Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University of Idaho, 2007)
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“A Nation of Narrations: Religion, Hegemony, & Self-identification in Arab American Literature”

Department of English

Monday, December 7, 2015
9:30 A.M.
David Turpin Building
Room A136

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Christopher Douglas, Department of English, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Lincoln Shlensky, Department of English, UVic (Member)
Dr. Jason Colby, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Carol Fadda-Conrey, Department of English, Syracuse University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Marlea Clarke, Department of Political Science, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This research project investigates the intersection of religion, self-identification, and imperialism in a number of Arab American literary works. It engages a wide array of, and contributes to, scholarship from American Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Islamic Studies, Global Studies, and Transnational Literary Theory. The project examines two groups of writers: the first group consists of American cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Nonie Darwish, Bridgette Gabrielle, and Wafa Sultan, while the second includes Arab American literary writers Mohja Kahf, Leila Ahmed, Ibrahim Fawal, and Alia Yunis. The former employ the traditional autobiography genre to produce master narratives, while the latter utilize the memoir, novel, and short-story cycle genres to challenge hegemonies and master narratives.

The cultural conservatives, I contend, belong to a growing transnational body of writers whose phenomenon constitutes an extension of what Matthew F. Jacobs calls an “informal network” of transnational self-identified specialists (4). In their autobiographies, Ali, Gabrielle, Darwish, and Sultan concentrate on the Middle East, Muslims, and Arabs, but they are unique in the sense that their policy-oriented personal narratives explicitly seek to influence not only American attitudes and practices aimed at Arabs and Muslims, but also those directed at American citizens of Arab or Muslim descent. Furthermore, their culturally-conservative traditional autobiographies *Infidel* (2007), *Nomad* (2010), *Heretic* (2015), *Now They Call Me Infidel* (2006), *Because They Hate* (2006), *They Must Be Stopped* (2008), and *A God Who Hates* (2009) deem American multiculturalism a serious danger to the United States and the West, a thesis not unlike Samuel P. Huntington’s in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

In this research project, I claim that Arab American literary writers have had to face, and write against, the predominance of this old-new clash of civilizations idea which has evolved into a discourse promulgated by the self-identified experts of the “informal network” and the cultural conservatives of Arab or Muslim descent. The Arab American literary novels, memoirs, and short-story cycles my study closely examines trouble the clash of civilizations discourse. Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), Ahmed’s *A Border Passage* (1999), Fawal’s *On the Hills of God* (1998), and Yunis’s *The Night Counter* (2009) are arguably representative of trends in, though not limited to, the contemporary Arab American memoir, novel, and short-story cycle genres and are best understood as literary writing within the context of this broader American tradition of interpreting the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims and the specific cultural conservative fixation on Arab and Muslim Americans.