

*Depiction of Arab Culture in Twenty-First
Century English and Arabic Novels*

"وصف الحضارة العربية في القرن الحادي عشر بالمقارنة مع
الحضارة الإنجليزية باستخدام الروايات العربية"

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ملخص

تناولت هذه الدراسة الأدب العربي في القرن الواحد والعشرين بالنقد. وتعرضت الدراسة بالتحليل الأدبي لروايات أربع، مؤلفوها جمعياً من النساء العرب. كما تعرضت الدراسة بالمناقشة لموضوعات سائدة في هذه الروايات مثل الهوية وأزماتها والحرية الدينية في المجتمع العربي وحرية المرأة وكفاحها ضد الظلم والمتناقضات والنفاق داخل المجتمع المسلم. أظهرت الدراسة أن المرأة ليست ذليلة في العالم العربي وذلك بالتناقض لما يذكره المجتمع الغربي عن المرأة العربية، ولكن حياتهن عبارة عن نضال متواصل ضد العادات والتقاليد.

ABSTRACT

This study reviewed the Arab literature of the 21st century. It analyzed some novels whose writers are Arab and they are women. It discussed four themes prevalent in these novels. These included identity and identity crisis, freedom of religion in Arab society women's freedom and struggle against oppression, and contradictions and hypocrisy within the Islamic society. The study showed that the women of the Arab world are not submissive as seen by the west, but their life is a constant struggle against their traditions and customs.

Introduction

In contemporary times, the image of the Arab has been vilified. When asked about the image of the Arab, the first few things to cross someone's mind would be terrorism, oppression of women and minorities, and violent and hateful people who are backward and traditional. This image of the Arab has been solidified across the globe in contemporary times. The Arab is seen as someone who is intolerant and who seeks to impose his will and way on people across the globe. He does not listen to reason and believes that his way is the rational way. This image of the Arabs as an intolerant, irrational and violent people has been further solidified through the events happening in Israel and the event of 9/11.

There are many factors that lead to the production of such an image. Different scenarios influence how a culture and its people are perceived by another culture and its people. This could happen through the dissemination of information through traveller's tales, anecdotes, books, novels, movies, documentaries. The major part played in this transformation of information for the formation of an image is by literature. Literature can be defined as "written texts with artistic value, including the traditional literary genres of poems, fiction and drama" (Lanqua.eu, 2015) It can include non-fiction, books written for children, diaries and autobiographies. Literature plays an important role in the transmission of an image to its reader. And if the literature is about a certain culture, it can transform the image of that culture or its people in the mind of the reader.

Keeping this in mind, this research study thus aims to analyze the impact of literature on the views and perceptions of the readers about a particular group of people and their culture. It will aim to give the reader of this research study an understanding of how perceptions about a certain culture and its people are created and how they change through the impact of the literature. The study will specifically use the case of Arab culture to prove its point, in that it will make a comparison of the way the Arab culture is depicted differently in the twenty-first century English and Arabic literature.

To find out how Arab culture is depicted in non-Arab literature, the research study will look at the literature that already exists on this topic, which will include articles from peer-reviewed journals. Then, it will carry out a first-hand review of the novels written on Arab culture. Through an analysis of the already existing literature, the research study will aim at three things. Firstly, it will define what 'literature' and 'culture' is and will look at the relationship between them. It will analyze what impact does literature have on culture and what impact does culture have on literature. Secondly, it will analyze the already existing literature on how literature impacts the way a certain culture and its group of people are perceived. The paper will analyze how a writer from a certain society can change the perceptions about another society through his or her writings. Thirdly, it will analyze the main topic and explore how the Arab culture has been perceived in the non-Arab 21st century literature. It will analyze the non-Arab literature and how the non-Arab literature forms a perception of the Arabs for people around the world. American, English and Israeli literature will be used to explore this fact. Answering these three questions will create groundwork for this research study and form a basis of comparison for the researcher to compare with in his research findings. As mentioned above, the comparison will be between non-Arab literature and the novels about the Arab culture that have been written by Arab authors. The comparison will help the reader understand how Arab culture has been depicted differently in different pieces of literature, and will hence explain to the reader how literature impacts the way the culture of one group is perceived by the other group.

1.1 Rationale for the study

As discussed above, the researcher believes that literature has a crucial impact on how a culture and the people of that culture are perceived by other people around the globe. The Arab culture has also experienced this phenomenon. But it is increasingly being witnessed that the Arab culture has been a victim of this phenomenon, in that it has affected the image of the Arabs in a negative way. The vilification of the image of the Arab has steadily

progressed through the 21st century. The Arab is now seen in an extremely bad light that has inculcated feelings of hate and fear in the non-Arab world. The paper thus seeks to analyze an important factor behind this negative Arab image. It was proposed by the research that literature is one of the important factors that has an impact on how a group is perceived by another group. The research study thus aims to analyze this factor thoroughly in the context of the Arab culture and find out how 21st century non-Arab literature has impacted the perception of the Arab in the eyes of other cultures. Moreover, it will also analyze novels by Arab authors written about the Arab culture to understand how the Arab culture is portrayed by Arabs themselves. The paper will then thoroughly make a comparison these two portrayals and try to understand the differences between them. Tackling the paper will allow the researcher to come to a successful conclusion on how literature impacts cultural perceptions about a certain group of people.

1.2 Structure of Dissertation

This research study is divided into five sections. The first section is the Introduction section which will introduce the topic and give the rationale behind the study. Moreover, it will also provide the structure of the dissertation so as to make it easier for the reader to understand and analyze the paper. The second section will be the Literature Review section. It will consist of a discussion of the already existing literature on the topic and will try to answer the three question described above. The literature used in this section will include Marston's 'The Arab/Muslim World: How It Looks in Books for American Children', an article on Literature and Culture published on Lanqua.eu, Zimmerman's 'What is Culture', Warren Bargad's 'The Image of the Arab in Israeli literature', Ann Auten's 'Understanding other Cultures through Literature', Fahd Mohammad Al-Olaqi's 'English Literary portrait of the Arabs', Quinn's 'Culture through Literature', and Kennedy's 'Defining a Culture'. The third section will describe the research methodology of this paper. It will include a description of the research design chosen for this paper, an overview of the 'systematic review'; methodology, database search,

data extraction and expected outcomes. It will move on to a description of the other secondary literature, particularly novels used in this project, and will conclude with the ethical considerations and limitations of the projects. The fourth section will consist of the research findings. The major portion of the researcher's study will be put out in this section. This will consist of the novels written about the Arab culture by Arab authors. The aim will be to find out the cultural perception of the Arabs provided by Arabs themselves. The novels used in this section will include Love in a Headscarf by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, Ten Things I Hate About Me by Randa Abdel-Fattah, The Girls of Riyadh by Raja Alsanea, The Story of Zohra by Hanan Al-Sheikh, Minaret by Leila Abdyllah, and Sandpiper by AhdafSoueif. The paper will try to establish the common themes within these novels and analyse an image of the Arabs in their light and discuss how is it different from the perception provided by non-Arab 21st century literature. The paper will then carry out an analytical comparison of how the non-Arab literature discussed in the literature review section is different from the Arab literature discussed in the research findings section. Lastly, the conclusion section will review the findings of the research study. This will lead us to an effective conclusion on how non-Arab 21st century literature has created different perceptions the Arabs than the Arab literature itself. By analysing the Arab case, the researcher will establish the impact of literature on the perceptions generated, in the mind of the reader of that literature, about a particular group of people and their culture.

Literature Review

This chapter will aim to review the relevant literature in order to analyze three main aspects of the impact of literature. Firstly, it will analyze the definitions of culture and literature. Secondly, it will analyze the impact of literature on the way a culture a culture and a group of people are perceived. Lastly, and most importantly, it will analyze the way the Arab culture has been perceived in the 21st century non-Arab literature. The literature review will set the basis

for the thorough analysis to be carried out in chapter 4 of this study, which will contain a comparison of the researcher's findings with the existing literature that will be reviewed in this section.

2.1 Defining literature and culture

Literature can be defined as “written texts with artistic value, including the traditional literary genres of poems, fiction and drama” (Lanqua, 2015, np). The horizon of literature not only includes fictional pieces of writings for adults, but it also includes non-fiction writings such as diaries, autobiographies and letters, as well as children's stories and folklore narratives (Lanqua, 2015). Lanqua.eu describes literature as a social and communicative system that forms an image of the society that it is written in and connects the people through the characters in that literature. An example of this would be a literature which contains a story about a specific social issue, and that forms a connection between the people who have suffered from that issue through the characters of the story.

On the other hand, culture is defined as a bigger concept than literature. “Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts” (Zimmerman, 2015). Literature is thus a part of culture. Lanqua.eu defines culture in terms of its relationship with literature. Because literature is a part of culture it plays a defining role in the teaching of culture, the aspects of a certain culture can be taught to its own people through the literature of that culture. Moreover, along with teaching culture to its own people, it also serves as a tool for other (foreign people) for learning about the social, historical, linguistic and other cultural aspects of a certain society (Lanqua.eu 2015). Thus, literature in society A can teach the people of society A about its own culture. Moreover, it can also teach the people of society B about the culture of society A. Furthermore, a writer from society C, can also write about society A, and form an image of society A for both the people of Society C and B. Thus, this is how literature plays a part in the teaching of culture, and the portrayal of culture across different societies.

2.2 Impact of literature on perceptions about a culture

As discussed in the introduction of this section literature can be used to teach the reader about a certain culture, either his own or some other culture. Keeping in mind the example about writer C writing a book about society A for people of society C, we can see how literature can have an impact on the way a culture and its people are perceived in other societies. Literature can change the way a certain society's people view another society. David Quinn has written about the impact of depicting culture through literature in his article 'Culture through Literature'. He describes how, "Literature is primarily an artistic arrangement of linguistic structures, but it is also a medium for the transmission of other types of information" (Quinn, 1980). He describes how literature is an institution for the transformation of information and how it has the power to dictate the views and perceptions that one culture holds about one another. Quinn's description of literature as an 'Institution of Transformation' is a testament to the fact that literature does have an impact on the perceptions about a culture.

Ann Auten in 'Understanding other Cultures through Literature', describes how literature is one the mediums of information. Anyone using literature as a source of information will be at the behest of that piece of literature to form perceptions about the subject it is portraying (Auten, 1984). If the subject is the portrayal of another culture, the reader will see that culture through the lens of that literature. Any way the literature describes that culture, the reader will perceive it as such. Thus, one sees here an apt description of how cultural perceptions are impacted through literature.

2.3 Arab Culture in 21st Century Literature

This section will review the relevant literature that is based on the subject of how and in what way the Arab Culture is perceived in the 21st Century Literature. As described above, literature has an impact on the way a culture is perceived. Similarly, the Arab culture and its people have also experienced the effects of this phenomenon, albeit in a negative way. This section will review the relevant literature that

is based on the subject of how and in what way the Arab Culture is perceived in the 21st Century Literature.

In the article ‘English Literary portrait of the Arabs’, Fahd Mohammad Al-Olaqi has highlighted how the image of Arabs has changed through the ages. He says that the distortion of the image of Arabs begin in medieval times when English medieval literary sources depicted the Arabs as “as tyrant caliphs, weak kings, lustful princes, medieval Saracens, mysterious travellers, filthy Bedouins, and immoral women” (Al-Olaqi 2012). Modern English writers explore, portray, and depict Arabian characters in the context of Islam. Thus, the writer’s perceptions of Islam are transferred on to his literature. In modern times, the Islamist Arab has been represented as a threat to the west, because Islam is seen by some as a threat (Al-Olaqi 2012). Therefore, modern literature of the 21st century, which has been viewed in the context of the negative perceptions of Islam, has portrayed negative perceptions about the Arab culture and its people. The author has described in detail the images of the Arab in English literature from the medieval times, but for the purposes of this paper, we will only review what he has written about the 21st Century. This he describes in detail in the section, ‘The Arabs of 9/11’.

He describes how the image of the Arabs has been tarnished by the events of September 2001. He describes how the current literature is influenced by the extremist, jihadist, and hateful movements within Islam (Al-Olaqi, 2012). He explains how literature now views Islam, and hence the Arabs through the lens of these jihadist portrayals of Islam. The image of the jihadist is applied to all the Arabs through the 21st century literature. The author also talks about how modern 21st century literature talks about the Arabs of the past. He gives the example of the novel ‘Jewel of Medina’ by Sherry Jones which is a fictionalized portrayal of the life of the Prophet and depicts the relationship between the Prophet and Aisha in a false way, which is blasphemous for Muslims. Moreover, he also talks about how 21st century literature has negatively affected the Arabs. Due to the current literature, the West views Arabs as ministers of terrorism,

and the threat of Islam has been portrayed as imminent (Al-Olaqi 2012). The current literature also portrays this threat as a sign of an incoming clash between civilizations which has created a fearful image of the Arabs in the west. Thus, Al-Olaqi has shown what perceptions does the 21st century literature portrays about Arabs, and how it has had a negative impact on the Arab cultural image.

Another literature that has shed light on how Arab culture has been depicted in foreign culture is 'Image of the Arabs in Israeli literature' by Warren Bargad. He talks about how the Arab was depicted for the very first time in Hebrew literature in a short story by Hayyim Brenner. Brenner's story views the Arab in a positive light. Brenner's perception of the young Arab is that of a soul brother, who is a fellow of the Jew in suffering, and a victim of economic persecution. For Brenner, the young Arab boy is a symbol of all downtrodden peoples whose inalienable rights have been abrogated (Bargad 1977). This portrayal of the Arab views the Arabs and Jews as brothers united in the struggle against societal oppression and injustice. Thus, one of the early Israeli literature on the Arabs views them in a favorable light and gives a positive portrayal of their culture and its people.

Moreover, Bargad has also described how in the early 21st Century, "much of the literature depicting Arabs consisted of a folkloristic or local-color type of fiction, in the "baneyarab" stories of Smilansky (1874-1953) and the collected works of Shami (1889-1949)" (Bargad 1977). In these works the reader is given the image of quasi-ethnological portrayls of Arab life; their customs, tribal ceremonies, rivalries and love relationships. This literature portrays the image of a primitive Bedouin "full of mystery, intrigue, impulsive violence and instinctive survival" (Bargad 1977, 55).

Bargad then moves on to how the Arab came to be depicted after the creation of Israel. He talks about the first generation of Israeli writers S. Yizhar, B.Tammuz, M. Shamir, and A. Megged, who produced a number of short stories about Arabs. The stories mostly revolve around the 'Arab problem' in the new Jewish state of Israel. The central themes in that literature are "issues of Arab displacement

from their land, the victimization of innocent villagers by forces beyond their control, and the agonized feelings of loss in terms of personal relations or possibilities of peace” (Bargad 1977). However, one must note that the point of view in this Israeli literature is sympathetic and the stories are told with an aura of understanding. The author moves on to describe how the image of the Arab starts to change in the literature of the second generation Israeli writers. Instead of providing a sympathy-worthy image of the Arab, the image now revolves around the theme of the Arabs as encroaching on Jew land. Moreover, as time has passed, the image of the Arab in Israeli literature has been increasingly seen in a negative light. From the Arab who was seen as a brother of the Jew against oppression, it has changed into that of an encroacher, and is currently viewed in a very extremist light. As in other literature, Israeli literature has also viewed the Arab in association with the negative image of extremists and jihadists. This is how Arab image has changed across the decades in the 21st century. The Arab culture has changed from one where it is perceived in a positive light to one which is viewed in an extremely negative light.

Moving on from Bargad’s work, another dimension to this is how the Arab world is viewed in children’s literature. Elsa Marston, in her article, ‘The Arab/Muslim World: How It Looks in Books for American Children’, describes how the theme of a mystical land prevails in children’s books. “Fairy tales and folk tales in the romantic settings of tents and temples, desert oases, golden palaces, and quaint old alleys provide delightful inspiration for both writers and illustrators” (Marston, 2010). Moreover, Palestine and Israel also account for a major part of the children’s literature. However, almost all the books published in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s presented the problem only from the Israeli side (Marston, 2010). Some novels have also depicted the Palestinians in extremely negative ways. They included stereotyped descriptions of the Arab with many wives, aiming to show the Arab as an oppressor of women. Moreover, there are some novels like ‘The Boy from over there’, in which the Arabs are describes as hateful and murderous. Thus, we see a variety of

ways in which the Arab culture and its people have been depicted in children's novels in America. These have ranged from image of Arabia as a mysterious and mystical land to one filled with violent people.

2.4 Summary

This chapter provided an overview on the literature which revolves around the impact of literature on cultural perceptions. It started off with defining literature as literary texts with artistic value that form a social and communicative system. It defined culture, how literature is a subset of culture, and how it plays an integral role in the 'teaching' of different aspects of culture to the reader. The chapter then moved on to describe the impact of literature on the perceptions about a culture and its people. It described how literature is a medium of transmission of information, and as an institution of transformation which has the ability to transform images about a certain society. We also see how people who only use literature as a medium and source of information have their view about a certain society limited to the extent that particular literature provides.

The chapter then moved on to a discussion of Arab cultural perceptions in 21st century literature. The section reviews three types of literature; English, Israeli, and American children's literature. In English literature, the Arab was portrayed in medieval times in primitive terms, with the Bedouin appearing repeatedly in the literature. In modern English literature, the Arab has started to be viewed in a negative light because of being the Arab image being associated with extremist Islam. In Israeli literature, we see how the Arab is viewed with sympathy and is seen as a brother of the Jew in the first and second generation of Israeli writers. Furthermore, we also see how the image changed to that of an encroacher and was then associated with that of an extremist jihadist. Moreover, the section also reviewed how Arabs are seen in a varying light in the American literature for children and how the image has progressed from one with magic carpets to one where the Arab is seen as hateful and murderous. We also saw how even in children's literature the Palestinian is seen in a negative light as opposed to the Israeli.

Summarizing, most of the literature of the 21st century forms an extremely negative image of the Arabs. The literature of the 21st century has had a large impact on how the world sees the Arab. The current literature sees Arabs through the lens of Islam, and because of the perceived negativity of Islam, with all the extremism and terrorism, the Arab is portrayed in a bad light. Currently, the image that is prevalent of the Arab in literature of the west is that of an extremist, violent, fundamentalist who seeks to impose his will and way on the rest of the world. It also sees the Arab as an oppressor of woman who does not treat women equal to man and in some cases does not even give basic human rights to them. The west views Arab lands with veiled women and men with ragged turbans. Themes of primitiveness form an integral part of the current image with the majority of the Arabs being viewed as Bedouin. The current literature has completely ignored the rich culture that Arabs have and has perpetuated false images of the Arab that are based on the actions of a small proportion of the Arab population.

Research Methodology

This chapter will provide an outline of the research methodology that was adopted for carrying out this research project. It will also try to justify the research methods adopted by the researcher in this project. The chapter will begin by describing the research design that was used for undertaking this research study before moving on to a description of the methodological approach which was used in the project. Following this, the data collection methods would be described and an explanation of the sampling technique will be done. This will be followed by a description of the data analysis method, specifically systematic review. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the ethical considerations, which the researcher took care of during this research study.

3.1 Research Design

To ensure the efficient collection of data through the research study, an effective research design is necessary. An effective research design is integral to make certain that the data is collected in a

manner which presents the research in a clear way. A research design is similar to a strategic plan as it describes the different steps that the researcher is required to take in order to guarantee that the research questions are answered in a comprehensive manner (Bryman, 2012). According to some authors, the research design consists of the blueprint for collecting, measuring and analysing data (Matthews and Ross 2010).

Following the defining of the research aims and objectives of this study, the aim of researchers is to identify the research design adopted. There are several different research designs that researcher can choose from, such as case study, systematic review, longitudinal analysis and experimental research designs. For the purposes of this specific research study, the researcher opted for systematic review research design.

Systematic review is a type of literature review systematic. "A systematic review typically focuses on a very specific empirical question, often posed in a cause-and-effect form, such as "To what extent does A contribute to B?" (Kennedy, 2007). The term 'specific' means that authors have defined authors have defined the research question as clearly and specifically as possible and have made a concerted effort to ensure that they have found all evidence relevant to that question (Kennedy 2007). A systematic review provides a complete summary of the literature pertaining to a specific research question. In the case of this study, the question, in terms of cause-and-effect form, is the literature as the cause, and its impact on cultural perceptions.. Thus, it will aim to answer the question of the impact of literature on cultural perceptions. The reason why the systematic review was chosen is because the research question that the researcher is aiming to answer was in a cause-and-effect form. In order to ensure that this question is answered in an efficient way, the researcher had to adopt the 'systematic review' method as put forth by Kennedy. Thus, this research study will provide a review, analysis and summary related to the question it has defined. It will go step by step through all the literature related to this topic, providing their summary, and analyzing their themes

along the way. Through this research design, we will thus establish how perceptions about Arab culture and its people are impacted by 21st century literature.

3.2 Methodology of the Systematic Review

As mentioned in the previous section, the research paper chose the ‘systematic review’ method as its research design. This section will provide the specifics of this paper according to the systematic review method.

3.21 Methodology

The question of the impact of literature on perceptions about a certain culture and people will be answered through the systematic literature review. Literature review and relevant secondary information from chosen studies were used to validate the research question. However, care was taken that academic integrity is maintained while in the process of gathering secondary data for the systematic literature review.

3.22 Database Search Strategy

Literature articles were mainly used for the purpose of this study. The articles used in this study were collected from authentic websites whose publishers were known and peer reviewed journals like JSTOR and Google Scholar. Data pertaining to the research questions was acquired from these sources and analyzed. The researcher specifically looked for articles which defined literature and culture, and which gave information on literature has an impact on the perception of a culture and its people, and the way the Arab culture has been perceived in the 21st century literature. Specific keywords and phrases that the researcher used while searching for this literature included ‘literature’, ‘culture’, ‘cultural perceptions’, ‘impact of literature’, ‘literature through culture’, and ‘culture through literature’. The chosen articles were evaluated, analyzed and investigated to extract the relevant information from them. The chosen articles were from credible sources, among them the ‘International Reading Association’, ‘American Educational Research Association’. Non-peer reviewed articles and articles from

websites which lacked credibility were excluded from the study. While the selection of these articles, care was taken not to deviate from the topic.

3.23 Data Extraction

When an article was found to be relevant to the topic, its full length versions were downloaded from online databases. The selected articles for research were then extracted. The articles were summarized and all the data related to the research questions was organized and divided in three parts according to the research questions. Before data extraction, each article was reviewed twice to ensure its relevance and assure academic integrity.

3.24 Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of this particular ‘systematic review’ of the literature expected to achieve the following outcomes:

- The reader of the research study understands how literature and culture are defined.
- The reader is able to know what the impact of literature is on cultural perceptions.
- The reader is able to understand how the Arab culture has been perceived in the 21st century literature.

3.3 Further Data Collection

A researcher must also opt for a suitable method of data collection depending on the nature and context of a particular study. Hence data collection methods vary from one research study to another. Usually, research studies consist of primary and secondary methods of data collection. Primary data methods include interviews with people regarding a certain subject. Secondary data collection methods include thorough research of existing literature on the subject. The data collection method chosen for this research study is the secondary data collection method.

3.31 Secondary Data Collection (Novels)

Following the defining of research aims and objects, and the selection of the methodological approach and the research design, the researcher proceeded to the data collection phase of the research

study. The researcher started off by collection of the secondary data. Here, we must emphasise the importance of secondary data collection. According to Anderson (2013), secondary data collection helps the researcher by informing him or her of the effective data collection methods with regards to the research topic. Moreover, it also informs the researcher of what is already known and what remains to be known about the research topic, which subsequently helps the researcher in defining the scope of the research study (Goddard and Melville, 2001). Moreover, secondary data also has a number of advantages, such as that it costs less to access secondary data, as compared to primary data, and that it is more trustworthy and reliable as its credibility is established (Bryman, 2012). For the purpose of this research study, the researcher carried out a thorough review of the literature pertaining to the impact of literature on cultural perceptions. The research study included two types of sources. One included the existing literature based on the topic of defining literature and culture, the impact of literature on the way a culture and group of people are perceived, and the way the Arab literature has been perceived in 21st century literature. This included Marston's 'The Arab/Muslim World: How It Looks in Books for American Children', an article on Literature and Culture published on Lanqua.eu, Zimmerman's 'What is Culture', Warren Bargad's 'The Image of the Arab in Israeli literature', Ann Auten's 'Understanding other Cultures through Literature', Fahd Mohammad Al-Olaqi's 'English Literary portrait of the Arabs', Quinn's 'Culture through Literature', and Kennedy's 'Defining a Culture'. These sources were used in the 'Literature Review' section and how they were used has been dealt in the 'systematic review' section previously. They consist of the existing literature on the research questions defined above; how is literature and culture defined and related, the impact of literature on the way a culture and group of people are perceived, and the way the Arab culture has been perceived in non-Arab literature of the 21st century. The other type of literature was the 21st century Arab literature which was about the Arab culture and its people. These included the

novels include *Love in a Headscarf* by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, *Ten Things I Hate About Me* by Randa Abdel-Fattah, *The Girls of Riyadh* by Raja Alsanea, *The Story of Zohra* by Hanan Al-Sheikh, *Minaret* by Leila Abdyllah, and *Sandpiper* by AhdafSoueif. Common themes within that literature were identified and an analysis of the image that they portray of the Arabs will be discussed. The image portrayed of the Arabs will be compared with the image portrayed of the Arabs in non-Arab literature of the 21st century. This will lead us to an effective conclusion as to the impact of literature on cultural perceptions of a people.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

In this research study, there does not arise an ethical issue in the research undertaken in it. There isn't any requirement of approval from the authors of the research sources for the dissemination of their works. The results of this research study will be based on secondary data which includes novels and articles which has already been published. Moreover, the use of citations relieves the researcher from any ethical considerations while using the works of these authors.

3.5 Limitations

The use of secondary data in the research study has advantages and disadvantages of its own as compared to primary research design. Some limitations associated with the systematic review design include quality of literature selected, the bias of the person who undertook the research study, the quality of analysis of the researcher, and the restriction of time. However, the researcher has tried to handle all such limitations in a convincing manner resulting in a reduction of the negative effects of the limitations on the research paper.

Research Findings and Analysis

This chapter will provide an overview of selected pieces of twenty-first century Arab literature which depicts Arab culture. The aim of this chapter would to analyze and identify ways in which Arab culture and its people are represented in Arab literature and will

identify common themes within those pieces of literature to conclude what image they form of the Arab people and culture. The paper will also try to establish how these portrayals are different from the established views of the Arab world.

4.1 Review of the books

The books that will be reviewed in this section include ‘Love in a Headscarf’ by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, ‘Ten Things I Hate About Me’ by Randa Abdel-Fattah, ‘The Girls of Riyadh’ by Raja Alsanea, ‘The Story of Zohra’ by Hanan Al-Sheikh, ‘Minaret’ by Leila Abdylah, and ‘Sandpiper’ by AhdafSoueif. Common themes within that literature will be identified, and what image these themes form of the Arabs will also be discussed. As discussed in the research methodology section, the analysis will be carried out through the ‘systematic review method’. An important aspect of the systematic review is the review of the research findings in tabular form. Thus, table 1 provides a systematic review of the books.

Table 1: Systematic review of Arab Novels

| Novel | Author | Review |
|---------------------|---------------|---|
| Love in a headscarf | Shelina Zahra | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelina Zahra’s memoirs about the concept of marriage in the British Muslim Community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a young age, Zahra held romantic ideals, like believing in her being destined to marry John Travolta and how he would convert to Islam for her and become a devout religious man. • A case of identity crisis is apparent; On one hand, the author is an oxford graduate, who detests cooking, despises samosas, is strictly against arranged marriages and aspires to marry John Travolta. But on the other hand she still strictly adheres to |

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| | | <p>the ‘muslim’ headscarf, while the men she was in a relationship with asked her to remove the headscarf.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her romanticized ideals were crushed in her early 20s when she started having guests at her home looking for her hand in marriage. • She laments how she was judged on her ability to make samosas rather than being an Oxford Graduate. • If one were to observe her desire to part with her scarf, one sees that she, instinctively and subconsciously, clings to her headscarf so as to protect and keep away from the culture of the west that does not emphasize on marriage for one to be in a relationship with the other person. • Zahra is torn between two identities. While she detests the idea of arranged marriage that comes from her own culture, she clings to her headscarf and keeps away from the norm of unmarried relationships that exists in the west. • Thus, even though she hates some aspects of her culture, she clings to some of them in order to protect herself from the aspects of western culture she does not aspire to. |
| Ten Things I | RandaAbdel-Fattah | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protagonist, Jamila, has two identities. She belongs to a muslim |

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| <p>Hate About Me</p> | | <p>family from Lebanon, that is living in Australia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the racism prevalent in Australia, and the association of terrorism with being a Muslim, Jamila hides her Lebanese-muslim identity and is known as Jamie in school. She has dyed hair and wears contact lenses. • The story portrays the difficulty of adapting to a new culture all the while holding on to one's own heritage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jamila's family is led by her traditional and conservative father. Jamila, along with the children in the family, question the traditions of their muslim heritage. • Jamila/Jamie also challenges the sexism prevalent in the rules of her father; a different set of rules for her brother and her. • This novel is another example of how Muslims in a western society engage in an identity crisis that could either be internal or imposed externally by the society. • Jamila is forced to hide her identity due to society's views about Muslims, while she also tries to challenge the traditions and values of her own heritage because she does not agree with them. Thus, we see how she is facing an identity crisis on |
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| | | multiple levels. |
| Minaret | Leila Aboulela | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A novel revolving around the lives of the girls of Middle East <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protagonist is Najwa, who is a highly westernised student studying in Khartoum. Her family is of a high standing, and is not religious. • The only way Najwa comes in contact with Islam is when she sees her servants performing the rituals put forth by Islam. • After a coup in her country, Najwa's life changes, and she has to escape to London. However, when she arrives in London, she realises that the conceptions she has of freedom in the west are far from the reality there. • Her experience with freedom there is identified with a close call with death, her brother's drug addiction, her poverty and a failed love affair. • In order to fulfil her survival needs, she has to work as a servant in for rich Saudi families in London. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This reversal of role, leads her to suffer in ways she did not imagine in her previous comfortable existence. • This suffering leads her on a spiritual search for the divine and forces her to come to terms with her roots. This search leads her back to her Muslim religion. • The once non-religious girl seeks and finds strength in her Islamic identity. |

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| | | <p>Najwa aspired to make her life in rhythm with the essence and core of the Islamic faith.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity crisis is apparent; and the transformation of a person's identity as they strive for peace. In this novel, Najwa strives for freedom, and the achievement of freedom leads to her being in peace with herself and her identity. |
| Girls of Riyadh | RajaaAlसानea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novel is about girls from an elite family from Saudi Arabia. The book revolves around the lives of four girls from upscale families. • Narrations of their lives reveals several things that are taboo in Saudi Arabia; driving women, illegal drinking, homosexuality, dating and premarital sex. • The book highlights the oppressive lifestyle that the women of Saudi Arabia have to live through; not being able to choose their education, career, and marriage. • The writer portrays how the youth of Saudi Arabia are stuck between their traditions and modernism and through the lives of the girls, the writer shows how the youth try to find ways around the strict rules of society. • This book showed how the lives of the youth in Saudi Arabia are a constant struggle between traditional and modern values. The book also seeks to |

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| | | <p>correct the western views regarding Saudi Arabia, that it is about oil wells, terrorism and veiled women.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By showing the lives of the wealthy class from the capital, the author shows that Saudi Arabia is not all about what west thinks it is. The writer also shows how a society that conservative is full of hypocrisy and contradictions. |
| Sandpiper | AhdafSoueif | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A novel about a marriage across two cultures. The protagonist of the story is a European woman, who marries an Egyptian man. • Initially, the marriage is stable and peaceful. However, due to Europe being drastically different than Egypt in terms of culture, the marriage starts to suffer. • The woman in the story is unfamiliar with the culture, beliefs, rituals, and customs of Egypt, which she does not take a liking to and this leads to the relationship with her husband to suffer. • Her trouble in adjusting to the new environment in terms of culture, leads to problems within her marriage. • Even though the protagonist was born in Egypt, her life in England has made her far removed from the traditions of Egypt. She now loathes the world of traditional Islam that she was born |

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| | | <p>into but is more accustomed to the life she has lived in the West.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through marriage, she has been brought back to this land but because she is so alien to it, her feelings of alienation are transferred towards her husband. • Moreover, her not being familiar to Egyptian customs, language leads to her husband being irritated. However, the fragile marriage is kept together because of their young daughter. • Sandpiper is another story about how identities transform, and when they do it leads to distance from and loathing to the old identity. • Moreover, it is also about a woman seeking freedom, and she seeks this liberation in the familiar values of her European upbringing and not the traditional values of Islam that she was born into. |
| <p>Story of Zahra</p> | <p>Hanan Al-Shaykh</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The novel portrays the story of Zahra, set in Beirut. • Story follows a young girl who lives in war-torn Beirut. The girl, Zahra, is mistreated by her mother and abused by her father who beats her as he is strict with regards to discipline. • Zahra leaves the country to stay with an uncle of hers. Eventually, her uncle's affection for her becomes sexual, and to escape that Zahra agrees to marry his friend Majed. |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The marriage is unsuccessful and Zahra returns to Beirut. She is now in a secret relationship with a supposedly military man. • The book throws light into an Islamic society where a woman seeks freedom from the traditions that are both patriarchal and religious. • The novel shows the contradictions in a Muslim society, secret affairs and adultery in a society that forbids them. |
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4.2 Analysis

This section will carry out an analysis of the above finding by finding the common themes within the above discussed literature in order to conclude what image they form of the Arab culture. These themes include Identity and Identity crisis, freedom of religion in Arab society, women's freedom and struggle against oppression, and contradictions and hypocrisy within the Islamic society. Analyze of these themes will lead us to a conclusion on how Arab culture and its people are represented in 21st century Arab literature.

4.21 Identity and Identity Crisis

The concept of Identity and identity crisis has been repeated time and again in Arab literature. Writers have used the idea of the 'Immigrant Muslim' in order to portray how identity crisis becomes a part of their lives. Due to the instability in the Arab world, many people have been forced to migrate to other developed and modernized parts of the world, usually Europe and North America. This, in the Arab world and in Arab literature, is mainly identified as the West, which is based on secular ideals. These secular ideals stand in stark contrast to the traditions and values that are upheld in the Arab world. When the immigrant Muslim comes in contact with and exposed to the secularism in this modern, developed and industrialized world, their identities get mixed. Hence begins an inner struggle, which shatters their identity into two. On one hand,

they see the ideals of the West based on freedom, individualism, liberty from imposed religious ideals, along with the ideas of consumerism and capitalism. On the other hand, they are held back by the traditions and values of their roots, which put family and community before the individual, where freedom is bound by religious commands and rules, and where there is no idea of freedom of choosing who you love. The freedom of the society attracts them while they are held back by the tradition of their families.

This theme can be witnessed in the novels reviewed above. In the novel ‘Love in a Headscarf’, Zahra is an immigrant Muslim, a member of the British Muslim community. On one hand, she has romanticized western ideals about marriage, fueled by Hollywood, while on the other hand she hates things that have to do with her own culture, samosas , cooking, and arranged marriages. However, one sees how this identity crisis transforms her. Even though she aspires towards some of the ideals of the west, she holds on to certain traditions of her own culture to protect herself from the norm of unmarried relationships between the West. Her identity is now neither strictly Muslim, nor strictly based on the ideals of the west. Her struggle in a foreign community has created a hybrid identity that is a mixture of her traditions and western ideals.

Moreover, the novel ‘Ten Things I Hate Me’ is another story which contains the theme of the identity crisis that an immigrant Muslim suffers from in a foreign land. The protagonist is from Lebanon, settled in Australia. Her name is Jamila, but in school she is known as Jamie, and has to dye her hair to protect her identity. However, this is a different kind of identity crisis than the one discussed previously. The one that the protagonist in ‘Love in a Headscarf’ was experiencing was internal, while the one Jamila suffers from is external, i.e. imposed by the society. In this case, there is no inner struggle going on in Jamila between her traditions and the ideals and traditions of the society in Australia. Instead, the reason she has two identities is to protect her Middle Eastern roots, and specifically to protect her Islamic identity. She has to hide the fact that she is a muslim because of association of Islam with terrorism. Therefore,

she faces a struggle between two identities, one based on her roots, and one is a mask she has to put on to hide her roots from the society she lives in.

Furthermore, in the novel 'Minaret', the protagonist Najwa is a highly westernized student from Khartoum, belonging to an elite family. She lives her life with freedom that one sees in a western society. She is not bound by the strictness of traditions based in the values of her religion or the customs of her family. Her only contact with Islam is when she witnesses her servants performing Islamic rituals. However, her identity crisis emerges when she has to flee the country due to a coup. She goes to London, but her conceptions of 'freedom in the west' do not materialize. Her harsh experiences there make her realize that the 'individualism' in that society is more of an 'each person on his own' type of freedom. For survival she starts to work for an elite Saudi family, and her mistreatment there sparks in her a desire to seek spirituality, and hence she seeks strength in the Islamic faith. This case is different from the one above, wherein the protagonists did not view their traditions highly, but nonetheless this case exhibits an identity crisis. Here, it is the other way round, in that her highly westernized self which aspired to the ideals of the west, now seeks to go back to her own Islamic faith in search for peace. This, identity crisis is different from the one in 'Love in a Headscarf', whereby we saw the emergence of a hybrid identity. Here, we see how the crisis completely transforms the identity of the protagonist; from a westernized individual to one who holds the Islamic faith dear to herself.

Additionally, we see this theme in the novel 'Sandpiper' by AhdafSoueif. However, the way it is portrayed is drastically different than the way it was in the other novels. Here, the protagonist is a European woman, who comes to settle in Arab lands. The woman marries an Egyptian man, and comes to settle in Egypt. Though she was born in Egypt, her life in England has driven her away from the traditions of Egyptian society and Islam. She is now more used to life in the west, and despises the values of Islam. She faces a struggle between her Egyptian identity, which are her roots,

and her western identity, which she acquired while living in England. However, unlike the previous cases, this identity crisis fails to transform her identity in any way, and she manages to hold on to her Western identity. Instead, this identity crisis is transferred to her marriage and while she holds on to her identity, she moves further away from her marriage. The alienation that her identity suffers from is transferred towards her husband. This novel, unlike the others represents an identity crisis which fails to transform the person.

4.22 Freedom of Religion and Tradition in Arab Society

The concept of religion, its oppression, and the desire to be free from its ideals and traditions can also be observed in Arab literature. Writers have again used the concept of the 'Immigrant Muslim' to portray the struggle that one faces as they aspire towards secular ideals of the west while they are held back by their own customs, rituals and traditions. These traditions are sometimes based in religion or are simply based in the culture and customs of the society. Moreover, writers have also used 'youth' in their stories in order to portray this theme. In their novels, there is usually a young person, who does not aspire towards his own religious ideals and traditions, and wants freedom from the oppressiveness of their religion. The young individual seeks this freedom in the secular ideals of the west. This either materializes in success, in that the individual gains his supposed ideas of freedom, or is held back by his religion, or in some cases, goes back to his religion as he sees a greater peace in that.

In 'Love in a Headscarf', even though Zahra seeks refuge in the headscarf, which is considered an important part of a woman's clothing in Islam, she seeks freedom from traditions that are entrenched in her Muslim community, for example that of arranged marriages. She loathes the idea of arrange marriage and holds romanticized ideals inspired by Hollywood. This story shows how the youth of the Arab are seeking freedom from their traditions in the values of the west.

Furthermore, in the ‘Girls of Riyadh’, the story again follows the lives of young girls who are far removed from their cultural and religious traditions. The book revolves around many taboos in Saudi Arabia, drinking, sex, homosexuality and dating. The book also portrays how the youth of Saudi Arabia try to find ways to get around the oppressive system that is in place there; women driving cars dressed as males. This novel is another representation of how the youth are stuck between religion, culture on one hand, and their desire for such on the other hand. Through the lives of the girls, the writer shows how the youth in Saudi Arabia seek freedom from the tough and strict rules of traditional society like family values, self-respect, dignity and honour imposed by their religion and cultural customs.

4.23 Women’s Freedom and their Struggle against Oppression

The concept of Freedom of women and their struggle against oppression is a recurring theme in these novels. This oppression is based in various factors. These include religion, tradition, and patriarchy. The majority world view about the women in Arab countries is that they are oppressed, and the reason that many people believe this is so is because they are submissive, which leads to their oppression. Arab authors have sought to correct these views by offering a window into the lives of Arab women who are the opposite of what the west believes them to be. These women suffer from oppression on multiple fronts. The oppressors range from clerics to fathers. Arab authors have sought to portray to the world that these women are not submissive and their lives are a constant strive for freedom and a continuous struggle against this oppression. In ‘Love in a Headscarf’, Zahra can be seen struggling against the tradition of arranged marriage which is well entrenched in her society. By telling the reader how she loathes cooking, making samosas, and how she is annoyed by guests looking for her hand in marriage, she portrays to the world that she does not agree with the image of Arab woman, that the Arab society seeks from her. Her actions show that

she does not want to submit to these traditions and does not want to be a woman whose character is judged by how well she cooks. Zahra shows how she, like many other women in her society, have to fight such traditions on a daily basis and how their lives are led by the goal of freedom from tradition and the oppression that is based in this tradition.

Moreover, in 'Ten Things I Hate About Me', Jamila's story also revolves around her desire to be free. However, her struggle for freedom is not about religion, but is about the patriarchy and sexism prevalent in her society. This struggle is directed against her father, whose sexism is evident in the different sets of rules he has for her and her brother. The story shows how, among other types of societal oppression, Arab women face discrimination that is so entrenched in society that it shows itself in the family system too. The story shows that patriarchy is another problem that Arab women face and their life is also a struggle against the patriarchal values engraved in the society.

The novel *Girls of Riyadh* has a similar theme of women's desire for freedom and their struggle against state and religious oppression. Even though the novel is about the lives of girls from an elite family, it shows how even these upscale girls are not free from the traditions of their society. The book emphasizes the oppressive lifestyle that women of Saudi Arabia have to experience in their inability to choose their own education, career, and marriage. The author highlights the extent of this oppression by telling the reader how women aren't allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia and how they try to find ways around these rules by dressing up as males. Through this story, the author tries to exhibit the fact that even the women of the elite, who are supposedly free from the rules of the society, are held back by the traditions and rules of their society. The fact that the elite women have to struggle for their freedom shows that women's desire for freedom and their struggle against oppression extends over all the classes.

Women's struggle against oppression is also shown in the *Story of Zahra*, albeit in a different light. The story follows a girl who suffers

mistreatment and abuse by her parents. Her desire to be free from such oppression causes her to flee from her country and move in with her uncle. There she has faced by the sexual advances of her uncle and marries his friend Majeed in haste. The marriage is unsuccessful and she goes back to her country. Through this story, the author has showed to the world that Arab women also suffer from the very same problems that women even in the west suffer from. Arab women can also suffer from abuse and mistreatment by their families. The author has tried to make readers around the world sympathize with Arab women in a way they would sympathize with their own women. She has tried to show that the problems of Arab women do not only revolve around religious oppression, but their problems can also be similar to the problems of women in the west; problems which are not rooted in religion.

4.24 Contradictions and Hypocrisy within the Islamic Society

One final theme that we see in Arab literature of the 21st Century is the contradiction and hypocrisy that exists within the Islamic society there. The west views that Arab world as a society that very strictly adheres to Islamic ideals, and where one does not witness things that exist in the west such as relationships, drinking, premarital sex, and homosexuality. The West's view of the Arab world is one where every woman is covered from head to toe in a veil. Arab writers have sought to change this view of the West by providing a peek into the secret lives of Arab youth, who indulge in all those activities that the youth in the west indulge in, but these activities are carried out in secrecy, and thus do not come to the forefront. These are the contradictions and hypocrisy within the Islamic society, but these are not necessarily held in a bad light by the authors.

Firstly, in the novel 'Love in a Headscarf', we see the protagonist having romanticized ideals that are distant from the Islamic concept of love. Here we see that an Arab woman feels about romance the same way that any western woman feels. She also engages in relationships before marriage, which are forbidden in Islam. The

author seeks to portray to the world that everyone within the muslim community does not strictly adhere to Islamic rules and rituals, which contradicts the image of a unified strict Islamic society that the west has about the Arab world. The story also sheds light on the hypocrisy that exists within the Muslims.

Moreover, this theme is also witnessed in the Girls of Riyadh, which offers a window into the lives of the elite of Saudi Arabia. The story is rampant with illegal drinking, homosexuality, relationships and sex, all of which are forbidden in Islam. It provides the western world with images of women in mini-skirts in the colleges and universities of Khartoum which contradicts the image of the veiled women that exist in the Arab world. The author has thus shown a society that is strictly conservative, but is also full of contradictions and hypocrisy. The society indulges in those very same activities the religion it is based on forbids.

A Similar theme is also shown in the 'Story of Zahra' where the story revolves around the secret relationship she has in her home country after her divorce. The story again shows that adultery and affairs, which are forbidden in Islam, do exist in Islamic societies. It seeks to show an image of woman that stands in stark opposition to the one held by the west. Along with showing the contradictions and hypocrisy within an Islamic society, it also portrays that women of the Arab world are quite similar to women in the west, in that they do not solely believe in the ideal of arranged marriages and seek love in a similar way to the women of the west.

4.3 Comparison of literature

This section will carry out a comparison of the 21st Century Arab literature on this topic with the Arab novels on the Arab culture. The 21st century non-Arab literature was discussed in chapter 2 of this paper, while the Arab novels were discussed in this chapter.

Through a review of Al-Olaqi's 'English Literary Portrait of the Arabs', the researcher had found that the image of the Arab had been started to be portrayed in a bad light since the medieval times. The

image opposed consisted of tyrant caliphs, weak kings, lustful princes, medieval Saracens, mysterious travellers, filthy Bedouins, and immoral women (Al-Olaqi 2012). Al-Olaqi described how the image of the Arabs post 9/11 is seen the light of the Jihadist and extremist movements with Islam. Moreover, through a review of Bargad's 'The Image of The Arab in Israeli Literature', the researcher find out how the image changed from a brother to hateful and violent person who seeks to impose his will. Through a review of Marston's work, 'The Arab/Muslim World: How It Looks in Books for American Children', the researcher found out that the image of the Arab has changed from one from a mystical land to a primitive man who oppresses women, and who is a hateful and violent person.

Summarizing, through the existing 21st century literature on the topic of how literature impacts the cultural perception of a group of people, the researcher find out that literature does play a part in influencing perceptions and in the 21st century English, Israeli, and American literature, the Arab has been portrayed as a primitive Bedouin, who follows extremist and jihadist ideologies, who is an oppressor of women, and who is filled with violent and hateful tendencies and who seeks the imposition of his will and way on those around him. Thus, an average person would view the Arab lands with primitive men filled with hate, extremism and violence, and women who are oppressed through the veil and completely submit to the will of the men. Moreover, the Arabs are also seen as people who follow an extremist and strict code based on their religion and tradition and they do not indulge in activities that are not seen in a negative light in the west like drinking, relationships etc.

On the other hand, the review and analysis of the novels by Arab authors pertaining to Arab culture, the researcher came across a totally different image of the Arab culture and its people. The researcher came across four themes in these novels which portray to the reader a different picture of the Arab culture than the one portrayed in English, American and Israeli literature. These four

themes included 'Identity and Identity Crisis', 'Freedom of Religion and Tradition in Arab Society', 'Women's Freedom and their Struggle against Oppression', and 'Contradictions and Hypocrisy within the Islamic Society'. With regards to Identity, the researcher found out that all the Arabs do not strictly follow their religion and traditions and do aspire to secular ideals of the west. For example, as described in the novels, they do loathe the tradition of Arranged Marriages. Moreover, with regards to Religion and Tradition, all the Arabs do not aspire to their strict traditions but have a tendency to tilt towards modernity. They do aspire towards secular ideals but are held back by constraints put forth by their tradition and religion. As we can see in the novels, especially the youth of Arabia want freedom from the oppressiveness of their religion. For example, in Love in a headscarf we see how the woman does not agree to what is expected of her like cooking and an arrange marriage. We see how Jamila fights against the sexism of her father in 'Ten Things I Hate About Me'. Furthermore, we also see in 'Girls of Riyadh' how women fight the rules of their state and drive while dressed up as males. Moving on, we also see that the Arab society, as portrayed by the west, is not a unified body following a strict code of life based on their religion. We see the appearance of various taboos like relationships, premarital sex, drinking and homosexuality that many segments of the society, especially the youth, indulge in. Thus, through this comparison, we can conclude that the image of the Arab portrayed in the literature of the West is drastically different than the image of the Arab as portrayed in novels by Arabs themselves. Whereas the English, American, and Israeli literature sees the Arabs as a unified body of primitive people who follow strict codes and extremist ideologies, are oppressors of women who are themselves submissive and have violent and hateful societies, we see in Arab literature that this is not the case. In Arab literature, we see how the Arabs are not a unified body and segments within them aspire to the secular ideals of the west. The youth of the Arab struggles for freedom from their strict religious traditions. The image of the submissive woman is also broken by Arab novels who show

that the life of an Arab woman is based on constant struggle against religion, tradition and patriarchy. Moreover, we also see that the Arab society is full of contradictions and hypocrisy and indulges in many activities that are forbidden in their religion. We can establish that the image portrayed by the non-Arab literature is very different from the one portrayed in Arab literature. Thus, we see how literature has an impact on cultural perceptions about a certain group. The fact that these two separate lines of literature portray two different images of the Arab culture and its people is testament to the fact that literature plays a crucial role in forming images and perceptions about a certain people and their culture.

4.4 Summary

This section reviewed the Arab literature of the 21st century. It specifically analyzed the Arab literature in light of how it portrays the Arab culture and its people. It sought to find the underlying themes that exist within those novels and what image those themes give of the Arab world. It used the novels, *Love in a Headscarf* by Shelina Zahra Janmohamed, *Ten Things I Hate About Me* by Randa Abdel-Fattah, *The Girls of Riyadh* by Raja Alsanea, *The Story of Zohra* by Hanan Al-Sheikh, *Minaret* by Leila Abdyllah, and *Sandpiper* by AhdafSoueif. All these novels were written by women and feature the stories of young women engaged in various struggles. However, through their novels, the authors have not only tried to portray an image of women of the Arab world, but they have also aimed at providing an image of the Arab youth, and the Arab society in general.

The section then identified four themes prevalent in these novels. These included Identity and Identity crisis, freedom of religion in Arab society, women's freedom and struggle against oppression, and contradictions and hypocrisy within the Islamic society. Analyze of these themes will lead us to a conclusion on how Arab culture and its people are represented in 21st century Arab literature.

The researcher analyzed how writers have used these themes using the concept of ‘Immigrant Muslims’ in an alien society and youth struggling between traditions and modernity. The researcher showed how these themes have been repeatedly witnessed in all these novels through the stories of young women in both foreign societies and in their own local land. We see how an identity crisis can completely transform one’s identity, or can create a hybrid identity. Moreover, the researcher also showed how an identity crisis does not manage to change a person. Additionally, we see how the youth of the Arab world are stuck between modernity and traditions and how they aspire towards secular ideals and are held back by their religion and societal traditions. Furthermore, we also see how the women of the Arab world are not submissive as seen by the west, but their life is a constant struggle against their traditions and customs based on rules set by religion, family and society. Finally, we see how the Arab society is full of contradictions and hypocrisy, and how on one hand the society portrays itself as a strict unified body following a single code, while on the other hand there are people in the society that indulge in the exact opposite of these strict codes.

Through stories of how the identities of these young women are confused, how the youth struggle for freedom against religion, societal customs, patriarchy, and different forms of oppression, and how they indulge in acts forbidden by their religion and culture, the writers have shown a different side to the women of the Arab world in particular and the Arab society in general. The authors have aimed to correct the image of the west about the Arab world; that Arab society only revolves around strict codes, and is a unified body of strict Islamic adherents who do not aspire towards the secular values of the west. For example, in the ‘Girls of Riyadh’, we came across how the youth of Arabia indulged in things that are considered a taboo in their society and indulge in activities like drinking, premarital sex, relationships, and we see girls wearing mini-skirts in the colleges of Khartoum. The elite of the Arabs are quite different from the image that the west has about the Arabs. Furthermore, with regards to women’s freedom and their struggle against oppression,

we see how the Arab woman is not the submissive woman as seen by the west.

The section concluded with a comparison of non-Arab literature and Arab literature about the Arab culture and the researcher explained how the images portrayed by these two different literatures are immensely different. This is evident of the fact literature plays an integral role in cultural perception formation and the reader can clearly see how literature impacts the way one group of people see the other group.

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