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A Quest for Hyphenated Identities: The
Arab-American Experience in Laila
Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

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Dedication

For all the migrants in exile

for the Soul of Sheikh Balbir Singh Sodhi and all the innocent victims of the “War on
Terror” May Almighty Allah dwell them in Jannatul Firdaus.

To my dearest Mother and my father ...

Acknowledgment

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bless and guidance

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Abstract:

The United State is considered as a multiracial community, where the racial and cultural boundaries are blurred. However, it is not the Case for The Arab American, mainly due to the conceived dissimilarity between binary cultural patterns, as a result, Arab experience in America is charged with the feel of alienation and displacement. Moreover, the Attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Centers inspired the stereotyped image of Arabs and Muslims. Arab American literature overviews this identity disorder especially after the tragic attacks of 9/11. Laila Halaby addresses the issue of belonging and cultural contrast in her novel *Once in a Promised Land*, Halaby explores the experience of Jordanian Couple and their failure in assimilating within the American community. This research aims to examine the experience of Arab American characters in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, in order to discuss the preceding hypotheses, I will analyze the main characters of the novel, at the same time, I will show how Laila Halaby unveils the illusion of chasing the American dream along with the false understanding of the American citizenship. I will also analyze the cultural hybridity of both protagonists and finally the change of attitude in post 9/11 beside the effects of institutionalized racism on the Arab-American characters.

Key words: Orientalism, Arab-Americans, Assimilation, identity, American dream.

Résumé :

Les États-Unis sont considérés comme une communauté multiraciale, où les frontières raciales et culturelles sont floues. Cependant, ce n'est pas le cas pour l'Arabe Américain, principalement en raison de la dissemblance conçue entre les modèles culturels binaires, de sorte que l'expérience arabe en Amérique est chargée de la sensation d'aliénation et de déplacement. De plus, les attentats du 11 septembre contre les World Trade Centers ont inspiré l'image stéréotypée des Arabes et des musulmans. La littérature arabo-américaine fait un survol de ce trouble identitaire, surtout après les tragiques attentats du 11 septembre. Laila Halaby aborde la question de l'appartenance et du contraste culturel dans son roman *Once in a Promised Land*, Halaby explore l'expérience de Jordanian Couple et leur échec à s'assimiler au sein de la communauté américaine. Cette recherche vise à examiner l'expérience des personnages arabes américains dans *Once in a Promised Land* de Laila Halaby, l'illusion de poursuivre le rêve américain avec la fausse compréhension de la citoyenneté américaine, ainsi que l'hybridité culturelle des deux protagonistes et enfin le changement de attitude après le 11 septembre à côté des effets du racisme institutionnalisé sur les personnages arabo-américains.

Mots-clés : Orientalisme, arabo-américains, assimilation, identité, Le rêve américain.

ملخص:

تعتبر الولايات المتحدة مجتمعا متعدد الأعراق ، حيث تلمس الفوارق العرقية و الثقافية. لكن هذا الوضع لا ينطبق على مجتمعات العرب الأمريكيان , ويرجع ذلك أساسا للإختلاف المعتقد بين النمطين الثقافيين (الشرقي والغربي) . ونتيجة لذلك فإن التجربة العربية في أمريكا مشحونة بمشاعر الاغتراب و التنحية , زيادة على ذلك فإن هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر على برجى التجارة العالمي كانت دعامة للفكر الإستشراقي و نشر صور مشوهة للعرب و الإسلام في الغرب . إن الأدب العربي الأمريكي يراعي مسألة تشوه الهوية العربية الأمريكية خاصة بعد الهجمات الإرهابية لسنة 2001. في رواية "مرة في أرض الميعاد" تناقش الكاتبة ليلي حلي مسألة الهوية و الإنتساب . حيث تدور أحداث الرواية حول فشل زوج أردني في الإندماج في المجتمع الأمريكي . تسعى هذه الدراسة لمناقشة التجربة العربية في أمريكا على ضوء رواية ليلي حلي , وكذا دحض الوهم المحيط بالحلم الأمريكي علاوة على الفهم الخاطئ للتمتع بالجنسية الأمريكية . ثم مناقشة التهجين الثقافي لبطل الرواية وأخيرا تغير الانطباع المتعلق بسياسات ما بعد 11 سبتمبر و تأثير العنصرية الممنهجة على الشخصيات العرب-أمريكية في الرواية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستشراق ، العرب الأمريكيان ، الاستيعاب ، الهوية ، الحلم الأمريكي.

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgment	ii
Abstract	iii
Résumé	iv
Arabic Abstract	v
Table of contents	vi
List of figures	viii
General Introduction	1
Chapter One: Concerning Arab Americans and the Impact of 9/11 Attacks	9
Introduction	10
1-1 the Arab American identity issues	10
1-1.1 Arab Americans diversities	11
I-1.2 Inferiority Complex	12
1-1.3 The American Dream Syndrome	15
1-1.4 The American Cultural imperialism	16
I-1.5 The Arab Americanism and illusion of Assimilation	18
1-2 the United States attitude against terrorism and its effects on Arab-Americans	20
1-2.1 Discrimination of Arab-Americans	21
1-2.2 the emergence of neo-Orientalism	23

1-3 Contemporary Arab-American literature and the emergence of counter-narrative	25
1-3.1 the Emergence of Arab-American counter-narrative trend	26
Conclusion	28
 Chapter Two: The American dream as a Motif for Identity Destabilization in <i>Once in a Promised Land</i>	
Introduction	30
2-1 The American consumerism as a trope of collapse	33
2-2 The deconstruction of the American dream	42
Conclusion	49
 Chapter three: The construction of Arab American identity in <i>Once in a Promised Land</i>	
Introduction	52
3-1 Hybridity and cultural anxiety	54
3-2 The post 9/11 and the political attitude as the handicap of assimilation	66
Conclusion	77
General Conclusion	79
Bibliography	81

List of Figures

The American Cultural Imperialism

17

General Introduction

The Arab diaspora is a vital topic in literature, Arabs as minority groups in the West suffer from severe streams of stereotyping and misrepresenting, Arab-American community is considered as one of the largest Arab migrant communities, this category of people had witnessed a continuous attack from media and some racist groups who consider Muslims and Arabs as a threat to nationalism especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Modern Arab-American literature came as a response to these racist attacks and call for justice and equality for Americans from Middle Eastern origins after their exclusion from their national belonging. Whereas this topic of belonging was dealt with at the academic level where Arab-Americans felt the urge of finding a home in the host land, the issue of belonging became contested at the political dimension. Because of the 9/11 attacks had reshaped not only the foreign policy of the United States but also the definition of Arab or Muslim within the territory of America. Arab-American writers felt the necessity of standing against the stereotyping voices that relate them to barbarism and terrorism which eventually exposes them to discrimination and social exclusion, the modern Arab American writings mainly focus on consolidating them into the American category and the trauma of instability of the Arab American identity especially as a response to the 9/11 attitude. In his article “*Arab Anglophone Fiction: A New Voice in Post-9/11 America*” Jameel Ahmed Al Ghaberi claims that the post 9/11 Arab-American fiction carries with it the complex relationship between Arab Americans and their homelands when America jilts them. At the same time Arab-American novels are tools that deflect the demonization of this community when it is spotted:

“Arab American novels are mostly counter-narratives, yet they construct fluid and porous perceptions of home, even though they resort in times of tragedy to imagining an idealized home through memories of the past. They also reflect the different realities imposed upon them in a post-9/11 America, hyper-visibility and otherness.” (Al Ghaberi 50)

General Introduction

The damage of Arab American identity necessarily required the emergence of new canonical literature trends that respond to the constructed stereotypes. Several Arab American literary works depict the experience of Arab American characters in post 9/11 America, where the Arab characters suffer from social exile and alienation Just because of their cultural affiliation or their physical appearance. *Once in a Promised Land* by Laila Halaby is an appreciated work that depicts the binary relationship between East and the West, Born in Beirut from a Jordanian father and an American mother, and raised in Arizona where she got her diploma of Master' s degree in Arabic literature. Halaby is aware of this cultural disparity between the East and the West. As an Arab migrant, she has experienced exile where it is hard to maintain a stable identity.

Literature review

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* has been the subject of several academic publications, Abdelhaq Jniyene, from the University of "Nova de Lisboa" in Portugal, argues in his article "*Arab-American Identity Representation*" that the fragility of Arab-Americans characters in particular literary works came as a response to "mainstream American society towards the Arabic community in their midst and the way displacement and social isolation" (7), eventually, the Arab characters try to adopt a balanced identity in order to overrun the spatial displacement, meanwhile they realize that their identity is "torn".

Similarly, Dr Fateh Bounar from the University of Tlemcen in his Doctorate dissertation entitled "*Representations of Islam, Terrorism, and Religious Extremism: Cosmopolitan Identity in Muslim Anglophone Novel*" perceives the Arab American literary works as a response to the stereotypic rage of the post-terrorism world, Fateh sees that the characters of Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* are models to deconstruct the aesthetic picture of the West in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims in general, he sees that both Jassim and

General Introduction

Salwa feels displacement and isolation because of their initial urge to maintain the American consumerist Style and their neglecting of Arab, Muslim identity.

Meanwhile, Steven Salaita in his analytical book named “*Modern Arab American Fiction*” overviews some of Arab Americans fiction as resistance canonical literature to the American anti-terrorism mainstream, in the Sixth Chapter entitled “Promised Lands and Unfulfilled Promises”, Steven analyses the novel from socio-political scale, he argues that Halaby uses the 9/11 attitude against her Arab characters to reveal the core of domestic policies against Arabs and Muslims as minorities, and uses the patriotism trend to institutionalize the racism against Arabs.

Research methodology

The present study mainly analyzes the literary construction of Arab Americans as minority ethnic groups in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks in Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*, the choice of this particular literary work is intended since it reveals the social and the geopolitical outcomes of the post the 9/11 attitude against Arabs and Muslims. Besides, Halaby dedicated her work to be a cultural portal to represent Arab characters from the inside, and it can be the suitable subject of study, as an Arab researcher to extract the fragility of Arab migrants in exile. So this work also highlights the issue of Arabism fragility in front of the more dominant culture (the American culture in this case).

Accordingly, this dissertation will be using the cultural and political criticism approach, the study will shed lights on the experience of Arab characters and their representation with the clarity of the cultural barriers which comprises the binary patterns. In an attempt to make a distinction between the generalizations that prompt the stereotyped image of Arab-American characters, then shift to give a humanistic face to those characters.

General Introduction

Concerning methodology, this thesis is based on the postcolonial approach where exile and displacement is a central theme, first, it reviews the Arab American diaspora and their identity construction before the 9/11 and the effects of the domestic attitude against them, then it will touch on studying literary work of Laila Halaby from a cultural background.

The first chapter is dedicated to the historical and cultural study of the construction of the modern Arab American identity, along with the historical obstacles this category had faced in their way to assimilation this study will review the political, cultural and religious backgrounds of the Arab American identity construction, then it will shed lights on the effects of 9/11 policies against them with the emergence of the neo-Orientalism.

The second chapter, entitled “The American dream as a motif for identity destabilization in *Once in a Promised Land*”, will highlight the binary cultural model between the East and the West, this chapter overviews that the fragility of Arab characters in front of the more dominant culture is the main reason of their identity teardown.

The third chapter will be dedicated to examine the cultural, socio and geopolitical outcomes of the post 9/11 attitude of anti-terrorism and their effects on the construction of Arab American characters identity, this chapter will mainly focus on the hybridity of Arab character’s identity and the failure of assimilation especially after the 9/11.

Orientalism and the Arab-American relations

The impact of Edward Said’s Seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) had great influence not only on the western academic community but also on Easterners the latter needed to respond to the distorted depiction of their identity, on his analysis, Edward Said shows the misrepresentation of the Middle East by Western writers and Artists to highlight the distinction between the East and the West “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the

General Introduction

time) “the Occident.” (Said 2) , For Said, the problem of Orientalism is that it portrays the Orient as one space of ignorance which is unable to change, it is only by the intervention of Civilized west that “civilization” or “modernity” can be transmitted to the East, this distorted image, in fact, overwhelm the reality over the East itself, and created a sphere of ambiguity and fear of the “barbaric” Easterners which are depicted in most of the time as extremist religious men with no respect to other races or even for their women.

Said claims that the East is synchronically progressing in the same way the West is. But it's the Orientalist ideology that presents a “dehumanized” “immobilized” and “unproductive” men, Said argues that, the Orientalist mission is to integrate the superiority of the Whiteman over all the non-white races, just because they are not quite as human as he is (Said 108), this means that the cultural gap between the East and the West is imaginative and human-made “as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made” (Said 5). For Said the West uses some cultural references of East as mockery or degradation to Eastern cultures when we mention the Orient, we mean the Middle East and Arabs precisely “these contemporary Orientalist attitudes flood the press and the popular mind. Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers” (108), in fact, this depiction conveys their political and economic weakness, the Orientalist depiction of Arabs revived especially prior the Israeli-Arab war as a humiliation for political reasons “from a faintly outlined stereotype as a camel riding nomad to an accepted caricature as the embodiment of incompetence and easy defeat” (285), therefore, the depiction of “Other” has always been politicized, the western orientalism labelled Arabs between good and bad according to their political agenda and their alliance “Orientalism governs Israeli policy towards the Arabs throughout, as the recently published Koenig Report amply proves. There are good Arabs (the ones who do as they are told) and bad Arabs (who do not, and are therefore terrorists).” (206)

General Introduction

In the preface of his twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of the book, *Orientalism* of 2003, after the United States declaration of the ongoing “War on Terror”, written a few months before his death against the backdrop of the imperial invasion of Iraq. Edward Said reminds his readers that his work *Orientalism* is a spur of the circumstances, “Orientalism is the product of circumstances that are fundamentally, indeed radically, fractious” (xii). The circumstances of the post 9/11 brought back the memories of orientalist ideas to the American popular culture mainly due to the misrepresentation of the Arabs by media, Said states that there were drastic changes in the Arab world and he re-affirms “neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort” (xii), but at the same time, he expresses his disappointment to the media intimidation to create an imagined enemy from Arab nations and Islamic cultures “myriad numbers of evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, plus innumerable tabloids and even middlebrow journals, all of them recycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up “America” against the foreign devil” (xv).

Said believes that the General image of the Middle East and Europe seems better than what was in the past, but it’s not the same for the United States with the reemergence of an “American Orientalism” which still uses generalizations and clichés “In the United States, the hardening of attitudes, the tightening of the grip of demeaning generalization and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power allied with simplistic contempt for dissenters and “others” has found a fitting correlative in the looting” (xii), Said concludes that his book involves as the study of a human experience apart from myths and distorted representations.

Negotiation of the Arab-American US citizenship

In her book *Contemporary Arab-American Literature* Carol Fadda-Corney notes that the integration of European neo-imperialist and Orientalist paradigm into the American governing agenda had led to the repercussion of Arabs in the Middle East and diaspora,

General Introduction

Carol notes that the US foreign policies in the Middle East had played a major role in the dispersion of Arabs around the world, she adds that the political turmoil between the Middle East and the United States of America allowed the creation of “negative conceptualizations” (2) of Arab-Americans or what can be described as *the American Orientalism* which allows the integration of binary logic of Orientalism by creating imaginary boundaries between “*Civilized*” America and “*Backwardness*” of the Arabs.

“Such Orientalist discourse has taken on an additional policing role after 9/11, portraying Arabs and Muslims as perpetual aliens, volatile extremists, and potential or actual terrorists (in the case of men) or oppressed, silenced, and disenfranchised subjects (in the case of women).” (2)

In General, it is this imagined view of Arab nations that creates suspicion and questioning the Arab-American national citizenship, the role of Arab-American writers, critics and activists is to create a transnational connection between Arabs in diaspora and their homelands outside the Eurocentric orientalist framework to deflect the imagined orientalist binaries (“here” and “there”, “civilized” and “barbaric”), by doing so, Arab-American writers call for a revision of these negative conceptualization and denounce the exclusionists trend of Arabs in the United States after the distorted image portrayed by media after the 9/11 and resulted questioning the Arab-American national belonging. Carol Fadda-Corney asserts that the transnational connectivity between Arab migrants and their homelands mandates their nation-state citizenship, especially after the 9/11 national trauma.

Through the literary analysis of Arab-American fiction, Carol argues that writers tend to re-create transnational connections between characters and their homelands in the Middle East outside the Orientalist and neo-imperialist framework. in an attempt to call revision of Arab-American US citizenship, which they have little room to negotiate mainly in the 90s and so on (after the Oklahoma City domestic terrorist attacks of 1995), by *Citizenship* Fadda-Corney provides two dimensions of the term: legal citizenship which

General Introduction

comprises legal rights along with civic duties, in short, the legal citizenship is granted by laws, the Arab-American civil rights of residence inside the territories of America is granted by the constitution.

The other dimension of citizenship is cultural citizenship. In this concern, Fadda-Corney provides two conceptualizations of the term “*Cultural Citizenship*”. The first conceptualization is provided by Aihwa Ong. For him, Cultural citizenship is a state tool that presents one’s national belongings as it “mandates the inclusion and exclusion of minority groups within the nation-state.” (4) , Ong notes that :

“I use "Cultural Citizenship" to refer to the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory. Cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to nation-state and civil society.” (Ong 737)

The other conceptualization provided by Carol Fadda-Corney is the theory of Renato Rosaldo “Rosaldo, on the other hand, defines cultural citizenship as the process by which minority groups such as Latinos negotiate a place for themselves within the dominant cultural sphere, thus laying claim to this sphere despite their difference from it” (qtd in Fadda-Corney 4).

In fact, both theories provided by Fadda-Corney can be valid for this Case of Study, In Laila Halaby’s fiction, both protagonists present their national belonging through their Cultural citizenship, or what Rosaldo describes “negotiate a place for themselves within the dominant cultural sphere” (ibid). At the same time, they have little room for negotiation of their Citizenship since their native identities are hyper-visible, or what Aihwa Ong describes as “webs of power linked to nation-state” (Ong 737) to the extent that their citizenship blurs any ties to their homelands.

Chapter One

The Issue of Arab American Ethnic Identity and the Impacts of 9/11 Attacks.

Introduction

The Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11 on The World Trade Centers had been viewed as a watershed event that has changed the United States permanently. Both in terms of its foreign policy or from inside; namely its social structure and home policy. The 9/11 events negatively affected the Americans in general, and Muslims and Arabs living inside the United States in particular. The events brought along with them a public fear among the Arab American groups about their future and stability as members of the American community. Although the attacks highlighted the issue of Arab Americans struggle of assimilation, identity disorder among Arab immigrants has its roots since the first wave of Arab immigrants to America. Gaby Semaan mentioned that:

“Arab Americans have been living in the U.S. since the second half of the 19th century (Hitti, 1923) and historically make up more than a 100-year-old tile in the mosaic of cultural groups in the country. However, since the US Census data does not have a category for Arab Americans and requires them to identify as White, the erasure of a distinct identity of this group within the White racial dominance made Arab Americans invisible until the late 1960s” (Semaan 17)

Prior 9/11 Arab American scholars discussed the issue of Americans of Arab origins as an invisible ethnic group in the American community. The case of American Middle Eastern was handled with much less interest in the academic field, Arabs from different geographical belonging were labelled under one ethnic group (The Arab Americans). In fact, Arab immigrants comprise a diversity of ethnic groups that have different origins, different religions but they share the same speaking tongue.

1-1 the Arab immigrants and the shaping of Arab identity in America

There are no precise statistics about the number of Arab American nowadays, neither on the scientific community nor in the governmental records of (INS) Immigration and Naturalization Service. According to Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, there are approximately three millions Americans of Arabic origins (some of their descendants are in their sixth

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

generation) (Haddad 2), they enjoy the American citizenship, Arabs comprises about 1 per cent only of the American population (*327.2 million according to US census bureau,2018*). Most of the Arab immigrants came to the United States after the first half of the twentieth century, as their number can be increased or decreased (following the government changeable policies towards immigration).

In the historical study of the Arab Americans identity construction, Steven Salaita provided an overview of two immigration waves (Salaita “ethnic identity and imperative patriotism” 149), the first wave of immigrants began arriving in the United States in the late 19th century. There were few Muslims escaping the Ottoman Empire (Syria, Jordan and Palestine) along with few Arab Christian labourers and farmers seeking for better opportunities and a decent life. The second wave of immigrants arrived in the post WWI era; it comprised Arabs of different social strata. In contrast to the oriental view of Arabs as one unified ethnic group, Arabs and Arab-Americans identity is constructed from different geo-cultural lineages.

1-1.1 Arab American diversities

The ethnicity of Arab Americans owes its roots to their original Arabic-tongue mother countries of North Africa and the Middle East. The stream of Arab immigrants began in the rise of 19 centuries, they were migrants of rural areas hoping for better conditions and charged with the hope of the American Dream. Due to the Famine brought along with the First World War another flow of Arab immigrants arrived in the United States at that time, most of Arab Americans of today are the descendants of the first wave immigrants who believed in the conformity and Americanism, like the other immigrants of different ethnic groups (Elkholy 104). Arabs followed the assimilation pattern that converted them to American citizens without any cultural or religious features from their

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

native lands. The other flow of Arab immigrants to the dreamland took place after the Second World War, at that time; the US government had enacted policies that facilitate immigration.

The Arab Americans of today who were born in the United States have cultural and ancestral roots from the different 22 Arab countries starting from Northwest of Asia to the North of Africa. Among these countries, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon are the origins of most of Arab Americans. The “Arab” Muslims of the United States reflect the religious and sectarian divisions of the population of the Arab world. The largest group is Sunni. The percentage of the Shi‘ite population in the United States is presumed to be larger than what obtains in the Arab world. (Haddad 5)

1-1.2 Inferiority Complex

“Despite their enthusiasm about becoming Americans, Arab Americans soon found that there would be impediments on the road to assimilation in the form of charges that they were racially inferior and thus not worthy of becoming American citizens” (Ludescher 99)

During the last four centuries, Arabs could not establish a considerably powerful nation, despite their history which was loaded with conflicts and colonization; Arabs view the West and United States as a land of opportunities and wealth. In fact, this is one of the major reasons that lead Arabs to immigrate to the West. In his Book *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains the Western’s perception of superiority through an exotic lens, Edward named it Orientalism, which is a depiction of aspects in Eastern world and imagining it as exotic and retarded.

For the West “Colonizer”, the East is an animal-like world that is ready to hand itself to the civilized West, this created the West master attitude towards the inferiority of the orient giving enough reasons to justify the superiority and suppression of the colonial system. From another perspective, Frantz Ibrahim Fanon (a French West Indian

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

psychologist) examines the psyche of the “colonized” and through his book *Black Skins, White Masks*, describes the relationship between the white colonizer and the black colonized as an emulation of shadow. He prescribes the feel of inferiority among those people of colour as “*inferiority complex*”, “Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon “*Black Skin, White Masks*” ii). In his second book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon extends his experience with the colonial system through the Algerian experience, Fanon stated that the west colonizer does not perceive black people only as inferior, but also the other colonized races.

“The colonized does not accept his guilt, but rather considers it a kind of curse, a sword of Damocles. But deep down the colonized subject knows no authority. He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority.” (Fanon “*The Wretched of the Earth*” 16)

This means that the internalized inferiority is not only engraved in the mind of the people of colour through their experience of the white imperialism, but it exceeded that to become a nature of his relations and interaction as he perceives white man in general as superior. Ibrahim Fanon added that people of colour try to make their inner satisfaction and reach what is supposed to be perfection by assimilating or “shadowing” the whiteness of white man. This desire might lead ex-colonized black people to the feel of alienation while they view themselves as inferior.

“It examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors” (Fanon “*The Wretched of the Earth*” vi)

While Fanon addresses the issue of inferiority as a psychological state of the colonized subjects where the colonial system integrates the inferiority in the subconscious of the colonized people. The Algerian philosopher Malek Bennabi (1905–1973) views the issue of “inferiority complex” as a social reality in the decolonized third world, Bennabi

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

argues that the integrated inferiority as an outcome of the colonial systems stands as a handicap for the renaissance of the former colonized nation. As the hegemonic logic of the colonial superiority “I am better than you” became “my culture, my language, my identity are better than yours”.

Similarly, almost all the Arabs had witnessed a sort of colonization through the past two centuries, colonial system of oppression and racial discrimination .the same colonial system that engraved the inferiority as a feature of black people, it convinced that Arab communities are submissive and invisible in the eyes of European white man. Although more than half-century had passed since the independence of Arab communities, it stamped the syndrome of inferiority in front of what they see as a more dominant culture (like the American’s). Arabs in General and Arab Americans of today tend to emulate the White civilization, which is considered as ideal and perfect.

In His Book *What Went Wrong? (2002)* , Bernard Lewis claims that Arabs and Muslims had an “inferiority complex”. He explains that feeling because the Muslim Empire had dominated the whole world and collapsed at once. Lewis argues that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the shrinking of Islamic domination of the world gradually and the loss of the last Muslim civilization (Bernard 84). The end of the 19th century marked the end of Muslim civilization and the emergence of European imperialism like French, Russia and Britain that took over the Arab territories and divided them into colonies. “The majority of Arabs suffer from an inferiority complex as a result of in fact being treated as inferiors for 400 years. It cannot have helped that the Turkish conquerors were succeeded by the British and French, who ignored Arab sensibilities completely and carved up their territories in ways that made no sense except to them – with the pernicious results of which we are still living.” (Norman P.III). In fact, the migratory circuit is affected by this cultural dependency, migrants of the Eastern part of the world consider

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

Western countries as shelters and host lands. One of the major ideas that control the immigration stream to America is the propagated idea of the “*American Dream*”.

1-1.3 The American Dream Syndrome

The migrant population in the United States had reached 33.4 million individuals at the beginning of 2003, as mentioned in the preceding section, the political status of migrant’s native lands and the Hollywood exported opportunist created an imagined picture of “the American dream”, While in fact, the propagated American dream reflects the American identity and its domestic policy trend “Exceptionalism”. In an article entitled “Achieving the American Dream: Facilitators and Barriers to Homeownership among Immigrants”, Lutchmie Narine and Marcia A. Shobe argues that the concept of “American dream” lures migrants to find a place in America, while their opportunities of jobs and education are submissive to their cultural backgrounds and physical appearance. (Narine and Shobe 74)

A recent study showed that some Japanese are exposed to a psychological trauma when they visit the city of Paris, due to the shock they face when they discover that Paris is not really that aesthetic city of culture and lights as films and propaganda pictures it. Scientists call this psychological disorder “*The Paris syndrome*”¹. Likewise, Arabs and other ethnic groups in the United States fail to recognize themselves as social strata pursuing the illusion of freedom and wealth or “The American Dream” which is not available for everyone as it is shown in Hollywood movies. For Kristine Ajrouch, the United States had restricted its immigration policy to fit a featured racial category “Yet, the defining characteristics of racial categories are complicated and open to negotiation.

¹ Paris Syndrome is a psychological condition experienced almost exclusively by Japanese tourists who are disappointed when the city of lights does not live up to their romantic expectations. – (SBS News)

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

Immigration policy in the U.S. historically employed whiteness as a precondition for citizenship” (Gualtieri 40).

In fact, the seductiveness of the American dream is one of the major motives that attract immigrants from different ethnicities to find themselves in the United States. However, the opportunities provided in America are not equally distributed especially for racial minorities and non-white people. In contrast, America and the Americans view some ethnic groups as inferior or threatened (sometimes: like Mexicans); The United States policies of today are the outcome of a set of reforms and laws that took place years and decades ago. For John Powell, the American dream is very vulnerable to race prejudice and inequality because of the oppressive laws that shape the contemporary US constitution. (Powell p.I)

The post 9/11 era was a turning point of the Arab American lives in the United States and The American view of Arabs and Muslims, whereas America was the promised heaven, it was no more welcoming for Arabs and Muslims as a whole . Instead, Americans view Arabs as a threat to their public safety and ideal Americanism, Media had played a fundamental role in portraying Arab Americans as the pure evil and that “the American dream is being threatened by Arab/Muslim terrorists” (Alsultany 69)

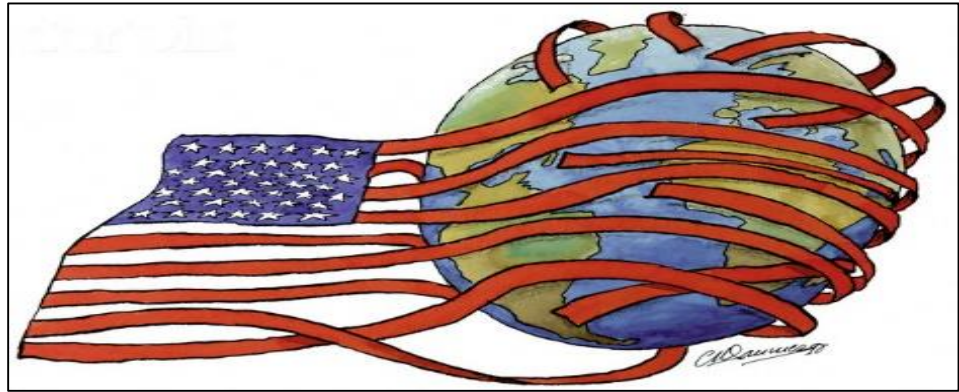
1-1.4 The American Cultural Imperialism:

The end of the 20th century had witnessed a rise of American cultural expansion all over the world. Cultural imperialism refers the American cultural hegemony and the influence of the American culture as a superpower in the world, mainly through music, cinema and technology. Foreign movies and Cinema business are always influenced by the American model due to the domination of Hollywood movie companies. American cultural imperialism helped multinational companies to become a pioneer in American cultural

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

exportation in the globe. (Libraries) , “Jonathan Gray wrote in his article *Imagining America: The Simpsons Go Global* a quote from George Ritzer who is worried that “America will become everyone’s ‘second culture’” (qtd in Surin)

Figure: The American Cultural Imperialism



Source: sites.psu.edu/comm411spring2015/2015/03/16/american-cultural-imperialism/

Postcolonial critics and scholars have noticed a great interest in the American culture in the world. In only three decades, the United States could position its cultural heritage as the most influential pattern in the world. This accelerated operation of what can be described as " *the Americanization*" of the globe creates an atmosphere of distrust and fear among sociologists and scholars from a new form of colonialization, though the word "imperialism" can deliver the meaning of political and military domination, Edward Said depicts another interpretation of the meaning :

“As I shall be using the term, “imperialism” means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; “colonialism,” which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory.” (Said “*Culture and Imperialism*” 8)

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said defines the American imperialism as the embodiment of the European Neo-Colonialism along with its Imperialist shell and Orientalist vision about the Orient; “American expansionism is principally economic, it is still highly dependent and moves together with, upon, cultural ideas and ideologies about America itself, ceaselessly reiterated in public” (Said 350)

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

The American cultural imperialism is considered as a primary motive for attracting immigrants from different countries of the world, as the American lifestyle affects the lives of immigrants inside America. It erases any cultural impact of the mother country for immigrants, and any violation of the American style may be considered as an undesirable gesture despite the fact that other ethnic groups can equally be discriminated though they are integrated into the American community

1-1.5 The Arab Americans and the illusion of Enjoying Americanness

The question of merging Arab, immigrants into the American society had been poorly tackled by scholars in the preceding century, and even before the 9/11, Islam was viewed as Anti-Americanism condition and barrier to the assimilation of Middle Eastern Americans. Elkholy is one of those scholars who were interested in the quest of identity for early Arab immigrants, in his book *The Arab Muslims in the United States: Religion and Assimilation; 1966*. Elkholy spots different Arab Muslim communities, tracing their lifestyle and religion. Abdo Elkholy found that the conservative communities or the more religious communities were poor communities living in rural areas of the United States, While the more assimilated community (Toledo Arab Americans community) were more assimilated, more integrated to the American lifestyle, However, this community had been reshaped by assimilation. Elkholy said that the descendants of the Toledo community were not so religious as they seemed ignorant to some Islamic rituals, they were so friendly and open-minded with Christians. (Elkholy 112-117)

A further survey in the late 20th century shows that the new immigrants and the descendants of the Arab Americans are brought to Americanization to its finest level. They were in economic ease and placed in a privileged social position. As two-thirds of them gained access to college and had a college diploma, but these generations of Arab Americans are ignorant of their native culture, their religious norms and rituals. While men

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

were not aware of the importance of ablution, women of these Arab American communities were not veiled, in fact, the veil was considered as an impediment of Americanism.

While Arab Americans perceive the United States as a model for democracy and the generous land for opportunities to anyone who believes in the American dream, there might be ties to Anti-Semitism and Anti-Arab beneath this Utopian land. In truth, Surveys from media had shown that Arabs and Muslims had been pictured as demonic and inferior "outsiders". The Arab-American identity has been deformed and re-curved by Arab immigrants as a response to American attitudes towards Arabs and Arab Americans, in fact, this hybridity is an outcome of Arabs' long experience in the United States. "the places in which they settle, their relations with older generations of immigrants, the reception and treatment they endure in their new environment, the diversity of the community with which they associate, their involvement in organized religion, and their attendance at ethnic or integrated mosques. Increasingly, it has also been profoundly influenced by American prejudice and hostility toward Arabs and Muslims, both real and perceived." (Haddad 14)

Many descendants of Arab immigrants claim their affiliation to white identity, which is considered as a key point of assimilation to American identity. Whiteness is not just a biological feature, but it is the clearest representation of particular culture, ethnicity, nation or religious group .immigrants from the Middle East and their descendants have a long history of identity honing and reshaping into the whiteness of Americans due to their long experience in the United States. "Descent and culture signify important traits of ethnicity that influence assimilation patterns. Americans with ancestry to Arabic-speaking countries are highly diverse in terms of those traits" (Ajrouch and Amaney 862)

1-2 the United States attitude against terrorism and its effects on Arab-Americans

One of the major outcomes of the 9/11 attacks is the new attitude of the neoconservative government of George Bush towards what is supposed to be terrorism, Although President Bush mentioned that his war is going to exclude allies of the Middle East; and his attempt to create a picture of an ideal Muslim “ good Muslim”. As he said in Congress “The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends” (E-Media Mill Works, 2001), However, the war directly targeted Arab and Muslim communities in the United States.

The "war on terror" is set of foreign policies ran by the United States under the government of Bush and his allies to wage a military campaign against the armed militia of terrorism and the Islamic State of Afghanistan as a response to the plane attacks of New York. Although the American government did not show any intention in taking arbitrary measures against Muslims or Arabs of the United States, the war did not exclude Muslims either in the United States or elsewhere as President Bush had promised. The Arabs and Muslims of America experienced very repressive conditions in the United States due to Bush's policies that fueled public anger against Arabs as ethnic groups, as the government's attitudes were redirected to highlight the existence of Arabs and Muslims as a threat, and intervene in their personal life (for the sake of public safety). Americans believed that the main danger is Islam, as they view the Taliban and the Qaeda’s attitude against non-Muslims and Westerners in general.

The war on terror is one of the major outcomes of re-orientalism and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims; to clarify, the lack of acknowledging the East lead the Western governments to initiate a grinding war in the Middle East against what is known as terrorist militia and its supportive regimes. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

vital examples of the Western attitude toward Islam. Arabs felt their inferiority and loss of safety not only in countries involved directly in the War but also in America, Americans of Middle Eastern origins suffered from discrimination in their personal lives just because of their Arabic identity or they look like an Arab.

1-2.1 Discrimination of Arab-Americans

The 9/11 attacks marked a change in the American home policy that can be described as oppressive and ethnic discriminating against the minorities of Arabs and Muslims. “There have been roughly twenty rule changes, executive orders and laws affecting immigrants or non-immigrant visitors, 15 of which predominantly target Arabs” (Cainkar 26). indeed Muslims and Arabs were subjected to harassment and hate crimes although they had nothing relating them to terrorist groups, moreover, the news and media were overwhelmed and obsessed with Anti-Arab bias. It was predicted that the number of Arabs and Muslims and immigrants of Middle East would shrink by 2003 (two years after the attacks), The privacy and obscurity of Arab and Muslims living in the United States became very fragile as the Department of Justice had confessed about its plans of spying and interviewing about 6,000 individuals of Arab origins. “This change in the attitudes toward and fears from Arab Americans would raise many questions about its effect on their cultural identity formation or expression.” (Semaan 27)

Louise Cainkar mentioned that there were orders from the Department of immigration to deport or track down immigrants of Middle Eastern origins. In addition, the US Congress was concerned about the issue of internal security. As the Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001 has started to be applicable, which restrict Visas of non-immigrant individuals of what is identified as “terrorist States” or its allies. (Cainkar 23)

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

The Government of George Bush engaged in some legislations and domestic reforms that were supposed to serve the security framework in order to prevent other terrorist threats in the future. One of these reforms is “*The Patriot Act*”, the core of the Patriot Act law is the legitimacy of intervention and investigating with all the individuals who are suspected or related to terrorism inside the US territories. Arabs and Muslims of the United States felt unsafe and being victims of Western accusations of terrorism.

In October 2001, The Zogby poll published its results concerning the issue of discriminating The Arabs and Muslims in the United States that was commissioned by the AAIF (Arab American Institute Foundation), The poll showed that the majority of 508 surveyed Americans (of Middle Eastern origins) were worried about the long-term policies of discrimination. While only a few of them had a personal background of discrimination (only 20 per cent).Almost half of the surveyed (45 per cent) knew individuals who had personals experience of discrimination in the post 9/11 because of their appearance (they look like an Arab) or Arab cultural background. While accordingly almost half of Arab Americans had reported discrimination acts against them since 9/11 attacks. (Zogby, John, and AAI)

The spirit of Patriotism that was raised along with the September 2001 attacks had turned the public view of the Americans against the Arab American citizens and created a cultural distinction between the two ethnic groups that were overwhelmed with an atmosphere of xenophobia and fear of the other. The 9/11 attacks did not radically shift the relationship between Arabs of America and the Americans but instead, it highlighted the existing notions and enriched them (whether the positive or negative notions).

The terror and the impacts of discrimination were vivid in the different aspects of Arab Americans lives due to the stereotypes and misrepresentation that came along with

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

the terrorist attacks. One aspect of discrimination that had been highlighted at the academic level is the discrimination of Arab-Americans on the context of education “There was some research with regard to young children and high school students, but none for university students studying at American colleges and universities” (Daraiseh 12). Arab and Muslim students had been remarkably influenced by the negative stereotyping of Americans towards them; bullying cases against American students of Middle Eastern origins had increased four times more, as the Americans view Arabs and Muslims as intruders who do not deserve to live among them. Hate crimes and racial harassment hunted Arabs and Muslims not only in educational institutions but also in workplaces, as the study commissioned by the Council on American-Islamic Relations showed an increase of 64 % in discrimination complaints and an increased violation in civil rights about a quarter of these reports happened at workplaces. (Rabby and Rodgers 280)

The 9/11 terrorist attacks did not only cause an atmosphere of public fear and Apprehension about other attacks in the near future among Americans. The terrorist attacks changed also the attitude of the public view in the United States towards Arabs in general and Muslims in particular, most of these fearful masses between Americans and Arabs is due to the stereotypes and misrepresentation that overwhelm Arabs and Muslim not only after the 9/11 but decades before the attacks.

1-2.2 the emergence of neo-Orientalism

The history of misrepresentation and stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims dates back centuries before the creation of diplomatic blocs or political regimes, the first encounter of “misrepresenting Islam started with the church’s reluctance to recognize the prophet of Islam as a true prophet sent by God” (Bounar 18). The church viewed Islam as a threat to the existence of Christianity, so it created tales about Islam like the fragility of the Holy

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

Quran and it's being a cheap corrupted version of the holy book. There is plenty of research that has examined the presentation of Arabs through American and Western media. Jack Shaheen wrote a piece of research concerning the attitude of the media in 1983. He presented how the American media pictures Arabs to children “through Cartoons, comics, school textbooks Etc.” Arabs were negatively stereotyped and dehumanized. (Semaan 17)

In his book titled *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said shed light on the view of Western imperial powers to the Orient “referring to the Islamic nations of the Middle East”, Said concluded the Western description of the Orient as a “disguised in empty rhetoric” (Bounar 33), mere illusion out of the European creation to justify their colonial campaigns. However, Orientalism tends to examine Orient or the East from objective, scientific occidental vision. The occident or the West misrepresented or misunderstood the East. The 9/11 attacks revived the orientalist's vision through the orientalist approach to justify the evil attacks of terrorists.

The American public opinion had seen the Arabs and Muslims as suspects of terrorism or associated with violent attacks, the war on terror came as a response to that charged situation of fear and suspicion. The United States and its allies launched a war against Afghanistan, the nest of terrorists and source of that evil attack. In addition, it has been promoted as a backward Afghanistan and unable to manage the internal situation. Media had played a crucial role in spreading and playing the role of creating stereotypes against Arab and Muslims, Media's continuous negative portrayal of Arab and Muslim Americans in news reaffirmed the stereotypes against Arab Americans especially in 9/11 era. Media tended to avoid mentioning the Muslims casualties that were killed in the 9/11 attacks. The number of Muslim casualties surpassed ten per cent of the total number of

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

casualties. The instance further indicated the biased media tactics against Arab Muslims in the US.

1-3 Contemporary Arab-American literature and the emergence of counter-narrative

The Arab-American literature is a contemporary trend of literature. Writings of Middle Eastern Americans are products of the past five or six decades only (Salaita “*Modern Arab American Fiction*” 3). The first product of the Arab American literature was the portrayal of their motherlands loaded with cultural and religious sentiments, and carrying hopes from their host land. In fact, the Arab American literature was considered as a cultural tie between the East and the West. In the “ Clash of civilization”, Arab American fiction depicts the boundaries between the binary East/West and the possibility of maintaining stable identity in-between the two worlds according to Lisa Majaj, this literary trend :

“reflects in part the shifting historical, social, and political contexts that have pushed Anglophone Arab writers to the foreground, creating both new spaces for their voices and new urgencies of expression, as well as the flourishing creativity of these writers” (Majaj 62)

The Subject of assimilation and the Americanization of Arabs and Muslims was a trending topic in the first publication of Arab American literature. As mentioned in the preceding sections, the first waves of Arab Americans were supportive to the political status of their motherlands, accordingly, the post-WWII Arab American literature overviewed the Palestinian cause and established a cultural bridge between America and native Palestinian in order to reconsider the political position of America towards the existence of Jews in Palestinian territories. At this stage, the emergence of the Mahjar literary group had helped the flourishing of Arab American literary trend, The Mahjar which means in Arabic “the new place where a person lives but maintains her difference”(Merdes 25) was mainly centred on migrants concerns themes like showing

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

fascination to the American lifestyle and rejecting materialism, as well as disclosing of the cultural disparity between East and West.

“the desperate need to escape the mundane materialism of the peddler lifestyle; . . . admiration for American vitality and hatred of American materialism; a desire for reform in the Arab world; acute concern about international politics and the political survival of the homeland; an obsessive interest in East/West relations; and a desire to play the role of cultural intermediary.” (Ludescher 97)

In fact, the Mahjar literary trend helped the Arab migrants to preserve their Eastern traditions and their lifestyles based on their experiences from the East. According to Maria Luiza, it was like the first school of Arab in America for the descendants of those migrant groups.

With the beginning of the twenty-one century, the Arab American literature changed orientation to highlight the challenging matter of non-whites racism and Islamophobia that was raised in the post 9/11 America. Arab American writers expressed their dissatisfaction toward the American foreign policy especially after the military intervention of Afghanistan and Iraq, while the “war on terror” created an odd interest in Arab and Muslims communities. Arab American communities suddenly shifted to visibility, the task of the Arab Anglophone literature was to challenge those of Western writers and reject the imagined picture of who Arabs and Muslims really are.

1-3.1 the Emergence of Arab-American counter-narrative trend.

The white American novelists were influenced by the racial prejudice and white supremacy which was fueled by the American foreign policies towards the Middle East, the white American fiction portrayed the experience of the 9/11 from the Western perspective which biased to the benefit of these racist voices by picturing Arab characters as exotic and savage. It was the role of Arab American writers to influence that literary trend of the white racists and subvert those negative stereotypes against their own people

Chapter One: The issue of Arab American ethnic identity and the impacts of 9/11 attacks.

and mainly re-introduce the Eastern culture and unveiling Islam from inside in order to ease the stress of Islamophobia at that time.

The pressure imposed upon the Arab or Muslim culture placed a burden on the Arab American writers to challenge the white narratives and refine a good image of Arabs and Muslims at the same time being supportive to their motherlands in the Middle East against these Western gazes. According to Edward Said these counter-narratives are “great deconstructive power” against the cultural clash of the West. The Arab American writers tried to highlight the difficulty of living between two worlds while struggling to maintain a lucid identity.

The Arab characters in Arab Anglophone fiction of post 9/11 live in confusion and uncertainty of their geographical space, at the same time stuck in between two cultural patterns, the Arab American writers find an outlet in literature, so their writings reflect the sense of disappointment and anxiety from the outside circumstances of their host land, as many writers, Arab American writers reflect “ binary opposition, pertaining to their experience of hybridity or identity conflict” (Kaid 64). They express the existential deadlock of making the balance between the two identities that reflect binary cultural models East and West.

One of the issues that were critical in the debate of Eastern cultural pattern is the liberation of Eastern women especially with the raise of the post-feminist trend that critically attacked the status of women in the Middle East. The role of Arab American writers is to disclose the status of women in the Middle East and reject the post-feminist notion.

Conclusion

The tragic attacks of 9/11 created an atmosphere of terror and anticipation among the Arab Americans especially after President Bush's declaration and his government that underlined the beginning of new era against terrorism. in other word, the 9/11 terrorist attacks directly influenced the Arab-Americans and the general attitude of Americans and the American government against them, this attitude did not only threaten the Arab individuals in America but also their culture and their affiliation as ethnic groups putting the case of Arabs and Muslims in the lenses of stereotyping and re-orientalism. According to CNN, hate crimes against Arabs in the United States had increased 16 times more in the period between (2001-2002) (CNN.com, 2002). The 9/11 attacks did not only shed lights on Arabs and Muslims of America but also exposed them to the risk of discrimination and race prejudice.

The racist practices of white Americans against Arabs and Muslims manifested in the white narrative's portrayal of Arab and Muslim characters, Arab-American counter-narrative trend had emerged to deconstruct this exotic image of Arab men and women. Arab American women writers exploited the situation in order to disclose the imaginary picture of Eastern submissive women as vulnerable gender. The next chapters will shed light on the preceding ideas through literary criticism of Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*.

Chapter Two

The American dream as a motif for identity destabilization in *Once in a Promised Land*

*“Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having
authority over the Orient”—E.W.Said*

2-1 Introduction:

“The idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter.” (Said 7)

With the emergence of the concept “terrorism” in the Middle East, which was mainly after the 911, Islam and Muslims have been directly associated to the concept, this misunderstanding in part of the Western world caused suspicion and anxiety of the Muslim minorities living in the West, especially in the United States, as a response Arab American literature tend to address the issue of Arab and Muslims diaspora and unveil the real identity of Arabs and Muslims that Western Media failed to present, the Arab-American literature has repeatedly addressed the lives of Arab Americans in the Aftermath of 911 events starting from Joseph Geha’s *Alone and All Together* (2002), Diana Abu Jaber’s *Crescent* (2003) to Hamid Mohsin’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land* (2007).

In her novel, Laila Halaby expresses the destruction of Arab American identity through the repercussions of their very silent lifestyle which empowers the feeling of isolation and social discrimination mainly after the 911 attacks. The novel penetrates through the lives of the Arab American couple and presents how the terrorist attacks affected their life and existence in America. Halaby investigates the psychological and sociological effects of social discrimination and institutionalized racism that was uncovered automatically as a response to both the terrorist attacks and the misunderstanding of Other (Arabs, Muslims and other minorities), these series of events caused the collapse of both protagonists’ world in American which was their dreamland at the first place. Halaby intends to draw a closeup view of two geographical sectors “here”

and “there”, where her protagonists’ assimilative strategies are aborted by the emergence of Orientalist attitude (of post 9/11 America).

Most of the interpretations of the post 9/11 Arab American literature is based on the works of Edward Said namely his book *Orientalism* (1978), “Most critics entering into a discussion of Arab American literature in a post 9/11 environment build off Edward Said’s seminal 1978 work, *Orientalism*” (Lloyd 6). as it depicts a distinct view of the Western cultural fallacies about the Orient, these fallacies, in fact, are imaginary imperial ideas and they overpower any attempt to understand the “Other”, Edward Said notes; “as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occident” are man-made” (Said 5), while Eastern cultures are always degraded and demonized in front of European ones. Migrants from East are considered as cultural hybrids. They have to adapt into their host land while preserving their native identical elements, Arab-Americans as a migrant community that is considered as the front line and the exposure of the Eastern culture. The relevance of “Orientalism” in Arab-American literary research is mainly due to the revival of these imperialist ideas about the Orient and the suppression of this community.

This chapter is dedicated to show how Halaby make use of the destruction of Arab characters’ American dream (propagated by the American imperialism) in order to denounce the racial discrimination of post 9/11 Orientalist attitude, her protagonists are very fragile towards the American consumerist citizenship, the latter erases the cultural belonging to their motherland. Benjamin Smith suggests in his article “Writing Amrika: Literary Encounters with America in Arabic Literature”, that Arab writers make use of the American dream to denounce hostility of American foreign policy for the interests of the Arab nation, the American dream reflects the American attitude toward an immigrant class, where the American dream becomes deceptive or a mirage, similarly, Halaby notes that her

protagonists are victims of both the American hostile policy and the deception of the propagated American dream that eventually becomes an illusion of broken promises as the hostility makes them seek to forget their presence in the dreamland and longing for their native countries.

“as American foreign policy took a hostile stance towards the interests of many Arab nations, the America of dreams and movies was often revealed in literature to be a “deceptive mirage” (sarāb khādi’).²¹ The American dream would often be cast as an American nightmare in the literary experience, inverting preconceptions in the process melding the imagination with lived realities.” (Smith 26)

In this counter-narrative, Halaby uses her protagonists to refute the stereotyped image of Arabs constructed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, at the same time she exploits the case of Arab discrimination in order to denounce the obsession to Materialism, her fiction is loaded with nostalgic sentiments and portrayal of traditions from the East, at this notion, Tanyss Ludescher notes that Arab American writers view themselves as “cultural middlemen straddling the great divide between East and West.” (Ludescher 97) , in Fact, Laila Halaby’s view of the American dream and materialism can be summed up in the description of the *Mahjar* writers as noted by Ludescher :

“. Among these themes are the desperate need to escape the mundane materialism of the peddler lifestyle [;] the desire to transcend sectarian religious conflict; admiration for American vitality and hatred of American materialism; a desire for reform in the Arab world; acute concern about international politics and the political survival of the homeland; an obsessive interest in East/West relation” (Ludescher 97)

The author mixes the Anti-Arab backlash of the post 9/11 and the lure of materialism to depict an image of Arab American characters who are totally lost and unable to control their life or make a balance between the host land culture and their native culture, eventually this confusion and the sense of un-belonging “leave them physically and spiritually broken and estranged from each other.” (Bhat 106). While both Tanyss Ludescher and Benjamin Smith highlights the cultural gap between Eastern and Western cultures, Carol Fadda-Corney on the other hands emphasizes on the experience of the Arab

American characters on Arab Anglophone fictions of post 9/11 environment where it is hard to construct a balanced identity in order to overcome the hostility of nationalism, as she notes that Arab American writers “turn to writing as a way to humanize Arab-American identities, pointing to their subtle individual nuances in the face of an overwhelming drive to define them in terms of the enemy” (62), Fadda-Corney uses some works of post 9/11 Arab writers (mainly poems) to show the traumatizing experience of Arab migrants in their host land where their “American dream” becomes accessible only to those who denounce their multiple national belongings and submit to the assimilative demands of a melting-pot America that suspects and battles against difference” (63).

On the light of the statements of both Ludescher and Smith, and based on the interpretations of Carol Fadda-Corney I will show how did Laila Halaby employ cultural evidence to introduce the “Other”, at the same time she uses her protagonists’ attachment to the American dream as a motif of their identity tear down along with the hostile atmosphere of post 9/11. Halaby uses the American dream as cultural evidence in order to emphasis the cultural diversity between East and the West and to denounce the American materialism, at the same time to unveil the xenophobic sentiments in the post “war on terror” America. The use of Cultural evidence such as “The American Dream” gives her protagonists vitality, while the cultural depth gives the case of identity destabilization a sort of credulity.

2-2 The American Consumerism as a Trope of Collapse

The theme of identity loss in Laila Halaby *Once in a Promised Land* can be viewed through two dimensions; mainly the suppression of American patriotism in the post 9/11 and the irresistible attraction of the American consumerism that is served in seductive propaganda. Halaby depicts the identity destabilization of her Arab protagonists by putting them in the trouble of disillusioned marriage and falling into the taboo of having

extramarital affairs with white Americans. The later event set an ending of what is supposed to be their embodiment of “*The American Dream*” which was the main reason for establishing this relationship.

The story is about an Arab-American couple who are trying to find themselves in the seductive consumerism of America especially after the 9/11 events which put them under a sort of social oppression. Jassim a native Jordanian whose with water “water is my first love” (243) lead him to study water harvesting to save that “priceless commodity, for future generations” (Bounar 111), hoping for a better life and new opportunities in America, Jassim refuses a job at the Ministry of Water Resources in Jordan to pursuit his PhD in the University of Arizona.

While the theme of water and water harvesting plays a critical role in the story, the author sets “water harvesting” as an allegory of success and at the same time a reflection to the fragility of the American dream, this paradox of success can be seen in Jassim's uncle Abu Jalal, the latter believed in the opportunities offered in Jordan although he was exposed to the loss of his wealth, eventually, Abu Jalal realizes his "*American dream*" in Jordan, Jassim, on the other hand, is driven by his fascination with both water and the American imperialism, this fascination leads him to experience exile in America and drop his actual self for an illusion of American promise. Eventually, Jassim loses both his "*American dream*" and himself (along with his obsession with water). Halaby highlights that Jassim's fascination with America blinds him from seeing Jordanian opportunist “nine years after he and Salwa had wed, he had no desire to return to Jordan. What would he do there? He couldn’t imagine living in that bureaucracy again, had become comfortable in this easy, predictable life.” (71)

Born in the United States and raised in Jordan, Salwa has Palestinian origins, she is connected to her birthplace, though her parents could not find a place there so they decided to return to Jordan. “Salwa herself was born in the US while her parents tried their hand, unsuccessfully, at achieving the American dream” (Bhat 106) As she had an odd passion to garments and silky pajamas, “*Made in USA. Miss America*” (47) grew a strong feeling of attachment towards America, this craving that unravels her threads thousands of miles in the United States back to Jordan “home” where the tip of the thread is tied tightly. Despite her parent’s failed attempt to maintain the ease of America and the luxury of the promised “American dream”, but eventually their attempt becomes an unpleasant experience, Salwa’s Father expresses the abomination of his American experience as he describes his life in America “We thought of staying there, but it was too hard[...]our life in America was miserable” (70), the Khalil family decided to save their souls and return to Jordan where they settle. Even though their American experience was not very pleasant, it engraved in Salwa a feeling of pride of her birth land, and in the same way an attraction to materialism, this feature was described by her father “That is why she uses so much water and has a taste for luxury. We tease her that she is really first world. A colonizer.” (70), Here Laila Halaby refers to the “consumer” culture as a colonizer (Ghouaiel 280), which appears that the Khalil family did not appreciate this feature in Salwa.

Through the narration, Halaby reveal her protagonist’s impulse to success that is covered under the veil of the American Dream, Jassim as a hydrologist had never thought of staying in the United States forever, Instead, he intended to focus all his efforts on studying Water Harvesting to help his country with the water shortage;

“From the first moment that Jassim set foot on American desert soil for his graduate education, he had been ready, willing, and able to return to Jordan upon completion of his studies, to implement all that he would learn. America’s ease and comfort was not so much greater than Jordan’s that he considered staying.” (62)

In a desperate attempt to adjust himself with the general situation, Jassim is fully aware of the seductiveness of the American dream “but America, once tasted, is hard to spit out” (64). During those long stretched years in America, Jassim grew a feeling of affiliation, or what he thought was assimilation to Americanism, an atmosphere of isolationism or “peace” that he could never find back home in Jordan. As he built in himself a model of success while excluding the risk of identity destabilization, Jassim took advantage of Salwa when he realized that Salwa’s American citizenship would enable them both to stay in the United States as long as he wishes. “At the very back of Jassim’s mind, in only the faintest lettering, was the idea that Salwa’s American citizenship would enable them both to stay. Forever, if he chose.” (70) . Salwa, on the other hand, attempts to create an imaginary picture of America to fit in and fill her endless fascination with anything that relates her with her dreamland (the United States), although she could not recall her existence in her birthplace, Salwa had been nourished the America that is served in the lust of propaganda. While she thought of America as fertile land for luxury and materialism “the America that pulled at her was not the America of her birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood, and the Marlboro man, and therefore impossible to find” (49).

Born and raised with Hassan, Salwa and Hassan grow a sort of emotional chemistry that tends to develop into “true love”. Eventually, with the emergence of Jassim in their path “She consequently jilts her boyfriend, Hassan and marries Jassim, “who promised her America” (Bhat 106). By marrying Jassim, Salwa crushes Hassan’s dreams, which is symbolic to the destructiveness of the hegemonic “American superiority” to the Orient, For Salwa, Hassan not only represents the beauty of Palestine but also her alternative path of success, jilting him for Jassim means rejecting the stability of the Arab way for the deception of the American dream and the lure of materialism.

We learn later as Salwa goes back in her memories through flashbacks that she had been attracted to Jassim's materialistic ease "In her description of him and his lecture, Salwa had omitted his obvious wealth" (250) although she did not consider him as handsome as her Palestinian ex-boyfriend Hassan "he was not her idea of handsome" (248) , instead from the very beginning , Salwa was attracted to Jassim's manifestation of luxury and his American background , in fact Salwa's description of Jassim reveals his attitude towards his US citizenship , the latter appears to be a committed to the US consumer citizenship in mean to present his cultural belonging to America , For Salwa , Jassim presents his American glamour through the consumer items "expensive-looking suit and shiny leather shoes" (249) and his "thousand-dollar watch" (250), Salwa's attraction to the consumer culture that characterizes Jassim , had lead her to exclude her boyfriend Hassan and classifies him among the strangers; despite the ethnic and emotional ties that bind them.

Meanwhile, Jassim is blinded by his fascination of the American ease "America was calling him daily, with her Anytime Minutes whispering stainless steel promises of a shiny lab and possibility" (62), Jassim marries Salwa because she reminds him of home "He loved Salwa because in her he saw home, which made her both more precious and a source of resentment." (325) but he fails to provide her with the safety of home, their marriage reflects their fascination with the American model, while they pursuit Americanization, they did not pay attention to the need of each other, gradually their relationship starts to unravel by the lack of communication and the inauthenticitythat overwhelm their way to the Americanization which eventually goes out of control. This marriage was built on fragile and pointless convenience that will become unable to recognize the meaning of a traditional family.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the couple feels the tension of their Arab background, while their privileged positions in the community couldn't help them to overflow the Racial discrimination of the American orientalism, therefore Jassim and Salwa's world and dream of America will collapse at once as their relationship will unravel falling in affairs with "*Native white*" Americans. The small lie that tore threads between the couple will gradually develop into a block of lies separating the couple apart.

Halaby notes that we come to know her protagonists right "on the morning of September 11, 2001, hours prior to the terrorist attacks" (Motyl 229), and Jassim and Salwa are married now living in Tucson, Arizona. For nine years both Salwa and Jassim had lived beneath sort of illusion that overwhelms their existence in the dreamland. The couple's life starts to peel the thick layer of sweetness and opium of the American dream right after the 9/11 attacks when a chain of lies is stuck as a blinding wall between the "beloved" couple and weakens their relationship. Beginning thus Salwa's pregnancy without telling her husband and leading to a series of events that mark the end of this relationship. The narrator argues that even though she had obtained luxury of American materialism Salwa cannot seek refuge in the country she had given up her family, her love and her identity for:

"In the safety of her car, hidden in the medical center's parking garage, she allowed the tears to come. Sat there for many minutes sobbing and moaning, wishing Jassim were next to her, wishing Jassim wanted this, and more than anything wishing that things between her and Jassim were as they used to be, not as they had become. The tears she released had been blocking tiny crevices that held bubbles of anger and resentment, packed tight so as not to surface, but now it all spilled out into her car. They had been married for nine years; what was wrong with her husband that he did not want to have children? That he had forced her to lie about this most important event?" (60)

The core of the problem for Salwa is the contradiction regarding her concept of happiness. At the beginning of the story, we learn that she is attached to silk pajamas,

because she wants to become one of the Disney princesses who do not raise children and spend their time wearing costumes and hanging out with the rich men “Women who wore these pajamas were rich, either in their own right or in someone else’s. Women who wore this kind of pajamas did not have the wide fingers and thickened wrists that raising children and cooking and cleaning every day produced” (47). In fact, she had chosen Jassim's life because he was the most appropriate man to provide her with the lifestyle she wished in the past, which has changed over time, the natural obligation of motherhood has won over her. Salwa eventually remembers her mother’s words which remind her of her real self “The answer clanged through her head with her mother’s voice: *The problem is clear: you need to have babies. Women are made to have children. A relationship is strengthened by having children, and a couple who does not have children is unnatural*” (100)

Jassim, on the other hand, believes that Salwa’s immersion in luxury and materialistic needs would satisfy her desires, at the beginning of the story we see Jassim hanging out with Salwa for their shopping routine, he consequently notices his wife’s obsession with Silky pajamas “You must have twenty pairs, Salwa. Two entire drawers of just pajama bottoms. Half a closet for the tops. Why do you need more than two or three?” (48). In fact, Jassim thinks that Salwa’s motherhood would prevent her from enjoying the American life she wishes, on the second swimming session for Jassim (during the story) and after the crash of the two towers, we learn that Jassim wants a daughter if he and Salwa agree on having a child “He squatted in the pool after his last lap, submerged to his neck, and thought that if he and Salwa were ever to have a daughter, perhaps they could name her Amal.” (46). Laila Halaby suggests that the couple’s American lifestyle enforces the miscommunication and alienation between them so that they could not find space to

discuss such fateful decisions that may lead to disruption of the relationship between spouses.

Both protagonists are engaged in the consumerist citizenship, a sign of cultural intent and class representation “Both are very career-oriented and their hard work is translated into a wealthy house, expensive cars and a luxurious lifestyle” (Dewulf 56). Although, Haddad's Family adopts a consumerist lifestyle, which features the American dream of wealth. They are way far from reaching their inner peace, The couple surround themselves with material luxury and consumer items believing that it brings happiness, but this routine of shopping and adopting materialism becomes exhausting, for Salwa, she becomes committed to the shopping routine of purchasing American branded underwear and pajamas to accomplish a missing spot in her life, we learn later that she gets a real estate license in order to occupy herself from feeling loneliness in her childless life “It was not I didn't take my birth control pill but instead a much more colourful For a few years now I've felt that I've been missing something in my life. That's why I got a real estate license. It wasn't enough, though” (10).

Laila Halaby through the novel demolishes the constructed image of Materialism and the celebrated satisfaction followed by obtaining luxury and consumerist items that might be the big achievement of the American dream “this is a couple of upwardly mobile over-achievers living the American Dream who are suddenly branded as outcasts and thus advisedly selected by Halaby to suffer a long and spectacular downfall.” (Banita 246). For nine years, both Salwa and Jassim had lived beneath a sort of illusion that overwhelms their existence in the United State. Ironically Randa, Salwa's Lebanese friend questions the celebrated happiness of maintaining luxury and surrounding the self with consumerist items, though Randa and her family are not as wealthy as the Haddad's but they are considerably satisfied with their life “Let's see. Am I happy? I am happy with my children;

they are healthy and good, thank God. I am happy to have the opportunity to be at home with them.” (283), through Randa’s voice, the author addresses the question of happiness of the consumerism life:

“Overall I am happy, but when it comes to some of the smaller details, the ones that don’t matter so much but are a large part of what makes life rich, then I am not. Happiness is a luxury; don’t you think?” (283)

In fact, the preceding statement reflects the writer’s position toward the question of adapting to the American culture, both Jassim and Salwa believe in the tendency of consumerism in order to present their cultural belonging as Americans, they become addicted to purchase and consume commodities to the extent that they become a subject of the consumerism without any religious belonging or political awareness, eventually they are caught vulnerable to the lure of the cultural imperialism and finally get jilted from America in the same way they jilt their native identities, unlike Randa and her family who stay safe during the 9/11 tragedy thanks to their adherence to Arabness.

Through flashbacks, Halaby clarifies that Jassim loses faith in God “Jassim didn’t argue, just turned these thoughts over and over for a few days. *I don’t believe in God, and I hope, he thought*” (46), while his wife Salwa is a non-practising Muslim, this description is illusive to their fondness and attachment to the Western lifestyle, this may convey their readiness to embrace the deceptive American promise of Stability, the Jordanian couple was dragged into the American territories with a charge of disappointment from the situation back home, but instead of the promised ease and the lost dreams, America serves them with more pain and feeling of displacement. Intentionally, Laila Halaby portrays her characters detached from any transnational connectivity (neither political nor cultural connections with their homelands) to convey that none of them is aware of this cultural imperialism which may lead them both to the collapse, unlike their wishes of assimilation Jassim and Salwa are featured as American citizens, both seemingly whites, but they are

not white enough to go beyond the racial discrimination of America's white profiling (Jniyene 53). Therefore, they both adjusted in material success in the American standards, their material conditions and social position seem unsupportive for their case after the 9/11 profiling.

Thence, I argue that both protagonists are products of the propagated "consumer" culture as mean of "modernization" at the cost of their "Eastern" values, this consumer culture is an outcome of the American imperialism, while the Arabs' cultural dependency to America is what Edward Said describes the effects of Western markets on the Orient, like "Capitalism" in attempt to "modernize" the East, For Said, these plans accomplish the neocolonial agenda which serves political purposes, the American's interest in the orient carries beneath it a continuation of European Orientalist ideology "the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing." (Said 320-325), and the destabilization of their identity occurs firstly when they have embraced their consumer citizenship "What Jassim didn't know and what Salwa hadn't fully realized yet was that in breathing her first breath on American soil, she had been cursed" (Halaby 49)

2-3 The Deconstruction of the American Dream

For nine years, the couple couldn't recall what was wrong in his way of assimilation and conforming their American dream, as the problems start to stress out the boundaries of their relationship after the 9/11 attacks. Salwa starts to question her path of success. The gap she feels in her life must be filled with a child in her life, while her husband Jassim was avoiding the matter of having a child in their life. Eventually, she stopped taking pills of pregnancy control and induced a pregnancy without telling her husband. But a few weeks later she miscarries it. Salwa feels that she is alienated from the country she had struggled to reach. She felt that she does not belong to Jassim's way of life. The

miscarriage experience worsens the atmosphere between the couple along with the social stress as the author notes :

“Emptiness is a dangerous substance, allows its possessor to believe in taking rash measures, as a way to fill up the tank cheaply... Salwa desperately wanted to fill it, but having nothing to barter with, no weapons and no maps with which to find a well, she was left with nothing more than her own flimsy silk-pajama fantasies of *potential*. (203)

Triggered by the 9/11 backlash, Salwa becomes very anxious and fearful to the emptiness that is created by her immersion in the loop of materialism due to the exhausting routine of her consumerist citizenship in America, her Materialist success couldn't accomplish her conceived happiness, Salwa's disturbance is also fueled by hegemonic supremacy of the American patriotism which repressed her native identity considering that it becomes a national threat. Salwa is caught assaulted by “the patriotic breathing of those around them” (185).

Halaby sets the American materialism in contrast to the couple's happiness and satisfaction, for Salwa, the childless marriage means the deconstruction of her “American dream”, after the miscarriage experience, Salwa realizes that her dreams are neither with Jassim nor in America, eventually, she blames her husband because she believes he brought her to this sorrow at the first place; “They had been married for nine years; what was wrong with her husband that he did not want to have children? That he had forced her to lie about this most important event?” (60)

After the miscarriage incident and after she struggles with the physical pain and the pain of losing her child due to her husband's indifference, Salwa shows her unwillingness to live the life of Jassim and the American life that seduced her with the deceptive glamour of materialism. “More than one week had heaved itself by since blood and baby had escaped from her negligent grasp. More than one week and sadness ate her from the inside out, a ghula munching and gnawing around an achy skeleton” (99). In other incidents,

Salwa feels that she is haunted by people around her just because she is an Arab for instance when she turns on the radio in the safety of her car, she feels threatened by the racist speech of the radio presenter; “Is anyone fed up yet? Is anyone sick of nothing being done about all those Arab terrorists? In the name of Jesus Christ! They live with us. Among us! Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us. They just want . . .”, a further example is verbal abuse of the Tucsonan client at the bank she works for, the old woman believes that Salwa threatens the safety of the bank; “Does it mean you will steal my money and blow up my world?” (113).

Salwa gets attracted to an American college boy, Jake, who expresses his admiration for Arab culture and the exoticism of Arab women. Gradually, Jake attracts Salwa's admiration as he exploits her weakness in these circumstances and lures her into a sexual relationship. Upon Salwa's decision to return to Jordan, Jake insults Salwa “Bitch! Goddamn fucking Arab bitch! You ruined everything!” (322) and turns into an extremist patriotic American, who sees Jordan and the Arab countries as a “pigsty”; “So you're running back to the pigsty?” (320). Jake attacks Salwa and leaves her in a bloodbath “as she felt her blood being pumped out of her body, spilling into the grass.” (323). The American Dream not only broke Salwa's heart, but it also left her physically shattered, semi-conscious in an American hospital

Jassim on his part feels the tension of his native identity, as he hits an American boy by accident on the day he knew about his wife's miscarriage, while he prefers to hide the accident from his wife, he feels more alienated from her, Jassim becomes a subject of racial incitement by some patriotic co-workers due to his physical appearance, This matter seems absorbed by Salwa, the latter is struck by the arbitrary federal investigations, which are chasing her husband only because he is Arab “It's crazy—they're not looking at who

you are as a person, at all the great work you've done. They're looking at the fact that you're an Arab." (301).

After the accident, Jassim finds a safe company with Penny a forty-year-old waitress, Jassim does not know that the waitress is also showing intolerance against Arabs "she felt an unspeakable pride. If she had had money, she would have sent it to him; if she had been younger, she would have enlisted, showed all those terrorists what Americans were made of" (280), in fact, Penny excludes Jassim from the terrorist labelling just because of his wealth "He's from Jordan, but he's so different from those people. That's why he's here "(81).

A few days later, Jassim loses his job, after the FBI annoys his boss at work, Marcus, due to Jassim's Arab backgrounds and after several complaints from clients considering Jassim threatens the national security of water in the region "you were a rich Arab with access to the city's water supply" (271). Jassim expresses his disappointment to Penny "Our firm has lost three big contracts. It seems because of me. Though not really my work, because I am doing the same job I have always done, but because I am an Arab, though of course, they say that has nothing to do with it. I am losing everything I've worked for in my life" (312). Gradually, he gets disconnected from his daily routine and loses the passion of his American dream when he becomes more skeptical about the liberal norms of his "beloved America" (165).

The writer sets the Orientalist view of American patriotic characters to Arabs and the Middle East as illusive imagery to distinguish between what is American and Anti-American, in this portrayal Arabs are categorized with the hijackers (Anti-Americans), the story is loaded with signs of Orientalist impacts on the American public view, from the beginning of the story, Laila Halaby highlights the fact that "the World Trade Center

buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs” (VIII), a further example is when Jack Franks describes his daughter he mentions that “ She converted. She’s an Arab now” (6) excluding her Americanism, in most part of the story, American characters attach the Arabs with terrorism, in conversation between Penny and her roommate Trini, Penny describes Arabs as Oussamas (all Arabs are similar to Oussama Bin Laden) as she says “Sometimes I don’t understand why we don’t just bomb those places. You know, blow up Osama and all his buddies and be done with it.” (281) , Her roommate Trini on the other hands seems to have a stereotyped image of Arabs which is restricted to Oil Sheikhs and polygamy “Men over there can marry four women at once, make them wear those sheets over their whole bodies” (281) , this Orientalist view floats in all parts of the novel to distinct between American “Superiority” and Arab “barbarism” , although her protagonists troubles is not linked directly to this orientalist flaw , it’s the repercussion of their Arab backgrounds that make them trembled and unstable during this epidemic .

The final scenes of the Story reveal the protagonists’ impression towards the so-called American dream, both Jassim and Salwa awaken on the reality of that the American promise, the American air is consuming them, and After the 9/11 it requires them to throw away any signs of their Arabic backgrounds “it was the patriotic breathing of those around them. American flags waving, pale hands willing them to go home or agree” (184-185), this claim matches what Fadda-Corney describes as “denounce their multiple national belongings and submit to the assimilative demands of a melting-pot America” (Fadda-Corney 63). For the first time, Jassim feels that the American life he was accomplishing for nine years is now rejecting him just because of his cultural backgrounds “And for the first time he felt unsettled in his beloved America, vaguely longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arabs” (165), Salwa on the other hands

realizes that her American promise is stuck on the fact that she is an Arab! “Salwa knew in the marrow of her bones that wishes don’t come true for Arabs in America” (184).

At the very end of the story the author shifts to exemplify the disillusioned “*American dream*” on other ethnicities to draw a general impression on the American promise of wealth when Salwa spots three garden workers, whom she presumes have crossed thousands of miles to “trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the American Dream” (316). At a moment of disappointment, Salwa awakens on the fragility of the American dream, the American consumerism which consumes her, while her parents had given up on her for an illusion that they themselves could never maintain.

“It’s all a lie!” she wanted to shout. “A huge lie.” A lie her parents believed in enough that they had paved her future with the hope of glass slippers and fancy balls, not understanding that her beginning was not humble enough, nor was her heart pure enough, for her to be the princess in any of these stories” (317)

Both Jassim and Salwa feel the burden of their toxic relationship that is supposed to be made of their wishes, in contrast, the lack of communication and the consumerist lifestyle enforced the feeling of isolation and displacement between them. While they believed in “consumer citizenship based on the promise of wealth and prosperity.” (Ghouaiel 283), the Jordanian couple disavowed their original identities for the sake of the American dream, whereas the Americanization process of the couple stands as deadlock to their stability and inner satisfaction. After the 9/11, with the series of the tragic incidents, the couple realizes that their dreams cannot be fulfilled in America, and their lives as a couple are not compatible to achieve their desired dreams, it is only after their extramarital experiences that they awaken on the reality that the American dream is a mere illusion and through the experience of their American partners (Jake and Penny) they become aware that “the promise of a happy ending seems equally unattainable.” (Vinson)

“Through vivid representations, such as the scene set in a Wal-Mart store, Halaby deftly juxtaposes the nuanced differences between Arab and American perspectives while illustrating their common vulnerabilities to the deceptive allure of consumerist economies.” (Ibid)

In her article “The Forgotten Victims of 9/11: Cultural Othering in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” Elena Ortells Montón borrows Fadda-Corney’s concept of “transnational diasporic subject” and applies it to Halaby’s protagonists to show their failed attempt of “Cultural belonging” to fit both Jordanian and American models, Elena Montón notes that Halaby’s protagonists’ fascination with the American dream leads them to transitional shift from traditions (embodied in Jordanian cultural intents) into modernity (American consumer citizenship), eventually the Haddad's awake on the reality behind “ *the American dream*” mirage which is embodied in the Ghula of the final section “The novel concludes on a pessimistic note since the transnational connectivity that initially had resulted in a move from tradition to modernity resolves into a tragic return to customary conventions” (Montón 24)

The author shows that her protagonists' troubles are triggered by the 9/11 anti-Arab backlash when the couple feel the tension of their Arab identity though they tried to bury it for nine years of their stay in America, they are not identified as Americans but categorized as “*Enemies*” or barbaric Easterner an annoying mark stamped in their physical appearance, the Haddad’s try to cover their Eastern badge by their attachment to Western culture and the embrace of the American dream, believing in the superiority of the Western culture over their native one, the Haddad family had maintained what can be described as a cultural shift from tradition to modernity, but eventually, they are caught de-cultured. Fadda-Corney notes that the Haddad’s immersion in their Materialistic side of their American dream rises the political naivety of the couple towards the case of Arabs in America or elsewhere “the Haddad's' immersion in the consumerist comfort of upper-

middle-class American life overpowers any lingering transnational political engagement linking them to the Jordan they have left behind” (Fadda-Corney 542)

By denouncing cultural reference such as “the American dream”, Halaby shifts from the classical style of rejecting the stereotyped image of East, instead, she makes use of this negative images in order to employ them as proof to the fragility of the Western claims, by the collapse of her protagonist’s American dream, Halaby questions the credibility of the Western plans in the East as a whole , in an article entitled “Uses and Abuses of Trauma in Post-9/11 Fiction an Contemporary Culture”, Ulrike Tancke claims that the trauma of identity loss for Halaby’s protagonists has little to do with the direct effects of post 9/11 attitude, instead, it’s the protagonist’s exaggerated fascination with a different culture that initiated the destabilization; “It is not the repercussions from 9/11 as such that causes Salwa and Jassim’s life to disintegrate. The traumatizing events in the novel are the result of coincidence and only vaguely connected events” (qtd in Lloyd 12)

2-4 Conclusion

By the destruction of the American Dream, Laila Halaby disarticulate the imagined ease and happiness that Arabs and Muslims seek in exile, in the same way, she denounces the mistreatment of all the voiceless migrants in exile, Jassim and Salwa are an example of the Arab migrant model who drops all their faith and hope of the motherland to stick on an illusion of people “making it” in the exile, but at the end, the Arab couple finds themselves live in between, so they cannot stay in unwelcoming land but at the same time they never think of rolling back and drop everything again in order to return to their motherlands.

The author depicts the social high position and the material success to illuminate the exclusion of social stratification, both Jassim and Salwa are considered in a privileged social position however they could not undergo the racial prejudice of the 9/11, in this

context, the Haddad's family were lured by seductive materialism of the United States at the cost of their cultural belonging and religious values, but with the wake of the 9/11, they were excluded from America after they lost stable identity. At the clash of cultures, Halaby seems conservative to the Middle Eastern cultural background which was triggered especially after the emergence of "war on terror" trend, Laila prevails the vulnerability of her protagonists right after their rejection to the model of Arab in exile.

Thus, the Arab identity of both protagonists had been abused twice since they have chosen to drop their lands first and identities later for an alleged promise of prosperity and happiness by neocolonial agenda " The American imperialism", then this illusion demanded them to detach themselves from any national traces or political orientation, Halaby highlights the fragility of Arab migrants to these imperialist regimes. since the destabilization process occurs through two stages (diasporic and pre-diasporic)

Chapter Three
The Construction of Arab American Identity in
Once in a Promised Land

Introduction

“Because exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives”. (*Reflection on Exile and Other Essays* 177)

“In the demonization of an unknown enemy, for whom the label “terrorist” serves the general purpose of keeping people stirred up and angry, media images command too much attention and can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-9/11 period has produced” (2003 XXVI)

Edward Said

Laila Halaby's *Once in a promised Land* is considered as one of the most influencing works in the post 9/11 literature that it cannot be overlooked, as an Arab-American Halaby argues the issues of identity trauma that was brought along with the 911 attacks, on her part the author uses the change of attitude towards Arabs of the United States to criticize the process of Americanization of other ethnic minorities in the United States.

As mentioned in the prior chapter, Halaby sets her protagonists in the trauma of unravelling a love story which is mainly built on the successful American love stories, for nine years both protagonists could not notice how did their integration to American style strip out their identities, but with the post 9/11 changes of intension and attitudes, they realized that the racial boundaries and prejudice were never ignored in front of the white supremacy and American featured whiteness which does not fit to contain everyone, through the narration, the author demolishes the belief of assimilation to the Americanism (or what can be described as becoming white), and while doing so, Halaby highlights the distinction between the designed boundaries between the West and the East, then she suggests a revision to these preconceptions which tend to ruin the lives of her protagonists.

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

Through the portrayal of Arab American characters, Laila Halaby assumes that the humanitarian voices of the American policymakers are just cover for its racist foreign policy especially towards the Middle East, her Protagonists' failure to find justice and the promised equal life in their host land they voluntarily migrated to, they wanted to merge into the American society, but the change of attitude after 911 against Arabs and Muslims exposed them to obscurity and visibility more than other minority ethnic groups. Through the novel, Laila Halaby shows the paradox of the American dream which lures her protagonists through the propaganda of equality and opportunities offered in the United States regardless people's race, colour or their cultural background, and then turns to be a nightmare which chases them and ask them to drop their identities in fulfilment of political agenda. Halaby's work stands against the orientalist voices which found the 9/11 attacks a subterfuge to prompt and revive the imperialist portrayal of the orient.

The cultural identity of migrants is not a standard for the national belonging, yet nation-state sets a cultural paradigm to mandate the inclusion and exclusion of individuals to the national citizenship demands (as mentioned by Ong Aihwa), in this context "literature produced by so-called minority groups in the US instigates research on their positions against a nation that welcomes them as immigrants and imposes their national belonging" (Sousa 68). In this work, Halaby adopts a counter-narrative strategy by highlighting the life of Arab immigrant and unveiling their life from the inside to show their culture at the time when the host land spots them as enemies of the nationalism, eventually, the Arab migrants feel alienation and isolation, Halaby focuses on the exhausted state of Arab migrants in America after the 9/11 and the misrepresentation of Islam and Arab culture " as Halaby raises awareness about the necessity to transcend a binary east/west frame of reference to avoid animosity and division." (Janiene 49). In fact, the representation of Arab American can be described in what Steven Salaita describes as "

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

Arab Americans suddenly were visible, and because of the pernicious intentions of various law and intelligence agencies, that visibility was not necessarily embraced” (Salaita 149). The visibility of Arab American communities is an outcome of the continuous stereotyping of Islam and relating it to terrorism, in the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition to his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said notes in the preface that the demonization of Arabs in post 9/11 attacks serves political agendas of unnamed parties, as he notes :

“Today, bookstores in the United States are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat, and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them” (Said 16)

As resistance strategy, Halaby sets her protagonists in an Economic success to conform the American consumerist style, both protagonists were able to maintain cultural hybridity, however, after the 9/11 attitude, neither Jassim nor Salwa could profit from their social privileged position in order to avoid the social discrimination and racism that was legitimized by nationalism. “Their Arab American identity becomes all the more tenuous as their interactions with Americans become progressively more strained.” (Lloyd 7)

3-2 the Hybridity and Cultural aAnxiety

In an article entitled “From Nostalgia to Critique: An Overview of Arab American Literature”, Tanyss Ludescher notes that the emergence of Arab-Anglophone literature had come as a response to Orientalist Western narrative, he argues that Arab-American fiction as a separated trend in literature gains attention because it enriches “ the search for voices outside the traditional canon of Anglo-American male literature” and covers “ Recent events in the Arab world combined to raise the political consciousness and solidarity of the Arab American community” while Arab American writers initiated their works to address the issue of the Arab American community as “immigrant community” from inside, in paradox to the 9/11 events which spot them as ethnic group separated from the American

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

community. Through the portrayal of Arab-American characters in some Arab Anglophone fiction, Ludescher highlights migrant's experience in maintaining a stable combination of cultural hybridity where their world is divided between two cultural models, and they have to adapt "the vagaries of living with a hyphenated identity" (104), especially with the raise of anti-Arab backlash "writers, dedicated themselves to putting a human face on the Arab American immigrant population. Paradoxically, the events of 9/11 increased the public's interest in this heretofore ignored community." (106).

Similarly, Maha El Said, in her article "The Face of the Enemy: Arab-American Writing Post-9/11," notes that "Arab-Americans, who are a *mélange* of Arab and American, become trapped in an attempt to redefine their identity, and reconstruct a hybridity that seems impossible in a world that is divided into 'we' and 'them'" (qtd in Lloyd). Those interpretations can describe Halaby's protagonists; the Haddad's family enthusiastically enjoy an American lifestyle that covers their Arabic backgrounds, however after the nationalism flaw, they start to feel the tension of their native identities. When they struggle to prove their loyalty to this "*racist patriotism*". Though their physical appearance betrays them.

Based on the interpretation of both Ludescher and El Said, I will present the complexity of Arab-American hyphenated identity due to the imagined disparity between "us" and "them" which is mainly created by the Orientalist binaries, both Jassim and Salwa's confusion and destabilization is the outcome of their Cultural anxiety, by using the concept "*citizenship*" I will be referring to Fadda-Corney's conceptualization of the term (both legal and cultural)

Once in Promised Land addresses the trauma of identity loss disorder for the Arab-Americans since they construct a hybrid identity, Laila Halaby delineates the vagaries of

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

their hyphenated identity which comprises a cultural mixture of American “us” and Arab “them” , her protagonists have to balance between their native and adopted identity in order to stay invisible and attain stability especially when confronted to a very anxious circumstances (the 9/11 attacks) , the author suggests that the attacks revived the orientalist discourse in America which is delivered by media and political influencers , eventually the Arab featured identity suddenly becomes tenuous and blurred by the US national demands ; while her protagonists have to create an acceptable model in order to conform their environment and fulfill the demands of their US citizenship , but their plans of integration was aborted by the national tragedy of 9/11 , this tragedy stands against the couple wishes of assimilation leading them to create an unstable model and unsettled attitude towards their hybrid identity , eventually they experience alienation and un-belonging to both designed boundaries .

The novel opens with a depiction of an airport corridor where the narrator guides what is supposed to be “the reader”, the guide soon shifts to give clues about the story which becomes an imaginary trip into the life of the protagonists rather than just a story of undefined figures, the narrator then asks the readers to eject all the misconceptions that might become heavy and disturbing while considering her “trip”: “*Has your luggage been out of your possession at any time? Do you see the tiny box I have placed in front of you? Please remove your shoes and place them in a gray bin*” (viii), here the heavy luggage is a reference to the rooted Orientalist conceptualizations of the Orient and Arabs in particular “This box awaits terrorists, veils, oil, and camels. There’s room for all of your billionaires, bombers, and belly-dancers.” (vii), the narrator then reminds the reader that the World Trade Centers were flattened by Arabs and Muslims (the argument that supports the Orientalist ideology), but soon states that our protagonists have nothing to do with the

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

attack “Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center.” (viii).

Through the past nine years living in America, the couple could maintain their US citizenship, they obtained a consumerist lifestyle and positioned in a privileged position, in fact, the couple believes that the American lifestyle is an essential condition of success, so they are caught in the major scenes of the story presenting an American identity over their Arabic one “Her doctor came into the room, and Salwa applied her Made in America face for the rest of the visit” (60). Through their daily routine, the narrator shows that the couple is fully converted into an American traditional family, where both wife and husband have more private space and a private life with the freedom of consumerist style practice (each one of them have a private car, Salwa vacates two job positions which is an American habit “shift man”) their lifestyle is pretty different from the life back in their homelands.

The writer suggests that her protagonists are exposed to cultural anxiety while trying to maintain their US citizenship, this anxiety is mainly resulted by the imagined boundaries of the Orientalist binary logic “barbarism” versus “civility”, the couple’s cultural anxiety manifest through their ambivalent attitude to both American and Arabic culture, both Jassim and Salwa created a false concept of assimilation leading them to abandon not only their cultural belonging as Arab-Americans but also their political awareness as an Arab community in exile, this ambivalence is portrayed through their daily practices and cultural manifestation like language, food and religion.

In an article entitled “Language and The Shaping of The Arab-American Identity” Dalal S. Almubayei argues that the ethnic mother tongue of migrants minority (which is Arabic in case of Arab-Americans) manifests or vanishes depending on its presence in the

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

tongue of the speakers, for Dalal, language is not only a tool of communication but significant to the root identity of the ethnic group :

“The destiny of an ethnic mother tongue is challenged by the way its speakers perceive it whether they find it uniquely significant to function within certain settings or replaceable by another language in all circumstances. Losing the native ethnic language is a common phenomenon among many minority groups, but it does not necessarily mean losing ethnic identity and pride.” (Almubayei 92-93)

Language in the story has a critical role in the life of the protagonists, at the same time it carries along with it the “cultural leap” of the Arab-American characters, for them, language is not only a tool of communication but also a symbol of cultural affiliation, the switch between the two languages is significant to the psychological state of the characters.

For instance, whilst both the couple master the Arabic language, they occasionally use it, they use English to communicate even in their very private conversations “Jassim reminded her in English. “*Once upon a time, you thought they were just ignorant and you said they couldn't be blamed for that.*” (32), or when Hassan (Salwa's Jordanian ex-boyfriend) called her for the first time after those long nine years, he barely could sniff the Arabic language from Salwa's accent “*Hello. Salwa Haddad speaking.*” No trace of an Arabic accent in her English (or so it sounded to Hassan). No trace of the Palestinian city where her family originated.” (83), by holding Jassim's family name instead of her Palestinian one “let us not to forget that her family name is a reference to a Palestinian city (El Khalil)”, and the usage of English instead of Arabic, Hassan reads Salwa's urge to disavow her Arabic side for “the glossiness of the Western world” (15). But, through the story, and mainly after the 9/11 attacks, both protagonists show a conflicted attitude toward the two languages, for them language becomes significant to identity, so when they express a nostalgic reaction for home they use Arabic, and while they deal with their daily trouble which becomes an “American problem” they use English, for instance when Salwa feels

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

regret after her first kiss with Jake, she promises herself to think of it in English only (Altwaiji 219), here the author shows that Language is not only a produced sounds or letters but a frame of mind: “Salwa demanded of herself in English, this being an American problem, an American situation. She promised herself to think about it only in English” (175).

Jassim shows an odd attitude towards his consumer citizenship, while he is committed to his consumerism lifestyle (like his very expensive Mercedes and his obsession to watches and Speedos), he criticizes other aspects of American consumerism (like their usage of water) or their fascination to superficial (like giant towels which he believes “the giant towels that Americans loved. “They are as large as bedcovers,” (5), Salwa also shows an ambivalent reaction to the American lifestyle While she believes in the fulfilment of her materialistic satisfaction in a way to attain happiness “Salwa still searched and tripped and bought smaller and sexier pajamas in the hope that she would one day wake up in that Promised Land.” (49) , she perceives her host land as deceptive propaganda to enforce alienation and isolation “she was beginning to think it was simply the culture of America to show everything but to remain an island” (54). The couple's confusion is also revealed in their position to religion, in some cases, Salwa prays for god in her sensitive moment, for instance, during her miscarriage “Oh God, please let me make it to the bathroom. She ran behind the banks of tellers, customers and coworkers glancing her way. Into the bathroom, into the stall. Thank God” (59), but at the same time, she appears as a non-practising Muslim.

In further narration we learn that the life of the Arab couple is more secular than religious, the couple’s detachment from any religious practice is empowered by their attachment to the American lifestyle, the husband Jassim builds for himself a morning routine of physical relaxations and meditation to compensate the spiritual emptiness of his

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

secular life, Although, Jassim seems to lose faith in God “Jassim didn’t argue, just turned these thoughts over and over for a few days. *I don’t believe in God, and I hope, he thought.*” (46). He appears to be praying to God when confronted with his “American Problems”. For example, when he hits Evan, he desperately prays that it turns to be a nightmare “Deep breaths, swimming breaths. Force calm, calm, calm. *Let none of this be happening. Dear God, let this be a nightmare.*” (119) Jassim’s concept of hope seems paradoxical, while he pretends to find hope without God, he desperately praises God for hope. The narrator shows that the couple had lost the religious language that is integrated with their mother language in their way of assimilation and adopting the American style of communication, Unlike people of Jordan who frequently use religious expressions to reveal their religious affiliation (Merdes 49), Halaby notes this when she first Portrays the life in the Slum where Salwa’s family live:

“In the bright late Amman afternoon came the slap, slap, slap of imported shoes running up just-washed stairs two at a time. *“Hi, Um Siham. How are you doing today?” .“Thank God, I am well, Hassan. How are you? God willing, your family is well.” .“Thank God, we are all well. My mother says hello.” Greetings from down the alley where he had lived with his family for so many years.*” (11)

The preceding scene brings to mind the openness and the xenophilia on its finest forms, in Amman or in other Arab communities, people of one society tend to live as one unite without any cultural or social stratus, Unlike the life of the protagonist in a xenophobic society, where Americans discriminate Arabs and other ethnic minorities just because of their physical features “somebody could report him, have them both deported because his eyebrows were too thick, his accent was not welcome” (58), or for their cultural or religious affiliation, In contrast, the American society encourages individualism and isolationism, this feature is appreciated and supported by Haddad’s family, through the past nine years the couple did not try to evolve in interactions with other people, the family had only a few friends, as Jassim did not appreciate the social constraints :

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

“People rarely tried to have conversations at this time of day, and certainly not people who ran into each other for the first time. That was something Jassim admired about Americans, something he had done his best to absorb for himself: they didn’t allow social constraints to get in the way of the day’s plan.” (8)

In fact, this isolation and lack of communication with others and between them at home that fueled the sense of displacement and anxiety after the 9/11, this feeling scratched into their lives beginning with the small lie about taking pregnancy pills to have extramarital affairs with white Americans in order to fulfil the integration sense especially after the repression applied upon them aftermath the attacks causing a fatal break down of their Arabic identity. the gap that led to the dissolution of their relationship is mainly resulted by this ambivalence or inability to balance between their featured identities, while Salwa chooses her American model in order to obtain success (including her consumer citizenship and her secular life), she grows a craving to have a child since her mother advises her that Arab women pursuit success in their relationships through children “The answer clanged through her head with her mother’s voice: *The problem is clear: you need to have babies. Women are made to have children. A relationship is strengthened by having children, and a couple who does not have children is unnatural*” (100), Jassim on the other hands believes that the traditional model of Arab women is abusive to their freedom:

“ He had made it seem that he was opposed to having children, but in fact he was opposed to women having children simply because they got married. Over time, perhaps he had hardened this stance. Had gotten used to their lives together, to her loving him exclusively. Perhaps he needed to come clean, tell her that he just wanted her to have all the opportunity she wished for so that she would not look back on her life with regret.” (110)

Through the profile of her protagonists, Halaby shows that her protagonists perceive American culture as a cover to their “*Barbaric self*” whereas materialism is a fulfilment to their “*backwardness*”, For instance, Salwa bought a set of giant towels “that Americans loved.” (5), and through the nine years of her American residence, Salwa grows a habit of

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

shopping and odd attraction to fancy garments in order to maintain a cultural match with the other Americans. Jassim, on the other hand, presents his Americanized self through materialistic American habits like wearing Speedos, Halaby notes that through Diane's description of Jassim "Jack, let me tell you, that's absurd. Jassim is a swimmer, not some religious freak. He wears a Speedo! He's been swimming here for years." (173)

Halaby relates the cultural hybridity of her protagonists (or what they see as their American citizenship) to the manifestation of Materialism in their life, in a further narration, Randa, Salwa's Lebanese friend links the lure of materialism to the loss of identity in America "No. I keep what is important and the rest is just . . . what do they say in English? *Topical?*" "*Superficial.*" "Yes, *superficial.*" (283), the same thing can be noticed in the use of English language over Arabic, in the description of Jake as an adulterer, Randa uses an American expression in order to smoothen the atmosphere "*Friends is okay,*" Randa said in English, and then switched back to Arabic. "Lovers is another story. God keep catastrophes far from you."(284) , in fact, in many occasions, Halaby notes that her protagonists are aware of this layer that overwhelm their realities :

"The morning she turned the corner, her thoughts edged on the idea that her life was just fine and it was time to move on, to accept how things were with Jassim and stop trying to force everything to fit into an American tale" (159)

Although, both Jassim and Salwa seem to cut all the ties to their motherland identity, and people of their own, except for casual phone calls with the family at home, they both cannot eject themselves from their origins, at their very sensitive moments the protagonist feel nostalgia to their past lives at home, and attachment their motherland and Arabic identity which is buried beneath the wreck of their Americanism. For example; on the next day of the attacks Jassim tried to look for balance while swimming (doing his morning routine) by fetching through his memories, looking for peace that he lost at home back in Jordan :

“Jassim slid into the water at the end of lane #2, the tension of the past two weeks detaching itself in clumps, the wreckage of four planes cluttering the space around him [...] As he swam steadily, Jassim’s thoughts tiptoed away from this picture and down a dusty path leading to his youth, to an early summer afternoon spent with his uncle Abu Jalal” (39)

Inside the mess of his thoughts and the traumatic scenes of the plane crashes, Jassim recalls the taste of roasted meat and garlic, the dish that he used to plead himself within festival back home, “a lamb that had been roasted with garlic in the outdoor stove. For years to come Jassim could taste it, the garlic having left a pleasant taste in his mouth and, later, in his years of being away, a taste of home” (39), Salwa, on the other hand, grows an intense urge for the Fennel candy “a container of candy-coated fennel, for which Salwa had suddenly developed a craving” (252), the latter enriches Salwa’s feeling of nostalgia for home. While the presence of food is a reference to cultural identity “food is an important marker of identity for Jassim and Salwa and is strongly connected to memories of the homeland” (Dewulf 53), the narrator depicts that the protagonists’ attempts to refresh their memories through food habits is actually a desperate attempt to recover from the traumatic identity teardown mainly because of the failure of their Americanization. The odd craving for Eastern habits and the revival of their pre-diasporic memories marks the end of Exotic West for the protagonists. Halaby describes this feeling of attachment to "American consumer" citizenship and the rejection of American racism, like Schizophrenia², the 9/11 attitude made her protagonists feel similar to what W.E.B Debois describes as "double consciousness"³. “All those years of schizophrenic reaction to American culture, disdain for the superficial, which she had buried with each new

² Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. People with schizophrenia may seem like they have lost touch with reality, which causes significant distress for the individual, their family members, and friends -- (National institution for mental health)

³ Double-consciousness is a concept in social philosophy referring, originally, to a source of inward “twoness” putatively experienced by African-Americans because of their racialized oppression and disvaluation in a white-dominated society. The concept is often associated with William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who introduced the term into social and political thought, famously, in his groundbreaking *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) -- (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy)

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

purchase and promotion, a spray of loathing she had denied in order to justify her current arrangement” (54)

Unlike Salwa, Halaby portrays Randa the Lebanese friend of Haddad’s family as more balanced Arab, despite her family’s residence in the United States for long, Randa and her family still live the conservative Arabic way, Halaby notes that Randa reminds Salwa of home “Randa’s fingers rubbed Salwa’s head, her back, her hands, reminded her of home and thickened her sadness” (91). Randa’s language did not melt into the long years of her staying in America, as Salwa likes to hear her friend’s Arabic speeches which remind her of home “Salwa loved Randa’s accent, loved how her Arabic was like a song.” (77), Moreover, Randa’s language seems overloaded with religious expression, which reveals her status towards religion. After all, Unlike Salwa, Randa was not lured by the seductiveness of the American style and the luxury of the consumerist society due to her rigid attitude towards culture (Ghouaiel 296), the profile of Randa reflects Laila Halaby's position towards Arab culture, Randa's nostalgic rituals to her native culture reflects the writer's disdain attitude towards the American materialism.

The author draws attention to the stability of Randa’s family although they are not committed to the American consumer citizenship , while the Haddads could successfully maintain luxury of materialism but they still feel the emptiness of the American lifestyle , their concept of assimilation had led them to become very fragile in front of the dominant American culture , Randa and her family on the other hands seem to find balance and peace in her hybrid identity since she did not reject her Arabness in the midst of the crisis . Salwa felt ostracism from both cultures after the failure of her assimilation plans so her friend Randa reminds her to “Be yourself [...] *while you still can*” (289), it took Salwa a dead baby and a failed marriage to realize “that Randa was right and Salwa was wrong, even though Salwa lived her dream exactly and Randa bent hers to accommodate others.”

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

(289). Salwa had lost her identity and purity for an alleged promise of freedom “Her American freedom had given her exactly that: American freedom” (202).

Given the attention to hybridity, Halaby highlights the cultural dissimilarity between the “*demonic*” East and “*exotic*” West that is perceived by Westerner and some Arab migrants, in many parts of the narration, Halaby depicts binary East and West through the portrayal of Arab character in the two conceived sectors differently. She argues that her protagonists have chosen American lifestyle because they believed it is the main requirement to maintain their success. To illustrate, the author shows through her male protagonist Jassim the integrated inferiority as he conceives his motherland to poverty and barbarism, When he visits the WalMart markets with Penny (which is market for poor people) Jassim recalls the Public market of Amman "In one breath he was in the souq in Amman, a place he couldn't stand, for the same reason he wouldn't have liked WalMart if he hadn't been invited to go with Penny: too many poor people, too many products to sift through" (278) Jassim has always seen himself as a detached entity from such places, he has never thought that he could " be backwarded to recall such incidents ", for him he belongs to an American middle-class family with a preferable position in society.

The effects of identity destabilization of the protagonists manifest right after the 9/11 due to the repression of Arab identity by "white patriotism", through the profile of white American characters, Halaby argues that whiteness as physical feature projects both national and cultural identities (in America), While her protagonists are considered whites, they are caught visible because of the suspension of their physical appearance (Jniyene 51). De Geoffrey Nash on the other hands concludes that the trauma of identity loss in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* is an outcome of their “cultural anxiety”, Nash argues that the Haddad's expected much from their host land while excluded the risk of an ethnic

repudiation, so that they are caught anxious and fearful of their position in America while they feel un-belonging.

“Halaby appears intentionally to endorse the paradox that it is the Arabs who have most to fear. To the Haddads, what happens to them in America confirms their subliminal cultural anxieties about a land that is rootless, momentary, corrosive of morality — and dangerous.” (Nash)

3-3 The Post 9/11 and the Political Attitude as a Handicap of Assimilation

The quiet life of the couple turns to be a tragedy after series of events and rise of unwelcoming voices rise right after the Attacks when the couple started to feel that they are unwelcomed in the American community and all ways to assimilation and integration into Americanism is interrupted with harassment and suspicion After the 9/11 the couple realizes that life in the United States becomes harder and they can no more go invisible behind their physical appearance or cultural background “Salwa wanted to shake him, to scream that for God’s sake, somebody could report him, have them both deported because his eyebrows were too thick, his accent was not welcome” (58). For instance, right after the attacks and when the couple were hiking around for shopping at the mall, a young clerk girl called Amber reports on Jassim, this move fueled Salwa’s anger which conveys her disappointment about the actual status of Arabs in the United States.

While Halaby focuses on the life of Arab Americans as an immigrant community and the issue of false belonging to the United States, she also uses her protagonists to engage into politics and deflect the terrorism, her characters are victims of the racist profile of 9/11 Patriot Act, in fact, Halaby’s engagement in politics can be viewed as Lusecher puts it “Recent events in the Arab world combined to raise the political consciousness and solidarity of the Arab American community. In order to combat the proliferation of anti-Arab stereotypes” (106). Her description of the post 9/11 policies is positioned in Ludsecher’s description. Through her protagonist’s immersion to consumerism citizenship

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

overpowers any political engagement or sympathy for the Arab cause in America or the Middle East, the 9/11 attitude and the racial discrimination marks their political awareness. In an article entitled “Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11” Carol Fadda-Corney Claims that the purpose of the domestic and foreign policies of the Patriot Act of 2001 is purely political, and its aim is to promote American imperialism by stereotyping the image of Arabs, whether in America or in the Middle East, to serve its “Neocolonial” agendas.

“The intense US domestic and foreign policy changes and the security measures put into place in the months and years after September 11 (including, for instance, the USA PATRIOT Act, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security),⁵ as well as the extreme US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, make evident that political rather than so called civilizational or cultural factors inform demonizing depictions of Arab identities, as they exist in the Arab world as well as in the US.” (Fadda-Corney 533)

Much of the novel revolves on how Domestic and foreign Policy right after the 9/11 intervened in the lives of innocent Arabs and Muslims “Salwa looped her arm through Jassim’s. For the tiniest amount of time, the Lie was distracted by the War on Terror” (32). a further example is the homicide of an old Muslim sheikh Balbir Singh Sodhi which is a real incident, plus other several cases of Arabs being assaulted as an act of retaliation for the terrorist attacks under the name of nationalism and patriotism in many parts of the novel, Halaby uses Social classes in paradox to the patriotism spirit which gather all the social strata’s against Arabs and Muslim considering them as a threat to that patriotism, in a further example of the clerks who reported Jassim to the security guard at the mall, Salwa his wife notices that

“Salwa’s eyes followed her, iced and angry, and then rolled back to the clerks, two teenage girls who looked barely old enough to work, standing by the cash register, one tall, with soft skin and large eyes, and the other broomstick skinny, trying to appear busy.” (29)

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

To illustrate, Halaby argues through different white characters that neither whiteness nor the social class can determine the faith or identity of individuals who have nothing to do with their economic status, ethnic origins or even physical appearance. While Jassim on the opposite side thinks that his economic status and social position might save him from being spotted as one regular threat in the eyes of other white Americans, eventually he realizes that his thoughts are wrong as he becomes subject of suspicion of FBI and will be fired from his job because of complaints of clients for his Arabic background which characterizes terrorism for clients.

“In more than a decade of good citizenship, he had never for a minute imagined that his successes would be crossed out by a government censor’s permanent marker, that his mission would be absorbed by his nationality, or that Homeland Security would have anything to do with him. Things like this aren’t supposed to happen in America.” (299)

Carol Fadda-Corney argues that both Jassim and Salwa were detached from any political commitment, but the 9/11 sphere awakens suspicion and calls for justice inside them, Fadda-Corney notes that the feeling of displacement and identity destabilization is empowered by their “concomitant choice (whether conscious or unconscious) of abandoning the political beliefs” (543).

“For even though the suspicion and downright racism meted out to the Haddads after the September attacks awakens in them, particularly in Salwa, a sense of justice and outrage at being discriminated against as an Arab Muslim, it becomes apparent that in their pursuit of material comforts, they had slowly relinquished all forms of transnational political engagement, building their image in implicit compliance with the assimilative criteria that guarantee the good Arab American label.” (Ibid)

Unlike Jassim, Salwa becomes more aware of the racial prejudice of the post 911 attitude, she was the first to warn her husband about the consequences of the terrorist events on Arabs in general “I hate to think what sort of retaliation there is going to be on a governmental level for what happened. Jassim, it’s not going to be easy, especially for you” (21) Salwa is aware of the seriousness of the situation for Arabs after the September

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

11 incidents. Here, Laila Halaby, through Salwa's voice, criticizes the unfair policies of the 2001 Patriot Act against the Arab Americans. Salwa is viewed in most parts of the novel very sensible to such harassment or any assault against Arab Americans, While Jassim feels cautious from interaction with anyone who threatens his assimilation process, Salwa feels disappointment and unwilling to live the lie anymore “but coming to Salwa as if for the first time. Out of nowhere, a thought louder than any of the voices popped into her head, a thought she had not had before: We cannot live here anymore.” (54), here again, the author questions the possibility of constructing a lucid identity in what is supposed to be a heterotopic environment (Jniyene 52).

With the repression of society and the lack of communication, both partners feel alienated from each other, so they both try to find alternative shelters after they failed to find shelters among themselves, Halaby denotes that their relationship was very fragile and unauthentic because of their untrue emotions, while they paid much attention to “*superficial*” (283) and missed “the core” of it “Jassim realized that they had spent their lives together not saying what mattered most, dancing around the peripheries instead of participating. He had seen in her a passion and excitement for life that had become dulled almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States” (303), Gradually, with the intensity of the persecution imposed on the married couple, their relationship begins to weaken until they find themselves estranged from each other in the midst of the crisis.

While Jassim starts to feel the impact of the that cursed Tuesday every day on his relaxation routine; “Each day that Jassim had gone swimming since that fateful Tuesday when the planes hit, his mind had not cleared on entering the water but rather captured memories, mostly of home” (62). Desperately, Jassim tries to prove his good Arab American labelling by his political dissent orientation (Al-Ibia 23), although he is aware of the rise of national order in face of the enemies (enemies are a reference to the barbarism

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

of "Eastern terrorists") Jassim is caught falling into the flaw of "white patriotism" by linking his cultural belonging to "barbarism". Gradually, he becomes aware that his surroundings cannot make a distinction between him and his wife Salwa as members of this multicultural society, instead, they are both categorized with those who blow the world, who like to cause suffering and pain.

Salwa, on the other hand, reacts to the 9/11 crisis with nostalgic sentiments for her native culture "Salwa found peace, a peace she would remember for years, as it would be scratched away within the hour by men whose culture was a first cousin to her culture" (11), part from these nostalgic rituals for Salwa is the intense urge for motherhood, the Jordanian part of her believes that "*Women are made to have children*" (100). Salwa induces a pregnancy without telling her husband but miscarries a few weeks later. Eventually, she starts to feel alienated and stressful after losing her baby, and consequently, she disavows Jassim's life because he brought her to this grief in the first place "Those fingers kneaded out what Salwa had been avoiding for close to three years now: that she was not happy in her life [...] this was the life she had chosen, but it was not the life she wanted" (91); and lately she becomes estranged from the American culture "she was beginning to think it was simply the culture of America to show everything but to remain an island, a closed-up individual" (54).

Jassim on his part starts to feel the boundaries of his hyphenated identity due to the racial segregation, and the miscarriage experience of his wife which was caused by their American lifestyle "Jassim reviewed his day, searching for the lost item, the missing clue. *Have I forgotten something?* This thought swung back and forth through his mind" (116). Soon later, he hits an American boy in a car accident, the boy dies in his arms. Even though the traumatic events experienced by the couple are somehow related to that "*Cursed Tuesday*" Jassim awakens from the deceptive feeling of affiliation to America

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

“after 9/11 along with the fact that he has accidentally killed a boy in a car accident make Jassim realize his delusional and false sense of being an equally represented citizen of the US.” (Al-Ibia 23) . This feeling of ostracism manifests in the use of English language in his very sensitive moments, when Jassim tries to describe the accident to the detectives he feels that “the words he spoke had not conveyed what he had intended them. He could never decide if it was his English, his actual use of language” (125).

After the accident, Jassim feels that his life has become insecure after he is being harassed by some co-workers due to his national belonging and lately, he gets haunted by the Federal police due to the anti-Arab feelings of the dead boy, he only knows about the boy’s orientation after he talks to his mother Mary Parker “when 9/11 happened, Evan was freaked out, totally freaked out. It was weird because once he was a teenager, he didn’t lose it very often. But he did then, ranted and raved about how Arabic people should all be kicked out of this country, rounded up, herded up, and thrown out” (201). Each tragedy experienced by the married couple reflects a fatal failure of the racial integration system in the United States; while Salwa’s miscarried baby symbolizes “the depletion of Arab-American security and happiness on American soil” (Bounar 118) . The death of the anti-Arab boy on Jassim’s arms reflects the irrationality of the American hegemony and The impossibility of the Arab-Americans’ inclusion due to their “*attributed barbarism*” and Media blackout.

Apart from the repression of their surroundings, and the unwelcoming climate of post 9/11 America, Laila Halaby suggests that the decision of both Salwa and Jassim to solve their personal problems on their own without consulting each other “This was an American problem; perhaps it needed an American solution” (179) (on the American way) is what increases their feeling of alienation from each other and weakens their relationship.

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

Eventually, their marriage which is built on the American way will be unravelled by the Americanism. The consequences of these events and the post 9/11 atmosphere make their marriage worsen. According to Natalie J Friedman, the existence of Adultery as a theme in some particular migrant literature convey the struggle of the parts of this relationship in what is supposed to be ethnical or national destabilization of the constructed identity:

“in these works, the unraveling of intimate relationships stands in for other representative acts of immigrant struggle in novels and stories, such as language acquisition and economic hardship. Adultery, especially, becomes an imaginary space in which authors explore what happens when national and ethnic identity is destabilize” (Friedman 71)

Both Jassim and Salwa “seek refuge in extramarital affairs with traditional white Americans” (Shaw 221) , while Salwa finds home with an American college boy, Jassim confronts his true emotion and his pain to an American waitress, but they realize that these affairs are making them lost more and more, they only face the reality when their relationship is on the edge when Salwa decides to take rest from her American life and return to Jordan, Jassim realizes that their life has been ruined because of their fascination with the American life that rejects them after it uproots them their origins, at the end of the story, Jassim confesses that the American life had led them to lose passion for life “. He had seen in her a passion and excitement for life that had become dulled almost immediately upon their arrival in the United States. What he wanted in her could not exist in America. Could not exist with him, perhaps. And he feared that he could no longer exist in Jordan” (303)

The 9/11 events put the couple in an unstable position, while they had a very high and respectable position in America before the attacks (Vilarrubias 236), and where there were no cultural or political ties that differentiate between the members of American heterotopic society, however, after the attacks the couple become very visible and

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

unwanted in that wide community just because of cultural or religious affiliation, Halaby notes the disappointment tone through Jassim's voice "*I understand American society, he wanted to scream. I speak your language. I pay taxes to your government. I play your game. I have a right to be here. How could this be happening?*" (234), this disappointment reflects the failure of his urge to freedom and opportunities that he couldn't find at home, and it was the main reason he had never thought of returning to Jordan before. Jassim states that his nationality has nothing to do with the home security, he has served America for years and he got rejected because of his origins, Jassim had never thought that "his mission would be absorbed by his nationality, or that Homeland Security would have anything to do with him. Things like this aren't supposed to happen in America. Americans are pure, simple people, their culture governed by a few basic tenets" (299).

The social isolation and institutionalized racialization of the post 9/11 United States make the couple feel that their assimilation process is aborted and impossible to reach, and the only way to make a balanced identity is to return to their motherland. But on the other hand, it is the rejection of their original identity from the first place that widens the wound and creates a loop of endless guilt. In his book entitled *Modern Arab American fiction*, Steven Salaita claims that the sphere of post 9/11 necessarily requires political justification to contain the repressive strategies applied on Arab American as an ethnic minority, these strategies followed the protagonists of Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and assaulted them through other white characters who tend to be very nationalists and patriotic: "Imperative patriotism relies on a certain ethnic imagery to produce a distinction between "us" and "them," with "us" representing good Americans and "them" representing evildoers." (Salaita 88)

The author highlights the institutionalized racism in many scenes in the story which is delivered through "patriotic Americans", this patriotism marks the susceptibility of her

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

protagonists' Arab identity, and for instance, when an American client asks Salwa about her ethnicity, Salwa's answer freaks out the American lady "What do you mean that you are Palestinian from Jordan"? *Does it mean you will steal my money and blow up my world?*" (113), in fact, the lady's response to the same question reflects her pride and high patriot sense "Here, born and raised. I'm a native Tucsonan, American born and raised." (114), further, example, is Bella's description of Jassim, although he was identified by his academic position before the 9/11 events, Bella identifies Jassim through his physical appearance and cultural belonging, whilst Jassim identifies himself as an American citizen; "Bella called the FBI on you a couple of days after it happened, told them you were a rich Arab with access to the city's water supply and you didn't seem very upset by what had happened." (271)

Laila Halaby clarifies that the domestic policy of the post 9/11 influences not only the patriotism trend of the United States, but also it touches different strata of the American society, Despite Marcus's liberal orientation, he was unable to do anything for his friend Jassim, but on the contrary, he is also dragged into the wave patriotism that distinguishes people racially and religiously. In the end, Marcus is aware that Jassim did not do anything that may cause him to be fired:

"In the lifetime of his company, Marcus had fired seven people, all administrative and technical. He had never fired someone he considered to be his equal, nor had he let someone go for such ambiguous reasons as with Jassim. He hated doing it, having to be so decisive about another person's life" (296)

The author shows the fragility of this patriot sense, the one that measures belonging to nationalism through physical appearance, where her Protagonist had to follow particular criteria in order to show their loyalty to this patriotism, at the same time they are asked to hide their Arabic backgrounds which become very sensitive to the nationalism, " In the past month that distance had been stronger, an aftereffect of what had happened in New

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

York and Washington, like the cars sprouting American flags from their windows, antennas to God, electric fences willing her to leave.” (54)

Through the voice of Jassim Halaby shows that such acts are pointless, while the real purpose of these criteria is to unveil the American hegemonic superiority to the public in order to socialize it “Do you think people who might intend to blow things up are putting those same decals on their cars for disguise?” (58) , the “War on Terror” creates an imagined image of the enemy from the community of Arab Americans, however, they are considered as a slice of the American society. Hainsworth notes that the 9/11 attitude marks the insecurity and suspicion of Arab-Americans community as he mentions “For many Arab-Americans, however, September 11, 2001, meant not only an awareness of a new phase of our national life but a loss of personal safety as well” (qtd in Shihabudheen 20)

While Halaby portrays the three main white Americans who are involved directly in stereotyping of her Arab characters (Jack Franks, Jake the Lover and Penny), she links them to Arabism in an aesthetic way. Each one of these three characters has a direct interaction with Arabic culture which changes his life radically. To illustrate, Jack Franks who plays the role of retired Marine who is overloaded with patriotic feeling “former marine with a zealous sense of patriotic duty.” (Salaita 93), the departure of his daughter with a Jordanian guy marks the change of drunk gambler “Jack” into a successful businessman. Jake, on the other hand, finds in the classes of Arabic language an outlet from his reality (as a drug dealer and guard at the topless bar). Penny is the one who suggests, “I don’t understand why we don’t just bomb those places.” (281) Referring to the Middle East where the terrorists live. In contradiction, she thinks that Jassim is her saviour and he is the only way to get her children back.

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

Even though in the most parts of the novel, the writer Laila Halaby criticizes the American policies of 9/11 towards Arab Americans just because of their cultural and religious background, in the same way, she argues that her Arab character's neglecting of Arabic profile that causes them to suffer and instability, in this concern, Halaby portrays Salwa as unstable and confused because the latter has lost the sense of home while she is "Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship." (70) (Jniyene 54), Halaby shows the schizophrenic senses of belonging in her male character too when he describes his love for America: "but America, once tasted, is hard to spit out, with its shiny tools and machinery. Jordan pumps through the blood, but America stays in the mouth" (64), in this context, Halaby argues that Arab Americans have to choose one cultural pattern in order not to fall in the confusion of identity loss trauma. The author describes this complexity of belonging in apart of Arab-Americans after the 9/11 as a stifling feeling:

"it was the patriotic breathing of those around them. American flags waving, pale hands willing them to go home or agree. Jassim didn't seem to be bothered, but Salwa could not tolerate it, those red, white, and blue fingers flapping at her, flicking her away. Again the idea of being home settled itself into her, offered her peace for the rest of the morning." (183-184)

Two aspects are notable here, the first is that Salwa's attachment to her birth place soon vanishes after the post 9/11 atmosphere, the sense of belonging after the 9/11 attacks has come to bear political backgrounds, this fact triggers in Salwa the pride of her Arab belonging. And secondly, despite her American citizenship, Salwa is unable to overcome the effects of institutionalized racism, consequently, her citizenship was excluded. Similarly, Jassim tries to reconstruct his sense of belonging once his ethnicity becomes highly visible "And for the first time he felt unsettled in his beloved America, vaguely longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arab" (165) and thus, the process of redefining his sense of belonging appears in the form of

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

homesickness, reorientation of his political sense, and a call for justice in favor of his ethnicity.

Laila Halaby sets her Protagonists in very luxurious circumstances and economic ease which is one of the main features of the American dream, both of them are non-practising Muslims and both do not have any odd circumstances toward the American policy in the Middle East, nevertheless they are considered Americans, but their Arab extremist profile will remain the wider projection of their attempt to melt into the American white community especially after the patriotism of 9/11, Whereas the poor cultural pride of her characters shows their acceptability to integrate into a totally strange environment without any traces to cultural biases or any religious intolerance, but they are forcefully ejected from that particular environment and their assimilation process operates backwardly, Halaby shows this function of reversed assimilation through the flashbacks of her protagonists and their nostalgia to their homeland.

3-4 Conclusion

To sum up, Halaby uses the diasporic experience of her Protagonists to show the difficulties and the struggle faced by Arabs and Muslims of America after the 9/11, Halaby denounces the American domestic and foreign policy that was raised after the terrorist attacks to institutionalize racism against people of the Middle East, at the same time, she discloses the fragility of the Arab and Muslim migrants when they interact with Western culture, Jassim and Salwa are model of Arab migrants who preferred to detach themselves from their native identity and mingle in world of materialism at the cost of their cultural and religious values, in the same way, they reject their Arab identity, the post 9/11 America has rejected them as citizens.

Chapter Three: The construction of Arab American identity in *Once in a Promised Land*

The story of Jassim and Salwa reflects the frustration that Arab Americans were subjected to after the exclusion of their American citizenship, Laila Halaby denounces the arbitrary policies applied against the Arabs after the terrorist attacks, at the same time, she stands against the barbarism of violence that targets only one side (migrants), the terrorist attacks trigger Arabs as a suspicious group, and at the same time, it provokes the internalized violence that covers the supremacy of American government. Halaby refers to violence in the realm of everyday life instead of physical assault (Salaita 95).

General Conclusion

“A crucial issue in understanding Arab American identity is how it might be differentiated historically from other ethnic or "hyphenated" American identities” (Aboul-Ela 15). The question of identity construction has always been a burning matter for sociologists and Academic scholars in general since literature is considered the voice for those who do not have an audible voice, Arab American literature has always drawn attention to the issue of identity destabilization for minority Middle Eastern American because the Orient was and still being represented in a distorted way, and Islam, in particular, becomes targeted by mass media and other parts who took advantage of 9/11 to justify the stereotyped image of the East in general and Islam in particular.

In the context of Orientalism, Cultural imperialism tends to spread the Western ideologies and cultures in the Eastern communities, and for that reason Western identities are viewed as superior and ideal when compared to Eastern identities. Through this study, I tried to show that the exotic image of the West mandates the cultural domination circuit especially for Eastern migrants, highlighted the integrated inferiority (Cultural dependency) which stands as an impediment to the formation of Arab-American articulated identity and I noted the emergence of neo-Orientalism and Islam phobia of the post 9/11.

The terrorist attacks of September the eleventh had brought back the issue of Arab-Americans' citizenship in particular among other migrant minorities, mainly due to their national connectivity with the hijackers (terrorists). Although Arab-Americans were considered as American citizens, Nationalism and patriotism became dependent on the cultural identity of the individuals. The suspicion on part of Arabs and Islam, in particular, came against the backdrop of Orientalism on the American popular culture, especially after

Conclusion

the national tragedy of 9/11 and making the connection between the Eastern cultures and terrorism.

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* is a suitable work to examine Arab-American identity from inside and the radical changes of 9/11 attitude in the lives of Arab characters mainly the protagonist Jassim and Salwa who dropped their lives back in Jordan (for what is supposed to be a political situation and economic status), the couple moved to America in pursuit for the American dream, they both positioned themselves in a very privileged position and adopted an American consumerist lifestyle along with the lure of luxury items, but after the 9/11, the impacts of the 9/11 and "war on terror" was the main player in the domestic policy of America, as the Anti-Arab racism was legitimized by patriotism. The couple's life had radically changed after the 9/11 when both Jassim and Salwa became visible in the society due to their cultural belonging and physical appearance.

Through the discussion of Halaby's protagonists, this research shows the difficulties faced by Arab characters in forming their identities especially after 9/11 attacks, Halaby criticizes the political reforms and the patriot act of 2001 that enabled the racial prejudice against other minority groups, in the same way, she sheds the responsibility on Arab Americans for choosing the American side instead of having their own position. Her protagonists experienced alienation because they admired the American lifestyle and materialism at the cost of their native values. The fascination of Western culture and the denial of Arab identity led both protagonists to feel un-belonging although the main character Salwa "is Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship."(70).

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A Quest for Hyphenated Identities: The Arab-American Experience in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

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Abstract:

The United State is considered as a multiracial community, where the racial and cultural boundaries are blurred. However, it is not the Case for The Arab American, mainly due to the conceived dissimilarity between binary cultural patterns, as a result, Arab experience in America is charged with the feel of alienation and displacement. Moreover, the Attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Centers inspired the stereotyped image of Arabs and Muslims. Arab American literature overviews this identity disorder especially after the tragic attacks of 9/11. Laila Halaby addresses the issue of belonging and cultural contrast in her novel *Once in a Promised Land*, Halaby explores the experience of Jordanian Couple and their failure in assimilating within the American community. This research aims to examine the experience of Arab American characters in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, in order to discuss the preceding hypotheses, I will analyze the main characters of the novel, at the same time, I will show how Laila Halaby unveils the illusion of chasing the American dream along with the false understanding of the American citizenship. I will also analyze the cultural hybridity of both protagonists and finally the change of attitude in post 9/11 beside the effects of institutionalized racism on the Arab-American characters.

Key words: Orientalism, Arab-Americans, Assimilation, identity, American dream.

ملخص:

تعتبر الولايات المتحدة مجتمعا متعدد الأعراق ، حيث تلمس الفوارق العرقية و الثقافية. لكن هذا الوضع لا ينطبق على مجتمعات العرب الأمريكيان ، ويرجع ذلك أساسا للإختلاف المعتقد بين النمطين الثقافيين (الشرقي والغربي) . ونتيجة لذلك فإن التجربة العربية في أمريكا مشحونة بمشاعر الاغتراب و التنحية , زيادة على ذلك فإن هجمات الحادي عشر من سبتمبر على برج التجارة العالمي كانت دعامة للفكر الإستشراقي و نشر صور مشوهة للعرب و الإسلام في الغرب . إن الأدب العربي الأمريكي يراعي مسألة تشوه الهوية العربية الأمريكية خاصة بعد الهجمات الإرهابية لسنة 2001. في رواية "مرة في أرض الميعاد" تناقش الكاتبة ليلي حليبي مسألة الهوية و الإنتساب . حيث تدور أحداث الرواية حول قتل زوج أردني في الإندماج في المجتمع الأمريكي . تسعى هذه الدراسة لمناقشة التجربة العربية في أمريكا على ضوء رواية ليلي حليبي , وكذا دحض الوهم المحيط بالحلم الأمريكي علاوة على الفهم الخاطئ للتمتع بالجنسية الأمريكية . ثم مناقشة التهجين الثقافي لبطل الرواية وأخيرا تغير الانطباع المتعلق بسياسات ما بعد 11 سبتمبر و تأثير العنصرية الممنهجة على الشخصيات العرب-أمريكية في الرواية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستشراق ، العرب الأمريكيان ، الاستيعاب ، الهوية ، الحلم الأمريكي.