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Exile from within the Homeland: Self-representation and Cultural
Identity in Arabic Film

by

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Abstract

One cannot consume and interpret the problematic notion of identity as a concept with “naturalistic” or constitutive implications. This study employs post-colonial theory in examining Arab cultural identity in Arabic film, as a case that exemplifies the problematic notion of identity. Because Arabness is an unstable cultural rendition that fails to perform homogeneity, reference to an Arab national cinema as a cultural industry that is representative of “Arabness” becomes equally precarious; despite the common language often regarded as a unifying factor. By examining films by Egyptian Youssef Chahine and Syrian Dureid Lahham, one notes Arabness as a fragmented identity that is performed in layered ways. Even though Arabs identify against a Western “Other”, “Arabness” is also performed intra-regionally by resorting to binaries, an exclusive method that demarcates fixed boundaries between differing Arab identities. Even though Arabness is regarded as an essentialist construct, Arab identification is fragmented, and its performance is ambivalent.

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***To my parents,
Abdul Rahim Awwad and Dunia Chamma***

***For my brother and sister,
Hisham and Dareen***

***In memory of my grandfather,
Mohammed Awwad***

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Points of Departure and Troubled Landings

My love affair with the Middle East began at my point of departure from it. I divorced myself from any associations with the culture setting high hopes and aspirations as my guide to the land of opportunities, the New World. I imagined that indeed everything would be “new”, the self and its habitat. The aftermath of the Gulf War had caused much confusion and a great desire for a sense of belonging to a place for an Arab youth born in Kuwait to Lebanese, Palestinian-Jordanian parents. But like any divorce, it was a messy one: one's national and cultural progeny is inescapable. And like the Egyptian saying goes: “One who drinks from the waters of the Nile will always return to it.” I have never ceased to return to “Arabness”, or what it means to be an Arab.

Following a nurturing nineteen years of Arab Middle Eastern life, and since my departure, I am unable to abandon the idea of Arabness, an idea to which I participated in giving birth as part of an Arab community. Even more so, I cannot escape the compelling duty to which I feel committed: the idea of nurturing it faithfully in my mind and

consciousness, if not in practice. My mind and consciousness affiliated themselves with this idea of Arabness that in turn had nurtured and affiliated itself with my self-definition. However as new marriages are forced with adoptive places and cultures, I not only remain obligated to the “old” but also become obligated to the “new”. As a result, I realize that these obligations are illusory entrapments as my existence is based in a border that delineates two primary imagined identities constituting my Self. Identification thereby seems as a drowning in a murky sea of anti-essentialism that makes tangible assertions of identities impossible.

On the other hand, national allegiances seem imperative. I remember once hearing: “One who does not admit to his origin, indeed has no origin of which to speak.” But perhaps the question to be posed is: does the origin speak to the Self? Or more precisely, *how* does the origin speak to the Self? In other words, of which “Arabness” am I speaking? My Arab affiliations and associations are distinctly multiple: a Kuwaiti birthplace, a Lebanese mother, and a Jordanian father, who has been explicit in expressing the necessity for asserting his Palestinian origin as the ultimate identity to which he belongs. In this climate of asserting specific Arab identities, the discourse of an all-encompassing rhetoric of a common Arabness was paradoxically more than evident during my lived experience in the Middle East. Yet with an overriding discourse of a common Arab brotherhood that often embodied

implications or allusions of unity, or at least cooperation, I found myself in a socio-political climate in which many Arab countries and their citizens avidly assert specific national identities demarcating national differences. Consequently, on the one hand, I was appeasing the imperative to identify with a specific Arab country; on the other hand, my hybridity of Arab ancestries, or origins, sought the need to identify with a common Arabness that seems to have no “tangible” manifestations.

It often seems as if I simultaneously belong to a number of Arab places and do not belong to any one of these places. Because of citizenship laws in the Middle East, Kuwait will not recognize me as a citizen and therefore deprives me of any legal identification with it, even though it really was the only “home” and geographic topos with which I was familiar at the time. Because of the paternal/patriarchal recognition of identity through ancestry, I am considered Palestinian; my forefathers originated from Palestine. And because of political historical circumstances, Jordanian citizenship was, by virtue of this recognition, through my grandfather and father, bestowed upon me. Jordan was a nation that supplied me with a legal identity, even though I have had minimal contact or associations with that country. Nurtured by a Lebanese culture, my cultural practices and manifestations, linguistically and otherwise, are more than often Lebanese in reference.

In the West, I find it difficult to conveniently identify and pinpoint my origin upon request or questioning. For this reason, it became convenient to assume an essentialist notion of an all-encompassing Arab identity that allows for a larger identification with all self-proclaimed Arab nations. This common Arabness appears to be an accessible and convenient practice of identification because of an inability to specifically identify with any one Arab nation, as defined in terms of European modernity. This practice allows me to literally imagine a grand Arab nation in an imaginary consciousness that is shared by all Arabists. Ironically, it seems readily acceptable to identify "Arab communities" outside the homeland (i.e. in the West, namely Canada) regardless of their specific Arab origin. This general categorization of these communities ignores the diversity of Arabness existing within the Arab homeland. Arabs are practically exiled from within in relation to the all-inclusive ideological Arab Nation that exists from without in the realm of the imagination.

My personal pondering over the issue of Arab cultural identity is primarily not caused by this "double-living" of Arabness on both local and regional levels. It has transpired with my arrival and assimilation into my newly forming Canadian identity. Zygmunt Bauman (1996) reflects this experience when he writes:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. (p. 19)

My questioning began because of the convenient tendency to assume an essentialist practice of identification. This attitude was supplanted by nationalist agendas in the Middle East aiming to mobilize a collective of people, thereby implying an essentialism in cultural identification. This essentialism often substitutes the diversity of Arabness with a constructed homogeneous view represented by Arabist discourse. Notably, there are also two essentialisms, an Arab internal one and a non-Arab (namely Western) one. These two views of Arabness reflect two different discourses of representing Arab cultural identity that respectively serve distinct purposes, both concerned with power and knowledge about the self and/or "other". In relation to my perception of my Arab cultural identity, I had always felt a belonging to an Arabness of sorts that remained unchallenged because it was indiscernible.

With my arrival in Canada, an old (Arab) consciousness was exiled, indeed orphaned from any direct Arab associations, while conceiving a

new (Canadian) one. This old consciousness became a subversive one that occupies my mind's imagining of the self in negotiation with new ones. I imagine the idea of a common Arabness like I never imagined before, and frighteningly it seems more feasible than ever before, as a convenient aggregate of the various origins of my hybrid Arabness. Nonetheless, there exists a dichotomy in Arab identification between what is purely imaginary (common Arabness) and what is "tangible" (specific Arabness of an Arab state). This "tangibility" reflects diverse Arab everyday experiences (e.g. spoken dialects, specific cultural behaviors, food, dress, etc.) based on differing "anthropological cultures" whose characteristics are unique to each culture of the Arab world. Therefore, the feasibility of overcoming this dichotomy becomes apparent, by referring to a collective Arabness that, nonetheless, remains in strife to self-define. As M. Nourbese Philip (in Doray & Samuel, 1993), refers to language, this collective reference "m/others" the self. In an attempt to re-evaluate and re-shape my cultural identity and before considering newer identities, I realize that the old one(s) have not been reconciled and the origin ceases to become that idea of a starting point of our "original" selves. Consequently, I often ponder: who is the Arab in me?

It is imperative as an "Oriental" Arab immigrant – with a Western education – in the West, to consider the implications of post-coloniality

as a lived condition. This consideration includes one of constant self-construction in order to establish self-identity for one's self and the "community" in which one lives. While the community does include that which comprises a person's social and geographical space, the post-colonial identity seems to traverse these boundaries to affiliate itself with other communities of origin that possess commonly imagined histories. In a sense, a migration of consciousness occurs from a problematic "Arab" one to an equally problematic "Canadian" one. Not only do I find myself reconciling the identities of East and West, but also my identity of origin in terms of an East-East dynamic. In other words, I am an Arab Canadian (i.e. an Eastern Westerner), Middle Eastern Easterner, an Arab Middle Easterner, and a Kuwaiti/Lebanese/Palestinian-Jordanian Arab. The list of identities and sub-identities continues, thus reflecting the problematic concept of identity as one that is inherently non-essentialist and constantly (re)constructed. Because the formation of Arabism as a cultural identity in the contemporary Arab world can be readily traced back to colonialism and its aftermath, twentieth century European expansion through colonization becomes an important contextual consideration for this study. Furthermore, it is this distance that enables a post-colonial critique of cultural identity, "by the fact of writing from a home away from home" (Acland, 1993, p. 122).

(Post-)colonial studies tend to focus on relationships between identities along a linear spectrum that often represents identities in binaries that “other” them from each other; the somewhat clichéd example of West-East relations, as noted in Edward Said (1994), is prominent. Moreover, these binaries have hierarchical implications through which the West is often perceived as better than East, or for the purpose of this study, common Arabness as a loftier ideal than individual Arabness. I wish to employ post-colonial theory in such a way that shifts this predominant focus, through an examination of Arab identity; from this linear/hierarchical spectrum of positioning identities to one that recognizes a concentric approach to identification. By shifting the focus in such a way, I would exhibit the simplistic approach of binaries as a means of identification located in *inter*-identity relations perspectives and approaches and call for an acknowledgement of the complexities of identities as a concept and practice through the examination of Arab *intra*-identity relations.

This thesis attempts such an examination through a consideration of Arabness and Arab cultural identification and representation in a post-colonial context. Film is a suitable site for conducting this examination because it captures the anti-essentialist nature of Arab identity. A foreign cultural mode for communicating the Arab, cinema is a Western technology that was initiated into Arab society with the advent

of colonialism. Films “reproduce the colonialist mechanism by which the orient, rendered as devoid of any active historical or narrative role, becomes, as Edward Said suggest, the object of study and spectacle. Any possibility of representing dialogic interaction is excluded from the outset” (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 148). Therefore, Arabic cinema becomes a post-colonial site of resistance acquiring a sense of agency in “responding” to the discourse of Orientalism. However, in doing so, the pathology of Arab identity surfaces on an Arab screen that is equally guilty of “fixing” its identity. Moreover, the very employment of a notion of an Arab national cinema promotes a homogenizing effect. Nonetheless, cinematic “voices” prevail to diagnose the Arab Self as schizophrenic and challenges assertions of Arab homogeneity.

Two such voices are those of film *auteurs* Egyptian Youssef Chahine and Syrian Dureid Lahham. Their selected films will be examined as textual narratives of subaltern voices that deconstruct an essentialist notion of Arabness. Hence, this common all-encompassing Arab identity in general is a schizophrenic one as it attempts – or has attempted as the case may be – to construct itself through a collective amalgamation of historical consciousnesses of those diverse groups present in those regions that consider or proclaim their (national) identity as Arab. The metaphoric rendition of schizophrenia attributed to Arabness in this case is not meant to imply notions of hybridity that

perhaps can be more metaphorically parallel to a multiple identity disorder. In the context of this study, hybridity in the post-colonial contemporary sense may be attributed to those conditions and people who are the product of mixed (Arab) marriages or those born in a different (Arab) country than their ancestry. While not pertinent to this particular study, the notion of the hybrid Arab raises critical issues in light of legal, social, and cultural means of identification in the Arab world due to the predominantly patriarchal structures. It is also noteworthy to point out the problematic interpretation of such a post-colonial hybridity because of the eurocentric approach to post-coloniality outlined in the following chapter. Historical notions of hybridity that have also arguably occurred during Arabic/Islamic expansions and colonization contributing to this problematic interpretation are not implied here.

A single hegemonic consciousness whose discourse is based on a historically Arab/Islamic nostalgic fantasy manifested in common Arab nationalist discourse conveniently replaces, or abrogates, existing distinct historical consciousnesses. By examining Youssef Chahine's trilogy, *Alexandria Why?* (1978), *An Egyptian Story* (1982), and *Alexandria, Again and Again* (1990), and Dureid Lahham's *Borders* (1984) and *The Report* (1986), I will demonstrate how these films are representatives of voices that challenge mainstream dominant ideology of

a pan-Arab ideal; the voices of these two *auteurs* are ones of difference that “speak” to signify a fragmented Arabness. The choice of these post-colonial “texts” is specific as they roughly span the 1980s, covering a period of time when a common sense of Arabness remained in currency. At the same time, this period also characterizes the relative downfall and gradual demise of this notion of Arabness clearly evident during and after the Gulf war of 1991, an incident that posed as Arabism’s gravest challenge. Arabism, in light of this incident, can be considered a rhetorical collective project that outlines the blueprints of a collective Arab Nation without exhibiting any tangible manifestations.

The following chapter will consider post-colonialism as a context for the examination of Arab cultural identity and Arab post-coloniality. By applying binaries as a methodology for self-definition and self-representation, the chapter will examine the application of binaries to illustrate the problems associated with this methodology of definition and representation; this will be illustrated through a portrayal of Arab internal exile emerging from a seemingly intransigent chasm between an imaginary Arab Nation and the “actualized” Arab nations. Subsequently, a historical background of Arabic cinema will address the issue of the representation of the post-colonial Arab through a colonial technology. Issues of representation between specific Arab cultural identities and an overarching Arabist cultural identity will become evident in the

discussion of the notion of an Arab national cinema. This issue is notably apparent in the context of a successfully domineering Egyptian national cinema that is often substituted for and representative of an Arab national cinema. The two final chapters shall each undertake a closer examination of the aforementioned Egyptian and Syrian films respectively as they, in their own distinct way, affirm the fragmentation of Arabness and deconstruct the Arab as a homogeneous identity. In bidding farewell to the common Arabness implied in pan-Arabist ideology, the Arab also bids farewell to the origin, as a homogeneous constant.

Chapter 2

Towards a Deconstruction of Arab Cultural Essentialisms

Arabness as a cultural form for identification, like many identities, has been represented and treated in an essentialist manner. This essentialism is of two types: an Arab essentialist construction of its own identity and a Western one that constructs Arabness as an “Other”. Orientalism – upon which Western essentialism of Arabness is constituted – serves to maintain the power/knowledge dynamic that at the same time identifies the self (the West) as a negation of an(other), the Orient (Arab). On the other hand, pan-Arabist ideology constructs an essentialist notion of Arabness in order to mobilize the peoples of the so-called Arab world as participants of a collective national project. At least, this project – if it does not imply the manifestation of a unified Arab nation – implies a sort of cohesive national sensibility. In this chapter, I intend to consider the essentialist construction and representation of Arabness by the West in comparison with the methodological use of binaries in the self-construction and representation of Arabness by Arabs in the post-colonial context. By doing so, the Arab Oriental as subject ceases to be one without agency and becomes a guilty accomplice in the

very act of “essentializing” as its Western counterpart. It is through perpetrating the practice of binaries that one can perceive the fragmentation of the Arab psyche and the problematization of Arabness as an identity. Hence, the binaries become the methodological focus in defining post-colonial cultural identity on the Arab cinematic screen.

Unveiling Western Cinematic Essentialism of Arabness

I was staying at a friend's place during a trip I took to Regina, Saskatchewan when I encountered the soundtrack from the original motion picture, *Aladdin*. In endeavoring to kill the boredom of a quiet morning spent alone, I did not realize that the outcome of what I intended to be an entertaining morning of listening to music would soon become one of general, thoughtful contemplation about cultural identity. As I played the first track, the tempting beautiful musical notes came short in charming me as soon as the first few lines of the lyrics began falling upon my ears. From the onset, I knew I had to take the whole project of Disney's *Aladdin* with a grain of salt as a subscribing consumer, at least in this example, to an Orientalist project that “exoticizes” a romantic and/or terrorist Middle East, as Edward Said (1994) would describe it. But little did I know that the lyrics would come to offend my aesthetic sensibilities and cause me to re-evaluate my initial

naïve approach to this entertainment. The lyrics bellowed throughout the room:

Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place
 Where the caravan camels roam
 Where they cut off your ear
 If they don't like your face
 It's barbaric, but hey, it's home!
 (Ashman, 1992, track 1)

Stereotypes about the Arab have been propagated as early as the eighteenth century with early encounters with the Orient; the most notable encounter is a literary one: the commonly known *Arabian Nights*, also known as *A Thousand and One Nights*. Providing an escape from the undesirable realities of the West, the exotic image of the Arab, who continued to perform the forbidden “fetishized” desires of the West, contradicted the mundane life in Europe. Consistent and direct encounters during Euro-colonialism, namely British and French, developed a sophisticated and institutionalized knowledge about the Arab, who became generally perceived as a simple, naïve, and inferior character; for example, the “colonizers transformed the hospitality for which Arab culture has always been celebrated into a sign of backwardness...[they] were seen as giving away things not out of cultural

codes of generosity but because they were too stupid to recognize their value" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 7). This body of knowledge about the Arab is a constituent of an institutionalized Orientalism that, according to Edward Said (1994),

is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied – indeed, made truly productive – the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. (p. 6)

Such stereotypes have been constantly recycled since many generations, and are consumed even in the beginning of a new millennium during which the Arab prevails as 'the last bad guy' on Western cinematic screens. With the rise of cinema as a new transcultural sphere of encounters between the "self" and "others", the binaries upon which Orientalist knowledge of the Arab are constructed continue to dominate methods of visual and mental consumption and definition of the Arab. The legacy of exoticism in portraying Arab backward simplicity and *naïveté* and/or romantic, sexually charged

tropes based on Orientalist sensibility continued with the rise of Hollywood films. Images of lusty sheiks and themes reflecting rampant sexuality were evident in 1920s Hollywood productions in such films as *The Sheik* (1921) and *Son of the Sheik* (1926) featuring Rudolph Valentino (Michalek, 1989). The Arab female furthermore is often situated in the context of an exoticized and highly sexualized harem, an image that feeds in its representation from imaginary Orientalist fantasies, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) explain in the following:

The topos of the harem in contemporary popular culture draws, of course, on a long history of orientalist fantasies. In fact, Western voyagers had little access to harems...The harem was described through paradigms furnished by European translations of A Thousand and One Nights, tales often translated quite loosely to satisfy the European taste for a passionately violent orient. (pp. 161-163)

Indeed, by the latter part of the twentieth century, Arab images became more violent. They were fixated on and associated with violent Arab terrorism, and “it becomes apparent that Hollywood’s Middle East had become a more sinister place” (Michalek, 1989, p. 6). It is this later evolution of the image of the Arab terrorist accompanied by residual Orientalist exotic fantasies that provides the formula for Arab

representation on the Hollywood screen, basically serving to dehumanize the Arab (Shaheen, 1989).

Whether by historically using an exotic, romantic Middle East or a terrorizing one as a backdrop, the binary mode of representation was/is accordingly constructed, upon which the Arab is cast as the "other" extreme: the Arab is what we (the West) are not. In defining and creating this Orientalist knowledge about the Arab, the West moreover expresses a statement of self-definition by negation. "[T]he Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said, 1994, p. 1-2). Furthermore, because Orientalist knowledge is inseparable from implications of power, Orientalism thus becomes simply "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1994, p. 3). The productive aspect of power allows for the production of "new discourses, new kinds of knowledge (i.e. Orientalism), new objects of knowledge (the Orient), it shapes new practices (colonization) and institutions (colonial government)" (Hall, 1997, p. 261); therefore, "one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1994, p. 3).

In response to consistent and formulaic stereotypes of Arab images, Abdeen Jabara (1989), president of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, invokes the following request: "We do not ask for apologies regarding past abuses. We simply want to see *real* images from here on in" (p. 2). While a valid concern, Jabara's request is highly problematic: what is his vision of a "real" Arab? Arabness cannot assume specific ethnic, racial, cultural, or religious characteristics in identification, and therefore, the problem of assuming the possibility of constructing a "real" Arab image becomes apparent. After all, who is a "real" Arab? How can one presume a "real" representation of Arabness when one considers the variety of identities that Arabness encompasses? Theoretically and practically, a "real" Arab identity does not exist. Arabness cannot be distinct from representation upon which it is based and dependent for constructing and interpreting the Arab subject.

By problematizing Arab otherness as a contingent, not objective construct and evaluating the methods of representing the Arab from a Western perspective, the claim or conclusion that the Arab is being misrepresented only allows the thinker a limited scope into the issue. A "proper" rendition is indeed impossible because if it should exist, the existence of an essential Arab identity would be implied. Let us presume that one wants to appropriately represent the Arab. Which Arab in what part of the so-called Arab world are we representing? Furthermore, if

representation is ideally accountable to the Arab, how does self-representation occur on the Arab cinematic screen?

Which Arab and Whose Arabness? Post-colonial Fragmentation of the Arab Self

Aijaz Ahmad (1992) in a critique of Edward Said's *Orientalism* writes:

A notable feature of *Orientalism* is that it examines the history of Western textualities about the non-West quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonized countries: not as an undifferentiated mass but as situated social agents impelled by our own conflicts, contradictions, distinct social and political locations, of class, gender, region, religious affiliation, and so on – hence a peculiar disjuncture in the architecture of the book. One of its major complaints is that ... the West has never permitted the Orient to represent itself; it has represented the Orient. (p. 172)

Ahmad continues in his critique to address Said's jumble of references to Orientalism perceived as a unified constitutive Western discourse.

According to this critique, two issues arise: the agency of the Oriental and an essentializing West. If the Orient/Arab is essentialized by the West/Orientalism, then an Arab nationalist movement, or pan-Arabism, establishes a similar in-reverse practice that presumably accomplishes the same end. Moreover if Orientalism is the institutionalized ideological discourse about the Orient to which the West also contrasts itself, pan-Arabism then can be regarded as serving the same function of an ideological force that politically and culturally contrasts the Arab world to, and positions it against the West. The Arab in this light ceases to become a passive object of Western Orientalist knowledge, and on the contrary, becomes an agent in mobilizing a type of knowledge about him/herself *for* him/herself. "Struggling against existing constructions of a particular identity takes the form of contesting negative images with positive ones, and of trying to discover the 'authentic' and 'original' content of the identity" (Grossberg, 1996, p. 87). It is this kind of positive representation of the Arab's identity that Arabism struggles to depict. "Here struggles over identity no longer involve questions of adequacy or distortion, but of the politics of representation itself. That is, politics involves questioning how identities are produced and taken up through practices of representation" (Grossberg, 1996, p. 90).

Arab "othering" of the West tends to serve – or is expressed – as a counter-discursive function in resisting colonial knowledge by asserting

an ideological definition of/on an Arab Self through pan-Arabism. The case of the Arab anti-colonial struggle followed suit: "many nationalists and anti-colonialists passionately, and often poetically appropriated the notion of a binary opposition between Europe and its "others".

Liberation, for them, hinged upon the discovery or rehabilitation of their cultural identity which European colonialism had disparaged and wrecked" (Lomba, 1998, p. 181). National allegories perceived as symbolic narratives are one cultural example in which such forms of counter-discourses may be conducted. In fact, Aijaz Ahmad (1992) has specifically criticized Frederic Jameson for his homogeneous, essentialist grouping of a "Third World Literatures" as national allegories.

By comparison, if films should serve as a cultural form of symbolic resistance, it is imperative to depart from such a category of inquiry as a "Third World Cinema" that exhibits homogeneous characteristics and tendencies in cinematic production and representation of its issues and identities. Roy Armes (1987), in *Third World Film Making and the West*, attempts such a grouping in providing a survey of various national cinemas and addressing generic issues that may or may not apply to all cinemas of the Third World. Teshome Gabriel (1994) considers a notion of "Third World Cinema" in pursuing a critical inquiry into Third World films. Gabriel (1994) assumes a homogeneity of characteristics of Third World films and common needs; his essay, *Towards a Critical Theory of*

Third World Films (1994), “focuses on those essential qualities Third World films possess ...[and it] lays the formulation for Third World film culture and filmic institutions based on a critical and theoretical matrix applicable to Third World needs” (p. 341). In this case, “Third World film culture” and “Third World needs” are grave generalizations that are challenged by the heterogeneity of cultures and needs across the Third World.

Pan-Arabist ideological discourse/knowledge, as a resistant discursive practice, does not attempt to dominate or consolidate power over the Occident/West in the realm of political economy or non-discursive materialities for example. On the contrary, power appears as a pan-Arabist discursive “imposition” over all those considered part of an ideologically Arab constituency. Arab identification in a “naturalistic” sense thereby “is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (Hall, 1996, p. 2). It should be noted that, while the dynamics of power of the two processes differ considerably, the methodological application is the same, or similar, in principle. In both cases, knowledge about the Arab “assumes that there is some intrinsic and essential content...which is defined by either a

common origin or a common structure of experience or both” (Grossberg, 1996, p. 87).

This “Arab condition” initiated by the mobilization of discursive practices that fix Arabness in particular essentialist discursive locations is necessarily a post-colonial one. Arif Dirlik (1997) attributes a multiplicity of meanings to the term post-colonialism whose definitional and referential ambiguity persists in its application. He defines the term as follows:

(1) It is used as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in “postcolonial societies” or “postcolonial intellectuals” ... (2) The term is employed as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is somewhat more abstract in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term “Third World”, for which it is intended as a substitute. (3) The word is used to describe a discourse on the above conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions. (Dirlik, 1997, p. 503)

Colonialism became a catalyst for the cultivation of national activity in colonial Arab society. Therefore, Arabism can be observed as a resistant

ideological movement derived from an oppressive colonial condition common in principle to all Arab peoples. "In the history of a people, there are moments of rupture that allow them to identify with an event, a period, an epoch, and to trace their roots from this epoch" (Amin Maalouf cited in Doray & Samuel, 1993, p. 46). "The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonial' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. It has occasionally been employed in some earlier work in the area to distinguish between the periods before and after independence ('colonial period' and 'post-colonial' period)" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 1). It is seemingly this experience of colonialism and its accompanying resistant movement that factor into the evolution of an Arab post-colonial society.

The mobilizing effects of Arabism, however, eventually induced a recurrent projection of national identity based on specificity, beginning with a specificity of colonial experience as a premise. If the colonial experience was conducive to a unified agenda and collective national project, then its departure initiated the dissolution of that unity. The colonial experience in general and the experience with a specific colonial power (mainly British and/or French) have uniquely affected the many countries of the Arab world, and "the breadth of appropriation and the general instability of a community's, any community's, sense of specificity complicate this nostalgic vision, and point to the need for a

rethinking of the relationship between identity and political action” (Acland, 1993, pp. 123-124). Moreover, the pre-Euro-colonial diverse demographic composition of Arab societies in addition to this colonialism contributes to the national portraits of Arab countries. One cannot simply assume that the common goal of dealing with an identity based on Eurocentric concepts, such as the “nation”, can sufficiently group the Arab peoples under the banner of pan-Arabism. Linda Hutcheon’s (1990) argument with Simon During’s essentialist definition of post-colonialism hinges on the diversity she sees in post-coloniality and alludes to the impossibility of actualizing a “freely” pure identity, and in the case of this study Arab identity:

I would disagree with one important part of Simon During’s particular definition of post-colonialism as “the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images” (1987, 33). Most post-colonial critics would oppose this as an essentialist, not to say simplifying, definition, and I would have to agree with them that the entire post-colonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of that identity ever being “uncontaminated”: just as the *word* post-colonialism holds within it its own “contamination” by colonialism. (p. 183)

Bhabha (1996) moreover states that “[t]he fatality of thinking of ‘local’ cultures as uncontaminated or self-contained forces us to conceive of ‘global’ cultures, which itself remains unimaginable. What kind of logic is this?” (p. 54). Likewise, pan-Arabism, in implying an “Arab” culture, encounters the same problem that an examination of the films will later reveal.

Arif Dirlik (1997) comments that “[t]he term ‘Third World,’ postcolonial critics insist, was quite vague because it encompassed within one uniform category vastly heterogeneous historical circumstances and because it locked in fixed positions, structurally if not geographically, societies and populations whose locations shifted with changing global relationships” (p. 503). Ahmad (1992) furthermore states, “‘the Third World,’ is, even in its most telling deployments, a polemical one, with no theoretical status whatsoever” (p. 96). Jean Franco (1994) adds, “the Third World is not much of a place for theory; and if it has to be fitted into theory at all, it can be accounted for as exceptional or regional” (p. 359). The appellation “Arab World” can be considered as a subset of the general term “Third World” whose implications are similar to those of the latter. The appellation “Arab world” – a margin among many postcolonial ones in global affairs – thus becomes a generic term that clubs together a myriad of marginalized peripheries of ‘Arab’ nations. The term’s genealogy reflects a movement

from an initially political descriptor to a cultural one that is used to serve political intra-regional agendas.

Moreover, the term necessarily serves the two Western and Arab essentialisms in characterizing a “world”: an exclusive, almost impermeable, hence “pure”, concept of “Arabness”. The term maintains this service to the two essentialisms because cultural “authenticity can only exist within an impermeable cultural environment, cut off from foreign influences” (Shafik, 1998, p. 6). Inferring a metropolis, this world is culturally dominated by Egypt whose capital city, Cairo, prominently serves as the main hub for cultural activity in the Arab world; also, considering Cairo's political weight, it served as the center for the only characteristically Arabist leadership, the Nasserite one. The Arab's world “post-colonially” assumes a position in global affairs as a marginalized category within the margin of the “Third World”. Furthermore, the Arab world is ubiquitously essentialized along with and by its inhabitants, albeit for different reasons and under distinct processes. More importantly for this study, the Arab world serves as the essentialized “home” for the essentialized Arab, an idea that “needs to be revised to include the simultaneous making and unmaking of nations and identities” (Acland, 1993, p. 123).

In an interview with Will Straw (1993), Marwan Hassan admittedly goes against mainstream conceptions of postcoloniality by disregarding Canada/Quebec as postcolonial. He suggests that Canadians/Quebecois are not autochthonous people, and “[t]he question of colonialism has much to do with indigenous status” (Straw, 1993, p. 91). Hassan assumes that Algeria possesses cohesive totality to which postcoloniality may be applied. However, how can one account for the Arab/Berber or colonizer/native dichotomy in Algeria and North Africa in general? Or can it be accounted for? Therefore, one is faced with the questions: Whose colonization? And which imperial process? Undoubtedly, in considerations of post-coloniality, one encounters the eurocentric bias in regarding historical events. The term “post-colonial” is used by Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1989) “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (p. 2). Consequently, how would the residue of Arab colonization during the Middle Ages underlie the practices of cultural and national mobilization to counter Euro-imperialism and factor in post-colonial considerations? By focusing on 19th and 20th century European colonialism, common application of post-colonial theory ignores the multiple and diverse types of colonialism in indigenous history.

The weight of antiquity seems to lie heavily upon the consciousnesses of the Arab nations. Thus it continues to affect and dominate cultural production in a way that incorporates Arabist means of identification. This cultural hegemony is perpetuated by (a residual) pan-Arabist ideology whose political discourse in the Arab world has been – perhaps until recently – pronounced and deeply felt. The hegemonic consequence of an Arabist essentialism of identity becomes a strategic and positional one (Hall, 1996). This type of strategic essentialism, Gayatri Spivak writes, is “the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity” (cited in Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 159). The employment of an essentialist Arabness in the Arab world is necessarily related to a glorious past, as Amin Maalouf explains that

For them [the Arabs], there is nothing in the world today that can comfort them in their identity, nothing to be proud of. They have to go far back into the past, to when they were the dominant civilization: if we talk of sciences, they cannot refer to Arab science today, because it does not exist. They have to go back to Avicenna or Berunii. (Doray & Samuel, 1993, p. 47)

As the Arab psyche acknowledges this impossibility of achieving a pre-Euro-colonial status, it remains wholeheartedly engaged in achieving the notion of the good-will of all Arabs by reclaiming a glorious past; “post-colonialism is much more to do with the painful experience of confronting the desire to recover ‘lost’ pre-colonial identities, the impossibility of actually doing so, and the task of constructing some new identity on the basis of that impossibility” (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 14). The nostalgia that ensues somehow becomes the ingredient for the maintenance of a myth of the eternal return as articulated by Mircea Eliade (1949/1954). Thierry Hentsch describes the motivation for this nostalgic pursuit as follows:

our attempts to partially rebuild the past through history is anchored in contemporary concerns. History is, in a sense, a fiction designed to help us understand the present. Its mythical element becomes extremely important. But, careful, when I say “mythical,” I do not mean “false.” Myths do not oppose reality; they are part of it. (Doray & Samuel, 1993, p. 70)

Ania Loomba (1998) affirms that “[s]uch a going back is actually quite modern in itself – it is a product of a *present* need, which reshapes, rather than simply invokes the past” (p. 195). And it is this present “need”, since national independence, for the Arabic language and Islam

“to serve as a starting-point for cultural purification and preservation” that one is drawn to overlook the purity of Arab-Muslim culture as mythical (Shafik, 1998, p. 6).

However, pre-colonial status in the Arab world does not imply one free of colonialism; it just is one of a different kind, one that is not recognized by a eurocentric perception of history and categorization of historical periods. The pre-colonial culture in the Arab world was in fact a colonial one, resulting in post-Arab colonial hybridity. Excluded from a post-colonial, contemporary context of the notion of hybridity, the Arab/Islamic expansions historically resulted in the creation of new transcultural forms (arabization) within the contact zones, or sites of Arab colonization, and Arab assimilation. As Stuart Hall (1993) describes Western nation-states, “the history of the nation-states of the West has *never* been of this ethnically pure kind ... they are without exception ethnically hybrid – the product of conquests, absorptions of one peoples by another” (p. 356).

Similarly, the same could be said of Arab nation-states, or the Arab world that ideologically comprises the ideal Arab Nation. Hence, one can employ Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) idea of transculturation in a contact zone outside a discussion of European colonialism. While the “Arab” as an identity may have historically experienced hybridization through

assimilation and Arabization, contemporary pan-Arabist identity attempts to paradoxically compile its pre-European colonial history, and “essentializes” it, by avoiding a construction and representation based on multiple identities. This discrepancy in historical referencing expresses the need, suggested by Ella Shohat, to “discriminate between the modalities of hybridity, for example forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (cited in Loomba, 1998, p. 178).

Historical eurocentrism, in assuming and interpreting world history as European history, leads to a precarious application of post-colonial theory in examining identities of colonized peoples. It appears that an abrogation of previous histories occurs as well as their effects on their peoples. In reference to Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha (1994) claims that Fanon “is far too aware of the dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial culture to recommend that “roots” be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenizing the history of the present” (p.9).

Because the “Arab” – in the amalgamated sense of Arab identity – historically underwent many different forms of hybridity, and “Arab” lands experienced multiple layers of ethnic, religious, and political imperialisms and colonialisms, one must distinguish between these

instances and acknowledge the various processes of transculturation. The European transcultural effect on Arab regions superseded the remains of the legacies of hybridization of distinct colonial periods. And even so, the late 19th century European colonialism driven by imperialist capitalism in the Middle East was not a settler type of colonialism. The most notable hybridity that emerged from contact between Arabs (colonizers originating from Arabia) and natives of regions they conquered (like the Berbers) reflects a kind of “in-betweenness” caused by processes of Arab assimilation into native cultures and arabization. The cultural identity of the Arab, a “survivor” of these two historical periods (Arab and European colonialist expansions) emerges in two contradictory and ambivalent spaces. Drawing from Roland Barthes’s concept of the Third Space of enunciation, Bhabha (1994) asserts, “[i]t is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance” (p. 38). But the question remains: whose colonialism? Furthermore, Ania Loomba (1998) criticizes Bhabha for ‘universalizing’ the colonial encounter: “ironically, the split, ambivalent, hybrid colonial subject projected in his work is in fact curiously universal and homogeneous – that is to say he [sic] could exist anywhere in the colonial world” (p. 178). Thereby, even as a hybrid, the Third World colonized person runs the risk of being essentialized as s/he becomes subjected to examination as an ‘object’ of study.

Binaries function not only in discerning national and cultural identities within the Arab world, but they also implicate a replacement, or even rejection, of an Arab version of history in favor of a European one. This European version implies notions of modernity, including that of the modern nation and the dividing historical borders imposed as a result of European colonization; “[t]he most significant challenge posed to colonialism, the narrative of nationalism, for instance, while serving a crucial function for decolonisation nevertheless relied on the narrative of modernity as progress and accepted the ‘universal’ value of Enlightenment notions of freedom and democracy. Replacing the grand narrative of which Europe was the norm, nationalism posited the modern nation-state as the new ideal” (Mongia, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, the Arab countries are subjugated to the global hegemony of the West. Antonio Gramsci (1986) best describes this condition in the following:

the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes – when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is

borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in 'normal times' – that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate. (p. 19)

By considering the way Arab national identities are asserted, Arabness as a cultural identity can be said to be comprised of two selves: one actual, the other ideal. The actual Arab selves locate a specific Arabness against which all "other" Arabs are negated or negotiated. The actual Arabness distinctly possessed by each individual Arab nation on the basis of its cultural peculiarities is identified opposite, or in negotiation with, the rest of the Arab nations. This process, in asserting the specificity of each type of Arabness, usually negates at the same time any other form of Arabness possessed by another Arab nation. Contrary to the "naturalistic" or essentialist approach to Arabness, Stuart Hall (1996), in the following, contrasts this "naturalism" with a discursive approach:

the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence,

including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency.
(pp. 2-3)

Lawrence Grossberg (1996) adds that this approach:

denies the existence of authentic and originary identities based in a universally shared origin or experience. Identities are always relational and incomplete, in process. Any identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term, even as the identity of the latter term depends upon its difference from, its negation of, the former. (p. 89)

Paradoxically, it is the amalgamation of these diverse cultural peculiarities into a (pan)Arab collective that constitutes a common Arab ideal Self to which all Arab nations ideologically belong. This collective Self ideologically serves to identify itself through all others who are excluded by cultural negation, especially the West. Consequently, on one level, the Arab collectively identifies against a Western – and other Eastern/Oriental identities – identity; and on the intra-national level, it fragments itself into diverse forms of Arabness. Ultimately, however, identity as a constitutive cohesive concept fails to deliver its ideological promises of unifying totality and “the impossibility of such fully

constituted, separate and distinct identities” (Grossberg, 1996, p. 89).

As a concept constructed through difference, identity becomes prone to relativity, to that of its negation, and can be perceived in concentric, not necessarily linear, ways.

Based on this discussion, I have argued that the Arab constructs his/her identity to create a particular knowledge about the Self, thus asserting an essentialist power over an amalgamation of a myriad of identities. This Arab essentialism is strategic and is implemented concentrically, beginning from a homogeneity that is consumed globally and works its way towards fragmentation regionally, as outlined above. It is important to note that such a practice must not be equated or paralleled to the way knowledge is constructed about the Arab by the West. The implications and consequences of employing the same method of constructing this knowledge differ significantly. The practice is implemented in terms of inter-identities in the case of West-East, whereas the Arab Self utilizes the practice in the context of intra-identities. According to Said (1994), the West deliberately attempts to distinguish itself from the Orient through a process of “othering”. In the latter case, the Arab constructs his/her identity based upon the premise that tries – albeit unsuccessfully – to eliminate difference as a means of resistance; “Arab” as a homogeneous cultural identity, when

“essentialized” against the West, is inherently fragmented into various Others on another level.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is important in its employment of the binary comprising of a self/other in describing East-West identity relations. What is perceived as a self/other binary or colonial relationship of tenuous conflict in the case of West-East discursive knowledge becomes, in comparison, one of dialogic interaction, or negotiation, between an (Arab) Self and other selves in the case of intra-Arab discursive contact. Despite intra-Arab negotiation of identity, this binary of self/other is, moreover, manipulated in identifying a discursively homogeneous Arabness against the West.

It is the implication of a homogeneous Arabness identified against the West that Said (1994), who maintains the objectivity of *Orientalism*, regards as misinterpretations of *Orientalism* in his afterword. These misinterpretations render *Orientalism* as an “anti-Western” text that “defends” Islam and the Arabs. And it is interesting to note, on the one hand, this perception of what is considered an anti-Western “attack”, one that can also be seen as rebellious to a Western essentializing power. On the other hand, Orientalist discourse is not necessarily perceived as “anti-Eastern” despite underlying political agendas of power/knowledge that may garner such sentiments. Consequently, an “Eastern” or

Arab/Islamic adoption of an allegedly political (mis)interpretation of Said's *Orientalism* is not regarded otherwise, as a "pro-Eastern" defense, or reclamation of power of self-identity, for example.

However, even such statements as the above must be approached with reservation due to the essentialisms upon which they rely. It becomes important to consider the interplay of theory and practice, and the sacrificial abandonment of one's theoretical purity in practice, to use Spivakian terms. Said (1994) claims that *Orientalism* "is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine" (p. 339) in defending the attacks on the book's theoretical inconsistencies and sentimental treatment of agency. It is perhaps this claim that harms his argument about "misinterpretations" of the work, exposing his subject position, as one that has crossed the boundary between the East and West.

Nonetheless, the binary serves to detect the process of cultural identification and formation on Arab cinematic screens as a discursive and representational act of "self-knowing". Even when discursive Arab essentialism is represented on the cinematic screen, the specificity of Arabness is depicted in different Arab national cinemas. Arabness consequently appears fragmented despite moments of amalgamating these fragments to make an Arab whole in the films.

The discourse of the post-colonial films, examined in this study, is one that addresses the epistemological and psychic orientations – to which Dirlik (1997) refers in his aforementioned definition of post-colonialism – of the Arab “knowing” himself on his/her own screen. These orientations or approaches adopted in the practice of “self-knowing” are particularly products of conditions that result from colonialism. In other words, even the way we know ourselves is influenced by the (colonial and post-colonial) conditions experienced by our societies. It is this type of post-colonial discourse that is produced and consumed on the Arab screens; and even “though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (Hall, 1994, p. 392). And in this sense, a state of perpetual cultural displacement prevails even when the Arab remains ‘where s/he is’.

Chapter 3

On Language and the Notion of an Arab National Cinema

A national cinema in an underdeveloped country, like a literature under colonialism, can only be understood if the external shaping forces, and the ways in which individuals and social classes have responded to them, are also appreciated. (Armes, 1987, p. 306)

I have always been intrigued by the manner of presentation of television programming material in the Arab Middle East. Growing up in Kuwait, it had been the case that an Egyptian serial or film would be introduced as the "Arabic serial" or the "Arabic film". Moreover, local productions, namely Kuwaiti serials, were introduced as the "local serial". It was not until my residence in Lebanon that this qualification of cultural media productions seemed to be interpreted differently when introduced. Lebanese television appeared to interchangeably employ the qualifiers "Arab" and "Egyptian" to introduce similar programming material; although references to the "Egyptian serial" or an "Egyptian film" were more prominently in currency. This practice of qualifying media content does not necessarily imply one and the same thing, even though it does pass unquestionably to undiscerning Arab audiences.

The adjective "Arabic" cannot adequately represent the specificities of Arab nations, nor can it successfully amalgamate the peculiarities of content of different Arab cultural productions. This discrepancy in qualifying the content of Arabic programming in general suggests the precarious overlapping of cultural ownership. By inserting the all-encompassing and vague qualifier "Arab", the adjective educes a shared cultural ownership of programming by all Arab nations, despite the varying specificities of content reflecting particular experiences of Arab nations. Therefore, can the Arabs claim a common Arab national cinema, a cultural industry that identifies them and refers them back to a common type of (pan) Arab "nationhood"? By considering the historical circumstances underlying the rise of cinema in the Arab world, as well as Arab cultural varieties, one is able to comprehend the dominance of Egyptian cinema in the Arab world as one that does not reflect an "Arab" experience and an "Arabness" common to all Arabs.

Samir Farid (1996) states that Arab cinema "is a descriptive term and does not imply Arab unity or any other political imperative" (p. 1). Furthermore, he distinguishes between cinema as a commodity and a cultural product:

As commodities, films are attributed to the nationality of the producing company; for example, a film produced by an Egyptian

company is considered to be Egyptian. But a film as a cultural product belongs to the language its characters speak. From this perspective, Egyptian films are Arab. (Farid, 1996, p. 1)

Accordingly, Farid defines Arab cinema as "cinema that speaks Arabic". Hence, Farid's approach to Arabic cinema becomes contentious in so far as he culturally translates the different cinematic practices of Arab nations into a homogeneous category based on linguistic similarity and under Egyptian cinematic dominance. It is difficult to separate politics from cultural implications of politics. One does not usually speak of an Anglophone Cinema per se, for example to include cinemas of Canada, Australia, the U.S., and Britain among other national cinemas of English-speaking nations. The reason that a category such as Arab cinema exists is arguably based on the political history of Arab integration; if this involved political unification in the not so faraway past, then today it at least may imply a consciously cooperative entity. The history – political, (post)colonial, and otherwise – that all Arab nations share, at least in principle, continue(d) to fuel the, now fading, fire for a more unifying, or integrative, approach to Arab cultural politics.

Therefore, Farid's distinction is too exclusive, too black and white, and overlooks the interplay of politics and culture. Even his following

example supporting this theoretical spectrum outlined above fails to illustrate the applicability of his approach. He claims that

A French-language Tunisian film, such as *Hikaya Basita Kahadhihi* [*A simple tale like this one*, 1970], is Tunisian in production and French in culture – it is part of both Tunisian and French cinema history. It expresses cultural reality in Tunis, the way a Senegalese film in French express a certain cultural reality in Senegal. More significantly, it constitutes part of the history of its director. (Farid, 1996, p. 1)

The fact that this particular film is *nationally* produced in Tunisia did not prevent the filming of "*cultural* reality in Tunis" [my emphasis], contradicting his earlier claim of the cultural identification as French: a cultural reality cannot be reduced to a linguistic reality which even in this example amplifies one reality over another (Arabic) one. In fact, what his polar spectrum fails to consider is the "in-between" hybridity that Tunisian culture occupies along the borders of Arab and French colonial cultural encounters and experiences.

As Viola Shafik (1998) reminds us, the Arab and his/her world are not constitutive entities whose cultural and national manifestations can

be conveniently represented under a common banner. Shafik (1998) affirms this fact when she claims that

The Arab world is not, as is often perceived, a monolith, but is made up of different communities, peoples, states, and governmental and societal forms. Neither does it form linguistically, ethnically, or culturally an unchallenged unity. The majority of its inhabitants adhere to Islam, but other religions are represented in the region, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islamic sects such as those of the Alawites and Druze. On the linguistic level little unity exists; in addition to the languages of ethnic minorities like Berbers, Nubians, and Kurds, the Arabic language itself has split into a huge variety of local dialects. (p. 1)

For this reason, Shafik (1998) refers to the discussion of Arab cinema in French publications as "les cinémas arabes" and not "Arab cinema". In turn, rendering language as the basis for the existence of a unifying Arab culture and cultural experience evident in cinema becomes a controversial assertion and/or practice. Moreover, it becomes apparent that not only are certain languages marginalized, but other religious and cultural minorities as well, who are rightfully part of this "cultural reality".

According to Zakaria Abuhamdia (1988), "Arabic remains the major factor of integration in contemporary Arabic society ... [and] Arabism depends on Arabic as the most enduring factor of a common bond and purpose" (p. 41). While Arabs differ in culture and traditions, they do share a common Arabic heritage and language, albeit hegemonic. "The pride that the Arabs took in the Arabic language assumed a social import and significance indicative of how deeply rooted the Arab consciousness was. They viewed the Arabic language as the symbol of their unity, the bond of their nation and the foundation of their culture" (Duri, 1987, p. 108). The glue of this notion of Arabness therefore seems to be a primarily linguistic one. But even that poses problems as linguistic variations reflecting an Arabic dialectology within different regions in the Arab world often alienate speakers of these distinguishable Arabic dialects; in some cases dialects are even deemed incomprehensible in parts of the Arab world.

On the unique position of dialectology in the Arabic language Abuhamdia (1988) suggests that the

natively acquired (spoken) varieties of Arabic differ in structural aspects, such features of variation as well as the acquisition of the home variety of any language used over extended territories. The controversy engendered over the dichotomy between regional

varieties and the standard variety of Arabic (allegedly unique to Arabic and a handful of other languages) was a *symptom* of social and intellectual division in the Arab world earlier in this century, not a source of disintegration. Nonetheless, standard Arabic has its distinctive ideologically faith-based integrative and unifying role among the Arabs to an extent unmatched by any other living language to its native speakers. This status of Arabic is not weakened by the domination of English and French as media for science and development. (p. 34)

It is perhaps for this reason that Roy Armes (1987) suggests that "[i]n Africa it is only in the Muslim north that we find a single unifying language – Arabic – which despite its considerable variations in dialect can to some degree constitute a focus of independence and a rich and viable alternative to the inherited language of the colonizer" (p. 30). The "rich and viable alternative" would most probably reflect the perspective of the advocates of Arabization in North Africa, a policy that was adopted following French withdrawal in an attempt to restore a glorious Arab reality, or Arabness. North African native languages, as a result, are overlooked as well as those advocates maintaining allegiance to French cultural and linguistic colonial influences, notably in Algeria. Perhaps this divisive issue of language – ironically proclaimed as a unifying element – might explain the stance of contenders such as Marwan

Hassan who suspects whether "language is ever able to sustain the position of founding a national identity" (Straw, 1993, p. 93).

It is difficult to overlook these (post-) colonial divisive factors in asserting an argument regarding the unifying effect of the Arabic language on its speakers. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (1989) remind us:

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. (p. 7)

This post-colonial voice is actually a myriad of voices, including post-colonial hybrids and subaltern, marginalized natives who historically underwent various periods of colonization. In this light, the post-colonial Arab voice cannot be effective, at least not implicitly, and in the context of cinema, power within intra-regional interactions persists in the form of

an Egyptian national cinema that dominates as the main cultural and national industry in the region.

In a discussion of post-colonial identities and cultures, it is imperative to reckon with this issue of language as a site of power between the colonizer and the colonized, or at least any center and its one or more peripheries. Because the pre-Euro-colonial culture in the Arab world resulted in a post-Arab colonial hybridity, linguistic alienation had been brewing in the region between the spoken forms, dialects, of Arabic of each nation. This constitutes one layer over which linguistic alienation occurs between an Arabic “native” language and a European colonizing one. The other layer is differences in dialectology – less often than not regarded as quasi-languages – within the Arab world. In terms of language, intra-Arab cultural relations are dominated by an Egyptian linguistic and cultural prevalence through its cinema, which is often considered (mistaken for?) as a representative of an Arab national cinema. This dominance maintains a position in the center of Arab cultural affairs.

Cinema's arrival in the Arab cultural arena occurred in Egypt, thus allowing it to become the pioneer in establishing an Arab cinematic tradition. Attempting to understand the interchangeable use of the labels Arab national cinema and Egyptian national cinema as a reference

to the same thing must take into account the colonial condition under which Egypt and the rest of the Arab world saw the rise of this cultural medium. In 1896, Egypt became the location for the medium's first encounters with Arab culture when films by the Lumière brothers were shown in Alexandria only a few months after their first screenings in Europe; and shortly afterwards, screenings in other Arab countries were organized in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (Shafik, 1998; Khan, 1969; Armes, 1987; Malkmus & Armes, 1991). "Egypt emerged as the center of production for the majority of Arabic films due to its early contact with modern Western culture through the city of Alexandria, which had been a model for coexistence between different races, nationalities, and cultures for centuries" (Farid, 1996, p. 2). In addition, Egypt was the only Arab state that was able to develop a national film industry during colonialism (Shafik, 1998, p. 11), and during the early twentieth century, it was the only Arab state that had historically founded a sense of national identity, instigating Egyptianization policies driven by nationalistic sentiments. Economic developments in this emerging nationalistic environment fostered initial interests in cinema as a cultural site for anti-colonial struggle, and Arab cinema outside Egypt did not steadily develop until the aftermath of World War II (Armes, 1987, p. 198).

It is important to note the paternalistic and hegemonic attitudes of the Western colonizer during the emergence of cinema in the colonies, as the colonized were acquainting themselves with the technology. The beginnings of cinema as a cultural industry were in the hands of foreigners and immigrant European minorities who owned the first movie theaters, as well as foreign investments in film productions (Shafik, 1998, p. 11). The limited and slow development of film distribution in the colonies was compounded with the lack of

impetus for local film production and the imported films reflected almost exclusively the tastes of the colonizer. As a result, under colonialism, cinema served as a socially divisive force, a mode of leisure from which the bulk of the population was excluded. Even after independence this situation could not be instantly transformed, since the crucial exhibition infrastructure (the film theatres themselves) and all the structures of the profitable distribution system reflected cinema's role as an imported urban entertainment medium. (Malkmus & Armes, 1991, p. 5-6)

Western hegemony as a cinematic metropolis prevails even today as Arab cinemas remain "greatly dependent on Western imports, technical know-how, evaluation, and partly even on Western financial support" (Shafik, 1998, p. 209). Consolidation of cinema as a national and cultural

industry was hastened by the advent of independence "which represented a sort of catalyst for national film making, even in those Arab countries that did not resist or did little to fight European occupation" (Shafik, 1998, p. 20). Moreover, "cinema was believed to create a platform for counter-representations, giving the formerly colonized a chance to challenged Western dominance, at least on the screen" (Shafk, 1998, p. 209).

In referring to the audiences and popularity of cinema, Malkmus & Armes (1991) explain that

despite all the difficulties inherent in importing a Western-originated technology and Western forms of dramatic and narrative organization into Africa and the Arab world, the innovators could take comfort from one certainty: films found enthusiastic audiences wherever they were shown. The film-makers of the post-independence era were able to use this popularity when they gave expression to the new sense of cultural awareness that came with the ending of the colonial system. (p. 35)

Such an interpretation of the popularity of cinema within the mass of consumers seems precarious in the face of the development of the medium during colonialism, especially when considering the primary

audience for which this industry developed in the first place. According to Malkmus & Armes (1991), the demand for films was "initially a response to the entertainment needs of settler audiences and the tiny bilingual elites which shared their tastes and values" (p. 5). The impetus for the medium's introduction originates in colonial objectives from that point on. In fact, cinema promoted the Orientalist projects in which films reproduced knowledge about the colonized: "the new media, and particularly the cinema, were also employed to create representations of African and Arab life for Western informational and entertainment purposes, as objects of European academic study – and it must be said – as expressions of colonial 'superiority'" (Malkmus & Armes, 1991, p. 12).

A couple of axes, suggested by Viola Shafik (1998), that result from dynamics of power need consideration in underscoring the diversity and seemingly problematic assumption and representation of homogeneity in the culture of the Arab world: firstly, the distinction between popular and "high" culture, and secondly, the distinction between varying cultures within the region based on ethnicity, language and religion. The medium assumed an elitist association and consumption in the colonies before it gradually was popularized and appreciated by the masses. Therefore, the Arab world experienced a different direction in the evolution of cinema's audience: "After being introduced first into the most elevated strata of society it [cinema] became increasingly a means of popular

entertainment, primarily consumed by the middle and lower urban classes" (Shafik, 1998, p. 122).

However, in spite of the popularization of cinema and its incorporation into projects of former colonies for purposes of proclaiming and consolidating nationalistic objectives, the medium remains a Western cultural technology influenced by Western cultural forms that may alienate mass audiences. Roy Armes (1987) describes the unique position of Third World artists of cinema as follows:

Though often at odds with the ruling members of the elite to which they belong by virtue of their education, they are equally cut off from the mass of the people by the literary forms and language that they choose. Their position could hardly be more different from that of the traditional storyteller or craftsman, whose identification with his audience or clientele was direct and immediate A film maker, a radio or television producer, will be using a Western technology; a writer will often be employing the former colonizer's language, in which only a tiny minority of the population is literate. In both cases he or she will almost certainly be using formal structures derived from a foreign source, for all the basic forms of print literature, as well as those of the filmic narrative or television documentary report, are imported. (p. 24)

Hence in essence, cinema is perceived in the Third World as a foreign import whose colonial associations cannot but refer to its elitist history. As a cultural industry, it becomes foreign as a non-native cultural tradition in its adoptive newly independent nations.

It is perhaps for this reason that cinema did not permeate the national projects of all Arab countries, namely the strictly Islamic ones such as Saudi Arabia. As Shafik (1998) elucidates,

[i]n spite of its seventy-year history, and because its existence is based on a Western technique, Arab cinema is frequently criticized as evidence of Westernization and acculturation. Its consideration inevitably touches on the relation between Arab-Muslim culture and the West, and raises questions about notions of authenticity and acculturation, tradition and alienation, and the roots of these relations and ideas. (p. 4)

On the other hand, it is this Arab-Muslim cultural hegemony within the Arab world that is most compelling for this study, thus bringing Shafik's second pair of axes of power mentioned above to the foreground. Arab-Muslim culture and its practices become incorporated into the various minority cultures in the region. And through such incorporation, the

difference that these cultures possess is subdued. They become diluted in the mainstream which becomes part of a marginalized minority's own sense of identity; the example of Youssef Chahine's trilogy in the following chapter exemplifies this hegemony.

Marginalized groups, or the "subaltern" in Arab society, in relation to cinema are historically transformed from being colonized "Arabs" in relation to the colonizers and an elite class during the rise of cinema, to ethnic or religious groups whose presence defies Arab-Muslim cultural claims of homogeneity. As cinema asserts itself as a site of anti-colonial struggle, this trend of maintaining this cultural hegemony is reflected on the cinematic screen. In fact, under the Nasserite regime, Islam has become a crucial factor in Egyptian national identification and unification despite the regime's secular inclinations towards a unity between Copts and Muslims (Shafik, 1998, p. 173). State censorship laws and regulations have further contributed to this hegemony as national unity in films is maintained

not through a just representation of different native religions but through the exclusive representation of Muslim conditions of life and convictions. Although there are many Christian directors working in Egypt – including Youssef Chahine, Samir Seif, Khairy Beshara, Daoud Abd El-Sayyed, and Yousry Nasrallah – Christian

characters hardly ever appear on the screen, and then mostly in minor roles. The representation of Jews is also frowned upon.

(Shafik, 1998, p. 34)

Religious minorities, in addition to marginalized and ostracized characters, such as the prostitute or homosexual, are often stereotypically rendered as an "Other" in asserting the Arab's ethnic, cultural, and moral reality (Al-Aris, 1994).

Language once again is associated with the representation of this hegemonic culture; Abuhamdia (1988) notes that "the religious value of Arabic adds a unique dimension to the frustrating complexity of the linguistic setting of Arabic, coupled with the sentimental attachment of the Arabs to their glorious past, as rulers of a universal state" (p. 47). This hegemony, however, has not continued unchallenged: as Shafik (1998) points out, the diversification of social groups in films of the 1990s that speak Berber and Kurdish, for example, in addition to Lebanese-Armenian short films and Coptic productions of religious films, is notable. These marginalized groups "speak" of an "Arab" reality. Nonetheless, while these attempts hardly constitute a mainstream, or trend in any way, their appearance ideologically represents an indication of the disintegration of common notions of nationhood and unitarian Arabism.

In addition to the diverse ethnic groups dispersed throughout the Arab world, marginalization also takes place intra-regionally in the presence of a domineering Egyptian national cinema. Egyptian cinema is perceived by default as representative of Arabic culture in the absence of notable individual national cinemas for each respective Arab country. Resistance to cinema as a cultural industry, for religious and cultural reasons in an Arab country like Saudi Arabia, may illuminate the leading influence of Egypt as a center for Arabic film production. In addition, historical particulars, namely those inter-cultural and colonial contacts and circumstances fostering the growth of the then new cultural medium, contribute to the marginalization of embryonic or semi-embryonic attempts at establishing separate national cinemas. These cinemas would otherwise be presumed to reflect on individual Arab national experiences, if a sound foundation for such national film industries were not challenged by an inability for self-sustenance.

Because historical encounters with the medium as well as linguistic influences factored into the dominant positioning of Egyptian cinema as an Arab cultural tradition in general,

[t]he Egyptian model was followed in almost all Arab countries

Commercial Syrian cinema still follows Egyptian concepts today;

the latest works of the Syrian comic Doureid Laham have been well received by Egyptian audiences, and show the same mixture of social criticism, verbal comedy, musical inserts, and theatrical performances as many Egyptian feature films (Shafik, 1998, p. 27).

Moreover, the dominance of Egyptian film culture is also attributed to the "role that film distributors played in Egyptian film production and, more importantly, in providing a distribution network that assured a regional hegemony" (Arasoughly, 1996, p. x).

Arab cinema may have experienced a shift from Egyptian dominance during the aftermath of the nationalization of the Egyptian film industry in 1963 under the Nasserite regime when many film artists moved to Lebanon to profit from the economic boom at the time. However, these Egyptian artists brought with them their styles and trends in cinema, and "[a] slim majority of Lebanese feature films (54 out of 100) that were produced between 1963 and 1970 used Egyptian dialect for dialogue. A further twenty films contained a linguistic mixture allowing each actor to speak his native tongue. Only twenty-two films used the Lebanese dialect exclusively" (Shafik, 1998, pp. 28-29). Thus, even in the light of those changes, the dominance of Egyptian films was maintained. Because it was a pioneer in the industry, Egypt became an emulated model that established Arab cinematic trends. Egyptian styles

and dialect familiar across the Arab world are often used or incorporated in non-Egyptian films. And this familiarity accounts for the marketability and consumption of the films in the Arab world.

Pan-Arab cooperation in the area of film production has been challenged by competing film industries, and co-productions are indeed exceptional (Shafik, 1998, p. 40). This cultural development in cinema perhaps alludes to the state of national and cultural identification of the Arab nations and their peoples. The failure of an Arab national cinema in espousing homogeneous realistic depictions of society is associated with the failure of a unitary Arab national project. Farid (1996) claims that the "history of Arab cinema in Egypt complements the history of Arab cinema outside Egypt in ways that confirm the cultural bonds between the two" (p. 3). While cultural bonds are undeniable, this historical complement remains nonetheless an instance of difference whose only confirmation is an Egyptian hegemony that competitively undermines the sustenance of (an)other lucrative Arab national cinema(s). For this reason, "[t]he various Arab national cinemas that emerged in strong resistance to this dominance wanted to express a local specificity in their cinema experience, as manifested in locations, vernacular, and themes" (Arasoughly, 1996, p. x).

The role of language in cinema is crucial in exemplifying the central location that Egypt has acquired in Arab cultural affairs. Although the common literary tradition is able to sustain the argument and reference to unity in an Arab cultural heritage, cinema challenges it. Unable to maintain classical, or standard Arabic, as the language of cultural transmission, cinema requires that specificities of varying Arab experiences be depicted in the vernacular in order to maintain "realistic" cinematic representations; that is, cinema necessarily requires and employs the vernacular for films to be consumed as "believable". The realistic rendition of specific provincial experiences must be accompanied by an appropriate "language" that communicates it. On this issue of dialectology and language, Malkmus & Armes (1991) furthermore explain that

[t]he linguistic diversity of spoken Arabic is a key factor in inhibiting the widespread development of Arab film production.

The language used in Egyptian movies by producers aiming at the whole Arab market could be neither classical Arabic – now largely confined to intellectual use – nor the authentic local Cairo dialect, which is largely incomprehensible in the wider Arab world.

Instead, film-makers initially had to adopt their own language – what Victor Bachy has called 'a nonexistent language, a cinema-speak, a synthetic product invented by scriptwriters' – in which a

surface coating of colloquial Egyptian is given to an essentially literary structure. Only gradually could spoken Egyptian, backed up by other media such as radio and recorded song, impose itself so widely that to audiences it eventually came to seem the *natural* language of Arab cinema. (p. 35)

This “naturalistic” view of the Egyptian dialect in cinema further emphasizes the peculiarity of the above-mentioned example of Egyptian-spoken Lebanese productions that followed the nationalization of the film industry in Egypt. In this way, Arab national cinema as a cultural industry becomes an indirect reflection of an unsuccessful pan-Arab national project as well as a regional Egyptian linguistic prevalence. The hold that the Egyptian dialect has taken in the Arab world is aided by famous Egyptian stars who became part of the operations of a star system, similar to that of Hollywood and upon which the Egyptian film industry is reliant (Shafik, 1998).

With their assistance, particularly that of the popular singers, Egyptian cinema at the beginning was able to overcome an important obstacle hampering the inter-Arab exchange of movies: the distinct dialects of the Mashriq and Maghreb, i.e., the eastern and western part of the so-called Arab world. The continuous consumption of Egyptian mass production caused the audience in

many regions to acquire at least a passive knowledge of the Egyptian dialect. This process gained the distribution of Egyptian films an advantage that Arab competitors from Tunisia, Algeria, and Syria could attain only exceptionally (Shafik, 1998, pp. 26-27)

In tune with its enthusiastic audiences throughout the Arab world, "[a]ll the popular genres created by Egyptian cinema throughout its history share the absolute determination to entertain and the permanent readiness to compromise in line with the oft-recited motto *al-gumhur 'ayiz kida* (colloquial: 'the audience wants it like this')" (Shafik, 1998, p. 26). Though, the question remains: who is this audience? And does it take into account those audiences on the peripheries of dominant Arab culture whether inside or outside Egypt? This all-encompassing approach towards an assumed homogeneous audience is unequivocally linked to the problematic notion of an Arab national cinema, and the "propensity to engage the spectator thoroughly in a complex series of identifications, with an almost ruthless disregard of the nationality (as well as class and gender) of the spectator" (Higson, 1989, p. 40).

Therefore, an Arab national cinema would represent what Andrew Higson (1989) labels "internal cultural colonialism". Arab cinema as an institution and all-encompassing cultural category serves "to pull together diverse and contradictory discourses, to articulate a

contradictory unity, to play a part in the hegemonic process of achieving consensus, and containing difference and contradiction" (Higson, 1998, p. 44). However, by taking a closer look at Arabic films, one cannot evade these differences and contradictions of the "textual" experience of film. Stuart Hall (1989) considers identity to be constituted within, and not outside, representation, and accordingly cinema serves "not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak" (p. 402). The Arab on the screen thereby can become a "foreigner" to an Arab audience.

The sets of films discussed in the following chapters belong to popular, or mainstream, Arabic cinema. Egyptian Youssef Chahine's unconventional techniques in his films cast them as commercially unsuccessful. Audiences in this case do not "want it like this", and despite their significance within the Arabic cinematic tradition, these films are not his most popular among Arab audiences because of their innovative and unique approaches. Separate from conventional drama and without explicitly resorting to native traditions, Chahine's attachment to political allegories affirms his devotion to the legacy of *iltizam*, or social commitment (Shafik, 1998). *Alexandria Why?* (1978) expresses this commitment through realism, which gives way to the

surreal in *An Egyptian Story* (1982) that refuses all claims of anything “real”; the latter film, according to Roy Armes (1987), ranks with anything by Fellini. Maintaining the seriousness of these two movies with lighthearted moments, the last of the trilogy, *Alexandria Now and Forever* (1990) resorts to overt humorous caricatures or lighthearted sequences that seem to interrupt the serious flow of the film. At times, the film can in some ways be perceived as a musical due to the number of musical sequences. In *Alexandria Now and Forever* (1990), Youssef Chahine attempts to reflect on society’s needs and he provides an entertaining cinema for audiences.

Syrian Dureid Lahham, like Chahine, does not stray away from the idea of the “purposeful” film. However, unlike Chahine, he refrains from realism to enter the realm of the abstract. Both his films are comical, and it is perhaps this reconciliation between entertainment and social commitment that motivated his success with a welcoming reception and consumption by Arab audiences who are allowed to laugh at their misfortunes rather than dwell on them. In *The Report* (1986), Lahham drives the abstract into the surreal, most notably during an imaginary court proceeding (a technique he shares with Chahine). And when the audience is driven back into the events of the movie, the abstract events seem more realistic. Both Lahham and Chahine pay particular and close

attention to their choice of subjects and dissociate from conventional narrative structures.

The analysis of the two sets of films in the following chapters will demonstrate the disintegrative nature of Arab identity and its accompanying notion of Arabness. Youssef Chahine, as a marginalized Arab and film *auteur*, depicts the subaltern through marginalized Arab characters. This depiction allows marginalization to surface into the Arab reality on the screen, providing an incoherence of perceived and homogeneously constitutive Arabness. Moreover, the experience is completely Egyptian which contrasts its "foreignness" with 'other' marginalized viewers outside of Egypt. In the case of Dureid Lahham, the very nature of Arabness is critiqued, ironically in an attempt to call for that very unity whose failures lie in an Arab reality that lacks political ethics and is suffused with prevalent political immorality. The films of both artists in total span the period following the Arab 1967 defeat until a number of years before the event of the Gulf War crisis in 1990. During this period and as disillusionment soared, renunciation of Arabist national ideology simmered, and eventually Arab nationalistic sentiments became consumed as mere recycled political rhetoric.

Chapter 4

The Subaltern Speaks in Youssef Chahine's Trilogy

To what extent did the Arab Self as a colonizing power with internal colonizing effects succeed in silencing its subaltern groups? And to what extent was cinema as a cultural industry able to sustain this colonizing effect? Are marginalized Arabs truly silenced victims, incapable of responding back or “speaking”? These are questions that require consideration in examining the films of Youssef Chahine. The issue of the subaltern as a subject with or without agency to “speak” has been controversial: Benita Parry and Gayatri Spivak respectively represent two differing views (Lomba, 1998). While the context of this issue is a post-colonial one in terms of Western colonization of Third World subaltern subjects, its relevance bears on the “internal cultural colonialism” mentioned previously that takes place in Arab national cinema. The consciousness of Arab audiences is colonized by a view of Arabness that is constructed according to and aligned with Arab-Muslim cultural values, creating a paradoxical “doubleness” of Arab living on and off the screen.

Youssef Chahine's autobiographical trilogy strategically counters this trend in mainstream Egyptian cinema. However, one cannot claim that the marginalized characters in his three films, *Alexandria Why?* (1978), *An Egyptian Story* (1982), and *Alexandria Again and Forever* (1990) serve to represent their respective subaltern groups to which they belong. Instead, Chahine merely "speaks" from an individual position as a subaltern. Born in 1926, Youssef Chahine was brought up as a Christian and was educated in a religious school followed by an education in the prestigious Victoria School in Alexandria where English was the language of instruction. The cosmopolitanism he experienced in his native city is concomitant with a local patriotism; "there is no evidence that Chahine's Christian upbringing or English-language education made him feel any less of an Egyptian" (Armes, 1987, pp. 243-244). The purpose of employing and examining the concept of the subaltern in its basic sense in Chahine's trilogy hence serves primarily in this chapter to further exemplify the anti-essentialist notion of Arabness and to demonstrate the problematic nature of Arab identity. Moreover, the 'doubleness' and layered levels according to which Arab identity is constructed and performed will be indicated.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of the subaltern means those "of inferior rank"; "those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes" (Aschcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 215). Childs &

Williams (1997) add that the subaltern is “‘the particular’ in distinction from the universal in logic” (p. 161). The “logic” of colonial struggle that provides the setting for *Alexandria Why?* (1978) does not normally encompass subaltern histories, individual or otherwise, as participants in historical evolutions of identity. However, in *Alexandria Why?* (1978), Youssef Chahine brings forth the subaltern – marginalized groups in Egyptian society – into the foreground. This approach can perhaps be considered a rare one, not only because the movie is constituted as the first of a trilogy whose autobiographical approach is innovative and uncommon in Arabic genres of film, but also because the inter-personal ‘culture’ of the film goes against the predominant Arab-Muslim one. The culture in the film depicts and emphasizes more specifically an Egyptian heterogeneous society through characteristically marginalized groups in Egypt and the Arab world.

While subaltern characterization fragments Egyptian and Arab identity respectively, the circumstances of the events that these characters experience on the other hand are common to all people in Egyptian society; and it is these circumstances that create a bond amongst its members. However, these colonial circumstances are deliberately and particularly Egyptian, not only in terms of demographics but also in the socio-economic and political circumstances that were foreign outside Egypt. For example, the British colonial experience is not

equivalent to the French one. In this sense, some Arab audiences may fail to directly identify with the particularity of the circumstances. Still on a higher level, even though Arab countries have been colonized by different European powers, most of these countries do share the resentment of European colonization and experience of anti-colonial struggle. The very experience of the subaltern minority is alien to an Arab majority inside and outside Egypt, although Egyptians can empathize, if not sympathize, with this experience since historical circumstances predicating the events affected all strata of Egyptian society.

Youssef Chahine in *Alexandria Why?* (1978) invites these two levels of identification, the Arab and the specific Egyptian ones, in the context of a young teenager, Yahya, whose passion for acting and the movies motivates his desire to study cinema at Pasadena in California. The (post-) colonial theme of the film attributed to the setting of the film encourages this “doubleness” in identification. The post-colonial tone of the film is undeniable as the setting of the plot revolves around the German invasion of British-occupied Alexandria in 1942. Under these conditions, Egyptian resentment towards the British is evident as well as anti-colonial sentiments through the characterization of the film. It is not surprising to note that Egyptians in the wake of the German threat to invade Alexandria aspire for liberation from British occupation.

At the outset of the movie, Chahine begins by juxtaposing 1940s newsreel footage of Hitler and Germany during World War II beside images of Alexandria, in order to foreshadow the relation of these seemingly unrelated locations whose implication is the impending danger of German invasion. He continues to invoke those "real-life" images and World War II footage throughout the film in order to emphasize the events in the film as realistic and to exhibit the effects of the war on Egypt. In this way, and along with evoking realism in film, he situates the story line carefully along a European and Euro-colonial narrative. In line with the ongoings of World War II and shots of Germany and Hitler, Chahine seems to involve the Egyptian reality in the global narrative of events as well as pressing Egyptian historical consciousness "in-between" a European and an Arab one. Indeed, European history, by reason of occupation, becomes Egyptian history, albeit a colonial history. The history that Chahine attempts to underscore then becomes a subaltern Arab one that counters the European colonizing one. At the same time, it is specifically an Egyptian one that alienates other Arab histories as well as the histories of Egyptian minorities as they uniquely experienced these historical events.

Nonetheless, colonial attitudes of superiority provide a reason for Arab identification through a shared colonial resentment. In the beginning of the film, Yahya the protagonist – playing the role of Chahine – encounters a faceless Australian soldier, a metonym of the West, when he visits the cinema with his friends; the soldier is heard saying "dirty 'gypos", a commonly prevalent righteous colonial attitude. It is upon Yahya's facing this character that the camera angle epitomizes the colonial relationship with the colonized Arab. The camera captures from above the image of a faceless soldier turned away from the camera. The camera angle portrays his enormous height and physique against a frighteningly overwhelmed miniature Yahya. This superiority, accentuated by the angle of the camera becomes the experience identified by most, if not all, colonized peoples, and therefore, the identity of the colonial ceases to matter, for his identifiable superiority and self-righteous attitude is sufficient. In this sense, the faceless mighty character of the Australian soldier becomes "every colonial".

The character of the Australian soldier is intriguing. By rendering this character as Australian, Chahine extends colonial prowess not solely to European colonial powers but to categorize this relationship of superiority with the whole West. It is interesting to note that Arab audiences are driven, through the character of the soldier, to regard Australia, arguably a post-colonial nation, as an agent of colonialism. In

addition, the power of the United States during this period is not left unremarked. A conversation between two Egyptian nationalist soldiers acknowledges the power that the United States exerts in the world. Even the beginnings of Hollywood's influence is traced through the very American musical that they were watching at the theater and whose influence is apparent on the youthful Yahya. This way, Chahine paints an image of a powerful West that is resented by the colonized; most evident are the expressions made by anti-colonial nationalists who reveal their desire to see "them" – that is colonials – humiliated at the hands of German troops.

Chahine's presentation of (Arab) Egyptian minorities can be regarded as an interpretation of a heterogeneous Arabness, and his employment of the subaltern is one that reflects dominant Arab values. This tendency highlights the presentation of the subaltern as part of an essentialist Arab identity working against the colonialism of an essentialist West that would historically be brought to an end by an Arabist-type regime. In any case, Chahine works patriotism and nationalism with morality, one that stems from a peripheral position, that of Yahya's Christian family. The character of Ibrahim, a Jewish Egyptian, is furthermore depicted as a patriotic Egyptian who works for nationalistic causes and who does not betray Egypt. Sarah – Ibrahim's lover – and her family depart from Alexandria, in fear of the impending

German invasion. Upon their departure, a short moving monologue to his daughter expresses her father's sentiments and attachment to Alexandria which he equates to his life: an investment of memories and thoughts, a childhood, ancestry, and his mother's resting place. He claims to be leaving to become a wanderer in other countries, an interesting comment that characterizes a diasporic existence only upon his involuntary departure from Alexandria, a city he considers his home, and not as a Jew living in the city.

Sarah's character is crucial in detecting the intricate process of Arab identification in the film. Her character in the film implores the audience for sympathy and identification with her loyal sentiments and struggle for Egypt and Egyptian national causes. By portraying her dismay at the happenings in the newly founded state of Israel where her family has finally taken up residence, Chahine "leaves the condemnation of Zionism to a Jew" (Armes, 1987, p. 251). Reflecting on her father and brother, whose mind and heart respectively have been taken over by Zionists, Sarah helplessly and distressingly provides Arab audiences with an Israeli Other, an evil that takes hold of their (Arab) people who are disrobed permanently of Arabness and clothed with a fabricated identity. Chahine continues to construct those same binaries of identification in *An Egyptian Story* (1982) in which Yahya remarks on the control exerted in the media by the Jews in the United States after his frustrations over

recognition and validation as an Arab director in the United States.

When reminded of his sadness when the Jews departed from Alexandria, Yahya carefully qualifies his statement by referring to Zionists. Hence, in this way, the Other becomes Israel and Zionism and not *necessarily* the Jew, with whom Arab audiences are driven to sympathize as an "us".

Through the character of Sarah, Chahine briefly addresses the question of Palestine. Her condemnation thus becomes the basis of a critique of the foundation of an Israeli state. By tapping into the issue of Palestine, the film stretches out to include the identification of other Arab nations. Palestine represents the culmination of colonialism whose experience, in principle, has been shared by all Arabs. In tandem with an outstretched hand of Arab brotherhood, Palestine becomes an issue of concern for all. It is through this bond that Arabs outside Egypt are involved. In addition, Egyptian history thus becomes their (other Arabs') history, as its consequences affect the individual histories of other Arab nations, from the Arab-Israeli wars that followed, to the unsuccessful creation of the United Arab Republic.

Post-coloniality seemingly evolves in *An Egyptian Story* (1982) – from an historical narrative evident in the first film, into a personal one. The film explores the struggle of Yahya, now an aspiring director, for success on the international scene, and his internal struggle is revealed

on the operating table during his by-pass surgery. Chahine admits the viewer into the surreal reality of a courtroom where Yahya, the child, is the defendant in the crime of killing himself, apparently from within. Upon facing the charges, the child relentlessly proclaims that he is killing himself because he – the adult Yahya – has been killing him – the child – for fifty years. The “doubleness” of identification is evident in Chahine’s second movie in which he transports the audience into unrealistic domains of fantasy where he confronts the child in him.

Roy Armes (1987) notes Chahine’s “interest in the psychology of the individual, and madness and schizophrenia are a constant feature of his work” (p. 245). In the second film, Yahya becomes a representative of the schizophrenic Arab Self that is ailed with fragmentation as an adult and whose childhood symbolizes embryonic pan-Arabness choked with pain and sorrow. Yahya the adult is still the child, just as Arabism continues to be this infantile project that grew up to the pains and sorrows of the circumstances to which it has been subjected; a parallel is drawn to the protagonist’s pains to which he has been subjected since childhood. Chahine directly positions this Self in a post-colonial historical narrative by invoking a flashback into the colonial times of *Alexandria Why?* (1978) when “the whole country was being raped”. In doing so, Chahine continues to resort to the juxtaposing of newsreel footage with the events in the movie. He also employs this intercutting

technique throughout the second film in which he utilizes archival footage from the Cannes festival as well as shots from his earlier films.

Moreover, *An Egyptian Story* (1982) contains two important scenes in which Chahine successfully renders Arab identification by remarking on it. In the waiting room at the doctor's office in London, Yahya identifies with a youth from the Gulf distinguished by his wardrobe commonly worn in the Gulf region. The child expresses his recognition of Yahya through his movie, *Bab el-Hadeed/Cairo: Central Station* (1958) one of Chahine's earliest movies. This recognition expresses affiliation and identification with other Arabs, but also on a grander level establishes the prevalence of Egyptian film, and its relation to other audiences outside Egypt; possibly this relationship can even be attributed to the interchangeable consideration of Arab and Egyptian national cinema as one.

The health conditions faced by both Arab characters, Yahya and the youth from the Gulf, are a bond that places both characters in the same predicament; it is as if Chahine is trying to symbolically exhibit to his audience the ailments that Arabs face and experience in their post-colonial circumstances. Yahya's encouraging statement to the child, "Don't be afraid; we are the courageous ones!", seems to go hand in hand with Arab political rhetoric that uses Arab heroism to promote

cooperative inter-Arab initiatives in the context of a much feared Other (the West, and imperialism). And it is in this scene that Yahya mentions his concern of offending a certain Dr. Ross, who apparently was replaced by an Egyptian physician. Yahya expresses a preference for an Egyptian doctor, a specificity that identifies the Egyptian allegiance of Yahya. Yet this allegiance allows for the mobilization of Arab sympathies outside of Egypt. The audience, who identifies with the Arabness of Yahya, regards its position against the same Western “other” character of the doctor.

In another similar instance, Yahya’s nephew speaks of the possibility that the magnitude of Yahya’s travesty might have been blown out of proportion. Yahya, in turn, in an agitated and dismissive response claims that it seems impossible that his long-term friend of twenty-five years, Kamal and the doctor, Magdi, by virtue of his “Egyptianness”, would conspire on him in such a way. The invitation of such discourse that dismisses the Egyptian as a conspirator further emphasizes this technique for identification. Conspirators are “others”, like the West, who have historically conspired against Arab national objectives, and colonialism is not a distant example in the Arab psyche. Hence, at the same time that Chahine distinctly refers to “the Egyptian” as a specific quality alienating “other” Arabs, he also allows for Arab identification to take place through the resonance of familiar discourse and language that he employs.

The second scene in the film enacts a conversation with Yahya's Scottish driver during which two subalterns speak with each other. Prior to the conversation as they are being served their food and drinks, Yahya deliberately exchanges a pint of beer with juice which appears to have been placed by mistake in front of the two characters. By doing so, Chahine seems to be complying with the norm of Arab-Muslim culture's condemnation of alcoholic consumption, a strategy to identify and assert the Arabness of Yahya. This assertion of Arabness however necessarily means a compliance with a mainstream form of Arabness that imposes dominant Arab/Islamic cultural values. During this conversation, Yahya appears to symbolize the Arab Self in its failed endeavors of actualizing as a "being". Yahya bemoans his disappointment in his unsuccessful quest and desire to search for decency. He later confirms this value when he indignantly refuses to make entertaining films that "sell dreams like the Americans" and make one forgetful of troubles that maintain a tight grip on people. Indeed, Arabist ideology, in spite of its noble intentions, has ironically sold dreams, a practice that reflects its failures of implementation.

Furthermore, Yahya contemplates his multiple roles as an artist, ones of which the driver reminds him: a director, writer, actor, among others. For Yahya, being a star is equated to a commodity, a consumer

item to be purchased, used, and discarded, something that he has constantly hoped to avoid. This analogy parallels the circulation of Arabism, a project that ideologically attempts to overcome the very political successes that, like Yahya, it has aspired to, yet failed to achieve. In another scene, during the "imaginary" court proceedings, a judge, who is enraged when the authority of the state is questioned, represents the state or "nation". When responding to this questioning, he emphatically engages in recycled Arab political rhetoric that is in turn mechanically received with blind applause by its consumers. Yahya the "star" becomes the same as Arabness –represented by a foolish judge – the "star": both are consumed commodities.

Yahya admits a personal discovery: he does not like himself. After fifty years, Yahya claims that, he among others, remains infantile. This infantilism is apparent in the child trapped within him, blocking his Self from life. Since the discovery of his faltering health condition, Yahya feels that he has grown thirty years; this aging of the Self implies its approach to death. And with this aging, he feels he has wasted time; "and time wastes me"; the driver quotes from Hamlet, establishing a common link between the three movies. In this way, these two subalterns appear to be positioned on the margin of mutual understanding. The marginalized Arab, as well as any Arab, has been

wasting time with an infantile ideology that has been growing for approximately fifty years, only to remain embryonic.

Chahine refuses to relent his subalternity as oppositional to the mainstream. When Yahya prepares for his operation, the nurse asks for his religion as part of a normal procedure taken in case of death, for funeral purposes. Taken aback and after his initial objections to the question's relevance, Yahya responds: "supposedly Catholic" – perhaps better interpreted as "supposedly subaltern". As the anesthetic is administered, the other nurse injecting the anesthetic inquires about Yahya's name. Yahya, claiming his unnoted identity, is requested to repeat his name to the nurse, despite the nurse's knowledge of Yahya. The Arab Self embodied in the character of Yahya is therefore confronted with a Western knowledge of the Arab whose attempts at self-expression becomes unintelligible with the numbness and eventual slumber of the Arab Self beckoned by the anesthetic. At the beginning of the operation, the viewer is drawn towards a camera that is linked to a monitor viewed by medical students. It appears that the Arab Self is placed onto the operating table to be examined and evaluated through Yahya's life. In the face of this knowledge, the subaltern Arab becomes any Arab in his/her experience.

The Arab experience, though, is fragmented, since the infant Arab Self has been scarred by its guardians, the ones that should have nurtured rather than stifled it. The teacher represents those guardians that educate their students about “ethics and morals” as the teacher himself proclaims. In this context, Yahya’s elementary teacher is addressed as an accomplice to the pains and humiliation, represented in the slap on Yahya’s face, carried by the child. The teacher, who appears like Hitler, is symbolic of a dictator, and he admits the failure of his “dictatorship”. The teacher adds that such failure is not uncommon to dictators like Hitler. Likewise, the dictatorial guardianship of Arabism can be said to have failed the Arab Self since its infancy. This failure is noticeable in the trend of Arabic films that emerged to critique state paternalism since the Nasserite regime (Shafik, 1998; Abu Shadi, 1996). The failure is embodied in a pained Yahya, a pained Arab Self, whose growth has been stalled. As he approaches his death, he realizes that his competency as an adult and his consciousness have been stagnant at childhood, like the embryonic sense of pan-Arabness. When Yahya appears as his own lawyer jumping to his own defense, a struggle appears again within the Self, in which it does not want to justify its position and struggles. Yahya, the lawyer, seems to perceive a lack of reason or purpose, as he experiences a sense of helplessness; these sentiments prevail in the Arab world today.

Manifestations of Arab fragmentation occur in another instance through Yahya's alienation from the political circumstances and experience of anti-colonial struggle in Algeria when making *Jamila/Jamila al-jazairiyya* (1958), a film depicting Algerian anti-colonial struggle. Ironically, at the Moscow film festival, Chahine is hailed as a contributor to the advancement and high esteem of Arabs despite his distance from the occurrences of another Arab experience to which he relates in this movie. In an attempt to overcome this ignorance, Yahya travels to Algeria when Arab identification is restored. During his visit, Farid Atrash and Um Kulthum albums are given as gifts, representing recognizably Arab icons of music with whom Arabs commonly identify. Towards the end of the film, an Um Kulthum concert hosts all strata of Egyptian society, in essence "the people", who identify with her enchanting voice. This identification is not solely characteristic in Egypt but all over the Arab world; "the people" thence become all Arabs.

Yahya allegedly claims that those people close to him have made him a legend. And if the Arab Self has been rendered a legend, a thing of the past, then it is not allowed to be in the present. The conclusion of the film witnesses the abandonment of the child in favor of Yahya the adult. Yahya the child is regarded as the past, but Yahya the adult is the grown one that has struggled and one with whom all is familiar. Has the Arab, a struggling and aging Self, captive in its infancy, given way to the

specific Arab whose acquaintance is with the familiar experiences of the direct and immediate? As Yahya's life is spared, the two selves reconcile back into one entity overcoming the schizophrenia. "I am not alone...anymore" is Yahya's conclusive statement. However, is this implied unity an implied understanding of selves, or reconciliation along separately distinct Arab paths? Ambivalence underlies the response to this question.

An examination of Chahine's final film in the trilogy does not supply a concrete answer and instead merely implies some indications based on another personal narrative. In *Alexandria Now and Forever* (1990), and contrary to the previous two films in the trilogy, Chahine strays away from any direct post-colonial experiences and focuses on the specificity of the Egyptian film artist's struggle in a personal narrative that obsesses with Amr, his leading actor, and a desired production of Hamlet. Hamlet, throughout the three movies and their respective contexts, remains a prominent reference point. It is the thread that weaves the three movies together. His failure in ever actualizing his dream of a Hamlet production is not unlike the failed dreams of the pan-Arab project, ones that seemed promising at the dawn of independence.

Yahya, played by Chahine, neglects people's advice – including his wife – to consider other productions and forgetting Amr. Those people

are aware of the toll that this obsession has taken upon the older director and gear him towards productions that speak of Alexander the Great or Cleopatra. Chahine's subaltern position in the final film of the trilogy continues to affirm his hybrid identity. Professing to speak a half-dozen languages, Yahya relates in one instance his ethnic background that is the basis of his identity. Furthermore, the subalternity of his personal narrative is narrated in the context of ancient Egyptian history, and in such a way, historical narrative becomes a setting for a personal one, a technique that, although differently employed, is evident in the films of his trilogy. The film includes caricature insertions of musicals that incorporate themes from Alexandria's Pharoanic and Roman history, ones that are not embraced by the dominant view of Arab history adopted in the construction of Arab identity. It is apparent in *Alexandria Now and Forever* (1990) that history becomes very specific, very Alexandrian. By incorporating such specificity historical narratives, historical identification becomes particularly relevant to Egypt and even more specifically to Alexandria.

Moreover, the hunger strike organized by the young actors in order to amend a law in the union represents specific concerns of the Egyptian actor. Yahya, who continues to represent the Arab Self, seems adamant in involving the "new" post-Nasserite generation with his obsession: Hamlet. The new generation of actors seems to have been the product of

a failed (pan-Arab) project, of Hamlet. In an effort to survive on commercial movies, Amr ignores Yahya's pleas for the former's involvement with his project. Amr represents Yahya's "other", his double. In reflecting on Amr's impact on him, Yahya claims that upon witnessing Amr playing his role, the role of Hamlet, their identities are indiscernible: "I did not know who was I and who was he." Amr becomes Yahya's "other" whom the latter attempts to unite with him in his production of Hamlet, and upon employing the Roman themes, indeed Amr becomes Alexander the Great, the specific. In the third film, Chahine seems to have not resolved his schizophrenia which is not internal anymore, but felt through an external Self that nonetheless remains part of himself. Although Chahine is not alone as Yahya professes in *An Egyptian Story* (1982), he is still not at peace with himself, with his identity that has seemingly developed an Egyptian particularity.

The subaltern, represented primarily in the character of Yahya, or Youssef Chahine, as well as the marginalized characters depicted in these films, is not in fact silent. However, one must be careful when interpreting these instances of "speech". What do we mean by "speaking"? Do we mean resisting or simply amplifying the voice of the subaltern? Because a study of Chahine's trilogy only allows an individual, Youssef Chahine, to be heard through an autobiographical

discursivity of an Arab person and film *auteur*, he cannot serve to represent a subaltern group. Admittedly, Youssef Chahine always claimed that his work is intended for the person on the street (Moharram, 2000), and if this is so, then it cannot be considered solely a marginal voice. In fact, the subaltern in Chahine's trilogy "speaks" to concede with dominant Egyptian/Arab values, in order to relate to the person on the street; it "speaks" to confirm hegemony. In asserting his Arabness, Chahine depicts his protagonist as a subscriber to mainstream Arab-Muslim values; the particularity or difference of the subaltern experience is not exposed or discussed. In fact, the subaltern, embodied in the protagonist, continually asserts his involvement in the causes and issues of Arab colonial struggle and the Arab mainstream, and he consents to belong.

Chahine does not "speak" from his subaltern position in resistance; rather, his trilogy can at least be considered a calling for a valorization of the subaltern experience – his experience – as valuable and important to the mainstream, if it is not even the mainstream. This call is not surprising as one spurring from his belief in a tolerant society evidently derived from his experience growing up in a characteristically cosmopolitan Alexandria. Chahine's act of "speaking" also cannot be considered to represent a subaltern group that as an identity cannot be theoretically constitutive, and thus is fragmented as well. "Since the

history of the ruling classes is realized in the state, history being the history of states and dominant groups" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 215), the subaltern as a notion would be attributed with essentialist definitions in order to counter this dominance. Furthermore, in the case of the films, even other marginalized characters, such as the Jew or the Nubian, are being "spoken about" through him – through his autobiography. In other words, Chahine's "speaking" silences them. However, what the subaltern as a concept represented by characters does provide is a problematization, an incoherence in our consumption and reception of a fabricated Arabness, whose fragmentation is evident in a "doubled" construction and performance.

Chapter 5

Dureid Lahham Reports on the Nation

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (Renan, 1882/1990, p. 19)

Youssef Chahine's autobiographical approach in his trilogy is a unique one in Arabic cinema. Its innovative contribution to Arab cinema becomes a brave one that counters a legacy of Arab intellectual history that does not encourage the Self/"I" to be exposed; for this reason, autobiographies are rare in the Arabic tradition (Al-Aris, 1994). By baring the Self, through a personal narrative, Chahine warrants its vulnerability. Implying this vulnerability, Dureid Lahham exposes a fragile Arabism that constructs and represents the Self. Its fragility is represented by realistic failures that are palpable to Arab audiences, and therefore requiring immediate revisions. By using a metaphorical approach in *Borders* (1984) and *The Report* (1986), Lahham criticizes the political and socio-economic state of affairs in the Arab world. Consequently, Lahham's protagonists, embodying "every-Arab" and the Arab Self, ironically remain positioned on the margins of a dominant immediate reality. In attempting to exhibit the potential of lofty Arabist

ideals, Lahham portrays these ideals indirectly by depicting manifestations of their “other”: notions of Arab segregation and the corruption that ensues from such circumstances. Whereas Youssef Chahine presents a “double” subaltern identity in perpetual struggle within one specific society (Egyptian), Lahham generalizes the “double” layering on a national level, intra-regionally among the different Arab nations.

Based on their content, Lahham’s two films can arguably be considered representatives of an Arab national cinematic tradition despite their linguistic Syrian identification. For the most part, the films address Arabist socio-political issues that are in principle prevalent and common to most Arab countries. However, as Higson (1989) reminds us, “[h]istorical accounts of national cinemas have too often been premised on unproblematic notions of nationhood and its production. The search for a stable and coherent national identity can only be successful at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions and contradictions” (p. 43). Both films rely on metaphors and their setting is deliberately not time or place-specific, allowing for generalized interpretations of a homogeneous totality of Arabness and Arab identity.

Furthermore, a study of Dureid Lahham’s *Borders* (1984) and *The Report* (1986) reveals the subalternity of the Arab national narrative, one

that can be interpreted as a post-colonial narrative of captivity about the Arab's psyche: Arabism is represented as captor and the Arab is captive. Because Arabism assumes this ideological captivity of the Arab psyche, the personal narrative in Chahine's films, for example, is concerned with these ideological issues of Arabism, allowing a historical narrative to intertwine with the personal. Unlike Chahine, who narrates Egyptian national history through a personal narrative based on "facts", Lahham abandons the actuality of events that are time- and place-specific in favor of addressing issues from within the realm of the abstract, the realm of the imaginary Arab home. This abstraction aids his inclusive strategy. However, at the same time, the abstract reality of the Nation is undermined by the very criticisms that Lahham makes in aspiring for its salvation. In other words, by presenting the flaws of Arabness as nationally all-inclusive, Lahham recognizes a reality – although an unhappy one – that cannot be subdued. Lahham in turn does not reckon with that reality and does not justify or explain it. In this way, the abstraction of his discourse about the ultimate reality of the Nation allows for its lack of pragmatism in the context of the practical immediate, and as a result, its dismissal.

When one speaks of identity, one cannot evade the space within which an identity is located or experienced. A discussion of Arabness and Arab identity is undetachable from considerations of the Arab

Nation, the basis of pan-Arabist thought and a Nation to which all Arabs ideologically belong. It seems that the Arab Self is perpetually bound to this notion of the Nation, or *watan*, in his/her psyche. It obsesses, and indeed stresses, the Arab's consciousness and mental, political cognition. *Borders* (1984) narrates the story of Abdel-Wadud, an Arab man who is traveling across the Nation. After losing his passport between border crossings, he is unable to proceed or return from where he came. Many attempts at sneaking across the border result in failure, after which he builds a traveler's rest area along the border between Sharqistan and Gharbistan (Land to the East and Land to the West). The rest area along the border thus becomes Abdel-Wadud's new home. This national margin characterizes the "in-betweenness" of Abdel-Wadud's existence that experiences the "ambivalence" of nationhood, to use Homi Bhabha's (1994) terms. From this experience, Abdel-Wadud is forced to reconcile his impressions of the Nation based on brotherhood and the paradoxical implications of a divisive border. Abdel-Wadud's "in-betweenness" becomes the site of reconciliation that reflects his displacement within the Nation. The film thus prominently features

the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place The dialectic of place and

displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. (Ashcroft , Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989, p. 9).

In such a way, the Arab world then appears as a place, or home, that is established in a narrative of displacement to which Arabs are captive.

When considering the idea of Arabness, and in considering Arabist identification and its essentialism, the concept of the "nation" poses as another dichotomy of Arab identification evident in *Borders* (1984). This "doubleness" of identity in this context becomes manifested in the Arab belonging to the Arab Nation in constant compromise with Arab national and cultural specificity. Paradoxical perceptions of nationhood entrap the Arab between an immediate national reality and a national idea that constitutes an ultimate national reality. Performance of Arab identity mainly occurs in two different layered ways. On the one hand, a specific Arab belongs to a specific Arab country -- or arguably a nation. According to patriarchal tradition, this belonging often practically translates itself in the form of the ancestral, and in turn, country of citizenship. Hence, the European idea of nation replaced traditional ones of tribe or village (Renan, 1882/1990), a replacement that becomes intriguing when considering the Bedouin character, Sudfah.

Often, Arab specificity is problematic because the basis of identification is clouded. Is identification in general based on ancestry, ethnicity, race, culture, or any other identifying category? The sociological, empirical categorization of identity becomes a problematic issue when examining the Bedouin character of Sudfah (Arabic, meaning "coincidence"), a smuggler with whom Abdel-Wadud grows infatuated and ends up marrying. She is as an interesting character in the film who evokes the arbitrary nature of borders, implied by her name. The nomadic lifestyle of Bedouins assumes a fluidity of existence that is not marked by fixity. The border however "locates" her and "fixes" her existence around it because of her smuggling activities: a tangible source for sustenance upon which her identity is based.

On the other hand, the Arabs in general can also be perceived to belong to the ideological idea of a unified pan-Arab nation. Discourse about commonness widely circulates within the Arab world that has been perceived as a common homeland for all Arabs. A sense of Arab brotherhood has emerged to eliminate by definition any notions of "foreignness", or "otherness", in any Arab space. However, Abdel-Wadud's predicament "strips bare the official Arab rhetoric of Arab unity and shows it to be nothing but political propaganda. Each Arab country refuses to allow Abd al-Wadud to enter its territory without a passport, as if that is the only proof of his Arab identity" (Jabbour, 1996, p. 60).

Captive to these political idealisms, a festival of solidarity is organized for Abdel-Wadud when the media becomes aware of his situation. A gullible Abdel-Wadud, who believes the speeches about the artificiality of borders between Arab countries, attempts to cross over the border unsuccessfully. The end of the film captures a defiant Abdel-Wadud who crosses over the border despite the gun pointed towards him, an image that concludes the film in a freeze-frame (see also Jabbour, 1996). In the concluding scene of the film, Lahham makes a poignant statement when he releases his goats and chicken, who cross the border unimpeded, an event that materializes the cynicism exchanged with Sudfah about cattle crossing the border unimpeded in the beginning of the film upon losing their passport.

Benedict Anderson (1983) defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 15). The unique, yet inter-connected, layers of post-colonial Arab self-performance theoretically lead to the problematization of “the nation-state and its ideologies and reveals the difficulty of conceiving the nation even as an ‘imagined community’” (Mongia, 1996, p.5). While the specific Arab countries, or nations, as a *being* are theoretically imagined communities, their *practice* as arbitrarily constructed entities is concretely pragmatic. For example, one can point towards a border or a border crossing in spite of their arbitrary nature.

Practically, such examples have various tangible sociological, political and economic implications, as effectively exemplified in the case of Abdel-Wadud. Therefore, the practical implications, or effects, of this arbitrary *being*, like a border, are “real”, and the feeling of belonging to a specific country with a national cause is tangible.

The ideological construction of the pan-Arab nation on another level is impractically imaginary. Even the only attempt towards the actualization of this cause between Egypt and Syria in the late 1950s was short-lived. It is possible that the anti-Nasserite sentiments that emerged following the Nasserite regime in Egypt are the result of alienation from this double layering of Arab identification. In the case of the film, the Nation only actualizes in the resonance of words that affectively seep into the Arab's psyche. The rhetoric of such Arabness is evident in the discourse that speaks the political idealism. Such idealism is exemplified in the festival of solidarity that is held for Abdel-Wadud towards the end of the *Borders* (1984); the protagonist, Azmi Bek in *The Report* (1986) who speaks the rhetoric of Arab idealism throughout the film, culminating in his recitation of his report towards the end, is another example.

In a sense, one can argue for the perception of the different Arab nations as diasporas separated, or exiled from, an ideologically

constructed Arab Nation that perpetually seduces the Arab's psyche. Abdel-Wadud's living on the border leads to the formation, and attraction, of a diaspora of sorts. The soldiers from both Arab countries (East and West) and Sudfah, whom Abdel-Wadud later marries, become the founding members of this diaspora existing on the border. In scenes with the visitors of the rest area, the unavoidable use of foreign languages, namely English and French, suggests its attraction to members of diasporas of the Nation living abroad. These expatriates, like Abdel-Wadud, appear alienated from the Nation and so release their frustration in the rest area, this comfortable area "in-between" and the diaspora *within* the Arab Home. The example of the expatriates residing in Kenya who visit the rest area is perhaps most notable. In Kenya, they are already members of an Arab diaspora outside the homeland, yet upon their visit to the Nation, they realize their lack of belonging and perceive their comfort in the transitional diaspora of the resting area. The husband, frustrated by procedures on the border, vows never to visit the Nation again. In pointing out the numerous stamps on his passport, he perceives them metaphorically forming the face of a gypsy, a figure through which the stamps of different Arab nations can be perceived as a sign of no belonging. As his humorous wife admires the beautiful colors of the stamps, she indirectly represents her admiration for the beauty of the Nation, a beauty we are reminded is captive within these stamps.

This condition is influenced by the failure of implementing Arab idealism, and the failure is explicitly, though rhetorically, deemed as a feature of imperialism during the speeches presented by the representatives of the different Arab countries, during the solidarity festival at the end of the *Borders* (1984). Nonetheless, this diasporic metaphor currently seems to fall short in aptly describing the position or location of Arab nations in relation to the Nation. The recent transformations in the Middle East seem to have driven Arabs away from pan-Arabist ideals. Pan-Arabism especially began to feel its paralysis as a movement with the advent of the Gulf War that divided Arabs into factions. Arab nations, in asserting their national identities, therefore abandon and fortify their sovereignty and borders as they prepare for such transformations. The “diasporas” of Arab nations form a centered notion of nationhood detached from the ideological Nation that encompasses Bhabha’s (1994) idea of “the many as one”, an idea that the border in the film negates as a metaphor for social incohesion.

The Arab remains subjected to the two layers of identification as the “I” is split into two constituent parts that comprise an “us” and a “them” simultaneously. This Arab “I” inhabits a unified Arab nation that only exists in the imaginary mind of all Arabs who subscribe to pan-Arabist ideology. The vacillation occurring between the two layers of identification provokes this ‘splitting’ of the national subject and the

national discourse ambivalently shifts its position of enunciation (Bhabha, 1994). Furthermore, the border delineates where the split happens and where it happens at the moment of crossing. The split implies a reality based on an Arab specificity that becomes “foreign” in an(other) Arab nation or country. This national difference is constantly emphasized in *Borders* (1984) by locating and referring to the border, a line that is often crossed to avoid the soldiers of either hypothetical Arab countries of Sharqistan or Gharbistan. While the space of the Nation can be artificially split with tangible repercussions, the psyche of the Arab Self is unable to do so. In turn, the Self embodies the ironies and paradoxes of identity because identification is unable to fulfill a clearly demarcated and constitutive role, and therefore remains problematic.

Lahham exhibits the faults of Arab nations on a number of occasions throughout the film. From bureaucratic inefficiency on the border to conversations in the rest area that symbolically bemoan the state of Arab affairs, Lahham taps into these issues on a subsidiary level in *Borders* (1984). Perhaps one of the most resonant in viewers' minds is the brief conversation that Abdel-Wadud conducts with a traveler who requests newspapers. Abdel-Wadud responds by offering tomorrow's issue of *The Times* and claims that he has last year's issues of Arabic newspapers; and today's issues are “like always”. In other words, nothing has changed and this stagnation is unsettling. This interchange

of dialogue is crucial as it epitomizes the Arab political experience and its socio-economic implications in the Arab's unsettled existence. Not until his second film, *The Report* (1986) does Lahham elaborate on the misfortunes of the Arab Nation. *The Report* (1986) approaches and examines the corruption and inefficiencies of the Arab Nation through its protagonist, Azmi Bek, a legal consultant who offers constant commentary and critique of affairs through the proposals and projects that require his approval. After he resigns from his position in protest of the intense pressure to approve a project he previously rejected, he is surprised to realize that his resignation would be eagerly accepted. As Diana Jabbour (1996) explains, "Azmi Bek's resignation from the job does not mean his resignation from the interests of the homeland, so he forms a work team with his wife, his daughter, and his former secretary to investigate the ills of society, which he then writes up in a huge report" (p. 60).

In *The Report* (1986), Arab identification occurs on a number of occasions: singing of the Egyptian national anthem; references to Lebanon and Israeli occupation of South Lebanon; as well as the issue of Palestine. The issue of Lebanon, like Palestine, becomes an Arab issue in the face of an invasive Israeli "Other". Common socio-economic problems linked to a post-colonial condition furthermore are an identifying factor for Arab countries. The most notable is Lahham's

commentary on the brain drain suffered in the Arab world to the West, a trend that is hardly felt by the majority, if not all Arab nations. When collecting information for his report, one instance at the airport features Azmi Bek and his secretary, Reema, interrogating travelers about the reasons for their departure. Destinations like France and the United States reflect the post-coloniality of the film's circumstances. While such instances of identification allow for a consolidation of a sympathizing Arab audience from all over the Arab world, the specific reference of France as a destination cannot be overlooked in light of the colonial relationship between Syria and France. Even though this colonial relationship resonates with North African audiences, the particularity of the reference is specifically understood as a Syrian bias in experience in the Syrian film; this particularity as well as the unavoidably Syrian dialect spoken in the dialogue.

The concern over language adopted by Lahham's character, Azmi Bek, is a crucial one. Often questioning the meaning and grammar of the dialogue with other characters, Azmi Bek often reverts to the use of standard Arabic over colloquial terminology. On a number of occasions, he employs a dictionary to correct word usage and frowns upon ignorance of proper language use and/or reliance on colloquial Arabic for expression. Loomba (1998) notes Gayatri Spivak's warning against "a nostalgia for lost origins", one that is evident in Azmi Bek's constant

reference to historical Arabic literary figures and somewhat obsessive engagement with Arab history. If pre-colonial cultures are not easily recoverable because they have not been left intact since colonization, then Azmi Bek seems unaware of the peculiarities of his immediate reality, as he attempts to “recover” what Arab culture seems to have lost. Besides employing a Syrian dialect in communicating the dialogue, the dialect’s incorporation of French terms (e.g. in greetings) is unnoticed or slips without commentary. Therefore, at least linguistically, Lahham seems to discursively constitute the subject of his characters as recognizably Syrian in the dialogue. By the same token however, Azmi Bek’s use of quotes and references from Arab historical thinkers and intellectuals cannot be ignored as a factor of common Arab identification which language alone can historically suggest; a notion that Benedict Anderson (1983) terms “unisance”.

Characteristically, Azmi Bek also experiences his reality in the glory and the values of the past in such a way that explains his apparent unawareness of the present. In the beginning of the film, he is so focused on his work that he does not notice people greeting him in the morning or that he has forgotten to wear his socks for work. In a conversation between his wife and secretary, they amusingly dismiss his oblivion and recall the day he arrived at work in his pajamas in '67. An important reference with which many Arabs identify becomes metaphoric

for Arab slumber embodied in the conscientious “every-Arab” character of Azmi Bek. Another instance exemplifies the magnitude of this distance from his immediate circumstances when his wife and daughter place a file containing a marriage proposal for his daughter, in attempt to acquire his attention.

In the aftermath of the resignation, the report becomes a means of salvation for the characters in which all their pains and grievances are addressed. And through the characters, the report also becomes the salvation for the Nation; the report outlines its faults and corruption, the cause of its weaknesses and vulnerability. The report moreover is a statement of the need for resuscitating the ideological project of the Arab Nation that only actualizes on the lines of paper and words that plead for the maintenance of the notion towards viability. It is notable that the people striving to create this report – his wife, daughter, and secretary – who have and resume the will to maintain the Nation’s objectives become a minority; along with the silenced ones that do not put their beliefs to practice, like the officer at the police station. Enacted by this minority of people, Lahham inserts celebratory and heroic scenarios of liberation from the evils of corrupt and immoral Arabness juxtaposed beside scenes of him on his way to meet the officials to present his report. Among these scenes is a depiction of the pan-Arab minority of characters heading towards Palestine, an issue that is raised in both Chahine and

Lahham's films. Palestine once again becomes the common identifying link between Arabs. However, in preparation for the report's presentation to the officials, Lahham's recitation of the report from memory to an elevated empty chair of authority foreshadows the failure of his endeavor: his speech is silent even as it is recited.

Lahham, in the conclusion of his second film, links his message to the first one. He once again portrays two hypothetical Arab rivals, in this case teams, the one of the West and the one of the East, playing against each other in the soccer game that high-ranking officials are attending. As soccer teams, Lahham represents Arab countries opposing each other in rivalry, not imposed by a border, but a soccer game that concludes with the fighting of both team members. The impact of the film's conclusive message is powerful. Lahham, caught in the midst of a fight between the two teams, is stomped under the feet of the team members and is eventually left lying there on the field immobilized and surrounded by the scattered pages of his report. Even as an idea, the hope for the Nation set out on paper outlining its ills for recovery evaporates into thin air. The pages of the report are scattered across the soccer field to the wind, carrying the pages of unfulfilled promises; in turn, the Nation metaphorically is "gone with the wind."

The Report (1986) is a critique of the consequences of immediate personal gains by hailing the praises of a better reality under Arabist inclinations, if not manifestations. Even as a recognizably noble ideal, pan-Arabism's unobtainable reality allows its dismissal; yet at the same time, it becomes a manipulated tool for espousing autocratic political actions. In any case, Abdel-Wadud and Azmi Bek are both captives to the nostalgic fantasy of historical Arab glory. Abdel-Wadud is influenced by the political rhetoric of Arabism derived from such historicism, and Azmi Bek feeds from the Arab cultural heritage of the past. Both are mentally captive to an imaginary nation in the mind, whose basis is an ethical morality of Arab values. Their "bondage" to historicism therefore marginalizes them on a border or in society respectively; therefore, Arabism, once a discourse of a center, becomes marginalizing in the context of centered or self-centering nations.

In both films, the nation "comes into being" discursively on the screen, allowing its 'fixation' at least as a notion in the Arab's consciousness. Bhabha (1994) writes: "The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse – the agency of a people – is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative" (p. 148). The ideological Arab

Nation, like any nation, is necessarily liminal even as a pedagogically discursive and narrative notion, and as such, cannot impose a transcendent authority. Layered identification in the Arab world indicates “the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of ‘doubleness’ in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centered causal logic” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 141). The temporality “written” in the films exposes their characters living the locality of culture, which, according to Bhabha (1994), is more around temporality than about historicity.

Can one then presume that the Arab, his/her psyche, is perpetually hostage to Arabism? If Azmi Bek’s character is part of an apparently Arabist minority in society, then has the mainstream become the subaltern? Has the Arab’s awareness succumbed to the specificities of an immediate reality? Or was the regard of Arabism as a mainstream nothing but a façade? Fernando Coronil (1999) suggests that subalternity

is a relational and a relative concept; there are times and places where subjects appear on the social stage as subaltern actors, just as there are times or places in which they play dominant roles. Moreover, at any given time or place, an actor may be subaltern in

relation to another, yet dominant in relation to a third. And, of course, there are contexts in which these categories may simply not be relevant. Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations. Subalternity defines not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being. Yet because enduring subjection has the effect of fixing subjects into limited positions, a relational conception of the subaltern requires a double vision that recognizes at one level a common ground among diverse forms of subjection and, at another, the intractable identity of subjects formed within uniquely constraining social worlds. (p. 44)

Lahham's characters in both films, Abdel Wadud and Azmi Bek, become relationally subjected to subalternity. With this subjection, a revision of Arabism does not necessarily suggest a rethinking of homogeneous Arab affiliation; rather, a consideration of the failure can be interpreted as an emphasis of the simultaneous carving of separate national paths while Arabism is discarded. Lahham does not apparently consider this implication, and his conclusion (resolution?) in *Borders* (1984) is an explicit defiance of the border: Abdel-Wadud trespasses the border with his back towards a soldier's pointed gun. The option of fragmentation of Arabness as a conclusion becomes an unintentionally valid one that an examination of his films uncovers. If Arabness is doomed to fail, focus and emphasis could very well be based on the specific concerns of an

immediate reality and not a fantasy of Arabism. Renan (1882/1990) writes that the "nations are not something eternal. They had their beginnings and they will end" (p. 20). The Arab Nation has never actualized, except in the consciousness of many Arabs; however, even in their minds, the notion is heading towards a gradual painful death.

Chapter 6

Conclusions: Exile from within the Homeland

...it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home
albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.
(Rushdie, 1992, p. 9)

...the idea of home appears locked within a fundamental
ambivalence: "home" – place or desire? (Mufti & Shohat,
1997, p. 1)

Post-colonial theory allows us a peculiar lens that challenges the conventional linearity of the spectrum along which identities and their "others" are perceived. The rigidity of linearity flexes vertically into wider layered identity formations; but even such a grid-like spectrum can come short in monitoring Arab identity formations in light of the complexities of the evident concentric ways by which this identity is formed. The linear binary method of representation along which identities are defined according to polarities is overly simplistic for the analysis of identities and identity construction. Instead, it is perhaps more suitable to regard identities in terms of concentric relations; that is the circular overlapping and consumption of multiple identities. Nonetheless, the most precise conclusion that can be made is that identity is problematic; and Arab identity is one such identity.

When the subaltern speaks only to position itself in the mainstream and for mainstream Arabism to be rendered a silenced subaltern, as exemplified in Youssef Chahine and Dureid Lahham respectively, one can find it difficult to view Arab cultural identity from a constitutive, "naturalistic" approach. As Chahine's trilogy has shown, even when peripheral minorities write their own historical experiences of the "locality" of their culture, they do so in an "autoethnographic" way, as Mary Pratt (1992) terms it. In other words, such "local" nationalistic experiences are expressed in terms that engage with dominant Arabism's own terms. Furthermore, Lahham's criticisms emphasize the failure of the Nation that lacks the solid will of its people. Even though he seems to call for the need to re-enforce this will, Lahham fails to recognize that the people's will might have rightfully manifested itself in other national projects and futures.

The discourse of cinema cannot be successful in maintaining a representation of generalized cultural experiences common across the Arab world specifically. Likewise, Third World cinemas cannot generally be assumed to encompass the unique experiences of various identities into a homogeneous discourse. Critical inquiries such as Teshome Gabriel's (1994) theorizing of Third World cinema are, moreover, too inclusive. Even a problematic identity like Arabness is unable to provide

a justification for sustaining the notion of an Arabic national cinema, one that would be considered a sub-category of a contentious category of Third World cinema. The specificity of identity, or Arabness, as a “local” experience, invokes the need for, and recognition of national cinemas that better represent unique forms of Arabness. The films that this study examines exemplify the specificity of identity as a discourse constructing and representing unique forms of Arabness.

The convenient call for “les cinémas arabes” in Arabic nations must not be stated uncritically. The implications of Western values in cinema as a (post-)colonial Western technology must be recognized as part of a global hegemony that renders cinema a revered cultural form that is taken for granted in the West. Religious, namely Islamic, influences on culture are an important factor in considering the critical rejection of cinema as a cultural practice in Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia, where even movie theaters are non-existent. Such Arab countries do not – and probably will not – develop a national cinema. In light of a burgeoning video market though, where the consumption of cinema becomes a private activity in the home, cinema is not completely left unembraced, at least at some level. Arab identification hence continues to occur across Arab inter-national boundaries, and affiliations with common cultural industries, like cinema, are perhaps even a

justification for the need of a common representative, one that represents common Arab interests abroad against all global "Others".

However, Arab differences necessarily beg for disregarding Arab cinema as a site mirroring an Arab identity that ontologically exists within an essentialist entity. On the contrary, cinema is a site where identity, or identities, are constructed within discourse. Even when Chahine's trilogy highlights the subaltern experience to bring difference to the foreground, the discourse of this experience is critically in question as one that asserts sameness. If subalternity is supposed to oppose mainstream Arab identity, then the subaltern in Chahine's trilogy fails to effectively expose and assert its difference and does little, in fact, to problematize Arab identity through a critical examination of its underlying cultural values. The subaltern hegemonically consents to dominant historical and personal narrative to situate itself in the mainstream in order to belong. More so, Chahine clearly favors the Egyptian over the Arab, a stance that becomes pronounced in *An Egyptian Story* (1982) and finally in an exclusively Egyptian narrative in *Alexandria Now and Forever* (1990). The orientation towards specificity is not surprising when considering Lahham's discourse of difference upon which the narrative is based. By indirectly criticizing difference to advocate Arabist ideals and interest, Lahham fixes difference and

acknowledges it by criticizing its flaws. Arabism in this way becomes the subaltern in its own home.

Even pan-Arabism's most cogent rationale for Arab unity or integration, the Arabic language and Arab cultural heritage, becomes questionable as a driving force towards this end. Anderson (1983) states that identity formation is centered in an idea, an act of the imagination, and the "use of a common language ... doesn't necessarily lead to the formation of a cultural identity" (Scheff, 1994, p. 278). Ernest Renan (1882/1990) affirms that "[l]anguage invites people to unite, but it does not force them to do so There is something in man which is superior to language, namely, the will" (p. 16). While not dismissing language as a factor in the historical construction of the state, it is, nonetheless, not a decisive factor in the formation of a state for a nation of people. And if Arab national unity is unachievable, then homogeneous cultural industries, like a national cinema, cannot effectively represent and construct the diverse national and cultural identities of Arab nations.

Homi Bhabha (1994) points out that colonial discourse produces a fixed reality of the colonized despite the ambivalence of colonized cultures and the "knowability" and visibility of the colonized cast as "other". However, what is noticeable here is that post-colonial discourse produced by the formerly colonized, Arabs in this case, appropriates the

same strategy and assumes a “fixed” self-represented identity.

Narratives about Arabness circumscribe subjects that are produced and consumed in an apparently implied totality. Despite this totality that intends to encompass identities into one Arab identity, the approach towards a total Arabness unavoidably strays away from imposed fixity to reflect the fragmentations of Arabness. Moreover, Homi Bhabha (1994) writes: “Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’: *postmodernism*, *postcolonialism*, *postfeminism*...” (p. 1). If identities are temporally and locally experienced in ambivalence, as Bhabha would argue, can one apply the “post-” in this case to another “-ism” and speak of an emergent “post-Arabism” whose features are indiscernibly in the making? In other words, has Arabism evolved into a “post-Arabism”?

One of the important moments of Arab identification in both sets of films is reference to the issue of Palestine, an issue that is prominent in Arabist discourse. Because it is a prominent bond in Arabist discursive affairs, the dubious issue of Palestine and Palestinians allows for illuminating the unstable condition of Arabism as an identity and the possibility of a departure from it. Edward Said inquires about the sense in which Palestinians can be said to exist. He asks:

Do we [Palestinians] exist? What proof do we have? The further we get from the Palestine of our past, the more precarious our status, the more disreputed our being, the more intermittent our presence. When did we become a people? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do those big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others? (Said, as cited in Rushdie, 1992, p. 167)

The answer to the Palestinian question – or seemingly lack thereof – can be in some ways said to respond to Arabist claims. The importance of this issue in Arabist discourse is evidently at the forefront. And like the Palestinians, the further the Arab is distanced from his/her past, the more precarious the Arab's situation becomes, for it is the nostalgia that makes the Arabs in general a people; or rather it is the nostalgia for becoming part, in the imagination, of what once were a people.

According to Said, "the history of Palestine has turned the insider (the Palestinian Arab) into the outsider" (Said, as cited in Rushdie, 1992, 168). Similarly, it is the history of the Arab civilization that has turned the contemporary Arab from an insider to an outsider to his/her Nation. In this context, it is unsurprising how the issue thus becomes crucial for Arabist rhetoric and Arabist discursive modes of communicating the Self, as in the films.

The notion of exile cannot be detached from a discussion of Palestinians, and it is interesting to note in light of the above parallel to consider the exilic existence in which Arabs live. Said claims that

in the West, everyone has come to think of exile as a primarily literary and bourgeois state. Exile appears to have chosen a middle-class situation in which great thoughts can be thought. In the case of the Palestinians, however, exile is a mass phenomenon: it is the mass that is exiled and not just the bourgeoisie. (Said, as cited in Rushdie, 1992, p. 171)

The Palestinian and the Arab – the same entity in Arabist terms – are driven by the same circumstances of exile. Unable to manifest a national space, the Arab, as a mass phenomenon, becomes perpetually exiled. Ironically, it is the Palestinian's very need for a nation that fragments the Arab as an inconstitutive categorical identity. And perhaps this need would explain the attempts of the younger generation of Palestinian scholars at discovering distinctly Palestinian political and cultural experiences that distinguish them from the rest of the Arab world (Said, as cited in Rushdie, 1992, p. 174).

The notion of "home", exile's binary "other", "simply cannot be understood except in relation to its outside(s)" (Morley, 1999, p. 153). "Home" therefore becomes a relative term, relative to the outside, the space of exile, against which it defines and from which it excludes itself. A culturally driven displacement, exile, according to Hamid Naficy (1999) is "inexorably tied to homeland and to the possibility of return It is possible to be in internal exile and yet be at home" (p. 3). As I reconcile the Arab constituents of my Self, the journey becomes evidently one of return, or a (re)visiting of my Arabness only to bid it farewell. What I bid farewell is the imagined fantasy of collecting my Arab fragments back into a nostalgic manifestation of a dream; the Arab reality sadly becomes a gloomy one. As Arabness gradually retires into the oblivion of the consciousness of its peoples, a realization beckons my consciousness to an acknowledgement: only in exile have I made a home – a new home – and only in exile do I realize that my home was exile from within the homeland.

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