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WHITENESS, ORIENTALISM AND IMMIGRATION:
A CRITIQUE OF TWO IRANIAN EXILIC MEMOIRS

by

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A Major Research Paper

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the program of

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a critique of two Iranian exilic memoirs: *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir* by Azar Nafisi and Marina Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran: A Memoir*. By reading both texts as "native informant" (Spivak, 2003; Dabashi, 2006) memoirs, this paper analyzes how the authors' performance of marginality within Iranian society and sameness with their Western readers results in their adoption of a 'white' Western feminist gaze at post-revolutionary Iran, which is located within an Orientalist discourse regarding differences between 'East' and West'. Nafisi and Nemat contribute to the racialization of Muslims and they racialize a 'white' identity that is primarily expressed through the unveiled body and strong support for Western values and democracy. I argue that their representations of Iran are part of a discourse of racialized whiteness that is a feature and governing principle of Western immigration and its attempt to control and 'liberate' the Muslim migrant subject.

Key words:

An article on Iranian exilic memoirs, used the key words: whiteness, Iran, Orientalism, memoir, veil.

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Introduction

The nexus of imperialism, Orientalism and 'whiteness' is currently manifest at the site of literary representations of the Middle Eastern[1] or Muslim 'Other', within the racialized discourse of Western immigration systems. I am interested in examining how in the period following the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the demonization of Iran, there has been a marked increase in representations of women's lives in the Middle East, in the form of the native informant[2] memoir, which shape popular readings of women's status and gender relations in the Middle East. In the most recent popular imaginings of Iran, engineered by the rhetoric of George W. Bush's administration, it has been conjured as part of an 'Axis of Evil' and as a potential nuclear threat. A large number of autobiographical texts by Iranian women living in either North America or Europe recall and seek to represent Iran both before and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.[3] Two texts which

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[1] Throughout this paper, I will use the terms West, Western, East, Middle East, Middle Eastern and East-West to refer to specific geopolitical regions of the world. Although I contend that notions such as the 'Middle East' are borne out of a Eurocentric mapping of the earth, they continue to be used as references to explain both the physical and discursive history of colonialism. While critiquing the binarisms of civilizational discourse, I will continue to use these terms to illustrate the depth of their power in the language of empire and in maintaining hegemony.

[2] My use of the term 'native informant' is a reference to the work of Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* and Hamid Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire". It should be noted here that Spivak uses 'native inform*ant*', whereas Dabashi has called it 'native inform*er*'. I will use the term 'native informant' throughout this paper, other than when using direct quotes from Dabashi.

[3] Examples of autobiographical texts published by Iranian women in the diaspora since 2000 include: Davar Ardalan, *My Name is Iran: A Memoir*; Gelareh Asayesh, *Saffron Sky: A Life Between Iran and America*; Firoozeh Dumas, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America*; Firoozeh Dumas, *Laughing Without An Accent: Adventures of an Iranian American, at Home and Abroad*; Afsoon Vivian Emtiaz, *Eve East & West: The Journey of Working Mother between Mideast and America*; Camelia Entekhabi-Fard; *Camelia: Save Yourself by Telling the Truth – A Memoir of Iran*; Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution*; Monir Farmanfarmaian & Zara Houshmand, *A Mirror Garden: A Memoir*; Zahra Ghahramani & Robert Hillman, *My Life as a Traitor: An Iranian Memoir*; Roya Hakakian, *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*; Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than Lolita in Tehran*; Afschineh Latifi, *Even After All This Time: A Story of Love, Revolution, and Leaving Iran*; Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*; Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*; Marina Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran: A Memoir*; Nahid Rachlin, *Persian Girls*; Nesta Ramazani, *The Dance of the Rose and the Nightingale*; Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.*

have emerged rather strategically onto the site of 'East'- 'West' relations are the oft-cited *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* by Azar Nafisi and a more recent offering from Canada, Marina Nemat; *Prisoner of Tehran: A Memoir*. These texts, along with similar work from women recounting their life experiences in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Morocco or other Muslim countries, have been of particular interest to a general 'Western' reading audience consumed with imagining the veiled Muslim woman. The fact that the mainstream literary market, though arguably over-saturated with this genre, continues to absorb countless such publications, indicates that the popularity of these books is very much linked to a deeper desire for 'authoritative' knowledge about the Middle East.

The native informant memoir thus emerges in response to the circular relationship between the public desire for knowledge about the 'Islamic world' and the production of hegemonic Orientalist notions reinforcing the binary of a 'good', democratic, civilized 'West' and an 'evil', barbaric and oppressive 'East'.[4] The hegemonic Orientalist East-West discourse in the context of the current political climate mobilizes a desire for narratives, which in turn echo and reinforce the message of the Western hegemonic discourse.

Both *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* are autobiographical texts by Iranian émigrés living in North America (Nafisi in the U.S. and Nemat in Canada) that reflect on the authors' experiences before and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Both books can be classified as native informant texts, which means that the authorial voice is embedded with a certain level of authority, due to the author's provenance and propensity to share information that

[4]Others have remarked on this point in relation to Iranian women's memoirs. Cf. Niki Akhavan et al, "A Genre in the Service of Empire"; Roksana Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism"; Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire"; and Negar Mottahedeh, "Off the Grid", to name a few.

is of use to her reading audience. The native informant mediates between colonial/imperial discourse (or government) and indigenous discourse. The native informant's embedded authority is necessary for the production of knowledge in the development of hegemony[5]. In the case of both Nafisi and Nemat, the embedded authority stems from the fact that these memoirs relay certain memories about life as a woman in the Islamic Republic of Iran that serve current Western interests in the Middle East. Nemat uses her Christian Russian-Iranian identity to strengthen her story of 'liberation' from Tehran's Evin prison. Nafisi uses her class position, her secularism and her regard for the Western literary canon to entrench her position of difference in Iranian society. From this position of difference, both authors make a variety of troubling and problematic claims. I am interested in how both authors write themselves into a position of whiteness to describe their memories of Iran and the consequences of that representation for migrant women from the Middle East. In addition, both texts are infused with a staged position of marginality and difference, and work to whet the Western reader's appetite for an authoritative account of what women experience in an Islamic regime. The marginality and/or difference is staged explicitly at the outset of both books and is a trait that conjures empathy from the Western reader, who can also imagine herself as an outsider in a Muslim society.

Through this act of 'difference from Iranian society' and 'sameness with Western society', both Nafisi and Nemat summon the legacy of subject formation and othering that was central to European colonial projects and which continues to be a feature of the nation-building myths of Canada and the United States. Nafisi does this through her enthusiastic support for the

[5] I am drawing on Gramsci's theorizing of hegemony, to denote a dominant political, social and cultural domination that is manifested through an elite group's dominance or leadership. Hegemony is maintained through the dominant group's establishment of cohesion between the 'leaders' and the 'led'. This cohesion is usually a form of subconscious consent, it is not established through force. An example to illustrate hegemonic thinking in the context of this paper can be the use of 'patriotic' or nationalist ideologies in the United States, following the traumatic event of 9/11. A host of cultural productions and political discourses work concurrently to support the dominant discourse of the regime, which in turn provides support or consent to the regime.

American notion of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', which is central to the promise of immigration and the 'American dream' and in her narrative renders Iran as a land without these possibilities. Similarly, Nemat reinforces Canada's celebratory rhetoric of immigration, which supports her representation of Iran as a country from which women need to escape. Both authors inhabit these discursive sites by performing whiteness. Whiteness, as an 'invisible' privilege[6] connects Nafisi and Nemat to their Western readers. In naming whiteness as the authors' positionality, I allude to a cultural, political and social category, rather than to their skin colour. The privilege of whiteness, whether exhibited through class position or symbolic/political worth within a racialized society creates advantages for those at the top of the racial hierarchy, with disadvantages for racialized others.[7] As Frankenberg has discussed, there continues to be a relationship between (neo) colonial and imperial discourses and the social construction of whiteness and '"Westernness".[8] This relationship is largely manifested through the formation of subject and Other: "one effect of colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous white/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is coconstructed (sic)."[9] Particularly relevant to my discussion of whiteness and Iranian native informant memoirs is the production of knowledge about the figure of the Middle Eastern, Oriental 'Other' woman whose body is the site at which neo-colonial and imperialist 'East'- 'West' discourses are articulated.[10]

In this paper, I will discuss *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* in order to map the convergence of an Islamophobic East-West discourse with the production of whiteness

[6] Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege"
[7] G.J.S. Dei et al, *Playing the Race Card*.
[8] Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 16-17.
[9] Ibid, 17.
[10] See Razack, *Casting Out.*

in Iranian native informant memoirs. I will attempt to theorize the native informant phenomenon in terms of its participation in and production of whiteness, as well as the political mechanics that mobilize the native informant voice. I argue that Nemat and Nafisi's performance of sameness with a Western reader and their adoption of a 'white' Western feminist gaze at post-revolutionary Iran are located within an Orientalist discourse regarding differences between the 'East' and 'West'.[11] Both authors' performances of whiteness become 'white' in that they seek to construct an Iranian identity in contrast to Iran being defined as primarily 'Middle Eastern' or 'Muslim'. By distancing themselves from 'barbaric' Muslims, they contribute to the rampant racialization of Muslims and they also racialized a 'white' identity that is primarily expressed through the unveiled body, strong support for Western values and 'democracy', as well as depictions of Iran as a place that restricts and negates women's freedom. Analyzing these themes within the writers' performance of sameness, I will discuss how their representations of Iran are part of a discourse of racialized whiteness that is a feature and governing principle of Western immigration and its attempt to control and 'liberate' the Muslim migrant subject.

[11] Edward Said's *Orientalism* is the seminal work analyzing Western discourses, evident in literature, art, science and politics, which produced knowledge mainly in relation to Islam and Islamic societies in their quest to both 'understand' and represent the 'Orient'. Said examines how cultures of the East were rendered as distinct from the West, a knowledge production that attributed specific characteristics to each. Importantly, Said outlined how these differences established discursive binaries between East and West and how these binaries were central to Europe's establishment of itself as a subject, with a corresponding 'Other' – the Orient. Orientalism and its manifestations continue to be analyzed by scholars, particularly in regards to its relationship to neo/colonialism, racism and feminism. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the various theoretical developments of Orientalism, some insights regarding Orientalism and its relationship to feminism and racism can be found in Abu-Lughod, "Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies"; Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism"; Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*; Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*; Razack, *Casting Out*; Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, among others.

I Was a Stranger: The Otherness/Sameness Dichotomy

Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is an autobiography describing the author's life briefly before, during and after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The narrative weaves forward and back in time and focuses largely on the period following Nafisi's resignation from the University of Tehran in 1995. At this time, Nafisi holds private classes at her home with seven of her female students. During these classes, they discuss Western 'classics' such as the work of Vladimir Nabokov, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jane Austen and Henry James. The book is interspersed with long sections of memoir and literary criticism. Nafisi's basic premise, both in her academic teaching and in terms of her reflection on those years of her life, is that having the ability to imagine is what allows the individual to have freedom. Whether that imagination is a literary one or whether it involves a more concrete imagination, such as imagining oneself out of a bad situation, 'imagination' is central to Nafisi's reflections on her personal life in Iran after the revolution, as well as, more generally, the status of women in contemporary Iran.

The period briefly before, during and after the Iranian Revolution is also the main context of *Prisoner of Tehran* by Marina Nemat. This is the memoir of an ex-political prisoner who spent two years in Tehran's Evin Prison on the charge of leading a student strike against the administration in her high school. Nemat's memoir focuses on her time in prison, particularly on the relationship formed with one of her interrogators, Ali. Ali is drawn to Nemat and 'saves' her from execution, with the understanding that she will marry him. As a Christian, Nemat must convert to Islam in order to be able to marry a Muslim man. The trauma of her forced conversion to Islam is a cornerstone of Nemat's memoir and coincides with her narrated loss of the self. After Ali's death, Nemat explains her attempts to rebuild the pieces of her life before

her imprisonment and eventually marries the love of her life and immigrates to Canada. Nemat's book is premised on the notion that a voice must be 'given' to Iranian political prisoners.

It is necessary to outline here exactly how Nafisi and Nemat's narratives are inserted into a discourse of whiteness. I am arguing that Nafisi and Nemat construct their narratives as authoritative by describing and presenting themselves as narrators that do not support the Islamic Republic of Iran and are concerned with women's rights in Muslim countries. As stated, Nafisi makes her narrative voice distinct by marking it as secular, educated and thoroughly engaged with Western values. Nemat's identity as a Christian minority in Iran, coupled with her experience of torture and imprisonment and her enthusiasm for Canada as an ideal place to live are used to construct Nemat as a reliable narrator. The modes through which both writers establish these differences predominantly involve depictions of Muslims and Iran as an Islamic society in a way that reiterates Western Orientalist thinking about the Middle East. In my thinking through these texts as uttering a form of 'whiteness', I put forth that 'whiteness' in relation to memoirs by Iranian diasporic women emerges as a category that seeks to distance itself from current racialized depictions of Muslims. The racialization of Muslims in the current context, occurs at both the level of institutional racism and sentimental racism. Razack has mapped this convergence in two parts:

> First, race thinking, the denial of a common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not, remains a defining feature of the world order. Second, this 'colour-lined' world is one increasingly governed by the logic of the exception and the camps of abandoned or 'rightless' people it creates.[12]

[12] Razack, *Casting Out*, 6.

As such, a discourse of 'fundamental difference' between Muslims and non-Muslims becomes the founding logic driving control of Muslim populations, as evidenced by American military invasion into Iraq and Western immigration management systems that detain asylum seekers and forbid Muslim schoolgirls from wearing the hijab. Through their narratives depicting life in Iran, books such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* align themselves with these movements by marking their narrative voices as distinct from 'barbaric' Islam. Thus, they establish marginal positions for themselves within Iranian society and 'whiten' themselves through affiliation with Western culture, values and practices. The reach of both of these texts in the current 'war against terror' is what gives the texts power in helping to justify both institutional and sentimental racism against Muslims. Arat-Koç has commented on this phenomenon in her analysis of Turkish feminisms, noting the emergence of 'white Turk' discourses:

> "White Turk" ideology takes an Orientalist and culturally racist position against non-"white Turks." It tends to blame Turkey's exclusion from Europe and "the West" on the "other Turks" who present a backward and uncivilized image of Turkey to "the West." ...Many differences in such things as clothing, personal upkeep, mannerisms, etc., are interpreted as reflecting cultural essence, cultural taste, choice of lifestyle."[13]

In using the term 'whiteness' to describe Nemat and Nafisi's texts, I am pinpointing tendencies in their work that mimic what Arat-Koç has described above. I am tracing this performance to the racialization of Muslims and the production of knowledge about Islamic societies.

[13] Arat-Koç, "(Some) Turkish Transnationalism(s)", 47.

Reading Lolita in Tehran and *Prisoner of Tehran* both consist of narratives that engage symbiotically with staging the authors' marginality in post-revolutionary Iran and the authors' performance of sameness with a Western reading audience. The process of successfully creating sameness with the Western audience requires the narrator of the native informant memoir to first establish 'marginality' in the Other's civilization. One of the modes through which marginality is accomplished in Iranian women's memoirs is through the representation of Iran's transformation into an Islamic Republic following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. As Whitlock has explained, for many writers of Iranian exilic memoirs life in post-revolutionary Iran is presented as "an experience of estrangement, a little death of the self and a painful loss of the known world".[14] The changes that occurred in Iranian society in the post-revolutionary period, in particular forced veiling, serve in Nafisi and Nemat's texts as the primary locators of their estrangement as well as the phenomena through which both authors gaze at Muslim women through the lens of Western Orientalism. Whitlock views the reception of Iranian exilic memoirs both in Iran and the West as central to the concept of estrangement:

> These memoirs appear at one and the same time as unfamiliar and belated to contemporary Iranians, and familiar and welcome to contemporary American readers – a conjunction that signals their entanglement in complicated and mutable lines of filiation, connection, and commodification.[15]

By performing 'difference' and 'marginality' in the Iranian context, both Nafisi and Nemat claim sameness and familiarity with Western audiences. As 'Middle Eastern women' living in the West, they can both be read as 'exotic' through the mechanism of hegemonic Orientalism. To a

[14] Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 165.
[15] Ibid.

Western reading audience, their positions of privilege within Iranian society might not be as clear in their life writings, because in the West they will first be read through their 'exotic' place in Western society. This is because in spite of reaching for sameness with Western audiences by gazing at the 'oppressed' Muslim woman, they continue to be positioned as 'different' in Western society. No amount of desire for integration in a Western society, whiteness, or belonging to a "comprador intelligentsia",[16] can alone undo centuries of 'Other' formation in the context of Orientalism. Thus both writers can bank on an 'Otherness' already ascribed to them, which rather than placing them in a marginalized position in the West, actually assists their 'mobility', or 'whitening'.[17] As Graham Huggan reminds us, it is necessary to ask what is 'exotic' about these texts in the first instance, and to examine how this exoticism is coded.[18] Only then can we understand whose interests are served in rendering certain narratives 'exotic'.

As Huggan has noted, exoticism is manufactured by the domestication of some form of 'otherness' so that it becomes familiar in some sense.[19] In building a case for her otherness in Iranian society, Nemat relied heavily on her Christian faith to provide for the Western reader a stark difference from what he/she might expect in an Iranian memoir – a narrative of an 'oppressed' Muslim woman. She is familiar because she is Christian and through this identity, the reader can join her in a shared horror at the cruelty of the Islamic regime. Yet strangeness and familiarity are so intertwined when it comes to what it considered 'exotic'. And in light of Nemat and Nafisi's staged otherness, the end goal is always to produce a sameness or familiarity with the Western audience. Thus these acts have a symbiotic relationship that can be serve a

[16] Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, 149 (quoted in Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 9)
[17] See Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*
[18] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.
[19] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.

variety of interests, ranging from sustaining hegemony in the war on terror or mobilizing resistance, and in this sense texts such as *Prisoner of Tehran* are 'soft weapons' as noted by Whitlock.[20] The prime example of this in *Prisoner of Tehran* is the use of Nemat's Christianity. While it does position her as an outsider in Iran, it can perhaps be argued that it works more strongly as a factor through which Nemat gains additional support and empathy from her readers.

In *Prisoner of Tehran* Nemat relies primarily on her Christian identity to stage her outsider status in Iranian society and to establish sameness with a Western audience. Her Christianity in combination with her Russian-Iranian identity (both her grandmothers were of Russian descent) goes further to mark her as an 'Other' in Iranian society, and one for whom a Canadian or American readership might have sympathy. Narratives dealing with Christian women's imprisonment, captivity or injustice in an Islamic world draw much of their popularity from a manufactured fear about the Middle East. Although texts such as Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter* achieved immense popularity with Western readers, I would argue that the desire for these texts has increased since the post-9/11 period with a correlative increase on the threat posed by the Middle Eastern or Muslim man.[21] When placed in this context, Nemat's work benefits in two ways: it is an account of a Christian woman in Iran, but it is also the voice of an Iranian women living in the West, which stimulates the desire of a Western audience that Whitlock claims is "primed for stories of disenchantment by exiles".[22] Claiming 'outsider' status in Iranian society inherently allows the text to cast certain distinctions between a 'real' Iranian and someone who is Christian or half-Russian. The 'real' Iranian becomes an identity

[20] Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 55.
[21] Scholars who have commented on this include Akhavan et al, "A Genre in the Service of Empire"; Bahramitash, "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism; Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire; Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh, "Why Americans Love Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*"; Milani, "On Women's Captivity in the Muslim World"; Mottahedeh, "Off the Grid"; Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*; Razack, *Casting Out*; Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*.
[22] Whitlock, *Soft Weapons*, 165.

associated with the dominant images of Muslims in the racialized knowledge production about Iran. The 'outsider' becomes both a representative from the exotic land that cannot be tangibly accessed by Westerners and also a guide who can help people in the West understand the plight of Muslim women living in the East.

Nemat's staged marginality relies on Orientalist generalizations about women in Muslim societies to describe Nemat herself (as narrator) as something 'other' than the Muslim Iranian woman. In a scene describing her initial interrogation at Evin prison, Nemat makes the following observation about her interrogator, who has been asking her questions about her Christian faith:

> It seemed like I had truly amused him. Maybe I was the only Christian he had ever seen in Evin. He probably had expected me to be like most Muslim girls from traditional families – quiet, shy, and submissive – but I didn't have any of these qualities.[23]

It is not simply that she happens not to be quiet and shy – it is her identity as a non-Muslim girl that marks her as inherently confident or outspoken. Her narrator is constructed as the opposite of women who have been raised in 'backwards' Muslim families. Nemat's generalization about Iranian/Muslim women's submissiveness also serves to ignite Western feminist benevolence towards women in the Third World. It promotes the idea that Muslim women simply need to be 'taught' (by their feminist sisters) how to emancipate themselves from Muslim men. In short, unlearning their supposed submissiveness is the first step to understanding and dismantling the veil shrouding the Islamic world.

[23] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 13.

In the same scene at Evin, Nemat establishes her difference in Iranian society by portraying her interrogator as fascinated by her Christianity and her emboldened personality, something to which he is apparently not accustomed in women. He states: "You were very brave out there. Bravery is a rare quality in Evin. I've seen many strong men fall apart here."[24] This sets up Nemat as a superb narrator because even the villain of her memoir has noticed a special quality about her. The notion of women's bravery in and despite the confines of the Islamic world is something that appeals greatly to Western audiences. One of the reasons *Not Without My Daughter* was such a success can be seen in the 'defiance' of the title; the author's bravery is what allowed her to escape her harrowing conditions. *Not Without My Daughter* in a sense 'paved the way' for memoirs like *Prisoner of Tehran*, whose narrator is also marked by her brave and unusual response to her circumstances.[25] Finally, the interrogator's statement that he has seen strong men fall apart at Evin gives Nemat's character the 'universal' qualities espoused by Western feminism. That is to say, despite living in an Islamic society where women are expected to be subservient, her behaviour has marked her as stronger than strong men.

By focussing on her Russian-Iranian identity, Nemat is further able to strengthen her image as different from the majority of Iranians, simply because she is writing for a Western audience largely unaware of the fact that Iran is an ethnically diverse country. Nemat's paternal grandmother figures in the story as the family member with whom she has the most intimate relationship and is also a direct link to Nemat's Russian identity. Nemat's grandmother stubbornly holds on to her Russian identity at the expense of resenting all aspects of Iranian

[24] Ibid, 12.

[25] Grewal, *Transnational America*, 66-68. In her analysis of the novel *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee, Grewal discusses how the characterization of the protagonist's adventurousness, risk-taking and rescuing of other Asian women reinforces the notion of migrant women becoming liberal, imperial subjects who embody the notion of successful migration to America.

society. Before the young Nemat has even started learning Persian at school, she hears her grandmother declare: "You know very well that I don't like to speak Persian. Russian is a much better language."[26] Furthermore, Nemat is instructed that "we only speak Russian".[27] When the teenage Nemat meets her boyfriend Arash's grandmother, the woman is quoted as delighting in his finding a 'Russian' girl, "How nice! Now you have a girlfriend! Not even an *ordinary* girlfriend, but a nice Russian one."[28] In addition, Nemat describes only feeling at home in the Roman Catholic Church in Tehran where she went for weekly catechism classes, while gazing upon an image of the Virgin Mary.[29] Nostalgia for a Russia that she never knew, as well as persistent reference to her family's staunch Russian-ness, conjure for Western readers an Iranian narrative that is at once utterly peculiar and welcome. The use of a Christian identity in addition to her focus on her Russian heritage can render feelings of sympathy on the part of the reader, for he/she can only imagine the horrors of life as a Christian in an Islamic republic.

It is worth noting here that Nemat's Christian identity is central to her claimed 'otherness' in Iranian society, and it is also an avenue through which she establishes important similarities with her readers. I will discuss the racialization of Muslims and Islam, to explain how in racial hierarchy, Christianity emerges in Nemat's memoir as a form of whiteness. As such, 'whiteness' or Christianity also becomes a racialized identity, albeit one with positive connotations, due to its association with Western civilization. In *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics*, Razack discusses the racialization of Muslims in the West. She argues that "race thinking" in relation to Muslims:

[26] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 23.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 69. (emphasis mine).
[29] Ibid, 131.

> is underpinned by the idea that modern enlightened, secular peoples must protect themselves from pre-modern, religious peoples whose loyalty to tribe and community reigns over their commitment to the rule of law. The marking of belonging to the realm of culture and religion, as opposed to the realm of law and reason, has devastating consequences. There is a disturbing spatializing of morality that occurs in the story of pre-modern peoples versus modern ones. We have reason, because *they* have not advanced as we have, it is our moral obligation against their irrational excesses. In doing all of these things, the West has often denied the benefits of modernity to those it considers to be outside of it. Evicted from the universal, and thus from civilization and progress, the non-West occupies a zone outside the law. Violence may be directed at impunity.[30]

Nemat's characterizations Muslims in her memoir echoes this binary that Razack discusses. On the 'civilized' end is Western culture, driven by European Christianity, an identity that has been able to adapt itself to modernity through secularism. Frankenberg has discussed how the cultural dimensions of racism, expressed through Christianity, can be traced back: "Anglo colonizers of what was to become the United States brought with them arguments for white racial superiority articulated in the language of Christianity."[31] She continues by noting that the association of white people with purity, cleanliness and gentility is connected to a seventeenth-century Christian standpoint.[32]

Nemat's emphasis on her Christian identity serves to place her outside of Iranian society and into a position of whiteness. But this 'Christian-ness' functions/works differently when it is

[30] Razack, *Casting Out*, 10.
[31] Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 73.
[32] See Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 271, n. 2.

used to perform sameness with the Western audience. Long before the Iranian Revolution and Nemat's imprisonment in Evin, Nemat characterizes herself as 'looking in' on Iranian society and having interests and activities that fall outside the norm. Like Nafisi, Nemat cites Western literature as a sort of 'salvation' or 'escape', one that presumably could not be found in the available Persian literature. She visits a used English bookstore in Tehran, whose owner she represents as a 'saviour'. Albert, the bookstore owner, lends her *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, thus beginning a friendship based on books. "For three years, my visits to Albert's bookstore were the highlight of my life."[33] Both authors invoke Western literature as having the ability to lift them onto the imaginary plane, thereby relieving them of the burdens of living in Iran. Nemat and Nafisi's reverence for Western literature connects them to Western readers by illustrating their regard for Western culture and their adherence to the notion of its 'superiority' over the East.

Nafisi begins her memoir by asking the reader to imagine herself and her students, quoting Nabokov to say that "we don't really exist if you don't".[34] Nafisi taps into the Western desire to unveil the Muslim woman by setting up an Orientalist fantasy for the reader. She suggests that the (presumably Western) reader can imagine the group of Iranian women as they "didn't dare to imagine" themselves,[35] thus allowing the imperial gaze to construct the women into something other than they are, and perhaps other than they want to be. Nafisi then takes this exercise in voyeurism to a more perverse realm by encouraging the Western reader to imagine the women in their most private moments and experiences, such as falling in love, listening to music or even walking down the street. In doing so she again mimics her own criticisms of the

[33] Ibid, 51.
[34] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 6.
[35] Ibid.

Islamic regime for making the private lives of women public. Finally, she tells the reader to imagine the women with the above acts confiscated from them, suggesting that in post-revolutionary Iran women do not fall in love or listen to music.

Nafisi positions herself as "an 'Oriental' woman who deliberately casts herself as a contemporary Scheherazade."[36] This self-positioning is key to Nafisi's representation of herself as a marginal figure. After ruminating on the young virgins in *A Thousand and One Night* who "do not quite exist" and "who have no voice in the story", Nafisi most explicitly names herself as the Scheherazade by linking Scheherazade's emphasis on "imagination and reflection" as the key to her liberation.[37] Nafisi posits that by rejecting the king's propensity to violence and using instead storytelling as her 'weapon', Scheherazade casts herself as different: "This gives her the courage to risk her life and sets her apart from the other characters in the tale."[38] In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi has cast her 'girls' as the silent virgins of *A Thousand and One Nights* precisely in that it is Nafisi's memoir and her rendering of the students' voices. With this, she has used the 'soft weapon'[39] of her memoir to imagine herself out of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Whitlock classifies the genre of autobiography as a 'soft weapon' not only because of its ability to lend voice to stories often unheard, but also because life narratives are:

> easily co-opted into propaganda. In modern democratic societies propaganda is frequently not the violent and coercive imposition of ideas but a careful manipulation of

[36] Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire", 3.
[37] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 19.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Whitlock, *Soft Weapons.*

> opinion and emotion in the public sphere and a management of information in the engineering of consent. Life narrative can be complicit in these processes.[40]

Thus, the emergence of an abundance of women's texts relating to Islam and to Muslim societies cannot be read as happenstance or coincidence, but has been theorized as symptomatic of the power of the role of the native informant in legitimizing the 'clash of civilizations'[41] discourse. In his critique of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Dabashi reads Nafisi's performance as such:

> *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is reminiscent of the most pestiferous colonial projects of the British in India, when, for example, in 1835 a colonial officer like Thomas Macaulay decreed: "We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, words and intellect." Azar Nafisi is the personification of that native informer and colonial agent, polishing her services for an American version of the very same project.[42]

The project which Dabashi describes results in the production of a 'mediator' between a (neo) colonial power and an indigenous population, a role played by the native informant. The native informant in her role as mediator ensures that the colonial centre maintains hegemony.[43] Spivak

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[40] Ibid, 3.

[41] Samuel P. Huntington's theory first emerged in 1993, formulated as a question in the article "The Clash of Civilizations?" and was later expanded into the book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. It is a theory that has gained new momentum in the post-9/11 era due to its buttressing of anti-Muslim racism predicated on generalizations of the 'nature' of Islam and fear of the Muslim 'Other'. The basic premise of Huntington's theory takes a primordial approach to cultures and civilizations, arguing that the post-Cold War era is mainly shaped by cultural conflicts. The incongruity of Islam (which represents irrationality, barbarism and underdevelopment) with Western civilization (defined as enlightened, rational and propelled by a regard for democracy and law) takes central place; its urgency has been promoted since 9/11.

[42] Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire", 3.

[43] Ibid.

characterizes the native informant as generating a "text of cultural identity that only the West could inscribe."[44] In the sense described by Spivak, Nemat and Nafisi each act as a native informant by occupying strategic positions at both ends of discursive plane; they 'perform' and emulate at each end. That is, texts such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* produce knowledge at both the Iranian end and the American/Canadian end. By assuming positions of 'otherness' within Iran, they generalize about large portions of Iranian society (for example through their portrayals of gender relations) and as such reinforce Orientalist notions about Iran that are crucial to legitimizing the anti-Muslim and anti-Iranian elements of Western hegemony. The anti-Muslim and anti-Iranian elements are part of an Orientalist discourse that legitimates the West as 'modern' and relegates Iran to 'tradition', which serves as a euphemism for 'backwards' or 'unsophisticated'.[45] By relying on this binary to tell their stories, both Nafisi and Nemat endorse what Inderpal Grewal describes as a migration narrative "...set up as the tension between tradition and modernity and the process of a woman's escape from one to the other."[46]

The tension between Nemat's Christian identity and Iran as a Muslim society is at the foreground of her story of liberation and freedom from the Islamic Republic of Iran and her representation of that freedom as a quintessentially Western quality. When describing her time served in Evin Prison, Nemat relies mainly on characterizations of the prison guards, her *captors*, characterizations which are based on their Muslim identities. As such she succeeds in creating for the readers a power relationship between a cruel, primitive and lawless Muslim man and a frail, pious and innocent Christian woman. This relationship can be best described as integral to

[44] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 6.
[45] Hamid Dabashi has astutely theorized Iranian intellectuals' preoccupation with the tension between 'tradition' and 'modernity', resulting in his theory of "anti-colonial modernity". See Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted.*
[46] Grewal, *Transnational America*, 63.

Nemat's attempt at creating a *captivity narrative*. The genre of native informant memoirs relies on specific modes of storytelling, one of which is the captivity narrative. Although *Prisoner of Tehran* is a self-proclaimed prison memoir, I am putting forth that it can be better understood as a captivity narrative, which is one emergence of the native informant voice. The scholarly tradition of looking at captivity narratives has a long history, most of which has been concerned with captivity narratives as pertaining to Christian colonial women and their 'savage' aboriginal captors.[47] Thus, captivity narratives as a whole have not been widely theorized in terms of looking at Muslim captors. While attempting to locate Nemat's work as a captivity narrative, I am nonetheless only beginning to engage with the idea of theorizing stories of women's captivity in the Muslim world as 'captivity narratives' in the accepted form. Thus my understanding of this emerging genre draws from the work of Nima Naghibi and Farzaneh Milani, who have looked at Muslim captivity stories from different angles.

Milani has theorized narratives of captivity and/or imprisonment by Muslim men or in Muslim societies as hostage narratives, which have marked differences from captivity narratives. Hostage narratives, as conceptualized by Milani, their starting point to be the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979-81 when 52 American diplomats where held hostage for 444 days at the American embassy in Tehran, rather than beginning with 9/11. According to Milani, the figure of the Muslim woman held captive or imprisoned emerges from the European imagining of the *harem*, a sex-segregated space where loss of movement and freedom were the defining features of women's place in the Islamic world.[48] Milani has identified what she calls a "hostage narrative" as emerging out of political interests and representing the Muslim woman as imprisoned,

[47] For one example of a work theorizing captivity narratives see Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others.*
[48] Milani, "On Women's Captivity in the Islamic World".

voiceless, without mobility and protection.[49] Milani marks the hostage narrative and the prison memoir as having some similarities, but notes that the prison memoir looks at women's courage and defiance, whereas the hostage narrative trivializes women's attempts at subversion or self-mobilization.[50]

Naghibi's analysis of the captivity narrative in relation to Iranian women's memoirs looks at *Prisoner of Tehran* and its appeal to Western readers' expectations of a female captivity narrative. Citing the relationship between Nemat and her captor/husband, Naghibi notes that "her narrative is also highly eroticized following the tropic conventions of Harlequin romances..."[51] and that this form of a captivity narrative is what Western readers are accustomed to and therefore expect. Naghibi also comments on the racialized nature of the captivity narrative, drawing us closer to a theorization of women's captivity in the Muslim world and its relevance to Islamophobia and Orientalism:

> Without meaning to belittle her brutalizing experiences, I suggest that one of the reasons Nemat's book in particular circulates so successfully amongst a Western audience is that it fulfills the public's expectation of what constitutes a female captivity narrative. Ironically then, it is these fictional tropes of the captivity narrative that help validate the 'truth' of these texts for a Western audience. In the tradition of this genre, hers is a story that is both racialized and eroticized. Through her book, she reminds us of her Christian faith and her important difference from other Iranians."[52]

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Naghibi, "Truth Telling and Trauma", 3.
[52] Ibid.

While the description of Nemat's experiences in Evin have a sensational tone and exhibit all the qualities of a story about captivity, such as descriptions of the physical pain of being lashed, or the dingy environment where one must sleep and eat, connections formed with other prisoners and so on, it is her descriptions of the period of her life following her conditional release from Evin that appear most markedly as a captivity narrative. In a scene eerily reminiscent of Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter*, Nemat describes the scene when her new husband, her former prison guard Ali, shows her the house he has purchased for them. Nemat states that she will continue to be a "prisoner" in the house, owing to the fact that it is only her marriage to a prison official which allowed her release from Evin. Thus, she must still be under a form of house arrest until the end of her sentence. The notion of women imprisoned in an informal manner (i.e. in their own homes, and outside of the law) was popularized by the success of *Not Without My Daughter*, and reinforces the image of Muslim countries as dangerous places for women.

To understand the power of the native informant memoir in the time of empire,[53] I will look at the positioning of these authors within specific social conditions. Beginning with an examination of how Nemat and Nafisi create themselves as marginalized 'others' in Iranian society, I will also look at how each author uses her so-called "difference" from the majority of Iranians to perform "sameness" with her Western reading audience. The sameness is a performance because both authors continue to be "domesticated Others",[54] and thus their sameness is tolerated or even naturalized by the reading audience to the extent that it serves the

[53] Quite simply put, my use of the term 'empire' (and alternately imperialism) seeks to insert a connecting thread between the colonialist/imperialist projects of political, economic, social and cultural domination of various Third World countries by European colonizers with current projects relating to capitalist globalization and military intervention, as directed by the United States and its political and military allies. I am drawing from Hardt and Negri, *Empire* and its analysis of a global capitalist order, with the corresponding regimes of immigration and militarization that are required to both control and sustain the gains of capitalism.

[54] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

interests of Western or neo-colonial empire. Huggan points to the symbiotic relationship of staged otherness and domesticated familiarity as such: "exoticism is a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity."[55] Rastegar has also commented on the balancing act of the native informant, noting that although authenticity is attributed to the informant, "the informant who can provide this story must be unrepresentative and exceptional, in that he or she must be familiar with the expectations of the Western reader in order to construct the authentic-sounding account."[56] Both Nemat and Nafisi have noted, in one form or another, that their memoirs are intended mainly for a Western audience. Nafisi alludes to this in her reminiscence of a discussion with her 'magician', a mentor-like figure. Quoting him, she writes: "You used to talk about writing your next book in Persian. Now all we talk about is what you will be saying at your next conference in the U.S. or in Europe. You are writing for *other readers*."[57] Nemat asserts that her story had to be written so that the world will pay attention to the plight of Iranian political prisoners.[58] Thus both authors put forth their texts with the knowledge that their readership will be Western, especially true given that both memoirs are written in English, and as such fulfill the desires of their would-be multitude of Western readers.

[55] Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 13.
[56] Rastegar, "Reading Nafisi in the West", 111.
[57] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 283. This reference to Nafisi's readership is also cited in Donadey and Ahmed-Ghosh, "Why Americans Love Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*", 630.
[58] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 276.

Unveiling as whiteness

In my analysis of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* I will suggest that both memoirs depict women's status in post-revolutionary status within a racialized discourse of 'whiteness' wherein the veil or hijab acts as the primary signifier of women's oppression. Although the dominant Western hegemonic insistence on the veil as a symbol of women's subservient position within Islamic cultures has been noted upon by a number of scholars,[59] when articulated within a performance of likeness with a Western audience, an Orientalist reading of the veil is inscribed with whiteness. Whiteness as a social, political and cultural category also brings Western discussions about the veil's oppressiveness into the process of consolidating the rhetoric of exclusionary nationalisms.[60] In the Iranian context, this is especially true, as noted by Naghibi: "The manipulation of veiling practices to reflect the aspirations of the nation remained a powerful political tool, first used by the monarchical state and later by the Islamic Republic."[61] Thus the project of 'unveiling' Muslim women which is linked to Iranian diasporic women's discussions of the veil becomes instrumental in the current Western discourse on the incompatibility of Muslim practices and beliefs with Western culture. Yeğenoğlu notes:

[59] See for example Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*; Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*; Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, among many others.

[60] An example of this is France's infamous headscarf affair and the ensuing discussions of *laïcité*, or secularism. The debate about protecting 'secularism' as part of France's self-identity in a manner wherein secularism is defined by a white, middle to upper class, post-Catholic majority serves to exclude certain groups (such as Muslim women who follow Islamic dress code) from defining state interests and participating in the 'imagined community', to borrow Anderson's term. Concurrently and consequently, Muslim women's interests also get excluded in the formation of 'acceptable' national identities. This tension is at the heart of debates surrounding race and immigration, not only in France and the rest of Europe but also in Canada and the United States, in different forms. See Kastoryano, "French Secularism and Islam: France's Headscarf Affair" for an analysis of the debates in France.

[61] Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*, 44.

> the colonial feminist discourse to unveil Muslim women in the name of liberation was linked not only to the discourse of Enlightenment but also to the scopic regime of modernity which is characterized by a desire to master, control, and reshape the body of the subjects by making them visible. Since the veil prevents the colonial gaze from attaining such a visibility and hence mastery, its lifting becomes essential.[62]

This desire to master and control is re-articulated in the context of the current war on terror and its robbery of the language of women's rights to which uses a Western universalist ideal of the unveiled body to justify the invasion of Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan.[63] Thus the unveiled Muslim woman becomes a symbol for 'progress' symbolized by sameness with Western women or whiteness, in that the unveiled body represents the 'liberated' white European woman. Yeğenoğlu's insights on the discourse of the unveiled body are integral to understanding how the desire to unveil the Muslim woman is a way of reinforcing Western hegemony:

> The presumption of the naturalness of not-to-be-veiled has come to secure the truth of bodies and is used as the universal norm to yield Muslim woman as a knowable and comprehensible entity for the West. In other words, it is the naturalness and truth of the unveiled body that legitimates and endorses colonial feminist sentiments and certitude in the necessity of interventionist action against Muslim women's veiling. Although the beliefs and values about not veiling are also incorporated in the existential and embodied being of Western women, the fact that this is a culturally specific inscription is effaced in

[62] Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 12.
[63] Bahramitash has commented on this in "The War on Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism."

> colonial feminist representations. Such an effacement ensures that the beliefs and values that produce Western women's bodies stand in for the truth of women universally.[64]

If the white and unveiled Western body stands as a universal norm, it becomes increasingly difficult to for the Western reader of Middle East women's memoirs to face an array of veiled women on the covers of numerous memoirs and not feel the desire to unveil or 'liberate' the Muslim woman, as Whitlock has noted.[65]

In her own life narrative, Nafisi relies heavily on Orientalist visions of the veiled Muslim woman to establish herself as an outsider in post-revolutionary Iran. At the outset of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, in a scene describing the private reading group that took place at Nafisi's home, she gazes at her female students, viewing their relationship to the veil as character defining. For Nafisi, a woman with a veil is virtually invisible'. In Western dress, she becomes full-bodied and present:

> For nearly two years, almost every Thursday morning, rain or shine, they came to my house, and almost every time, I could not get over the shock of seeing them shed their mandatory veils and robes and burst into color. When my students came into that room, they took off more than their scarves and robes. Gradually, each one gained an outline and a shape, becoming her own inimitable self. Our world in that living room with its window framing my beloved Elburz Mountains became our sanctuary, our self-contained

[64] Yeğenoğlu, quoted in Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*, 62.
[65] See chapter two in Whitlock, *Soft Weapons* entitled "The Skin of the Burka: Recent Life Narratives from Afghanistan" for a discussion of unveiling and the mass market for Muslim women's life narratives.

> universe, mocking the reality of black-scarved, timid faces in the city that sprawled below.[66]

And so Nafisi speaks as a voice representative of the interests of American empire, by marking the unveiled body as a universal norm.[67] In this context, unveiling can also be seen as a process of 'whitening', in that it removes the mark of 'difference' and brings the Muslim female body in line with the Western norm. This suggests that Western feminist ideals are universal desires and as such are ideals that the Muslim woman would aspire to, if she was not 'oppressed' by her traditional society.[68] This notion of the 'liberated' identity as being embodied by the Western, unveiled body is what Nafisi channels with her use of the phrase "her own inimitable self".[69]

Nafisi's methods for producing her marginality in Iranian society in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* are somewhat different from those of Nemat, but both produce a whiteness that casts the author in a position of superiority within Iranian society. Nafisi relies on her elite class position, her secularism and her devotion to the Western literary canon to produce herself as a marginal voice in Iranian society. As such, a binary is produced wherein the marginalized native informant is secular, wealthy and trained in the Western tradition and the *true* Other is religious, poor and anti-Western. By creating this contrast, Nafisi can then set up the Muslim 'Other' and his characteristics as the key obstacle to her freedom and happiness. If this dialectic is transferred to the global, it becomes American anti-terrorism rhetoric regarding radical Islam and its threat to the security of the American nation and empire.

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[66] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 5-6.
[67] Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, 115.
[68] See Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*, especially chapter two, "Scopophilic Desires: Unveiling Iranian Women". For a wider, non-Iranian context, see Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, especially chapter four, "Sartorial fabric-ations: The Enlightenment and Western Feminism".
[69] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 6.

In describing one of her 'girls', Nafisi engages in a detailed Orientalist questioning of what Sanaz's life might be like when she puts on her *chador* and walks out of Nafisi's apartment.[70] Nafisi's statement that Sanaz's gait has changed and that "it is in her best interest not to be seen, not be heard or notice"[71] is the pronouncement of Nafisi's own belief about women's status in Islamic societies. With this statement, Nafisi negates the possibility of *being* for her female students and for all women in the Islamic Republic, by suggesting that they are present only when their scarves are removed. It is surprising that Nafisi misses the irony that this very act of limiting possibilities or "confiscating life"[72] is her own central complaint against the regime.

Nafisi's studied and desperate reinforcement of the veiled, Muslim woman as the 'Other' is revealed in a passage where she describes running into two of her students at the university. Both of these women had been in her intimate reading circle in her home, hence she knew them both well. Nevertheless, when Nassrin and Mahtab appear outside her office, she does not recognize one of them: "One was Nassrin, with her usual pale smile. The other was dressed in a black chador that covered her from head to foot. After staring at this apparition for a while, I suddenly recognized my old student Mahtab."[73]

Because Mahtab chose to wear the chador,[74] she is instantly unrecognizable and cast as the 'Other' and is not deemed worthy of a tangible bodily presence; she is reduced to an apparition. Furthermore, Nafisi expresses confusion as she tries to understand Mahtab's

[70] Ibid, 26-27.
[71] Ibid, 26.
[72] Ibid, 33.
[73] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 217. (emphasis mine).
[74] In Iran, there are a variety of ways in which women interpret Islamic dress. They range from the traditional head scarf worn by older women before the Islamic Revolution, to the full-body covering of the *chador* to the fitted *manteau* accompanied by a brightly coloured, slipping *hijab* which is currently de rigueur for fashionable Tehrani women. Thus one can presume that if Mahtab is wearing a chador, it is because she is choosing to do so.

trajectory from a "leftist student" in her trademark khaki pants" to "*this* Mahtab, standing with a rueful smile and begging recognition".[75] The grounding of the two ideological stances (leftist and Muslim) as active and inactive, respectively, plays out at the site of two women's bodies, a reprehensible representation for which even Nafisi's most ardent whitewashed feminist supporters should reproach her.[76] In her chador, Mahtab has no agency, no political stance, no material presence and is represented as sullen and desperate.

[75] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 217. (emphasis mine).
[76] Among them are Margaret Atwood and Geraldine Brooks who have both championed Nafisi as a great 'liberator'.

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

Not only does Nafisi explicitly reject the notion that veiled women can have agency, autonomy and indeed be a part of public life, but the very notion of the veil becomes a metaphor for everything ugly.[77] In a rather disturbing passage, Nafisi describes Tehran after the first attacks during the Iran-Iraq war. Gazing at a quiet, somewhat deserted and dejected Tehran following the attacks, Nafisi sees the city before her eyes as having "shed its vulgar veil to reveal a decent, humane face."[78] It is in such passages that Nafisi's utter contempt for post-revolutionary Iran and her connection to infamous neo-conservative strategists such as Paul Wolfowitz and Bernard Lewis explicitly merge together to reveal the kind of Iran that she is proposing to Americans, with the publication of her book.[79]

In fact, Nafisi has been criticized immensely for her links to discourse-shaping individuals and institutions complicit in the war on terror and the perpetuation of Islamophobia.[80] In addition to her affiliation with Bernard Lewis and Paul Wolfowitz, both prominent supporters of the 'clash of civilizations' discourse and the war on terror, Nafisi has also been linked to the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, which is considered one of the most influential right-wing foundations in the United States. According to both the Foundation's financial records and a report on the watchdog website "Media Transparency: The Money Behind Conservative Media,

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[77] Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*, 64. Naghibi suggests that in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* Nafisi reproduces the stereotype that veiled women are removed from public life, thus repressed and voiceless.
[78] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran,* 207.
[79] Nafisi's connection to Bernard Lewis and Paul Wolfowitz are evident through Nafisi's current position at John Hopkins University, where she was hired by Wolfowitz, as well as in the acknowledgements of her book where she thanks both men.
[80] See Dabashi, "Native Informers and the Making of the American Empire"; Donadey & Ahmad-Ghosh, "Why Americans Love Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*"; Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More than Lolita in Tehran*; Rastegar, "Reading Nafisi in the West".

the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation gave a total of $25,000 to the Sisterhood is Global Institute, Inc. in 1996 "to support a series of workshops in Tehran, Iran under the supervision of Dr. Azar Nafisi.[81] In addition, her "Dialogue Project: The Culture of Democracy in Muslim Societies" has been funded by the Smith Richardson Foundation in 2003, with a grant of $200,000.[82] Given these foundations' self-proclaimed dedication to conservative politics and policy development, especially in relation to foreign policy, it is not peculiar that Nafisi has been criticized for her neo-conservative connections by theorists such as Hamid Dabashi.

Nafisi's involvement with political actors such as Wolfowitz and the Smith Richardson Foundation in concurrence with her espoused concern for women's rights in Iran is ignorant of how the political, military, and discursive projects engineered by said actors works precisely to negate the mobility and basic dignity of Muslims living in the West and throughout the Islamic world. The insistence that Western values and democracy are universal 'norms' in effect seeks to establish "a racially homogenous community [that] is nevertheless one made up of subjects who imagine themselves as raceless individuals , consumers, and agents without defining links to community – in other words as citizens who have the freedom to make their own choices."[83] On the other side of establishing a group of subjects who can determine their own destiny is a group of "pre-modern racial Others" who do not hold the same beliefs as the West and whose beliefs must be kept separated from Western civilization.[84] In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi reinforces these discourses through her praise for Western values as an ideal towards which the Muslim world should strive. Her connections to institutions that seek to make this a material reality through economic bullying and military intervention illustrates the role of her memoir in

[81] See Media Transparency, "Grants to Sisterhood is Global Institute, Inc."
[82] Smith Richardson Foundation, "Annual Report 2003."
[83] Razack, *Casting Out*, 8.
[84] Ibid.

supporting Western hegemony. Razack captures the essence of the convergence of civilizational discourse with foreign policy in her comment: "In our context, race thinking reveals itself in the phrase 'Canadian values' or 'American values', uttered so sanctimoniously by prime ministers and presidents when they articulate what is being defended in the 'war on terror'."[85]

In the epilogue to *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi goes further with her support of American-style democracy, and its application or adoption throughout the world. She writes:

> ...I know now as much as I will ever know anything that it is this dogged desire for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by young Iranians today, the children of the revolution and the anguished self-criticism of former revolutionaries that will determine the shape of our future.[86]

With this one sentence, Nafisi makes a somewhat opaque, yet deliberate statement about how Iran's future must be decided. By inscribing the hopes of young Iranians with a decidedly American desire, Nafisi reinforces the politics of liberal democracy that informs American foreign policy, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Her claims that young Iranians are desperate for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as uttered by the West, promotes the idea that the 'Orient' is anxiously waiting for an American or Western model of civil society, drawn from a liberal, individualist ethos, and that longing creates justification for both 'diplomatic' and military intervention in the region. Rastegar notes that Nafisi's identification of democracy and freedom as only Western notions maintains what Said has termed the "flexible positional superiority of the West."[87]

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 341.
[87] Quoted in Rastegar, *Reading Nafisi in the West*, 109.

Nafisi's neo-conservative connections and her endorsement of American-style democratic values are presented in various ways throughout *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. The notion of freedom is a recurring theme and is represented as a distinctly American idea. Nafisi seeks to appeal to her readers' regard for Western-style liberal democracy. She often cites "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as fundamental rights to which all human beings should enjoy access. For an Iranian immigrant writer to echo this classic, famously American regard, embedded in the Constitution, for the rights of humankind is a direct confirmation of the myth of the American nation-building project. Nafisi's reverence for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness expresses that very secret desire, wish and belief of empire – that everyone, everywhere wishes they could live in America, be American and enjoy the rights and privileges of a liberal-democracy. It is difficult to imagine a more fitting buttress for hegemony than the 'exotic' woman who is re-iterating the mantra of a white settler society.

Nemat does not elicit sympathy from her Western readers simply because she is Christian. The treatment of her forced conversion to Islam serves throughout the book as a trope for the 'evil' of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this sense, it captures many different facets of current Orientalist thought regarding Islam and Muslim societies. In order to complete her conversion, Nemat must take a Muslim name. When reflecting on this, she likens herself to Judah, suggesting that she is now a 'bad' Christian and worries that God will in some way punish her for turning her back on Christianity.[88] The conversion brings pain to her parents, and Nemat speculates that it is the reason her father does not want to lend her money when she and her husband Andre decide to immigrate to Canada. Nemat's Christianity is always seen as a saving force – it is a true faith in the sense that it provides support for her at her neediest times. She

[88] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 174.

sees beauty in the rituals surrounding Christianity and remarks that the only place in Tehran where she feels at home is the Roman Catholic Church.[89] Islam, on the other hand, is the religion of control, rules, oppression, violence and conformity. It appears difficult for Nemat to imagine that Muslims gain the same strength and feel the same beauty in their faith as Nemat does in hers. This example again points to similarities with *Not Without My Daughter*, in which Mahmoody portrays Iran as a nation full of brainwashed conforming Muslims who will go to absurd lengths to observe their faith. Nemat's Christianity becomes a prime site through which her book can be marketed and positioned in the Orientalist landscape and its war on terror. By using the premise of a Christian woman imprisoned in an Islamic country who is then forced to convert to Islam and be sexually intimate with one of her captors, Nemat's work touches on the fear underlying the popular 'clash of civilizations' discourse. The widespread belief of the 'clash of civilizations' discourse in the West is what leads to accounts of Europe being 'overrun' by Muslims and fears of violent Muslim men becoming hegemonic manufactured 'truths'. The tragic irony that is missed is that the treatment of Iraqi prisoners of war at Abu Ghraib and the treatment of Muslim detainees at Guantanamo Bay are examples of American violence as expressed by an empire during a time of war. The crimes committed by American officials at these two sites alone, touch on the same kind of horrific acts described by Marina Nemat. Prisoners humiliated, tortured and sexually abused, and detainees having to witness a Koran being flushed down a toilet are not dissimilar acts from being lashed and being forced to convert to Islam and marry your prison guard.

Nemat arguably uses more sensationalist and extreme circumstances to perform her sameness with a Western readership. Part of her performance relies on the imagination of the

[89] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 131.

reader, in that her constructed sameness plays on hegemonic fears that have been cultivated as part of the war on terror. Nafisi, on the other hand, establishes her whiteness and/or sameness with her Western audience in somewhat different ways. Nafisi echoes certain powerful elements of American rhetoric, notions to which she seems to have subscribed wholeheartedly and she often uses banal examples to show tangible evidence of the West's 'superiority'.

She begins with a basic premise that is used to illustrate to American readers the cruel environment of post-revolutionary Iran. Nafisi cites eating ice cream in public, holding hands and reading *Lolita* in Tehran as forbidden things which bring pleasure to her and those she knows.[90] Throughout the book there is a sustained focus on things such as eating ice cream or going for a walk, that are presented as whimsical acts frowned upon by the regime. The use of such mundane activities is meant to convey to the American reader – who can eat an ice cream in public at any given moment – just how barbaric and uncivilized a country Iran is. There is a brief section in the book where Nafisi touches on her years as an international student, going to university in Oklahoma. Upon her return to Iran years later, she reflects on her unhappiness in Iranian society by stating that she longed to speak to someone who spoke English (with a New York accent) and knew about Mike Gold's Lower East Side. Again later, she states that life in the Islamic Republic has taught her to appreciate things in life such as "Austen and James and ice cream and freedom."[91]

In *Prisoner of* Tehran, Nemat also draws on familiar memories to make her narrative of Iran ring true with Western readers. Nemat's narrative of danger and imprisonment, and her descriptions of physical torture serve to contextualize her memoir with other incidents of

[90] Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, 55.
[91] Ibid, 338.

women's imprisonment in Iran, which are more known to Western audiences. In the postscript to *Prisoner of Tehran*, Nemat reflects on the death of Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian photographer who died in Iran in 2003, after being arrested, imprisoned and beaten for taking photographs of a protest outside of Evin.[92] By making a connection to Kazemi's tragic case, Nemat attempts to convey to her Canadian audience, that there are similarities between what happened to her and what happened to Kazemi. After describing Kazemi's physical injuries and the Kazemi family's demand to have Zahra's body returned to Canada for an autopsy, Nemat reflects on the fact that the world noticed Kazemi's death because she was Canadian.[93] Nemat concludes the postscript:

> I wished I could have saved Zahra. I wished I had died with her. But my death wouldn't have helped anyone. I had a story to tell. Zahra had given Iran's political prisoners a ` name and a face; now it was my turn to give them words.[94]

The Kazemi case received a great deal of attention in the Canadian media and what happened to Kazemi continues to stand out as a reason for the strained relationship between Iran and Canada. When Iranian human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi won the Nobel Prize and published her own memoir, Canadians knew her as the lawyer who had worked on Kazemi's case from within Iran.[95] Thus within the globalized market of knowledge production about the Middle East and its violence committed against women, this connection serves to in a sense legitimize and/or familiarize Nemat's testimony. Nemat's memoir also works to confirm Canadian readers' expectations of Iran as an entity destined to continually be found in the 'bad news' section of the

[92] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 275.
[93] Ibid, 276.
[94] Ibid.
[95] See Ebadi, *Iran Awakening.*

newspaper. By drawing on Kazemi's case, which was well publicized, Nemat adds nothing more than new Orientalist iterations of women in the Middle East to an already limited public knowledge of Iran.

Prisoner of Tehran has benefitted from a large advertising campaign, particularly in the publisher's city of Toronto, where the book's cover, featuring a hijab-clad woman, has been displayed in public spaces such as the subway. The much-used image of a woman wearing a hijab or headscarf draws on Western expectations of veiled Muslim women as oppressed or living in a state of constant imprisonment. The prominent display of the book title *Prisoner of Tehran* can only work in the West if its accompanying image is that of a woman in a hijab. Orientalist depictions of Muslim women accompany and infiltrate institutional responses to Muslim women, especially migrant women in the West who must contend with the weight being presented as abject. Razack argues that "racialized knowledge production, that is, the plethora of images and texts establishing First World superiority, is integral to what constitutes knowledge in refugee discourse."[96] Razack makes her argument citing the example of women applying for refugee status in Canada on the basis of gender persecution and she examines the extent to which the claimants and their lawyers must rely on an Orientalist discourse to present themselves as oppressed victims of Third World barbarity.[97] Cultural productions such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* or *Not Without my Daughter* contribute to such racial hegemony, particularly when they strive to make connections with known incidents, as Nemat does when she connects her story to Kazemi's.

[96] Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 91-2.
[97] See Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, chapter four, "Policing the Borders of the Nation: The Imperial Gaze in Gender Persecution Cases."

Prisoner of Tehran has been translated into twenty-two languages and was released in paperback form in early 2008.[98] In the midst of all this, it is possible that Nemat is benefitting from the public's 'knowledge' of or interest in Zahra Kazemi's story. Nemat herself states it clearly when she endows herself alone with the responsibility of giving words to Iran's political prisoners, many of whom have published their stories of courage and resistance but to a much smaller audience than that with which Nemat has been graced.[99] In addition, Nemat seems to be implying that her words and her story also give a voice to Kazemi – a voice that Canadian readers will never hear. This is another way in which *Prisoner of Tehran* gains appeal – it offers the reader something that she can presumably never find otherwise: an inside look at a story that has shocked the entire nation. Nemat seems to be suggesting that her story can stand as a universal example for the prison narratives of all of Iran's political prisoners, including Kazemi.

Nemat performs sameness with her Western readership by deliberately politicizing both the Canadian and Iranian physical landscape at the outset of her memoir: "There is an ancient Persian proverb that says, "The sky is the same colour wherever you go." But the Canadian sky was different from the one I remembered from Iran; it was a deeper shade of blue and seemed endless, as if challenging the horizon.[100]

With this opening statement, Nemat references the implicit/explicit binary of Canada as the land of possibility, and Iran as without. At once, Nemat taps into (Canadian) popular sentiment by citing the monumentality of Canada's geography and praising its vastness. Yet she also sets herself as narrator to speak the tone of the 'ideal' immigrant, one who can draw

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[98] Andriani, "'Prisoner of Tehran' Gets Dual Boost".

[99] The majority of political prison memoirs by Iranians are written in Farsi and have not been translated and as a result they do not circulate in the same way as texts like *Prisoner of Tehran*. A recent publication Agah, Mehr and Parsi, *We Lived to Tell*, has been published in English by McGilligan Books, a small publishing house.

[100] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 1.

comparisons between her country of origin and the new land of opportunity. She describes only the new Canadian sky, leaving out any image of the Iranian sky and thus creating it as an 'Other' that is without characteristic or quality. Importantly, the Canadian sky is also personified as providing freedom and opportunity, through its described 'endless' quality, and also challenges boundaries, symbolized by the horizon. Here, Nemat implies, in Orientalist fashion, that in the West limits can be pushed and expanded, whereas in the archaic East there are only set identities or modes of being. Later, in the book's epilogue, Nemat concludes that Canada is the place "where we would belong" because it is 'safe', 'free' and beautiful.[101] With this sentence, she pays homage to the myth of Canada's nation-building project – that no matter where one comes from, a life in Canada means equality and the freedom to be oneself. This is the Great White North, where Nemat can encounter a clean, safe country that will 'liberate' her from the worst possible place for a 'defiant', white Christian woman: the Islamic Republic of Iran. Thus *Prisoner of Tehran* is bookended by celebrations of Canada's beauty and references to its open possibilities, as expressed by its landscape and its welcoming of new immigrants, such as Nemat and her husband.

Waiting in line at the airport in Zurich, en route to Canada, Nemat observes a group of Canadians, noting to herself that she envies them and wonders what it feels like to be Canadian.[102] As she gazes at the group of Canadians, she reassures herself with the following thoughts, which comprise the end of her epilogue: "It [Canada] would be our new home, where

[101] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 274.
[102] Ibid.

we could be free and feel safe, where we would raise our children and watch them grow, and where we would belong.[103]

Nemat's expressed desire or aspiration to 'be Canadian' reflects the promise of immigration itself. It is a knowledge built on the premise that in the West, one's individuality and individual concerns reign supreme: an antithesis to the tyrannical control of 'backward' regimes be they Communist or Islamic. This desire for a generic Canadian-ness is a symptom of sustained hegemonic empire-building. In Nemat's narrative, it is expressed by an uncritical embrace of Canada/the West, which explicitly overlooks any complicity on the part of North American or European countries in creating the very conditions in the Third World that Nemat and other migrants are leaving. She feels indebted to what she calls "this strange country that had offered us refuge when we had nowhere to go" and takes pride in her family becoming full-fledged home-owning middle class suburbanites.[104] Embracing Canada's self-honed image as a country welcoming to immigrants and as a place where one acquires immediate membership to the 'imagined community'[105] is a main pillar upon which Nemat's performance of sameness with her Western audience is strengthened. In this sense, invoking one of Canada's central myths builds trust with the reader and renders the narrator/author's voice all the more authoritative, particularly in this historical context when narratives by Middle Eastern women are highly sought in the literary market. Further, by closing *Prisoner of Tehran* with reflections on how the geopolitical site of Canada has helped her to reconcile her trauma, Nemat reinforces the notion of the imperialist (country) as a saviour to the Third World. Razack points to this ideology as a key construct in Canadian nation-building and something which allows Canadians to assume a

[103] Ibid.
[104] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 1-2.
[105] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

position of innocence in regards to complicity in acts of violence or imperialism.[106] Perhaps in contrast to its innocence, Canadian self-identification as a 'peacekeeping' country is also a performance filled with bravado and intended to mark the Canadian nation-building project as distinctly un-American. Although *Prisoner of Tehran* is filled with highly detailed accounts of Nemat's life in Iran, all references to her migration to Canada and her life in Canada are brief and glossed over with the sheen of simple and easily come by freedom. When referring to the her Canadian immigration process, Nemat alludes only to a country that "had offered us refuge",[107] endowing the process with benevolence, rather than noting the arduous, discriminating measures through which people are 'granted' temporary and/or permanent status in Canada.[108] This way of describing the migration process as almost effortless sets up Canada as the safe and accepting antithesis to Nemat's description of the torturous prison chambers of Iran, where Nemat and her political views were *not* accepted. And as immigration is bound in law and the constitution, the reader can then assume that in Canada the law was on the side of Nemat and her family, whereas in Iran the law not only failed to protect her, but facilitated the process of her undue imprisonment.[109] Razack states that "the deceptively ordinary and outwardly compassionate process of granting asylum" is based on racialized knowledge production regarding distinctions between East and West that allow countries such as Canada to view migrants from the Third World to the First World as desperate to be allowed to stay in a

[106]Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 89.
[107] Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran*, 1.
[108] There is a large body of critical work dealing with the contradictions and fallacies of Canada's immigration system. For works specifically analysing the racialized nature of admissions and refugee hearings, see Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*;
[109] It is important to state here that I do not know, nor am I concerned with, the particulars of Nemat's immigration to Canada. That is to say, it is unclear whether she and her husband arrived as refugees or how difficult it was for them to attain legal status, other than her brief references to being "taken in" by Canada. What is at stake in this text is precisely what Nemat has omitted regarding these details and how her descriptions of Canada/Iran are acts of racialized knowledge production in the tradition of Orientalism.

Western country.[110] Nemat's use of the hegemonic Canadian immigration rhetoric to illustrate a resolution to her story of torture and imprisonment serves to embolden said hegemony through a flowery reflection on her immigration process.

[110] Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 91.

Conclusion

As we are currently in the midst of the rise of women's memoirs from the Middle East and the ever proliferating Islamophobia, it is difficult to judge the long term effects of memoirs such as *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and *Prisoner of Tehran* and their ability to shape discourses of East and West. With the continual increase of global migration, particularly in the context of migration from 'East' to 'West', it is apparent that narratives and representations of ethnic or national identities will continue to be a feature of the contemporary era. Stricter restrictions on mobility rights for people of the Third World, especially those from predominantly Muslim countries, are already part of the post-9/11 immigration regimes of Canada, the United States, Europe and Australia, in part due to panic and participation in the anti-terrorism industry. Combined with a steady rate of globalized capitalist expansion, conditions for the migration of people will undoubtedly continue to be tangled, unjust and tragic in its displacement and detainment of people.

Part of the legitimizing industry behind empire is a host of writers and speakers, a "comprador intelligentsia" who are native informants ready to help build hegemony for neo-colonial countries such as the United States. Texts produced by native informants continue to be of interest to Western reading audiences who are seeking to understand the 'Other' at a time when the U.S. and many other Western countries are implicated at sites of violence such as the Iraq war, the invasion of Afghanistan, the horrors of Abu Ghraib and the injustices housed at Guantanamo Bay. The long established Orientalist binary between the West as a democratic, civilized superior entity to the East's repressed, backward barbarism has been strengthened through attempts to mobilize support for the projects of empire, as noted above. As a result, Muslims and people from the Middle East have been typified as either untrustworthy and

inassimilable terrorist males, or as uneducated, abject veiled women. Life narratives which rely on repeating Orientalist tropes about the status of women in Islamic countries are implicated reinforcing those binaries.

Through an analysis of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and Marina Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran*, I have sought to outline the nexus of imperialism, Orientalism and 'whiteness' and its appearance in Iranian life narratives by women living in the diaspora. I argued that each writer inscribed themselves into a superior position of whiteness by first positioning themselves as 'others' outside of Iranian society and then performing sameness with their Western readers, mainly through the use of unveiling as whiteness, democracy as whiteness and freedom as whiteness. The uncritical adherence to the myths of Canada and the United States as immigrant-receiving lands of milk and honey is a further dimension of Nafisi and Nemat's staged marginality in Iranian society and performed sameness with a Western audience. By legitimizing dominant myths about the process and outcome of immigration to the West, diasporic memoirs by Middle Eastern women contribute to the growing silence about the harshness of immigration regimes, particularly for migrant women from the Middle East. Both texts rely on the heavily-circulated textual and visual image of the Muslim woman as oppressed and abject and thus continue a long tradition of gendered and/or feminist Orientalism.

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