

America Through Arab Prism: Exploring Tapestries of Ambivalence, Cultural Hybridization, and Otherness in Arabic Travel Writing

أمريكا من خلال المنظار العربي:

استكشاف أنسجة الالتباس والتهجين الثقافي ومفهوم الآخر في أدب الرحلات العربي

L'Amérique à travers le prisme arabe : explorer les tapisseries d'ambivalence, l'hybridation culturelle et l'altérité dans les écrits de voyage arabes

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ملخص: يهدف هذا المقال إلى دراسة صورة أمريكا في أدب الرحلة العربي من خلال تسليط الضوء عن مظاهر الالتباس، والتهجين الثقافي، وتمثل صورة الآخر في كتابات رحالة وأدباء عرب مثل أمين الريحاني، ميخائيل نعيمة، وفيليب حتي، إلى جانب أصوات نسائية أخرى. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجًا تحليليًا نقديًا يقوم على قراءة نصوص مختارة لرصد أثر التفاعل مع المجتمع الأمريكي في تشكيل الوعي العربي بالغرب. وتبين من خلال التحليل أنّ الرحلة لم تكن مجرد انتقال جغرافي، بل تجربة معرفية عميقة أتاحت للكتاب العرب استكشاف فسيفساء المجتمع الأمريكي بما يحويه من لغات وثقافات وأنماط عيش متنوعة. كما أظهرت النتائج أيضًا أنّ هذه النصوص عبّرت عن رؤية مزدوجة تجاه الغرب، جمعت بين الإعجاب بالحيوية والتعدد والانبهار بالحدثة، وبين النقد الحاد للهيمنة السياسية والإمبريالية والعنصرية. وعليه فإن أدب الرحلة العربي إلى أمريكا يُعدّ مجالًا خصبًا لفهم جدلية التفاعل بين الانفتاح والرفض في الوعي العربي الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدب الرحلة العربي؛ صورة أمريكا؛ التهجين الثقافي؛ الالتباس؛ تمثيل الآخر

Abstract: This article examines the portrayal of America within Arabic travel literature by illuminating manifestations of ambivalence, cultural hybridization, and representations of the Other in the writings of Arab travellers and literati such as Ameen Rihani, Mikhail Naimy, and Philip Hitti, alongside other female voices. The study employs a critical analytical approach predicated upon readings of selected texts to trace the impact of engagement with American society in shaping Arab consciousness of the West. The analysis reveals that these journeys transcended mere geographical displacement, constituting profound epistemic experiences that enabled Arab writers to explore the American societal mosaic with its diverse languages, cultures, and lifestyles. The findings further demonstrate that these texts articulated ambivalent perspectives toward the West, combining admiration for vitality, plurality, and modernity with trenchant criticism of political hegemony, imperialism, and racism. Consequently, Arabic travel literature to America constitutes a fertile ground for comprehending the dialectical interplay between receptivity and rejection within modern Arab consciousness.

Keywords: Arabic travel literature; Image of America; Cultural hybridization; Ambivalence; Otherness

Résumé : Cet article vise à examiner l'image de l'Amérique dans la littérature de voyage arabe en mettant en lumière les manifestations d'ambivalence, d'hybridation culturelle et de représentation de l'Autre dans les écrits de voyageurs et écrivains arabes tels qu'Ameen Rihani, Mikhail Naimy et Philip Hitti, aux côtés d'autres voix féminines. L'étude a adopté une approche analytique critique

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fondée sur la lecture de textes choisis pour déceler l'impact de l'interaction avec la société américaine dans la formation de la conscience arabe de l'Occident. L'analyse révèle que ces voyages dépassaient le simple déplacement géographique, constituant des expériences épistémiques profondes permettant aux écrivains arabes d'explorer la mosaïque sociétale américaine avec ses langues, cultures et modes de vie diversifiés. Les résultats démontrent également que ces textes articulaient des perspectives ambivalentes envers l'Occident, conjuguant l'admiration pour la vitalité, la pluralité et la modernité avec une critique acerbe de l'hégémonie politique, de l'impérialisme et du racisme. Par conséquent, la littérature de voyage arabe vers l'Amérique constitue un terrain fertile pour comprendre la dialectique entre réceptivité et rejet dans la conscience arabe moderne

Mots clés : Littérature de voyage arabe; Image de l'Amérique; Hybridation culturelle; Ambivalence; Représentation de l'Autre

Introduction

“Travel is a passage from the self to the ‘Other’”

— Michel, “*Désirs d'Ailleurs*”, (2000, p.19)

Following the Post-war Boom, the United States underwent strong economic growth in the latter half of the twentieth century, which propelled this pristine nation to ascend into a major world power, ushering into a new historical phase of sustained peace and affluence. Now leading the world as an ‘emerging economic powerhouse’— a land emblematic of prosperity and opportunity, the United States quickly attracted a wave of explorers and entrepreneurs lured by the promise of opulence, happiness, and influence. For so many scholars (Lipset, 1996; Stephanson, 1998; Mead & Leone, 2009; Nye, 2009), American power would not just stem from the pursuit of happiness it had so far been pledging to offer all its citizens, but also from its profound commitment to human virtues, ideological openness, and spiritual freedom that ‘*The Land of the Free*’ has asserted that it would afford to the world, on a much grander scale (Reeves, 2000). As President John F. Kennedy forthrightly noted in a speech he had never had the chance to deliver in Dallas (November 22, 1963): “We in this country...are—by destiny rather than by choice—the watchmen on the walls of world freedom” (Kennedy, as cited in Gordon, 2005, p.iii).

These enticing bounties of freedom and wealth have rapidly beckoned multitudinous immigrants from across the world, who have been merchants, scholars, artists and intellectuals, to journey into this strange far-off shore “to pursue their own ideas of happiness” (Gordon, 2005, p.XV). They have all been swayed by its charming beauty and the propitious dream “of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man” (Cullen, 2004, p. 7). Indeed, the dream has soon become every man’s dream, not just, ‘American Dream’, *so to speak*. In the late nineteenth century, the United States had become the new site of pilgrimage, welcoming a surge of immigrants flooding in hundreds of numbers from Europe, Africa, and Asia, a process which led to the striking assimilation and hybridity of diverse cultures characterising today the national atmosphere of the country. At times, American hybrid culture, including music, film, media culture, and advancement in technology, enjoying a lap of luxury, embodied the very bedrock of the American identity. (Reeves, 2000)

On the threshold of the 21st century, American imperialistic expansion across Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, coupled with the country’s interventionist foreign policy, had quickly instigated brooding sentiments of scepticism, fear, and contempt among the general public. Shaken by the growing unrest, the close of the twentieth century witnessed an upheaval in social morals, where dreadful rise in scenes of delinquency, violent crimes and suicides dragged ‘American exceptionalism’— long a consensual term in the national lexicon— dramatically to a grinding halt (Lipset, 1996). In 1988, Robert Bork, the leader of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, wrote: “The traditional virtues of this culture are being lost, its vices multiplied, its values degraded—in short, the culture itself is unravelling” (Bork, as cited in Reeves, 2000, p. 277). At the dawn of the 21st century, tensions were aggravated by the aftermath of deadly 11th September attacks on the

World Trade Centre, resulting in a bleak atmosphere of strain and suspicion inside the Western world. For, in some later decades, that blood-curdling incident grounded in U.S. history had profoundly besmirched the picture of Arabs and Muslims in Americans' cast of minds. In this high-tech electronic era, more than any time before, Muslims in the Middle East and Mediterranean are palpably assaulted as terrorists and barbarians in all Western mass media, visual culture, and films so as to propagate a cruel picture of the Arabic culture. (Gordon, 2005)

For the hybridity of American culture more critically considered, some researchers (Schlesinger, 1998; O'Callaghan, 1999) laid bare the intricate yet very loose membrane covering the American aspect of "multiculturalism", which is turning out to be "more of a salad bowl", encompassing a clash of races and traditions, than "a melting pot" (O'Callaghan, 1999, p. 79). This great diversity between a plurality of cultures coexisting within the same area had only engendered unbiased, or roughly ambivalent perspectives towards the occidental, epitomised by its preeminent state, the US, and *vice versa*.

To mention the occident is strongly reminiscent of the vastly overrated hyphenated binary between 'the West' and 'the East'; with an overemphasis on the drastic issue of difference finding plenty of room in Edwards Said's provocative book *Orientalism* (1978). In his lines of thoughts, Said discussed how the distinction between the Western 'Europeans' identified as what he called "us", and its cultural contestant 'the Other' or 'the Orient' transcends political conspiracies. It is no longer the expression of a sinister imperialist scheme led by the "Western" hemisphere to suppress the "Oriental" world. It is rather a pivotal element of modern political-intellectual culture, more connected to "their" world than the Orient itself. Said therefore contends that the term Orientalism is long overdue; it not only brings this distinction to life but also sustains it. It embodies a deliberate will or intention to understand, and at times control or manipulate, a distinctly different arena of the world – one that is alternative and novel. And therefore, he believes, "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said, 1978, p. 5).

As a matter of reality, though it was cataclysmic, Edward asserted, based on his personal experience in the West, that the existence of an Arab Muslim in America emphasising that of Palestinian origin evokes a disheartening reality. Pathetically, the majority of Arabs are facing their uniquely punitive destiny, namely for being a typical emblem of inertia, violence and backwardness, in contrast to the Occidental that it highly eulogised, to use Said's words, as "a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said, 1978, p.7). Here, Said's devotion to Occidentalism is hardly invisible. To revisit Said's Orientalism from a critical distance would also drive someone to stand aghast at how he contends that Europe has, to a great extent, fabricated the Orient. From antiquity onward, the Orient has existed in European consciousness as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories, and landscapes" (Said, 1978, p. 1). Said asserts that the Orient has served as the origin of Europe's "greatest, richest, and oldest colonies" (1978, p. 1), unleashing the path to its civilizations and languages to thrive, while the time of its boon thence is over. Moreover, the Orient, in Said's eyes, stands as a cultural adversary, providing Europe with a profound and reverberating portrayal of the Other. He posits that the Orient has played an instrumental role in shaping Europe's identity, serving as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experiential counterpart.

To all intents and purposes, Said's illustrative selection of Western perspectives reveals not just an assumed Western supremacy but also the flimsy pretexts used to legitimize a colonial greed for subjugating what he calls 'the Near East'—a region often demonized as a sub-human species (Said, 1994). This very process of dehumanization, as Aucock (2019) argued, "could both justify and reinforce the staggering imbalance of power between countries with colonial presences in the Middle East and the people there" (p.68).

Many works that emulate Said's Orientalism paradoxically perpetuate the very power structures they seek to critique. The racialized voice of the overpowering colonizer, reverberating

through various literary and cultural forms, often gains more credence than that of the colonized. This imbalance, in turn, normalizes a 'desire for otherness' (Young, 1994), which is either wholly forgiven or partially tolerated.

This paper is a far cry from a counterblast against negative visions of the Orient; instead, it seeks to amplify the seldom-heard, dissonant voices from the Arabic diasporic narrative. Drawing on a limited number of travel autobiographies and geographical discourses, the endeavour is to show how Arab writers have portrayed the convoluted American lifestyle, culture and traditions, expressing mostly ambivalent impressions that are divided on the country's worth. Against this background, the current research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Arab writers reconcile their admiration for American material progress with their critique of its moral and spiritual deficiencies?
2. To what extent has the American ideal of 'female beauty', often perceived in the Arabic Islamic world as superficial, exerted a cultural influence?
3. What lasting impact has this exposure had on the beholders' own cultural perceptions and social customs?

To answer these queries, this study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in postcolonial literary theory and cultural studies. It extrapolates on the frameworks of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Homi Bhabha's concept of *cultural hybridity* (1994), and Mary Louise Pratt's notion of *transculturation* in travel writing (1992). The meaning of this research lies in charting a new path towards understanding how Arab travelers engage with American culture, transcending beyond conventional paradigms of assimilation and acceptance to explore more nuanced modes of cultural negotiation and self-representation.

According to Pratt (1992), indigenous texts by marginalized groups do not merely select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant culture; they transcend this process to transform these cultural patterns into a hybrid discursive production. In the context of Arabic travel narratives, transculturation is evident as writers actively navigate American modernity—neither fully discarding nor entirely embracing Western values, but instead, critically poaching and (re)calibrating the products of the dominant culture while asserting their own identity. This process reveals how travel writing becomes a site of cultural hybridization, where identities are perpetually reassessed and the seemingly powerless "Other" enacts agency through a subversive reinterpretation of the dominant culture. (Pratt, 1992)

The exploration of travel accounts further resonates with Homi Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity (1994), which closely intersects with notions of transculturation, diaspora, and in-betweenness. The encounter with Arab travelogues recalls Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "Third Space"—capturing hybridity as a liminal, in-between space situated between Western and Eastern culture, where migrants and other postcolonial subjects undergo processes that reshape their previously fixed sense of identity. Bhabha (1994) emphasizes the significance of transforming boundaries and limits into intermediary spaces where cultural and political authority can be renegotiated and redefined (p. 4). In this regard, Bhabha (1990) clarifies that hybridity's significance lies not in tracing its dual origins, but rather in its capacity to generate new positions and perspectives that transcend binary frameworks (p. 211). Through this concept, Bhabha reconceptualizes the rigid categories of race, class, and gender as fluid cultural locations by foregrounding the significance of border zones, crossings, and interstitial spaces that exist within the in-between.

Given the significance of Bhabha's theoretical framework, this concept of the "Third Space" proves highly relevant to the examination of Arab travel writers who occupy precisely this liminal position—navigating between their Arab-Islamic heritage and American modernity, creating hybrid identities that belong fully to neither culture yet draw from both.

To accomplish the target of this research, the analysis implies a contextual interpretation of the primary texts under scrutiny to examining how Arab authors represent America and negotiate self/other relationships through literary travel narratives.

The corpus consists primarily of early to mid-twentieth-century Arabic travel accounts written by key intellectual figures such as Ameen Rihani, Mikha'il Naimy, Philip Hitti, and Abd al-Malik

Sidqi, among others. These texts were selected for their representative range of perspectives — from expatriate intellectuals to short-term visitors — and for their pivotal role in shaping the Arab literary imagination of the United States. Anthologies such as Abdel-Malek's *America in an Arab Mirror* (2000) were used as secondary reference points to ensure access to a wide array of voices within the same cultural and historical framework. This reliance on curated anthologies is necessitated by both the limited availability of individual primary sources and the fact that the selected accounts, written in Standard Arabic, are most authoritatively compiled and presented within these resources.

Methodologically speaking, the analysis follows a contextual interpretive model, identifying patterns of ambivalence, admiration, and critique within the narratives. Each author's text is approached as a *cultural contact zone* (Pratt, 1992), where ideological negotiation occurs between Arab identity and Western modernity. The study applies postcolonial concepts such as otherness, hybridity, and representation to reveal how Arab travellers both resist and internalize Western discourses about progress, civilization, and morality.

Before delving into the primary texts, it is crucial to situate this corpus of Arabic travel writing within its historical trajectory.

1- America in Arabic Travel Writing

Resting on a descriptive quote from “The Meaning of Travel” by Thomas Emily (2022), the act of travelling is depicted as a window to the realm of the Other. This exploration towards Otherness unveils a spatial estrangement of the self, “forcing the soul to continually observe ‘new and unknown things’” (Thomas, 2022, p. 13). It is a process of positioning human beings in the borderlands where desperate confines of familiarity and heterogeneous edges of existence meet. It is such a sort of displacement that would very much, as portrayed in the pity words of Hutton (2010), “enlarge our thoughts and souls, and help to cure those diseases of little minds” (p. 23). In other terms, travelling in its entire quiddity serves not only to satiate wanderlust but also to solidify cross-cultural relationships among people of diverse creeds, races, and colours. In doing so, it forges a deeper awareness of others' habits, nuances, strengths, and vulnerabilities an Achilles' heels. It is literally a sightseeing tour to explore foreign traditions, customs, and ideologies that are often at odds with those of the receiver.

However, to say ‘voyage’ or ‘travel’, is to refer to a timeless human longing, which is as antique as the first man's feet stamping upon the earth. It is often deemed the past and the future of human existence and evolution across a long span of ages. Besides being a vignette of vitality and personal growth, as many researchers (Adams, 2014; Matousek & Borysenko, 2017) would take pleasure in describing it; leading lives beyond the armchair had been so far an insatiable thirst for spiritual rumination and self-discovery to many literary explorers.

As Kandil (2020) has illuminated in his compelling work “The Literature of the Journey in the Arab Heritage”, voyage forms— in this grand symphony of existence, a captivating and thrilling part of the divine order. It even transcends the confines of the universe, guiding human and natural trajectories toward greater quests of self-understanding that nurture both the mind and the soul. It is a matter of elevating man's spirit through the intensity of experiences, the fervency of situations, the wondrous yearning for adventure, and tempestuously still, the perpetual novelty encountered in every aspect.

While embarking on the exploration of travel literature as a literary genre, invaluable in *itself*, Arabic travel texts manifest among the pioneering works that championed fervently for its glorious departure. It is almost axiomatic that the expansion during conquests and the monumental political triumphs achieved by the holy Islamic nation, notably during the second century of the *Hijra* had greatly bolstered effervescence in venturing to unprecedented heights. After the Islamic call illumined the human heart with the certainty of the existence of God, voyaging in pursuit of knowledge could contribute immensely to magnifying the significance of travel, illuminating the perilous complexities that scholars encounter on their enlightening journey towards wisdom. As a corollary, the notion of

travel has by and by transformed into a mode of life around which many Arabic narratives are spun, including autobiographies of *Abu Muhammad al-Abdari* and *Ibn Umar Allah bin Rashid al-Nashriasi*, the enticing travelogues of Yaqt al-Hamawi, Ibn Said, and al-Abdari in the thirteenth century, *Ibn Battuta*, *Ibn Khaldun*, *Muhammad bin Rashid al-Fihri al-Andalusi*, and *Muhammad al-Tajani* in the fourteenth century, followed by the *journeys of al-Dhahiri* and *King Kaytabai* in the fifteenth century (Kandil, 2020). Admittedly, those luminaries, among other names, so many to state, have enriched Arabic literature in varied ways and helped to keep this literary genre in a state of a burgeoning thrive from the tenth to the twenty-first centuries AD. It is crucial to acknowledge their multifaceted contributions, which have imbued this literary genre with enduring vitality. However, it is noteworthy that the advent of European explorations marked a distinctive epoch, during which the Arab world endured a prolonged period of quiescence and setback, spanning approximately three centuries or more. This hiatus unfolded in the aftermath of the collapse of Islamic civilization, introducing a chapter of relative dormancy in the continuous narrative of Arabic literary prosperity. (Husni, 1983; Newman, 2019)

Historically, in the annals of history preceding the nineteenth century, only one Arab luminary ventured to the Western Hemisphere. This trailblazer was none other than the Chaldean priest Ilyas ibn Hanna of Mosul, embarking on an extensive 15-year odyssey across Europe and the New World from 1668 to 1683. His captivating adventures were meticulously chronicled in a concise yet enchanting account, which was shaped under the title *Kitab al-Gharib fi al-Gharb* (“A Stranger in the West: The Trip of Mikhail Asad Rustum to America”, 1885–1894). Notably, Ilyas deliberately confined his explorations to the realms of Central and South America, aptly designated as *bilad hind al-gharb* (“lands of the western Indies”), thus regrettably missing the northern expanse of the continent in his quest for cultural understanding and enlightenment (Ghersetti, 2012).

In fact, until the middle of the nineteenth century, America stayed timidly uncharted territory with a dull picture that went beyond the horizons of interest to the Arabic hemisphere. The reasons why the American allure was shrouded in dormant darkness until the 1950s might be miscellaneous. First of all, the meagre presence of Americans in the Middle East preceding this era failed to ignite local curiosity, in stark contrast to the fascination generated by their European forerunners in earlier times, which has long captivated the imagination of Arab intellectuals, writers, and artists. So, since the Medieval Ages, ‘the West’ for the Arab world would have meant ‘Europe’, and nothing much beyond. Analogously, American interaction with indigenous populations sustained a reserved presence, encompassing a modest number of mission pupils, a sparse assortment of merchants, and a handful of officials, all with axes to grind, pursuing their own commercial, religious, or political interests (Ayalon, 1984). It is likely then, thanks to the advent of Protestant missionaries in 19th-century Jerusalem, the growth of economic relationships between Egypt and America following the American Civil War, the flourishing of the Arabic press, and the imperialistic presence of American oil companies in the 1950s Gulf States would all have helped to smooth the course for the nuanced evolution of Arabic travel narratives depicting America in tandem with the Middle East. Meanwhile, during the span from 1895 to 1995, there was a remarkable upswing in the compilation of accounts by Arab travellers to America, pioneered by the prominent intellectual Bustani, who played a pivotal role in acquainting the public with the American continent through Arabic periodicals like *al-Jinan*, *al-Nahla*, and *al-Muqtataf*, all originating from Beirut and later Cairo. His noteworthy contributions extended to a magnum opus titled *Da'irat al-ma'arif* or *Encyclopedie Arabe*, a multi-volume work from the late nineteenth century, in which the author intricately delved into the intricacies of the American landscape, eloquently crafted a sweeping narrative that traversed the vast dimensions of the continent, providing a comprehensive exploration of America’s size and scope (Aucock, 2019; Ghersetti, 2012). It should be crucial to note that any earnest attempts to venture into Arabic travel literature, notably from 1895 to the 21st century, or maybe earlier, would have to highlight the importance of the two fertile grounds of research undertaken on this area of concern: Rasheed El-Enany’s “Arab Representations of the Occident”, and “America in an Arab Mirror: Image of America in Arab Travel Literature” by Kamel Abdel-Malek, in its parts one and two. On the credit side, Rasheed El-Enany’s path-breaking book is the first sedulous effort to thoroughly study how Europe

and the United States are portrayed in modern Arabic narrative, offering a wealthy treasury of accounts of Arab travellers to America, organized chronologically based on their publication dates, such as Ameen Rihani, Mikhail Naimy, Mahmud Taymur, among others (Casini, 2009). On his part, Abdel-Malek's anthology expands the panorama to 32 titles, encompassing both fictional and nonfictional accounts.

What is strikingly noticeable through these seminal works is the substantial number of works elaborated by Egyptian authors, whose vivid accounts have divulged plenty of ambivalent emotions and keen aspirations harboured for the United States. Another point that seems to have girdled a wide range of Arab narrative plots is the issue of ambivalence, refracted through the light of an ongoing clash between the East and the West. As Aucock (2019) demonstrated:

The "East" was therefore a place that existed separately from the desirable "sphere" of the "West," and the former represented a negative, distrustful kind of exoticism and the unknown, while the latter was a place of both familiarity and superiority that the traveller belonged to" (p. 62).

Gherstet (2012) notes that across a diverse array of Arabic travelogues and fictional writings, a mystifying air of uncertainty and dubiousness suffuses the whole atmosphere of the stories, where ambivalence manifests in every aspect of the unexpected twists and turns of the account. This leads to discernible undertones of admiration for America's material advancements coalescing with nuanced critiques targeting its foreign policies. For instance, in *A Stranger in the West* (1985), Mikhail Asad Rustum draws this distinction crystal-clear from the very onset, opening his book with the stark comparison "We are Easterners", "They are American Westerners" (Rustum, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 3). —a contrast that leaves no room for confusion

With this luminous insight, the author, in the ensuing section, will delicately unveil the nuanced tapestry of ambivalence woven into a selection of Arab travel writings spanning from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first century. The endeavour is to reflect on the paradoxical, often complex feelings of ambivalence towards the West by typifying here America. This ambivalence manifests in a nuanced dichotomy, where perceptions vacillate between admiration and criticism concerning the New World's geographical terrain, its hybrid culture, and imperialist politics.

Having traced the historical emergence of this literary tradition, it is noteworthy to explore one of its most persistent themes: the ambivalent portrayal of America's physical and urban landscape in Arabic diaspora literature.

2- Depiction of American Landscape

The Arabs' ambivalent outlook toward the United States is crucial to this discussion, a perspective aptly captured by Adil Hammuda's (1982) title *America: Paradise and Hellfire*. This juxtaposition posits a nation perpetually torn between conflicting perceptions of its power and culture; a duality reflected in the accounts of Arab travellers who often stand entranced before the country's landscape. (Hammuda, 1982)

Captivated by America's startling beauty, the first Arab writers romanticized its towering skyscrapers, vibrant social dynamics, and the decency and spiritual purity they viewed as the pinnacle of civilization. Beyond shadows of doubt, America since its very inception, had soared to the zenith of glory becoming a metaphor for hope, freedom, and unfettered religious devotion for many travellers treading its land of Promises. For instance, Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), the Egyptian Islamic Activist famous for his modest collection of Western travelogues, has been one of those who praised the New World as a cradle of human development, and an inexhaustible wellspring of material wealth, robust vitality, and human capital. One of his heartening depictions of the country manifests in "The America I Have Seen" (1951), where Qutb draws, in as many words, how "America's bounty and prosperity evokes the dreams of the Promised Land. The beauty that is manifested in its landscape,

in the faces and physiques of its people is spellbinding” (Qutb, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 10). Nonetheless, Qutb’s travelogue, like most of his contemporaries, is never far from ambivalence. Paradoxically, as he perceives, America embodies both the zenith of progress and the abyss of primitiveness. Progress manifests notably in the realms of work and production, specifically in applied science—an endeavour intertwined with America’s earliest dreams. Yet, this advancement comes at a cost, as it transforms humanity into mere machines, leaving Americans noticeably underdeveloped in regard to ethical values. Succinctly, the American genius exhibits formidable intellectual power but regrettably fails in all that concerns human virtues, demonstrating the very characteristics “where American naiveté and primitiveness become apparent” (Qutb, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 26).

Mahmud Taymur’s *The Flying Sphinx [in America]* (1950) masterfully encapsulates the profound ambivalence that the American urban landscape evokes. Confronting the “terrifying magnificence” of New York’s skyscrapers, Taymur articulates a sentiment common among visitors: a mixture of awe and anxiety. He captures this feeling as “a sudden pang of excitement and anxiety, much like a child who embarks on some unknown journey” (Taymur, 1955, pp. 65-66), portraying the observer as both enthralled and overwhelmed, anxiously scanning the picturesque scene so as not to miss a single detail. However, along the whole Taymur’s account of his visit to the USA, the novelist delves into the central theme of his narrative—the clash between his own civilisation set on a contradictory pedestal with that of the host land. Metaphorically, at the beginning of his story, Taymur employs the allegorical portrayal of the aircraft, which carries him and his wife on their journey to New York, takes on the form of a contemporary *Abu al-Hawl* or “Sphinx in Flight”. The latter is a travel book written by Mahmud Taymur published in 1950. Dexterously, the Sphinx stood as a literary symbol, representing the splendour of the Egyptian historical legacy sitting with all its majesty before the eyes of a modern city denoting the burgeoning vitality of America—a seamless melding of two great civilizations (El-Enany, 2006).

As always, bearing those subtle feelings of ambivalence at its heart, Taymur’s *The Flying Sphinx* offers further vivid examples of the writer’s indecisive impressions of the Occidental world, which stands in contrast to his Oriental belonging. In his critique of the overwhelmingly massive architectural landscape, Taymur ironically highlights how these magnificent achievements are so grand that they drive a man to sense his own insignificance. He writes, “A man feels that he has been rendered insignificant in front of these intimidating constructions. In one instant the power and greatness of America becomes manifest” (Taymur, 1950, pp. 61–62). In other words, the author commends American architectural splendour, yet this admiration is inextricably linked to a feeling of personal diminishment.

From a critical prism, one would say that although his vivid experience bestows a touch of genuineness upon his minute portrayal, the tenuousness in such a self-contradictory stance undermines his position. Taymur’s narrative oscillates between glorifying his nation’s ancient heritage and lamenting its stagnation in technological and civilizational progress. This duality is crystallized in his grateful admiration for American advancements, as he pronounces unequivocally: “As an Oriental, I contemplate the spirit which characterises American life and feel the strength of our need, us Orientals, for a spark of that light to illuminate the road ahead for us” (Taymur, 1950, p. 134). The defining feature of his stance is thus its fundamental contradiction: he portrays America simultaneously as a beacon of progress to be emulated and a source of an inferiority complex, a tension that remains unresolved in his accounts.

The desire to place American society on a pedestal is substantially evident in the work of Philip K. Hitti (1886–1978), a Lebanese-American historian. In his travel account, *America in the Eyes of an Easterner*, Hitti portrays his adopted homeland with such unwavering positivity that the reader cannot mistake his profound admiration for the American way of life. He suggests that a visitor’s first impression is of the nation’s immense vitality (Hitti, 1924). As quoted by Abdel-Malek (2000), Hitti describes the arrival: upon seeing New York’s skyscrapers, “You will feel as though you have arrived in a country whose inhabitants are giants among men” (Hitti, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, 49). This sentiment is reinforced by the pace of daily life; upon entering the city, one

“will be struck by how eager Americans are to go to their work, how quick their pace is, and how active and energetic they are” (Hitti, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, 49).

In the passage above, Hitti extols the remarkable ‘vitality’ of Americans, highlighting their punctuality and fervent work ethics, casting them as ‘giants’ and ‘heroes’ in comparison to other human species. From a critical lens, it is indubitably plausible that this absolute positive vision stems from the fact that Hitti feels that his roots are in America, no matter what are his true origins (Al-Quzahy, 2009). From a critical lens, Hitti’s awe to his homeland displays an insider’s outlook to America, though as the title implies “America in the Eyes of an Easterner”, the writer promises a foreigner’s fresh vision to the country. In some sense, Hitti’s discourse contributes in what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha calls “colonial mimicry”—the colonized or subaltern subject’s echoes the colonizer’s values and perspectives, but not typically practicing them as they are (Bhabha, 1994). Owing to Bhabha, the immigrant who exalt the foreign land more intensively than those native-born Americans embodies a doubled consciousness: simultaneously demonstrating assimilation with the target culture, while more or less, divulging its impossibility (for the very excessiveness of the praise marks the speaker as *trying too hard*, as fundamentally *other*) (Bhabha, 1994).

On a similar note, the Egyptian bacteriologist and writer Zaki Khalid expresses high esteem for the American philosophy of life, particularly its distinctive sense of materialism. In his “America Under the Microscope” (1954), Khalid frames this materialism not as a vice but as a key driver of national success. In this paradigm, success is measured by the wealth and prestige acquired through tangible accomplishments and hard work. Khalid finds it logical that Americans work tirelessly to surpass one another in accumulating wealth, rhetorically asking, “Who among us does not wish to distinguish himself and make money?” (Khalid, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 64). Unlike Europe and other nations, where money is suck from the populace, in America “even the millionaire works in order to show his compatriots that he is capable of producing something” (Khalid, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 64). This, for Khalid, encapsulates the core of the American economic spirit: a meritocratic drive where social value is tied not to inherited wealth, but to the continuous demonstration of material wealth and productive agency. In the narrative, Khalid also discloses his deep appreciation of American technological advancement, especially in regard to the advancement in modern travel and the mesmerising human experience of flight. In that, Khalid said:

I told you in another chapter that throughout my journey, I had been flying constantly from one place to another in air-conditioned planes — sheltered from the air, the pressure, and everything around me, sitting as though I were in the lounge of a luxurious hotel. And when I reached San Francisco, I realized that one cannot truly experience the feeling of flight — cannot even sense it — unless one boards a helicopter. From another perspective, I think that this is an inevitable development of our age. Soon, every person will have his own aircraft, moving from one place to another just as cars do today. In countries with vast lands such as Egypt, where the earth is so crowded that it cannot offer private spaces here or there, every location is no more than a few steps away from the next... Above all, it is a new experience — one I truly love to undertake. (Khalid, 1954, p. 73, my translation)

By recalling again Said’s theory of Orientalism, the excerpt above unveils the author’s evocation of binary scene between the Eastern and Western spheres, admitting the supremacy of America as the land of “vast spaces”. Whereas, Egypt’s “crowding”, symbolising the Orient, explains and justifies its technological “backwardness”. Interesting enough, if Khalid is purposefully contrasting spacious America with crowded Egypt, then he is plausibly not just expressing his praise to American technology and progress—he is internalizing the geographical imagination that positions the East as inherently restricted, inferior, and dormant. Yet in doing so, Khalid also seems to return to his native soil Egypt, describing the place of his self-belonging as simultaneously large and crowded—a paradoxical formulation that exposes the subtle strain of transculturation. Egypt, in the

eye of Egyptian inhabitant, is not small or insignificant; it possesses vastness comparable to America's legendary expanses. This premise reasserts Arab writers' ambivalent feelings towards the West, by conjugating paradoxical contentions towards the 'other' space, while maintaining a firm grip on their own cultural authenticity.

In the same vein, some other fellow Arab travellers have disclosed mellow perspectives towards the New World, at least to their eye. Besides Arabs' laudatory portrayal of America's sophisticated architecture and advanced civilization, numerous narratives have been taken by the triumphant image of the exceptional nation—incorporating many modes of life; psychological, social, industrial, commercial, and economic. For instance, according to some writers of the late twentieth century, such as Amir Boqtor, and Muhammad Labib al-Batanuni, among others, the United States is a typical emblem of success, though, for Jabri, this is only a tiny portion of the truth (Abdel-Malek, 2000, p.83).

Beyond aesthetic responses to America's material landscape, Arab travellers confronted deeper questions of cultural identity and difference that positioned America as the definitive 'Other'.

3- America, 'Us' and 'Otherness'

Many Arab travellers to the United States have placed in their vivid accounts a heavy emphasis on the binaries of "East" and "West," or "Us" versus "Them", as a way to show both, the persistent clash of civilisations, and the socio-religious disparagement and fragmentation embedded deeply inside (Abdel-Malek, 2000; El-Enany, 2006). Relevant to the theme of this study, America, the epitome here of 'the Other' is often posited on an oppositional scale against the Orient or the Arabic Islamic civilizations. There are in fact many examples in which the motherland is compared to the host nation, and often, the scale is tilted to the homeland. Comparisons meditatively revolve around a variety of subjects, on the head of the list is the subtle theme of Americanisation cast in light of globalization and democracy. Other themes incorporate the celebration of native culture's sense of morality and humanity set against the mirror of the hideous cruelty, lack of unscrupulousness, and irritating mannerism of the Other, along with the blaming of 'the self' or the mother country, be it a part and parcel of the Eastern world that is still lagging behind the pace of Western technological progress and power achieved across epochs.

However, discussing the aforementioned themes in a fitting literary context compels the selection of some relevant discourse materials, always with a reminder that many other travel accounts can be very worthy to explore in this realm. One of those Arabic encounters with the American subtle life is the Ameen Rihani, (1876–1940), a prose writer of Lebanese upbringing. Rihani endures as one of the most visionary and conciliatory figures among Arab writers in his profound exploration of the East/West dichotomy. Through his fictional travel narrative, *The Book of Khalid*, published in 1911, the narrator delineates his long journey from Lebanon to America and uses his protagonist Khalid as the mouthpiece of his undertones, which bear his great resistance to the conceptualisation of Americanisation that some of his mates have passively embraced. The story, in general, sets the East–West complex dichotomy in parallel with the protagonist's spiritual consciousness and American materialism, respectively. At the beginning of the narrative, Rihani represents his persona as fully absorbed by the beauty of the seductive America, yet soon this admiration vanishes as first struck by its ugly truth. When beauty is no more in the eyes of the beholder, he exclaimed "Oh, my greatest enemy and benefactor in the whole world is this dumb-hearted mother, this America, in whose iron loins I have been spiritually conceived..." (Rihani, as cited in El-Enany, 2006, p. 154). This paradoxical metaphor captures Rihani's conflicted relationship with America as both the source of his intellectual and spiritual awakening and the site of his deepest disillusionment; a nation whose unyielding materialist values have shaped his consciousness even as they repel his sensibilities. The last watchword 'conceived' reveals his emotional frustration with the American "worship of money" (Rihani, 1911, p. 112), a metonymic image of capitalist materialism enshrined in American social politics (Aronovici, 1920, p. 695). In other aspects of his literary endeavours, Rihani manifests a steadfast commitment to safeguarding his identity amidst all those

pervasive forces of Americanization, a phenomenon he observes succumbing to many of his fellow Syrian emigrants. In a humorous tone, he recounts how he fancies himself one morning as being “greater than America.” I, the Lebanese Arab, was the only thinking being among one hundred and twenty million non-thinking people. . . all so proud of their Americanism...and concerned about nothing else in the world: America was the world” (Rihani, as cited in El-Enany, 2006, p. 157)

In its ethical dimension, the autobiographical story *The Book of Khalid* is painstakingly woven to critique the pervasive cult of egoism and arrogance that are profoundly hardwired in American culture. Showing some feelings of antagonism against American mentality, Rihani appears very safe to align the other’s ego-centrism “as the self-same which characterised the Roman Empire in antiquity and brought about its destruction” (Rihani, as cited in El-Enany, 2006, p. 157). In that, he says, “O America, equally beloved and hated of Khalid, O Mother of prosperity and spiritual misery, the time will come when you shall see that your gold is but pinchbeck, your gilt-edge bonds but death decrees, and your god of wealth but a carcass enthroned upon a dunghill” (El-Enany, 2006, p. 157).

In a parallel essence, Youssef Maaty, a sarcastic Egyptian writer, published many books on the perilous political, economic and social status of the Oriental countries, not least Egypt. One of those works entitled “Do you love to hate America” (2003), has intentionally been threaded as a dedication to the United States, in response to a book released in the aftermath of the 11th September incident, “Why do People Hate America?” Sarcastically, Maaty’s narrative depicts varied sceneries from his travel to America, which portray a myriad of reasons underlying the antipathy directed towards Americans, one of which is the elusive American psyche. (Abdel-Malek & El-Kahla, 2011)

Prominent Palestinian American academic Hisham Sharabi is renowned for his deep knowledge of Middle Eastern politics and history. His seminal book *Embers and Ashes* (1988) remains a touchstone of Arabic travel literature, offering readers an intimate portrait of his inner life through a moving narrative that vividly recounts his formative years in Palestine and his educational journey in the United States. With candid sincerity, Sharabi articulates a melancholy that permeates the work, conveying throughout his account the profound anguish of existing between two worlds—the place where one’s body resides and the place that resides within one’s soul. He continually reminds his readers that American life is staggeringly rough; even after thirty years of settlement, his disappointment remained unchanged. Life in America, as he straightforwardly reveals to the Arab world, is a man-made myth—utopian and illusory, existing only in movies and the press. The idealized American life portrayed in films and newspapers is only a fictitious story. This distortion stems from the tendency of American cinema to depict the national scene not as it truly exists, but as the Americans dream of themselves. As noted by Abdel-Malek, “The Americans are like us; they don’t go to the movies to be reminded that their life is full of hardship and discontent. Instead, they go to escape from it to a beautiful world that Hollywood creates for them” (Sharabi, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 99).

Elsewhere in the travelogue, Sharabi makes disparaging remarks about the sinful aspects of social life in America; a whole corrupt mode of living replete with immorality and vulgar flavour of materialism, if one may say so. As explained by the narrator, in this exotic nation everything, literally, is for sale, even “beauty, like experience, intelligence, and talent, is a commodity in the United States..., not only in the moral sense, but in a materialist way” (Sharabi, 1988, p.141). It is very appalling how Americans flout moral values, as the writer himself considers, showing that even beautiful women are also for sale. Then, never hesitating to penetrate deeper into the greatest taboos in Arabo-Islamic culture, to depict somehow the unethical face of the Other, Sharabi also narrates how those prettiest ladies enrolled as students at North-western University work all as part-time strippers in the bars. He was particularly struck by the sight of these students dancing late into the night, vulnerably presenting their bodies as cheap objects of attraction (Sharabi, 1988, p. 142). In essence, “Embers and Ashes” (1988) closes by unravelling the clash of ideologies and religious beliefs between Western and Eastern traditions, trying to get out of the limbo of those rigid social mores, when hopefully in so doing, human consciousness wakes up to the deeply rooted sense of

belonging ending by relinquishing ‘the other’ for ‘the self’. As Sharabi emotionally introduces his book, “My people are an inseparable part of my existence, never to be left behind, and my homeland resides within my heart - impossible to relinquish. One day, I shall return home” (Sharabi, 1988, p. 9, my translation).

The theme of the conflict in human values between the East and West serves as a pervasive thread that intricately binds together a substantial portion of Arabic travel accounts, predominantly penned by authors from the Middle East. It is noteworthy that writers from the Maghreb region have displayed a greater inclination towards narratives that glorify Europe rather than those centred around America. Prominent among these travelogues are works such as Saad al-Din al-Badwihi’s “Values Struggle: Years of Loss in America” (2004), Mikhail Naimy’s “The Cuckoo Clock” written in 1925, Halim Barakat’s writings from 1933, and contributions from other notable authors including Yusuf Idris (1927–91) and Suncallah Ibrahim (1937), among many others.

Many of these authors wrote from an impassioned stance, symbolizing the anti-Western sentiment that forms the core of their narratives. A prominent example is Mikhail Naimy, who has argued that American civilization has misguided humanity, promoting paths of greed while lacking compassion, justice, and love. Consequently, Naimy frequently asserts that America’s grandeur left no positive impression on him; its towering buildings and bustling, advanced life stirred no admiration, evoking only a profound sense of nostalgia for the Lebanese mountains of his youth. Interestingly still, in his thought-provoking narrative, “The Cuckoo Clock,” Naimy employs the symbolic resonance of the timepiece to encapsulate the material progress of Western civilization. Implicit in this metaphor is the poignant suggestion that the pursuit of such progress exacts a profound toll on the individual’s soul. In this short story, Naimy conveys a profound sense of grandeur about the significance of *rootedness* (the soil of one’s homeland), and writes from the vantagepoint of *displacement* (America), that “within the native soil dwells a fragrance that no apothecary’s shop has ever experienced” (Naimy, 1925, p. 11, my translation).

The story is, in essence, a hymn sung in reverence to authentic culture, identity, and place, maintaining deep fidelity to Arabic literary heritage and Eastern spirituality. Conversely, Naimy’s narrative reveals a profound sense of loss and alienation within the American landscape—a place he perceives not as liberation but as a coffin of delight and self-satisfaction. America embodies for him what Bhabha terms a “third space,” suspended between displacement and belonging, where neither full integration nor complete return seems possible. As Naimy writes, “Happy is the soul who discovers joy in their present dwelling. Miserable is the one who roams in search of felicity elsewhere” (Naimy, 1925, p. 11, my translation). This paradoxical wisdom—articulated from his position of exile—suggests that contentment lies not in geographical location but in an internal reconciliation with one’s condition. In a nutshell, this particular concise narrative stands as a remarkable work, unfolding as a lucid allegory that draws on the binary opposition between the East and West, juxtaposing spirituality against materialism (El-Enany, 2006).

Building on this critical engagement with the West, the encounter with America has been a particularly relevant theme in modern Arabic literature, one that female writers from Egypt, the Middle East, and the Maghreb have articulated with unique eloquence and deep insights. What distinguishes their viewpoint from that of male writers is their focused attention to gender-related issues—such as patriarchal family conflicts, women’s rights, and the inner struggle between personal desire and social law—alongside their articulation of a pervasive sense of freedom unavailable under the norms of their home societies (Casini, 2009). But the plot that is always entailed in common is the struggle between the native soil and that of the host nation.

In this vein, Egyptian fiction writer Jadhbiyya Sidqi’s “America and I” (1962) exemplifies this disenchantment through its portrayal of elderly Americans living in isolation, abandoned by their families. Sidqi mourns what she views as the erasure of intergenerational care and reverence for parents—values that occupy a sacred place in both Arab culture and Islamic tradition. Her anguish is palpable: “My God! My heart feels for the harsh loneliness that graces their faces and hearts, especially in a place like America, where there is no place for the elderly” (Sidqi, as cited in Abdel-Malek K. &.-K., 2011, p. 108). For Sidqi and writers of similar sensibility, this cultural practice

represents not merely a social difference but a profound moral failing—a society where even familial affection and filial duty have been sacrificed to individualism. The implicit horror in her account stems from witnessing a social order, in which the bonds considered most sacred in her own culture appear to have dissolved entirely, suggesting an ethical void at the heart of American life.

From other female perspectives, America is portrayed as a repository of crime, homosexuality, and sexual harassment that often escape with no at all, or no severe punishment. As the Egyptian writer Karima Kamal mockingly delineates in her stimulating account *An Egyptian Girl in America* (1983), “In no other country can you shoot at a president and not get sentenced to life imprisonment. Only in America, where the television cameras filmed Hinckley shooting President Reagan, could he be found not guilty and sent for psychological treatment” (Kamal, as cited in Abdel-Malek, 2000, p. 115). Karima Kamal strongly believes that the commitment to murder is ironically something that people live by, and thus, the big America myth is paradoxically all of these; freedom, then development, leading to violence and assault, all of a sudden (Kamal, 1983, p. 113).

Kamal’s concluding reflections on the West depict the hardwired irony that reflects the American conception of freedom. Despite the fact that America manifests itself mostly as a pinnacle of civilisation, this ideal picture often comes at a devastating cost, ruining the ethics of morality, and social inner peace and innocence. This over-freedom, compared to the confined freedom in the Arabo-Islamic world, is putting the country at stake of being consumed by its excess. In this vein, Kamal finishes her story by reaching into a haunting existential question that puts human destiny in a persistent dilemma, whether “is it the fate of the human beings to go on comparing and complaining?” (Kamal, 1983, p. 110). What one can infer from women’s accounts on America, compared to male visions, is that Arab females are more emotionally immersed with family bonds and social predicaments that stand at the centre of their plots. Many writers like, Hala Sarhan (Egypt, 1990s), Layla Abu Zayd (Morocco, 1980s-90s), and Radwa Ashur (Egypt, 1970s), critique the immense heterogeneity in American mode of living, marked by a large regional peculiarity, hybrid customs and rituals, a rigorous work ethic performed in tandem with lower moral values. (Casini, 2009)

Besides this female outlook on America, some prevalent Egyptian travellers writing on America in the 21st Century have added to their stories a redeeming taste of humour, which with a subtle touch of sarcasm, not only intends to entertain but also wittily raises intricate questions. Those queries aim, therefore, to sensitize and also enrich the Arabic readers’ comprehension of the socio-political dilemmas prevalent during this era like American new greed of colonisation, terrorism and anti-terrorism, and the Iraqi War. Some of those satirical accounts may include *My Story with Eva* (1993) by Ali Salem, *Cheerful America of the Past* (1989) by Mustafa Amin, and *America, You Cheeky Devil* (1990), by Mahmud al-Sadani. Those literary works can be an excellent venue for further exploration in this area of concern.

Conclusion

As illuminated so far along the lines of this paper, America as depicted from the prism of contemporary Arab travelogues is represented within the binary scale of East and the Otherness; a thematic knot that ties many postcolonial accounts. The study aims to charter the intricate and often convoluted portrayal of America within Arabic travel narrative, drawing its spectrum as a generative discursive space where Arab writers dynamically grapple with their identities amidst the robust waves of Western modernity. By examining Arab travelogues across three core themes—the American landscape, the dynamics of Self and Other, and the process of cultural hybridization — the research reveals that the Arab encounter with the land of promises is seldomly one of facile approbation or animosity. Instead, it is a deep and enduring Janus-faced perspective, a dialectical confluence between absorption and repudiation that retains the very quintessence of modern Arab consciousness. To providing an answer to the first research question, the study illuminates that some travelogues written by MENA writers like Sayyid Qutb, Mahmud Taymur, and Zaki Khalid opt for selective appropriation strategy. In their vibrant accounts, the aforementioned prominent writers in Arabic

literature express indestructible affinity and noticeable admiration to the American technological power, the gloriously magnificent architecture, and work integrity, seeing in these aspects the epitome for a resurgent Arab intellectual and cultural flourishing. Nonetheless, this fascination with American landscape and progress is invariably tempered by piercing critique of the spirituality languor stealing over the country, pervasive sense of materialism, and the fragmentation of social norms that form the backbone of American exceptionalism. This indeterminate dual stance — poised between aspiration and sharp censure — is a foundational reverberation of what Homi Bhabha would term a ‘hybrid’ consciousness; a concept born from the thorny tension between two distinct worlds. As far as the second research inquiry is concerned, the analysis of some explanatory diasporic Arabic stories, like those of Hisham Sharabi and Karima Kamal, demonstrates that the American aesthetic, namely that pertinent to gender and the body, is widely sketched as a symptom of a deeper spiritual decay. And in unfolding the moral deficiencies inherent in American culture before the readers’ eyes, the Arabic Travel Writings stand as a testament to the Eastern world conviction in the moral supremacy of their own cultural values, precisely the moral ethics engendered in family interrelationships, modesty, and intergenerational respect; those sacred sensibilities in Arab culture and Islamic tradition of which Jadhbiyya Sidqi laments as having no place in America. Therefore, the effect of America on Arabic perception is not one of openness and assimilation as much as alienation, rejection or even a direct opposition to the “Other.” Third, the study corroborates the pivotal role that travel experience to America has played in stimulating Arab writers’ critical self-reflection. Based on textual analyses of selected passages by Mikhail Naimy, and Hisham Sharabi, besides others, the confrontation with the “Other” likely serves as a catalyst for a re-evaluation of the “self.” While writers like Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy firmly reject Americanization, their very act of defining themselves against America reinforces and, in some cases, reifies their attachment to Arab-Islamic heritage. The journey does not culminate to a passive assimilation but to a reaffirmed —if more critically examined— cultural identity. It fosters a hybrid consciousness—a state of in-betweenness where the traveller becomes a critical observer of both cultures, belonging wholly to neither but drawing from both to articulate a unique, transcultural perspective, as Homi Bhabha has theorised. This study’s implications are in fact double-barrelled. Theoretically speaking, the work pushes postcolonial discourse beyond a simplistic East-West dichotomy of Said’s Orientalism framework, by challenging the mindset that pictures Arab writers as passive upholders of Western imperialistic patrimony. Conversely, travel to America by Arabs across approximately the last two centuries has not only made them open to a new vista of a civilized world, but also the absence from their homeland has made their heart grow fonder (nostalgic and also proud) of their Islamic faith and Arabic belonging. Most of those travel accounts are shaped to exercise important cultural agency, actively parsing, criticising, and reconceptualizing American modernity from their own first point of view. Those travelogues are not mere exploration or contemplation but operate as active contact zones, where the dominant culture is critically processed and reframed. From a methodological stance, this work incorporates a body of subaltern travel accounts from the Eastern part of the world, that resonates with complex and culturally subtle themes and emotions, which aspires not only to capture the striving of the Arab world to preserve its cultural authenticity in the face of Western imperialism, but also divulges the persistent yearning of the East to make his voice reverberate in global discourse. Travel finally, as far as Damrosch (2009) explicated, “entices and alarms us, posing questions about who we are and what counts as home as we encounter ourselves on the move” (p. 186). In this context, we find many epitomes from Arabic accounts of America that are navigating between Charybdis and Scylla, trying to surmount the intricacies besieging the temptation of Americanisation, while also questioning the passivity and lagging of ‘the self’ as a metaphor for the backwardness of Arabic civilization in the current millennium. Notwithstanding its substantial contributions, the scope of this research is necessarily limited to travel narratives produced up to the late 20th century. Drawing on these limitations may underpin to further critical studies on post-9/11, Arab Spring, and contemporary travelogues, seeking healing answers to how “War on Terror,” the rise of social media, and shifting global power dynamics (shifting hegemonies as the rise of China) have altered or complicated the America-as-modernity paradigm. Promising still, drawing on translation studies frameworks to gauge

how Western readership perceived these travelogues through translation could reveal important patterns in intercultural comprehension and misreading.

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