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Political Islam in Laila Lalami's "The Fanatic" and Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic"

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Abstract: *This article aims at comparing Laila Lalami's short story "The Fanatic" and Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic". Between the lines, it will discuss how Laila Lalami's short story "The Fanatic" shows how the rise of political Islam in Morocco is partly responsible for conflicts between parents and their children. While the parents embrace what they perceive as a liberal Western culture, the children choose to support Islamic movements for political purposes. Like Lalami, Hanif Kureishi, as a Pakistani-British author, also sheds light on the theme of the generational gap to criticize the conflictual context generated by political Islam. Specifically, in his work "My Son the Fanatic," he intentionally opens a debate on multiculturalism, cultural identity, and alienation to demonstrate how Western media's misrepresentation of Islam easily creates a cultural struggle between parents and their children. Therefore, this article will compare the two short stories and will eventually discuss how political Islam after the Iranian revolution in 1979 significantly had an impact on Muslim youths, whether at home or in diaspora.*
Keywords: *Political Islam, Laila Lalami, Hanif Kureishi, Secularism, Fundamentalism*

Introduction

Political Islam, a term that significantly means the power of using religion as a theory of politics, is a movement that emerged globally in the 1960s in opposition to secular states (Cesari, 1). Interestingly, after the Iranian revolution or since the start of Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, political Islam became a complex sociopolitical reality that emerged out of "religious nationalism" (Cesari, 2). In his theoretical book *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad (2003) emphasizes that nationalism in its most significant sense has been shaped by religion. According to Asad, generally, there is no specific difference between nationalism and Islamism because nationalists and Islamists in the Arab world often go against modernity and development (169). For Asad, despite the fact that they go against modernity, they also attempt to show how Islam requires Islamic governance or *Sharia* which is nothing but a "subdivision of legal norms '*fiqh*' that are authorized and maintained by the centralizing state" (Asad, 272). In this context, it may be convenient to say that political Islam or Islamism became a powerful force throughout much of the Muslim world today, especially in Arab countries (Asad, 257).

Certainly, the rise of political Islam has become "a pervasive pattern in contemporary Arab politics" (Dekmejian, 1) which is one of the reasons why many Arab intellectuals, including Islamic scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and even Arab writers, have decided to show how Islam today "has a higher political profile" (March, 4). For instance, Moroccan-American author Laila Lalami and Pakistani-British writer Hanif Kureishi have gradually presented in their works how political Islam has become a complex form of government that (dis)organizes the social, cultural, and economic life of most Arab and Muslim communities, whether at home or in diaspora. Lalami and Kureishi pay special attention to the manifestation of Islamist fundamentalism as they scrutinize, in a subtle way, social issues such as religious violence which is directly associated with questions of belonging, alienation, and cultural identity (Athanasiades, 60).

In his book *Writing Muslim Identity*, Geoffrey Nash (2012) argues that Arab writers in diaspora such as

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Laila Lalami and postcolonial authors such as Hanif Kureishi write in order to show how Islam is "a religion, not an ideology, and there is no point, ultimately in making war with religion" (2). Indeed, in most of his works, Kureishi depicts his characters as either homosexuals or jihadists to criticize "the conflictual context generated by the clash of Islamist fundamentalism" (Athanasiades, 55). Specifically, in "My Son the Fanatic," Kureishi deconstructs and offers a brilliant political point of view through the experiences of the characters, mainly Parvez who struggles to keep his son Ali from all kinds of what he considers as religious extremism. Living in a multicultural society and more precisely in Britain, Parvez refuses to let his son Ali practice what he perceives as a radical fundamentalist version of Islam because as Karam Nayebpour (2018) puts it, in Kureishi's story, "the father's nearly fulfilled desire to mime the hegemonic culture is challenged by his son's revolt against it by attempting to remove everything that represents Western culture" (55). On this basis, it may be evident to say that in his text Kureishi uses the father-son relationship to comment on how the emergence of political Islam after the Iranian revolution has disrupted the cultural identity of second-generation British Muslim immigrants. Between the lines, Kureishi also focuses on exposing how the Western media's representation of Islam distorts the image or identity of Muslims worldwide.

In parallel, Lalami, as an Arab-American author thinks that political Islam is a violent kind of movement that rejects primarily the understanding of humanism. For instance, in her novel, *Secret Son* (2009), Lalami shows how a radical Islamist party recruits the protagonist Youssef El Mekki to murder a journalist who is "falsely accused by the Party of advocating the government's plans of neoliberalism and open market policies" (Awad, 110). Critically speaking, for this Moroccan author, Islam ought to be separated from politics because "Islam as a religion should not be identified with any particular political program or ideology since doing so places the limits of time and place on its universal message" (O. Voll, 175). So, just like Kureishi's short story, Laila Lalami's short story "The Fanatic" sheds light on how Western media's persistent representation of Muslims as terrorists and extremists has substantially influenced Muslims' self-perception. Besides, it also shows how "the political participation of Islamist parties has given rise to a new form of Islamism" (Karagiannis, 14). In this sense, it is conveniently evident that Noura's decision to wear hijab comes as a shock to her father who suspects that his daughter has fallen a prey to Islamist fundamentalists. Seen from these perspectives and views, this article will thus deconstruct and compare the two short stories to show how both authors have consciously relied on the parents-children relationship to comment on the sociocultural repercussions of the rise of political Islam or Islamism in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution.

The Rise of Political Islam

In the Arab world, the central role of Islam in politics has substantially influenced social, cultural, and intellectual life. After colonialism, most Arab political leaders were interested in joining religiosity with politics to dominate and establish strict authoritarian regimes to continue to serve the capitalist system. In this context, Michael E. Salla (1997), observes that the rise of political Islam became a force in global politics (730). Importantly, Salla maintains that the reason that lies behind this assumption is that the Muslim world is still dominated by essentialists and orientalists that often cover the image of Islam (ibid, 730). Bernard Lewis, as a case in point, negatively misrepresents Islam in his famous article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" (1990) whereby he claims that "Islam inspires a mood of hatred and violence" (48).

Similarly, according to Afary and Anderson (2005), Michel Foucault wrote about political Islam or more specifically about the Iranian revolution to support "the enormous power of the discourse of militant Islam, not just for Iran, but for the world" (4). In his article "Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism," Michael J. Thompson (2005) scrutinizes how Foucault's interest in political Islam was driven by the Orientalist misconception of Islam as anti-humanist religion (21). Thompson highlights that between 1978 and 1979, Foucault wrote articles for the *Italian Daily Corriere Della* where he showed extensively his admiration of "the anti-modernism of Khomeini and his coterie as a liberating political impulse against domination, power and against the Enlightenment rationality and the institutions of modernity" (21).

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For Thompson, Foucault was undoubtedly skillful and powerful in celebrating the ideologies of Khomeini because while writing about power and discourse, Foucault encouraged "the Nietzschean theme of the ubiquity of power and domination" (22). That is to say, power in the pre-modern world was commonly used as a tool for domination and torture which is one of the reasons why Foucault used it to offer this alternative image of how power functions as a discourse that rejects modernity and the structure of the self (22).

Over time, many critics have examined the genealogy of political Islam and they recognized that this socio-political reality is deeply rooted in Western Marxism. In her article "Political Islam: A Marxist Analysis," Deepa Kumar (2001) argues that the rise of political Islam emerged from "the spread of capitalism and the encroachment of colonialism onto various Muslim empires" (1). Indeed, after colonialism, the spread of Marxist ideologies in the Arab world has resulted in creating this cultural debate about how an Arab society should advance economic, social, and cultural development and at the same time how it should maintain an Islamic identity (Salem, 4). Unfortunately, after independence, these ideological and social transformations failed in the Arab world because, as clarified by Wael B. Hallaq (2012), nationalist elites, in particular, started to pay attention to "the national security state by disfiguring *Sharia*'s governance norms, leading to the failure of both Islamic governance and the modern state as political projects" (12). In this context, one may say that political Islam cannot be regarded as "a geostrategic factor, but a societal phenomenon that rejects all kinds of resistance against the international system and the state itself in the era of globalization" (Perwita, 12).

In other words, it is worth mentioning that political Islam is one of the movements that shape the understanding of how modernization is still regarded as a barrier in the Arab world. The issue of how religion represents an obstacle to modernization and democratization is still a topic that is world widely discussed and studied in many different domains (O. Voll, 170). In literature, novelists, poets, and playwrights of Arab and Muslim decent have approached this topic through presenting the ideology of how political Islam plays a key role in shaping the daily experiences of their characters. Laila Lalami and Hanif Kureishi are among these novelists who sought to depict how secularism and Islamist fundamentalism affect the parents-children relationship in Arab and Muslim families, whether at home or in diaspora. As the titles of the two stories highlight the concept fanaticism, both stories offer insights on how this issue has become increasingly intricately linked to people's quotidian experiences. While Lalami recounts how Larbi's attitudes toward his daughter change after she joins the Islamic movement with her friend Faten, Kureishi shows how Parvez becomes suspicious of his son's behavior once he begins to pray in the mosque and speak about the abstract laws of Islam. As Nash (2012) reminds us, "Kureishi's writing on Islam is further inflicted by his need to identify himself as a successful writer, which in turn is a commitment to freedom of speech and the multiple truths of postmodern aesthetics" (35). As a secular thinker, Kureishi believes that "Islamic fundamentalism has always seemed to be profoundly wrong, unnecessarily restrictive, and frequently cruel" (Athanasiades, 68). Like Kureishi, Lalami also thinks that Arab regimes' corruption and ineptitude to secure welfare for their citizens only make Islamic fundamentalism stand as a malaise that ultimately disrupts the social, cultural, and economic life of most Arab countries. In their article "Winners and Losers: Morocco's Liberalization and Contemporary Cultural Representations," Awad and Tayem (2015) argue that Lalami recognizes that in Morocco, religious extremism is manipulated by the state to hide its failure to deliver the promised development and progress (77). In one of her interviews, Lalami even declares that "religious extremism is the result of very specific political and economic failures that happened in the 60s and 70s" (Hussein, 2006). Based on this statement, one may argue that when Lalami tackles the theme of political Islam in her short story "The Fanatic," she attempts to illustrate how Morocco's social corruption usually forces people to either immigrate or participates in political or religious parties.

Like Lalami, Kureishi remains one of the remarkable authors who has explored the link between government corruption and political Islam to outline broadly "the so-called clash of civilization that is between the West and Islam" (Nash, 18). For instance, in his short story "My Son the Fanatic," Kureishi focuses

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intentionally on the themes of multiculturalism, identity, and racism to show how the racial policy of Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s has led many Muslim youths to support the Islamic revolution of Khomeini. In their book *The Iranian Revolution: What has been its Global Impact*, John L. Esposito and James Piscatori (1989) state that "the Iranian revolution occurred at a time when conditions in much of the rest of the Islamic world were particularly favorable to its cause" (13). They maintain that during that specific period, Khomeini called on the Islamic world for a political and cultural struggle against the West because his main purpose was to reintroduce the Shariah (Islamic law) as "the sacred blueprint for the good society" (4). For this reason, after this revolution, many Muslim youths in Arab and Muslim countries or even in the West started to view Iran as a model for cultural unity; they often engaged in demonstrations to declare that Islam must be spread everywhere (5). Hence, as a response to this cultural unity, Arab and Muslim writers across the globe started to investigate the reason behind this phenomenon to examine "the hegemonic discourses on the formation of identities" (Athanasiades, 3).

Political Islam in Lalami's "The Fanatic"

Like many Arab writers in diaspora, Laila Lalami's inner desire is to adopt a liberal position with regard to the racism and violence that is often directed against Muslim immigrants in Western societies (Nash, 12). Born in Morocco, Lalami is one of the authors who won critical acclaim when she first published her collection of short stories *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005). Her second book is *Secret Son* (2009) which is set in contemporary Morocco and it depicts the lives of people of different social classes. Her third book, *The Moor's Account* (2014), is a historical novel that won the American Book Award, the Arab American Book Award, and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award.

According to the "Encyclopedia of World Biography," Lalami started to write fiction as a way "to challenge oft-repeated accounts of Muslims and Arabic-speaking peoples in the media, which she characterized as 'stories about the veils, the bombs, and the billionaires'" (2007). Certainly, considering her reasons for writing, Lalami believes that Western media do not represent Islam as it is supposed to be. For this reason, through her novels and short stories, she attempts to show how Western media's misrepresentations are partly responsible for the rise of political Islam in the Arab world.

In his discussion of the topic of the rise of political Islam in the Arab world, Nader Hashemi (2012) argues in his article "Political Islam: A 40 Year Retrospective" that Islamism or political Islam either in the Arab world or in the West came as a reaction to the decline of Muslim civilization during the 19th and 20th centuries. Nader states that "this movement of resistance appeared firstly from the impact and legacy of Euro-American imperialism and the failure of post-colonial regimes" (Hashemi, 1). Indeed, after colonialism, Nader emphasizes that political Islamists started to develop some specific Islamist ideologies to intentionally reverse the power of secularist elites (Ibid, 1). Particularly, in Morocco, Islamist ideologies were best known by the take-over of the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM) or Islamic groups such as Al Islah Wal Tajdid, Al Adl Wal Ihssane, and Jama'at Shabiba Islamiyya who were all opposing the Moroccan system including the leftist secularist elites of the 1970s and 1980s (Sater 2010, 52).

However, it is important to note that the roots of political Islam in Morocco did not start with these religious groups because before and after the nation's independence, the relationship between politics and religion in Morocco was always framed by "the monopoly and religious dominance of the monarchy" (Arroub, 4). The Moroccan monarch, for example, called himself the commander of the faithful, the head of the religious council, and the supreme authority who retains the exclusive right of *Fatwa* (4). In her article "Political Islam in Morocco: Is there an 'exception Marocaine'?" Ana Belen Soage (2013) highlights that the beginning of political Islam in Morocco was different from other Arab countries because it came as a response to the Moroccan Monarch (Hassan II). Specifically, after the nation's independence, sectors from the left that were influenced by the socialist regimes of Algeria and Tunisia wanted to adjust the policies imposed by the Moroccan regime. Yet, this failed over time because the Moroccan Monarch reacted with harshness to this

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structural adjustment to the point that many were arrested during this specific period of time (1).

Hence, when reading Lalami's "The Fanatic," one has to be aware of the way political Islam has influenced characters' attitudes, beliefs and reactions. Certainly, in "The Fanatic," Lalami explores broadly the theme of the generational gap to demonstrate between the lines how the rise of political Islam in Morocco after the Iranian revolution has seriously created a clash between the parents and their children. One can see for example at the beginning of the story how Larbi, as one of the main protagonists, struggles to keep his daughter Noura away from the young Islamist Faten. Faten desperately seeks to influence Noura because she thinks that she scarcely knows about what is going on around her in contemporary Morocco. This is clear when she consciously informs Noura that "'the injustice we see every day is proof enough of the corruption of King Hassan, the government, and the political parties. But if we had been better Muslims, perhaps these problems wouldn't have been visited on our nation and on our brethren elsewhere'" (28). In this passage, Lalami attempts to show how poverty, bad governance, and a lack of progress in educational and social matters in Morocco are the main reasons that lead many Moroccans to turn to Islamism for a solution or a way to a living democracy (Schiller, 1).

In his book *Modern Arab American Fiction*, Steven Salaita (2011) states that throughout her novels and short stories, Lalami focuses on the theme of political Islam along with the internal and external corruption of Morocco itself. No doubt, in "The Fanatic," Lalami offers a brilliant political point of view through the experiences of Noura and Faten to uncover how the corruption of the Moroccan system is what lead these two female protagonists to turn to Islamism as a solution to their social problems. On several occasions, Lalami consciously discusses class stratification to intelligently demonstrate how Faten, for instance, cannot be regarded as a young fanatic but rather a victim of cultural and structural changes in contemporary Morocco. As the story shows, Faten comes from a low-income neighborhood, and unlike her friend Noura, Faten is incapable of achieving her goals because there is much corruption in the system of Morocco. Consequently, Faten starts to gradually influence Noura who in comparison is a rich young intelligent student who decides to stay in Morocco because, just like her friend, she thinks that "there is much corruption in the system, and she wants to be part of the solution" (43). In her article "De-Imperializing Gender: Religious Revivals, Shifting Beliefs, and the Unexpected Trajectory of Laila Lalami's *Others Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*," Kimberley Segall (2019) argues that "Faten's religious revival is a form of economic protest" (80). Indeed, when alluding to King Hassan's corrupted regime, Faten thinks that the political system of Morocco is corrupt and barely pays attention to the socioeconomic problems which is one of the reasons why she admits in a passage that the nation's problems stem from people's lack of adherence to Islamic doctrines and principles.

Later on, readers discover that Faten has joined the Islamist party in Morocco to resist the political power of her own country because she thinks that unlike her, the majority of the youths are blinded by the West. She openly declares to Larbi, "'The Western world often takes the brightest instead of keeping them here where we need them" (47). Overwhelmed by her social situation, Faten thus starts to have an impact on Noura's decision not to attend New York University, for she blames the Moroccan system for favoring the degrees of those who pursue an education in private schools. As Segall suggests Faten's religious extremist views are mainly intertwined with the influx of traumatic events she experiences in Morocco (79). Truly, the fact that Faten starts to wear *Hijab* and join the Islamist party means that this female protagonist is not practicing faith but rather acting against the "alienation produced by colonialism" (Segall, 5). So, one may say that when Lalami explores the theme of political Islam in her short story, she attempts to show how religious extremism in contemporary Morocco is inextricable from the nation's socioeconomic problems which came as a result of "strategies and policies adopted by successive Moroccan governments in response to global political, cultural, socioeconomic and ideological transformations" (Awad and Tayem, 77).

Despite the fact that the short story depicts the hard economic conditions that Moroccans experience, it is clear that Islamic fundamentalism is not related only to this specific issue but is also connected to the Western

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representation of Islam. In several passages of the story, Faten and Noura reject the Western world for political reasons. However, the experiences of both characters reveal different views and perspectives to readers. For instance, when Noura decides to abandon her studies in New York, Lalami consciously demonstrates that her rejection of the West is inevitably linked to the orientalist misrepresentations of Islam. Slowly, readers discover that Noura's experiences in the story differ from those of Faten in the sense that Noura seeks to rebel against her family, mainly her father who refuses to let his daughter wear the headscarf (37). Disappointed by Noura's unexpected attitude, Larbi finds out that his daughter is turning into a young fanatic just like her friend Faten to the point that he beats her in the middle of the story.

In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said (1981) argues that *US News* has reported that "fundamentalism is a riding popular groundswell through much of the Islamic world…there is still little evidence that the majority of fundamentalists pledge obeisance to Khomeini's declared revolutionary objectives" (14). In this famous book along with *Orientalism* (1979), Said examines how US policymakers continue distorting most Muslims' identities worldwide. According to Said, the West sees Islam in general as a threat, and the youths in the Arab world continue to convert from Sunni to Shiite Islamic movements because they believe that Westerners are big haters of Muslims (Ibid, 14). This is well exemplified when Noura declares to her mother that "'Americans hate us'" (43). From this passage, Lalami structurally shows that Noura's rejection of the West becomes a form of cultural resistance against "the Eurocentric notions of Muslim otherness" (Nash, 19). Indeed, in their book *The Iranian Revolution: What has been its Global Impact*, John L. Esposito and James Piscatori (1989) argue that Islamic activists did identify with many of Iran's Islamic ideological principles. Among these were "the reassertion of Islam as a total way of life and the belief that the adoption of the Western, secular model of separation of church and state was the cause of the political, military and economic and social ills of all Muslim societies" (4). So, as the story highlights, the practice of Islamism deployed by Noura has eventually led to a conflict between her and her parents. In various passages, readers notice that Noura goes against her parents' views of Islam. For instance, she reminds her parents that "God commands us to wear *Hijab*, it says so in the Qur'an, and women are harassed on the streets in Rabat all the time. The hijab is a protection" (37). As this quotation shows, for Noura, Islam, represented by the hijab is a form of protection against harassment. Hence, her view contradicts that of her parents who perceive Islam as "a traditional force…; resisting progressive change and consequently constituting a negative influence or barrier to social and political development" (J. S. Ismael and T. Y. Islamel, 1).

Lalami gradually shows how the transformation of Noura's identity turns Larbi into a violent father because he sees that his daughter is not only practicing religious beliefs, but she is also reading a book by Sayid Qutb, who, Larbi mentally notes, is "the Egyptian dissident and member of the Muslim Brotherhood" (34). Clearly, Lalami in this passage deconstructs and offers her political point of view concerning how Islam in Morocco is merely political. Between the lines, she shows how the latter is interconnected with the hypocrisy and the corruption of the Moroccan regime. Larbi thus becomes a violent father because he partly knows that Faten is just using Noura for her own interest.

However, it is important to note that Lalami does not focus only on Noura's identity because partly Lalami believes that Larbi Amrani leads also a double life. As someone who works at the Sureté National, Larbi is perfectly aware that the Moroccan educational system is "poorly funded and equipped" (Sater, 116). This statement is better reflected when he insists that Noura must go to New York to pursue her education. He actually reveals to her that "'a degree from abroad would be better'" (25). Interestingly, in this section, Lalami thematically criticizes the government's educational system which is partly "responsible for producing a large quantity of semi-educated workers and employees produc[ing] at best mediocre results across all economic sectors" (Ibid, 116). In fact, for Lalami, education in Morocco is not well funded because it is "severely influenced by the government's downsizing of its spending. For this reason, graduates of local universities generally do not stand with those who study from abroad" (Awad and Tayem, 82). In this context, it would be

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tempting to say that the Moroccan educational condition in this case occupies a central place in Lalami's representation of Moroccan contemporary society because it is somehow regarded as "a mechanism for social mobility to become an instrument of status and exclusion" (Kessler, 2003). By the end of the story, readers discover that Larbi excludes Faten from the educational system because he thinks that Faten has changed his daughter's identity from a civilized to an uncivilized ignorant peasant.

Arriving at the final lines of the analysis, one may argue that in "The Fanatic," Lalami consciously focuses on the gradual transformation of Noura and Faten to partly present between the lines how "social corruption actually conflates antigovernment sentiment and religious activism" (Salaita, 118). Interestingly enough, she combines together the themes of racism, class stratification, political Islam, identity, and religious conversions to show how Muslim youths after the Iranian revolution were somehow victims of a certain clash of civilization that is between the West and the Arab world. In conclusion, one may say that Lalami's focus on the theme of political Islam gradually informs readers that Islamic fundamentalism is nothing but a code of resistance against Western modernity (Nash, 18). The next section shows how debates over "Islam" in diaspora in Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" considerably punctuate another fraught parent-child relationship.

Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" From Secularism to Fundamentalism

Over the past three decades, diasporic writers of Muslim descent have explored themes of cultural identity, exile, migration, and multiculturalism to express their own ultimate experience in the West. Hanif Kureishi, as a case in point, has brilliantly used for example the theme of hybridity and in-betweenness to not only express his own experience in the West but also to give voice to those British Muslim immigrants who suffer from the problem of alienation, exile, and racism. Born in south London in 1954, Kureishi is the son of an English mother and a Pakistani father (British Library, 2014). At an early age, Kureishi went to school in Bromley and studied philosophy at the University of Lancaster and King's College London. In 1985, Kureishi wrote his first screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette*, a film that discusses the life of a homosexual in London. Later on, he wrote other novels including *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and *The Black Album* (1995), two novels that won the Whitbread Award (Ibid, 2014).

In his book *Writing Muslim Identity*, Nash (2012) states that "after his early works, Kureishi's writing became focused on the binary opposition between liberal discourse and Islamic fundamentalism with an emphasis on Muslim violence and the promotion of the values of secularism" (29). So, just like Laila Lalami's short story "The Fanatic," Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic" tackles the idea of how the rise of political Islam after the Iranian revolution has simultaneously separated moderate Muslims and radical ones. At the beginning of the story, Kureishi introduces the main character Parvez who works as a taxi driver in Britain. As a secular person, Parvez drinks alcohol and hangs out with prostitutes, and, unlike his son Ali, he likes Western culture. Ali, on the other hand, is represented by Kureishi as a young fanatic who refuses to follow Western culture for political reasons. Hence, just like Noura and Faten, Ali resists the political power of the West because he feels discriminated against, marginalized, and displaced.

Speaking about marginalization, radicalism, and political Islam in Britain, Tahir Abbas (2011) states that "the experience of Islamic political radicalism in Britain is compounded by ethnicity, migration, social class, and gender" (5). Abbas asserts that the so-called "radical jihadi" leaders have emerged from communities that are poor. In general terms, as stated by Abbas, these radical leaders have all been born or have grown up in bad circumstances which is one of the reasons why they often turn to violence and Islamism as a solution to their social problems (5). Before that, it is important to remember that Britain has always exercised political and economic power over its colonies. Many Muslims migrated to Britain "largely to meet the needs of the shipping industry; in particular significant numbers of strokers worked in coal-fired steamships, jobs that Europeans avoided at all costs" (Abbas, 45). However, by the 1980s onwards, "Britain as a whole suffered from high levels of unemployment, rampant inflation, and low growth" (Zarolli, 2013). According to Tony Travers (2013), Britain during the period of Margaret Thatcher particularly was described as the sick man of

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Europe. The problem of unemployment for example allowed the British government to put emphasis on preserving good race relations by bringing immigration to an end. In fact, during this specific period of time, 14 percent of the population, including Pakistani and Bangladeshi, suffered from the problem of unemployment, and even employment that existed were "highly exploitative and low paid" (report by South Asia Solidarity Group, 2001, 1).

The gradual transformation of Ali's identity from a secular to a young fanatic gives an idea of how Hanif Kureishi "demonstrates quite clearly his grasp of the political challenge of groups like Ali's, whom he represents as self-proclaimed defenders of the Muslim community" (Nash, 31). Thus, like Faten and Noura, Ali becomes this young religious "fanatic" who develops a strong sense of hatred toward Western civilization; his social situation, in particular, pushes him to think of how the Western world often marginalizes and deprives Muslims of their rights. It is clear when he declares to his father that "The Western materialist hate us…how can you love something which hates you" (104). Apparently, Ali's words are almost identical to those of Noura to her mother quoted in the previous section. To his chagrin, Parvez discovers that Ali no longer hangs with his girlfriend and instead he has recently started to pray and go to the mosques in London. Parvez is furious and he is unable to understand this sudden change. Hence, like Larbi, who struggles to keep his daughter Noura from all kinds of religious extremism, Parvez refuses to let his son Ali controls his personal identity and he tries hard to steer him away from religion. When Ali informs his father that he is too "'implicated in Western civilization'" (104), Parvez responds furiously, "'Implicated? We live here'" (104).

The conversation between Ali and his father must be understood within a larger context of Muslim communities' immigration and settlement experiences in Britain after World War II. According to Tahir Abbas (2023), British Muslim radicalization can be traced back to the period of immigration to the country (11). As these new immigrants conformed to British culture and society, they began to integrate, but "there were also instances in which individuals felt alienated by their new surroundings or dissatisfied with life in Britain" (Ibid.). Therefore, Abbas maintains that radicalization should be viewed as "a social phenomenon, a social problem, and a social outcome" (11). Abbas insists that radicalization "is the tipping point a person reaches as a result of the frustrations they experience in their daily lives, where they do not have the answers to the questions they seek regarding the self and others and are pessimistic about the future due to the precariousness of their realities" (11). Based on Abbas's argument, one may argue that Ali's religiosity should not be read as purely spiritually motivated; rather, it should be viewed within a sociopolitical context that substantially contributes to his gradual change.

The theme of secularism versus fundamentalism can be clearly seen through the confrontation between Parvez and Ali. As the story shows, Parvez seems to embrace Western culture because in Pakistan he was taught Koran and religion with certain violence and obscurantism; since then, he "had avoided all religions" (102). Ali, on the other hand, believes that to defend religion means to defend a whole Muslim identity. For this reason, in Britain, he joins Muslim communities because he thinks that Islam is being attacked and misrepresented (105). Lucidly, one cannot deny that in this passage Kureishi attempts to show how political Islam after the Iranian revolution became a form of resistance since the latter is directly associated with the debates about islamophobia and racism. In his article "Multicultural Politics in post-Islamist Muslim Britain," Tahir Abbas (2014) states that Islamophobia is an observable cultural phenomenon that emerges from "a negative politicization of the debate in the light of media and political discourses" (25). Indeed, in his work *Covering Islam*, as mentioned by Bayoumi and Rubin (2019), Edward Said writes "Islam, has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility" (170-171).

In this context, one may argue that like Lalami, Kureishi attempts to deconstruct the binary opposition between Islam and the West by representing Ali as a victim who defends Muslim communities in the West. As Abbas puts it, Muslims in the West often feel threatened which is one of the reasons why they invoke Islam

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as a justification for political action (27). As the story goes on, readers discover that Ali starts to reject the identity of his father, for he thinks that Parvez does not follow properly the law of Islam. When Parvez asks Ali what he means by the Law of Islam. Ali responds thoughtfully, "'The will to *Jihad*… I and millions of others will gladly give our lives for the cause…for us, the reward will be in paradise" (104). In his article "Hybridity of the Characters in My Son the Fanatic,'" Waworuntu, Michelle Intan Goh Rumengan and Arianto, Tomi Arianto (2019) state that "Ali's decision to abandon all of his past habits was a form of resistance to the idea of Western superiority. The resistance is also represented by attitudes that are contrary to the thoughts and ways of thinking of his father" (206). Certainly, Ali's rejection of Parvez's Western culture becomes a form of resistance against imperial/colonial Western discourse because British Muslim youths experience "a complex, dislocated reality" (Abbas, 28). As Abbas also explains in his article "Politics in post-Islamist Britain," many youths struggle with their identities in the West which is one of the reasons why they turn to Islam as self-empowerment. As Abbas puts it Muslim youths turn to Islamism because of the "ongoing harmful media and political discourse that vilifies, stigmatizes and homogenizes Muslims and Islam" (32).

Again, in "My Son the Fanatic," one may say that like Lalami, Kureishi seeks to break through the deployment of the theme of a father-child relationship the binary opposition that is between the West and Islam to demonstrate how the rise of political Islam after the Iranian revolution has universally distorted the image of most Muslims around the world. As Nash puts it, "Kureishi wants to make it clear that he is putting behind him […] the irrationality and violence of the new politicized form he has encountered in a West London Mosque" (32). So, while Parvez turns to alcohol and sex to forget about the miserable life he is enduring with his son, Ali, on the other hand, chooses to convert to Islamic fundamentalism in order to find his identity as a Muslim in a world where the practice of religious beliefs is barely accepted. As Nash argues, "Islam has been invoked with the aim of refuting and nullifying the perceived Islamic threat to Western values, in the process of re-asserting these values as universals constitutive of the entire program of modernity" (9). Thus, like Lalami who connects the theme of religious extremism with the issue of identity, Kureishi also combines the two themes to show how "global Muslim subjectivity is seen as a conscious response to Western hegemony and as a defining feature of post-modernism" (Abbas, 27). As a result, one may argue that like Faten and Noura, Ali's gradual transformation can be read as a form of cultural resistance against the Western hegemonic discourse.

When focusing on the themes of racism, exile, and identity, Kureishi explores quite clearly the dynamics of the clash between the parents and their children in order to uncover how political Islam plays as "a global social movement that seeks to mobilize Muslims into activities that have political ramifications" (Karagiannis, 10). Specifically, in "My Son the Fanatic," he carefully discusses how Islam after the Iranian revolution and the Salman Rushdie fatwa has become a form of resistance against the so-called political ideology of "the West is best" (Nash, 16). One can see clearly for instance how Ali feels disgusted when seeing his father drinking alcohol simply because he thinks that Parvez is too implicated in Western civilization and that he does not apply the laws of the Quran. As Ali declares to him, "There was more to the world than the West, though the West always thought it was best" (106).

Therefore, one may argue that Hanif Kureishi is one of the authors who brilliantly approached the theme of political Islam to show how the latter "manifests as an anti-modern reaction to the license of immorality and cultural decadence of Western modernity" (Nash, 18). In a way, Parvez's reaction to his son's sudden religiosity reflects his belief that political Islam is often violent and does not support liberalism, humanism, and freedom of speech. However, when seeing things from Ali's perspective, one perceives Islamic radicalism as an ideology that emerges from the violent racism that emerged during Margaret Thatcher's reign. Readers are confronted with Parvez who beats his son violently because he does not accept his identity as a Muslim. Ali encounters his father's aggression with a simple question: "So who's the fanatic now?" (108).

Conclusion

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The article has investigated how the Islamic revolution in Iran had a huge political, cultural, and intellectual impact all over the world. With its direct and immediate impact on the image of Muslims worldwide, the Iranian revolution has extensively provoked an internal and external debate concerning how Islamic societies globally are not moving along the path to modernity. Numerous Arab and Muslim writers have decided to tackle this specific subject to investigate how "Islamism or political Islam is at once a claim or a project that rejects widely the process of modernity" (Dickson, 2). Indeed, from a theoretical point of view, one may say that Islamism as much as modernism offer "a network of language, symbols, assumptions, and actions that both constitute and are constituted by social reality" (Ibid, 1). Olivier Roy for instance as cited by Dickson indicates that "re-Islamization" in the Arab world or the West is nothing but a response or a reaction to "the growing popularity of non-state Islamist movements" (Ibid, 3).

Thus, when tackling the theme of political Islam, Lalami and Kureishi have meticulously examined how the concept of re-Islamisation arose as a response or a power of resistance to the Western orientalist discourse on Islam. As a result, throughout their short stories, Lalami and Kureishi have approached the theme of the generational gap to widely demonstrate how political Islam has created conflicts between secular Muslims and radical ones. As diasporic authors, Lalami and Kureishi have deconstructed and shown how both generations suffer from identity crises because of the traumatic events they endured during their childhood experiences. For instance, in Kureishi's story the parent turns to sex and alcohol because he has been taught Islam with a certain violence and obscurantism or more precisely, he has been taught religion without virtue. The children, on the other hand, become judgmental and violent toward the secular thinkers because they resist the political power of the West and mainly, they follow the political ideology of Khomeini. For this reason, in both short stories, one can sense that the Islam practiced by Ali, Faten, and Noura is political and ideological.

In this context, one may argue that while relying on the parents-children's relationships, both Lalami and Kureishi seek to deliver an important political point that concerns mainly how Islamism cannot be regarded as a barbaric movement but rather as a struggle or a vengeance against the polemical orientalist Western discourse. Whether in the Arab world or the West, Islamism is partly fed by Western misrepresentations of Muslims as terrorists, barbaric and inferior. As Nash succinctly puts it, "[t]he paradigms and models mobilized in the Western debate over Islam hardly reflect the real practices of Muslims" (12). To some extent, this paradoxical debate about Islamism and modernity is what led many Muslim youths to join the Islamist movements after the Iranian revolution.

To sum up, one may argue that both Lalami and Kureishi delve into an examination of their characters' consciousness to show how both generations are unable to understand each other because of the lack of philosophy of mind and humanism. In fact, if one has to scrutinize both short stories from a philosophical point of view, one may argue that both authors seek to deliver how political Islam has tormented both generations. As the short stories have shown, the parents are unable to accept their children's personal choices because they believe that the practice of Islamic beliefs by their children is undoubtedly too fanatic and violent. The children, on the other hand, become too pejorative toward their parents because they believe that Westerners see Muslims as barbaric, inferior, and uncivilized. Hence, one may argue that the concept of fanatism in both short stories is elastic and debatable in the sense that both authors seek to deliver the idea of how political Islam has turned both generations into fanatics.

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