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“RE-ENCOUNTERING SCHEHERAZADE”: GENDER,  
CULTURAL MOBILITY, AND NARRATIVE  
TRANSFORMATIONS IN ALIA YUNIS’S *THE NIGHT  
COUNTER*

**Abstract**

This paper explores the manner in which Alia Yunis’s novel *The Night Counter* evokes the figure of Scheherazade from the *Thousand and One Nights*. First, the paper looks at Yunis’s comedic articulations of cultural mobility in her description of her childhood attachment to Scheherazade in her essay “My Arabian Superheroine.” Next, the paper examines how the novel reconfigures those childhood articulations to present a “reverse 1001 Nights,” transforming Scheherazade from a storyteller to a listener that elicits stories of more than a century of Arab American history. Through these stories, the novel foregrounds questions of migration, cultural exchange, and translation while exposing the performative dimensions of gendered and racialized configurations of cultural identity. In so doing, this paper suggests, Yunis’s novel not only “counters” narratives of distorted views of Arabs but also promotes a type of “coming out” that embraces the plurality of Arab American stories and modes of belonging.



In a piece titled “My Arabian Superheroine,” Alia Yunis describes how she formulated the idea for her novel *The Night Counter*, a work of fiction that draws on the figure of Scheherazade from the *Thousand and One Nights*. Remarking on how “one storyteller’s tales can rescue another storyteller,” Yunis recalls how Scheherazade came to her rescue during an interview for admission to the Squaw Valley Writer’s Workshop. When asked about her “novel-in-progress,” which, she confesses, “wasn’t in progress at all,” Yunis declares: “Scheherazade came to my mind then. I began to spin a tale in my mind, not to save my life but to spare my pride and dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

In the *Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade saves her life and those of would-be victims of the ruthless Shahrayar by telling stories that compel him to want to hear more of her tales. Through her

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narrative skill, Scheherazade reforms Shahrayar and ends his misogynist pattern of serially marrying then killing one young woman after another, a delusional practice he had developed to guarantee that no woman could ever be unfaithful to him again as he discovered his first wife had been. In Squaw Valley, Scheherazade saves Alia Yunis by inspiring her to propose a book about “an older woman who shared the Middle East with her [Scheherazade] but had the struggles of America as the framework for her stories.”<sup>2</sup> Through her narrative intervention, Scheherazade facilitates Yunis’s entry into a particularly American literary milieu and gives shape to her novel *The Night Counter*, a text that draws on Scheherazade’s art of storytelling to present a century of Arab American presence and multiple ways of belonging in the United States.

CULTURAL MOBILITY AND THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS  
 Through a type of reverse 1001 Nights, Yunis transforms Scheherazade from a teller of tales to a listener who travels from the medieval Arab context of her stories into a twenty-first century American framework. There, she meets Fatima Abdallah, a somewhat cantankerous octogenarian from Lebanon who has recently divorced her second husband after a marriage of more than sixty years. During the course of 1001 nightly visits, Scheherazade elicits stories from Fatima about her past, her two husbands, her ten children, their children, and their children’s children. These intersecting stories that Fatima narrates about her family include narratives of travel back and forth between the Middle East and America as well as movement within various locales in different Arab countries and in the United States. In their totality, Fatima’s stories open new possibilities for reconfiguring Arab American heritage and multiple modes of cultural belonging. In the process, they also trace the ways in which cultural mobility informs contested negotiations of gendered, sexualized, and racialized notions of national and transnational belonging.

Stephen Greenblatt maintains, in his book *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, that “great writers take symbolic materials from one zone of the culture and move them to another, augmenting their emotional force, altering their significance, linking them with other materials taken from a different one, [and] changing their place in a larger social design.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Alia Yunis takes symbolic material from the *Thousand and One Nights* and links it to other material within American frameworks. She does so, however, in a comically syncretic fashion, evoking a type of disarming humor that Kimberly Blaeser has

identified with Native American writing and which, Blaeser observes, serves to "incite an imaginative reevaluation of history."<sup>4</sup> In so doing, Yunis presents a cross-cultural mobile text that draws its energy from the life-sustaining art of Scheherazadian storytelling even as it reconfigures Scheherazade's tales in a comedic fashion that alters their significance for Arabs in America.

As the rich body of scholarship on the *Thousand and One Nights* makes clear, the figure of Scheherazade and the tales she tells are themselves highly mobile texts of travel, cross-cultural encounters, and transformations.<sup>5</sup> Ferial Ghazoul, for instance, has shown that the tales contain stories of interactions across various social classes, races, and religions.<sup>6</sup> These interactions occur between characters that move seamlessly between vast geographical locales, from China, Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo to the intangible realm of the jinn. As Wen Chin Ouyang has shown, the stories also highlight the connections between the idea of the journey as self-discovery and the transformative potential of Scheherazade's storytelling.<sup>7</sup> With roots in Persian, Indian, and Arab oral literary traditions, the tales have furthermore undergone their own transformative journeys at the hands of various adapters who have transported, translated, and appropriated them. Redacted for centuries by one "rawi" or itinerant Arab oral storyteller, and another, the tales first appeared in printed form in 1704, when Antoine Galland published his French translation of a fourteenth century Arabic manuscript that he had discovered of the tales. Known as the "Arabian Tales" ever since their publication in a cribbed English translation from French in 1706, the tales have reached worldwide appeal, with adaptations by Russian choreographers, Hollywood filmmakers, South American writers, and Japanese animé creators. Such enduring and ever-expanding interest in the tales has secured their place in the annals of world literature and contributed to their return migration to the Arab world, where they have witnessed a revival of interest and a type of reclamation of their form.<sup>8</sup> A quintessentially cross-cultural traveling text, the *Thousand and One Nights* clearly offers unique opportunities for subversive appropriations, cultural relocations, narrative translations, and literary reclamations.

At the same time, however, as the history of European reception of the *Thousand and One Nights* attests, the facility with which the tales lend themselves to creative appropriations has, in the words of Eva Salis, "fostered an indulgence in the experience of the exotic Other and various aspects of Orientalism."<sup>9</sup> Considered as ethnographic sources

of information about Arabs, the *Thousand and One Nights* reinforced Orientalist associations of Arabs with despotism, seduction, and fantasy.<sup>10</sup> Given the insidious nature of such associations, one must ask what it means for writers of Arab descent such as Alia Yunis to evoke the figure of Scheherazade and her tales from within American frameworks. This is especially the case if we consider Edward Said's much critiqued though still potent definition of Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" that "is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, 'there' in discourse about it."<sup>11</sup> A close look at Alia Yunis's explanation of her childhood identification with the figure of Scheherazade provides a useful lens from which to view her novel and its engagement with Orientalist appropriations of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

#### YUNIS'S "ARABIAN SUPERHEROINE"

In her essay "My Arabian Superheroine," Yunis explains that as a child, she would dress up as Scheherazade for Halloween because, as she puts it: "I didn't feel American enough to think the neighbors would let me get away with dressing up as the Bionic Woman or a Charlie's Angel."<sup>12</sup> Yunis's comment locates her childhood experience in the 1970s in the United States and highlights her perception of her difference from her American environment. Feeling that she would be denied access to American expressions of female heroism, the young Alia attempts to gain entry to American culture by masquerading as an Arab through American eyes. For this, she chooses Scheherazade, a figure that she imagines as someone "who went around being beautiful by swirling around in lots of diaphanous veils and telling stories of magical people."<sup>13</sup>

As the young Yunis's imagination reveals, the image of Scheherazade presented in the U.S. is mediated by Orientalist depictions of things "Arabian" on shows such as *I Dream of Jeannie* and Disney's *Aladdin*.<sup>14</sup> These shows not only borrow motifs such as magic lamps and flying carpets from the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*, they also cast the female figures in costumes of diaphanous veils that draw on a trajectory of Orientalist associations between the *Thousand and One Nights*, belly dancing, and the Arab world. As Amira Jarmakani has shown, costumes of diaphanous veils and exposed midriffs were introduced to belly dancing in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s at the same time as striptease was integrated into burlesque performance.<sup>15</sup> However, as Jarmakani has also pointed out,

constructions of the Arab dancer as a "racialized and sexualized other" coalesced in an even earlier period when belly dancing was introduced at the Chicago's World Fair in 1893 at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Not incidentally, this is the same period when the *Thousand and One Nights*, Sari Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum observe, "would play a central role in [Orientalism's] development."<sup>17</sup>

As Yunis informs her readers, however, her childhood idea of Scheherazade was not fostered merely by American TV shows; it was also counterbalanced by both the resilient women of her family and by her mother's depiction of Scheherazade as someone who told stories in order "to stay alive to protect her own life but more importantly the lives of her beloved sister and other family members."<sup>18</sup> The view that Yunis's mother presents of Scheherazade thus repositions the idea of Arab womanhood away from the allure of a magical, seductive Orient and aligns it instead with what Nadine Naber has identified as immigrant "articulations of Arabness grounded in Arab histories and sensibilities about family."<sup>19</sup>

As it happens, the young Alia would go trick-or-treating not in diaphanous veils as she had imagined, but in clothes that her Arab family sent to her. As she recalls: "I would put on a long dress some relative I had never met had sent me from Lebanon or Jordan or Palestine and wrap my head in a colorful scarf with fake coins on it."<sup>20</sup> By so inhabiting Scheherazade, the young Alia Yunis at once gains access to American popular culture and signals her allegiance to her family's Arab heritage. As she describes it: "I was Scheherazade, the Wonder Woman of the Middle East, the prettiest and most powerful person I knew."<sup>21</sup> In comic book fashion, the young Alia changes her clothes and becomes an American superheroine in Arab guise. As Yunis admits, however, "most people thought [she] was dressed as a fortuneteller."<sup>22</sup> Such deflating and comic misprision hints at the limits for reshaping Orientalist representations of Arabs from within American frameworks. It also suggests that the project of taking symbolic material from one zone of culture and moving it to another has the potential not only to augment its force but also to leave it vulnerable to performative imperatives of gendered, racialized, and sexualized conceptualizations of cultural identity and national belonging.

Gendered imperatives of cultural performativity are highlighted in Yunis's insistence on Scheherazade's beauty as well as her skill. This is a point that she reiterates in an interview with Karen Boustany on the Arabic-language program "Kitab." There, Yunis

explains that it was important for her to emphasize Scheherazade's femininity, her "*unoutha*," even though ("*ma annaha*") she is presented as a learned lady ("*mutacalima wa mutathaqaqa*") in the *Thousand and one Nights* (my translation).<sup>23</sup> As with the expression "My Arabian Superheroine," Yunis's insistence on presenting Scheherazade as both beautiful and capable – perhaps unwittingly – exposes the instability of appropriating American comic book hero frameworks for subverting Orientalist views of Arabs. Though she does not present her idols ironically, Yunis's childhood adulation of both Scheherazade and American television heroines breaks down the difference between Arab patriarchy and American expressions of hetero-normativity. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade outmaneuvers authoritarian misogynist rule through the power of her storytelling, but she also, as one popular ending of her tales suggests, reinforces patriarchal norms by accepting Shahrayar as her husband and bearing him three male heirs.<sup>24</sup> On American television, Wonder Woman and Charlie's Angels perform extraordinary feats of physical prowess and daring, but they also ultimately reinforce the association between women's power and their sexuality. Wonder Woman's outfit exaggerates her feminine attributes and Charlie's Angels must answer to a disembodied, patronizing male voice at the end of each episode.

#### RECASTING SCHEHERAZADE

The tensions evident in Yunis's childhood reconfigurations of Scheherazade are thus encapsulated in the creative frictions that the juxtaposition of the Orientalist term "Arabian" with the idea of an American comic book "Superheroine" generates. These same types of destabilizing juxtapositions are evident in Yunis's novel *The Night Counter*, where they produce comedic ironies that unsettle the categories "Arab" and "American." They do so, moreover, by evoking and reconfiguring the image of Scheherazade and the Arab-Islamic context of her tales.

Like the *Thousand and One Nights*, *The Night Counter* offers stories replete with suspenseful interruptions, cliffhanger endings, and meandering arabesques of tales within tales that spin one from the other in seemingly endless permutations.<sup>25</sup> Commenting on the narrative art of the *Thousand and One Nights*, Roy Mottahedeh observes that "it is the promise that things more astonishing and strange, *aja'b* and *aghrab*, that lie ahead that sustains suspense" and propels the action in the tales.<sup>26</sup> Astonishment and suspense propel the action in *The Night Counter* as well. However, in Yunis's novel, the "*aja'b* and

*aghrab*" revolve around a type of comedy of errors that has nothing to do with the world of the jinn or magic lamps, and everything to do with representations of sexual and cultural identity in cross-cultural encounters between the Arab world and the United States.

Of the many comic misunderstandings in the novel, two types bear extended commentary. One set revolves around the seemingly endless Orientalist permutations of Scheherazade's image in America. The other includes both Fatima and her favorite grandson Amir. Both sets of comical misunderstandings coincide with Scheherazade's arrival to Los Angeles from Baghdad and with Fatima's arrival at Amir's apartment in Los Angeles from Detroit, where she had been living since she left Lebanon at the age of seventeen. Occurring immediately after the horrible events of 9/11, both arrivals trigger a series of astonishing coincidences and tragicomic misunderstandings that provide the occasion for comedic re-evaluations of both Arab American history and the performative imperatives of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and mobility in constructions of cultural identity.

In *The Night Counter*, Scheherazade finds Fatima after traveling on her flying carpet and following the flight path of an American soldier returning home from Iraq. Such a reconfiguration of Scheherazade, who does not ride on flying carpets in the frame story of the *Thousand and One Nights*, allows Yunis to overlay several cross-cultural references in one stroke. On the one hand, she evokes a view of a far away and magic-filled Orient, which she associates with Baghdad, a city that is figured in the *Thousand and One Nights* during its heyday under the rule of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. On the other hand, she juxtaposes this image of Baghdad against contemporary American military engagements in Iraq and she associates such entanglements with Los Angeles, home to Hollywood and its power to disseminate images on a global scale. As Jack Shaheen and others have shown, Hollywood images of Arabs are rife with Orientalist valences.<sup>27</sup> From the early days of cinema, with films such as *The Sheik* in 1921, on through movies like *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), the television sitcom *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970), Disney's animated film *Aladdin* (1992), and *Sex and the City 2*, which appeared in theaters as late as 2010, Hollywood has produced and inspired a variety of Orientalist views of Arabs as both seductively alluring and threateningly violent.<sup>28</sup> In transporting Scheherazade to Los Angeles from Baghdad on a flying carpet, Yunis links American geopolitical involvement in the Middle East with Hollywood's role in disseminating fantastical, highly racialized and gendered images of

Arabs and the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*. In so doing, Yunis underscores a point that Steven Salaita has made with regard to Arab American fiction, namely that “what happens ‘there’ always influences the ‘here.’”<sup>29</sup>

In *The Night Counter*, the connection between what happens there and what happens here is shown to constitute an integral component of Arab American experience from the first waves of immigration from Mount Lebanon toward the end of the nineteenth century up through the more varied migration patterns of the present.<sup>30</sup> As Yunis tells her readers in the afterward to her novel, she draws on the research on Arab American history conducted by Michael Suleiman, Evelyn Shakir, and Gregory Orfalea, and she narrates this history through the stories that Scheherazade coaxes from her main character Fatima.<sup>31</sup> For example, through Fatima’s stories of her childhood and first marriage, we learn how geopolitical factors such as Ottoman rule, the opening of the Suez Canal, the subsequent decline of the silk industry in Lebanon, and the First World War contributed to the economic hardships that made life difficult in Lebanon and led to Fatima’s emigration to Detroit. As Fatima tells Scheherazade: “Mama was sure that in America I would have a better life.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, we learn that Fatima’s first husband Marwan worked as a peddler in New England when he was a child and that he later went to work for “Mr. Ford” in Detroit only to meet his death as a result of his participation in workers’ strikes and union organizing. We also learn that immigration laws influenced the early immigrants’ conceptions of themselves, changing their attitudes from those of mere sojourners to active participants in American life. As well, we learn that even though early Arab immigrants fought legal battles to ensure they would be considered “free white persons” and so be eligible for citizenship, Fatima’s children were not immune to racial bigotry, as was demonstrated when white Southerners regarded them as “cute mulattos” during a family vacation stop at a coffee shop on the road from Detroit to Florida.<sup>33</sup> Each story that Fatima tells Scheherazade reveals a different aspect about her past and about the lives of her large family. In their totality, the stories produce a wealth of intersecting and bifurcating narratives that illustrate Scheherazade’s lesson to Fatima when she tells her: “life is a collection of stories.”<sup>34</sup> In their multiplicity, Fatima’s family narratives also seem to answer Steven Salaita’s call for an “emphasis on plurality [as] the only plausible way to discuss Arab Americans.”<sup>35</sup>



The history of the plurality of Arab American experiences must be told, *The Night Counter* suggests, because telling stories saves lives not only from Middle Eastern authoritarian misogyny, as in the fictional case of Scheherazade, but also from forgetfulness and invisibility, as Joanna (now Joe) Kadi, Barbara Nimri Aziz, and others have maintained.<sup>36</sup> This is a point that Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa make in their introduction to an anthology where an early chapter from *The Night Counter* first appeared. Noting that although Dinarzad is instrumental in initiating the cycle of stories that Scheherazade spins in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Kaldas and Mattawa lament that "the tales end without a clear sense of what happened to Dinarzad."<sup>37</sup> In some ways, they elaborate, "the lives of Arab Americans have been similar to those of Dinarzad."<sup>38</sup> In *The Night Counter*, Yunis alludes to this association between Dinarzad (also known as Dunyazad) and the neglected history of Arab Americans when she describes how Scheherazade recognizes Fatima, "the mortal with whom she was fated to spend the next 1001 nights" by the color of her hair. "Purple," *The Night Counter* maintains, "had been the color of Scheherazade's sister Dunyazad's hair, which Scheherazade used to braid every night as they planned their future."<sup>39</sup> The sight of Fatima's purple hair revives "the trill of Dunyazad's laughter" in Scheherazade's ear, though Dunyazad, Scheherazade declares, "had been part of the past for centuries."<sup>40</sup>

Assuming the part that Dinarzad played in initiating Scheherazade's own tales, Scheherazade, in Yunis's novel, coaches Fatima in the art of storytelling and helps her discover how personal memory and family history open a world of redemptive and life-sustaining stories. As Scheherazade discovers, however, in order for Arab Americans to tell their stories, they must first extricate themselves from Orientalist narratives about their lives. This proves no easy task, as Scheherazade finds that Fatima and her numerous offspring contribute to Orientalist representations of both the immortal Scheherazade and the Arab world. Fatima, for example, begins to tell her stories by launching into a tale about "the chicken farmer's wife that hid out in the Abdul Aziz house until her hens forgave her for accidentally feeding them leftover omelet and then were able to lay eggs again."<sup>41</sup> Indicating her ennui with magical-realist stories of an exotic "Orient," Scheherazade yawns and urges Fatima to tell her "sexy, juicy, passionate stories" of love and family. Resisting Scheherazade's prompting, Fatima defers such disclosures, pretending "not to have heard those adjectives."<sup>42</sup>

The complicity of Arabs and Arab Americans in perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes of themselves is illustrated at several junctures in the novel but nowhere more pointedly than in the variety of ways in which certain characters link themselves to distorted images of Scheherazade. As Amira Jarmakani illustrates in her lucid discussion of representations of Arab womanhood in the United States, "the predominant images of Arab women in U.S. popular culture lie at two opposite poles: Arab women are either represented as erotic, romanticized, magical, and sexualized, as with most images of belly dancers or harem girls, or they are portrayed as helpless, silent, and utterly dominated by an excessive Arab patriarchy, as in representations of the veiled woman or harem slave."<sup>43</sup> These contradictory representations of Arab Muslim women are precisely the images that Scheherazade confronts in Alia Yunis's *The Night Counter*. In a surrealistic scene set in that most "unreal" American city, Las Vegas, Scheherazade finds a "belly-dancing convention, or the 'casbah,' as the casino signs read," where a group of Saudi men on vacation watch "the Dance of the Seven Veils" by dancers "named Fatima" and "the scintillating Scheherazade."<sup>44</sup> To Fatima's alcoholic son, Bassam, the American bellydancers look like a "sheikh's harem rebelling."<sup>45</sup> However, as Bassam also observes, for the Saudis dressed in Western suits, the "women were a fantasy. Women who looked as cheap and easy to them as McDonald's. . . . For the women, the Saudis were a fantasy, too: rich, handsome, interested, really rich."<sup>46</sup> Cynically, Bassam wonders, "Why defy your stereotype when you can afford not to?" The question that *The Night Counter* asks is: "At what price?"<sup>47</sup>

The link between the monetary exchanges that underlie the circulation of Orientalist images of Scheherazade and the participation of Arab Americans in the loss of Arab heritage in the United States is highlighted in *The Night Counter* through the presentation of Scheherazade's distorted image in the marketing strategies of Fatima's own children and grandchildren. Fatima's grandson Zade, for example, opens a hookah bar, which he names "Scheherazade's Diwan Café" and which he decorates with "beautiful mosaic calligraphy" and "a drawing of a half-naked belly dancer."<sup>48</sup> The costume in which Scheherazade is presented on the entrance to Zade's café recalls the Orientalist images of Scheherazade in diaphanous veils that the young Yunis had absorbed from watching shows such as *I Dream of Jeannie* when she was a child. As Amira Jarmakani has shown, "the metaphoric importance of images of veiled women, belly dancers, and reclining odalisques" has a long-standing precedent "in the marketing

and selling of tobacco in the United States" during the 1930s.<sup>49</sup> Exclaiming, "What is that supposed to be? Surely not me," Yunis's Scheherazade pointedly refuses to recognize herself in such sexualized, commercialized depictions of her image.<sup>50</sup>

In direct contrast to Orientalist renditions of Scheherazade, Yunis costumes her character in much the same way that she used to dress up for Halloween when she was a child, presenting her "superheroine" in an embroidered Palestinian *thawb*, or long dress, headscarf, jangling bangles, and kohl-lined eyes. However, just as the young Yunis was mistaken for a fortuneteller when she would dress up as Scheherazade for Halloween, so too in *The Night Counter* Yunis's Scheherazade finds that Fatima's daughter Soraya, Amir's mother, adopts the name "Scheherazade the Magnificent" to make a living by reading people's fortunes.<sup>51</sup>

The travesty of Scheherazade in *The Night Counter* extends to the presentation of the FBI agent who comes to interrogate Fatima about her grandson. Not only is this agent mistaken by Fatima (who has misplaced her eyeglasses) for Scheherazade but she is also called Sheri Hazad, yet another parody of Scheherazade's name. Even more improbably, it turns out that this Sheri Hazad is herself of Lebanese descent and has learned Arabic by taking university classes from none other than yet another one of Fatima's many children, her daughter Nadia, Zade's mother, who herself had studied Arabic in college as a response to anti-Arab sentiment in the United States after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Appalled at her distorted image in the service of Orientalist, commercial, and state interests, Scheherazade protests: "She – Scheherazade, daughter of the Great Wazir and wife of King Shahrayar, reciter of love stories, religious legends, and the poetry of the magnificent Abu Nawas [sic] – was not a charlatan playing out people's fates with devil's cards and fiberglass balls. ... Did no Abdullah respect her memory?"<sup>52</sup> In calling attention to her illustrious status and to her recitations of Abu Nuwas's homoerotic poems in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Yunis links Orientalist distortions of Scheherazade's image not only to Orientalist distortions of her tales but also to Arab refusals to acknowledge the plurality of their Arab Islamic heritage.<sup>53</sup> This refusal is represented in the novel by Fatima, who willfully proclaims that she never heard the word "gay" in Arabic, "as such dreadful nonsense did not exist in Lebanon."<sup>54</sup>

As Fatima's favorite grandson Amir reminds her: "there's nothing in the Koran about it being a sin to be gay."<sup>55</sup> However, as Amir himself is reminded, it is not always easy to disabuse others of their illusions. An openly gay aspiring actor of Arab descent in the United States, Amir finds himself ensnared in a series of strange and astonishing events that revolve around the performative imperatives of gendered and racialized expectations of what happens "there" and what happens "here." These events begin when Amir breaks up with his boyfriend on the day of his grandmother's arrival to his apartment in Los Angeles. To get back at him, his jilted lover "casts" him in the role of a terror suspect and sets a pair of paparazzi-turned-FBI informants to spy on him as he rehearses in long beards and flowing robes for the "role of a lifetime."<sup>56</sup> For her part, Fatima "casts" Amir in the role of an eligible bachelor, stubbornly maintaining that Amir's acting is a "mere hobby" and insisting that he should "forget that dreadful word" which she refuses to say, and settle down with a wife after inheriting Fatima's childhood home in Lebanon. To further compound the overlay of sexual, racial, and ethnic absurdities, Amir's casting agent, who sends him to try out for "every terrorist role in Hollywood," warns him not to wear chenille for his latest audition because, she tells him: "If they think you're gay, they'll never let you audition for the terrorist parts."<sup>57</sup>

As Jack Shaheen has pointed out, Hollywood has been particularly unkind in its depictions of Muslim Arabs, often presenting them as "brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural 'others' bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners."<sup>58</sup> More recent television presentations, as Evelyn Alsultany has observed, "racialize Arabs, Arab Americans, Muslims, and Muslim Americans as threats to the nation."<sup>59</sup> This new image, Suad Joseph and others have noted, is supplemented by news media discourses that transform Arabs into "high-risk citizens."<sup>60</sup> One of the consequences of such views, according to Nadine Naber, is an "articulation of Muslim masculinity as intrinsically connected to misogynist savagery."<sup>61</sup> Caught in of a nexus of intersecting gendered, racialized, and sexualized expectations of performative identity and cultural display, Amir exclaims: "I need a better agent. Or a better heritage."<sup>62</sup> That "better" heritage, *The Night Counter* suggests, may be reclaimed through the regenerative and rehabilitating power of "counter" storytelling. Such storytelling, however, *The Night Counter* also suggests, entails a type of Arab American "coming out" that accepts

the plurality of Arab American stories and modes of transnational belonging.

#### RECOUNTING ARAB AMERICAN STORIES

In *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, Kenji Yoshino expands upon Erving Goffman's distinctions between "passing" and "covering" and explains: "passing pertains to the *visibility* of a particular trait, while covering pertains to its *obtrusiveness*" (emphasis in original).<sup>63</sup> Hiding a trait to render it invisible or downplaying it to render it unobtrusive, Yoshino observes, are practices that sexual, ethnic, and other types of minorities engage in to assimilate into the dominant culture.<sup>64</sup> In *The Night Counter*, Fatima's daughter Randa presents the starkest and most pathetic effort at assimilation. Wishing to integrate her family into American life, Randa moves to Texas, dyes her hair blonde, and changes her name to Randy. She also convinces her Palestinian husband Bashar to go by "Bud" because, she ironically tells him, no one in Houston is going to want to hire a "lawyer descended from people who lost their land and haven't been able to win their legal right to return."<sup>65</sup> But even though Randa "had built a life doing all the right things for maximum public viewing," her ability to continue to "perform whiteness" reaches its limits.<sup>66</sup> This occurs when she tries to demonstrate her "Americanness" by offering to work for the FBI. As she tells her family: "I just didn't want anyone thinking Bud and I were terrorists, but then I realized by offering to help them I would let the neighbors find out that we were Arabs, and that just was worse than offering to be patriotic."<sup>67</sup> As John Tehranian, who draws on Yoshino's work, observes: "Like the gay population [sic], and unlike most racial minorities and women, Middle Easterners have the 'luxury' of significant covering in multiple ways, enabling them to perform whiteness and assimilate within mainstream American society, but at a tremendous cost to their identity, dignity, and rights."<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, as Randa's efforts to establish her American identity reveal, passing not only often comes with a cost to one's dignity, it can also trap one in the absurd contradictions that performative imperatives of belonging can generate. This point is again emphasized when Amir attempts to dissuade his grandmother from leaving the house in a headscarf. Though Fatima wants to wear a scarf to hide the bad haircut she had recently given herself, Amir reminds her that if she goes outside like that, "People will think you're Muslim."<sup>69</sup> In keeping with the loaded humor that characterizes much of the dialogue in the novel, Fatima indignantly retorts: "I am Muslim."<sup>70</sup> Amir, who is

concerned for Fatima's safety, reminds her: "It's not so great that you're walking down the street talking to yourself. Luckily, this is L.A., so that's not going to stop traffic, but the scarf . . . Even in this community we've got punks. You're old and vulnerable, and it's better to pass as Mexican in that condition. Without the scarf, you can pass."<sup>71</sup> As Nadine Naber has pointed out, the discourse of the war on terror configures the veil "as a boundary marker between 'us' and 'them,'" so that "as long as women remain 'veiled' they remain intrinsically connected to 'potential terrorists.'"<sup>72</sup> To protect his grandmother from possible attacks, Amir advises her to distance herself from markers of Islam and so ironically recommends that she "cover" herself by "uncovering" her hair.

As Kenji Yoshino explains, although "passing" requires hiding one's identity and "covering" requires refraining from flaunting one's identity, the two modes of assimilation are not always easily distinguishable from one another. For example, Yoshino points out, "the same behavior—such as not holding hands with someone of the same sex—can constitute passing or covering, depending on the literacy of the audience."<sup>73</sup> If we translate Yoshino's terminology into the language of *The Night Counter*, we can extrapolate that not wearing a headscarf in the United States allows Muslims to pass as non-Muslims. Such a form of "passing" transforms the headscarf into a sign of "flaunting," an "obtrusiveness" that is often met with demands of "covering." In a similar vein, Amir's agent, who tells him to hide the "obtrusive" signs of being gay—wearing chenille—wants him to "cover" his homosexuality in order to pass for someone who can be type cast in the role of a Muslim terrorist.

Though he does not fit the type, Amir, like Randa before him, soon finds himself trapped in absurd contradictions that revolve around layers of contradictory imperatives for gendered and racialized displays of identity. After finally landing the coveted role of Jesus Christ for which he had been rehearsing in his long robes and beard, Amir discovers that the film director has decided to pull him from the movie because he has found that Amir is under investigation by the FBI. As Evelyn Shakir's archival research on Arab Americans has shown, identifications with the land of Jesus were tropes that early Arab immigrants exploited in order to gain access to American cultural spaces and commercial markets. This trope, she says, has contributed to the success of the Lebanese *mahjar*—that is immigrant—poet Kahlil Gibran, as Gibran Khalil Gibran is known in the U.S. According to Shakir: "Gibran . . . played a role made up in equal parts of Far-Eastern

swami and latter-day prophet from the Holy Land. In a sense, he plied the same trade — only at a more sophisticated level — as Syrian peddlers whose stock in trade was holy trinkets from Jerusalem."<sup>74</sup> The unfortunate yet comically over-the-top events that Amir's thwarted desire to play Jesus Christ generate in the novel allow Yunis to subtly comment on the shift in possibilities that the discourse of Orientalism has undergone in the United States: Arab Americans are no longer identified with a romanticized and anachronistic Christian Holy Land, nor even with an alluring fantasy of a feminized East, but with racist views that mark them as decidedly threatening "Others."

Arab Americans, *The Night Counter* suggests, cannot protect themselves by distancing themselves from Islam. They can, however, embrace a more expansive view of both their Arab heritage and their American presence. This, Yunis illustrates through contrasting the tragic fates of both Fatima's second husband Ibrahim and their twin boys with the life-affirming stance of Fatima's great granddaughter Decimal and the storytelling traditions of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Consumed with nostalgia, Ibrahim regularly rides the bus to the airport in order to regain a sense of home through familiar scents that linger on the clothing of travelers arriving from Lebanon. Failing to communicate his love to Fatima, he eventually dies alone on the same public bus that had taken him back and forth between his home in Detroit and the gateway to the one he had left behind in Lebanon. Similarly, Fatima and Ibrahim are so concerned to protect the life of their twin boys that they refuse to let them visit Lebanon and even find a way for them to avoid the draft to Vietnam. Kept apart from the lives of others in both Lebanon and the United States, the boys end up dying a violent death in a senseless car accident.

In contrast to the many characters in the novel who attempt to distance themselves from either an Arab, Muslim-identified past or their American present, Fatima's great granddaughter Decimal, like Fatima's grandson Amir, refuses to cover who she is and literally "comes out" to meet Fatima in Amir's apartment in Los Angeles. An unwed pregnant teen, Decimal, who was herself born out of wedlock to Fatima's teenage granddaughter, Brenda, seeks out Fatima because she wants to learn "a little more about being Arab or Lebanese or Muslim."<sup>75</sup> Fatima, who had not known of Decimal's existence because her children had feared her disapproval, wastes no time in telling her newly discovered great grandchild: "In Lebanon, all babies are made after weddings."<sup>76</sup> To this, Decimal responds: "How do you know? A lot of people are better at covering things up than me."<sup>77</sup> Ultimately,

*The Night Counter* insists, Arab Americans must stop “covering.” Rather than searching for a better agent, or a better heritage, as Amir would have it, they should instead, like Decimal, seek to understand the heritage that they have. This heritage, the novel suggests, can be found through a recovery of Scheherazade and the Arab-Islamic framework of her life sustaining tales.

In his book *The Islamic Context of “The Thousand and One Nights,”* Muhsin al-Musawi points out that Scheherazade succeeds in “defusing the morose king’s vindictive . . . plan by deploying a “counternarrative” that “works within the parameters of Islamic faith.”<sup>78</sup> He adds: “As it appears in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Islam is a way of life, a culture, and a context for aspirations, adventures, love, enterprises, and vicissitudes.”<sup>79</sup> This culture, *The Night Counter* demonstrates, is not the seat of Oriental despotism or Islamic terror, but, as Fatima Mernissi has maintained, a pluralist milieu, able to accommodate various human experiences, ethnicities, races, and sexualities.<sup>80</sup> This way of life, Decimal’s presence forces Fatima to see, was not only possible in a distant and obscure literary past but can be reclaimed from within a tangible and life-affirming Arab American present.

#### THE REGENERATIVE POTENTIAL OF STORYTELLING

In an unabashed celebration of both her out-of-wedlock mixed-race pregnancy and her own multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-racial, and transnational origins, Decimal proclaims that she is “one-fourth Muslim . . . 50 percent Christian and 25 percent Taoist.”<sup>81</sup> This is because, Decimal proclaims, her grandmother, Fatima’s daughter, is of Lebanese descent, her grandfather, Fatima’s son-in-law, is of Chinese origins, and her father, whom Fatima’s granddaughter eventually married then divorced, is African American. Coincidentally, Decimal tells Fatima, the father of the child she is carrying is Brazilian and this Brazilian’s own great grandfather, like Fatima’s first husband, worked as a peddler upon first arriving to the Americas from Lebanon. Compelling Fatima to acknowledge the connections that bind her to her soon-to-be great, great grandchild, Decimal asks her: “Did you know . . . my baby’s going to be three-eighths more Arab than me and just three-eighths less Arab than you?”<sup>82</sup> By compounding an absurdly improbable but not entirely implausible series of inter-ethnic and multi-religious intersections in the figure of Decimal, Yunis offers Fatima an opportunity to recognize an expansive and expanding definition of Arab, Muslim heritage in America.



This expansive definition is comically highlighted by Fatima's grandson Zade, who realizes that instead of competing for exclusive rights over his dating service, "Aladdin and Jasmine, Inc.," which "guarantees[s] it won't take 1001 nights of bad dates to find love—or your money back," he can join forces with others such as Mina Parstabe, CEO Of "The First 1001 Nights to Forever. Iranian singles no more," who tells him: "You guys got your little Arab-on-Arab business going, like I got my Iranian thing going. But I'm thinking bigger. Big Middle East and Muslim lovers plan. [. . .] We combine databases and there will be no end to what we can do."<sup>83</sup> Arabs, this humorous expansionist vision of "Middle East and Muslim lovers plan" points out, do not hold exclusive claims to Scheherazade or to creative appropriations of her legacy and her tales. Arabs in America, however, can recognize their shared history with other ethnic and religious groups both in the Middle East and in the United States. As Scheherazade tells Fatima at the end of the novel, "Family lines," like the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, "are not as straight as they could be, but they are continuous. . . . Eventually enough generations pass through life and death that everyone's story begins *kan ma kan*, once upon a time."<sup>84</sup>

Reminding her that "immortality . . . is the continuation of our stories," Scheherazade helps Fatima realize that her nightly visits to her were meant not to help her count the days to her death, as Fatima had mistakenly thought when Scheherazade told her: "when our tales are over, so are our lives."<sup>85</sup> Rather, they were meant to elicit counter-stories that, like Scheherazade's tales in the *Thousand and One Nights*, at once transform the listener and extend the life of the teller. In acknowledging Decimal, Fatima accepts Scheherazade's call to tell her life story in all its various dimensions and finally says the word "gay" out loud. On the same day, Amir notices that a single fig has emerged from the tree that he had been dutifully watering in his yard ever since his grandmother brought it with her from Detroit when she moved in with him in Los Angeles. Fatima, we learn, had initially brought the fig tree with her from Lebanon and had replanted it in her garden in Detroit, though the tree had never born fruit in the United States until now. Like the fig tree, which managed to produce fruit after a long period of dormancy and multiple displacements, Arab American stories, Yunis's novel suggests, can regenerate and flourish in multiple settings and on distant soils so long as they are nourished appropriately. By linking Scheherazade's art of storytelling to the cultural mobility of her stories, Yunis presents a view of Arab

American transnational belonging that, like the improbable title of her essay "My Arabian Superheroine," reconfigures both Arab and American signposts of cultural identity. In so doing, she calls to mind Stuart Hall's articulation of diaspora as a category that unsettles "hitherto settled conceptions of culture, place, and identity."<sup>86</sup>

Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat have addressed the ways in which "identities become sites of contestation, politicization, and struggle over national narratives . . . in the context of transnational cultural flows."<sup>87</sup> Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt has observed that cultural mobility can "lead to an anxious, defensive, and on occasion violent policing of the boundaries."<sup>88</sup> At the same time, however, as Greenblatt has also noted, cultural mobility can "lead to heightened tolerance of difference and an intensified awareness of the mingled inheritances that constitute even the most tradition-bound cultural stance."<sup>89</sup> It is to this latter potential of cultural mobility that Alia Yunis directs her work, and she does so through appropriating the figure of Scheherazade and reconfiguring the life-sustaining power of her tales.

By adopting a comedic, anti-nostalgic and celebratory embrace of various cultural flows that make up Arab American plurality, Alia Yunis perhaps too easily resolves the tensions present within and between both Arab and American realities. Nonetheless, the absurdly humorous coincidences and intersecting stories that Yunis spins in her novel open a space for producing new understandings of the empowering potential of storytelling and the creative reinventions that can be forged through the mobile flow of peoples, goods, and ideas between and across multiple, sometimes divergent, often intersecting landscapes and signposts of identification and cultural expression. In so doing, Yunis manages to present a type of cross-cultural traveling text that not only incorporates storytelling techniques from *The Thousand and One Nights* but also transforms the image of Arabs in America from terror suspects into unsuspecting heroes of a reinvented American burlesque.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alia Yunis, "Afterward: My Arabian Superheroine," in Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, eds., *Scheherazade's Children* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 399, 398.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Theatrical Mobility," in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 245.

<sup>4</sup> Kimberly M. Blaeser, "The New 'Frontier' of Native American Literature: Dis-Arming History with Tribal Humor," in Alan R. Velie, ed., *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Scholarly discussions on the origins and spread of *The Thousand and One Nights* are plentiful and extensive. See, among others, Ottmar Ette and Friederike Pannewick, eds. *Arabamericas – Literary Entanglements of the American Hemisphere and the Arab World* (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 2006); Friederike Pannewick "Performativity and Mobility: Middle Eastern Traditions on the Move," in Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, 215–49; Ferial Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1996); Richard Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh, eds., *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, revised Edition (London: Tauris Parke, 2004); Muhsin Mahdi, *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ulrich Marzolph, ed. *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (U.S.A.: Wayne State University, 2007); and Wen-Chin Ouyang and Geert Jan Van Gelder, *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics*, 24. See also Andre Miguel, "The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society," in Hovannisian and Sabagh, eds. *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Wen-Chin Ouyang, "Whose Story Is It? Sinbad the Sailor in literature and film," in Ouyang and Geert Jan Van Gelder, eds. *New Perspectives on Arabian Nights*, 13. As recent critical commentary on *The Thousand and One Nights* has elucidated, the world of the jinn in the tales is treated not as superstition or fantastical but as another realm of the actual world. See in particular Amira al-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); and Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Belknap/Harvard: Cambridge, MA, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> For the view of the *Thousand and One Nights* as world literature, see Sandra Naddaf, "The Thousand and One Nights as World Literature," in Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, eds., *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 487–96. For discussions of the history of publication and the revival of interest in the *Thousand and One Nights* in the Arab world, see Muhsin Mahdi, "Introduction," *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 85–87.

<sup>9</sup> Eva Salis, *Scheherazade through the Looking Glass: The "Thousand and One Nights"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Makdisi and Nussbaum. *The Arabian Nights in Historical*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 42. For a review of the influence and variety of responses to Said's work, including critiques of essentialist tendencies in Said's methodology, see Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (US: The University of Washington Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Yunis, "Afterward: My Arabian Superheroine," 395.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>15</sup> Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 84.

<sup>16</sup> Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> Makdisi and Nussbaum, *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Yunis, "Afterward: My Arabian Superheroine," 396.

<sup>19</sup> Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Yunis, "Afterward: My Arabian Superheroine," 395.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>23</sup> Alia Yunis, Interview by Karen Boustany, *Kitab Show*, December 1, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeH1Ke9U850>.

<sup>24</sup> For a particularly scathing attack on celebrations of Scheherazade's acquiescence to patriarchy, see Joumana Haddad, *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010). For discussions of various endings of Scheherazade's tales, see Mahdi, "Introduction," *The Arabian Nights*, xiiixiv.

<sup>25</sup> For insightful discussions of storytelling techniques in the *Thousand and One Nights*, see David Pinault, *Story-Telling Techniques in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 1–25; and Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics*, 18–67.

<sup>26</sup> Roy P. Mottahedeh, "'Aja'ib in the *Thousand and One Nights*," in Hovannisian and Sabagh, eds., *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> See especially Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, 2nd ed. (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2009); and Evelyn Alsultany, "The Prime-Time Plight of the Arab Muslim American after 9/11: Configurations of Race and Nation in TV Dramas," Amaney Jamal and

Nadine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 204–28.

<sup>28</sup> For discussions of depictions of Arabs as both violent and alluring in film and television, see Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*; Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism in the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 59.

<sup>30</sup> On the division of Arab American history into three distinct waves of immigration, see Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*, M.E.R.I. Special Studies (New York: I.B. Tauris), 1993.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); Michael Suleiman, *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999); and Gregory Orphalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Ithaca, NY: Olive Branch Press, 2005). For a more recent nuanced re-evaluation of Arab American immigration, see Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Alia Yunis, *The Night Counter: A Novel* (New York: Shayne Areheart Books 2009), 34.

<sup>33</sup> For a cogent discussion of Arab American entanglements with the discourses on race and ethnicity, see Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). See also Louise A. Cainker *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); and Jamal and Naber, *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11*.

<sup>34</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 337.

<sup>35</sup> Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Joanna Kadi, *Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab Canadian Feminists* (US: South End Press, 1999); and Susan Muaddi Darraj, ed., *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* (West Port, CT: Praeger, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa, eds., *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2009), xv.

<sup>38</sup> Kaldas and Mattawa, eds., *Dinarzaa's Children*, xv.

<sup>39</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>43</sup> Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 313.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>49</sup> Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 118.

<sup>50</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>53</sup> As several scholars have pointed out, censure of homosexuality in Arab Muslim societies has been neither uniformly upheld nor historically uncontested. Such censure, however, has found expression in the enactment of laws against homosexuality as well as in the censorship of Abu Nuwas's poetry from most Arabic-language editions of the *Thousand and One Nights* printed after 1930. For discussions of homosexuality in Arab Muslim societies, see, Khaled el-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); Scott Siraj al-Haq Kugle, *Living out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Brian Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Sahar Amer, *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> On the denial of homosexuality in Arab world, see especially Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 343

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 67, 9, and 26. For discussions of linkages in articulations of sexuality, gender, and race within the discourse of the "war on terror," see Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Paul Amar, "Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of 'Men in Crisis,' Industries of Gender in Revolution," in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7.3 (2011): 36-70. See also Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2.

- <sup>59</sup> Alsultany, "The Part-Time Plight of the Arab Muslim American after 9/11," 228.
- <sup>60</sup> Suad Joseph and Benjamin D'Harlingue, with Alvin Ka Hin Wong, "Arab Americans and Muslim Americans in the *New York Times*, before and after 9/11," in Jamal and Naber, *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11*, 234.
- <sup>61</sup> Nadine Naber, "'Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming!': Cultural Racism, Nation-Based Racism, and the Intersectionality of Oppressions after 9/11," in Jamal and Naber, *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11*, 293.
- <sup>62</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 77.
- <sup>63</sup> Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007), 18.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, x.
- <sup>65</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 162.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.
- <sup>68</sup> John Tehranian, *Whitewashed: America's Invisible Middle Eastern Minority* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 78.
- <sup>69</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 124.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.
- <sup>72</sup> Naber, "'Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming!'," 295.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>74</sup> Quoted in Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61.
- <sup>75</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 222.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.
- <sup>78</sup> Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of "the Thousand and One Nights"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 77.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>80</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 43.
- <sup>81</sup> Yunis, *The Night Counter*, 303.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 40 and 60.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 364–65.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 363 and 11.

<sup>86</sup> Stuart Hall, "New Cultures for Old?" in Timothy Oakes and Patricia Price, eds., *The Cultural Geography Reader* (US: Routledge, 2008), 273.

<sup>87</sup> Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat, eds. *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 25.

<sup>88</sup> Greenblatt, *Cultural Mobility*, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.