

Hilary Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazzab Street*: The Displacement of British Expatriates in Saudi Arabia

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This article explores how Hilary Mantel portrays the lives of a British expatriate couple, the Shores, who are seen as “others” when they move to a different country, Saudi Arabia, where the socio-political scheme is totally different from those they have previously known. The protagonists’ experience in Saudi Arabia will result in feelings of displacement and marginalisation, and the conditions under which they live make them lose their own identities, to the point of not knowing who they really are. The situation is compounded for the woman protagonist, who also suffers from the consequences of racism and Islamic fundamentalism. Furthermore, the novel also depicts how the Shores are doubly displaced, these feelings also appearing when they are with other British expatriates in Saudi Arabia as well as when they go back to their homeland, England, since they are not considered to belong there anymore.

Keywords: displacement; expatriates; belonging; Islamic religion; Saudi Arabia; Hilary Mantel

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Eight Months on Ghazzab Street, de Hilary Mantel: el desplazamiento de los expatriados británicos en Arabia Saudí

Este artículo muestra cómo Hilary Mantel describe la vida de una pareja de expatriados británicos, los Shore, que se convierten en los “otros” al mudarse a Arabia Saudí, un país cuyo esquema sociopolítico es diametralmente opuesto a los que habían conocido. La experiencia de los protagonistas en Arabia Saudí hace que se sientan desplazados y marginados, y las condiciones bajo las que viven hacen que pierdan su identidad hasta el punto de no saber quiénes son en realidad. Esta situación es aún peor en el caso de la mujer protagonista, ya que también sufre las consecuencias del racismo y del fundamentalismo islámico. La novela

describe también cómo los Shore sufren un doble desplazamiento, por un lado porque estos sentimientos aparecen de nuevo cuando la pareja está en compañía de otros expatriados británicos en Arabia Saudí, y por otro cuando vuelven a su lugar de procedencia, Inglaterra, ya que allí tampoco se les considera ya parte de la comunidad.

Palabras clave: desplazamiento; expatriados; pertenencia; religión islámica; Arabia Saudí; Hilary Mantel

I. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of her career, many critics and researchers have included Hilary Mantel among the most prominent writers of the time. *Every Day is Mother's Day*, her first published novel, appeared in 1985; she has subsequently published ten more novels which deal with a great variety of topics, a considerable amount of short stories, a memoir and innumerable reviews and articles. Her works have been awarded a number of prizes and recognitions, and she is the first woman to receive the Booker Prize for Fiction twice, in 2009 for *Wolf Hall* and in 2012 for its sequel *Bring Up the Bodies*.

Even though Mantel is considered a mainstream writer, she has also explored topics such as displacement, identity and otherness, usually associated with postcolonial literature. She was in fact born in England but her grandparents came from Ireland and she has been defined as having “always existed on the margins. Of her family, of her university group, of the expatriate communities in the Middle East and Africa, of literary London”; and therefore “the experience of being not quite at home, even when at home, has contributed to her life not only as a writer but as a reader” (Campbell, 2015). Hence, out of her own feelings of non-belonging, Mantel could also be said to have contributed, in her own way, to postcolonial fiction, since some of her novels deal with postcolonial concerns and are developed in postcolonial settings. For instance, in *A Change of Climate* (1994), the action takes place in Botswana and South Africa at the time of apartheid, and in *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), the protagonists move to Saudi Arabia, which was not exactly a postcolonial country, but was, especially during the first three decades of the twentieth century, under the sphere of influence of the British Empire, as were other countries in the region.

According to Mullaney, postcolonial literature covers “that complex and various body of writing produced by individuals, communities and nations with distinct histories of colonialism and which diversely treats its origins, impacts and effects in the past and the present” (2010, 3). The main intention of postcolonial writers is, in the words of Elleke Boehmer, to “resist colonialist perspectives,” such writing being “deeply marked by experiences of cultural exclusion and division under empire” (2005, 3).

Interestingly enough, although it is usually first-generation writers, labelled as “postcolonial writers,” who have dealt with postcolonial issues, it is worth pointing out that other authors—second-generation or even writers of British descent with minor direct connection with the former colonies—also concern themselves with postcolonial matters in their writings, and some of their works could therefore be included under the postcolonial umbrella. As early as the 1960s, writers like Colin McInnes were tackling such issues in Britain (see several of his novels in the period and his collection of essays *England, Half English* (1961), which depicts the problems of marginalisation and exclusion of young black immigrants and their culture in London in the 1950s). Since then, other British writers have made rewritings of colonial classics, such as

Marina Warner's *Indigo* (1992), a rewriting of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Together with Warner's novel, Mark Stein also wonders if some of Maggie Gee and Barry Unsworth's writing might not also be termed postcolonial and be "profitably read alongside that of Caryl Phillips, for example" (2004, 174). Certainly, Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger* (1992) and Gee's *The White Family* (2002) deal with the postcolonial world.

In the same way, other writers who have no true postcolonial experience, but who have lived in former colonies, have also provided accounts of what happened when roles in the colonies reversed; that is, they have depicted life in former British colonies from the point of view of British citizens who went there after the countries gained their independence. It is within this group of writers who are continuing to expand the postcolonial canon that Hilary Mantel belongs since, drawing on her own experiences in South Africa, Botswana and Saudi Arabia, she has written about the lives of British citizens there. The aim of this essay is, then, to explore how Mantel, apart from reversing the postcolonial experience, also describes the way feelings of double displacement, marginalisation and the search for identity—recurrent topics in most postcolonial writings—are present both at home and abroad in the case of the Shores, a British couple who move to Saudi Arabia in her novel *Eight Months on Ghazzab Street*.

2. LIFE AS AN EXPATRIATE IN SAUDI ARABIA

Published in 1988 as her third novel, *Eight Months on Ghazzab Street* was written out of Mantel's own experience in Saudi Arabia, where her husband's job took them for four years. In this book, Mantel includes a number of autobiographical details of her time there, which she has described as the worst experience of her life. The novel tells the story of Andrew and Frances Shore when they are spending time in Jeddah because of Andrew's job as a civil engineer. Even though the Shores had previously lived in other parts of the world, it is their experience in Saudi Arabia that will completely change their lives.

Eight Months on Ghazzab Street has been described as Mantel's "most overtly political novel, filled with a sense of outrage at the Saudi social system and Western willingness, for financial reasons, to turn a blind eye to its human rights abuses" (Rennison 2005, 98). In his review of Mantel's novel Abbas Milani points out that "apartheid is not dead: It lives on in Saudi Arabia, based not on race, but gender" (1997). Indeed, Frances Shore will suffer from this 'apartheid' based on gender because of the socio-political structure of this Islamic country. Hence, religion is presented as playing a very important role in the story, to such an extent that most of the problems of displacement, otherness and marginalisation arise because of religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia, where laws and social conventions are based on the Holy Koran, and where, therefore, there is no difference between sins and crimes. These feelings of displacement and marginalisation are more clearly seen through Frances,

who can be said to be doubly displaced, both for being a foreigner and for being female, since the conditions under which women in Saudi Arabia live are completely different from those she had been used to.¹

When the Shores decide to go to Saudi Arabia, it is Andrew who goes first in order to arrange Frances's visa and arrival. Frances "was not entirely sure" that she wanted to live in Jeddah (Mantel [1988] 1989, 144), and even though she thought she would be able to manage, as she had previously done in Africa, and despite the fact that she knew about some of the restrictions, she was not able to even imagine how hard her life would be in Saudi Arabia. Andrew does not tell her much about the country while she is waiting for her visa in London, but when she arrives in Jeddah she learns quickly that, as expatriates, as a friend of Andrew's explains, "there are different rules for us ... Never forget that as individuals we are very unimportant in the Saudi scheme of things. We are only here on sufferance ... As individuals we are not expected to make our mark. The best we can do, as individuals, is to keep out of trouble ... Keep your head down you'll be all right" (41-42).

In Saudi Arabia, they are the "other," the outsiders, and that is how people of Jeddah make them feel. As White puts it, "migrants may find themselves in situations where they are confronted by an alternative ethnic awareness that labels them and confines them to a stereotyped 'otherness' from which there appears little chance to escape" (1995, 3); precisely the Shores' experience in Jeddah. The Saudis do not mix with the expatriates; they do not like foreigners in general, for they think that they will contaminate their world. They do not even let news from another country appear in their newspapers, nor news from their own country told in foreign newspapers. An example of this is the scene where the Shores are visited by another expatriate who tells them that the Saudis are "trying to keep out news from abroad. I bought a copy of *The Times* this morning, and when I held it up it had holes in it" (Mantel [1988] 1989, 256). In fact, the official Saudi Press is manipulating the news to make the "decadent and immoral" West seem the cause of all evil, blaming the Western media for showing Saudis as "thieving and ignorant and suffering from diseases" (126). At the same time, the press also criticise the fact that foreign expatriates "were coming into the Kingdom saying there was more to life than this" and also expounded ideas against the role of a woman, which according to the official press was "to look after her husband and children, prepare food and manage the housework" (73).

The only thing that Andrew had told Frances before she arrived was that it would be very difficult for her to have a job. When they had lived in Africa, she had been able to work, so on learning that she would have to stay at home "another pang stabbed her . . . she imagined herself already in Saudi, a discreet teetotal housewife, homesick for this

¹ Some postcolonial critics and theorists have discussed the concept of "double displacement" of women. For instance, Spivak argues that "such double displacement is more specifically the condition of woman, who experiences an originary displacement since she is already a 'dissimulator' in a cultural discourse deemed 'phallogocentric'" (1983, 185).

place [London] that was not home in another place that was not home” (24). Actually, given their travelling for Andrew’s job, the Shores did not feel England was their home anymore; as a matter of fact, they felt they did not have anywhere they could call home. This sense of displacement and non-belonging is presented in a passage of the novel when their lives in Jeddah have already become a nightmare, and Andrew asks Frances if she wants to leave Saudi Arabia. Frances asks herself: “if we did leave here, where would we go? We don’t belong anywhere, physically. If we didn’t have each other we wouldn’t belong anywhere emotionally” (197).

When they spend some time in England between one job and another, they still feel displaced, since, as Frances comments, “once you spend some time out of your country, people stop caring about you, they do not consider you as a neighbour anymore,” and she tells an anecdote to exemplify this: when she came back from Africa she went to visit one of her cousins (45-46), taking with her some photographs of her house in Botswana, but her cousin did not seem to have any interest in them. In Frances’s words, taking the pictures was “probably a mistake and a boring thing to do, but it wasn’t a bad enough thing to account for those whiffs of hostility I kept getting from Clare” (45-46).²

This feeling of hostility and disregard towards their lives happens again when they arrive in Jeddah. As Frances knows there are not many things to do in the city, she decides to write a diary, both to keep her busy and in order to remember all the exciting things that may happen to her, and so send some letters home. However, in a way, she knows that there will not be many things that she can tell because nothing interesting could happen to someone who is at home all day. Moreover, as Frances knows from previous experience, “once you have been in a place for a few weeks it is not exciting, or if it is, then it is not exciting in a way that people at home understand or care for” (45).

Although they do not feel comfortable in Jeddah, they try to create a home out of the house they are given. When exploring the concept of “home” as opposed to “abroad,” Madan Sarup says that when she thinks of home she does not think of “the expensive commodities I have bought but of the objects which I associate with my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, valued experiences and activities ... particular objects and events become the focus of a contemplative memory ... Many homes become private museums as if to guard against the rapid changes that one cannot control” (1996, 2).

² This feeling of double displacement, both in the host and in the home country when going back, is also present in Mantel’s novel *A Change of Climate* (1994), and in both novels this situation coincides with the description Christine St. Peter offers about Ireland in this respect. To her, “if leaving, or worse, having to leave, can be infinitely painful, the experience of returning may be no less problematic. Once gone, forever changed, and even a returned emigrant would be an insider/outsider perched uneasily in the place called home” (St. Peter 2000, 43).

And this is precisely what the Shores try to do. When they are still in London, they pack some things to send them to Jeddah. As they have travelled so much, there is little to pack, but they put in the boxes some objects and pictures that remind them of their good times in Africa. Like Sarup, Frances thinks that having these things with them will help them feel more comfortable and at home, but when some weeks after Frances's arrival she receives the boxes, she realises that their private objects are not enough to make them feel better: "unpacking my stuff gave me a funny feeling. I was imagining myself when I packed the crates, thinking about the exciting future, which is now the dull present. I found places for the things around the flat. I imagined they'd make it seem more like home. But they didn't look right. They seemed to come from another life" (Mantel [1988] 1989, 102). Thus, their feeling of displacement and the hostilities they face every time they go out, particularly Frances, cannot be overcome, not even with the familiar objects that should remind them of better times.

The changes in their way of life as a consequence of the change of country are perceived from the very beginning. For instance, Andrew has already changed, or has been changed by Saudi Arabia, even before Frances arrives. From her very first day in Jeddah, she feels he is always angry and upset as he gradually discovers how things function there, especially at work. The few times they talk about it, he describes the reasons for his irritating mood like this: "once a day I realize what's happening in some particular situation, and I realize what I've let myself in for..." He put a hand to his ribs. 'It's like being kicked'" (2). But if he feels enraged and frustrated it is mainly because he does not feel appreciated in his job: he feels he is left out of every conversation and his ideas not taken on board in the company, when he had always been a well-valued member of the team when he worked in Africa.³

At one time Andrew explains to Frances how the first British workers for the company in Jeddah felt. For them, "the physical stress was crushing, their hours were ruinous, their pay pockets enormous. Off-duty hours they spent lying on their beds ... they became like long-term prisoners, subject to paranoia; to fears that were sometimes not paranoid. Some of them were even deported for bad behaviour, above all with problems and offences against the religious laws" (53).

But things had changed since then: at the beginning, expatriates lived outside the city in special blocks built for them, but, in order to avoid the problems they experienced, they now lived inside the city, although their salaries were not as high as they used to be. Actually, at a certain point in the novel, Andrew is depressed because

³ Actually, comparisons between their lives in Africa and in Saudi Arabia are present many times throughout the novel, especially in order to contrast how different and easier their lives in Africa were, with regards freedom. As they explain, while "in Africa nobody cared whether you came or went" (Mantel [1988] 1989, 36), in Jeddah they feel observed and controlled: they cannot leave the country without official permission, or "just move around as you like" (50). Contrary to Africa, "the trouble with this place" was, for them, that "even if you aren't doing anything wrong, you always feel as if you are" (50). They feel trapped and kept under control and living in Jeddah makes them feel, in Andrew's words, as if he were living "inside a glass cage" or "being convicted of something" (249).

he feels that things cannot get worse: the company is running out of cash, he feels cheated by his bosses, and feels the promises made to him were false. Plus, he leads an empty life and he sees Frances suffering from the strict religious laws which do not let her lead her own life.

Despite this, there are some things that have not changed in the expatriates' lives: the feeling of displacement and distress and of being trapped by the laws of the country was still the same and in this Frances and Andrew are not alone. There is a whole community of British expatriates, especially those who work with Andrew, who they can count on and socialise with. However, their relationship with them is somehow complicated. At parties Frances always feels out of place, even though she is among her compatriots, as she is very different from them. To her, "expatriates do have this habit of laughing at everything. I suppose it is the safest way of expressing dissent" (62). In fact she prefers to visit her Saudi women neighbours and learn more about their culture since, in her early days in Jeddah, she thinks that, instead of laughing, expatriates "should be more open minded, and not think that we are the ones who are right, and that we should contrive to be more pious about other people's cultures" (62).

In the same way, the other English expatriates do not like Frances either. They criticise her for her behaviour and believe that "Frances is such a misery ... She's not a bit broadminded. She bothers with those Saudi women in her flats" (189). Moreover, they marginalise her in their meetings: "Frances hung about on the fringe of the group; turned shoulders seemed to exclude her ... Always she tried to make polite conversation, to take an interest; but they seemed to know that her mind was elsewhere" (188).

The reason for this lack of understanding between the Shores and the other expatriates might be the different ways in which they regard their futures. Andrew and Frances are not able to get used to their lives in Saudi Arabia, they feel oppressed, displaced. The conditions in which they live are stressful, and although they have lived in different countries, it is after their experience in Jeddah that, for the first time, Andrew proposes going back and settling in England once his contract is over, even though they do not now really consider England their home. Their stay in Saudi Arabia has changed them so much that they have lost their identities; they do not know who they are or where their place in the world is. That could be why Andrew is thinking of going back to England, maybe searching for the roots they seem not to have: "They should buy a flat, he said, something to give them a base ... 'We ought to have somewhere ... We can't keep drifting, can we, just crating things up and sending them from one country to the next, everything serviceable and disposable, no books, nothing of our own'" (206). The link between home place and identity has been established before. For instance, according to Sarup, "the concept of home seems to be tied in some way to the notion of identity" (1996, 3). Similarly, Glenn, Floriani and Bouvet point out that feelings of loss and the reconstruction of identity are interrelated with the migrant's sense of

home and their perception of homelessness. For them, “the way migrants try to face and overcome their condition of being homeless is inevitably correlated to the ways that they try to reshape identity, recompose biographical disruptions and redefine their sense of belonging” (2011, 2).

However, the attitude of Andrew’s expatriate colleagues is the opposite, perhaps more in line with Pauline Leonard, whose analysis of expatriates in postcolonial countries argues:

The transience of expatriate life means that as migrants come towards the end of a posting or contract, decisions will need to be made as to *what next?* Whilst the talk and activities of many expatriates reveal deep and strong connections to the places of home, at the same time these links are also often constructed with some ambivalence. Some dread the thought of actually returning home, and would rather try and seek another job elsewhere. A few hope *never* to return: desiring to retire and live out their final days in a place where the expatriate lifestyle, and perhaps the privileges of whiteness, might in some way be maintained. (2010, 129)

This is what perhaps had happened to Andrew and Frances in their earlier life, where they went from one place to another, first Zambia, then Botswana and now Saudi Arabia. However, now their dread of returning home is weaker than their dread of staying, setting them apart from Andrew’s colleagues. When Frances refers to other British expatriates in Jeddah, she describes how

[t]hey intend to stay until they get a certain sum of money in the bank, but as they get towards their target, they decide they need more ... They always say, we’ll just do another year. It’s called the golden handcuffs. No matter how much they complain about their life here, they hate the thought of leaving. They see some gigantic insecurity ... they don’t know how to behave anywhere else. (Mantel [1988] 1989, 103-104)

With respect to what it means to be an expatriate, there is an interesting passage in which Andrew tells Frances about some research that a psychiatrist had conducted on the effects of stress on immigrant workers, especially about how the Indians that work in Saudi Arabia “are shot to pieces mentally. Totally paranoid. They come here and they’re totally cut off from their families, they’ve got language problems ... they are afraid that other Indian immigrants are after their jobs and that bosses try to cheat on the terms of their contracts” (141). The psychological disorders and stress suffered by migrant workers have been studied, for instance, by Adler and Gundersen, who talk about “cultural shock” as “the expatriate’s reaction to entering a new, unpredictable and therefore uncertain environment” (2008, 322). In their words, “expatriates face many changes in leaving their home country and organization and transferring to a new country, and a new job. Separation from friends, family, children ... increases stress. When expatriates arrive in a new country, different perceptions and conflicting values

exacerbate the stress” and they explain how “stress-related culture shock may take the forms of anger, anxiety, embarrassment, frustration, identity confusion, impatience and physiological responses” (2008, 279). As one of the expatriates they interview reveals, “there is some kind of traumatic reaction to it” (279).

Actually, we can see that the situation and feelings of these migrant workers are not very different from those of the expatriates when Andrew explains the different phases they have to go through when they get to Saudi Arabia:

when you get here and everything’s so strange, you feel isolated and got at—that’s Phase One. But then you learn how to manage daily life, and for a while the place begins to seem normal, and you’ll even defend the way things are done here, you’ll start explaining to newcomers that it’s all right really—that’s Phase Two. You coast along, and then comes Phase Three, the second wave of paranoia. And this time around, it never goes. (Mantel [1988] 1989, 141)

Thus, the only thing you can do is to “leave, before you crack up” (141).

Frances very quickly sees herself and Andrew reflected in that description, and even asks herself in which phase she is. However, she makes a more interesting observation, as she thinks that, even though their feelings are so similar, it is “strange how Indians are immigrant workers, but we’re professional expatriates” (141).⁴

Thus, the Shores’ lives are marked by displacement, no matter where they are: in Saudi Arabia, they are expatriates living in a foreign country, and therefore the marginalised others; in the same way, they are displaced from the group of expatriates; and, finally, they are also displaced in their own country, as people in England do not consider them part of their community. And of course, there is another important form of displacement in the novel, based on gender, from which Frances suffers.

3. AN EXPATRIATE WOMAN IN JEDDAH

Frances discovers that Islamic religious laws will make her life a nightmare even before landing in Jeddah. She is still on the plane when she learns that she cannot even take a taxi on her own since, as another expatriate tells her, “it’s bad news, a man picking up a strange woman in a car. They can gaol you for it” (Mantel [1988] 1989, 29). When Frances answers that it is the taxi driver’s job to pick people up, she is told that in Jeddah, because she is a woman, she is not a person anymore.

It is difficult for Frances not to think about all the horror stories she has been told about Saudi Arabia by the stewardess and other passengers during her flight to Jeddah, but she tried to convince herself that things might not be so hard. Plus, she thinks

⁴ In fact, as Leonard points out, “expatriate” is “in many ways an exclusionary term. It has connotations of classed Western whiteness, as well as, in its use in working contexts, middle class professionalism, and this means that it ‘Others’ other migrants, differentiating expatriates by virtue of their race, class, nationalities, occupations and education” (2010, 2).

that if she was able to adapt to life in Africa, there is no reason why she cannot do so in Saudi Arabia. In her opinion, “travel ends and routine begins and old habits which you thought you had left behind in one country catch up with you in the next, and old problems resurface, but if you’re lucky to carry as part of your baggage the means of solving those problems and accommodating to those habits, and you take with you an open mind, and discretion, and common sense, ... you can manage everywhere” (18).

However, she soon realises that an open mind and common sense are not enough to deal with the way of life she has to live in Jeddah. Despite all the things she has read and heard about the host country, Frances is not prepared for what she finds there, and she has not even been able to imagine what her life in Jeddah would be like. Even though “her first, her original response to Jeddah had been boredom, inertia, a disinclination to move from the bed or look out of the window” (38), when she draws the curtains back, the only thing she sees is a wall. Another wall is what Frances finds when she tries to go out to the hall of the building where they live. As Andrew explains to her, there was an Arab couple living there before, and the husband had bricked up the doorway so that his wife could not go out to the hall and run into a male neighbour or tradesman, and so Frances has to go out of the side door and go straight into the car (36). Even though that first day Andrew tells her that he will ask someone to unblock the doorway, when he goes out to work, he locks her in. Frances tells herself that it was an unconscious act, but “for a second she was frozen with surprise” (37). But surprises and shocks in response to Arab culture continue beyond that first day and she learns that if she wants the front door unblocked, Andrew will have to stay at home.

Actually, the image of the wall could be considered as a symbol to describe what life for women in Jeddah is like, for every time Frances tries to do something on her own, the only thing she finds is a wall, both literally and metaphorically. Religious laws prevent women from doing what Frances considers the most common things. The truth is that everything is forbidden for women: they cannot go out alone, and when they do, they have to be completely covered. They are considered the origin of all sin, and cannot do anything without their father or husband’s permission. Consequently, when the door is finally unblocked, Frances finds another “wall.” The moment she can go out and walk in the street, she asks herself what purpose it serves, since, as there was nothing she could do without Andrew, there was no point in going out.

Moreover, neither were women allowed to get a job and these rules not only applied to women from the country, but also to expatriates. It was just for a few specific jobs that women were allowed to work outside their homes.

Here we have another example of displacement through gender. As Leonard puts it, “for many expatriate women, work may be seen as just too difficult an option, and their ‘new’ identity may become one in which the traditional subject positions and performances of gender are reconfirmed” (2010, 106). Frances was used to having a job, and now she has lost her independence and, as seen in other accounts of expatriate women, she feels “lost and overwhelmed” and her experience fits the common discourse

of “boredom and isolation” of this type of narratives (Leonard 2010, 106). However, even if Frances had been allowed to work, she would have never found a post related to her career as a cartographer, and she is shocked when she learns that there are no maps in Jeddah. As another expatriate explains to her, Saudi people were “too bloody secretive to have maps. Besides, the streets are never in the same place for more than a few weeks together” (Mantel [1988] 1989, 27). Thus, because of these and other restrictions, Frances feels not only displaced in such a different society, but also discriminated against and trapped for being a woman, as she cannot do anything on her own.

According to Pauline Leonard, in many ex-colonial countries,

indigenous women may have little autonomy and may be actively discriminated against, and recent events in the news show how women expatriates can be included in this gendered marginalization, whatever their nationality. The host country’s culture may exert both legal and more subtle influences on foreign communities ... In many countries, the local culture requires women to make greater modifications in their dress and behaviour than is expected of men (Coles and Fetcher 2008), and in others legislation may govern the consumption of alcohol. (2010, 64-65)

This is also what happened to Frances. Even though she knew that in Saudi Arabia she would not find a free society, she had never imagined that the laws were so strict, especially for (expatriate) women. Throughout the novel many episodes show how Frances suffers from this double displacement and how, at some points, she feels not only trapped but also invisible in a society that has learnt to ignore and exclude women. For instance, when Frances finds that she cannot buy anything if she goes out wearing her usual clothes because, as she is told, “the shop people won’t serve you, if they don’t think you’re properly covered up” (Mantel [1988] 1989, 90), or when she is in a group of expatriate women who are not allowed to sit down for a drink because no man is with them (98). And even when she is with Andrew, it is him who has to ask for things in shops, since when she asks she is totally ignored by the men at the counters (111). These and other experiences in Jeddah make Frances fall into a state of profound disillusionment and depression. As she explains, “I knew the facts, but I didn’t know what impact they would make on me ... I knew there were restrictions, but I didn’t know what it would feel like to live under them” (73).

For this reason, she, like Andrew, changes completely. Only two weeks after her arrival in Jeddah, “introspection had become her habit. There are things she was sure of, that she is not sure now, and when her reverie is broken, and first unease and then fear become her habitual state of mind, she will have learned to distrust herself, to question her own perceptions, to be unsure—as she is unsure already—about the evidence of her own ears and the evidence of her own eyes” (67). Actually, as quoted before, Saudis are ‘bloody secretive.’ In fact, the official press controls the news so that, as an expatriate friend of the Shores puts it, “[y]ou hear what they want you to hear. You

think what they want you to think" (164). But in the case of women it is even worse, because it is only through men that they know about the events that take place in their city: "information was received at second hand, by courtesy, through the mouth of one of the city's male keepers" (291).

The marginalisation of women, Leonard argues, is very usual in this kind of narrative, which "tend to focus on white, company men ... particularly those who are privileged in their access to, and control of, the uneven power geometry of mobility such as those pursuing careers in finance, science, management and technology" (2010, 58), which is certainly the case for Andrew, and "meanwhile, for their trailing spouses or partners, the experience usually offers a devaluing of their productive functions and relegation to the domestic sphere" (58). However, in the case of *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*, although Frances is indeed the wife of a male professional expatriate and therefore relegated to stay at home, it is she who is the real protagonist of the novel.

Despite the differences in culture, which "often exacerbate the tendency to maintain an 'expatriate bubble', in which the (often neo-colonial) lifestyles and cultural values of the home country are maintained" (65), Frances tries to adapt and understand the new culture. The community of British expatriates living in Jeddah do conform to the previous definition: they gather to celebrate their festivities such as Christmas, and they have parties with food and drink like those they would organise in England. However, as Frances is also displaced from the expatriate group, she decides to leave that 'expatriate bubble' and mix with Saudi women, to try and understand their way of life.

From her conversations with them she will learn many things about the functioning of Islamic societies, and they will exchange their points of view about the East and the West. As Andrew had done, "almost every day she would unveil some new, astonishing viewpoint" (Mantel [1988] 1989, 84) from her Saudi neighbours that shocked her. For instance, she discovered their perspective on women staying at home or having to wear the veil; for them, being confined at home was the way in which men gave them protection, and wearing the veil was a sign of respect, not of contempt. When it came to the prohibition to work, they thought that it was women in the West who were oppressed and not respected by men, as they have not only a job outside the home but they also have to do the housework.

In these gatherings the women also speak about education, of how schools for girls were opened not long ago, after days of rioting because there were still many people who did not agree with them. With respect to education, there is an interesting passage in which Yasmin, one of the Shores' neighbours, tells Frances how difficult and expensive it was for her to marry her husband because she had got herself "overeducated" (120). As she explains, education is valued by men; however, this value is reduced when women begin to ask questions, give their opinion or argue. Frances, despite her attempts to understand these women and to adapt to the Saudi rules, cannot see why they defend a culture which makes women suffer, and this enrages her.

This feeling of rage, as well as her feelings of displacement, marginalisation and invisibility, is intensified by her relationship with her husband. Most of the time, Andrew acts as if Frances was not there, so she is not only invisible to Saudi men, but also to her own husband. He does not talk to her when he comes home from work even though it was what she most needs after being alone at home all day, and he still locks her inside the house sometimes. Moreover, he vents his frustrations at work on her, saying, for instance, that he does not think that the feeling of displacement and marginalisation suffered by guest workers and expatriate labourers can be applied to women at home.

Frances is not only silenced by society, but also by her husband, as her voice is not even heard at home. It is not only that Andrew does not talk to her when he gets back home; when she decides to write her experiences in a diary, he forgets to buy a new notebook for her, something she cannot do on her own. Therefore, as Milani also points out in his review of the book, “her direct voice and presence in the narrative are silenced” (1997). So her husband’s disregard makes Frances suffer even more: “It is as if she does not exist any more as definitely, as firmly as she used to. And it is true that she is going thin. . . . she feels shaky; each day a degree worse . . . she feels that she once had a grip on the situation, but that now she has lost it” (Mantel [1988] 1989, 232-233).

There is one further reason which makes Frances almost go crazy in Saudi Arabia. Alone as she is for most of the day, when she hears strange noises in the flat above, which is theoretically empty, Frances begins to get obsessed with the things that might be happening there. She decides to investigate, and although Andrew asks her not to get involved, one day she sees somebody in a veil leaving the flat. It is a man, and he is carrying a gun. Frances meets him on the stairs, he pushes her and Frances ends up on the floor. When she phones her husband’s boss to tell him, he stops her and says that there are things he cannot afford to know because “once past a certain point, you see, you become an undesirable person . . . they don’t want you here, and if you see what I mean, they don’t want you to leave either” (241). And he reminds her that it is her husband who would be responsible for anything she had seen or done, and that witnesses to a crime are also held in gaol. So, she does not tell Andrew.

However, some weeks later, and as a consequence of what Frances has seen, they are robbed. Still, it is not until Fairfax, another British expatriate, spends a night at their flat that Andrew realises that Frances was right. Fairfax goes before they wake up, but leaves them a shocking message advising them to leave the flat as he had seen two men carrying a dead person down the stairs. Later, Andrew discovers that Fairfax is dead. He has apparently had an accident, but the Shores think that someone might have killed him because of what he had seen. Thus, Andrew and Frances try to investigate, but nobody will tell them anything: the police “deny all knowledge of practically anything” (273), and the hospital will not let them see the corpse, since, “to identify, you need four Muslim men. Christian men will not do” (278).

At this point, Andrew understands that Frances was right and that there had been something going on in the flat above. After the death of another of their Saudi neighbours, Andrew and Frances move to a new house, outside the city. From that moment, Frances, who had previously always tried to go out and discover new things, feels reluctant to leave her house. At one point, after all these horrible events, she sees herself in a mirror at the new house and describes her image: "My face is black, deeply shadowed, with empty eyes, and a pale ragged aureole encircles my head. I have become the negative of myself" (298). She can only think about the moment she will leave Jeddah.

4. CONCLUSION

In *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* Mantel has shown how her protagonists have suffered from displacement, and how their lives and identities have changed dramatically after their experiences in a different country. The Shores decided to leave their home country, motivated by their wish to earn more money, but they simply feel doubly displaced, both at home and abroad. On the one hand, the host country considers them a menace as they can tell stories about freedom and opportunities in the West, and send a message to the local population that there is more to life "out there" than what the local people have. Furthermore, they are rejected by the population: in Saudi Arabia, not only are they foreigners, but they are also the source of sin, as the Saudi government has made its people believe. And it is even worse for Frances, who also feels displaced and invisible for being a woman, due to the Islamic laws and religion.

On the other hand, though, they suffer from another kind of displacement, related to people from their own country: their fellow British expatriates marginalise them when they are in Jeddah, and when the couple decides to return to England, more displacement and rejection come from their own people, who are generally indifferent and hostile, rather than offering them a warm welcome. Thus, they are unable to know who they really are or to find a place in the world they can call home, a feature that this novel and its protagonists share with many postcolonial and migrant writings, as can be seen in the works of Boehmer, Mullaney, Leonard and White quoted in this paper.

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