



The De-Indigenisation of the English Language: On Linguistic Idiosyncrasy

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Abstract: *This paper introduces and explains a fresh adaptation of linguistic hybridity. This creative strategy is common among postcolonial, transnational and transcultural writers, who would import linguistic features from their first languages to hybridise their prose and paint it with a distinctive identity. I aim, however, to demonstrate that my English text can be hybridised without looking outside the English language, but rather by looking within it. The English language, as I argue, is already a hybrid language, populated by thousands of words borrowed from various languages, including Arabic. The words of this latter, if used intelligently and selectively in my prose, should provide the desired effect of linguistic hybridity. I term this process the de-indigenisation of English, a meta-hybridisation process. Four linguistic strategies represent it and are elucidated and exemplified in this study. The result is an idiosyncratic English that only exists on my page and bears my personal thumbprint.*

Keywords: *linguistic hybridity; de-indigenisation of English; meta-hybridisation; idiosyncratic English; personal thumbprint; distinctive identity*

INTRODUCTION

Why do you write in English? As an Algerian creative who writes in English, I have been asked this question many times by writers and non-writers. I understand the evident roots of this question. People who ask me this question would arguably find it irregular or odd that a North African writer crafts anglophone works rather than Arabic or French ones, which are—as known—the dominant literatures of the country. In Algeria, besides, the English language is still not widely spoken and read (Chemami 227). In lieu of an answer, I used to equivocate and offer vague and romanticised responses, such as I do it because I love the English language, or because I love telling stories in English, or simply say, because I can. The truth is, I had no well-defined answer for one simple reason—I did not think I needed one. I did not believe I needed to explain why I write in English. I still do not.

Why do I write in English? I find this question unnecessary and outdated, especially when asked in this day and age. It has become common knowledge that the English language is the lingua franca of the world. It has, in the well-known words of Salman Rushdie, “ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago” (63). It stands as a global language read and understood by millions of people who do not spring from the Anglosphere, or the post-colonial sphere where English is employed in speech and writing. Those two spheres do not and cannot “claim sole ownership” (Crystal 140) of the English language anymore. It has become a universal language. It has become owned by the world, and the world is simply owning it, using it as a tool of expression, however it wants.

The sphere in which the English language currently thrives is the global sphere, and employing it as the language of literary expression shows clear objectives. A book written in English enjoys the privilege of entering and inhabiting many cultural spaces and, thus, attracting many readers. It could attain global attention and readership. It facilitates access to the global market and its varied types of capital: economic, cultural, symbolic. It gives certain writers the opportunity to inform the world about their societies, as several African writers do, who write in English to “to inform the world about Africa” and dispel “the false myths and wrong impressions given to the outside world by early European scholars” (Bandia 14). If I deemed it necessary to answer the question of my language choice, I would say that I write in English for the same reasons. This global language offers visibility in the literary world. It is every writer’s dream to be read and appreciated globally. It could score me an international podium that could be harnessed to open cultural discussions, brew intriguing debates and even make social changes.

Thus, the case of a writer who does not come from the previously mentioned spheres and who writes in English is no longer considered an irregularity, or an oddity. It is becoming increasingly common and unsurprising. It should not raise eyebrows anymore. This case has been normalised by many writers springing from non-English-speaking spaces, from—to mention a few examples—South America, Asia, North Africa, and the Middle-East. Concerning the two latter spaces, I have discovered many creative writers from Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain and Lebanon, all of whom write in English. This situation, in other words, is not unique. Everybody is doing it, and we know their reasons. A unique case worthy of creative writing studies, however, concerns the many ways the English language is being hybridised and varnished with idiosyncrasy and coloured with personal touches. I specifically mean the Englishes that only exist on the writer’s page, and not the Englishes employed in speech and writing in a community or communities. So instead of asking *why do you write in English*, we should ask *how do you write in English*.

Yes, how do I write in English is the question. How do I hybridise my English to make it mine? Significantly, many Englishes are personal, idiosyncratic, only thriving in the world of the creative work. The previous questions should be directed towards this phenomenon, investigating its roots,

characteristics and—more importantly—the process of constructing it. What are the challenges encountered while crafting those Englishes? How do they appear on the writer’s page? How are those Englishes designed? Those are the questions that should be posed and addressed.

Those are the questions I posed while attempting to establish my own adaptation of linguistic hybridity in my creative work. What are the features of my own English? How do they appear successfully on my page? How do they represent my own creative thumbprint? How do I design it, this personal English? This is the answer—I decided to demonstrate that my English text can be hybridised without looking outside the English language, but rather by looking *within it*. I term this process “the de-indigenisation of English,” a meta-hybridisation process, which refers to hybridising the English language *with the English language*. Four linguistic strategies represent it and are elucidated and exemplified in this creative writing study—they are the employment of culture bound words, de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words, coinages, and finally the acculturation of popular English expressions.

Linguistic Hybridity

To begin with, one should ask: What is linguistic hybridity? It is “a common feature of texts that are translated across linguistic and cultural borders” (Klinger 01). As Amardeep Singh defines it in his online article, it can “refer to elements from foreign languages that enter into a given language, whether it’s the adoption of English words into Asian or African languages, or the advent of Asian or African words into English.” It signals an effect created collectively by a set of features in the worldview of the reader. It notifies the reader of a mutation in the familiar composition of the English language, including its lexicon, semantics, morphology, and phonology. It announces the presence of a different “tempo” and an “outlandish” rhythm in the English language. By “outlandish,” I mean foreign, unfamiliar. The reader senses and notes elements that usually do not belong in English, features that make the reader pause and wonder about their foreignness, their outlandishness. This creates a multivocal impression, and—to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin’s terms—“a special type of double-voiced discourse” that delivers “two voices, two meanings and two expressions” (224). Certain “out of place” characteristics inform the reader of a change and a creative innovation in the standard anatomy of the language.

The term linguistic hybridity appears persistently in postcolonial studies, transcultural studies, translation and creative writing studies. A great deal of research has been conducted on the concept by many researchers and scholars (Klinger, 2015, Young, 1994, Kachru, 1992, Bandia, 2014, Bhabha, 1994, Ch’ien, 2004, Zabus, 2007), all of whom have provided their own explanations and positions towards the term in various methods. For example, Paul Bandia contextualises the term into translation studies, with special focus on its appearances on the African writer’s postcolonial

page. Although Bandia writes convincingly about linguistic technique, I am particularly interested in how Chantal Zabus explains it. In *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (2007), Chantal Zabus coins many significant terms to elucidate how African writers attain the intelligibility of their translinguistic prose.

She coins several terms to classify the methods African writers use to achieve the comprehensibility of the non-English words present in their books. In fact, the majority of postcolonial and transcultural writers service the following concepts. Relexification, the first term, refers to “an imaginative, world-creating step at forging a new literary-aesthetic medium or ‘third code’ out of the alien, dominant (European) lexicon” (Zabus 350). Zabus also adds that it “is also an attempt at appropriating the Other’s language to make it one’s own and bend its otherness or fixity to artistic and ideological exigencies” (350). One aspect of relexification is the practice of including non-English words within the English sentence without changing its standard grammar. However, when African-language words cannot be relexified, Zabus proposes the methods of “cushioning” and “contextualisation” (176). The first means tagging “an explanatory word or phrase” onto the African-language words; the latter suggests providing “areas of mediate context” as a tool of elucidation. The three methods are collectively named “indigenization,” which is “the attempt at subverting the linguistic difference or otherness of the European language by indigenizing it” (Zabus 346).

Indeed, the aforementioned scholars brilliantly advocate their studies on linguistic hybridity. I, however, contend that they generally centralise their research on the cross-linguistic innovations the postcolonial/translingual writer utilises to create their hybridity. Their pieces of research underscore the African-language lexicon (words, phrases, expressions) and “out of place” features the writer borrows from their indigenous languages. They refer to how those writers combine their first languages with the English language, forming a new medium, indigenised and generally italicised. I aim, however, to demonstrate that my English text can be hybridised *without* looking outside the English language, but rather by looking within it. The English language, after all, is *already* a hybrid language. This operation, as I elaborate below, becomes a *meta-hybridisation* of the English language—hybridising the English language with the English language. There is no necessity to seek external elements of hybridity, but simply employ internal elements that are encoded within English.

For the purposes of this research, I target a certain reader. Initially, I entertained the possibility of writing for two readers: the Anglophone reader (the reader who comes from the Anglophone sphere) and the Arabophone (the reader who comes from the Arab World). Now, however, I only write for the Anglophone reader. The Arabophone who reads in English is already at an advantage, being already familiar with the Arabic features of the work, so no need for their inclusion here. I target solely the Anglophone reader, to whom the Arabic features of the English prose would seem

outlandish. To achieve this, my methods of linguistic hybridity stem from challenging the following statement by Chantal Zabus: “A potential result of eradicating footnotes, cushioning, contextualisation by reference is that the text becomes inaccessible to the non-African reader” (359). What if the accessibility to the text can be attained without using cushioning, footnotes, or a glossary? What if intelligibility can be guaranteed with fresh methods, without alienating the Anglophone reader? Without the necessity for googling the words?

The De-Indigenisation of the English Language

Chantal Zabus writes that “to indigenize a text is to make it a text of one’s own” (19). This is exactly what I aim to do—make my text mine, but not through using her methods. To challenge her statement, I do not indigenise my text, but *de-indigenise* it. Let me explain. First and foremost, my linguistic experimentations are translational in nature. They are “a literary act of mental translation” (wa Thiong’o 18). In this view, I rely on deliberate practices of foreignisation, which are, according to Laurence Venuti a “strategic cultural intervention” (19). My adaptation of linguistic hybridity is that—a *strategic cultural intervention*, expressed and designed carefully with acts of deliberate foreignisation. This method, in terms of language, is unequal. The English component is dominant, the Arabic supplementary. This means that I do not overstuff my prose with my methods of linguistic hybridity, but I colour it with them so that they work together to achieve my translanguistic objectives. In figurative terms, the body is English, the clothes Arabic. So how am I going to strategically and culturally intervene in the English language to other/hybridise my text without directly borrowing from Arabic? This is the answer—I aim to de-indigenise the English language.

David Crystal informs us that the English language has always been an “insatiable borrower” (136). It is always welcoming new words, new expressions, which would be twisted morphologically by the Anglophone tongue, Latinised (and thus indigenised) and then codified in an English dictionary. In *Weird English* (2004), Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ing writes that this process of hybridisation “has been an ongoing phenomenon throughout history’ and that English is already a ‘hybrid, and its original influences include Latin, French and German” (4). It has also—I must stress and add—taken many influences from the Arabic language. Perhaps two of the earliest books that record this are *A History of Foreign Words in English* by Mary S. Serjeantson (1935) and *Etymological List of Arabic Words in English* (1933) by Walt Taylor. In his elusive booklet, Taylor (mentioned in Darwish 2015) attests that “the English Language borrowed about a thousand words from Arabic and there are thousands of derivatives from these words” (105). Of course, since the 1930s, many other words—hundreds in fact—have been borrowed from Arabic and Latinised to suit the nature of the English language. Etymologically, thousands of Arabic words and Arabic cultural references populate the English language now, which—if unearthed and used creatively

and selectively within my text—should provide the necessary effects of linguistic hybridity. I refer to this process as the de-indigenisation of the English language—the othering of English with features that already exist within it.

Before all else, I should mention that I mainly service Latinised Arabic words and expressions rather than phrases or sentences. I should also remark that linguistic hybridity provides a double-voiced discourse. It announces the presence of a different “tempo” and an “outlandish” rhythm. So to endorse this linguistic endeavour, to engineer the hoped for comprehensibility, I propose four linguistic methods.

1. *Culture-Bound Words*

To begin with, I propose to foreignise my text with culture-bound words that suggest or directly refer to Arabic culture. Those words, I should assert, exist in major dictionaries of English (Oxford, Cambridge, Merriam Webster’s). They are well-documented, explained and exemplified. A basic search would find them, evidence their existence and even mention their Arabic counterparts. It is significant to remember that Arabic is the main or the only etymology for such English words. In other words, those words have been borrowed first-hand from Arabic. The phonological resemblance of those words, I should also add, is the same as that of the Arabic word. Consider, for example, the words *salaam*, *sultan*, and *henna*. Or think about the expressions *inshallah* and *bismillah*. They are similar to their original phonological pronunciations in Arabic. All of them are bound to Arabic culture and allude to it. In addition, the etymology of the word can be easily understood by the Anglophone reader. It is a word, although English, still sounds and seems foreign. It appears to be rather misplaced and outlandish. I understand that some of those words may seem “exotic,” “non-English,” but not explicitly “Arabic” to the reader. And this can simply be solved by referring to a dictionary. The reader, for example, may not know that the word *hummus* is an Arabic word, but the dictionary does.

The objective of this method is to create a culturally foreign discourse as I harness those words carefully and strategically within my prose and within my dialogue. The words can be cultural expressions in general, or religious expressions in particular, namely Islamic ones. Many of these words can be found in a dictionary of English words of Arabic etymology—*Paradise Dictionary: Dictionary of English Words of Arabic Etymology* (2012). It has taken Mohammed Al-Fallouji twenty years to compile, and it contains thousands of English words of Arabic etymology.

I have compiled here a list of examples: *salaam*, *khalifa*, *imam*, *sheikh*, *sultan*, *sultana*, *admiral*, *hashish*, *oud*, *couscous*, *mecca*, *mufti*, *emir*, *wazir*, *harem*, *minaret*, *zakat*, *mujahid*, *burnoose*, *muezzin*, *masjid*, *halal*, *haram*, *fatwa*, *fellah*, *hadj*, *djinn*, *inshallah*, *cipher*, *sheitan*, *souk*, *ghoul*, *dinar*, *madrassa*, *dirham*, *shisha*, *henna*. I do not attempt to highlight the words with italicisation, for they are already *culturally italicised* in the worldview of the reader. Usually, to highlight the

foreignness of the borrowed, non-English word, African writers italicise it. This habit notifies the reader that a word specific to the writer's culture is being used. As for my words, they do not need to be italicised; their etymology exposes their cultural foreignness. The reader at once realises that the word has probably been taken from another language, then Latinised. The words, in addition, will not be cushioned and followed by an elucidative word, phrase, or even a sentence. Those words do not require a footnote, a glossary, or an intext-translation, contrary to how African writers hybridise their pages. It should be known that this method only works for the languages from which English has borrowed (Imagine what a French writer who writes in English could do with the ten thousand French words that inhabit the English language).

To evidence a difference, let me juxtapose the regular methods of other African writers with mine. As a rule, African writers service and conform to the aforementioned terms of Chantal Zabus. The following sentences are from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007): "Yes! Yes! Okjukwu, *nye anyi egbe!* Give us guns! *Iwe di anyi n'obi!*" (171), meaning "there is an anger in our hearts." She also writes, "He called her *nkem*, my own" (24). Observe how she accompanies the italicised Igbo sentences with their counterparts in English, translating them. In other instances she contextualises the meaning of the word: "Anulika was measuring out cups of *ukwa* and the crusty aroma of roasted breadfruit seeds hung thick in the room" (119). In other parts of the book, she leaves the words untranslated. In this case, the reader either researches the words (it took me fifteen minutes to find an Igbo/English online dictionary), or keeps reading unconcerned with the meaning. Personally, I keep reading. Other readers may find it didactic and thought-provoking. Many other African writers include non-English words without a translation, without an explanatory method, as Nadifa Mohammed evidently does in *The Fortune Men* (2021).

Now here are examples of my first method. Observe the following fictitious passage:

Salim el-Khatib has just smoked an ounce of hashish. He's dizzy, his eyes a bit misty. Yet, as an emir, he traipses across the street, this mecca of Algerians, this haven of halal products. He spots the high minaret of a masjid in the distance, which was constructed by a sultan of *passé* times. It shines with age, with stories, with pigeons' feathers. A familiar face, the muezzin's, salaams him, then vanishes quickly like a djinn, like a ghoul. Salim keeps walking, in the mood for a dish of couscous, for this North African delicacy.

Now here is an example from one of my unpublished stories. In "Colonels Don't Confess," I write:

She could have paid attention to the lazy tram on its quaint track rallying (and always losing) with the cars opposite the highway, or to the masjids and their high-rise minarets in town as her taxi reared the hotel. But she didn't, not until she had overcome the jet-lag with six hours of

sleep. The azan of Isha prayer had aroused her from her untroubled sleep. This strange noise to her, the calling of a man uttering unintelligible words. Of the muezzin.

I could also apply this method within the dialogue. Consider the following exchange:

- Character A: “Salaam, Karim. Did you buy this burnoose from the souk near the masjid?”
- Character B: “Salaam. Yes, sheikh Omar, it cost me ninety Algerian dinars.”
- Character A: “That much? How did a faquir fellah like you afford that?”
- Character B: “I am a musician on the side. I play oud at weddings.”

Although written entirely in English, undisrupted with italicised/unitalicised Arabic words, the discourse of the provided examples displays a foreignness and a different rhythm to the language. We discern that the language is entirely English, but *not really English*. It is unsubverted with non-English words, yet we sense an outlandish effect within its layers, hiding among its sentences. We register this in our worldview. A particular culture clearly inhabits the work. It alters it with odd chimes. It coats it with a foreignness. The reader finds themselves immersed in a new cultural space, a hybrid one which services the English language to introduce the lingual qualities of a religion. Although the words are English, a foreign culture accents them.

2. De-Latinised-Italicised-Contextualised Words

Unlike the first method, the second one requires an italicisation of the words. Many Arabic words inhabit the English language secretly. They hide in the English language, their Arabic roots unacknowledged and unknown. These words were Latinised and normalised centuries ago. They have been used and believed to be English for centuries so their roots are unknown to the Anglophone reader. They do not explicitly and particularly refer to Arabic culture. They are not culture-bound. More significantly, those words do not seem foreign, exotic, different, or non-English. They are believed to be English. Here is a list of surprising, eye-opening examples: sugar, cotton, coffee, alcohol, mummy, muslin, sofa, lemon, safari, saffron, mirror, mattress, zero, algebra, assassin, camphor, crimson, elixir, fennec, ghazel, giraffe, jar, jasmine, kohl, nadir, zenith, spinach, talisman and many others. The Anglophone reader is unaware of their cultural roots. So how am I going to solve this? How am I going to indicate their Arabic roots?

I use a method of threes—de-Latinisation, italicisation and contextualisation. I de-Latinise the word, italicise it, then contextualise it. This method divulges the word and its roots. It exposes its Arabic nature. It unearths it. However, it must be noted that I do not intend to uncover all the words that have been borrowed from the Arabic. The structures of certain Arabic words have been corrupted and defaced by Latinisation, both phonetically and syntactically. I should call attention to the

fact that the borrowing of those words may not have occurred first-hand, not directly loaned from Arabic. In *Paradise Dictionary: Dictionary of English Words of Arabic Etymology*, Mohammed Al-Fallouji writes that English has borrowed “few Arab words ‘from the source’” (05). He also states that “its main borrowing, however, was secondhand, via French or Latin, meaning that by the time they had been passed into English, they have been phonetically (and sometimes syntactically) assimilated not once but twice” (05). For instance, the Arabic word *toll* (a noun, meaning height) has been syntactically Latinised into an adjective *tall*. Further, the phonology of certain Arabic words has been so entirely corrupted that there is no resemblance between the English one and the Arabic one. Would you discern that the word *hoopoe* comes from the Arabic *hoodhod*? Or that the word *paradise* is derived from the Arabic *firdous*? Or that the word *admiral* comes from the Arabic *amir-el-bihar* (the prince of seas)?

Thus, the words I harness must conform to four criteria. The two words (Arabic and English) should enjoy four resemblances—phonetic (the sound of the pronunciation), semantical (the meaning of the word), morphological (the structure of the word) and syntactical (the proper use of the word in a sentence). Examples include: *suffah* (sofa), *sukkar* (sugar), *yasmeen* (jasmine), *cottun* (cotton), *mumya* (mummy), *mira’ah* (mirror) and so forth. The word, as I mention above, should be de-Latinised, italicised and contextualised.

How do I de-Latinise an English word of Arabic etymology? Italicising a word is easy. So is contextualising it. But how do I tamper with the word without distorting its morphology? Surely I was not going to revert it to its original letters and write it in Arabic. By de-italicisation, I refer to two steps. I, first, keep the word written in Roman letters. Then I slightly change its morphology to coincide with the pronunciation of its Arabic counterpart. This is done either by omission or addition. I may change a letter, perhaps two, but no radical alterations to the morphology of the word should occur. To illustrate, consider the word “alcohol.” I could write it this way: “The *el-cohol*, cold, soaked all my face.” I simply change a letter and add a hyphen to de-Latinise its pronunciation.

I present here other examples of other words: “It was silly of him assuming someone could be hiding inside a piece of furniture, crushed under his *matrah*, or curled in the closet. The *suffa*’s cushions wouldn’t fit a baby.” “It relaxed him. Laila’s perfume, too—a mixture of cherry and *yasmeen*.” “His hair, once dark as Pegasus, is now *cottun*-white, smoothed backwards simply with his hands.” Discern how the words cotton, jasmine, sofa and mattress become *cottun*, *yasmeen*, *suffa*, *matrah*. The roots of the words are not ruined beyond recognition. No, they remain recognisable, their semantics discernible. Only a few letters are altered to correspond with the Arabic pronunciation.

In some instances, the morphology of the word remains the same. The pronunciation of the English word already matches that of the Arabic one, so I do not de-Latinise the word. I just italicise it to accent its Arabic etymology. Did you know that the word “astrolabe” is an Arabic

word? I could deploy it in my prose without a de-Latinisation, writing: “The street takes the shape of an *astrolabe*.” And did you know that the word “farina” is an Arabic word? I could write it as so: “He wanted to buy five loaves of corn bread, three bags of *farina*, a string of rope and some dried, halal meat.”

3. *Coinages*

The two previous methods can be manipulated to create a third, which is the fashioning of coinages. I have two types of words now: culture-bound words and de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words. Those words, all understood by the reader, can be serviced to construct and invent other comprehensible words, relying on certain techniques. There are many possibilities here to coin new, intelligible words, which I hyphenate to avoid any confusion or misreading.

I could, initially, blend the words with English ones and fabricate hyphenated compound words, such as the following: hashish-hopper, *sukkar*-honeyed, high-madrassa, hashish-smoking addict, hummus-loving chef, *leimoon*-coloured, masjid-sized, *mumya*-looking, halal-burger, *yasmeen*-smelling, sultan-sized bed and *cottun*-white hair. The next technique incorporates the words with prefixes and suffixes. I blend them. I hybridise them. Discover these examples of prefix-blending: super-souk, non-*el-cohol*, on-masjid prayers, masjid-goer, post-fatwa, masjid-yard, Allah-sent, pre-fatwa, mega-mufti, anti-*sukkar* diet, ex-wazir, ex-muezzin. Notice these examples of suffix re-employment: sheikh-hood, imam-hood, sultan-hood, emir-hood, *ghazāl*-like animal, fellah-able land, *fenek*-like fur, Muslim-like courtesy, burnoose-like clothing, dinar-less, dirham-less, *sukkar*-less coffee, couscous-ria, *suffa*-like seat, chakchouka-ria, kohl-less eyes, *zarāfa*-like neck, henna-able palms, ghoulish-phobia, jinn-phobia.

This is how they could appear on my page: “The first establishment of the street has a name—Milevum’s Resto, masjid-sized...he flogged his sultan-sized bed, inspected the backs of doors.” The words do not require an italicisation. They are perfectly understandable. Other combinations have generated intriguing words, such as super-souk, beghrir-like. I could describe a place as “Allah-forsaken” instead of “God-forsaken.” And many other examples can be generated.

Manipulating the morphology of the words with prefixes and suffixes has also created intriguing words. This technique is perhaps less challenging. Prefixes and suffixes are like generic plastic bricks; they can be united with many words. And I have to design significant words, which would foreignise the prose distinctly and culturally. Have you ever been, for example, to a couscous-ria? Certainly you have been to a pizzeria, a pizza restaurant, but perhaps not to a couscous-ria, a couscous restaurant. How about a chakchouka-ria? Or a tajine-ria? I could employ the words as so: “He is nearing the street, a mecca of Arabian food. It’s populated with Middle-Eastern and North African restaurants—couscous-rias, chakchouka-rias, tajine-rias...” In the world of my prose, my

characters do not pay with dollars, pounds, euros, or pennies. They pay with dinars and dirhams, two currencies adopted in North Africa and the Middle-East. Thus, when the characters have no money, they are not penniless, but dirham-less and dinar-less.

4. *The Acculturation of Popular English Expressions*

Now let's finish this section with the fourth and final method. It introduces the acculturation of common Anglophone expressions and popular culture references. By this I refer to the deliberate tampering with common expressions in the English language using the above-mentioned methods. I aim to varnish certain Anglophone idioms with my culture, with my words, with my methods. This method is perhaps the most apparent cultural intervention, for it, in a sense, becomes a cultural colonisation of the English language.

Popular culture references—from films, music, books, songs—populate the English language. So do idioms and cultural expressions, which, if used strategically and electively, can foster my adaptation of linguistic hybridity. This method is a cultural manipulation, a linguistic subversion. How am I going to do it? I illustrate with a few examples. Pay attention to the following common expressions: Speak of the devil/Play the devil's advocate/The devil is in the details. Now observe how I subvert them with my fourth method: Speak of the sheitan/ Play the sheitan's game/The sheitan is in the details. To illustrate further, here are other instances from pop culture:

- Original: You had me at hello (Jerry Maguire).
- Acculturated: You had me at salaam.
- Original: Say hello to my little friend (Scarface).
- Acculturated: Say salaam to my little friend.
- Original: I am king of the world (Titanic)!
- Acculturated: I am the khalifa of the world!

This method also includes the variation of idioms. I supply here a few samples: An apple a day keeps the doctor away/An apple a day keeps the hakim away. Fit as a fiddle/Fit as an oud. He wears many hats/He wears many turbans. Boy, you got the devil in you; you need Jesus, our Lord and Saviour/ Boy, you got the sheitan in you; you need Allah, our Lord and Saviour. Face the music/Face the *musiq*a. As genuine as a three-dollar bill/As genuine as a three-dinar bill.

As another cultural intervention, I turn Biblical expressions into Koranic ones. I am a Muslim writer who writes Muslim characters. I could colour my dialogue with a Muslim language, which further foreignises and hybridises the prose. Observe how I acculturate the following Biblical

expression. The expression—also mentioned above—“you need Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour” certainly refers to the Christian faith. I could turn it into the following: “Son, you’ve got the shaitan in you...you need Allah, our Lord and Saviour.” The term the “Good Book” refers to the Bible. I manipulate the word to allude to the Holy Quran instead. I write: “Only an imam, masked and turbaned, carried on the ceremony on his own, softly reading verses from The Good Book.” As known, Muslims use the word “Allah” instead of “God.” So the question “what in God’s name are you talking about?” is influenced to become “what in Allah’s name are you talking about?”

These four methods represent my own idiosyncratic adaption of linguistic hybridity. Collectively, they refer to the de-indigenisation of English. Their features are explained, exemplified, and can be implemented in prose. The question is: would they be implemented easily? No, the concept has limitations and implications.

Limitations of the De-Indigenisation of English

I must reiterate here that the hybrid component of a literary work has always been subsidiary. It supplements the dominant English part. The hybrid disruption appears sporadically and irregularly. It just needs to inform of a different tempo in the worldview of the reader. It also needs to provide a foreign, unfamiliar rhythm in the English text. The hybrid features, remember, cannot be expected to manifest in every sentence and in every paragraph. For this reason, the insertion of the four linguistic methods was guided by three major factors—textual, contextual and authorial. The positioning of a particular word depends on its convenient existence in the context and its logical presence in the text. The features of the methods must appear in the text rightly and appropriately. They must also serve the context. As for the authorial factor, I, the author, decide where and when to intervene and when and where to abstain. I authorise the interference depending on my personal relationship with language, my style of writing, and depending on the objectives of the creative work.

These factors, I have discovered, not only guide the application of the four methods, but also limit them. In theory, my term of de-indigenisation reveals a long list of words that are either distinctly or secretly Arabic. The theory promises an abundance of them, hundreds of them, but the application not so many. Only a limited number of words can be unearthed from English, and only a limited number can be involved in my prose. The presence of the words in a particular story requires logical reasons to vouch for their inclusion. To collect the culture-bound words that specifically refer to Arabic culture, I relied in part on Al-Fallouji’s *Paradise Dictionary* (2012). Although it contains thousands of English words of Arabic etymology, I cannot borrow all of them; they may not suit the context of the creative work. So their number may decrease dramatically. Similarly, the secret Arabic words that inhabit the English language are limited in number.

Not all of them conform to the criteria of selection, mentioned above. I cannot, in other words, de-Latinise, italicise and contextualise all of them. The Arabic roots and meanings of many Arabic words have been distorted beyond recognition.

In addition, the de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words must also have a reason to be in the prose, which requires a process of selection. I can only unearth and collect the words that may serve the creative work. I must confess that the result could be dispiriting. The list may not comprise a great number of words, because of the four criteria I mentioned previously. Only a limited number of words conform to the four resemblances that identify this method. Now here is the question: Why must the words abide by the four resemblances? The answer points to the reader. My methods, remember, promise facile intelligibility. I aim to achieve it without alienating the reader, without disengaging them from the page and without googling the word. Would the reader, for example, guess that the word “earth” comes from the Arabic *ard*? Certainly not, they would have to google the word.

Fashioning coinages, however, is enjoyable and easy. Many words can be created. I highly relish blending the culture-bound words and the de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised ones with others to generate the third method. I hyphenate the words to avoid any confusion or misreading. Those words, all understood by the reader, can be serviced to fashion and invent other comprehensible words, relying on two essential techniques. Firstly, I fabricate compound words by joining the culture-bound words and the de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words with regular English words. This operation is very much similar to interlocking plastic bricks, or Legos, to design certain constructions. The result is a long and diverse list of the culture-bound and de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words. It contains around a hundred words. Similar to playing Legos, some words do not match and refuse to connect. They simply cannot harmonise. Other words do match, but may not suit the context. This, again, could limit my options.

These methods have produced exciting words such as “sultan-sized” and “masjid-sized.” The words, notice, imply religious meanings, which is admittedly a concern, even a limitation. The four linguistic methods possess an unequivocal Islamic identity. It is ubiquitous on my pages. It is apparent. This could be misconstrued by the Anglophone reader, who may confuse hybridisation for islamisation and who may think that I am “converting the English language into Islam.” Although I enjoy the sound of that phrase, this is not the case. Arabic possesses an Islamic identity because it is the language of Islam and the Holy Quran and both are inseparable. In the Arab world, daily conversations are replete with Islamic words and expressions. They are embedded in our language. In addition, the sayings of Prophet Mohammed teach Muslims to speak in a certain way, which is no doubt religious. One cannot, for example, say *I’ll see you tomorrow* without adding *inshallah*. To show appreciation, a Muslim may not usually say *thank you*, but *may Allah bless you*.

Implications of the De-Indigenisation of English

To de-indigenise a language is to undress it. The concept of de-indigenisation implies rummaging through a particular language to learn about the foreign components that hide among its layers. It entails finding the alien words that have been incorporated into its system and uncover them, disclosing their foreignness, either overt or covert. This is an internal operation that strictly happens within the English language. There is no need to import words from another language to achieve hybridity. To de-indigenise a language is also to reveal its already hybrid nature. The English language has borrowed thousands of words from other languages rapaciously. Those words have either been taken first-hand from the source or second-hand from other languages. Notably, this information should easily disprove the argument of those who seek to keep the English language “pure” and “unpolluted” with foreign words. The English language is already “polluted” with non-English words. It has been for centuries.

Further, to de-indigenise a language is to expose its various appropriations and misappropriations. De-indigenising a language requires a meticulous investigation from the writer interested in this concept, especially when peering for the Arabic words that inhabit English secretly. I had been using some of those words for years, without realising they were of Arabic origins. A simple example is the word “sugar.” This word did not sound or seem Arabic to me, let alone to the Anglophone speaker. Additionally, I have learned that the morphology of many Arabic words has been defaced beyond identification, often deliberately. Yes, they have been disfigured on purpose for several reasons, such as the inability of the Anglophone speaker to pronounce the word in Arabic. Thus, the words have been twisted and corrupted to ensure facile pronunciation. This process, in many cases, has negative connotations and results. So much is lost in Latinisation. So much is misunderstood in Latinisation.

When the word is corrupted, it loses its cultural properties. It loses its identity. When the word is Latinised, it is appropriated and coated with another culture. Consider the Arabic names of poets and scholars that have been Latinised. This, to me, represents a cultural loss. The cultural origins of those figures have been distorted and obscured after Latinising their names. Some are even attributed to Anglo culture and believed to be English or Greek. For example, Rumi is one of the most famous poets in the world. According to an article published by the BBC, he is “the best-selling poet in the US” (Ciabattari). He is read and loved by millions, including celebrities. His verses are even tattooed on their bodies (Brad Pitt has tattooed one of Rumi’s poems on his arm). But, I wonder, how many of them know that he was a scholar of the Holy Quran? How many of them know that his real name is Jalal al-Din Muhammed Rumi? How many of them know that he was a Muslim? I offer another example. Who is Averroes? The reader of this word would likely think that Averroes was

a Greek philosopher, or a European Scholar. He was not. The word is a Latinisation of this name: Abu el-Walid Muhammed Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd. He was a Muslim scholar, active and popular in Islamic Spain. Latinising his name has erased his identity entirely.

True, so much is lost in Latinisation, but still so much is gained in de-indigenisation. So much is discovered and re-discovered in de-indigenisation. De-indigenisation represents a return to the origins of a word. It communicates much information about its history, the culture attached to it and even the story of its insertion into the English language. For instance, researching the roots of the words “moccasin” and “skunk” can take the researcher to the New World, when the European settlers started making contact with the Native Americans, taking their words and subsequently writing them “in their letters” (Crystal 2013). De-indigenisation, in a sense, exposes the English language by revealing that some of its features are not really its property, but merely classified, unacknowledged borrowings, taken from various sources. While unearthing the English language for Arabic words, I have discovered unbelievable words. I provide here three interesting examples. According to Al-Fallouji’s dictionary, the words “Hawaii” and “Honolulu” come from the Arabic language. The first one comes from the Arabic “*Hawa’ee*.” It means “land with clear air” (316). Honolulu apparently means “here are pearls” (323). It comes from the Arabic “*Huna lo’ lo’*.” Apparently even the religious expression “halleluiah” comes from the Arabic “*اليلهت ل ل ل لله*,” meaning “there is no God but Allah” (309).

In conclusion, to de-indigenise English is to make it idiosyncratic. It becomes the writer’s personal feature of identification. Applying the concept distinguishes the prose and renders it different, informing of a unique process. The result is an idiosyncratic English that only exists on the writer’s page as it does on mine. And it can exist on other writers’ pages. This concept is not particular to Arabic. It is important to stress that my term “de-indigenisation” can be applied to other contexts, languages and literary landscapes. The English language, as known now, has borrowed from several European languages. French and German writers of English expression can exercise the term in their English texts, should they be interested in linguistic hybridity. A French writer can easily hybridise their texts by de-indigenising the thousands of French words that inhabit the English language. To achieve the same hybrid effect, a German writer of English expression can easily employ the five hundred thousand German words that dwell in the English language. There would be no need to seek external methods of hybridity.

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