

Writing Back to “Culture Talk”: Reinvention of Muslim Identity in *The Road from Damascus*

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Abstract

A couple of decades before 9/11, after the collapse of USSR, Islam started to be culturally represented as the major “Other” in the West. 9/11 attacks accelerated the movement with the “culture talk” project positioning Islam as the backward culture against which the West and secularism are portrayed as the epitome of progressive liberal civilization/culture. Muslims, however, wrote back to the project. Literature, especially fiction, was found an appropriate media through which Muslims’ voice could be expressed. Robin Yassin Kassab’s *The Road from Damascus* is a true writing back attempt in order to respond to the hegemonic “othering” of Islam in the West. The narrative actualizes the purpose upending the constructed bifurcation of “the West” versus “Islam”. Being approached from a new perspective, both terms/signs are deconstructed in the novel so that the center/periphery opposition is reversed. In this new structure each term/sign is given new significances challenging the mainstream “imagined identities” of Muslims in the West.

Keywords

Culture Talk; *The Road from Damascus*; Secularism; Writing Back; Islam; Identity.

1. Introduction

Although “othering” Muslims had started within Orientalist discourse, the project gained force right after the 9/11 events. Several Western authors contributed to the new surge of “*Kulturkampf*” (Nash 1), literally cultural campaign, against Muslims. The Muslim community in the West, under pressure, tried to respond to these cultural representations. Robin Yassin Kassab, as a member of the Muslim community who knew both the Western and Muslim cultures, has his own unique response in his novel *The*

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Road from Damascus. The narrative, a semi-linear Bildungsroman, follows Sami Traifi’s life right around the 9/11. Sami, entangled in a dilemma, tries desperately to choose his way among his father’s firm belief in ideological secularism, his mother’s traditional Islamic faith, and his wife’s modern, creative interpretation of Islam. *The Road from Damascus* can be taken as an attempt from within the Muslim community to offer a reconstructive image of Islam and Muslims against the imagined identities constructed of them in the Western public sphere.

Positioning the protagonist in the center of the conflict among three different views about Islam, Kassab has tried to offer a real, rather than an imagined, picture of the Muslims especially those who live in and interact closely with the Western people. The present article is an attempt to explore the ways a novel written by a Muslim writer is likely to rewrite the identity of Muslims both around the world and in the West. The article also will try to investigate the possible trajectory of a Muslim informant’s response to the “culture talk” project which has set the West as the symbol of civilization and progress against Islam as the representation of ignorance and backwardness.

2. Literature Review

The revival of religion especially of Islam in the second half of the 20th century has been the subject of much research. Some have paid attention to it as a result of the new political World Order; some have studied it in light of politics of identity, while others have investigated its cognitive aspects. Both Malise Ruthven (2007) and Mahmood Mamdani (2002) have underscored the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent constructing of Islam as the major “Other” of the West. Karen Armstrong (2000) has focused on the mythos/logos binary as a framework to explain the phenomenon. Hodayun Ansari (2008) has approached it from the identity politics perspective.

Karen Armstrong maintains that the modern Human being, unlike the people of the past, has chosen the “logos” (rationality) as the major way of “thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge” (10). Although she appreciates this approach because it “works efficiently in the mundane world” (10) and helps humanity to move forward and invent new things, Armstrong acknowledges it lacks the potential to help us “find some significance in our lives” (10); it fails also to “direct our attention to the eternal and the universal” (10). It is perhaps due to the same fact that secularism as a by-product of the “logos” could not hold in the contemporary era, and people, around the world, has turned to religion to compensate for the logos’s failure.

Scholarly articles on *The Road from Damascus* are, surprisingly, less than the digits of one hand: The first one is written by Susie Thomas (2009) who begins her argument with the novel's focus on "spiritual aspect of Islam"(unpaginated, paragraph 1) and moves to the argument that the central conflict in the novel is "not primarily between liberalism

and political Islam [...] but rather is seen in opposition to socialist pan-Arabic politics"(paragraph 4). The first half of the quotation is acceptable but the second half is far from the novel's thematic structure. Catherine E. Rashid's *British Islam and the Novel of Transformation* (2012) focuses on those parts of the novel which reflects upon the compatibility of Islam (or religion in general) with literature. Rashid argues that *The Road from Damascus* has successfully managed to use the Sufi ideas, as an Islamic tradition, for the trajectory which its characters take in the plot. Rather than being based on the usual western Bildungsroman in which the characters come to an understanding of their situation and gain a certain knowledge about their situation in life, she argues, *The Road from Damascus* builds its plot on the ideas of Sufi *Kashf* and *Heyrat* in which the characters come to a point in which they realize that they cannot know anything for sure.

3. Writing back to “Culture Talk”

Mahmood Mamdani in “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A political perspective on Culture and Terrorism” (2002) refutes the West’s “Manichean” (Ahmad, 195) strategy of “culture talk” which sets the Western “modern” culture against the Muslim world as the epitome of “pre-modern” episteme. The strategy, Mamdani holds, demonizes” (766) and “essentialises” (767) Islam with the everlasting characteristics of “intolerance, fanaticism, and patriarchal chauvinism” (Nash, 12), whereas it associates the West with “freedom of expression, democracy, ..., and, ..., women's rights” (Roy, viii). To find a way out of this unhealthy and damaging strategy, Mamdani offers that we need to “deconstruct not just one protagonist in the contemporary contest-Islam- but also the other, the West” (766). Accordingly, any attempt by those Muslim discourse makers to challenge the “culture talk” movement should inevitably focus on writing back to it. The attempt, as a culturally significant counter discourse, has set to rewrite the Muslim identity through offering new images both of Muslims and the religion of Islam.

The Road from Damascus (hereafter *RFD*) could be taken as an attempt from “within the Islamic culture ...” (Malak, 2) to expose the failure of both the “logos” and “culture talk”. To do so, Kassab sets to deconstruct both “Islam” and “the West” constructed by the West in both public and intellectual spheres. Therefore, as Kassab also states, *RFD* takes a “writing back” framework:

[As] Muslims in Britain, many fictions are being written about *us*. Many are presented as fact. [...] So we should *write back*. (Yassin-Kassab, qtd in Chambers, *Multi-Culti* 390).

The novel sets to realize the aim by following the vicissitudes of the protagonist’s identity construction from a strict advocate of Western secularism to a “born-again Muslim” (Roy, xi). Taking identity construction as a process, the narrative explores the process in three stages from Sami’s childhood to the point of the “epiphany” he experiences in his early thirties near the end of the novel: childhood, adolescence, and marriage.

3.1. Childhood: Patriarchal Secularism versus Religio-Feminine Narrative

Identity construction in Sami's formative years of childhood involves several, often contradictory, factors culminating in identity crisis. Sami's childhood is torn apart between two discourses. On the one hand, there is his father's blatant struggle to "other" Islam and mark it as “strange” as possible for him. On the other, there is her mother's silenced religiosity and her scared attempts to read Islamic identity into her son's character. Mirroring the macrocosmic political and social power hierarchy in the original homeland of Syria, Mustafa's home/state is run by patriarchalism in which the patriarch holds a strong grip on his subject's (Sami's) identity through ideological constructs. Excluding Sami's mother and her beliefs as "other", Mustafa tries to construct the identity of his son through the “ideological state apparatuses” (Althusser,102) of education and literature.

Sami is educated by his patriarchal father to prioritize Arabism over Islam by appropriating and censoring history, “focus[ing] on the ancient and the contemporary Arabs, cutting out the fourteen hundred years in between [i.e., Islam]” (69 emphasis added). Heavily obsessed with his secularist antagonism against Islam, Mustafa puts up a structure of feelings for his son in which two elements are conspicuous: “the Great Arab Nation” and the secular Arabic poetry. The Great Arab Nation projected by Mustafa as a major element in Sami's identity is in fact a defense mechanism erected by him against the Nation of Islam or Umma. The Arabic poetry is put up against the Qur'an described in the narrative as “the peak and glory of Arabic poetry, even if it wasn't the word of God” (24). Where the Arab Nation is associated with civilization and “glory” (69), Islam and Qur'an are, to use Althusser's terminology, “interpellated” (122) as “womanly superstition” (33). Mustafa's active attempt to construct Islam as “backward”, feminine, and superstitious, gains more force by Sami's mother's passive reaction to her husband's actions.

RFD in a counter-Orientalist move portrays Nur as an eastern immigrant woman disempowered both by her background cultural upbringing and more importantly by being cut off from the wider familiar community at home which exposes her to the bare dictatorship of her husband. Although she is opposed to the inscription of Mustafa's anti-Islamic ideas to his Son, she is not courageous and powerful enough to resist and speak out against him openly. Therefore, she resorts to Qur'an as her last resource of power to counteract and resist the patriarch's “ideological apparatus”. She secretly reads verses of Qur'an and tells some religious stories to Sami. Nur's attempts to protect Sami from his father's hegemonic secularism, and naked antagonism to Islam, fails but remains as a peripheral sub-discourse in her son's identity process. In spite of realizing that there was “certainly something attractive” (75) in his mother's religious stories, practices, and rituals, Sami decides that “No, he needed another identity” (75).

3.2. Adolescence: Lack of Belonging, Symbolic Identification, and Boutique Arabism

During the adolescence years, in addition to the passive nature of Nur's religiosity in comparison to the active and seemingly knowledge-based secularism of Mustafa, London as a multicultural space plays a very powerful role in directing Sami towards his father. Mustafa's "othering" strategies to estrange his son from Islam is accomplished because it is very much reinforced by and finds a fertile ground in the particular cultural space of London that causes Sami to consider the religious people who lived in London- compared to "the healthy, [...] the sane" normative people- as "senile" and their religion as "humiliation" (75). Unlike his parents as the members of the first generations of immigrants who feel belonged to their homeland, i.e. Syria, as the stable anchor of their identity, Sami suffers from lack of a "locus standi" (Kral, 71) or fixed locus of identity. Sami's father had tried to establish the imaginary "Great Arab nation" for him as his only point of identification, but Sami's process of identification and identity construction is fractured because of the surrounding atmosphere outside his parental home.

RFD depicts Sami as a second-generation immigrant who is not recognized by the native English people as one of their own while not finding any diasporic community with which to share his common identity. He feels neither belonged to the major community of the "White English" as the "normal standard" nor identifies with the "Black". Sami is restless to find a community to anchor her belonging to, but the confusion of race, ethnicity and religion and the ensuing humiliation attached to Muslim community discourages him from identifying with them. "[I]n Britain Muslims meant Pakis" (78) and Pakis were in turn essentialized and stereotyped as nothing but "crumbling mills, [...] anoraks and miserable accents" (78). Another community that could have provided Sami with a stable locus of identity was the Arabs. However, "there were so few of what he was [i.e., Arab] that it barely qualified as a community" (78). Being bereft of his both potential religious and racial/ethnic belongings, Sami turns to an abstract locus of identity as his main identification point, that is, "Mustafa's Arabism" (78), which is a deterritorialized, decontextualized, abstract concept, releasing him from the pressure of finding a concrete community. The lack of belonging to a material community makes Sami very much vulnerable to what Žižek calls "symbolic identification, one which, as Žižek puts it, is based on 'the identification with the way the Other(s) perceive(s) me'" (Žižek qtd. In Sentesso 101). Žižek explains this psychology essentially as a form of misidentification:

Symbolic identification occurs when the way I appear to others become more important to me than the psychological reality beneath my social mask, forcing me to do things I would never be able to accomplish from within myself (Žižek, qtd. in Santesso 101-102).

An important manifestation of Sami's symbolic identification is depicted through his relationship to English girls. In a significant chapter of the novel entitled "A Mirror for Sami", the protagonist's relationship with the "English girls", his looking into their eyes to find out "his own reality", is pictured as a special kind of mirror relationship described "as innocent as looking in a mirror"(11). He sees in the mirror of his English girlfriend's eyes "a definite, deliberated image" of himself which is informed of the well-known stereotypical Orientalist images that reduce the Eastern characters to the position of mere objects of sex: "His full, tasting, lips. His passion-heavy eyebrows. His unblemished skin." (51). Well aware of the dynamics of the consumerist cultural space in the West, Sami "commodifies [his] ... difference" (Huggan, 12) and sexuality offering it to the English girls who are "drawn so easily [...] into his careful net of difference" (36). Instead of resisting or feeling excluded by the English girl's sexual-Orientalist attitude, Sami overdramatizes his symbolic Arabism by wearing traditional Arabic costumes e.g., Kuffiyeh. This theatrical Arabism is in fact an example of symbolic identification which is far from identity. His body is transformed into a showcase in which he merely displays the roles ascribed to him either by his father or by the mainstream British society. Naturally, these two powerful forces, though with different purposes, conflate in driving Sami to play the role of a dehistoricized Arab.

3.3. Marriage: Deconstructing "Imagined Islam" of the West

The superficial, "boutique" Arabism (Bauman, Charlie Hebdo unpaginated) is exposed when it is offered to Muntaha, Sami's would-be wife leaving him powerless and restless. *RFD* portrays Sami's attraction towards Muntaha as a strategy for the confirmation of his imaginary Arab identity described as "a sexy version of the Arab world" (36). Sami reprojects onto Muntaha the same images that both his father and the English girls had projected onto him. Immediately after reporting Sami's identification with the "sexy Arabism", the narration proceeds on with Sami's views on Muntaha. Muntaha appeals to him because she is primarily "an Arab. A proper Arab. Baghdad-born" (36).

Nevertheless, the following sentences betray his image-charged view which is heavily influenced by his western upbringing. To Sami, Muntaha is "every bit as Arab as the Kuffiyeh" (23) he wears at the university. Muntaha's body, viewed in terms of Kuffiyeh, is transmuted into an Oriental signifier with the mere function of satisfying and arousing sexual interest in the viewer. However, there is a subtle difference between Sami's relationships with Muntaha on the one hand, and with his English girlfriends on the other. Whereas Sami's relationship with the English girls is based on a mutual process of seeing in the mirror of the partner "what they wanted to see of themselves", in his relationship with Muntaha it is Sami who unilaterally reduces Muntaha to a mirror through which he can see the desirable images of himself. Due to the same fact, Sami believes that Muntaha with the qualities of being "Arab, and educated, and eloquent" is excellent because "She reflected him" (39 emphasis added).

Unlike the English girls, Muntaha does not look at Sami from an Orientalist point of view, nor does she allow Sami to appropriate her as a mirror for the confirmation of his own desirable images. Rather than being involved in a game of imaginary constructs, she actively engages in a dialectical interaction with Sami wherefrom she deconstructs Sami's stereotypical images of himself (i.e. a secular sexy Arab) and of her (a passive oriental sexy Arab). The English girls- whose attitude perhaps represent that of the mainstream English society- interpellate Sami as "other" and make him to be caught in the damaging process of doing what he "cannot accomplish from within". In contrast to them, Muntaha is portrayed as an honest fellow-ethnicist who tries to reverse the process and help Sami unlearn the representational knowledge and worldview he has internalized in the British cultural space. Muntaha's insightful opposition to Sami's desire of pulling her to his own imaginary world is symbolically suggested through their major in university, namely, poetry vs. history:

For him, the real world held no surprises; it had to be turned into poetry first. She was saying the opposite. That it's necessary to escape from poetry to see the world in front of your nose. (39)

Sami sees the world through the filter of his fancy and turns it to subjective images. Muntaha, on the other hand, historicizes everything and puts it in the current spatio-temporal context. Hence the former's theoretically-based career as a student with a never-ending doctoral thesis and the latter's practical job at school as the teacher of history and geography. Whereas Sami's worldview is theoretical, ahistorical, immaterial, and cut off from the geo-historical background, Muntaha's understanding is informed of contextualization and historicity. This wide gap between the two characters is best shown in their first meeting in the novel at the "British Museum". While looking at some relics of Sumer (Ancient Iraq) including the shepherd god, Sami suggests to her that "It comes from your land. You must be proud of it" (39). Muntaha's rejection of the idea precisely stems from her serious involvement with history: "I'm from Iraq, not Sumeria. We have different gods today." (39).

While Sami's understanding is under the influence of nationalist discourse, Muntaha's comments suggest that she is not involved with the ahistorical and blind nationalism associated with an imaginary nation stuck in the past. Writing back to "culture talk" which depicts Muslims as "mummified ... and Museumised" people (Mamdani, 777), *RFD* portrays Sami, the secularist, to be unaware of the continuing changing realities which results in his confusion of -and inability to differentiate between- past and present. In fact, the border between past and present is blurred for him because of his ignorance of these changes.

He describes Muntaha's Arabic accent as "Sumerian, Iraqi", overlooking the thousand years of historical and territorial changes separating them. In contrast to Sami, Muntaha interprets the past history in terms of the present context where her understanding of the historical and political realities of the present is not blurred by such ideologically-driven concepts as nation or “Great Arab nation”. Hence her view about the story she was told in her Iraqi school about the Arab nation: “You must get away from other people's ideas to know what it means to you” (39). Unlike Sami who has been depicted as being under the influence of the rigid ideologies of both his father (anti-Islamic secularist Arabism) and his English girlfriends (Orientalism), Muntaha is shown to be enjoying the ability of resisting them. Muntaha with her strong sense of history fractures Sami's imaginary and mythical narrative of his life.

"Unclothed of his [abstract] symbols" (99), Sami resorts to his doctoral thesis to put the world back together through theory. Yet, his library research in England to build up his thesis fails him and makes Sami to take a journey to Syria to find practical evidence for his theories. Importantly, Sami's “anthropological” (195) journey to Syria dismantles his identification with the Arab nation because he is not accepted by his nearest family members as one of their own.

They have found a wide epistemological gap between themselves and their immigrant cousin who lives in London, and consequently exclude him from their community as a stranger/other. In other words, in his own ancestral homeland he is interpellated as a "reverse" (36) immigrant with the shaky position of an "Other". When he offers his thesis question to his cousins asking them "What kind of poetry do you like?", they answer him through the binary oppositional discourse of us/you;

"I tell you, cousin, which poetry is important to *us*. Probably no to you, but to *us* [...]. The Qur'an ... The Noble Qur'an (27 emphasis added).

In addition to be positioned as an “Other”, Sami also finds himself in the position of a suspect who becomes subject to interrogations by her aunt who throws a series of questions on him about his maternal uncle (Uncle Farris's) imprisonment and torture in the Syrian prison cells. Sami's first-hand contact with the realities of part of the imaginary Arab nation his father had constructed for him adds to his disillusionment. The images and ideals his father had provided for Sami are broken down by the street realities he witnesses by himself. In contrast to Mustafa's ideal secular Arab society, Damascus has turned mostly towards Islam and hijab which “would have represented the end of world to him [Mustafa]” (27). Sami's journey to Syria could be understood in light of Bauman's dichotomy of “pilgrim/tourist” (Hall, 18) identity. Sami travels to Syria as the home or the promised land of his Great Arab Nation to find a tangible “shrine” to anchor his

abstract identity to it. His Syrian relatives, however, do not accept him as one of their own and make him to leave Syria as a mere tourist. Sami the tourist travels back to London to continue his quest. Back in London, Sami finds his primary locus of identity, i.e. Great Arab nation, is doubly dismantled when he finds that his wife has turned to Islam and chosen to wear *hijab*.

Muntaha who had been chosen by Sami as his wife because she was "an Arab [,] A proper Arab [and] Baghdad-born...." (15), now resists Sami when he tells her that "You belong to the Arab Nation". Muntaha with strong sense of history and also with her insight into the political developments around her, challenges Sami's Blind idealism: "you can't see what's happening in front of you. Nobody talks about the Arabs any more" (123). The aggregation of all these burdensome realities shatters Sami's illusory certainty: "Where had his earth gone? He was all at sea" (74). Deprived of all external loci of identity, Sami is engaged in what Zygmunt Bauman calls "cloakroom communities" (Hall, 30). He goes to different pubs, bars, discos, and resorts to using narcotics just to get rid of the distress and disillusionment which hangs on him.

Sami's Holden Caulfeildian escaping-from-reality journey ends up to his imprisonment in a police station. Sami is arrested near a mosque merely for "grow[ing] a rather thick beard" and for posing "a suspicious manner" (371). In fact, Sami is taken to be a terrorist "regardless of his actions" (Hilal, 105). Sami's sojourn in the prison provides him with the opportunity to reconsider the bitter reality experienced by the real Arab people under the authoritarian "secular" regimes who ruthlessly imprison, torture, and dehumanize their people because of their belief. Sami's mind is opened to his father's blind, cruel, and damaging insistence on forced imposition of secularism to Arab countries like Syria and Iraq. In prison Sami recognizes Mustafa's betrayal of his uncle which brings about dehumanizing tortures on the uncle, as well as Muntaha's father's horrible experiences in Ba'thist torture houses in Iraq. Deprived of all kinds of "home" coupled with the horror of the prison, Sami experiences a radical change of outlook which is described skillfully through the terminology of Islamic Mysticism:

No more of those sensations that he usually employed as a hijab to drape around things-as-they-are.... He felt he was on the verge of something.
The lifting of a veil. (180)

RFD deconstructs the meaning of Hijab as one of the most contentious Islamic signs to write back to the mainstream western discourse. Whereas hijab is normatively portrayed by the western discourse makers as a sign of suppression of Muslim women, Robin Yassin Kassab shakes the Western overtones off the signifier and inscribes a new signified on it. For Sami, *Hijab* no longer signifies the texture which veils the Muslim female body. It is

rather the masculine ideological veil which has blinded both his and his father's eyes not letting them to see the misery of the Arab people oppressed by the dictators. Sami's ideological veil has so handicapped him that for more than ten years he could not see the cruelty of the secular government he supports.

Another difference between femino-physical *hijab* of Muntaha and the Masculine ideological *hijab* of Sami is the fact that the former independently chooses hijab when his father is dying, but the latter's ideological hijab has been imposed upon him by his father from his early childhood through which he has been panoptically, to use Foucault's term, controlled. It is exactly due to this fact that only in prison and after the veil is being left from his eyes that does Sami for the first time attack his father's ghost which for several times had haunted his hallucinations in the form of a centaur: "[... It was time] to examine all the superstitions he'd built around his father's ghost" (183). While Sami's father had struggled to suggest to his son that Muslim ideas are "womanly superstitions", the spiritual unveiling reveals that it is Mustafa's own patriarchal Arabism that had been subject to damaging superstition.

RFD makes use of the Islamic topos of "sacrifice" to portray the consummation of Sami's revolutionary turn towards Islamic identity. Reversing the well-known father-son relationship in the Qura'nic story of Ibrahim-Ismail, Sami in a dream-like experience in a research center kills the haunting ghost of his father who has manifested himself in the shape of a centaur by "stab[bing] it upwards through the throat [...] The son sacrifices the father" (252). Although the Freudian model of triangular relationship is seen in Sami's relationship with his parents, there is a significant difference between that model and Sami's experience. Nowhere in the novel is the relationship pictured in terms of sexual desire. It is more rendered as a relationship based on power, knowledge, and belief.

It is due to the same fact that Sami is inclined more towards his father as a source of power and knowledge. The climax of Sami's spiritual change which is realized with the symbolic killing of his father is also represented in terms of belief not sexual desire. Sami, who has taken part as a guinea pig in a research project on religiosity of the subjects, hears the voice of a boy who is reciting some verses of Qur'an which remind him of his mother:

"A boy's voice singing Qur'an on the stereo: *yanzi'u 'anhumaa libaasahumaa liyuriyahumaa saw'aatihimaa...* Each Arabic word ending on a long 'maa' sound, like *mama, mama*, says Sami, *maama*, but he isn't naked, he's wrapped up in towels, in the couch of her body, her fingers in his curls ... " (252).

It is after this call of the unconscious that Sami "sacrifices" his father. Unlike the usual Western, Freudian process Sami's action is rendered as part of a religious, divine ritual inspired by verses of Quran. Importantly, Sami's success in overcoming the ideological grip of his father is realized through two Muslim women who are usually pictured in the west as passive, oppressed, and in the urgent need to be saved. But the novel deconstructively reverses the process and suggests that Muslim women are themselves agent saviors than passive victims. In accordance with this new perspective, Sami's return to Islam is structured in the form of a journey from the discourse of masculine, rigid, secular modernity- based on the Western attitudes towards knowledge and progress- to the Islamic religiosity portrayed as a feminine process with its own unique view of life which can be reconciled with modern life. Near the end of the novel where Sami has come to the realization that his former secularist ideas could not carry him through life, the narrative relates his introspections about Muntaha's phone call to Iraq in this way: "For Muntaha, her people, her ancestors, didn't mean trouble. She was as she was, accepting her past, hopeful for the future." (110).

4. Conclusion

The Road from Damascus is an attempt to be an authentic writing back, or as Md. Mahmudul Hassan puts it, "writing back in its true sense of the world"(4). Robin Yassin Kassab as a member of the British Muslim community tries to offer an insider's view of the "lived experience" (Roy, 131) of the Muslims against the Western "imagined culture" of the Muslims. His narrative/counter-narrative focuses on characters from within the Muslims with the unique experience of living with and then moving away from secularism to religious identity. For Sami, reinvention of his Muslim identity, mediated through his wife, ends up with the reconstruction of his damaged relationship with his mother and his wife who symbolize "origin and basis" for Sami. The rigid secularist fundamentalism of Sami's father had disconnected Sami from an important part of his "origin". In fact, *RFD* deconstructs, first of all, the West and its secularism and positions it in the nexus of several signifiers introduced by Western media and literature as the part and parcel of Muslim culture. Then he embarks on deconstructing the Islam imagined in the West by creating a new structure in which women and *hijab* as two signs of Muslim identity gain totally new significance which challenges their previous significance in the context of Western public sphere.

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