, Eastern tyranny, Eastern sensuality, and so forth (Said, 1978, P. 203). This unfair portrayal affects the actions of the two agents when dealing with Khaled, as they perceive him through this narrow understanding of the East. Therefore, Khaled is portrayed as the "Other" who is subjected to the gaze of the Orientalist, wherein his identity is constructed and defined by the dominant Western culture. The way Khaled is viewed by the agents strips away his agency and reduces him to a mere stereotype shaped by Western views. In this sense, the Western world assumes the role of defining Arab identity, creating unrealistic images and suppressing true representation.

Back of the Throat opens with an unexpected and unannounced visit from U.S. officials, Bartlett and Carl, who arrive at Khaled's apartment to interrogate him suspecting a connection to another Arab accused of being a terrorist. Shortly after their arrival, Bartlett and Carl reveal to Khaled that their visit is "informal" (P. 1). These informal visits to Arab Americans result from intensive security and surveillance investigations in the name of "national security measures" (Serap, P. 183). Surveillance of Muslims is

justified by the aim of verifying identities and detecting any suspicious activities due to the widespread fear of Muslims and the possibility of future attacks (Serap, P. 183). It is clear that Khaled is chosen because of his Arabic background, which is linked to the September 11 attacks. These attacks left a lasting impact on these two agents, fueling their anger and driving them to create an overwhelming sense of suspicion toward Arabs and Muslims. The sudden and devastating nature of the attacks has overshadowed their judgment, causing them to perceive every Arab American as a suspect, even labeling them as terrorists. As Said emphasized, Arabs are thought of as “camel riding, terroristic, hook-nosed” in the popular mind (1978, P.108). Furthermore, these acts of terrorism were seen as “declarations of war” by the Bush administration, and they justified the subsequent military response as an act of self-defense (Butler, 2004, P. 4). In the play, Khaled is treated according to this reasoning.

Khaled does not know that he is considered a suspect. This is due mainly to the secret government surveillance and investigations against Arab Americans, which makes it nearly impossible for them to find out when they are being suspected. However, Khaled expresses his intention to cooperate and provide answers to the officials’ inquiries: “Are you looking for anything in particular” (P. 7). His offer of cooperation is driven by his desire to reside in America and his understanding of the complex conditions that emerged following September 11. But his offer is met with hostility and disrespect from the two agents, trying to force him to confess a crime that he never commits: “KHALED: Tell you what? You haven’t told me what I’ve been accused of!... (Bartlett quickly walks over to Khaled, grabs him by the arm and drags him into a corner of the room” (P. 26).

In an attempt to distance himself from terrorist attacks, Khaled denies practicing his religion after Bartlett picks up a picture frame with a religious theme: “Bartlett picks up a picture frame from a table. KHALED, A present from my mother...It says, er, “God” ...I’m not religious myself” (P. 2). As postulated by Mohammed (2011), Khaled’s attempt to distance himself from accusations of terrorist ties symbolizes a larger struggle to avoid being targeted because of his ethnic background (P. 169). Although it is not clear whether Khaled is actually religious or not, he thinks that distancing himself from his Arab and Islamic heritage is the key to ensuring his safety. That

said, Khaled may still identify with Islam, but he claims not to practice it or actively engage in religious rituals and community activities. In doing so, Khaled adopts a survival strategy in response to Islamophobia and discrimination. He is well conscious of the negative stereotypes related to Islam and Muslims in America and tries to distance himself from these stereotypes by denying his religious identity. People like Khaled in this situation are looked at with a lot of doubt and bias even after they try hard to step away from their culture and religion. Bartlett and Carl treat Khaled's decision to take on his American identity as his main form of self very suspiciously, asking him many questions.

In this context, people like Khaled face scrutiny and prejudice despite their efforts to distance themselves from their cultural and religious roots. Therefore, Khaled's choice to embrace his American nationality as his primary identity is met with suspicion, rejection and interrogation by Bartlett and Carl. Their focus on Khaled's religion embodies the pervasive nature of Islamophobia within American society. This wave resulted in increased reported hate crimes, which included insults hurled at passersby, to defacement of private residences and houses of worship, to aggressive acts such as school bullying, physical assault and murder (Love, 2017, P. 90). Islamophobia in the United States extends beyond religious affiliation to encompass anyone perceived to have Muslim characteristics, regardless of their actual religious or cultural background. Erik Love (2017) contends that in the U.S, anyone who appears to be Muslim is vulnerable to Islamophobia, even if he/she follows another religion, such as "Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist" (P. 3). Regardless of their ethnic, religious and cultural heritage, they may encounter violence based on perceived race.

On this basis, El Guindi contemplates the internal conflict experienced by Arabs who adhere to Islamic beliefs and the pressures they face in America to hide their religious identity. The reason for this is the prevailing perception among some segments of American society that Islam and all Muslims are inherently dangerous and pose a threat to the fabric of society. This view contrasts with the values of Western liberalism, which advocates for tolerance and the right of everyone to express themselves and live according to their beliefs. Individuals who exercise this right are seen as educated, and their group is considered a "sign of civilization" (Brown, 2006, P. 157). A liberal society is considered "the world-historical apex of

culture and cultural productions” (Brown, 2006, P. 167). However, some perceive Muslim Americans as barbarians “acting by instinct” (P. 10) and being violent and fierce; thus, they are deemed dangerous because they are associated with these qualities (P. 163). Consequently, the existence of Muslims in America is seen by some as an indication of barbarism and is considered a sign of being “submissive tribal followers” (P. 156).

It is worth noting that, as Said indicates, Islam has not become a symbol of terror and fear for Europe and America without reason. This perception arose due to the growth of Islamic military and religious hegemony and the fall of Persia, Egypt, and other countries to Muslim forces. In addition, “Sicily, and parts of France were conquered” (P. 59). These historical events caused Europe significant psychological trauma on political, social, and cultural levels (P. 59). Over time, these European perceptions influenced American attitudes, especially as some politicians in the United States worked to consolidate and perpetuate stereotypes linking Islam to terrorism (Stack Jr, 2011, P. 32). Said asserts that Islam was systematically portrayed as an enemy, embedding these distortions deeply within American cultural and political narratives.

However, as the play unfolds and the conversations between the two agents and Khaled progress, the two agents quickly notice many suspicious elements inside Khaled's apartment. This discovery leads them to believe that Khaled is “very unnatural” (P. 17). Among the hidden items they find are the Quran, Arabic books, porn magazines, political books including those on communism and a book about assassins. The presence of explicit magazines alongside political books suggests a reinforcement of neo-Orientalist stereotypes of Arab or Eastern males as lustful and politically extremist (Said, 1978, P. 311-312). This conflation of lust and politics dehumanizes Khaled and justifies the agents' suspicions and actions against him. Khaled explains that he is a writer and needs to collect information from various sources: “I told you, I’m a writer. I need any number of reference books on different subjects. That’s the context” (P. 13). Nevertheless, Bartlett emphasizes the idea that “a person is reflected by what he owns” (P. 12). Based on the books discovered with Khaled, both Bartlett and Carl assume that Khaled is connected to unlawful acts. Their aim is to fabricate evidence against Khaled and use whatever they can find as proof of

his radicalism and terrorism. Khaled confirms that these books cover most people's interests in all fields. Nevertheless, Bartlett denies the existence of these elements in his own home and confirms that "[they're] basic if you consider them important" (P. 16). From this perspective, it becomes clear that Bartlett's goal is to frame Khaled, as he increasingly strives to get a confession from him. It appears in this quote:

BARTLETT: No. No, this isn't normal. I have to tell you, Khaled, none of this is normal. Right about now I would place you a few feet outside of that category. To be honest, you are shaping up to be a very abnormal individual. I am frankly amazed at just how abnormal everything is in your apartment. I have actually been growing quite alarmed by what we've been finding. More: I'm getting that uncomfortable feeling that there's more to you than meets the eye and not in a good way. I wouldn't be surprised if we were to turn on that computer and find plans for tunneling under the White House. Or if Carl was to walk out that door having found something very incriminating indeed. (P. 16-17)

This interaction reveals a lack of confidence, fear and uncertainty about Khaled's potential involvement in illegal or dangerous activities. In reply to the claims directed against him, Khaled asks for a lawyer and wants his rights as an American citizen in the U.S. Constitution. According to the Sixth Amendment Rights of Accused in Criminal Prosecutions, the accused have the right to a trial that is both speedy and public, conducted by an unbiased jury from the state and district where the crime was committed. The district must be determined beforehand by law, and the accused must be informed of the nature and reason for the accusation. They also have the right to confront the witnesses against them, to obtain witnesses in their favor through the compulsory process, and to have the assistance of counsel for their defense (P. 1399). Unfortunately, Bartlett rejects Khaled's request, claiming that he has been "misinformed" (P. 18). Khaled's plight extends attention to a troubling issue, as the request for legal representation leads to skepticism

instead of support. As Bartlett says, “asking for a lawyer is a dumb move because it alerts me to a guilt you may be trying to hide” (P. 18). This reflects the wrong idea that asking for legal advice means one is guilty. In truth, the right to get a lawyer is basic legal protection that ensures fair treatment and representation. It should be noted that asking for a lawyer does not mean one is guilty but just acts as a safeguard against any possible injustice.

Throughout the unfolding events, Bartlett continues to mistreat Khaled both verbally and physically, to the point of using obscenities: “You’re a Muslim and an Arab. Those are the bad [obscenity] currently making life a living hell” (P. 23). Bartlett’s statement reinforces harmful assumptions about entire communities based on their religious or ethnic backgrounds. This highlights the persistence of racism and discrimination that Arab Americans faced after the events of September 11. Consequently, Khaled’s torment is unending, and there are no signs that it will cease. Instead of presenting evidence to the court, Carl and Bartlett continue to perpetuate his suffering without any legal basis other than his religion and descent. Carl resorts to physical brutality and treats Khaled harshly, further dehumanizing him (Al-Amro et al., 2021, P. 8802). This violence is vividly portrayed in these lines: “If you’d’ve kept your nose clean, ... , would you, crawling on the ground, trying to get away from the next hit that’s sure to come if you don’t tell us what you and Gamal got up to” (P. 56). This quote depicts Khaled’s plight, highlighting the brutality he endures where he is being whipped like a prisoner in his own residence by law officers (Al-Amro et al., 2021, P. 8802). It explains the depths of despair and weakness that Khaled finds himself in as he attempts to escape the next inevitable hit if he does not cooperate with the authorities. This serves as a testament to the overwhelming fear and pressure he is subjected to. In addition, “Carl kicks Khaled in the groin. Khaled gasps... and collapses onto his knees” (p. 54). What makes this situation ironic is that the perpetrators of this violence are individuals entrusted with the responsibility of upholding justice and safeguarding the law. Ironically, the Fourth Amendment of the US constitution states the people's right to feel secure in their persons, homes, documents, and belongings against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be infringed; no Warrants shall be granted except based on probable cause, confirmed by Oath or affirmation, and specifically detailing the

location to be searched. (Fourth Amendment Search and Seizure, P. 1199). However, in reality, the two officers are violating these tenets and abusing their power to illegally punish Khaled.

Moreover, the appearance of Asfoor alongside three female characters, Shelly, Beth and Jean, signals an important turning point in the play. This moment indicates a pivotal transformation in the narration and advances the tension and conflict for Khaled. Bartlett's accusation that Khaled has a relationship with Asfoor adds a layer of complexity to the plot. The two agents believe that Asfoor is involved in terrorist activities or is even the mastermind behind the attack. Bartlett attempts to confirm this suspicion via emails and the testimonies of the three women. The two officers utilize these witnesses as instruments to charge Khaled (Sirwah, 2020, P. 303- 304). According to Louise Cainer (2010), to prevent further attacks, the government collaborated with American citizens to closely observe Muslims and Arabs in the United States. Activities that seemed natural were treated as suspect. Cainer contends that the social relationships between the neighbors have "changed into a new set of roles" (P. 181). Some Americans focus on identifying potential threats, while many Muslims feel compelled to act in ways that prove they are not suspects.

This interplay of vigilance and defensive behavior led to an increase in reports related to "neighbor or co-worker" (Cainer, 2010, P. 182) who showed suspicious behavior based on their clothes or their unusual actions. This can be observed through Khaled's actions, who tries to defend himself while Beth persistently believes he is guilty because of his strange attitude. Furthermore, Beth is presented as a witness who supports the suspicions carried out by Carl and Bartlett regarding Khaled's personality and potential involvement in terrorism. Beth reinforces the officers' suspicion by indicating that Khaled is a mysterious and unclear person: "He never seemed to come clean about anything. Always keeping things close to his chest, like he had another" (P. 44). Beth unfairly thinks of Khaled as being unwilling to share personal thoughts, intentions, or plans. Beth's prejudiced answer to the agents' questions about Khaled reveals her baseless suspicion, apparently influenced by his Middle Eastern background. She also believes that his "whole life seemed to be one big lie. I don't think he has an honest bone in

his body” (P. 44). Moreover, Beth's statement that she “wouldn’t surprise me if he was involved” (P. 45) in terrorist acts further indicates her bias of him.

Jean is another character who illustrates the heightened suspicion of Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11. In an interview with Bartlett, Jean’s suspicion of Khaled and Asfoor's behavior is unfounded and driven by subjective interpretation rather than concrete evidence:

JEAN: Yeah. It was dark, but yeah. Both of them were Middle-Eastern, that I know... Suddenly his attention is full on him. And he's changed. Like he's frozen or something. And this guy just stares and he's looking at Khaled and me. And I say again, "do you mind?" And he looks at me and his eyes - they're like, I'm-going-to-get-you eyes. (P. 64)

Jean’s bias does help the claims about Asfoor and Khaled being terrorists. Jean says Asfoor looks at her in a way that seems to threaten: “they’re like, I’m-going-to-get-you eyes.” A look from someone doesn’t confirm any real intent to threaten. Even if his behavior makes Jean uneasy, it does not show any evil intention on his part.

Unfortunately, Jean’s bias does help the claims about Asfoor and Khaled being terrorists. Jean says Asfoor looks at her in a way that seems to threaten. Asfoor’s standing and staring do not necessarily confirm any explicit threatening action. Even if his behavior makes Jean uneasy, it does not inherently indicate malicious intent. For that, Jean’s negative perception of Asfoor's seemingly normal behavior is influenced by biases and fears that may not reflect his actual intentions. However, Khaled’s connection to Asfoor has nothing to do with terrorist planning. Instead, Asfoor wants Khaled to teach him English, believing it will help him express his Arabic ideas more effectively. As his Arabic education limits his ability to translate them into English. Asfoor describes himself as having “a river of beautiful speech” and wishes to capture it in a book written in English. (P. 68).

Conclusion

In *Back of the Throat*, El Guindi deals with the Arab American situation post-9/11. He unravels long-settled biases due to Orientalist discourses and their destructive and fatal effects. El Guindi vividly demonstrates that Orientalist discourses have contributed towards the rise of Islamophobia

against Arab Americans, with its perspective influencing Western perceptions of Arabs and Muslims in a profound manner. Through the play's protagonist, El Guindi portrays Arab Americans as marginalized and untrusted within their American society. The play serves as a powerful symbol of the fear and violence that Arab American communities encounter exemplified by the unfair actions taken against Khaled by American government agents. Hence, El Guindi's depiction of Khaled's struggle is a stark reminder of the continuous injustice that Arab Americans faced in Western societies. The play urges audiences to confront biases and assumptions about Arab Americans. Consequently, it emphasizes the necessity to have sympathy, understanding, and efforts to combat Islamophobia, thereby giving a true and fair image to Arabs and the Eastern world in general. Accordingly, El Guindi's play is a strong invitation to work for social justice and equality.

In El Guindi's presentation and portrayal of Asfoor and Khaled's painful experiences and unjust treatment by the US government. We see how deep-rooted Orientalist biases come to wield their influence on the lives of Arab Americans, regardless of their guilt or innocence in terrorist acts. The struggle that Asfoor and Khaled had to go through draws a stark picture what a majority of Arab Americans face in Western societies, where the ignorance about their issues can easily lead to victimization of innocent people. In *Back of the Throat*, El Guindi demonstrates Western society's inability to understand or empathize with the Arab plight through the government agents' interrogation of Khaled, which is fueled by racial and cultural biases rather than factual evidence.

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