

## The Comic Disruption of Stereotypes in Loubna Haikal's *Seducing Mr. Maclean*

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### INTRODUCTION

IN THE LAST DECADE AN ENORMOUS CORPUS OF ANGLOPHONE Lebanese Exilic literature has emerged. These works, written by Lebanese writers, voice the immigrant condition in English. Jad El Hage, Rabih Alameddine, and Tony Hanania are some of these famous writers. However, Australia has not had a very big share of Lebanese writers over the past century, and there is more or less a vacuum despite the enormous number of Lebanese living there. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), Australia has 181,751 people of Lebanese ancestry and 74,848 Lebanese by birth. Examples of some Australian Lebanese writers are David Malouf, Ghassan Hage, Abbas Al-Zein, Nada Awar Jarrar and Loubna Haikal. This paper examines Loubna Haikal's novel *Seducing Mr. Maclean*. Haikal migrated to Australia when she was a teenager and her novel is about her migrant experience from a Lebanese perspective using a "Lebanese accent" and style. El-Maleh contends that "[m]ost of the Arab-Australians currently writing [. . .] except for Malouf) were not born on Australian soil, and may thus write from an expatriate perspective rather than from the stance of fully integrated citizenship" (El-Maleh 45). Consequently, "*Seducing Mr. Maclean* is therefore important, not only for addressing this cultural vacuum by pulling together the richer aspects of Lebanese culture and putting them into the context of the difficulties of being a young migrant, but for turning the migrant experience into art" (Ball 2). This novel is set in the 1980s and is about a Lebanese family's experiences of living in Australia. Naim's family decides to immigrate to Australia for two reasons: war and his lost business. He moves to Melbourne with his wife, Hayat, and eight children. They run away from war thinking that they will find a peaceful life in Australia; however, they learn that they are unwelcomed by Australians and they face problems, among which is racism. Loubna Haikal is against misrepresentation of Arabs in all media, especially literature. "She does not believe in the ghetto-isation of literature but does object to non-Arabs writing simplistically about Arabic culture" (Sharing a Landscape 3). *Seducing Mr. Maclean* is a satire because it utilizes humor to expose human vices and follies. This essay argues that although Haikal draws on oriental stereotypes of Arabs, the purpose of her satire is not merely to make the readers laugh at stereotypes,

but to make them identify their own vices and change them. She does that by presenting stereotyped caricatures of both Lebanese-Australians and Anglo-Australians.

One of the dominant oriental stereotypes employed in this novel is that of the "postcolonial exotic." According to Huggan, "exoticism describes [. . .] a particular mode of aesthetic perception—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery" (Huggan 13). In this novel, the Lebanese-Australians are presented in this fashion as "the other" and as exotic: strange, mystical, weird, magical, uneducated, and barbaric. To illustrate, in *Seducing Mr. Maclean*, women are viewed by Prof Maclean and usually by Anglo-Australians as "exotic" seducers of men, as "femme fatales." The narrator represents these exotic Arab women: "After all that I had explained to him, about Lebanon and our French connection, distancing myself from anything native, he still called me *exotic*" (46). Initially, her grades do not qualify her for medical school, but after flirting with the Professor she eventually manages to do so. The Professor gives her private lessons and sexually molests her. She tries to copy femme fatale heroines in both Egyptian and Western films. She dresses up for him in a "short, above-the-knee, pleated green-and-white stripy skirt" (16) and all color-coordinated. She speaks English with a French accent to seduce him: "I know zat" (21). She is even his Scheherazade who can seduce him through her stories and her dances: "I even heard Maclean say that I was his Scheherazade but he was my captive" (291). Mr. Maclean tells her that he admires the image of Scheherazade so that is why she tries to live this fantasy: "I was flattered that I had such influence on Prof. Maclean, on his life outside the office and Medicine, and it helped confirm to me that I was on the right track—since he was so attracted to Scheherazade, I should behave very strictly like all the women in her stories, a virgin, and play very hard to get and try to lure him with stories from the East" (273). In *One Thousand and One Nights*, Sheherazade does not tempt the King through her beauty but through her wisdom and stories; this image is reiterated because the narrator keeps making Mr. Maclean come to the restaurant for food, stories and belly dancing. She offers him food; she tells him stories about Lebanon, and dances for him. Her family and

even Prof Maclean think that she is still a virgin, but she has lost her virginity with her ex-boyfriend Robby. This distorts the image of the Lebanese virgin, or in this case as the narrator calls it "Scheherazade, the mysterious virgin": "I danced in front of the mirror in my room, night after night, trying to find that image. I danced for him, dancing like a virgin or a seductive belly-dancer, and I had to cling to me the dancer and rehearse the belly-dance, rehearse, over and over, dancing for my life, trying to survive the king's wrath" (276). Furthermore, the image is dismantled because she does not appear to be an expert in dancing and the narrator admits that she does not know a lot about Lebanese writers and is not as good as Scheherazade at storytelling. Moreover, on the cover of her novel the narrator shows us a picture of a belly dancer with a stethoscope. This picture symbolizes the narrator who is Lebanese, who might be stereotyped as an exotic belly dancer, but at the same time she is studying medicine.

Keft-Kennedy argues that the image of the belly dancer with stethoscope on the cover "functions as a marker of 'otherness' and draws on the viewer's knowledge of stereotypical notions of the sexualized Eastern belly-dancing woman—that is a body for Western consumption" (315). She attacks Haikal and says that she does not resist the oriental stereotypes and "by the end of the novel neo-imperial notions of Western superiority are left unchallenged and Orientalist constructions of the exotic East are reinforced" (Keft-Kennedy 278). The fact that she merges the two images of the belly dancer with the medical doctor arouses irony and satire because it disrupts the typical stereotype. "The cover design of the book contributes to this cultural 'farce' by displaying the torso of a female in a sensational belly-dance outfit" (El-Malah 51). Haikal draws on oriental images but she attempts to subvert these images through satire. She is not reinforcing these oriental stereotypes but on the contrary is disrupting these images. Haikal is attempting to use caricatures and humor as a parody to draw light on the negative stereotypes employed in relation to all nations whether they are Lebanese, Australians, Egyptians or Turks. By mimicking the known stereotypes of the ethnic Lebanese in Australia, she does not confirm the stereotypes but draws attention to racism. The narrator does refer us to the colonial binary oppositions, where she alludes to the East/West struggle: the narrator represents the East, the colonized, the Lebanese; Maclean represents the West, the colonizer, and their inheritors. Nevertheless, this allusion does not reinforce the stereotypes but questions them and deconstructs colonial/Australian power. The author admits to referring to the gaze of the West in a politically incorrect manner, but this was intentional in order to subvert these images. She explains:

I wanted to tell the story in such a way, using the voice of the exotic and speaking back, addressing the dominant culture. In a nutshell, the book is about the exotic talking back. Through that peculiar voice of a new way of using the English language, I wanted to express the dominant culture that yes we do understand you, we understand your cultural baggage, and I wanted to reflect back, at times in a politically incorrect way, the gaze of the West toward the East. (Nikro 26)

To add, the image of the narrator seducing the reader or Mr. Maclean can also be viewed symbolically: "[w]ho Haikal actually tries to seduce beside the reader is Australia itself" (El-Malah 50) in order to belong. "Her nameless immigrant protagonist needs to learn how to flirt with the West, or allow it to flirt with her in order to get along with life and become a good Aussie" (50). This symbolizes how the weak East tries to seduce the powerful West to gain protection and approval. As mentioned earlier, food is used for seduction in this novel. Mr. Maclean turns out to be an orphan who is seeking love and affection from the narrator and her family. This is symbolized in the scene when he is eating "tahini" and dribbling like a baby: "He dipped the falafel in the taratour, and the taratour dribbled out of his mouth thick and creamy like colostrum and he ended up with a tahini ring around his lips and I couldn't help thinking of him as a baby" (*Seducing* 287). To illustrate further, food in this case is utilized as a metaphor for the power struggle for the Lebanese Australian identity where the narrator's family try their best to open Antar restaurant and win over the Australians; by the Australians eating Lebanese food, they have access to the Lebanese world and culture. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that accepting and admiring "migrant" food does not imply total acceptance in matters of state and governmental decisions. In addition, Nikro argues that "seduction in a way is the tool of countries that are economically weak towards countries that are economically powerful and secure" (28). Haikal wants "to expose the insecurities of the West [the Lebanese] so much want to seduce and mimic [. . .] by the end of the story, both Maclean and the protagonist realize the illusion they created about the Other, and in that way all labels and identities are drawn out of their essentialist associations" (28). Haikal tells us that, by the end of the novel, the narrator "no longer needs to seduce the west to belong. She gains through the story a sense of self, of integrity and her future will be based on sound decisions from a position of strength, not of insecurity" (Ball 2). The gaze is also reversed because the narrator gazes at McLean sexually: "Despite the emergency, I couldn't help but notice his chest, hairy, grey, and an olive on his flank, a dark brown olive just like mine, ripe, ready to be picked" (*Seducing* 312). Moreover, there is one incident when the narrator resists Mr. Maclean's advances at the end of the novel that might hint at her being able to resist him sexually and which symbolizes the triumph over the colonizer. In fact, because Maclean's attitude towards the Lebanese changes by the end of the novel, this also deconstructs the colonized/colonizer dichotomy. "By the end of the work one cannot tell the seducer from the seduced as the welter of seduction, multilayered, targets the entire cast of characters" (El-Malah 51). The revelation at the end of the novel that Mr. Maclean is of Lebanese origin can be viewed in two ways. On the one hand, though Maclean, who represents the racist West, starts to accept the Lebanese culture, he at the end of the day turns out to be of Lebanese origin. On the other hand, "[i]n Australia you cannot dwell on who you are, your origin; everyone comes from somewhere" (Lebanese Literature); so, all Australians come of a certain origin. Mr. Maclean might be initially interested in the narrator as an exotic image, but later on he becomes a friend of the family, a godfather to the

unborn baby, a mentor, and he seems to like the narrator for her character and not her body.

To further disrupt the image of the oriental exotic, Haikal shows us the narrator as being some sort of hybrid. Though the heroine eventually breaks up with Robby, she keeps undergoing this transformation. To a certain extent even though her family has bad luck and they lose their restaurant, their house and gymnasium, she learns to adapt and fit into the Australian community. She feels she belongs to this homeland where her father gets buried:

The day Dad's body hit Australian soil was a turning point in my life. . . . It was not just his struggle that was over, but mine too, because the fact that he was in the land, irretrievably in it, made me connected, physically connected to it, and for the first time I could say I belonged, that's it, the roots have been established (297).

The narrator has become a hybrid and no longer suffers from the predicament of in-betweenness. However, the term "hybrid" has been debated and questioned in postcolonial theory. Hout contends that "for an immigrant, assimilation means coming to terms with what Edward Said calls 'contrapuntal consciousness,' i.e. the inevitable double or plural visions which exiles acquire as a result of being aware of two or more cultures" (Hout 1). In short, the narrator has adapted "to a new culture/country always implies a certain degree of self-internationalization" (1). Moreover, she sees herself as a combination of Lebanese and Australian, occupying Bhabha's "third space."

Other stereotypes that belong to the exotic imagery are that the Lebanese are mystical, in this case extremely superstitious, and deal with witchcraft. For example, the narrator's mother is presented as someone who takes extreme precautions to guard her daughters' reputations and to protect them against the maliciousness of the evil eye. She utilizes various techniques such as wearing blue, melting lead, reading coffee cups and using magic potions. To protect the narrator from the evil eye, her mother pins a blue glass bead in the shape of an eye on her underwear (*Seducing* 22). Furthermore, the narrator's mother prepares a special potion that would get Robby to love the narrator again (143). The mother blames the evil eye for Robby's coldness towards her daughter. She invites Robby over for "ma'moul" and asks her daughter to fill an empty jar with a little bit of her urine. Robby gets offered a cup of coffee mixed with the narrator's urine; however, knocking over the cup of coffee by accident while taking the "ma'moul" plate saves him from drinking this magical potion. Here, the narrator is subverting this stereotype because she is presenting it in an exaggerated, comical manner. Some Lebanese believe in the evil eye but this is taken to an extreme. Her mother also had intended to do the same with Mr. Maclean in order to get him closer to her daughter.

Linked to the exotic stereotype is the portrayal of the Lebanese Australians as backward, naïve, barbaric and uneducated. The narrator, before her transformation, is introduced initially as uneducated and cannot speak English. She is initially not able to speak English and she tries to speak with a French accent. She tries to socialize with her fellow classmates in the

pub but mistakes the sport for "crickets." When she does not understand, she smiles to cover up her ignorance. Usually the Lebanese Australians are viewed as uneducated. Moreover, the Australians associate the Lebanese with the labor force because they usually work in factories and Robby's parents are surprised that the narrator is studying medicine: "It must be unusual for a Lebanese lassie to enter medical school," she said. "You must be the only one in Australia. We have a lot of Lebanese at the factory [. . .] They love their compo" (73). Also Naim, the narrator's father, is presented as mainly uneducated, obese, barbaric and racist. He feels "castrated" because he cannot fit into the Australian society and he cannot earn enough money to support his large family. He first works as a taxi driver but then becomes a manager of Antar, the restaurant. He does not listen to his doctor's advice about not smoking. He thinks that he is Phoenician and not an Arab and that Phoenicians are a superior race because they were the creators of the alphabet and builders of the first ships. Naim's claim of Phoenician ancestry might be due to a colonially induced self-hatred. The satire is evident in its picture of how some Lebanese are ethnocentric and feel superior to other Arabs and nations. The narrator's father says: "I defy anyone who says the history, the culture, or the cuisine of their country can match ours" (66), ". . . [m]ake sure you tell the Dean the Lebanese are very different from the rest of the Arabs. Tell him we are more like the Westerners. Tell him Beirut is the Switzerland of the Middle East and better" (17). He cannot speak English and needs his daughter to translate for him when he speaks to Australians. He walks on the street in a pair of pajamas and does not find anything wrong with that. Both parents smoke heavily despite doctor's orders and thought that there are good effects to smoking such as curing colds and constipation. Moreover, they do not believe in going to see medical doctors and are only benefitting from the healthcare benefits to make up for the medical care they have missed in Lebanon. At times the Lebanese Australians are portrayed as backward and barbaric in the way they eat and celebrate. During celebrations the Lebanese prepare feasts and over-eat and then they suffer from indigestion; the narrator jokes and says that they lapse into a comatose state. Furthermore, the way Mr. Maclean describes Lebanese food implies that the Lebanese are backward. He believes it is a "well-known fact" that Lebanese people eat sheep's eyes. The narrator corrects him and tells him that the Lebanese do not eat sheep's eyes and they have "lovely" recipes such as tabbouleh, stuffed vine leaves and cabbage rolls.

Likewise, the author utilizes comic exaggerations to subvert the stereotype of the Lebanese Australians being drug dealers and terrorists. The focus mainly is on the narrator's twin brothers and on Mr. Shareef. However, in principle the whole family is involved because the father seems to endorse this deal and even the narrator, her mother and sisters seem to help. Focusing on the twin brothers, they do not continue their education and appear to be caught up with crime, selling drugs. They are presented in a caricature fashion where they wear dark sunglasses, go to discos, have gymnasium passes, own an expensive Mercedes, and wear open shirts exposing their chests. They make lots of money and spend it on people and luxury. They "had skyrocketing overheads, they were spending it like mad on

their friends, their cops, on cars, mag wheels, sound systems" (159). "They acquired Mr. Shareef's silent language and shoulder movements and were [ . . . ] always in a hurry and looked behind them, right and left" (113-4). The nationality "Lebanese" becomes synonymous with the word "dope," and as soon as an Australian sees the twin brothers, they expect "Lebanese gold." What is humorous about this incident is that the mother does not put the blame on her sons or on herself but that they "are responding to the high expectations and demands" of the Anglo-Australians and that "they just fell into the dope job" (108). So, the author implies that that Lebanese are taken for granted as drug dealers and this stereotype is presented in a comic manner to show the absurdity of generalizing. Mr. Shareef is the culprit behind the drug dealing. Because the narrator's family is in a vulnerable situation, the "beneficent" Mr. Shareef, who is also Lebanese, takes advantage of them and forces them to work with him in illegal business. Through bribery, Mr. Shareef makes sure that the restaurant and its illegal goods escape the attention of the law. However, when the twins decide to quit working with Mr. Shareef and open up their own gymnasium, he takes revenge and burns the gymnasium and restaurant for them. He also arranges for the twins to get shot at, injured and arrested. The irony is, despite being an uneducated criminal who cannot speak English, he is honored and rewarded, getting an honorary degree from an Australian university and an award on the Lebanese national day. Mr. Shareef is involved with corrupt Australians, such as the police commissioner and Mr. Whiteside, the minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, who tries to please the Lebanese so that they will vote for him. When he gives speeches, he tells them lies that the Australians are proud to have them in their country. His name is symbolic of the fact that he belongs to the "white nation" and that he has two faces, showing us only the "clean" side.

The Lebanese are portrayed not only as drug-dealers but also as terrorists to parody the stereotyping. To illustrate, the main terrorists are the twins but the novel seems to portray the entire Lebanese race without exception, the narrator as well. The novel tells us that the Lebanese love carrying machine guns, shooting one another for fun, "killing the Jews instead of going back to the desert where [they] belonged" (72). When Robby's father asks her what Lebanese do for a hobby, he comments that they like to shoot one another. "You mean shooting each other,' he replied off the top of his head" (90). The narrator tells us that she feels like a terrorist: "There I was a terrorist in their peaceful God-loving home and they didn't know what to do with me" (74). That is when she is at her boyfriend's parents' housing watching the news of the killings in Lebanon. She cannot "compete with the TV coverage of the Lebanese atrocities" (74). Her boyfriend thinks that she belongs to a guerrilla movement: "Robby loved the fact that I belonged to some guerrilla movement and to the struggling minority. I represented determination, the status of the underdog, the truth, the left, passion" (75). Furthermore, the narrators' twins are described as being "excited to be reunited with their long lost friends and [ . . . ] life savers, the RPGs, Kalashnis, and last but not least, their favourite, the Douchka, their little Lebanese queen and

saviour" (181-2). This exaggeration ridicules the stereotyping of all Lebanese people as militiamen who cannot depart from their weapons.

The narrator does not only focus on how the Anglo-Australians see the Lebanese Australians, she also shows us the reverse but in a satirical manner: "Both Arabs and Australians engage in constructing false perceptions of each other" (El-Maleh 51). To start with, the narrator tells us how some Lebanese see Australians: "They had heard of the cannibals, Aborigines, dingoes, swimmers, and politicians eaten by sharks. What else was there in Australia? the dollars" (*Seducing* 157). In the novel, some of the Lebanese also stereotype Australians as restrained, backwards, ex-convicts and racist. The narrator describes Australian families, like Robby's, as restrained and insular, as opposed to the Lebanese who are presented as loud and highly emotional: "His parents, who also didn't talk to each other, never questioned him. His father ate and watched TV. The children ate and helped clear the table. There were no fights, no expectations and no family conflicts" (71). Robby is described by the narrator's father as someone who is cold about his feelings towards the narrator, predicting that eventually he would leave her. Her father warns her that he will "never understand the culture, he will drink and love football and leave you in no time to be with his mates at the pub. The Australians don't have the same emotions that we have" (57). Moreover, the Lebanese see the Australians as backward. The narrator's father tells Robby: "Sorry, Robby, but to us, the Australia are still "Hamaj" (primitive) (66). Similarly, the narrator's father sees most Australians as ex-convicts. When the narrator's family tries to dig out Mr. Maclean's past, they remark that most Anglo-Australian family trees are blemished: "So Mum and Dad knew that the chance of meeting anyone in Melbourne without a blemish in their personal records or family tree was remote" (*Seducing* 285-6).

Overall, the majority of the Australians in the novel are presented as racist but mainly Mr. Maclean, Robby and his parents. Mr. Maclean, who is the medical Professor, is initially presented as disreputable, racist, and vulgar. He sexually harasses his student, the narrator. He tells her that she comes from a backward country and criticizes her culture, though he himself acts barbarically when he relieves himself in public coming out drunk from the pub. He later on changes and learns to appreciate the Lebanese culture and food. However, we do not know if this is because he is originally Lebanese or because he has been transformed or "seduced" by the narrator. Robby is in love with the narrator and is interested to learn about her culture, but once he sleeps with her, he breaks up with her and says that he is fed up with the Lebanese culture. He is a stereotype of some Australians who cannot tolerate the migrant Lebanese Australians. Robby reached a stage where he could not tolerate the food, the traditions, the rituals or anything about them. When he met the narrator, he was immersed in the Lebanese culture to the extent that her mother adopted him like a neglected orphan overfeeding him. However, one day Robby gets invited to Church on Palm Sunday. During a procession a little girl carrying a lit candle burns a thread from Robby's ponytail. A person extinguishes the fire in his ponytail and some of the

crowd run to him and suggest ways to get treatment for the burns. Eventually he gets upset and goes home alone telling his ex-girlfriend: "I can't go on like this. It is all too much, too intense" (Seducing137). The narrator explains to us what had happened: "Robby was burnt out. He couldn't take the whole Lebanese thing any longer. The crowds, the over-the-top hellos and goodbyes, the kissing, the laughter, the garlic and Turkish-coffee breath mixed with aftershave and deodorants" (138). His parents display an extreme case of racism when they deal with the narrator. When the narrator tells Roby's mother that Lebanon is very beautiful and that it is the Switzerland of the Middle East, she is rude and racist, telling her to go back to where she came from and live there. Roby's father makes a racist remark and tells her that her culture is not civilized: "His dad thought people from different cultures should not intermarry, unless the two cultures were equally civilized" (85). Moreover, Robby's parents look down on Lebanese food. They can always tell when their son has eaten Lebanese food and they are glad he lives in a bungalow on his own.

In contrast, the author exemplifies how the Lebanese also stereotype the Turks and the Egyptians in a caricatured manner. Some Lebanese despise the Turks and tend to stereotype them because they occupied the Middle East, including Lebanon, from 1516 to 1916. In the novel the narrators' family cannot tolerate Turks and would not want to be associated with them. They do not talk to their daughter because she had an affair with a Turk, "a married man, a chauvinist and, worst of all for our reputation, a Muslim" (12) and is having his baby out of wedlock. To add, the narrator's family seems to be racist against the Egyptians, especially Elham, the cook who works in their restaurant. The narrator's father "hated Egyptians as well because they were part of Africa, and Africa is the continent of slaves" (219), and her mother thinks that "all Egyptians [are] a pick-pocket and a schemer" (220). By the end of the novel, the reader would find that these satirical and comical exaggerations have questioned the common stereotypes of Australian-Lebanese and Anglo-Australians. People of all nationalities go through similar human experiences and human nature displays both virtuous and corrupt sides in every nation. Even if the migrant retains his/her own identity or "illusions" of it this person grows: "As each character tries to hang to the illusion of what is their identity, they discover at the end that they had been victims of that illusion" (Nikro 28). This mainly applies to the protagonists, Maclean and the narrator. By the end of the novel, the author hopes that there is "a strong identification in the process of negotiation of the moral cultural and ethical issues within the two cultures, highlighting the difference between shame and honor that affect both cultures equally-loyalty and betrayal, love and friendship. By the end of the story I would hope that traditions and the image of what makes someone Lebanese or Australian would merge into common human endeavors and values" (Nikro 28).

Haikal revealed in an interview with Nikro that some Lebanese were not comfortable with the comical stereotypical portrayal of the Lebanese characters in the novel: "I feel that this was one thing my fellow Lebanese were uncomfortable with:

the fact that our image in the West was so vulnerable and so tarnished that anything other than a glowing report about Lebanese characters—heroic, honest, beyond criticism—was yet another betrayal of our Lebanese identity" (Nikro 28). However, stereotyping positively is equally one-sided and her method is as effective in showing the absurdity of these stereotypes. It would be interesting here to compare Haikal to Filipino Australian writer and poet Merlinda Bobis. Bobis was born in the Philippines and she, like Haikal, now lives in Australia. Both Haikal and Bobis focus on the theme of marginalization of ethnic minorities in Australia. Both try to highlight racism against the immigrants and try to break the stereotypes. Both try to present alternative positive images of the immigrants. In Haikal's case, she shows us the educated narrator and tries to defend the Lebanese when attacked. Likewise, Bobis, in her book *the Solemn Lantern Maker* (2008), breaks the stereotypes by showing us that the American reporter does not get kidnapped by a Muslim Cult, Abu Sayaf, or terrorists but is saved by an innocent dumb boy and his widowed mother. They, in reality, take good care of her and the American feels guilty because the authorities imprison and question them. Never the less, Haikal and Bobis differ in that Haikal focuses more on satire whereas Bobis resorts to magic realism, especially in her short story "White Turtle" (1999) where she uses this technique to disrupt the stereotypes of Filipino writers. The solution to her to survive in multicultural Australia is to have a dialogue between cultures and share heritages, rather than attack one another. "One can only really love what one does know; it is ignorance and the irresponsible reliance on stereotypes that generates conflict and unnecessary suffering" (Granado18).

#### RACISM, MULTICULTURALISM AND MIGRANT LITERATURE

Though the White Australian policy was "disposed" of officially in 1973, many incidents prove that whiteness still plays a major role in how Australians perceive themselves. For example, John Howard's restrictions on asylum seekers in connection to the "war on terror" (2001) and the Cronulla riots (2005) show evidence of racism against Arab-Australians. Additionally, a recent survey conducted by the University of Western Sydney "recorded high levels of perceived racial discrimination in the workplace, the housing market, and instances of verbal abuse" ("Race Debate" 1). The survey explains that this is happening mostly in ethnic areas: "More than one in 10 of those polled identified themselves as 'prejudiced against other cultures. [. . .] Also, nearly half the population or 41.4 per cent of Australians believe that Muslims, Aboriginals, Asians or Jews 'don't fit into Australian society' (1). Hage argues that "both White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White 'ethnics' are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will" (*White Nation* 18). He calls it the "White nation fantasy," which is based on the belief that the "White" control the nation through racism and "white multiculturalism" (18). Moreover, Hage contends that

Arab-Australians feel humiliated when dealing with matters of the state. Arab Australians “speak of honour and honourability and often define their experiences with the state as dishonouring” (2). In addition, Poynting et al., in their book *Bin Laden in the suburbs: criminalizing the Arab Other*, argue that Australia nowadays, especially after September 11 events, is attesting to “the emergence of the ‘Arab other’ as the pre-eminent ‘folk devil’ of our time.” This “Arab Other” is not only connected to crime but seems to threaten the security of Australia. They contend that “the concern with ‘ethnic crime’ and ‘Lebanese gangs’ meshes with national and international politics in forming an image of a violent and criminal Arab Other, a process in which community leaders often unwittingly participate” (Poynting et al 3). In an article on “Representation of Youth in Sydney: A Critique of Liberal Rhetoric about Young Lebanese Immigrants,” the authors tackle the issue of misrepresentation of Lebanese immigrants in Australia and investigate some of the problems these immigrants are facing. The image the Australian media is propagating is that Lebanese young men are terrorists and “lost” or “caught between cultures”: “In some ways, this ‘caught between cultures’ portrayal can be seen as an ethnocentric misreading, or an exploitative and even racist misrepresentation” (Tabar 213). For instance, in one of the Sydney newspapers, six Lebanese-Australian young men were portrayed as being “caught between cultures” and ready to “Dial-a-Gun” (213), though according to the article these boys were not “lost” and there was no evidence of wanting to carry a gun. There might be some Lebanese Australians who are involved in street crime but not all; however, the majority of newspapers point the finger to Lebanese Australians, whenever there is a crime (214). In another instance when a school boy was stabbed, “the first article to appear in a metropolitan broadsheet presented the attack in the context of clashes involving ‘Asian’ and ‘Middle Eastern’ gangs (214). Similarly, Gunew comments that “in sociology and immigration the ‘migrant or minority as problem’ is a prevailing trope and emphasis is consistently placed on compatible differences and the need to obey the laws and conform to the mores of the new country. In contrast to supposed Western tolerance the minority is often represented as primitive or uncivilized, importing its social pathologies (such as criminal gangs, or ‘uncivilized practices,’ such as arranged marriages or clitoridectomy)” (Gunew 17).

One of the proposed solutions to racism is multiculturalism. It must be said, though, this term has many dimensions and can be interpreted differently from different perspectives. For example, Duncan Ivison argues that this term “refers to a broad array of theories, attitudes, beliefs, norms, practices and policies that seek to provide public recognition of and support for accommodation of non-dominant ethnocultural groups” (Ivison 2). However, in her book *Haunted Nations: the colonial dimensions of multiculturalisms*, Gunew explains the different dimensions of multiculturalism and argues that modern multicultural Australia is affected by past colonialism (Gunew 33). She refers us to the British colonialism of Australia. In her introduction, following Stuart Hall, she contends that “the legacies of British colonialism haunt contemporary Australian

debates around the nation, citizenship and multiculturalism so that who owns modernity (and inherits European civilization) instigates a process of racialization in which the descendants of European postwar immigrants are aligned with indigenous and ‘Asian’ settlers” (10). To add, Gunew distinguishes between state and critical multiculturalism; the former manages diversity and the latter argues for “participation, grounded in their differences, in the public sphere. [. . .] Minorities use a variety of strategies to overcome the assimilationist presumptions of most state multiculturalisms” (15–17). Hence the state wants the immigrants to assimilate, integrate, spurn their own culture and blend into the Australian culture.

Recently there has been a debate asking whether multiculturalism is working or not in Australia. Hage argues somehow that there is no link between multiculturalism and racism: “Multiculturalism is working well and belongs to one (mainstream) reality, and racist violence is occurring in another (marginal) reality. Multiculturalism is in one valley and racist violence another, as the Lebanese metaphorically put it” (Hage 77). I refute Hage’s argument by saying that multiculturalism is not working, since it has been a policy taken by the government to solve the problem of racism and this problem has not been solved. What is dangerous is parading multiculturalism as a way to celebrate the diverse cultures without having a true practical participation in all governmental and important affairs. In an interview, Haikal comments on the “decorative” multiculturalism: “Multiculturalism. . . has a long way to go. We have the decorative multicultural. Food and entertainment and artifacts do not create change. It is entertainment, it is sort of diversionary. You can eat kibbe as much as you like, but we have no say in how to run the country, or our opinions may not mean anything” (Griffin 6).

One fear of multiculturalism that Anglo-Australians have is of the migrant’s taking over with their cultures and traditions. A further reason for phobia against immigrants is foreigners taking control. As Haikal’s narrator puts it: “Migrants will always be migrants. They want to change the country to suit them. That’s when racial violence starts” (*Seducing* 86). Hage asks: “Why do we always tend to see it as the Italianisation, Vietnamisation, Lebanonisation etc. of parts of the Australia? It is a form of multicultural claustrophobia that always ends up generating the question: what is happening to us?” (Hage 13). For multiculturalism to work, its policies must be “reinforced by national laws and institutions, as well as by the media, academia, the professions, industry, unions and civil society” (Omara 24). Literature is a useful medium in helping multiculturalism work because it plays a role in either perpetuating or dismantling stereotypes. By writing in English, Loubna Haikal tries to bridge gaps between the Anglo-Australian nation and the Lebanese-Australian nation basically but in turn to expose the world to migrant experiences, which is the call for a dialogue to which Bobis is referring. Part of fitting in, Haikal says, is becoming familiar with the “code” or the protocol of a particular culture. One of the challenges of being a migrant, she says, is to feel “at home” and not marginalized. A lot of being marginalized happens through stereotyping. She hopes that her novel will confront her readers with some of the stereotypes she grew up with (George 1).

Loubna Haikal's novel can be labeled as "migrant," "ethnic writing," or even "multicultural writing." This latter term in Australia is "reserved for those who write from outside the prevailing Anglo-Celtic traditions, that is, writers who have a privileged relation to languages and cultures other than those deriving from England and Ireland, the point of embarkation for most of Australia's first colonizers" (Gunew 1). The author feels that non-Anglo-Celtic literature is marginalized and not given its worth. However, Haikal's novel has been attacked to the extent that it has not even been labeled as "literature" by some. Magdalena Ball does not categorize this novel as "literary fiction" because "it is not particularly challenging in its structure, assumptions, or language" (2). To some, this novel has no artistic worth because it has many language errors and is written with a "Lebanese accent." But this is to simplify and misread the novel. First, Haikal tells us that the editors did try to correct the syntax errors, but whenever they did the meaning and metaphors were lost. "Although some agents and editors have balked at the Lebanese accent she worked into her manuscript, Haikal persisted, eventually landing a Varuna fellowship and a publishing deal with Picador" (Griffin 1). Moreover, this novel reinforces the "theme of how language confine[s] the identity of the protagonist to that of a foreigner" (Nikro 25). To add, the author argues that even if the reader would have problems when reading this novel because of the "Lebanese style" and "accent," she claims that it is done on purpose: "The reader is made to experience in that language the same awkwardness and discomfort the protagonist felt inhabiting it" (Nikro 27). The author argues that writing the novel in English is a "liberating moment." Deleuze and Guattari dwell on one aspect of minor literature that is written in the language of the country of immigration: "[L]anguage is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization, which means that a "minor author" wrests language from the hegemonic control of the 'native speakers' and, in so doing, re-contextualizes it" (qtd. in Mattson 68). So by writing in English, the writer claims this language as "her" language and succeeds in sharing her experiences of being a Lebanese migrant in Australia with a wide and international audience. In turn, this writing process has been therapeutic for the writer because it is a form of catharsis to find her identity.

It is important for the Lebanese living in exile to ameliorate the image of the Lebanese in the West since the media has propagated negative stereotypes. The media plays a large role in manipulating what is being portrayed about Arabs. This "oriental fear" (Semmerling) against Arabs in general is triggered by various events in history, such as the oil embargo of the 1970s, the Iraq War, Al Qaeda and the September 11, 2001 attacks. However, Lebanon has had its share of war and terrorism for many years. Sometimes media distorts the images of the Lebanese where they are most of the time shown as being involved in fighting, war and terrorism. Haikal tells us that she has experienced this misrepresentation of Lebanese in the media: "I feel like an outsider when I'm watching television because I don't see the faces representing me. And when I see the faces behind the bars in Woomera, they look like me, so there's the things that make me realize I am outside" (Griffin 2). Through her use of satire and comic exaggerations of Leba-

nese Australians, Anglo-Australians, Turks and Egyptians, Loubna Haikal is trying to address all readers calling against racism and stereotyping of all nations. □

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