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**Resistance and Transcultural Dialogue in the Fiction of Anglophone
Arab Women Writers:**

Towards Diasporic Arab-American and Arab-British Poetics of Identities

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Doctorate Degree in Sciences: Anglo-American Literature.**

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Dedication

To the Light of my Heart, To my little son, Mouâd

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Abstract

This study focuses on Diasporic Identity construction in two contemporary novels which are respectively *West of the Jordan* by the Arab American writer Laila Halaby and *The Map of Love* by the Arab British novelist Ahdaf Soeif. It negotiates the Arab women diasporic identity formation as expressed by and represented in the fictional narratives of this set of writers. It aims to shed light on the different modalities of identity construction adopted by these authors to reflect the heterogeneity and diversity of Arab women in diaspora. The present dissertation essentially applies a postcolonial-transnational feminist approach to examine the life of Arab women in both sides of the Atlantic and the challenges they face socially, culturally, politically and psychologically as postcolonial “Third World” women in diaspora. In fact, these writers defy the oppressed, invisible, and voiceless image that the term Arab woman connotes in the West by creating strong women characters that forge a new identity for themselves after a long journey of losses and memories that necessitates both nostalgia and criticism of their homelands and the dislocations which they constantly occupy. Influenced by the heterogeneous experiences of immigration and settlement in their host countries these writers have adopted different strategies to express their hybrid identities. This study demonstrates that Arab women writers are carving out a niche for themselves in the early twenty-first century Anglophone literary scene.

General Introduction

Arab Anglophone literature could be a fiction of exiles and ethnics, travellers and homemakers. It is a burgeoning field struggling to carve a space of its own within the mosaic of diasporic literary scene. Its tradition dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century with the arrival of early Arab émigré writers to America, according to wail Hassan (2009, 66) it was in America that writers produced the first Anglophone Arab poem, play, novel and Arab English autobiography. This literary genre has been shaped by the different phases it has gone through, together with the varied circumstances and historical events which have affected its course.

During the last decades, Anglophone literature was marked by the significant contribution of Arab women writers in carving out creative spaces to foster a better understanding of their experiences as Arab women from a relative point of view which is hers and not that of the mainstream's view. The increasing interest in Arab women's writing led to the growing body of scholarship on Arab women's writings to which my dissertation is another contribution, that focal the point of: formation and negotiation of Arab women diasporic identity as expressed by and represented in Arab women diasporic fictional narratives.

The selection of writers I examine in this study attempts to make sense of their identity and place in the world, while simultaneously influencing that reality through writing. This process of identification is made more complex when set in the context of multicultural nations like the United States and the United Kingdom, in which "Arabness" as a signifier of identity is indeterminate, precarious, and conflated with Western understandings of Islam. These circumstances installed a deep feeling of

uncertainty within Arab migrant peoples about displacement and relocation. Such uncertainties are largely created out of existing in-between cultures and of neither fully identifying with one or the other. Accordingly, the Arab diasporic identity subject's complex positioning: of the constant slippages from one temporal and spatial reference to another; of being dislocated and relocated across space, time, and culture; of racial ambiguity, which renders them invisible at one moment and visible at another.

However, within these confused circumstances, Arab women's Anglophone literary works appear to be heterogeneous and diverse in matter of thematic concerns; in the sense that Arab British women novelists adopted a transcultural dialogue and cross-ethnic identification strategies, while, their Arab American peers tend to employ literary strategies in order to resist stereotypes and misconceptions about Arabs in the American culture. Based on a corpus of two novels *The Map of Love* (1999) by the Arab British novelist Ahdaf Soueif and *West of the Jordan* (2003) by the Arab American Laila Halaby, this study aims to shed light on the different modalities of identity construction adopted by these authors to reflect the heterogeneity and diversity of Arab women in diaspora.

I started to become interested in this theme after reading a thesis untitled "Cartographies of identities: Resistance, Diaspora and Transcultural dialogue in the works of Arab British and Arab American women writers" that examined the literary works of several Arab women writers in both sides of the Atlantic, the author introduced his work in a very interesting and appreciable way, however, while going through the corpus I was a bit disappointed because many aspects in these women's journey on a quest for an identity remained ambiguous for me. But this

disappointment quickly turned into excitement at making my own research in this sense as an attempt to clarify what remained ambiguous in my mind. It is worth mentioning in this context that though I adopted the same theme tackled in the cited work, I approach it from different angles in the sense that while Youcef Awad used a direct comparative approach to deal with his corpus compound of seven works (four works of two Arab American writers and three novels of three different Arab British novelists) by focusing on comparing particular aspects in these novels; my study is based on a postcolonial-transnational feminist theoretical approach that utilizes the voices of different postcolonial feminists to analyze the role that Arab Anglophone women writers play in creating a path of consciousness for Arab women living in the borderlands, the bridge between two worlds, through resisting multiple hegemonic identity constructions by adopting different strategies. In addition to that I have limited my corpus into two novels only to be able to analyse every single aspect in the lives of the female characters in the works under study.

The following are questions underlying my examination: Do Arab women novelists in both sides of the Atlantic share the same cultural values? How do their different localized experiences of immigration and settlement influence their literary works? How do they cope with identity labels and western assumption and representation of Arabs? And more pointedly how do these writers theorize and portray Arab women diasporic identity?

Halaby's *West of the Jordan* depicts women characters' sense of being both Arab and neither American, yet being completely neither Arab nor American. In fact, these writers resist both the East's and the West's perceptions of them. They resist both the East with its oppressive regimes as well as the West which sees them as domesticated

and unenlightened other. In this context, Abdelrazek (2007:4) points out that most Arab American women writers disagree with those feminists who claim that the reason of Arab women's oppression is based in religion; they insist that their problems come from patriarchal values which have complex social and political roots leading to the potential limiting of their agency.

By contrast, Soueif's *The Map of Love* brings together the various cultures of here female characters and aims to show their shared histories, families, and friendships. True to the image of Mezzaterra, this novel presents a marketplace of encounters, where there are no clear foreigners, and characters travel both to the East and the West, to the North and the South within the same country and across continents. The novel can be considered as a model of a transnational literary text which consciously provides a way to theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history (Mohanty, 1991: 518).

What can be hypothesized at this level is that this major difference between the two sets of writers is a result of their different experiences of immigration and settlement in their host countries, and to the unclear positions they occupy within the racial hierarchy which is one of the primary means by which identity is established. If the status of Arabs within the American context is quite ambiguous, in Britain they were completely invisible until recently. Such a position occupied by "Arab" within ethnical and multicultural discourses in both countries has to varying degrees, influenced the Arab diasporic women writers' sense of identity which was clearly reflected in their literary texts.

The authors in this dissertation present diverse experiences of Arab diasporic women, in the female characters of Hala, Soraya, Khadidja and Amel as they forge a

new identity for themselves after a long journey of losses and memories that necessitates both nostalgia and criticism of their homelands and the dislocations which they constantly occupy. I argue that these women are in constant shifting and transformation as they keep encountering different cultural, social, political, psychological borderlands before they find a stage of healing and empowerment through a complicated process of memories and writing by telling their stories of rejection to the passivities of their homelands as well as the prejudices of the dominant Western culture in the case of Arab American writers or, as Arab British authors, narrate the negotiation of their culture with the others to correlate an interpersonal relationships marked by mutual recognition where the self comes to exchange values, beliefs, and ways of life with the other in a distinctive hybrid identity which is gradually shaped through transculturation.

In fact, each one of these women has created a narrative of her own to express her identity; in this context Chandra Mohanty discusses the significance of “the process of rewriting and remembering history” as a way to self identity formation. It is indeed this process that Halaby and Soueif are constructing in the female characters of their works. However, despite their different ways in adopting the process, their narratives correlate as a patchwork of an Arab women identity i.e. different but making a whole complementary experiences, literary speaking we are moving from Reality to realities which are coherent and cohesive too.

Arab women’s writing became an interesting arena of research which led to the growing body of scholarship in the field such as *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature* (2008) by Lindsey Moore, Brinda Mehta’s *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women’s Writing* (2007), Anastasia Valassopoulos’

Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context (2007), and Suzanne Gauch's *Liberating Shabrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism and Islam* (2006), *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (2009) edited by Layla Al Maleh, provides examples of important critical engagements with Arab women's literature. In different ways, these works foreground the study of Arab women's literature within an existing and ongoing tradition of literary criticism. In fact, Arab women writers in America and Britain are significant not only for representing a very recent branch of literature drawing from the immigrant experience but also for exposing and interrogating the politics surrounding the identity formation of the current diaspora community in both sides of the Atlantic who are racialized as "Arab".

My project is an attempt to explore the extent to which fiction produced by American and British women writers of Arab descent negotiate the tension between home and belonging, and either challenge or reinforce pre-existing assumptions about Arabs in these countries. More specifically, it makes an original contribution to the rapidly emerging field of Arab Diasporic Literature in its focus on fiction as one form of cultural production and practice in the Arab diaspora in the West. Through Arab-American and Arab-British literary lenses, my project explores, delineates, traces, and imagines Arab women identities and their self-understanding (individual and communal) in Arab diasporic fiction. More particularly, it aims to examine the literary themes and aesthetics, as well as the nuanced narrative modes through which these novels imaginatively depict, articulate, and interrogate the intersections between diaspora, gender identity, and homeland. Together, these writers employ a broad spectrum of narrative structures but different strategies for portraying Arab women diasporic subjectivity.

In this dissertation, I essentially apply a postcolonial-transnational feminist theory to examine the life of Arab women in both sides of the Atlantic and the challenges they face socially, culturally, politically and psychologically as postcolonial “Third World” women in diaspora. While I situate the experience of Arab American and Arab British women within a postcolonial/transnational context, I discuss the multiple theoretical developments that the postcolonial feminist discourse undergoes in light of contemporary global changes and the impact of different hegemonic forces on the lives of women worldwide. The postcolonial feminist theoretical frame provides a comprehensive study of the lives of women of colour in the U.S. and the U.K. in which the different issues of identity, hybridity, diaspora, and border-crossing are widely investigated. The major development within the postcolonial feminist discourse as a transnational paradigm has recognized the examination of the lives of diasporic, immigrant, and hybrid female subjects within a multiplicity of historical and global forces.

In order to proceed with the analysis of the texts under study that negotiate Arab women’s different experiences of diasporic identity construction, a brief review of existing literature on identity and diaspora must be discussed. In fact, identity is a hotly contested issue at virtually every level of our social lives. Whether we look in academia, in the international political arena, in national politics, or in cultural forms such as novels, music, or film, identities are being claimed, named, contested, and self-fashioned. While identities may be made and unmade, the stakes in the production process are always high and always political. We can look to virtually any corner of the globe and bear witness to the fact that identities are worth fighting for. People are

willing to give them lives in order to secure a place on a map that they can call their own.

Conceptions of identity range all the way from the notion of an autochthonous human born with attributes that attach permanently to self—a rooted theory of identity (Asante, 1990)—to the idea that the very concept of identity is a mythic invention of the modernist movement (Adorno, cited in Bronner & Kellner, 1987) to the notion that identities are routed through experiences of travel, contact, displacement, and relocation (Clifford, 1998; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1996; Pratt, 1992). While there exist multiple approaches to the study of identity across the social sciences and the humanities most of the debates emerge out of two competing theories of identity: rooted and routed theories of identity. On the one hand, proponents of rooted theories of identity have imagined it as a bounded collective held together by common cultural traits and practices such as language, food, religion, ritual, expressive forms, and economic practices, as well as an attachment to land. Both identity and culture are conceptualized as discrete and fixed.

The ethnic absolutism implicit in such rooted theory assumes that identity, culture, and history are “already accomplished facts” (Hall, 1996, 110). Rooted theories of identity have pull in postcolonial national imaginations because a return to one’s roots helps ease the pain of being “othered” and erased by dominant modes of western knowledge production. Moreover, the colonial encounter begins with a loss of identity, attracting those who mourn a lost past, cultural forms, and indigenous sensibilities. To a large degree this theory of identity assumes autochthonous claims by tribal people. Rooted theory assumes further that in most traditional cultures natives

rarely travel outside of their communities, leaving little room for contact with other peoples.

This theoretical approach is problematic on several levels. The essentialism that drives it cannot account for difference, nor can it contend with contemporary global conditions of diaspora, dispersion, and cross-cultural contact. What is more, there is not necessarily the polarity between tradition and modernity which rooted theory assumes. Rooted theories are also essentialist at the level of national identity. Roots imply that identity is tied to territory, that there is a natural relationship between land and language, blood and soil, and that there exists an immutable link between cultures, identities and fixed places (Lavie & Swedenburg, 1996).

On the other hand, routed theories of identity assume that identities are made and unmade through cultural contact and discursive formations. Routes imply that identities are constructed in and through travel and contact, calling into question the multiple layers of mediation that bear on identity, movement, contact, and social space. Routes assume further that identities are constructed, that identity formation is at base a process of production. Identities, from this perspective, are contingent and fluid. Routed theories of identity also problematize the arbitrariness of territorial boundaries, a move which, in some ways, deterritorializes the production of identity.

Many forces have prompted scholars to rethink identity, and particularly national identities: global scattering and migration (Bartkowski, 1995; Glick-Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Pries, 1999); transnational economic structures and cultural flows (Appadurai, 1996); the fissures of our global political economy (Harvey, 1985); and the breakdown of nation-states (Morely & Robbins, 1994). These conditions and others such as ethnic wars, fundamentalist coups, and desperate

economies have led to the emergence of diasporas. Given that diasporic peoples, who come predominantly from former colonies and postcolonial nation-states, are located within the heart of many western metropolises, diasporic identities stand at the intersection of multiple national attachments. As diasporic peoples straddle the boundaries between their former homelands and the nations in which they have relocated, they put pressure on the mechanisms through which nations try to cement national identity. Moreover, as Gilroy has documented so brilliantly, diasporas reveal the ways in which people navigate and negotiate a way of living double-consciousness, a mode of subjectivity that renders identities liminal, while challenging the ideologies driving the melting pot of culture.

Originally, the term diaspora referred to the exiled Jewish community in Alexandria in the 3rd century BC (Jana Evans Braziel & Anita Mannur, 2003; Robin Cohen, 1997). Most authors theorizing diaspora seem to agree that although the Jewish diaspora was the original diaspora. But, the term has expanded to encompass many groups of individuals who share a real or imagined attachment to a territory, but who have been dislocated from this geographical point of origin and have had to relocate new territories.

According to Clifford (1998), “diasporas define themselves against the norms of the nation-state and indigenous, especially autochthonous claims by tribal peoples... that is to say, the nation-state is traversed by diasporic attachments’ (p. 249). Whereas nations are locked into specified territories, diasporas are deterritorial. Their attachments and modes of communication cross national boundaries without being policed from the inside-out. Diasporic peoples have a precarious relationship to the nations from which they come. On the one hand, I agree with Clifford that diasporas

can never be exclusively nationalist. Their existence is inherently transnational. Thus, it is important to recognize that “diaspora is oriented not so much to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations” (Ghosh, cited in Clifford, 1998, p. 249). In fact, it is important to take stock of the ways in which diasporas are deployed in transnational networks and cultural forms and connect dispersed groups in remote locales, the degree to which diasporas are removed or connected to their former homelands depends on the conditions which prompted the departure, but desire to return with a difference, and the ability to recreate cultural practices in diverse locations, are not mutually exclusive. Both of these phenomena can happen at once.

Travel and relocation are indeed forces that shape identities. As people are on the move so too are then identities, their cultural practices, national affiliations, and religious beliefs. Relocating in new host countries becomes a continuing process of social and cultural negotiation, a process of being interpolated into new sets of power struggles, and a process of intercultural contact that is at once friendly and dangerous. National identities are particularly important when people are either forced into displacement or chose to relocate; their identities are subject to reflection and they become more contested, more multi-layered, and more complex. Travel destabilizes and restabilizes national identifications and peoplehood, creating transnational sets of identities.

Invoking Gilroy, Clifford contends that diasporas “are able, in part, to traverse nation-states because they are deployed in ‘alternative public spheres,’ forms of community, consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time-space in order to live inside, with a difference” (Clifford, 1998, p. 251).

This ambiguous locale, outside the national time-space, is what Lavie & Swedenburg identify as “third space.” In a move similar to that of Clifford they argue that a productive way to think through diaspora and diasporic identity is to move away from notions of identity as essence toward a conception of identity as conjuncture. The possibilities of conjuncture are located in third time-spaces. For Lavie and Swedenburg (1996), third space

involves a guerrilla warfare of the interstices, where minorities rupture categories of race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, and empire in the center as well as on the margins. The third time-space goes beyond the old model of culture without establishing another fixity. Yet while the third time-space designates phenomena too heterogeneous, mobile, and discontinuous for fixity, it remains anchored in the politics of history/location, (p. 14)

Diasporic peoples occupy third time-spaces as they live a doubled life, an “out-of-country, out of language” mode of experience (ibid.), they occupy a hybrid position where categories are crossed, and where a space between defined subject position is created. According to Homi Bhabha (1994), it is within this space that the bearers of a “Hybrid identity” (55) are “free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference” (55). That is to say, the recognition of the “split-space of enunciation” (55) will open the way to “conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (55).

The Third Space, therefore, is a way of framing the liminal which allows hybrid individuals to create a space where they can articulate their cultural difference. In this space, they are able to invent their own history and renew their past, “refiguring it as a

contingent in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). Hence, Arab Anglophone literature is the very articulation of this idea, as its different phases display the different episodes the Arab community in both sides of the Atlantic has gone through.

Contemporary Arab Anglophone academics have recently started to pay more attention to the legacy inherited by early Arab American writers who, as Layla Al Maleh expresses it, were “able to negotiate boundaries beyond the spaces of their birth-place, an in-dwelling contentment quite unlike the expressions of pain and agonizing dislocation that characterize postcolonial hybridity of late” (4). Al Maleh uses Radhakrishnan’s terms to describe how these writers were “ensconced comfortably in the heartland of both national and transnational citizenship” (159). She states that there was “a hybridity that undoubtedly helped them negotiate the ‘identity politics’ of their place of origin and their chosen abode with less tension than their successors” (4). It is within this context that my dissertation will articulate hybridity and therefore negotiate the formation of an Arab-American and Arab-British poetics of identity as expressed and represented in Arab Women diasporic fictional narratives. I employ the word poetics to refer to a methodical theory that attempts to define the nature of Arab women novels, the principles that rule them, the themes that distinguish them and the circumstances that have paved the way to their production. It is worth mentioning in this context that Transculturalism and Resistance as literary strategies are other relevant key concepts to the study that will be discussed deeply throughout the analytical chapters.

This thesis is composed of four chapters; while the first chapter will present background information on the body of literature that portrays diasporic identities

with a particular focus on Arab women diasporic identity's construction. The second one will examine the different processes of Arab immigration and settlement patterns in the United States as well as the United Kingdom, it will also shed light on their long uncertain ethnic classification in order to be able to understand the differences existing in the literary texts produced by Arab women writers living in those societies either at the level of the themes tackled or the strategies adopted.

The third Chapter will emphasize how Laila Halaby in *West of the Jordan* is transgressing a normative paradigm already conceptualized in the mainstream western culture for the Arab-American woman hybrid. Her characters are living a transformational experience that leads them to challenge hegemonic constructions of the dominant knowledge, resist the different contradictions and ambivalences of their native patriarchal cultures, and find a political voice to fight their invisibility and oppression.

The fourth chapter will concentrate on how the Arab British novelist Ahdaf Soueif celebrates hybridity as fusion of different cultural background that allows the self to coexist with the other in her novel *The Map of Love*, My focus while exploring the text will be on the way the writer instigates dialogue with her Arab, British and American characters resulting in a full recognition of the one's culture and that of the other, which gave birth to a self identity that flows from the fusion of values and ways of life and styles from both cultures through an act of transculturality.

Chapter One

Enacting Arab Women Identities in Diasporic Communities

I.1 Introduction

Global population movements and transnational migration are currently the focus of broad academic debates and involve discussion of some issues such as transnational cultural relations, the renovation of migrants' worldviews, and the dynamics of identity reconstruction. Henceforth, theorizing identity should be in and through diasporic communities to facilitate a rethinking of the relationship between individuals and their imagined communities of both their home-land and new recipient country.

Confronted with diaspora, immigrant intellectuals have expressed being torn between their commitment to universal-human values, their commitment to their new land, and their attachment to their homeland. In fact, migrants experience profound changes in their conceptual social orientation as they move from the state of being a “majority” at home to that of being a “minority” or “diaspora” in another country, giving rise to feelings of dislocation, alienation and in-betweens which they have to cope with. It is in this sense that the present chapter will examine how the body of literature portrays diasporic identities with a particular focus on Arab women diasporic identity’s construction.

I.2 Dialogues of Diaspora

Robin Cohen (1997), posits that “diasporas are positioned somewhere between nation-states¹ and travelling cultures,” meaning that although they are physically

¹ A form of political organization in which a group of people who share the same identity, history, traditions, or language...etc live in a particular area under one government. The nation-State is held together by its physical boundaries, its government and the fact that people believe they are connected to each other.

situated within the borders of a nation-state, they are simultaneously located outside its boundaries through their symbolic relationship with the homeland or their past (135)² Cohen's reference further implies the voluntary movement of cultures, which is a feature not traditionally ascribed to diasporic cultures. However, Cohen's claim leaves room for broader consideration of the notion of "travelling cultures" in terms of the way diasporic identities are changing and becoming more globally oriented and culturally and politically resistant. The cultural Anthropologist James Clifford (1994) takes up the same motif in his reference to culture as a site of travel. Clifford challenges discussions of diaspora that tend to "localize" cultures by putting forth the idea of "travel" as a paradigm that expands the perception of cultures as displaced or migratory, while also implying that cultures retain attachments to a place of origin. Travel is therefore not only a metaphor, but even more so, a diasporic posture and praxis that is suggestive of cultures as dynamic.

In today's globalized world³ the term diaspora has major socio-political, national, and cultural currency. New dispersals of people create new diasporic settlements in new geographical locations, thus continually reconstituting the composition of nationhood and national identity. Indeed, the centrality of dually-identified and even multiply-located immigrant groups has brought "diaspora" to the fore as an important source for new ways of understanding perceptions of home and the experience of belonging. According to *Diaspora* journal's editor-in-Chief, Khachig Tölölyan (1991), diasporas are "the exemplary communities of the transnational

² Edward Said also takes up the figure of the Traveller in his essay, "Identity, Authority and Freedom: the Potentate and the Traveller", *Transition* 54 (1991): 131-150

³ The term "Globalized" refers to the development that reflects the intersections of economies and peoples and the spread of global markets and, in turn, as a phenomenon that has significantly given rise to cross-border relations and exchanges between cultures, material goods, and systems of thought.

moment.”⁴ The transnational moment at that time was a manifestation of the intensifying processes of globalization –economic, technological and cultural- since the 1980s. This transnational moment was also, at that time, widely experienced as a moment of cultural possibility, a moment of the emergence of previously submerged, multiple perspectives, a moment of emancipator and democratic potential. In particular, this transnational moment was associated with the promise of unsettling the homogenizing, assimilating power of the nation-state.

The term diaspora, originated from the Greek word meaning “to sow or to scatter,”⁵ has historically referred to peoples who are forcefully displaced from their homeland and bound by a collective traumatic experience, or as Cohen states, bonded by a “common fate” (1997: 20). In turn, diaspora identity has been conceptualized as constant and unchanging in its direct correlation to one fixed location. In other words, individual or collective identity in the diaspora has always been defined, at least in part, by homeland orientation, that is, by the relationship to the original or historical homeland⁶. However, in the current postmodern⁷ and transcultural global arena, diasporas are formed as a result of both choice or coercion, and the simple assumption of a diasporic attachment to an imagined homeland is complicated by an

⁴ Tölölyan « Preface » to the inaugural issue of journal *Diaspora* 5.

⁵ OED online

⁶ Safran (1991), Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1997), Brubaker (2005).

⁷ The rise of postmodernism as a philosophical discourse during the 1960s and 1970s was matched by the emergence of literary theory and in particular linguistic and discourse analysis. The work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva quickly became associated with the theoretical principles underpinning postmodernism and whilst they tacitly acknowledged the economic enchainment of the work of art, they moved the agenda of the Left onto fresh territory by insisting that all cultural practices were imbued with oppressive undertones and therefore offered sites of productive political struggle. That any communicational act was conceived, made and interpreted within ideology and thereby excluded competing ideological formations became a defining intellectual reference point for postmodernism and allied to significant socio-economic shifts in the Western world, encouraged the formation of emancipatory movements dedicated to the vocalization of previously marginalized politics. In 1979, Jean-Francois Lyotard published *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In it he argued that the postmodern condition was characterized by a deeply felt scepticism towards metanarratives (discursive formations promising a totalized account of knowledge). For Lyotard the traditional pivots of human belief (whether they be religion, philosophy or science) could no longer be sustained for each reveals its domineering ideological insistence in its intolerance of competing voices. The totalizing imperative of the metanarrative obscures and denigrates the claims of Others and, in so doing, according to Lyotard, it invalidates itself. The freedom that this anti-establishmentarianism extended was grasped by a host of liberation movements (such as feminism, gay rights and the racially and religiously dispossessed) as a vindication of their rights. (Peter Childs, Roger Fowler, *The Routledge dictionary of Literary Terms*, 2006, p 185-187)

expansion of the parameters that set and usher in diasporic collectivities. Tölölyan establishes diaspora in a broader semantic framework through a “vocabulary of transnationalism” (“Preface” 5), which includes such diasporic collectivities as “immigrants, expatriates, refugees, guest workers, exile communities, overseas communities, ethnic communities” (“Preface” 4).

Diaspora today has, therefore, come to offer a larger space of inquiry and broader critical purview for the remapping and rearticulation of identities that vacillate between and across two or more locations. Tölölyan’s reference to diasporic peoples as “others of the nation state,” highlights the way in which diasporas, as transnational social formations, challenge the boundaries and legitimacy of the nation-state. Diasporic collectivities are not only the symbols of transnationalism, but also the embodiment of the very question of borders. With the constant re-organization and repositioning of so many diverse migrant groups on a global scale, diaspora identity is now being re-conceptualized as a continuously evolving, dynamic process. Pnina Werbner (2010) underscores this notion when she discusses the new direction that the concept has taken: “diasporas are historical formations in process; changing and responsive to the different political and social contexts; reconstructed and reinvented imaginatively and socially in new places or as political circumstances change in their place of settlement (74).

The impetus of current critical dialogues surrounding diaspora has shifted to notions of multicultural heterogeneity, transnationalism, multiplicity and pluralities,

and ethnic diversities⁸. This shift in diasporic mobilizations has led to what Madeleine Demetriou (1999) refers to as a “new breed” of diaspora (2) and what Werbner calls “complex” or “segmented” diasporas” (75). These new configurations of diaspora in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries deviate from the more narrowly established parameters of diaspora as exemplified by the classic Jewish model⁹. The Jewish prototype, having become a predictable and normative conception of diaspora, emphasizes an oppositional positioning between the desire for a stable and sacred homeland and a site of settlement, which has acquired negative valuations as it is marked by unfamiliarity, uncertainty, confusion, and ambivalence.

Modern diasporas¹⁰, by contrast, span across multiple geographic locations, indicate multilingualism, and mixed allegiances that is a result of more easily sustained multiple attachments to the homeland¹¹. The diasporic subject, no longer anchored in one national sphere, but rather in diverse diasporic enclaves that constitute a larger transnational arena, centres on what Mariam Pirbhai (2009) calls a “multiply positioned identity” (16). In this vein, Pirbhai challenges the tendency to impose limits on diaspora rather than to approach it as a variegated set of experiences and complex matrix of identification. For her the new classification of diaspora rejects the traditional marker of religious persecution and applies to the broader understanding of diaspora as migrant communities with a shared set of independent historical, ethnic,

⁸ Steven Salaita in *Arab American Literary Fictions* establishes the ethic of “Plurality” up against the “illusion of homogeneity” as a necessary approach to interpreting the Arab American diasporic identity experience and its literature (1-2)

⁹ William Safran uses the Jewish prototype as a basis for establishing the six key features of diaspora.

¹⁰ In many ways, the Palestinian diaspora has been conceived as the exemplary model of modern diasporas, in so far as its trajectory is marked by permanent exile and a continuous hope for and impossibility of return. Renowned Palestinian-American cultural theorist, Edward Said (1991) remarks on the distinctiveness of the Palestinians as an entire nation in Diaspora, when he states that for “forty six years they (Palestinians) have been painfully resembling a national identity in exile” (178). The Palestinian case, exile has become their national identity. The Palestinian diaspora, in which the diasporic population exceeds the homeland population, demonstrates, on the one hand, the (self) conscious and tenacious connection to the actual homeland for the maintenance of a diasporic identity, while on the other, their endurance despite the loss of a homeland and the obliteration of Palestine as a political entity, questions the relevance of a territorial core or nation-state for the maintenance of diasporic status.

¹¹ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Christina Szanton Blanc. “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration.” *Anthropological Quarterly*. 68.1 (1995): 48.

religious or other attributes. A diasporic consciousness arises out of vastly different historical circumstances and should therefore, be viewed in ploythetic terms rather than through a simple taxonomical lens (*ibid.* 15). Pirbhai's examination draws attention to the critical overreliance on the nation-state model of diaspora, flawed by dichotomous homeland-diaspora conception that obscures alternative modes of cultural consciousness, multiple networks of social organization and new forms of political praxis. The increased popular and critical attention on modern diasporas is therefore not only indicative of the progressively weakening borders of nation and the blurring boundaries of homeland, but also speaks to the conceptual expansion of diaspora and its reaching possibilities and implications. Similar critical interventions in diasporic discourse focus on the need to deconstruct the home/homeland notion at the core of diasporic formations.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, the sociologist Avtar Brah (1996), for instance, argues for a broader interpretation of the poetics of space, in which she offers a critical distinction between a desire for the homeland and "homing desire" (180), where the former is a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination...a place of no return" and the latter a "lived experience of a locality...as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations" (192). Brah calls into question a historical and fixed notions of home, arguing that, "the concept of diaspora places the discourses of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins"(192-193). This tension between homing desire and lack of a fixed homeland problematizes the secure sense of belonging. As such, this tension is played out differently according to particular historical circumstances and specific migratory processes.

Contemporary scholarship seeks to expand and alter traditional understandings of diaspora and the diasporic condition. It moves away from the conventional focus on physical geography as it is imbued with cultural, ethnic, religious and historical significance towards thinking about how identity and social relations are formulated across a wide spectrum of geographical spheres, and through “multiple modalities of power” (208), to borrow from Brah, as they are configured and articulated through structures of class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and nationalism. Floya Anthias (1998) strongly argues against the conceptual overreliance on totalizing notions of race and ethnicity, based on what she refers to as “deterritorialized ethnicity,” as it relates with to “primordial bonds of homeland” (557). Following Brah, Anthias emphasizes the conceptual limitations of diaspora to adequately address “intersectionality.” Referencing similar vocabulary as Brah, Anthias calls for a broadening of diasporic discourses to be more inclusive of the internal diversities and divisions within ethnic communities, as well to take into account the ways in which specific diasporic groups, at specific historical junctures, are shaped by intersecting axes of power such as class, gender, racism, or sexuality. Anthias argued that in order to understand diaspora it is important to take into account the affiliation between homeland and diasporic positionality as well as the forms of political and social mobilization through what she calls “trans-ethnic alliances” (557). She writes: “the lack of attention to trans ethnic solidarities, such as those against racism, of class, of gender, of social movements, is deeply worrying from the perspective of the development of multiculturalism, and more inclusive notions of belonging” (577).

In response to what he refers to as “constructivist” critiques of diaspora¹², the early diaspora theorist William Safran (1991), well known for his delineation of the six key defining features of diaspora in his off-referenced article, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” expresses concern about the dangers of the concept of diaspora becoming an all-too inclusive metaphor for postmodernity. He states:

the indiscriminate extension of the label to almost any group of expatriates, or even to individual migrants, has denuded the concept of much of its historical meaning and led to a conflation of the term, which has made it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish diasporas from other kinds of minority communities and to reduce the concept to a useless metaphor. (9-10)

Similarly, Rogers Brubaker (2005) expresses concern about the “dispersion of the meanings of the term” (1), problematizing that diaspora has come to apply “essentially to any and every namable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space... if everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so” (3). Safran’s charge against the inclusivity of contemporary or “constructivist” definitions of diaspora is one of several other key responses in this dynamic debate including, Khachig Tölölyan, Kim D. Butler, Rogers Brubaker, and Robin Cohen; each of whom give credence to homeland attachment as constitutive of the diasporic condition, while at the same time, recognizing the need for diaspora to establish a broader platform for the consideration of transnational, multicultural, global, and trans-ethnic processes.

¹² Robin Cohen, in keeping with Safran, refers to this approach as “social constructionist” in his brief outline of the diaspora debate in his essay, “Solid, Ductile, and Liquid: Changing Notions of Homeland and Home in Diaspora Studies,” in *Transnationalism: Diasporas and the Advent of a New (Dis) Order*. Eds. Eliezar Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009. 117-134. Cohen and Safran similarly associate these contemporary theorizations as closely associated with post-modernism and post-structuralism. These critical approaches offer counter-definitions to what they suggest as Safran’s over-restrictive definition.

This dissertation recognizes Arabs in United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) as an example of diasporic communities that are not only set in cross-cultural, but also transnational, transborder, and trans-ethnic networks, in which forms and politics of membership and belonging are re-conceived and attachments to home are multiply recast. It is situated in a theoretical middle ground, between established diaspora critics and newer, more politically engaged scholars that posit an alternative to the idea of fixed origins and rooted belonging. In keeping with contemporary scholarship, the present work seeks to resituate diaspora within what Brubaker calls a “multi-paradigmatic field” (2009: 22) that facilitates an interpretation of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationhood as a set of interlacing forms for understanding Arab socio-cultural formations and political mobilization as they are linked to a politics of location. Contextualizing diaspora within this multi-paradigmatic frame is a productive methodology for repositioning Arab diasporic subjectivities in Britain and the United States within postcolonial, global, and transnational terrains. While this framework presents multiple interpretive possibilities for perceptions and experiences of “home,” it is careful not to overlook the relevance of the homeland-host land relationship in Arab diasporic literature. In other words, this examination foregrounds transnationalism to inform and reorient, not undervalue the conventional relationship between diaspora and homeland. I draw on Khachig Tölölyan’s positioning, which still emphasizes the importance of place in relation to diasporic identity:

Diasporists shaped by globalizing discourse describe genuine erosions of the link between a bounded place and a people, diagnose it as irresistible, and quickly affirm its contribution to a pluralistic, multicultural, hybrid world of which they approve. Diasporists like myself, who want to argue that attachment to place was indispensable to diasporic life and thought

until very recently, and that despite its erosion, it remains important today, must tread carefully in order to avoid the charge that we are either imitating discredited national rhetoric about the link between land, people, and culture, or that we remain naive about the global spaces that have opened up in the past several decades. (2005: 138-9)

The emphasis by Tölölyan and others is a major shift from the old perspective of diaspora to the new perspective¹³. The selection of Arab British and Arab American women literary productions in this examination explore the old and the new, which is to say that there are multi-dimensional and divergent diasporic orientations and practices. In other words, these novelists situate diaspora within an intersectional diasporic network that allows for the consideration of various interconnecting nodes of identity formation.

Arab-American literary critic Somaya Sami Sabry (2011) describes Arab-Americans as people who “can inhabit more than one imagined community, and this shapes their intersectional perspectives” (81). Hence the significance of these works consists in the fact that intersectionality is a shared frame of reference from which these writers are able to provide diverse and multilayered representations of Arab diasporic subjectivity. These works therefore function to counter pervasive representations of Arabs in the West as a homogenous, unified body of people with a shared religion, ethnicity, culture, nationality, history, and politics. In doing so, they press the limits of the conventional definition of diaspora through their own complex positionalities, layered by their postcolonial, trans ethnic and multi-national perspectives.

I.3 Gendered Identities

¹³ Much like Safran and Tololyan, Brubaker puts forth the notion of “Homeland Orientation” as one of the “three core elements” of diaspora (5-7). Moreover, in his article, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora” he differentiates between “Old” and “New” approaches to diaspora; Mariam Pirbhai also makes a distinction between old and new configurations of diaspora by drawing on Vijay Mishra’s model of the old labour diaspora created in the 19th century and new diasporic formations created in the mid- to late-twentieth century (17).

Gender is at the heart of constructions and classifications of systems of difference. Therefore, an investigation of the construction of ethnic identities must necessarily be conducted by paying close attention to the ways in which they are gendered. Historically, women have played important roles in the transmission of culture and in the maintenance of ethnic identity. In addition, because as Mani (1993:36) notes, there is not a sudden cessation of patriarchal power from one location to another, the effects of immigration are not identical for men and women.

Gloria Anzaldua's (1987:3) idea of "borderlands" proves extremely useful in elucidating the lived realities of borders, both physical and cultural, in women's lives who occupy more than one cultural landscape. Women often find themselves straddling two (or more) cultures that do not completely mesh together, drawing on each but belonging to neither. Overlapping and divergent identities mark the experience of ethnic women's lives, as well as, shifting relations of power. Anzaldua (1987:78) points out the need to realize that, "[t]he coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes a choc, a cultural collision." The "borderlands" as Anzaldua (1987:3) describes it, is a place of conflict. It is also a place of violence and this violence emerges from the scraping experienced as variant worlds collide. Women often find themselves squarely in the middle of these conflicts, struggling to make sense of the expectations of multiple cultures. This is what Anzaldua terms the "third country." Identities formed here are not reducible to a whole, conceived as half-ethnic and half-American or half-British, devoid of cultural conflicts. According to Anzaldua (1987), the new *mestiza* retains the two irreconcilable worlds at the same time and turns "the ambivalence into something else," a radical consciousness of what it means to live on the border, to be constantly crossing

between two states of being, to be in-between. On this border are also the differences of race, class, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexuality. This is a contentious area, a place where identities are reconstructed and renegotiated. Narratives are rewritten and by virtue of this so are knowledges (Anzaldua 1987).

How women respond to the collision of their divergent cultures and the ways they resist and reformulate their identities inform the focus of this study. In fact, the women's narratives should be read as interventions that disrupt understandings of gender and ethnicity. As Michael Fischer (1986:195-6) points out,

Ethnicity is not simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learnt...It is a matter of finding a voice or a style that does not violate one's several components of identity.

As mentioned above, ethnicities are stratified not only by differences of gender but also of class, race, sexual orientation, religion, and other modalities and these play significant roles in the construction of ethnic collectivises. As a result, intense competitive struggles for hegemonic positions occur within ethnic collectivises due to political and social goals that are not identical as often as between ethnic groups and national cultures (Yuval-Davis 1999:112-3). Gender, a critical difference under colonialism, is not surprisingly one of the preeminent sites of these contestations within ethnic groups.

Hegemonic ethnic projects often marginalize women through a number of different strategies. However, women are not passive participants. Instead, they continually engage in struggles of resistance (Grewal 1996; Yuval-Davis 1999). Kandiyoti (1988) referred to women's strategies as bargaining with patriarchy. However, as Yuval-Davis (1999:114) points out, on the other hand, the compliant behaviour of women within

hegemonic ethnic projects plays a critical role in the maintenance of patriarchal control and domination. One of the most important sites of the reproduction of ethnic collectives is the family and women are the central reproducers of ethnic culture and the next generation through childbearing and rearing (Das Gupta 1997; Yuval-Davis 1999). According to Yuval-Davis (1999) women's subjugation is located within the different regulations that mark the boundaries of the family within the ethnic collectivity. Customs, traditions, religious practices, and legal covenants are mechanisms that determine these boundaries.

Symbols of gender play a significant role in the articulation of difference within the ethnic collectivity and these symbols maintain the boundaries between members of the collectivity and outsiders (Yuval-Davis 1999). Women, just as they did within colonial discourses, frequently are used to symbolize the national collectivity, its past, its present, and its future (Das Gupta 1997; Yuval-Davis 1993; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). Women are, therefore, often expected to assume much more of the burden of preserving distinct cultural values. Women become the intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and language (Yuval-Davis 1999; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). Women also often assume primary responsibility for the culture within the home. In Arab societies for example, the family occupies a privileged position in political, economic, social, and religious spheres and women are essential agents in the preservation and maintenance of family and cultural traditions (Barakat 1993; Joseph 1996). In their transition to their adopted countries, women continue to perform this important function. This often results in their preserving and valorising traditions that they perceive as being emblematic of

their home societies, even if they are no longer retained or have been modified considerably in those countries (Das Gupta 1997).

The importance of women's culturally "appropriate behaviour" within ethnic collectivises is a subject endowed with particular significance within adopted societies (Yuval-Davis 1999:115). Consequently, certain restrictive parameters on women's actions and modes of dress may serve as markers of cultural identity and its boundaries among certain segments of ethnic collectivises. These parameters help to define the ethnic group as a separate and unique collectivity within the crush of a homogenizing adopted national culture. This is also one of the main reasons that stronger social control is likely to be exercised on girls than boys within the ethnic collectivity, particularly with the children of recent immigrants (Yuval-Davis 1999:115).

I.4 Feminist Discourse

Women of colour were instrumental in calling attention to the ways in which gender, race, class, and sexualities intersect. Due to their critiques, it was no longer possible to conceive of an essential, universal, female experience. Feminism, as it was originally articulated in the U.S., was primarily concerned with white, middle class, European women's lives (Frankenberg 1993). It erased, silenced, and overlooked the experiences of many women who were not white, not middle-class, and not from the West. This new relativist approach meant that feminists were making a conscious effort to engage with third-world women in a way that acknowledged cultural particularities

I.4.1 Third World Feminism: Perspectives on Middle Eastern Women

Third world women join mainstream feminists in their struggle against gender oppression and inequality, and quest of women's universal rights of education, labour and freedoms of choice and expression. However, they criticize their white sisters for their ethnocentric assumptions about the singularity of feminism, the homogeneity of women's experiences and the universality of their struggles; and they alternately pluralize feminism and assert the plurality of their voices and the heterogeneity of their colonial and postcolonial identities. As a leading advocate of this orientation, Chandra Mohanty rearticulates the discourse of western feminism from a pluralist perspective and conveys the particular concerns and aspirations of what she terms Third World feminism and defines as "a socio-political designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the United States. It also refers to (new immigrants) to the United States in the last three decades: Arab, Korean, Tai, Laotian, and so on" (2003: 49).

What distinguishes Third World feminism from mainstream feminism, pursuant to Mohanty, are the conceptions of the "simultaneity of oppressions" and "historicized exploitation" (52-6) which relate the social and political marginality experienced by indigenous women to the histories of racism, capitalism and imperialism. Besides, there is the notion of "common context of struggle" (49), which Mohanty believes makes Third World feminism a viable oppositional project that is predicated on the politics of cultural location, temporality of history, and notions of hybridity, multiculturalism and interdependence; and a project that is capable of expanding the egoistic horizon of western feminism, bringing to the surface transnational interests, and creating virtual alliances encompassing all women of colour

who face identical challenges and undergo similar oppressive experiences. Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” takes a similar action when she asserts the ethnic, racial and gender inclusion of subaltern women and particularizes their voices in an attempt to purify feminism from its ethnocentric and homogenous connotations. For Spivak Western feminists ignore women’s specific cultural, social, and political conditions and this is why Western feminists’ universalism is just a failure. Spivak’s essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” demands a stop of the universalizing “Sisterhood”. She contends that “if in contest of the colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (1999, 274) Here she specifically looks at the situation of British occupation in India as an example of white European ideology taking over the other cultures. Writings about a subaltern group, and Third world women is a good example of this, from an outsider’s perspective (the Western feminists) are not taken seriously by the people they write about because such writings are written without experiencing the culture as an insider. How can an outsider correctly write about or accurately express a culture they do not directly experience?

The experiences of Third World women are diverse and unique especially in the Arab Muslim countries due to the Arabic culture and Islamic religion. Gloria Anzaldua recounts some of the experiences of Third World women trying to show Western feminists that their assumed universalism is not working and they should stop speaking for third world women and on behalf of them. Anzaldua recounts Third World women experiences asserting

Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit. The schools

we attended or didn't attend did not give us the skill for writing nor the confidence that we were correct in using our class and ethnic language (165).

Western feminists' claim that Third World women are victims of men and the patriarchal system that ruled them is another problematic issue that transnational feminists tackle. Western feminists look at women of the Third world as a singular unit who as a group are victims of men as a group. This monolith assumption has been challenged by transnational feminists. Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999) contend that transnational feminism criticizes not only forms of patriarchal oppression as analyzed by Western feminism, but also of feminists' culture hegemony. They give the example of a hegemonic approach that demonizes non – Western, Middle Eastern and Arab Muslim women in particular, and describe them as more oppressive than their First World counterparts (358). Mohanty, on the other hand, criticizes the assumptions made by Western feminists of Third world women's oppression and she notes that this assumption implies Third world women's powerlessness mistakenly "the discursively consensual homogeneity of women as a group... for the historical specific material reality of groups of women".

Spivak also defends Third world women claiming that they are not victims of their patriarchal system and not oppressed by their husbands and own men. For Spivak herself, Western feminists perpetrate their role of colonizer toward Third world women who serve as a category to these dominant Western feminists.

I.4.2 Islamic Feminism

The current interest in the discourses of feminism, human rights, and democracy have encouraged and supported many Muslim intellectuals to explore

feminist models of emancipation. Since feminism in the West is largely shaped by gender relations, economy, radical change in objectives and life-styles, and by capitalism, Muslim feminists focused on presenting a genre of feminism that does not threaten the social ideology of the faith. If feminism is seeking a voice for women, it would be better to know whose voice we seek to listen to when we search for feminism with third world women, particularly Arab /Moslem women. As they seek freedom in Muslim spaces, Arab Moslem women are usually sensitive to their roles in the communities as they realize that the goals of feminism, as conceived by Western society, are not necessarily relevant or applicable to Muslim women whose feminism is directly linked to religion and culture.

Faruqi (1999) affirmed that “if feminism is to succeed in an Islamic environment, it must be an indigenous form of feminism, rather than one conceived and nurtured in an alien environment with different problems and different solutions and goals” (p. 4). Feminism is not a novelty to Arabs/Muslims, but it is very different from the concept of feminism in the West. Lazreg (1988) invited readers on Muslim women or on women in the third world:

to take inter-subjectivity into consideration when studying [Muslim] women ... means seeing their lives as meaningful, coherent, and understandable instead of being infused “by us” with doom and sorrow. It means that their lives like “ours” are structured by economic, political, and cultural factors. It means that these women, like “us,” are engaged in the process of adjusting often shaping, at times resisting and even transforming their environment. It means that they have their own individuality; they are “for themselves” instead of being “for us.” An appropriation of their singular individuality to fit the generalizing categories of “our” analyses is an assault on their integrity and on their identity (p. 98).

Whether Muslim/women live in their culture or in a foreign one, their conflicts are to be addressed within the boundaries and understandings of their culture and religion, and do not need to be compared or expected to achieve similar objectives as Western feminists. Hijab (1991) describes how Muslim/Arab “women’s influence in society is primarily expressed through traditional structures, such as family ties where women’s power and status increase with age and the number of children they bear, and through women’s organizations [political, national, and social]” (p. 51).

Mojab’s (2001) “The Politics of Theorizing ‘Islamic Feminism’: Implications for International Feminist Movements” showed how the theoretical perspectives of identity politics, cultural relativism and postmodernism emphasize the uniqueness, particularism, and localism of each and every feminist movement. The study highlighted the differences between feminist women in the West and those in the East. Mojab presented how “feminist movement is global in the sense that women in almost every country of the world are engaged in various struggles to change their lives. However, Muslim women and Islamic feminists, like those in the feminist movement in Iran, have advanced a new political approach to the state of women living in Islamic totalitarian states. Mojab detailed how since mid-1980, a new type of “Islamic women” has emerged creating a new consciousness or a reformist trend, which some have called “Islamic feminism” (p.3). The study is an ideal example of how consciousness in the Muslim world has emerged and how gender relations are changing, not necessarily like feminism in the West, but rather with boundaries set by religion and traditions.

Moghadam (2004) defined “Islamic feminism” as a “Koran-centered reform movement by Muslim women with the linguistic and theological knowledge to

challenge patriarchal interpretations and offer alternative readings in pursuit of women's advancement and in refutation of Western stereotypes and Islamic Orthodoxy" (p. 1). Moghadam discussed Islamic feminism in a critical context of Muslim family, laws, and economy that aimed at marginalizing patriarchal forms of Islam and moving toward norms of justice, peace, and equality (p. 1). Moghadam's report clarified what Muslim feminists mean when they refer to feminism in Islam that is not separate from religion, but aims at reforming what has been misinterpreted in the religion.

Tohidi's (2002) "Islamic Feminism: Perils and Promises" described the unprecedented rise of literacy in women's rates in Muslim societies, noting that "the gender gap in the realm of education is closing and in some societies women's enrolment in higher education is equal to or even surpassing men's" (as is the case in the United Arab Emirates) (p. 13), he asserted that women are not only affected by change but are themselves its agents, describing how Islamic Feminism provided a feminist reinterpretation of Islamic texts, an alternative view of modernity that called for the urgent development of tools for women (like knowledge of Arabic, the Quran and fiqh as well as feminist theories and method) that enable them to redefine, reinterpret, and reform Islam to be a women-friendly and gender egalitarian religion (p. 15).

Kamarck (2002) described how women met in Cambridge to draft a document called "Transition within Tradition: Restoring Women's Participation in Afghanistan" and sent an important message: "If you want to help us, let us do it our way," meaning the Islamic way. Rina Amiri, one of the leaders of the Afghan group points out that Muslim Afghani women "do not need to be 'liberated' from Islam" but they need to

be armed “with the ability to fight Islam with Islam”(p. 2). Kamarck (2002) invited “Westerners, especially feminists to ... [take] some pretty deep breaths ... for the sake of Afghan women [to] try, this time, to do it their way” (p. 5). Such is the voice of many Muslim women who seek feminism that is in harmony with Islam.

Feminist voices in Islam have been divided into dominant voices and alternative ones. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Muslim/Arab feminists in Egypt had already established dispensaries, nursery schools, charitable organizations for women and had become visible politically as they organized themselves and revolted against the British colonizers. However, as Ahmed (1992) detailed, over the first three decades of the century, feminism became visible intellectually, organizationally, and politically (p. 174).

The leader of the dominant voice was Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) who was involved in the Egyptian national struggle and who organized a march of upper middle class women against the British in 1919. The alternative feminist voice led by Zienab Radwan, Hiba Ra’uf, and many other feminist scholars in Islam believed that Islamist women need to resist mainstream interpretations of Islam and the Shari’a (Ahmed, 1992) and find new interpretations from within the texts.

The dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself with the westernizing, secularizing tendencies of society (predominantly the tendencies of the upper, upper-middle, and middle-middle classes) promoted a feminism that assumed the desirability of progress toward Western-type societies. Tohidi (2001) identified the trend of the “earlier pioneers of women’s rights and feminism in the Middle East who were of a secular liberal, socialist (“Western”) orientation [and] unwilling to break away from their religious orientation, and hold Islam as a significant component of their ethnic,

cultural, or even national identity” (p. 13). The dominant voice of feminism a century ago trusted nationalism, secularism and equality in education, but the institutionalization of the nation-state as an outcome of secular epistemology has failed in the Muslim/Arab world and a new voice of feminism emerged.

The alternative voice opposed Western ways, and searched for a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native Islamic discourse in terms of a general social, cultural, and religious renovation. Majid (2000) described how “the nation-state has had catastrophic effects on much of the Third World, where thousands of culturally autonomous communities were tyrannized by dictatorship and parasitic bureaucracies ... The rejection of certain Western secular models in the age of late capitalism is consequently a survival imperative for Muslim people, not just a fanatical reaction to ‘progress’” (p. 119). What Muslims/Arabs fear is the removal of their epistemological, ethical, and religious values. Secularism, as the separation of state and religion, failed in the Arab Muslim world as it was imposed mostly by state and it “intensified the opaqueness of a Muslim subjectivity shrouded in a different ‘regime of truth.’” (Majid, 2000, p. 3). Al-All’s (1995) “Fundamentalism and Feminism in Egypt” reflected on the alternative voice of Muslim feminists led by Heba Ra’uf who advocated a new women’s movement—an Islamic one: “Ra’uf is creating a new discourse on women and politics which is seen as liberal inside the Islamist movement” (p. 29). Ra’uf declared that she “believes in Islam as a world view, and [thinks] that women’s liberation in our society should rely on Islam” (El-Gawhary, Interview, 1994, p. 27).

The Muslim/Arab women continue to have feelings of both acceptance and rejection to the aspirations of Western feminists. Harik and Marston (1996) illustrated

how “while many [Muslim/Arab women] gladly seek out what the West has to offer, others prefer an identity distinct and separate from the West ... some welcome the freedoms and rights taken for granted by women in the West, while others strive to preserve the roles assigned them by traditional society” (p. 20). Whether the dominant voice or the alternative voice prevails on different issues of feminism, both categories of voices seem to agree that women are not so much fighting for the freedom to be women as for the freedom to be fully human with certain rights.

I.5 Poetics of Women Diasporic Identity

The process of immigrating to a foreign country can be a taxing experience in the best of times (Noh and Avison, 1996). Immigrants have to learn to adjust to new physical and emotional surroundings, as well as to a new cultural environment. The American historian Oscar Handlin, in his work *The Uprooted*, describes the migratory process as being essentially shattering to immigrant culture on personal and collective levels. He points out that, "the history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences" (1951: 4). Individuals who move to an adopted country are faced with numerous practical challenges, such as finding housing and employment, and learning a new language. As part of their experiences in the adopted land, they also often face other barriers such as integrating into a different system of values, understanding the symbols of the host society, as well as possible discrimination and racism.

They are no longer part of a homogenous community with similar values and traditions; they are now in a new setting seeking to redefine themselves, their identity and their role, and to ascertain a new sense of belonging. Sharon McIrvin Abu Laban (1989) describes this process of adjustment as one that “Necessitates a dramatic change; from hegemonic to minority status; from a setting that reinforces ethno-

religious traditions to one that may throw that heritage into question” (cited in Rothenberg, 1999:43). From the moment of arrival in the UK and the US, Arabs as other immigrants are faced with identity related confusion, starting with the labelling imposed on them from the host society, transforming them from an immigrant, to a member of an ethnic group or race, thus a separate and different entity from the mainstream.

Although this study specifically addresses the construction of the Arab women identity in both sides of the Atlantic, it is important to take into consideration the literature on immigrants’ identity in general in an effort to contextualize these Arab women identities in their host countries. The identity model that is appropriate for this study is the Hays (2001) model that argues that multiple identities exist. Within this model Hays speaks of a dominant identity for those who are in control of groups that are less powerful, and she also speaks of a minority identity which is an identity that is appropriated by those who are in powerless situations

One can argue that as our surroundings change, we seek out a variety of new roles. As a result, a corresponding change in our identity is required. This includes how we define ourselves within our new environment. Newman (2004, 2006) suggests that identity encompasses a number of different, matching, opposing, intersecting and separate concepts of self. Within the realm of this definition one can have different facets to identity or to some extent have two selves simultaneously (Newman, 2006), or as Clark (1999) says, there is a non-unitary self; Rossiter (2007) discusses possible selves. This is relevant because just looking at “Arabs in the US and the UK,” we can instantly extract two intersecting identities based on geographical locations, Arab American and/or British, ensuing therefore many other intersecting possible selves in

light of gender and other influences of identity, including historical events, that affect how identity is constructed.

In the light of these factors, we are going to discuss three distinct facets of immigrants' identity which are respectively: immigrant, ethnic, and national/host country. These identities are further complicated by status and/or visibility of their racial background, by religion, and by gender. The influence and interplay of each of these identities differs given the specific context. The negotiation of identity depends to a large extent on the national ethos of the host society, which defines the outset placement of the new immigrants and their type of affiliation to it. In order to be received by the host society, immigrants often engage in "identity work" as a means of self-enhancement and acceptance by the dominant society (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Identity work is the "range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Ibid: 1348). Entering a new society, the new immigrants must become acquainted with new ways of living, relating and interacting, which include deciphering the cultural code of the society. The reading of the new culture is essential to making sense of their new lives and re-constructing their identity.

This concept was explored by George Herbert Mead who posits that we see ourselves in relation to the norms of self and of the social entity to which we belong. He states that self grows out of realization of social norms, and this is accomplished by activity or praxis. We may not subscribe to the norms, but we are nevertheless entangled in them and we can only view ourselves by relating to them, thus orienting our position on the map of reality through the entries of our society's norms. We can "locate" ourselves only through the perceived reflection of Self in Other—and this

process requires that a communication be engaged into between Self and society. It is out of this communication that the Self is realized (Mead, 1934).

Such a process of migration is a bit complex to discuss when the migrant is a women, and even when willingly undertaken, it produces a variety of experiences with significant consequences that shape their sense of perception of self and society. By becoming members of a new society, immigrant women experience a cultural transition often expressed in feelings of dislocation, rupture, and loss, which can produce confusion about the new culture's values, and an unclear awareness of its norms. In this context, Ralston says that

An immigrant woman had crossed not only territorial borders but also cultural, social and psychic boundaries. Her socialization had inculcated different values, attitudes and codes of conduct from those she encountered in the settlement country (2002: 4).

This state of rupture or "normlessness" may lead to withdrawal from participation in the greater society, as well as the reduction in the degree of interaction and solidarity (Durkheim, 1964). It can also create alienation due to "structurally imposed breakdown of interconnectedness" (Ritzer, 2000:164) resulting from the perceived difference by the individual between the culturally mediated presentation of reality and the individual experience of that reality. This difference can create conflict, confusion, alienation and self-doubt, which can hinder the integration process into the host society.

Moreover, there is a lack of commonalities with the new culture, such as language, symbols and semiotics of a culture. From the start, immigrants are faced with a multitude of cultural signifiers that seem strange, unfamiliar, and different. Along with their personal effects, they literally arrive with other baggage comprising of

codes, symbols, and dispositions that cover a whole range of elements, from the pace and sequencing of various modalities of social interaction to the broad organization of social life. Some aspects of the new environment are easily learned, such as geographic locations and road signs. Others may take much more time and can pose as many difficulties as learning a foreign language and decoding cultural symbols (Espin, 1992).

The pace of life is embodied in habits such as local customs and traditions, and other actions involving interaction, such as body language and modes of communication - all of which have to be learned in order to avoid ill feelings, embarrassment, and indifference. There is a whole semiotics of culture that has to be internalized. According to Geertz, culture is a “system of meanings that give significance to shared behaviours which must be interpreted from the perspective of those engaged in them” (1973:44). Culture includes not only the systems and standards adopted by a group for “perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting”, but also includes the “rules and symbols of interpretation and discourse” utilized by the members of the group (Ibid.)

Immigrants who are not able to fully decipher these “rules and symbols” - at least initially - will therefore be unable to fully interact and assimilate in the host society. This can lead to further alienation and a threat to their identity. Just as the experiences from the past can be seen as providing an organizing framework for perceptions of the present, so do other signifiers of the past in the present make human culture meaningful. Symbols are powerful in conveying meaning because they are central to culture. Symbols are meanings that link everyday life to realities that are present in the mundane world. Their importance for the identity construction lies in the work of Turner and Falgout (2002) who argued that the sensory memories of the

embodied mind represents the principal source of a sense of self from which people construct a memory of self. Henceforth, the coming across of past and present will help people to act and interact the everyday life (105). A core sense of the self derives from reflections on past experiences in relation to a systematic set of symbolic representations. One manner of coping with these experiences is to retreat into “Old World” values, to a place of familiarity and nostalgia. In order to understand the present, some of these women tend to look to the past and to the memories of the “Old” country to redefine their new world.

Memory functions as a way of transcending time....[it] connects people with the past, and imagination allows them to anticipate the future, but perception roots them in what really is, the present and place. It is as much prospective as it is retrospective (Ibid: 102-3)

The process of migration can entrap immigrants in a “‘time warp’, a mythologizing of tradition” (Shukla, 1997 cited in Anthias, 2001:628) creating through immigrant memories, a mythic world that revolves around the values, customs and traditions of the homeland in an effort to empower themselves in the midst of a host country that has labelled them as immigrants, refugees, minorities, newcomers, ethnics, or even foreigners. These names “...keep proliferating as though there were a seething reality, unmanageable and uncontainable in any one name” (Bannerji, 2000: 65). This form of identification emphasizes a strong sense of “Othering” in relation to the mainstream new culture, implicating heightened individuation, and often a sense of isolation and marginality.

As a result, a new state of consciousness takes place. Dislocation tends to intensify a sense of divergence from the mainstream. Old patterns and beliefs are revised and new ones are created. Schutz (1932/1967 Cited in Ritzer, 2000: 426)

explored the concept of consciousness in the everyday world and he observed that, “As long as things are running smoothly in accord with recipes, reflective consciousness is relatively unimportant, and actors pay little attention to what is going in their minds or the minds of others”. However, when these patterns and “recipes” change, a new sense of self-awareness kicks in, and the individual construction of her new reality is revised accordingly. A dialectical process takes place between the ‘familiar’ and the ‘strange.’

Faced with strangeness, an individual must give meaning to these circumstances and locate self within them. To give meaning is to reflect on past experience, to typify it at the present circumstances, and to assess its relevance for a plan of action. Through action, strangeness is appropriated and made familiar (Lewis, Mclain, and Weiger, 1993:83)

In addition, a heightened sense of distinctiveness can often occur due to being in a visible minority position in relation to the dominant White mainstream cultures. Factors such as accents, skin colour, and for some, the wearing of the *hijab* can increase their alienation and “otherness” especially when such images are portrayed in the media in a negative fashion. In order to resolve this dilemma, the immigrant woman must readjust the lens through which her existing world is viewed, and reconfigure her experience through the continual process of learning:

Crossing cultural boundaries involves a cultural disabling; to become enabled, the stranger must learn to see the world through the indigene’s eyes. The stranger needs to learn new recipes, not yet tested by experience, and must be involved in a continuous process of translation. The conflict of universes of meaning is resolved by cultural adaptation and assimilation (Anthias, 2001: 623).

This “process of translation” is achieved by immersing oneself in the general community by relying first on the experiences of ‘veterans’, such as other established immigrants. But interaction with the ‘indigenes’ - through community activities or labour market attachment - is often the best tutor, and it usually takes time for the unfamiliarity to be partially dissipated. The gradual internalization of the useful knowledge and clear rules associated with the normalcy of everyday life will tend to lessen the immigrants' sense of foreignness in the host country.

This desire to assimilate has often been founded, however, on “physical evidence of foreignness with all its irrational implications of moral inferiority” (Shakir, 1997:112). Physical evidence appears in the form of skin pigmentation, which comes in a range of colours. Some Arab are dark, others are blond and blue-eyed, but most have dark hair and skin tending to be olive, a characteristic shared by other Mediterranean people.

Indeed, their racial or ethnic visibility, coupled with international political conflicts involving Arabs and Muslims, and the negative and inaccurate portrayal in the media emphasize their “Otherness” and keep them in an outsider status - not as full members of the nation. They are in a “diasporic space” defined by Avtar Brah (1996)

to be the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested...[this informs] how and in what ways a group is inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the [host] country (cited in Ralston, 2002:10-11)

Arab women are especially vulnerable due to the fact that they are both women and immigrants. They are subject to a double measure of oppression, having to cope with racial and gendered constructs that lead to increased marginalization and exclusion.

I.6 Diasporic Women Writings: A Quest for an Identity

Diasporic literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term, which includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but related to the native culture and background. In this wide context all those writers can be considered as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remain related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature has its root in the sense of loss and alienation, which emerged as a result of that immigration and expatriation. It won't be out of the way, if we say that diasporic literature is a kind of psychological attempt to regain that which the writer has lost at the level of reality. The driving force for this kind of literature may be to derive solace or to experience affinity with the homeland or a strong longing to regain the lost paradise - homeland.

This Literature is divided into two distinctive types of writing. The first of these is more autobiographical with references to the narration of self. The second is more scholarly dealing with studies on diaspora. Töllöyan makes a distinction between these two types of writing by explaining that there are two discourses, named the emic diaspora and the etic diaspora. The emic diaspora refers to the diaspora that talks about themselves, while the etic refers to scholarly works on diaspora. He further states that, “[t]he self-study of diasporas produced representations and various forms of self-knowledge, some embodied in quotidian practices, some in public performances and others in oral and written archives and the thriving native language press of groups such as the Armenians and the Chinese” (654). He is of the opinion

that diasporas in the emic discourse generally keep making self representations by referring to their selves in English. The other matter that is significant in diaspora studies, according to Töllöyan, is the aspect of representation: “Who represents diasporas—the community itself or scholars— matters. As the works of Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey imply, the diasporic social domain that exists when only emic study and self-representation is going on takes a different shape when it is constituted as the object of knowledge of diasporic studies” (654). Furthermore, “theoretical conceptions, specialized terminologies, acknowledged and unacknowledged disciplinary interests and intentions, a will to knowledge, and a variety of methodologies combine to reformulate diasporas” (654). Thus diasporians become objects of knowledge and cosubjects. Töllöyan finally hints at an additional factor in this aspect:

A corollary of this point is that the object of knowledge in area studies is also always in some sense a given and always, in another sense, created. For example, the territory and populations of the Middle East existed as sociopolitical domains before orientalism, and then Middle Eastern studies, represented and transformed them into disciplinary objects. They continue to exist, but in subtle ways how they think of themselves, how they act, what they are, is altered by the dialectic between self-study and the disciplinary and area studies emanating from powerful quarters. (655)

In spite of these kinds of differences most diasporic writings reveal certain features that are similar. Many of the works discuss the individual/communities attachment to the homeland and the urge to belong in the settled land and as a result

of this they reveal a hybrid existence because they are people who are as multi-cultural as they are multi-lingual. They do not regard themselves as fully belonging in either culture, and have practically evolved a sub-culture peculiar to themselves. They try to take the best from both worlds, but suffer the sense of hybridity and cultural entanglement (Lau 2005: 241).

Although the diasporic life portrayed to some extent is realistic, yet it is also fictionalized due to the type of imagination that is indulged in diasporic writings. Emphasizing this point, Jasbir Jain refers to it as a 'split narrative'. She further discusses the past and the present of diasporic literature as being different -the past has a different 'history', 'tradition', 'regional and colonial memories' and 'political equations' and the present has different kinds of 'loneliness, isolation, social ghettoisation, success, affluence and recognition'. Even though they live in the present they co-exist in the past too (76). Yet another point of interest is that of Ramraj in his article "Diaspora and Multiculturalism" wherein he discusses the difference among immigrant, exile and expatriate writing. According to him "exile and expatriate writing is more immersed in the situation at home and the circumstance that prolong the individual's exile or expatriation" more than with "the emigre's or emigre's community's relationship with the dominant society" (229). Therefore he thinks that diasporic writing is often about "people who are linked by common histories of uprooting and dispersal, common homelands, and common cultural heritages", but due to the political and cultural particularities of the society, on the other hand it develops different cultural and historical identities (229).

Thus, one of the key problems that a diasporic community faces is the predicament with regard to identity. Thereby identity is one of the most common

themes in their literature, and in many cases the search for self-identity is portrayed as confusing painful and only occasionally rewarding. Lau points out that some of them write semi autobiographical novels, delving into personal pasts in order to either discover or re-examine their motivations and affinities. And others use fictional characters and situations to question traditional norms, testing, trying, and occasionally reinforcing (whether internally or otherwise) notions of race and culture (252). The second and later generations of the diasporic community generally display a dual identity. Although the second and later generations of the diasporic community consider the country in which they are born as the home country, the society still perceives them as outsiders and therefore they are caught in a hyphenated identity. Kwame Dawes' words as quoted in Weedon's article "Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing" substantiates this issue, "They were born there or have grown up there all their life. They are uncomfortable with the notion of a home elsewhere for they have no sense of exile. Their sole exile is the exile within their own home country" (28)

Middle Eastern women's literatures that represent Arab immigrants of differing gender, backgrounds and professions within the global space becomes very important to diasporic Arab discourse because they disrupt the stereotypical and popular beliefs that usually define the Arab immigrant experience under one monolithic umbrella. The monolithic constructions of Middle Eastern people continue to pervade popular imagination in the West, and in this new context of immigration, the attributes of terrorism, Harem, backwoods people among others usually associated with the image of the Arab world , seem to follow the Arab immigrant.

Some contemporary Arab immigrant narratives, particularly women's narratives, are keen on reflecting this diversity in the Arab diasporic experience in terms of class, cultural, and gender differences. More than just immigration narratives that present a diversity of Middle Eastern immigrant experience that is usually overlooked and seen as collective in the West, these new contemporary Arab female writers also present different cultures in dialogue in their works by exploring a wider worldview through women's individual experiences both in their home countries and in the West.

In order to achieve a diasporic identity that reflects subjectivity, that is, an identity that they have created for themselves and that has not been imposed on them nor is defined solely in nationalistic or geographical terms, the characters created by these writers have to learn to reconstruct their identities by continuously negotiating and overcoming the conundrums created by the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity in the West, but more importantly through their renegotiation of gender dynamics within the Middle Eastern context. Even though many female authors have produced remarkable narratives portraying the Arab female immigrant experience in the West, they have not delved as such into the phenomenon of return which enables a much wider global perspective on the diasporic woman's transcultural experience.

I.7 Trans-cultural Consciousness in Literature

As a concept of merging and convergence between cultures, Transculturation is one aspect of "culture" which develops as a result of cultural confrontation, openness, and finally co-existence. Derived from "cult" and associated with the intrinsic need to cope with a group of people and adopt its ways of living, the notion of culture was given its clearest expression in the mid-Victorian period by Mathew Arnold, in his

famous article “Culture and Anarchy”, he perceives culture as “ a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (qtd in Johnson 1979: p.2). Furthermore, Arnold believes that as a study of perfection, culture leads us to “conceive of human perfection, developing all parts of our society” (ibid). Relative to Arnold’s observation is that of Raymond Williams, who asserts in *Culture and Society* that culture which, due to its complexity in idea and reference has undergone many changes in meaning, starting from “a general state or habit of mind (to) the general state of intellectual development in a society as a whole” (16) of a distinct people or other social group.

As can be inferred, “culture” is, in its general meaning, an evolutionary process that aims at achieving or approaching human perfection through studying, reflecting on, and accepting the best which has been thought or said in the world. This act, in turn, can be clearly manifested in the consciousness of different individuals and peoples, and the ways of life they follow. By effect, the diversity of thought, belief, and the “Spirit of the whole way of life” (16) as Williams contends, contribute to establishing cultures that continue to influence and be influenced by one another interestingly enough, cultural contact and confrontation can highlight discrepancies of thought and widen the rift between human communities. Yet, it can pave a new way of cultural understanding and coalition through transculturation which, being the art of living with the other is a positive force that aspires to solve rather than exacerbate conflicts in a shrinking world which is becoming more and more interrelated.

The term “Transculturation” was first coined by the Cuban anthropologist and sociologist Fernando Ortiz in his classic 1940 study *Contrapunto Cubano del Tabaco y el azúcar* to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. In his study, Ortiz observes that the Caribbean, and more specifically Cuba, has established multicultural identities and new ways of living, arising from mixture of two cultures and the fusion of their peoples. Reflecting on the concept of transculturation, John Beverly (1999) argues in *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in cultural theory*, that Ortiz meant the term to alternate to acculturation as a model for the evolution of modern Cuban culture adapts to the powerful “Self” and assimilates to it, “in transculturation elements of both cultures come into a dynamic relationship of contradiction and combination” (43) which, in effect, ensures a practice of cultural creativity and a performative philosophical reasoning. In this respect, it seems plausible to mention that Ortiz sees transculturation as a quotidian practice in ordinary commodities, objects, and services that guarantees reciprocal benefit to all participants, and more importantly aids to pacify cultural conflicts which become less hostile through continuous contact and cross-cultural dialogue between human beings.

Throughout the years, many South American Scholars have reflected on transculturation in an attempt to explain the phenomenon of cultural integration, the most renewed of whom is José Martí, who scrutinized the impact of cross-culturation on legitimizing the Americas and forming “métissage” or interculturally mixed peoples. Meanwhile, other sociologists including Lamberto Tassinari and Ángel Rama have adopted Ortiz’s concept to serve their ends. Rama’s remarkable contribution to transculturation appears in his widening the scope of the theory to cover not only cultural, but also literary aspects of criticism. He applied the literary angel of

transculturation to the writings of famous authors such as Garcia Marquez, José Maria Arguedas and Guimaraes Rosa and deduced that intellectual exchange can take place between high (or academic) cultures and subaltern ones. Moreover, he has made it a point that Latin American literary tradition is neither a mere product of the colonizer's culture nor that of the colonized. Rather Rama believes that it is a fruit of the mixture of the two cultures, for intellectual influence it is a two-way process, one in which two societies impress and are impressed through an act of transculturation.

More recently, Arianna Dagnino (2013) argues that since the transcultural literary works are produced at the crossroad of different cultures they are engaged with and express the confluent nature of cultures overcoming the dichotomies between the North and the South, the West and the Rest, the dominator and the dominated, the Native and the Immigrant, the National and the Ethnic. According to her, transcultural literature records the re-shaping of national collective imaginaries in an effort to adjust to the new age of transnational and supra-national economic, political, social and cultural processes (p.03)

Since its being put to use by Latin and South American anthropologists and sociologists transculturation has been transmitted to North America by the American sociologist Mary Louise Pratt. Her notion of this concept in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, as “ the ways in which subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (1992:06) resonates to some degree with that of Fernando Ortiz. Yet, what distinguishes Pratt's perspective is her referring to transculturation as a phenomenon of the “contact zone” which in turn is described as “the space of colonial encounters” (*ibid*). This zone, according to the sociologist, is aimed at foregrounding the interactive

and improvisational dimensions of relations between Self and the Other, Colonizer and Colonized, or Traveller and Travellee, not in term of separateness or apartheid, but in those of co-presence, interaction and interlocking understandings and practices. In this sense the “contact zone” becomes an attempt to invoke the spatial and historical relations between warring cultures whose trajectories intersect upon interactive encounters usually repressed by domination and conquest.

The phenomenon of cultural confrontation between dissimilar cultures has always provoked the dialectical Self-Other dichotomy which has, in turn, become a controversial issue in postcolonial theory. As Edward Said argues in his book *Orientalism*, the occident defines its existence through the ideological construction of an opposite “other”, represented in the Orient. According to him, Orientalism that justifies colonial rule of oriental lands produces a set of binary representation through which the west claims intellectual superiority, dynamism, and innovation, while the East’s construed as inferior, static and dependent. These distorted assumptions about the Orient do not polish the Western self only but also cultivate animosity between the two poles and foreground multidimensional clashes of imperial conceit over power and domination. Consequently, ongoing conflicts of control and resistance are infused between the subjugated “different” other and the Eurocentric “normal” self as Said theorized (1978:07).

Building on Said’s postcolonial perspective, Homi Bhabha observes in *The Location of Culture* that instead of establishing East-West relations on the basis of cultural diversity, the colonial hegemonic discourse promotes ones cultural difference, where “ a mediator or metaphor of otherness must be found to contain the effects of the difference” (1994:31). With its regime of representation formed by Foucault’s

couplet of “power / knowledge”, the ideology of the colonial self aims at inferiorizing and silencing the colonial subject so that it could never be the active agent of articulation. As a result, Bhabha assures that “the other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse... it is its location as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it be always the good object of knowledge, the docile body of representation, that reproduces a relation of domination” (*ibid*).

Reading from these two critical stand points, it can be argued that Said and Bhabha assert the formation of the self to be a two dimensional process in that it, the self is identified in opposition with the other. Closely related, in Ortiz’s transcultural observation, it is in rapport with the other that the self is recognized. Nevertheless, what distinguishes Ortiz’s view is that cultural encounters which underscore divisiveness can create in-between spaces of mediation, gradually forged in interpersonal relationships, and find roots in solidarity experiences of peaceful and fruitful integration.

I.7 “Writing Back”: Narratives as a Strategy of Resistance

Resistance literature is a politicized literature that actively critiques and interrogates oppressive institutions and ideologies. Barbara Harlow explains the origin of the phrase “resistance literature” in her book by the same title. “The term ‘resistance’ was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his study *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*” (Harlow 1987: 2). Harlow extends Kanafani’s concept to analyze other world literatures growing out of actual armed resistance movements; however, her emphasis on the power of the literature itself to resist particular

ideological oppressions established a category of literature and a phrase for literary criticism that has persisted into the present. “The term ‘resistance literature’ has become nearly ubiquitous since the publication of [Harlow’s] book” (Rodriguez 2000: 63).

The concept of resistance in post-colonial literature refutes the use of the language of the empire to rebut in dominant ideologies. It undermines the hegemony and authority of colonial knowledge production by subverting the binary thought and essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge. Bhabha locates resistance in the spaces between colonial expectations and the native’s response, so that the disempowered can calculate strategies, ‘alter’, and ‘displace’ authority within these in-between spaces. In this model, subverting colonial authority is possible because such power is never total, nor absolute, due to hybridity, mimicry, and liminality.

Resistance Literature is therefore, an act of “Writing Back”, speaking either of the oppression and the racism of the colonisers or the inherent cultural “better-ness” of the indigenous people. Helen Tiffin expresses this point best in her essay “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse”: “Postcolonial literatures-cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer field’s counter discursive strategies to the dominant discourse.”(Tiffin, 96).

It is within this context that, Mary DeShazer (1994) deals with writing as a tool for survival and consciousness raising and a form of activism. It brings together many voices of resistance by Third World women and United States First World and Third World women. These women writers assert their identities; celebrate their difference while they search for common grounds with each other and with other Western

feminists. DeShazer argues that they challenge “polarized forms of thought, to “unsettle every definition of otherness arrived at” and that women’s resistance poetry “helps with this unsettling” (23). We do believe that a similar unsettling of hegemonic perceptions and thoughts can be achieved not only through resistance poetry but also through other forms of resistance writings such as prose narratives and other selected literary works.

In this dissertation, resistance is a form of consciousness raising explored in various literary genres represented by the works of Arab women narratives, who are examined as writers and intellectual activists resisting typical definitions of otherness and traditional structures of power relations across gender constructions and ethnic, religious and cultural borders. Their writings work towards change and the unsettling of constructions of otherness and the commonly stereotyped United States Third World female “Other”.

The unsettling of these constructions is achieved through various narrative techniques that counter oppressive, often dehistoricized, and decontextualized images and identities. I believe Arab American Women narratives are literary attempts of resistance to currently constructed histories of their cultures. These writers seem to share with Harriet Jacobs a deep frustration with the common representations of their culture and people and the determination to write their own (hi) stories as she did in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In *Writings by Racial Women of color* Gloria Anzaldua addresses Third World women writers in a letter in which she states:

I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve autonomy ... To show that I *can* and that I *will* write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally, I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing (84).

In fact, these writers struggle to find a feminist space in which they are not restricted by the cultural and patriarchal norms set by the hegemonic culture nor their own US Third World cultures. They are torn between their ambitions as empowered feminists and their cultural affiliations which they respect and wish to maintain. They strive to shape their own feminist identities that are independent yet strongly connected to their cultural origins.

I.9 Conclusion

Global population movements and transnational migration are currently the focus of broad academic debates and involve discussion of such issues as transnational cultural relations, the renovation of migrants' worldviews, and identity reconstruction. In fact, the traditional notions of identity tend to advocate a static and tangible correlation between location, citizenship, and identity. However, the current era of globalization and the postmodern age have rendered these views obsolete and have confirmed that identity is fluid and dynamic. According to Stuart Hall, "Identity becomes a 'moveable feast'; formed and transformed continuously in relation to the

ways we are represented or addressed in postmodern societies”¹⁴. Diasporic communities, then, are emblematic of the times because they are constantly negotiating their identities within the borders of their adopted home as well as across borders with their homeland, experiencing, therefore, a profound changes in their conceptual-social orientation as they move from the state of being a "majority" to that of becoming a "minority" or "diaspora", giving rise to feelings of bewilderment and alienation with which they have to cope.

Initially, the diasporic community try to adjust with the new culture and society into which they have moved. But at the same time they are not willing to follow the new land’s culture completely. At times, even when they live in the settled land for a long time, they still consider it as another country. When discrimination occurs the first generation accepts it in an ordinary way, but the second and further generations are affected psychologically. The reason is that from the second generation onwards are from the moment of birth, brought up in the settled country and consider it as their home country and follow its culture and tradition as their own. Therefore, when they face discrimination, it hurts them and raises questions regarding their roots/backgrounds. This kind of discrimination paved the way to the emergence of “counter narratives” and hegemonic discourse at political, social, cultural and intellectual level as well.

The Literature emerging from the background of diaspora is seen as the literature of cultural differences, which is dynamic and ever changing. In the stories that diasporic writers narrate, and in the beliefs that form the matrix of their writings,

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, quoted in *Communication and Identity in the Diaspora: Turkish Migrants in Amsterdam and Their Use of Media*, Christine Ogan, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001)8. Quote originally appeared in “The Question of Cultural Identity” In *Modernity and its Futures*, eds Stuart Hall,

there are two threads being unravelled simultaneously: that of the dominant culture and the ethnic sub-culture; theirs and ours. Sometimes the two strands intermesh so that the one may not be distinguished from the other. As one undergoes cultural or geographical or emotional or psychological displacement, one may go through any or all of these phases. Displacement and Resettlement: the outcome is 'hybrid' evolving sensibilities. "Our identity is at once plural and partial" says Rushdie, "...we straddle two cultures" (199, p.15)¹⁵, and so the writer speaks in many voices, in plural tongues.

Female writers began the task of representing the challenge specific to their migrant fellows in a variety of literary genres that represent their different historical and cultural diasporic backgrounds as they contend with their global space. In this context, Chandra Mohanty discusses the significance of the process of "rewriting and remembering history" in her *Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (2003: 78), not only as a corrective to the gaps, erasures, and of hegemonic masculinist history, but also as it leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity.

The literary writings and performances of contemporary diasporic Middle Eastern women form part to this category because these writers have launched a new literary movement in the last decades that is characterize not just by writing but also rewriting the past stories. The marginal position from which they write have been a liberating factor that allows them to revisit, deconstruct and reconstruct modernist fictions and replaced them with their own postmodern meta-fiction.

¹⁵ Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands : Essays and Criticism*, London: Granta, 1991

Chapter Two

Contextualizing Anglophone Arab Women Writing: From Cultural Context to Literary Text

II.1 Introduction

Since literature is a reflection of the social context in which the latter is produced, it is therefore, impossible to deal with a particular diaspora without discussing the historical and current debates on the different processes of integration and acculturation adopted by the immigrants to adjust the “Self” with the “Other”. Henceforth, and in order to understand the Anglophone literature produced by Arab women writers it is important to shed light on the Arab communities experiences within their host societies.

The present chapter presents background information on Arab’s history and culture in Britain and America in pre and post September 11th period. In fact, immigration to these countries include the experience of being placed into a racial hierarchy which is one of the primary means by which identity is established, however, Arabs occupy an ambiguous position within the racial system of both societies which has affected their own sense of identity.

Women’s adjustment to the British and American culture has proved to be more problematic because of their portrayal in the western popular culture as belly dancers, harem girls, oppressed and in need of liberation; the Arab woman has always been depicted as a silent submissive creature. Yet Arab British and American women who were born and raised in these countries are strongly attached to life and culture in these societies, but their Arab part of identity is regarded by others as un-British and un-American.

Given that contemporary Anglophone Arab women literature has been written against the backdrop of these events and experiences the present chapter will provide a solid foundation for the study that follows.

II.2 Arabs in both sides of the Atlantic: Historical Perspective

Arab immigration and settlement patterns in UK and the US occurred under different social, political and economic conditions; these differences had a great impact on the literature produced by Arab women writers living in those societies. Therefore, and in order to understand the thematic differences existing in the texts produced by these writers, it is worth providing a historical and contextual backdrop to the lives and experiences of the Arab women on both sides of the Atlantic.

II.2.1 Arabs in the United Kingdom

Over the past century or more¹⁶ people from over a dozen Arab countries have settled in Britain for different reasons, either because of colonial linkage, academic studies, for business, as refugees or asylum seekers. Although links between the Arab world and the UK go back centuries, very little is known about Britain's present day Arab community. In fact Arab migration to Britain should be considered a relatively recent phenomenon and even though 'Arab migration to Britain' encompasses migrations from up to twenty two states, as a whole it cannot be compared to the volume of migration from Old or New Commonwealth states to Britain. In this context, El-Solh concedes that information of Arabs in Britain is "hampered by the lack of accurate quantitative data" (1992. 238).

¹⁶ In his Article entitled « Invisibility of the Arab community in Britain », Ermes claimed that the Middle Eastern people, who were the ancestors of today's Arab, came to Britain before the Roman did, they came to mine and export metal like aluminium from places like Cornwell, and few centuries later, He added, Britain became part of the Roman Empire and was ruled by a Roman Emperor who was an Arab from Syria called Philipos. Retrieved on: <http://naba.org.uk/thelibrary/articles/Diaspora/invisibilityofarabin Britain.htm>

The Arab British community is made up of numerous people who originally hail from Arab league countries which include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, The Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman and whose mother tongue is Arabic. Despite the fact that majority of Arabs are adherent to Islam, there have always been in the Arab world minorities which are Arab-speaking but profess other religions, notably Judaism and Christianity, therefore, not all Arab British are of Muslim faith¹⁷ (Halliday, 2010: 03).

It seems that the earliest migration of Arabs to Britain occurred in the nineteenth century, these migrants were mainly Syrians and Moroccan merchants engaged in trade who settled in the industrial cities of the north around the middle of the century (Karmi, 1997). Thereafter and towards the beginning of the twentieth century, Somalis and Yemenis, recruited by the British Merchant Navy, began to settle in British ports like Cardiff and Liverpool. When discharged from the navy after the Second World War, such seamen later became low-paid workers living in disadvantaged urban areas (Karmi, 1997 and Seddon, 2012). During the 1940s and 50s, small numbers of Egyptians and Sudanese came the Britain for professional reasons, as did Palestinians displaced by the 1948 conflict with Israel (Karmi, 1997) However by all accounts, El –Solh (1992: 240) asserts “these new comers were numerically too insignificant to form distinct ethnic communities based on national origin”. Halliday too, concedes that compared to the migration from the commonwealth countries

¹⁷ El-Solh, argues that the lack of research on Arabs in Britain is the result of the conflation of Muslims and the Arab identities, thereby overlooking Arabs of other religious affiliation, such as Christian Arabs or Jewish Arabs that have settled in Britain.

These Arab immigrants were relatively insignificant with the overall context of Migration to Britain over the same period. The numbers involved – a few hundred Lebanese and Syrians, a few thousand Yemenis, perhaps a few thousand North Africans and a few hundred Palestinians- were too tiny compared to the three four million immigrants who settled in Britain in modern times (2010: 06)

In addition, their spatial dispersal, as well as the fact that they were not clustered in specific job categories, very probably also played a part in discouraging a trend similar to that discernible among Yemeni and the Somali seafaring communities, where ethnic boundaries had clearly begun to be demarcated¹⁸. El-Solh notes that the 1960s mark an important turning point in the history of Arabs settlement in Britain both in terms of numbers and the increasing diversity of national origins and social class; this was confirmed by Karmi (1997, 9) who stated that “It was not until the 1960s that Arabs in significant numbers began arriving to Britain, mainly to seek work”. In this context Nagel (2001) argued that this period witnessed a relative openness in the British policy toward skilled migration and student migration and for a short term, toward exiles and people feeling civil conflict abroad which enable thousands of Arab students and professionals to settled and obtain British citizenship with relative ease.

El-Solh (1992: 240) emphasizes that a distinction between “a more or less random and chain migration” is required. The first pattern, she maintains, applies, for example to skilled and semi-skilled Egyptians (mostly men) who came to Britain “as individual economic migrants” many secured a permanent residence status or British citizenship through employment and/or through marrying British women. By all accounts, this also applied to some Iraqi and Sudanese economic migrants. Chain

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the Yemeni community in Britain, see Halliday's *Britain's First Muslims*

migration, on the other hand, applies to Moroccans recruited from rural areas in northern Morocco for employment in the hotel and catering industries in London, and to some extent in the National Health Service. They were generally confined to menial job with little prospect of career mobility. In the late, 1960s and early 1970s many of Moroccans brought their families over to Britain, thus transforming what was originally intended as temporary migration into a longer term settlement.

The civil war in Lebanon and the economic boom in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis, coupled with economic and political instability in some parts of the Arab region, encouraged an Arab “brain drain as well as flight of Arab capital in search of investment opportunities” in Britain (Karmi, 1997). From 1984 onwards a process of naturalization begins to take effect with the number of Arabs applying for and being granted British citizenship increasing significantly. This increase appears to be largely the result of political and legislative developments in Britain (passing of the British Nationality Act in 1983) and conflict in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Halabja massacre in 1988¹⁹, the 1991 Gulf War and the UN sponsored sanctions regime were key factors affecting the extent and nature of migration from Iraq in particular. In the months leading up to the 1991 Gulf War, Iraqis, Arabs and British Muslims more broadly were targeted by the British security services and the tabloid press.¹⁸ “We should round up every one of the Iraqis now in Britain BEFORE THEY ATTACK US ON OUR OWN DOORSTEP” read the headline of *The Daily Star* (20th August 1990). From the outset tabloid coverage of the Kuwait

¹⁹ On the 16-17 March 1988, in the closing days of the Iran-Iraq War, Iraqi armed forces used chemical weapons against Kurdish town of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan, under the pretext that the attack was directed against Kurdish insurgents. The attack instantly killed up to 5000 civilians and injured 7,000-10,000 more. Subsequently thousands more died of complications, diseases, and birth defects.

crisis fuelled widespread fears that there were hundreds of Arab and Muslim would-be terrorists in Britain. Between September 1990 and March 1991 a total over 160 Iraqis and Palestinians, frequently described in the press as “Arabs”, were deported and up to 150 others interned without trial.¹⁹ The political events of this period are likely to have motivated many Arabs living in Britain to secure their legal status.

Some Arabs have set up their own Arab business in Britain, ranging from real estate and import –export ventures, to consultancy and leisure services, travel agencies and small scale commercial enterprises. However, Armanazi (1991) describes Arab involvement in British business as “skin-deep”. He argues that Arab businessmen tend “to prefer the understated, almost embarrassed attitude towards any business connections or activities that may carry high profile in British life” (Ibid. p 31). He identifies two types of Arab businesses in Britain; the first includes all retail trade, service, or light industries that are geared almost exclusively towards servicing the requirements of Arabs living in Britain and Arab tourists. The second type of Arab businesses in Britain is represented in many intermediary establishments that organize supplies to the Arab market and act as a window into the outside world for Arab commercial and investment interests. However, both types are “largely detached from the mainstream of the British economic environment and tangential to British society and culture” (Ibid. P 43). Similarly, El-Solh (1992: 241-242) argues that “these businesses are either geared to overseas, mainly Middle Eastern, markets, or have tended to operate on the basis of quick profit consideration”. By servicing a

predominantly Arab clientele, generally on a seasonal basis, their economic impact on the British economy would appear to be relatively limited, she asserts²⁰

In fact, Arab immigrants have settled with a relatively secure middle class status (or at least a high level of education) and have been in a better socio-economic position than many new commonwealth immigration and their descendants. There are important exceptions to this, including London's sizeable Moroccan population employed mainly in low waged hotel and catering sector and more recently settled refugees from Iraq, Algeria and Sudan. But overall, they are highly educated and have professional status, reflective of well-off economic position of British Arabs relative to other minority groups and even to the majority society²¹ (Al-Rasheed: 1996, cited in Nagel and Stacheli: 2009, 102).

II.2.2 Arabs in the United States

The story of Arab Americans in the United States is a very vivid one. Many came to the U.S. as sojourners planning on going back to their home lands²². With time most assimilated and became an invisible population. For the last few decades, and especially after 9/11, the status of Arab Americans has changed: they have become a singled out and stigmatized group that is politically marginalized.

²⁰ We should take into account that Armanazi's paper was written in 1990 and El-Solh's paper was published in 1992; since then, Arab investments in core British businesses have increased. According to the 2012 Arabian Business rich list, the UK is home of 10 percent of the world's 50 rich list; see http://richlist.arabianbusiness.com/rich-list-2012/news/culture_society/2012/dec/16/317999/#.UkG1qT_AvUY [Accessed in September, 2013]. Besides, the number of Arab millionaires investing in Britain in exchange for permanent residency has increased through the use of investor visas that allow wealthy foreigners to live in the UK in return for buying at least £1m (US\$1.6m) of gilts or shares and bonds in British companies. For more detail see: <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/wealthy-arabs-buy-right-live-in-britain--476604.html>

²¹ Scholars have drawn this conclusion based on data from the other-other category in the 1991 census. Whilst this category is problematic for several reasons (including the fact that it includes many who do not consider themselves Arabs and does not include many who do), it is regarded to be a proxy for British Arabs and provides a rough profile of this population (Al-Rasheed 1996, cited in Nagel and Stacheli: 2009, 102)

²² At the beginning of the Arab American immigration there was no mentioning of Arab States yet. First Arab immigrants were members of the Ottoman Empire.

The Arab American Institute and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, agree that there are approximately 3.5 million Arabs living in the United States. American Arabs come from all of the nearly two-dozen Arab countries, but the majority is Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, and Iraqi. Approximately 82% of the Arabs living in the United States are citizens and the majority of U.S. Arabs are native born (Samhan, 2001).

Arab immigrants came to the United States in multiple waves. According to Suleiman (1999), there were two major waves. The first wave took place beginning in the 1870s and continued until the onset of World War II. The second immigration wave occurred during World War II and continues today. Other researchers characterize the immigration as happening in several waves (Ajrouch, 2000; Erickson and Al-Timimi, 2001). Because of faulty records it is difficult to separate the waves into distinct periods. Arabs were sometimes counted as Ottoman subjects, or they were not counted as Arabs because they entered the United States through Canada and Mexico. Many Arabs did not disclose their ethnicity to immigration officials for fear of repercussion and Palestinians often arrived with Israeli passports and thus were not counted as being Arabic (Ajrouch, 1997).

Notable characteristics define the immigrations. The earliest wave consisted of primarily Christian Arabs who came from the Greater Syria region part of the former Ottoman Empire²³ (modern day Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine). The immigrants from Greater Syria were primarily seeking economic gain and social status. There is evidence that the Homestead Act of 1862 drew the first Arab persons of record to

²³ According to Suleiman, (1999) and Naff (1994) at the early stage of immigration, records did not distinguish between the different ethnicities of the immigrants coming from the Ottoman Empire and other areas around the Mediterranean, consequently Greeks, Arabs and Armenians were all combined into one category.

America in 1862 and then, in 1876 Arabs coming to Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition remained in the United States (Al-Hazza, 2005).

This particular group was uneducated, illiterate, and poor and thus, found work in factories and mines. As unskilled labourers in a labour market already filled by other ethnic groups, many of the Arab immigrants became peddlers. Both women and men carried a stock of goods consisting mainly of items for personal use that were difficult for farming families to make themselves or to procure in nearby stores. They carried on their backs products such as dry goods, lotions, combs, and handcrafted goods (mainly fine linens made by Lebanese women). A handful of families established a network of peddling, setting the routes and supply sources for next families to come. No other immigrant group, with the exception of German Jews, were so completely identified with peddling (Naff 1994). By 1920s many of the peddling families were able to establish stores. Subsequently, they became wholesalers and retailers of groceries and produce (Faires Conklin and Faires 1987).

In two decades, the Arabs established themselves as a middle-class, entrepreneurial group. They fended for themselves, created and sustained religious, social, and service organizations but were not vocal in politics. Many Arabs from the earlier waves created tight-knit colonies primarily in Boston and New York as well as other north-eastern United States cities including Detroit, Chicago and Cleveland (Cainkar, 2000; Suleiman, 1999).

The second major wave of Arab immigration to the United States followed World War II and consisted of many Palestinians displaced by Israel's creation (Haboush, 2007). Others came from all over the Arab world. The second wave of immigrants, while also seeking personal advancement and wealth, sought to escape

oppressive governments and war-torn countries (Suleiman, 1999). This wave was much smaller than the previous or subsequent immigration waves due to the 1924 Immigration Act, which allowed the minimum quota of 100 immigrants from Arab countries per year. Asians were the only ones given less immigration privilege, as they were totally banned from immigrating to the United States (Cainkar, 2000).

Beginning in the 1960s, and including a large influx during the 1975 Lebanese Civil War, a third wave of Arab immigrants came to the United States. These Arabs were highly educated professionals. They were primarily Christian or Sunni Muslim, although many Shi'a, or Shiite Muslims joined the influx (Haboush, 2007). The most recent influx of Arabs to the United States began with the Gulf War in 1990 and has continued through the current Iraq War. Therefore, many of these immigrants were motivated by the desire to find a "democratic haven" (Suleiman, 1999) where they would enjoy freedom without political or economic harassment.

In 1999, Suleiman asserted that Arab Americans in the U.S. are doing well on the economic, professional and educational level. He pointed out, however, that too many of them have to hide or de-emphasize their origin because of racism, asserting that their full integration and assimilation will not be achieved until Arab Americans can stop "struggling to be accepted in the American society" (p.16) This historical perspective about the immigration process of Arabs in the U.K and the U.S. showed that the factors that had an impact on the formation of their cultural identities in their new home away from home; it showed that they were not disconnected from the events taking place in their original homeland and that these events played a major role in their life.

II.3 Arab-British and Arab-Americans: Meaning of Race

Discussions of ethnicity are typically situated within paradigms of assimilation or cultural pluralism for which the ethnic assertion or what Charles Taylor calls “the politics of recognition”²⁴ is required. The quest for public affirmation of group identity for the purpose of cultural survival is of particular importance to Arabs in Britain and America, who have historically been rendered invisible.

Arabs, for the most part, have been excluded from dominant race relations discourses in these two countries, and Arabness does not fit into publicly recognised categories of diversity and cultural difference. Yet while they have not been constructed as a “problem” and a “ghettoised” (Nagel, 2001: 388) minority, they are understood in public discourse to be a foreign element. This section investigates the Arabs’ position in Britain’s and American’s racial system, which is a crucial element in the construction of their current diasporic identities.

II.3.1 Arab-British as “Other-Others”

Historically, Arab migrants in Britain can be said to have experienced a double exclusion, the first a result of ethnic and racial discrimination, the second stemming from their exclusion from British multiculturalism which is still largely concerned with the consequences of colour and culture for Black and Asian minorities²⁵. This is perhaps best illustrated by Searle’s (1991) interview with Abduglalil Shaif, Chairman

²⁴ Charles Taylor et al., (1994). *Multiculturalism : Examining the politics of Recognition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, P.75-106 cited in Lisa Souheir Major’s Arab American Ethnicity: Location, Coalitions and cultural Negotiations, P.20

²⁵ Writing on race, ethnicity and migration in Britain has until very recently focused almost exclusively on the experiences of Black and Asian migrants and their descendents. While this has been based on the scale of these migrations and the structural inequalities and discrimination that these groups have faced, it has meant that migrants and migrations that fall outside these two umbrella groupings have received little academic attention.

of the 'Yemeni Community Association' in Sheffield, one of the longest standing and established Arab communities in Britain. Shaif offers the following:

The first thing that Yemeni's here wanted to do in 1971 was to support the revolution and learn all about it. They could only learn in Arabic. So the first information and lessons that they gained in working-class consciousness and organisation was not about the struggle here in Britain. It was about how the Yemenis organised the revolution back home. That was what taught them how to organise themselves as working-class people first of all, and then they applied that to their life and experience here in Sheffield. But they didn't learn about working-class struggle and development in Britain. They were divorced from that, and that was part of the racism they faced. If local working-class organisations had helped to give them an education about organisation, about taking power, it would have integrated them into the movement and they would have developed with that. But it didn't happen that way. The British trade unions and working-class organisations didn't bother reaching them, so they took their inspiration from their struggles in the homeland." (Searle and Shaif 1991:74)

Shaif here draws our attention to the class differential in the double exclusion experienced by 'Arab migrants' who are stereotypically seen (and often see themselves) as middle-class despite evidence that the overwhelming majority are working-class. This is supported not only by what we know about longstanding Yemeni settlement in the industrial and port towns of Britain from the late 19th century onwards; equally the majority of Egyptians and Moroccans who came to Britain in the 1960s and 1970s to work in the hospitality and catering industry. More recently the most significant waves of migration from the 'Arab world' have been the result of war, dislocation and forced migration from Iraq, Algeria and Somalia. In many respects the assumption of affluence stems from the point at which these separate migrations are taken out of

their particular national contexts and understood in terms of ‘Arab’ migration. Thus heterogeneous and contested political and cultural affiliation comes to stand for a geo-political idiom ‘Arab oil wealth’ and consequently the notion that Arabs are not economically disadvantaged or discriminated against systematically like other migrant groups and are therefore not in need of inclusion within anti-racist working class solidarity or equality initiatives in Britain. As El-Solh (1993: 72- 73) Puts it:

The association of the term “Arab” with oil wealth conjures up in the popular Western images of affluence spiced up with exotic, thereby overlooking those Arabs in Britain who are trapped in menial employment or are subject to the restrictions of their asylum status

Furthermore, the fact that Arabs were not recorded as a distinct ethnic category in British censuses of 1991 and 2001²⁶, they have scattered themselves in several different categories and became therefore “the silent section” of minority community in Britain (Nusseihab, 2000). Al-Rasheed (1996) and Nagel (2001, 2002) both stress the way in which Arabs have been excluded from British ‘multiculturalism’. As Nagle argues it is not clear why ‘Arabs’ are recognised as an ‘ethnic minority’ in France but not in Britain or why a group that is thought to be larger than the British Chinese community is not similarly enumerated in the census (2001). In some ways Nagel’s question seems to overlook the way in which specific colonial relations between particular European nation-states and their post-colonial migrant communities create different discourses and modes of classification. Notwithstanding, this exclusion is

²⁶ In the 2011 UK census “Arab” was included as a distinct ethnic group for the first time. This significant development was an important step in the recognition of the Arab community within the British context. But surprisingly no research experience was made in this sense, for this reason our investigation regarding the Arab-British was based on the narratives produced after the 1991 and 2001 censuses. The results of the 2011 Census have been published in batches and can be found on the Office of National Statistics website (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html>). It should be noted that the Census results are for England and Wales only; Scotland and Northern Ireland publish separate results and do not have the same categories as those of England and Wales.

common to 'Arabs' both in Britain and the United States where racial and biological notions of difference prevail while the category 'Arab' has little meaning in terms of biological difference or racial distinctiveness.

Although being 'Arab' "is spoken of with confidence with regards to Oil, Terrorism and Middle Eastern politics...There is no mention of Arabs as part of 'multicultural Britain' despite indications that they are economically active and educated, achievements that other minorities have been commended for Arabs in Britain are neither an oppressed 'racial' minority nor are they accepted" (Nagel, 2001:382).

On the other hand, Nagel considers Arabs in Britain to be "white minority", while Yurval-Davis and Salverman suggest that they "have sometimes been included in the political category of Black" (1997: 10). Both these instances exemplify the inadequacy of attempts to fit "Arab" into colour based conception of difference. Al-Rasheed (1996) argues that the "ethnic origin" question is often confusing to people from the Arab world as they are not White or Black or Asian in the way that these labels are understood on Britain. She concludes that the majority of Arab migrants would record themselves as "white", transporting conceptions of colour from their country of origin. In contrast the British born or raised Arabs are less likely to select "white" which is not an objective determination of skin colour but primarily refers to Europeans.

Therefore, while confused with the ethnic origin question many second generation Arabs select the "other-other" category. Al-Rasheed argues that this category is the nearest approximation that is available for the Arab population in Britain, although it is very much more heterogeneous. This was confirmed by the

results obtained by Ramy Aly (2010)²⁷ while analysing commissioned data from the office of National Statistics Longitudinal survey in order to negotiate the ethnic origin question in 2001 census using the “Any other ethnic group” category.

The absence of the Arab population from public discourse in Britain raises several questions such as the criteria by which a group is deemed a minority group and why some groups but not others are enumerated as “racial” or “ethnic” groups. Nagel, maintains that Arabs in Britain are neither assimilated into the social ideological structure of mainstream Englishness and whiteness nor into publically recognised categories of race, multiculturalism or diversity they are instead as the census reveals, the “Other-other”.

II.3.2 Arab-Americans as “White but not Quite”

What race means to Arab Americans has taken an increasing significance in the past decades, as Arabs excluded from the rosters of minorities of colour as well as of white ethnic groups, have debated whether to lobby for a categorization as “Arabs” or “Middle Eastern” or to continue to struggle for inclusion as white American. Michelle Hartman (2006) argues that this group fit uneasily into racial schema that identifies individuals and groups as either “black” or “white”. In fact, the many studies on Arab American ethnicity and racial formation show that historically Arab Americans were first consider “not white”, then “not quite white”, and later became “white”.

²⁷ “It shows that sixty six percent (66%) of the ‘Arab’ sample ‘born in England’ responded to the ethnicity question in the 2001 census using the ‘Any other ethnic group’ category [...] Those born in Egypt make up 50% of the ‘Other - North African’ group followed by Algerians (15%) and Moroccans (10%). Algerians and Egyptians were also the most likely to describe themselves as ‘White North African’. Those born in Iraq (27%) and Yemen (24%) dominated the foreign born population describing themselves as ‘Asian Arab’. Iraqis also represented a high proportion of those describing themselves as ‘White Arab’ (25%) followed by those born in Lebanon (13%) and Syria (12%). Overall those identifying themselves as ‘[Other] Arab’ made up the largest proportion of the foreign born Arab sample (33%).” (p.26)

The current status of Arab Americans as Caucasians/White is a history of inconsistent racialization. From the early days of their immigration there was much confusion over how to classify Arabic-speaking immigrants. Alixa Naff (1985) notes, that immigrants from Mount Lebanon, at that time part of Ottoman controlled “Greater Syria” were considered an “enigma” and viewed with mingled curiosity and derision. Initially classified on immigration forms under the category of “Turkey Asia” or “Other Asians” (109). By 1899 the Bureau of Immigration had begun “to distinguish Syrians and Palestinians by ‘race’ from other Turkish subjects, considering them Caucasian” (Ibid). Moreover, in 1910 people from the eastern Mediterranean, including Turks, Palestinians, Syrians, and others were officially “Asiatic” (Ibid: 253), and thereby, excluded them from citizenship and other “white” privileges.

From this time and until 1952s immigration and nationality Act, Arab Americans -like other “borderline white”- used the court system to fight for status as “white” in America. According to Sarah Gualtieri, who has written extensively on the subject, they were represented in “racial prerequisite” cases. The courts have at various times allowed for or denied white status, often depending on the ideology of time. Decisions have been based on what was considered to be scientific evidence, on physical appearance, on religion, on perceived assimilability and democratic mind, on differing definitions of “Caucasians”, therefore, Syrians were found to be white in some years, but not in other. In this sense, and using Saliba’s words Arab Americans identity was transformed from “non white, to white, to somewhere outside the limits of racial categories” (1999: 311).

The unstable identity of Arab Americans nevertheless burdens this group with what Lisa Souhier Majaj (1999) describes as an ambiguous state of “honorary

whiteness”, allowing this group a tentative and provisional entry into American white society, only to find that citizenship “readily stripped away at the moments of crisis” (P.321), what Majaj describes as “honorary whiteness” serves to isolate Arab Americans from both the white category –since they are never actually included in discussions of racial whiteness- as well as from ethnic minority status, situating them in an ambiguous unstable racial space (Conrey; 2006). Such racial liminality has had profound implications for Arab Americans as they attempt to assert a public identity, claim a voice within the American multicultural stream.

According to Omi and Winant, racialization is “a matter of both social structure and cultural representation”, cultural representation of Muslims and Arabs in America is derive from government and media discourses, that Nadine Naber considers as a reincarnation of European colonialist discourses that portrayed Islam as backward, uncivilized, homogeneous and misogynist towards women (2008: 2-4). Such discourses of exclusion and Arab Americans marginalization are positioned

Within the context of U.S. histories of immigrant exclusion, through which the racialization of a particular immigrant groups as different than inferior to whites has relied upon culturalist and nationalist logics that assume that “they” (Immigrants) are intrinsically unassimilable (Naber: 31)

Anti-Arab racism is then a fluctuating process of racial exclusion that intensifies during times of crisis, the 9/11 attacks against the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre is probably the prominent historical moment in this process. However, this event further consolidated the binarization of Arab and American identifications, validating discourses of supposedly clashing civilization. Hegemonic discourses in American nationalism and patriotism post 9/11 served as the intersection point where the discursive construction of crises and identity change crossed. By identity change I

am referring to the fact the September, 11 aftermath has thrust the community from invisibility to an undesirable hyper-visibility within the US ethnic context with derogatory representations²⁸. Also, official discourses and practices, contributed to igniting hatred and violence against this minority group, who found its population and culture threatened by being ‘against the grain of the nation’ (Joseph 1999:257), and even more seriously, by accusations of being labelled unpatriotic. Their citizenship was governed by the binary rhetoric of the ‘War on Terror’: either with us or against us, and American vis-à-vis non-American.

Addressing issues of contested citizenship, the Vera Institute of Justice conducted a study entitled “Law Enforcement and Arab American Community Relations After September 11, 2001” to examine the impact of September 11 on Arab-Americans’ daily life. The study reported

In every one of the sites, Arab Americans described heightened levels of public suspicion exacerbated by increased media attention and targeted government policies (such as special registration requirements, racial profiling by law enforcement, and the detention and deportation of community members). Their accounts were largely supported by local and federal law enforcement participants. While community members in most sites also reported increases in hate victimization, they expressed greater concerns about being victimized by federal policies and practices. (2006: iii)

The PATRIOT Act of 2001 and its stipulations of allowing surveillance without approved court orders was a major concern for the Arab-American population. This legislation has intensified the political and cultural climates and placed the whole

²⁸ For further details about Arab-Americans identity shift from invisibility to high visibility after September 11, see Louise Cainkar “Targeting Muslims at Aschroft’s Discretion”, available at <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero031403.html> and Shryock Andrew “The Moral Analogies of race: Arab American Identity, colour politics and the limits of racialized Citizenship” in Amany Jamal and Nadine Naber, 2008, pp 81-113.

community under scrutiny. This hostile domestic environment has terrified Arab-Americans and drove them away from politics. On the one hand, they seriously feared government harassment and unjustified detentions. On the other hand, they experienced a lack of real leadership that could stand for them in the media or protect them from FBI investigations. In this sense, Naber points out that “Government policies, such as the PATRIOT Act, special registration, and FBI investigations put the logic of “good Muslim/bad Muslim” into practice by targeting noncitizens as “potential terrorists” or “bad Muslims,” and distinguishing them from “citizens” or “good Muslims” (2008: 3). The increased visibility of Arabs and Muslims, and their targeting within both public and governmental contexts, reflected an extension of discourses that were already in existence, as the “not quite white” Arab became more “othered” than ever.

As Omi and Winant (1986:62) point out, “Without a racial identity, one is in danger of having no identity.” The racial ambiguity of Arabs in both sides of the Atlantic contributes to the idea that they do not have a racial identity and thus it is acceptable to continue to ignore them within discussions about race in the U.K and the U.S. In the US the racial ambiguity is most clearly reflected in the increasing dissonance between the official classification of this group as white by the federal government and the growing consciousness among many Arab Americans that they do not identify as white. The recognition that they are not looked upon or treated as white within U.S. society only adds to their discomfort and their sense that being categorized as non-white is no longer useful. In the UK the racial ambiguity of Arabs is more important since they are completely ignored and not even classified within the British census

II.4.Negotiating Arab Women Identity in Context

Whether in the UK or in the US, Arabs constitutes a minority group that has recently and suddenly come under the spotlight after 9/11. Before that date Arabs were largely invisible; when they were acknowledged at all, it was usually with ridicule dismissal or an outright racism as discussed above. Therefore, very scarce information was available about this minority group. In fact, the main source of information about Arabs is TV, movies or popular media, and these sources repeatedly convey mostly stereotypical images of who Arabs are. So for most people in the west, Arabs and their life style are frozen in history; this is an image that seems to resist any kind of change (Said: 1979; Steet: 2000). Hence, for Western people Arabs are backward, and Muslim Women are terribly oppressed and degraded (Ahmed, 1982: 522)

Suleiman (1999) discussed the types of images of Arabs and Muslims that are available in the US²⁹ and described that at times, images of “poverty, filth, the desert, sheikhs and harems are emphasized; at others, the view changes and the desert gushes with oil, the sheikhs are wealthy beyond belief their “spot” (other than sex, of course) is to destabilize western economies and ruin the world in order to master it” (P: 1). While The images of Arab women in American culture include those of belly dancers, harem girls or submissive women clad in black from head to toe. “They have no identities whatsoever, and they are always mute” (Shaheen, 2000: 6), similarly Ali (2005: 33) explains “ In America we’ve come to see these women as timid creatures, covered from head to toe, who scurry rather than walk. They have no voice, no rights and no place outside the home”

²⁹ In fact the image given to Arabs and Muslims was the same in all the western countries, and what Suleiman (1999), Shaheen (2000) and Ali (2005) are describing in this context is not restricted to the American culture.

Some studies that concentrated on issues of marginality of Arabs as a minority group in the west and the prevailing images of Arabs and Muslims in the mainstream drew from Said's (1979) work *Orientalism*. In his work, Said (1979) defines Orientalism as "the system of knowledge" about the East through which everything about Arabs and Muslims is filtered, a system that "remained unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign service institutes)" for centuries and through which images and statements about Arabs and Muslims proliferated into the general culture (P.6). Said saw orientalism as a deliberate discourse intended to present the Arabs and Muslims as "The Other" a discourse that "is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power" including cultural, intellectual, political and moral powers (P.12). The discourse of orientalism is depended upon a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the western in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (P.7). As a result, Said sees that the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arabs or Muslims is very strong indeed" (P.27).

After 9/11, Arabs were suddenly ultra-visible, with negative images that intensified in relation to political events and the turmoil that swept and continues to sweep over different parts of the Middle East. In addition to being seen as backward, post 9/11 and 7/7 Bombings in London, portrayal of Arabs as enemies of democracy and modern life, as well as terrorists intensified. According to Zaal, Salah and Fine (2007), after the 9/11 there has been a shared western criticism and devaluation of Islam and Muslims which affected Arabs in diaspora.

To counteract such ostracizing treatment on the hands of the majority of the society; Arabs had come to realize the importance of exerting self-representation in order to achieve social, political and religious equality in their host countries. By doing so they repeatedly fight to posit themselves as a variable and important segment of the UK and US culture, negating the constant “Outsider” treatment and attempting to correct the misconceptions and stereotypes that fix them in a devalued position within the terrain of racialized ethnic groups. In this regard Omi and Winant (1986) note, the value of individuals creating collective identities and collective subjectivities by offering group members an alternative view of themselves and their world, should not be underestimated in the struggle for group recognition; using their words, individual consciousness and practices “shapes the universe of collective action” (P: 68).

Under these circumstances, Arab women in the west are faced with difficulties unique to their gender, in that they must negotiate between sets of values and cultural ideas that often seem incompatible. Their identities embody the “demarcation of possibilities at particular junctures” and a heritage of difference that is constantly negotiated (Majaj in Kadi, 1994: 83). American and British Arab women are often confronted with cultural boundaries that are in constant motion, subject to the external setting of their environment, and to internal factors of heritage and embedded traditions. These complex and continuously changing identities are perhaps best summarized in the following statement by this Arab American feminist:

My sense of liminality grew as I became more aware of the rigid nature of definitions: Arab culture simultaneously claimed and excluded me,

while the American identity I longed for retreated inexorably from my grasp (Ibid.: 79).

Arab women in the west embrace identities and roles that cannot be defined as a coherent whole, but have many contradicting layers that are constantly changing, depending on the generation, social setting and political climate of their host country. The British and American contexts actually exacerbate the gender disparities, which exist in the ethnic cultural and religious systems.

Indeed, their racial or ethnic visibility, coupled with international political conflicts involving Arabs and Muslims, and the negative and inaccurate portrayal in the media emphasize their “Otherness” and keep them in an outsider status - not as full members of the nation. They are in a “diasporic space” as defined by Avtar Brah (1996)

to be the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of ‘us’ and ‘them’, are contested...[this informs] how and in what ways a group is inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality, or other axes of differentiation in the [host] country (cited in Ralston, 2002:10-11)

Arab women are especially vulnerable due to the fact that they are both women and immigrants. They are subject to a double measure of oppression, having to cope with racial and gendered constructs that lead to increased marginalization and exclusion

In this context is worth remembering that while Arab-Americans have a long history of uncertain ethnic classification that was finally resolved in the courts, Arab-British have tended to be marginalized in the British and racial ethnic discourses and that Arab-British women were completely invisible by virtue of their ethnicity and their social status (See sections above). We do believe that such

differences of settlement, racial classification and immigration processes have directly influenced the shaping of their identities as Arab women and immigrants as well.

As far as Arab women in the US are concerned, Ajrouch and Jamal (2007: 811) assert that the majority of them identified themselves as non-white because they do not feel that the categorization as “white-other” best captured their race. However, having rejected white and in the absence of an adequate choice for their racial designation, most women were faced to choose “Other” as the best alternative. Such a choice is an example of how Arab- American women resisted and contested a racial appellation that they did not accept. Additionally, and because of the increasing animosity and bias against them after the world trade center’s attack most of them expressed a desire to resist the demonization of Arab American racialized as violent, dangerous and represented as potential terrorists and traitors (Baligh, 2003: 118). In response to these characterizations many of the Arab Women in America expressed a renewed pride in their ancestry and identity. This is not surprising, considering that pride of ancestry has historically been highly valued within the Arab culture and society (Hourani, 1991: 10)

Concerning Arab women in Britain, Awad Youcef (2012) argued that they frequently create links with other people of different ethnic origins, probably because within the British mainstream there is a conflation of Muslim/Arab/Middle Eastern identities. These links, he asserts can be interpreted as a process of ‘transforming habitation’. In this sense, Ashcroft, in *Post-colonial Transformations 2001*, argues that the practice of habitation ‘is more than the occupying of a location, it is

itself a way of being within which, and through which, place comes to be'. (P.159)

According to Ashcroft:

Habitation is critical to the ability of colonized or dislocated people to transform that external cultural pressure which constricts them because it extends through the widening horizons of the experience of place, from the intensely personal (often regarded as the province of poetics) to the global. (Ibid.)

In this context, Ashcroft points out that the practice of habitation involves a confrontation with boundaries which 'are fundamental to European modernity'. (ibid., 164) Ashcroft argues that the most subtle way of dealing with boundaries lies in the mode of their habitation because, Ashcroft maintains, '[it] is through habitation that the concept of boundary [. . .] may be deconstructed in post-colonial discourse, as the tenuousness of its symbolic spatial function is exposed'. (ibid, 171) I would like to extend Ashcroft's argument by arguing that boundaries are not only physical borders that demarcate a country from another. Boundaries are also social, psychological, as well as ethnic and racial. In this sense, the opportunity to transform boundaries is made available to refugees, displaced people and the marginalized as is the experience of having boundaries reinforced. Seen from this perspective, Arab British Women ability to make links with people of different cultural backgrounds and ages is an act of crossing borders and transforming them 'by seeing the possibilities – the horizon – beyond them'. (Ibid., 182). In fact, this social context has shaped the literature produced by Arab women in these countries as will be discussed in the coming section.

II.5 Arab Women in their English Words

Arab Anglophone literature is a literature of exiles and ethnics, travellers and homemakers. The Arab Anglophone texts that have emerged over the last century testify to the experience of Arab immigrants and their descendants as they negotiate displacement, engage with intersections of geographies, nationalities, languages, cultures, politics and identities and claim assert or create ground space Arab, British/American and Arab-British and Arab-American.

II.5.1 Overview of Anglophone Arab literature

The western world has welcomed to its bookshelves an important number of works penned by Arab writers, Noami Shihad, for example, is well known for her poetry and books for children most notably the young adult novel *Habibi* and the edited collection *The space between our Foot steps: poems and paintings from the middle East*. Edward Said's nonfiction, including *Orientalism* and *covering Islam*, has revolutionized literary criticism and political analysis. Ahdaf Soueif, an Arab British novelist winner of Booker prize in literature, was the first Arab and Muslim women to be so recognized. Since the tragedies of 9/11 the work of these writers has gain more attention or attain recognition, as western readers seek to understand the "Arab mind" and world. In that respect, Arab Anglophone literature becomes especially important because it by passes the need for translation bridging East to West and addressing directly the English speaking audience by telling stories about the other side of the divide (Muaddi Darraj: 2002)

Arab Anglophone literature dates back to the turn of the last century when the first Arab emigrant to the US. As Wail Hassan (2009:66) states it was in America that writers produced the first Anglophone Arab poetry collection, *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905) the first play *Wajdah* (1909), the first Novel *The Book of Khalid* (1911) and the first Arab English autobiography *A Far Journey* (1914). Al Maleh (2009:11) asserts that in the course of one century of Anglophone Arab writing, three trends can be identified: The Mahjar (early 20th c immigrants in the USA), the Europeanized aspirants of the mid 1950s and the more recent hybrid, hyphenated, transcultural exilic/Diasporic writers.

Writing during the first phase, Arab emigrants were more politically positive and disengaged (Hassan:2011,71) the most prolific and celebrated of these writers was Khalil Gibran Khalil (1883-1931) whose most famous work, *The Prophet* (1923) was internationally translated and read. Gibran and his contemporaries, Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) and Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988) established a small group, the first of its kind, called the Pen-League³⁰, which came to be referred to as al Mahjar (Immigrant) poets. Deemed as “cultural translators” and “cultural mediators” by critics Wail Hassan and Layla Al Maleh , this group of writers in general and Gibran in particular, articulated a bridging of East and West and were able to preserve a happy balance between home and the host country.

By the mid 1950s, Anglophone Arab writing shift to Britain due to the Arab students who began trickling into British universities. The latter were the product of missionary and foreign schools that were flourishing in the middle East (AL

³⁰ The primary goals of the pen league were in Naimy's word “ to lift Arabic literature from the quagmire of stagnation and imitation, and to infuse a new life into its veins so as to make of it an active force in the building up of the Arab nation”, Naimy, M., (1950), qtd from Nadeem, Naimy, (1985) in *The Lebanese Prophets of New York*, American University of Beirut, P.18

Maleh:2009,13) their works reflected their British educational and intellectual formation, these include Edward Atiyah a British citizen of Lebanese origin, author of *The Arab* (1958), *An Arab Tells His Story* (1946), *The Thin Line* (1951) and several other novels. Waguih Ghali an Egyptian Copt author of *Beer in Smoker Club* (1964), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra wrote *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960), Rima Alamuddin's *Spring to Summer* (1963) followed by a collection of short stories, the Palestinian Isaak Diqs author of *A Bedouin Boyhood* (1967). According to Al Maleh this generation "Came from elite background and worked assiduously to embrace the identity of the European "Other"....Doomed to face rejection to metropolitan power but having cut their moorings to their country of origin" (P.11). Thematically these works were concerned with issues of psychological and social alienation at home and abroad and the "return of exile" theme, the experiences of hybridity and double- consciousness.

The third group include those who began writing after the 1970s until present days, this group is marked by its heterogeneity because it is formed by second, third and even fourth generation hyphenated Arabs who were born and raised on the no longer foreign soil of their immigrant parents; there were also those who were new immigrants working out of an experience of transculturation. The latter came from different intellectual and social backgrounds, faith, vocations and political inclinations that settled in Canada, USA, Britain and Australia and had a diverse or divergent connection to the homeland. Al Maleh (2009,13) asserts that despite their individual differences pertaining to religious credo, social practices or political orientations, they all subscribe to one broad unifying belief in Arab culture³¹ and much of what they

³¹ Regardless of their faith or political orientation, Arabs have a great esteem to their native tongue "Arabic", Muslims for its being the language in which the holy Qur'an was revealed and Christians for the great literature written in it.

wrote reflect a warm relationship to the homeland though they were distant from it geographically.

Anglophone Arab literature was marked during the last decades by the significant contribution of Arab women writers in carving out creative spaces to foster a better understanding of Arab diasporic experience and literature. The increase in interest in Arab women's writing led to the growing body of scholarship on Arab women's writings, including Arab, Muslim, Woman: *Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature* (2008) by Lindsey Moore, Brinda Mehta's *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (2007), Anastasia Valassopoulos' *Contemporary Arab Women Writers: Cultural Expression in Context* (2007), and Suzanne Gauch's *Liberating Shabrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism and Islam* (2006), provides examples of important critical engagements with Arab women's literature. In different ways, these works foreground the study of Arab women's literature within an existing and ongoing tradition of literary criticism. In her introduction to her book, for example, Valassopoulos questions the "reluctance to study and interpret the writing [of Arab women] alongside a tradition of criticism that we seem to be accustomed to performing with other literary traditions" (3). Her study of Arab women writers performs the important task of reading this literature while simultaneously showing "how feminist, queer, postcolonial and cultural theories can all play a part in the negotiation of these texts" (3). This attempt to read Arab women's literature through relevant theoretical frameworks and critical lenses can yield a more nuanced understanding of contemporary Arab literary production as a whole, as well as its interactions with other ethnic literatures.

II.5.2 Schehrazadian Narratives: Contemporary Anglophone Arab Women Literature

The oriental woman has always represented a particularly contested terrain previously in relation to colonialism and currently vis-à-vis the “war on terror”, she has been the space upon which many prejudices and preconceptions about the East have been mapped out. This oriental woman has made from the literary writings and performances her arena of reply and resistance to such an orientalist discursive practices.

Contemporary Anglophone literature is “mostly female”³² in Britain, for example most of Arab writers are women such as Fadia Faqir, Leila Abulela Zeina Ghandour and Ghada Karmi, to list the most prominent. While in America most of the key texts in contemporary Arab American literature are written by Women such as *Arabian Jazz* by Diana Abujaber, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf and *Once in the Promise Land* by Layla Halaby....etc. Khalidas and Mottawa claim that Arab narratives are emerging recently because of the writers “sense of urgency and confidence as well as deeper ethnic feminist discourse” (2004: xi).

There is a tendency among Arab women writers to adjust the “Schehrazadian Narrative” and its’ “Orality” to tell their stories in relation to a dispersed spectrum of Arabs identities in diaspora. They, hence, open up a rigid category of collective identity. They translate their experiences in diaspora, by drawing upon collective cultural narratives like the frame of one thousand and One Nights. This frame tale is re-appropriated by Anglophone Arab Women writers as “Schehrazadian Narrative” and “Schehrazadian Orality”, Gauch (2007: xi) argues that “as a result of her journey

³² Al Maleh, 2009 : 13

between East and West. Scheherazade has become a powerful trope for contemporary Arab and Muslim women writers, particularly those who address international audiences”

In the diasporic context, “Schehrazadian narrative” refers to a narrative which resists stereotypical and exotic representation through reformation of the frame tale of the thousand and one Nights or the invocation of its orality. These women resist attempts to fix their identities through the revival of the narrative techniques of the storyteller of Arabian Nights, Scheherazade, to depict a process whereby the individual is constantly processing new experiences and representations in the new homeland and attempting to correlate and understand them in context of an “other” homeland, creating something similar to what W.E.B Dubois refers to as a double consciousness (1996:4)

One of the major topics tackled in Anglophone Arab literature written by women, is the sense of possessing a hyphenated identity, this hyphen is currently a particular contested zone due to resurgence and stereotypical racial discourses on Arabs. This racing is further complicated by its being shaped against the backdrop of the Iraqi war, the “war on terror” and hostility against Arabs and Muslims post 9/11 which increase their sense of dislocation they are living in two worlds and yet belonging to neither. According to Sharobeem the concept hyphenated identity refers to:

A term that implies a dual identity, an ethno cultural one, and evokes questions and debates regarding which side of the hyphen the person belongs to. Such questions often loom large in the minds of immigrants, those who leave one country to another, one culture for the other (2003: 01)

The writer argues that the literature which reflects the hyphenated identity is always a multicultural one and exists in the countries which have many immigrants and races in which the immigrants adopt their old values to the hosting culture. This kind of identity is probably the reason behind the emergence of ethnic literature in the world. Within the same context, Stuart Hall argues that diasporic identities cannot be defined by essence or purity but should be defined as

The recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through not despite, differences, by hybridity. Diaspora identities [.....] produce and reproduce themselves a new through transformation and difference (1990: 235)

This draws our attention to the complexity of diasporic identities, therefore, I argue that the works produced by Arab women writers in both sides of the Atlantic, need to be framed within their different geopolitical contexts that have greatly affected their creative writing. These may explain the difference we may find between the literature produced by Arab women writers in the UK and the US; which is probably a result of the different patterns of the Arabs’ immigration and settlement in both countries in addition to the ambiguous position they occupy in the discourses of ethnicity and multiculturalism, as demonstrated previously, Arabs in the US are officially recognized as Caucasian white while their counterpart Arab British had no official status and were for a long time classified as “other”, these positions they occupy has affected the writers’ own sense of identity that has been reflected in their works.

We do believe that Arab British novelists’ set of a strategy of cross-ethnic and transcultural dialogue, in the sense that they usually create a link between their Arab characters and other characters from different ethnic background which is not the case of their peers Arab Americans who employ a strategy of resistance towards the

mainstream stereotypes about the Arabs and their culture and tend to focus on the contradictions within their community.

Thematically, the literature produced by Arab British women writers' canters on the struggles of an Arab character (most of the time a female character) that moves between Britain and the Arab world and it engages in a cross-cultural dialogue with characters of different ethnic origins, that resolve around socio political themes such as marriage, friendship, immigration and (self) exile³³. On the other hand, most of Arab Americans literature is about young women who search for and struggle to claim an Arab Identity while trying not to be marginalized by American society. Al-Momani (2011) claims that most of Arab American literature depicting female adolescence is semi-autobiographical in nature. Hassan discusses, in this context, the role of the genre of autobiography in Arab American literature in reflecting Arab American identity, saying that Arab American autobiography is constrained by two requirements "first, that it constructs a selfhood that is intelligible in light of American paradigms of subjectivity, and second, that it address western ideas about Arabs, Muslims, Middle Easters" (2002: 11); thus Arab American writers in their autobiographies try to reflect their individuality, freedom, and independence which are outcomes of American individualism and at the same time, these writers reflect their cultural values, Islamic rituals and Middle East Political conflict (10).

³³ In *the Translator* (1999) for example Aboulela tells the story of Sammar a young Sudanese Women who falls in love with Rae an Islamic Scholar at a Scottish University and Fadia Faqir's *my name is Salema* (2007) tells the story of Salema who was adopted by a British nun Miss Asher. In Exter she meets Parvin a second generation Asian British who teaches her how to negotiate her everyday life by raising her awareness of the fact that she is a British citizen

II.6 Conclusion

Arabs have been deeply involved and implicated in the racial politics and policies in Britain as well as in America. The construction of race has become especially problematic since the attacks of September 9/11 and the subsequent global war on terror. 9/11 is one of the paradigmatic events of contemporary global and political moment, a moment that Brinda Mehta describes as “incendiary”³⁴.

Whether in the UK or in the US Arab women embrace identities and roles that cannot be defined as a coherent whole, but have many contradicting layers that are constantly changing, depending on the generation, social setting and political climate of their host country.

Diasporic Arab women writers are trying to construct and shape what it means to be Arab-British and/or Arab-American women. In addition to dispelling the stereotype and foregrounding trans-cultural dialogues, Anglophone Arab women writers, in their writings, aimed at finding for themselves a space as an ethnic group in Britain and America by articulating both aspects of their culture of origin and the culture of their host countries. This is a space between two cultures which belongs wholly to neither. It is an articulation that is not easy since being an Arab has a negative connotation in the western mainstream. Bhabha (1994) talked of the space in-between cultures as one that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood singular or communal. That initiates new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (12).

³⁴ Mehta, B, (2007). *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press

Chapter Three

Voices From Borderlands: Arab-American Women Negotiating Their Diasporic Identities by Resisting Hegemonies in Laila Halaby's *West Of The Jordan*

III.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, Arab Americans have been subject to decades of racism, discrimination, negative stereotyping, and hostility in the United States. These problems have motivated Arab American cultural leaders and creative writers to put forward in their texts the challenges that they face in the United States. These problems have also encouraged Arab American writers to try to find their place and identity in the American community.

Many scholars such as Layla el Maleh, Lisa Souhier Madjaj among others, argued that most of the key texts in contemporary Arab American literature are written by women as counter narratives to the western negative stereotypes and a reflection to the difficulties they face because of their feelings of gender discrimination and their sense of possessing hybrid identities or hyphenated identities; it should be noted that their writings are playing an important role in creating an insurgent women who not only are deconstructing the several modalities of female identity for Arab women in the West, but also rejecting their homelands' patriarchal, nationalist, and anti-colonial emancipatory discourses and resisting western imperial hegemonies.

The present chapter examines how Laila Halaby in *West of the Jordan* is transgressing a normative paradigm already conceptualized in the mainstream western culture for the Arab-American woman hybrid. Her characters are living a transformational experience that leads them to challenge hegemonic constructions of the dominant knowledge, resist the different contradictions and ambivalences of their

native patriarchal cultures, and find a political voice to fight their invisibility and oppression.

III. 2 Reviews of *West of the Jordan*

In *West of the Jordan*, Laila Halaby documents the histories of four Palestinian young women using their own fragmented voices. The work appears as a collection of short stories narrated from various perspectives into small autobiographical sections which render the reader confused about distinguishing the speaking voice each time a new chapter unfolds. In her *Ethnic Entanglements*, Marian Helmy Gabra describes the work's narrative style as a "patchwork³⁵ of fragmented family stories lacking a teleological order or chronology" (2010: 36).

However, Gabra asserts that this explains the work's engagement with creating ethnic identities saying, "The anxieties of storytelling therefore speak to the complexities of formulating and reformulating female ethnic subjectivity" (187). This subjectivity emerges in the heterogeneous viewpoints of these four teenage cousins about wide spectra of issues that reflect their historical background and their position into womanhood. In the case of Hala, who appears as the most stable character among these women (can be considered the novel's main protagonist), Halaby

³⁵ Whether applied to part of a work, or to the whole, Patchwork or pastiche as literary technique implies that the work is made up largely of phrases, motifs, images, episodes, etc. borrowed more or less unchanged from the work(s) of other author(s). The term is often used in a loosely derogatory way to describe the kind of helpless borrowing that makes an immature or unoriginal work read like a mosaic of quotations. More precisely, it has two main meanings, corresponding to two different *deliberate* uses of pastiche as a technique. There is a kind of pastiche which seeks to recreate in a more extreme and accessible from the manner of major writers. It tends to eliminate tensions, to produce a more highly coloured and polished effect, picking out and reiterating favourite stylistic mannerisms, and welding them into a new whole which has a superficial coherence and order. Unlike plagiarism, pastiche of this kind is not intended to deceive: it is literature frankly inspired by literature (as in Akenside's poem 'The pleasures of imagination', 1744). The second main use of pastiche is not reverential and appreciative, but disrespectful and sometimes deflationary. Instead of ironing out ambiguities in its source(s) it highlights them. It cannot be distinguished absolutely from PARODY, but whereas the parodist need only allude to the original intermittently, the writer of pastiche industriously recreates it, often concocting a medley of borrowed styles like Flann O'Brien in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939). Many of the specialized uses of pastiche are reminiscent of this literary game: it may give encyclopaedic scope to a work, including all previous styles (Joyce's *Ulysses*); it is used by writers who wish to exemplify their ironic sense that language comes to them second hand and stylized (George Herbert's 'Jordan I'). And a general *air* of pastiche is created by many writers who, for various reasons, refuse to evolve a style of their own, and who (like John Barth) employ other's cast-off phrases with conscious scepticism. From: Childs, P., and Fowler, R. (2006). *The Routledge Dictionary Of Literary Terms*, p 168

presents a young girl's turbulent entrance into womanhood as she is finishing high school in the U.S. and returning back to her home country of Jordan to visit her dying grandmother and see her conventional father, Abu Jalal, and conservative sister, Latifa. Hala, who has been living with her maternal uncle Hamdi in Arizona, faces a number of cultural conflicts in which she is to make complex decisions about her life, identity, and future. The complexity of her decisions about her education in the U.S. and her rejection of marriage in Jordan reveal her ability to resist the either-or ethnic categorizations which are deeply instilled in both cultures.

Both Soraya and Khadija, on the other hand, are struggling in the crossroads between Arabness and Americanness, but they represent an extreme polarity in which they continue to fight excessive forms of identity that their families, traditions, and surroundings keep restricting them within. The modest Mawal³⁶, who has never left the village of Nawara³⁷, is Halaby's representation of an imaginary national cornerstone through which other women, including the novel's young women and their mothers, can yearn for a unified, uncomplicated character which represent pure "home" and nationalist identity.

Coming from the small Palestinian village of Nawara in the occupied West Bank, these female cousins' lives are dispersed to experience the burden of occupation, nationalism, immigration, racism, and aborted dreams. While the novel tracks the journey of three Palestinian young women; Soraya, Khadija, and Hala, in the

³⁶ The names of places and some characters in *West of the Jordan* are very significant as far as the meanings they holds, which let me, supposed that their choice was done in purpose. Based on an onomastic study, the name of Mawal in Arabic means "affiliated with", "associated with" which is an exact description of the character of Mawal within the novel, who is the only one stuck in Nawara, but is directly associated with her cousins in the U.S. as she stands as a reminder of their Palestinian heritage and nationalist identity on the one hand and the passivity and ambivalences of their native cultures on the other.

³⁷ Nawara means blossoms, according to the Cambridge dictionary of English when people blossom means "they became more successful and confident" which is the case of Hala in the novel; she was the unique character able to equilibrate between the Eastern as well as the Western sides of her identity. Her blossom as a person was only possible through the memories of Nawara and her family particularly her mother (See section III.3.3)

United States, the author chooses to leave one female character, Mawal, trapped in her small village and unable to change her destiny. Nawara, which means blossoms or flowers, “sits at the top of the West Bank, just west of the Jordan River,” describes Mawal, “east of Jenin and far enough away from both of these places to be a peaceful village that only every so often releases an avalanche of stones and fire... that happens more often as the Israelis take parts of our village to build their settlements” (15). Living the pain of their occupied land in every part of their bodies, the people of Nawara carry a burden of losses, defeats, and nostalgia even after they disperse as exiles and immigrants around the world.

Laila Halaby, who herself is a daughter of a Palestinian-Jordanian father and an American mother, is able to capture this burden of a Palestinian diaspora in the United States through the transformative journeys of these young women. She intends to present a different world that for so long has been suffering from various forms of marginalization, essentialization, and prejudice. A Palestinian female world which is perpetually stereotyped in the mainstream culture and media as “terrorist,” “submissive,” “ignorant,” and “backward” while compared to a “free,” “modernized,” “civilized,” and “inclusive” American world.

While coming from the same Salaama³⁸ family, each young woman embroiders a unique story according to her family’s cultural traditions, social position, economic situation, and gender-role beliefs. These particularities have shaped these women’s experience with the different social, cultural, psychological, and sexual borderlands as conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldúa in her *Borderlands/ La Frontera*. While adding an Arab-American dimension to Anzaldúa’s discourse of borderlands, I argue that the

³⁸ The name Salaama is derived from Salam meaning Peace in English, which is very significant; it seems to me that Halaby wanted to say that this family is a peaceful and has nothing to do with terrorism.

borderlands that these Palestinian women hybrids live are both external and internal in which they struggle to doubly resist an inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic hegemonies, which include the various meanings that the different Western, nationalist, cultural, and religious forces cast on the female hybrid's body which is constantly constructed to meet different personal and political interests. It is significantly crucial to examine the impact of different hegemonic forces, whether patriarchal, nationalistic, colonial, imperial, or capital, on the lives of these female hybrids within their historical, cultural, and political context.

Therefore, Halaby's *West of the Jordan* stands as a significant example in which the author steps beyond an essentialist binary opposition of "us" and "them" to reconceptualise a female hybrid's position amid several hegemonies. I argue that the women of Nawara who are creating their stories in *West of the Jordan* are a sophisticated consequence of the conflicts between many hegemonic forces in the west as well as at "home." These postcolonial subjects, have been constantly used, constructed, and deformed as they continue to be positioned in larger-than-them situations throughout their resistant journey to find meaning and build their own political identity³⁹ and consciousness.

While the novel allows us to see a woman's life from different perspectives, Laila Halaby has selected four young women to present their stories autobiographically in an attempt to indulge in the many details that explore the internal differences between those who are monolithically constructed in the Western mainstream culture "Arabs." The author is aware of the many generalizations and essentializations that Arab women are subjected to as she tries to negate a myth of sameness vs. difference

³⁹ Political identity is almost always associated with a group affiliation and describes the ways in which being a member of a particular group might express specific political opinions and attitudes.

in the Western mind. The intra-ethnic discrepancies that Halaby presents in her novel affirm the distinct way in which each woman engages with the borderlands inside and around her.

III. 3 “Neither East, Nor West”⁴⁰, a Third Space is My Quest: Arab American Women Resisting Hegemonies

While a hybrid life is conceptualized in the bridge between worlds, the individual’s experience is universalized to represent a new construction of a bi-cultural or multi-ethnic character which further intensifies the dichotomies instead of problematizing them. Part of this problematization is to internalize borderlands to accurately depict the struggles and shifts within one culture instead of only between two cultures.

The turn of the analysis to the racialized, gendered, sexualized, and economically and religiously stratified borderlands within one culture is the first step to refute the claim of a monolithic cultural existence as well as a static cultural identity. As critic Stuart Hall argues,

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, ‘cultural identity,’ lays claim. (1990: 236)

Therefore, even a hybrid’s claim of carrying a bi-cultural identity is challenged in this context since both sides of the hyphen are incomplete, unrepresentative, and

⁴⁰ The title is inspired from Christian Brid book entitled *Neither East nor West: One Woman’s Journey through the Islamic Republic of Iran* published in February 2002 by Washington Square Press

inauthentic. In other words, an Arab-American female identity, for example, is preconceived in our minds as a universal construction in which a woman-carrier is positioned to differentiate her from other mono-cultural subjects. She is granted this imaginary unified status in which she incorporates and borrows from two clearly identified cultures. Furthermore, an imaginary standard of “purity” is employed in this case to measure the hybrid’s level of true representativeness of each culture. But the question remains, what makes a specific culture, and who puts the belonging criteria to determine representation and misrepresentation of each culture.

The meaning of culture itself is already constructed in the mainstream hegemonic knowledge which keeps supplying us with representative images each time the label “Arab” or “American” is conjured. It is a “dominant regime of representation,” as argued by Stuart Hall, which keeps assigning various essentialist traits on people as representatives of a specific cultural identity. Hall employs Michel Foucault’s “power/knowledge” paradigm to refer to a hegemonic discourse within and between cultures which determines what represents a culture and the features of belonging to it. In this context, cultural identity, Hall explains, is determined in terms of

[O]ne, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold on common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (1990:236)

Therefore, culture and cultural identities are conceived as already existed authorities to whom one can refer to determine sameness or otherness. This discourse, which excludes the individual from the particularities of history, location, and time, perpetuates all forms of essentialism and stereotyping about heterogeneous ethnicities. “Arab” or “Muslim” women, for example, are constantly depicted as powerless, submissive, and ignorant, an “entity without agency,” as Steven Salaita states in his *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*, who lives outside all the historical forces of race, gender, class, and religion unaffected by colonial, imperial, national, and capital hegemonies.

Within this context, contemporary Arab-American women writers, such as Laila Halaby, have turned to an internal, subjective, and realistic style in which they explore the different positions in which “Arab” and “Muslim” women are situated within wide spectra of hegemonies. It is specifically argued in this section that a female hybrid, who carries an Arab heritage and lives in the U.S., as the characters in *West of the Jordan*, is already subjected to various forms of intra-ethnic borderlands within her own culture. Halaby is careful not to assign any determinants on her female characters that would homogenize their experiences as “Arab,” “Muslim,” or “American.” She presents a diversity of women’s experiences in an attempt to refute claims of monolithic identity and universal hybridity.

Although *West of the Jordan* focuses on the hybrid experience of three Palestinian women struggling with different forces in the U.S., the “West” in the title refers alternately to the Palestinian village of Nawara, which lies west of the river Jordan, as well as the “West” represented by the United States in which these characters live. In this very specific context of geographical location the term “West” is as much

problematic as the situation of the region itself. A different point point of view might be very appropriate as far as the American policy is concerned. The Israel- Palestinian conflict would lead to the idea that this “West” is a tiny part of the big “west” (U.S.) as the political situation is very confused as to who is sustaining Israel.

Describing the novel as a “transgressive text”⁴¹ Steven Salaita explains that “the word ‘West’ functions alternately as a geopolitical space, a private aspiration, and a philosophical marker” (2007: 131). The combining together of two spaces (Palestine and the U.S.) asserts that these women are in constant shifting between different forces that shape their hybrid identities. While they are affected by the “West”/U.S., Soraya, Hala, and Khadija are still integrated in the “west”/Nawara which is conceptualized in the character of Mawal. Therefore, one may say that in *West of the Jordan*, Halaby works to internalize all the borderlands that these women live within their own culture while presenting their lives between cultures.

III.3.1 Transgressing Patriarchal, Colonial and National Discourses

The Palestinian women in *West of the Jordan* are not disintegrated subjects of hybridity whose hybrid experience is the only definitive marker of their lives. Instead, their pre-diasporic life has been shaped by a multiplicity of forces which hegemonically try to construct their identity whether as women, national citizens, religious subjects, or colonized indigenous people. Thus, any study of these female hybrids’ life should be integrated within the forces of colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism. As Palestinians, these women occupy a specific space within the colonial/postcolonial

⁴¹ Transgressive fiction is a genre of literature which focuses on characters who feel confined by the norms and expectations of society. The genre deals extensively with taboo subject matters. Michel Foucault’s essay “A preface to transgression” (1963) provides an important methodological origin for the concept of transgression in literature. Transgressive fiction shares similarities with splatterpunk, noir and erotic fiction in its willingness to portray forbidden behaviours and shock the readers, but differs in that protagonists often pursue means to better themselves and their surroundings. Much transgressive fiction deals with search for self-identity, inner peace or personal freedom.

condition. Palestine was under the British Mandate from 1920 to 1947 when the British government terminated the Mandate and announced the partition of the country which led to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. While the country's history was affected by the British colonialism, the contemporary Israeli colonization and U.S. imperialism are what have shaped the lives of the parents and the grandparents of the women in “west” of the Jordan as well as *West of the Jordan*.

These women are carrying a diasporic pain of a doubly-colonized homeland from which they were displaced twice. Between the 1948 Nakbah (Catastrophe), when Palestinians were expelled from their homes due to the establishment of Israel; and 1967 Naksah (Setback), when Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in addition to the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria; Palestinians have been constantly losing their homeland and dispersing around the world. However, they continue to be displaced and dislocated on daily basis due to the persistent establishment of Israeli settlements.

At the beginning of her narration, Hala recalls the impact of the Naksah war on her childhood saying, “In 1967, the Occupation began and my father lost a lot of his land. My mother lost her freedom to visit her family. My father became less generous with my mother, and she became less generous with her children” (11). This is a pain that continues to overshadow the characters' narrations in *West of the Jordan* in which Halaby beautifully integrated the meaning of diaspora and the traumas of displacement for Palestinian women at “home” before indulging in the diasporic experience of Hala, Soraya, and Khadija in the United States.

Early in the novel, which the reader may assume that it is representative of a pre-diasporic state for the work's women as they start narrating the histories of their

families before immigration, Laila Halaby has used the voice of Mawal, the only character who does not leave Nawara, to reflect on an already lived diasporic experience and border-crossing for Palestinian women in the West Bank. Mawal, who stands as a history narrator and a safe-keeper of women's stories at home and in diaspora, is described as an embroiderer of Nawarese "rozās," the village's traditional dresses, "with both Palestinian and western stitches and patterns" (15). She states, "So many women come spill their secrets and their joys and their agonies because they know my mother – and I – will keep them safe and do no more than stitch them into the fabric of our *rozās*" (17).

These rozās of female stories represent the collective memory of Palestinian women whose constant displacement and repositioning have put them in confrontation with different identity questions. Questions they cannot answer, avoid, or change as Mawal describes them. "Everything sharp like nails in your bicycle tire and beyond repair and no money to buy a new one. Loud and crisp, every breath a statement, every thought a rumble. The land is everywhere, too much in places, too lovely, too much yours and not yours at the same time" (206).

In a chapter titled "Crossing," Mawal narrates the hardships that Palestinian women live on daily basis having to deal with different borders and hegemonies. From the Israeli checkpoints which border the space around them to the contradictory patriarchal and political hegemonies of their culture, these women are in constant border-crossing in order to survive. Farah, who is a forty-year-old woman from Nawara, is an example of these hardships as Mawal recounts. After sending her young nineteen-year-old daughter for marriage to Jordan like many Palestinian families, "[a]s life gets harder, more fathers are willing to release their daughters to a different

world,” Mawal states, Farah has to cross the bridge of the river Jordan to return back to the humiliation of the Israeli checkpoints, the patriarchal oppressiveness of her father and husband, and the agonies of displacement in one’s own homeland.

Through Farah’s silent thoughts, we are able to see the different constructions that women are subjected to as wives and daughters in a patriarchal culture, terrorist suicide-bombers in a colonized country, and nationalist fighters with their male counterparts in a decolonizing battle. Women are made to accept these facts as part of life, “not pleasant, but unavoidable, God-given burdens,” as Mawal indicates, “there was no way to change it, just accept God’s will and teach yourself rigidity. Teach yourself to keep all of the pain in one small corner inside” (49). The different colonial, nationalistic, and patriarchal forces have worked to manipulate the meaning of womanhood and the feminist cause of Palestinian women in order to exploit them for their own interests. At the Israeli checkpoints, for example, women are suspected as potential dangerous terrorists hiding explosives in their multi-layered clothes; and thus, they should be checked carefully. “Farah felt nothing as she took off her clothes all the way down to naked, avoiding looking at her body whose loose flesh she rarely inspected, almost as if it belonged to someone else. The women guards poked around with rubber gloves and Farah felt nothing – no anger, nothing more than tiredness” (49). At home, on the other hand, Farah has to resist different patriarchal mentalities of conventional men who, unable to fight colonialism and imperialism over their country, are scared to lose control over their families.

Farah, who has been married twice before her current husband, recalls her sick father who kept repeating “you will marry again” after her first divorce and her second widowhood. “She remembered being sixteen years old, so much like that

lovely daughter of hers, and sent off to live with her new old husband who gave her two children and fists that pounded her with welts to cover her body, welts she ignored or covered until it broke her father's heart and he convinced her husband to release her with divorce to freedom, but there is no freedom for a divorced woman with two children" (51). However, women's role construction continues within the Palestinian nationalist discourse against the Israeli colonization and the U.S. imperialist power for its double standards which keep supporting the Israeli policies against the Palestinians. In addition to accepting God's will, women are asked to put their female rights aside for the greater cause of emancipating the country.

In *West of the Jordan*, women like Farah are symbolic strong Palestinian women who sacrifice their lives, rights, and freedoms for the noble cause of liberating the mother-land. The new female generations, on the other hand, are supposed to aspire to these women as models they need to follow. Therefore, the character of Mawal stands as an imaginary "true" representative of a Palestinian nationalist identity that the young women in the novel are judged according to. Soraya ironically narrates, "Mawal, who lives in Nawara, would be my mother's version of perfect if she weren't so fat" (25). Like Soraya's mother, Khadija's mother keeps wishing that her daughter is like the modest, conservative, "true" Palestinian, Arab girl, Mawal. In his *Arab American Literary Fictions*, Steven Salaita argues that in *West of the Jordan*, "Palestine" appears as an "actual locale" which is created as a "national entity" by Palestinians in exile, "despite the lack of a geopolitical space with the same name" (132). Though this locale is shaped by the struggle against the Israeli colonization, it assumes the existence of a "pure" home, in the Palestinian diasporic mind, which people struggle to preserve and yearn to return to.

Therefore, a traditionalist image of the female identity is kept in the male and female diasporic mind which rejects all forms of modernization, assimilation, and westernization. Soraya criticizes this mind which is still stuck in a pre-diasporic mode saying, “[t]he older people all act the same way they did when they were home, which isn’t fair in a lot of ways because we’re in America now, but they tell us that we are not supposed to be living an American life” (31). The diasporic life of the colonized/postcolonial Palestinian subjects is trapped in a paradoxical world in which they struggle to preserve an imaginary collective identity while trying to assimilate into a mainstream “white” culture.

The traditionalist image of a female identity represents a safe refuge for the diasporic subject who tries to find balance in the borderlands between cultures. This secure space becomes a safety blanket which allows the Arab American immigrant or exile to preserve a form of cultural identity in face of different racist, essentialist, and imperialist hegemonies. Unfortunately, the Palestinian hybridity experience in the U.S. is completely gendered to burden the female hybrids with this new meaning of national identity which continues to construct their womanhood and control their femininity. In her “Arab American Femininities,” Nadine Naber describes this burden as a “policing” of “Arab American femininities” in which “the ideal of reproducing cultural identity [is] gendered and sexualized and disproportionately placed on daughters” (88).

This ideal female cultural identity which is presented to the daughters of diasporic families is supposed to bring stability, protection, security, and happiness if adopted and preserved against the assimilationist, westernizing forces of the mainstream “white” culture. On the contrary, in *West of the Jordan*, Laila Halaby

presents this constructed model as failing to speak to the reality of the life of the young Palestinian women at home and in diaspora. In a chapter titled “Safe” at the end of the novel, Halaby concludes Mawal’s female journey in the book with a gloomy, sad picture of her life in which all days look alike in the stories of the women of Nawara. Mawal, who speaks very little about her own needs and desires throughout the narration, opens up about a deep suffering she has been living in silence, for the first time, we see her resisting the claim of “safe” and “secure” which hegemonically describes her life. She states:

But a day like today is also gray like old sadness that’s been buried awhile, and gray like happy memories snatched by death returning to tempt you, to show you what is no longer yours, like my father... Stories are stitched under the skin at birth. Sometimes during a lifetime, or even half a lifetime, they can grow out of control and cause so much pain that you have to die to spare yourself the misery. Days when sleep is your only goal, when a dreamless night would be a gift from God, when sadness is quite happiness. Gloom when rain comes down like heavy mist and then like bullets and still you don’t run to avoid it. Instead you walk more slowly. Sometimes there are no stories, only feelings and still no words for those feelings, only pictures – that gray sky is my heart: vast and sick and empty. My own branches are breaking. Why every time when I open my eyes am I still here? That bird is my future, far away and uncertain. Accept that which is God’s will. Accept that which ... I will accept. (206)

Halaby presents a strong refutation of the patriarchal, nationalist construction of the “Arab” female identity which is hegemonically imposed on women ignoring the particularities of their lives and controlling the meaning of womanhood and selfhood that they should adopt to represent “true” Arabness. This failing model for Mawal’s life in Nawara is irrationally adopted for her cousins in the United States.

III.3.2 Women in Borderlands: Her Body between both sides of the Hyphen

For the young Palestinian women living in the United States and narrating their histories in Laila Halaby’s *West of the Jordan*, intra-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic borderlands have become spaces of continuous negotiations of the meaning of identity, hybridity, sexuality, individuality, and womanhood. They are constantly transitioning between different constructions of their existence as young “women,” “Arabs,” “Muslims,” and “hybrids.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa calls this in-between space a “place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (19). Women in the borderlands live a constant struggle of various hegemonies; nevertheless, as Anzaldúa indicates, they are able to discover new abilities in themselves which allow them to understand and resist these hegemonies. “[D]ormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes, the ‘alien’ element has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society’s clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home” (1987: 19).

For Soraya, Hala, and Khadija, this liminal space represents their history of struggle between worlds which is the only “home” they know. Their hybrid experience resists essentialism of both Arab/Palestinian and American cultures and expose the contradictions deeply instilled in them. Soraya lives an experimental life, which does

not fit her Arab community's expectations for a good woman. In Hala's words, "people say —vicious things about Soraya because —she does things people are scared of" (82) like dancing at weddings as she does at Hala's brother wedding:

She is wearing a tight black dress that reaches below her knees. Her long, lush hair is loose and swinging about as she shakes her hips. Her movements are the kinds you see belly dancers make in Egyptian movies, coordinated to such a degree that she can move around the floor while her hips guide her. [...] Each provocative twist and shake seems to invite the viewer to watch more closely. She stares at the camera with heavily made-up eyes, no smile on her full lips. (81-2)

Soraya's dance, which her Arab Muslim community considers a sin and the West exotic, has a totally different function for Soraya. It is her proper way to express her freedom and reduce her frustration and angry, Soraya dances even if only in her mind. After reflecting on everything being considered as haram or halal, Soraya "drive[s] home with the windows down and the stereo blasting, and although she can't close her eyes, in her mind she danc[es] the rage away" (117). Dancing helps her to get rid of her rage after she and her friend Walid, who wears a jacket that makes him look like a Mexican (60), get beaten up at a bar by a group of men who think they are Mexicans. Assured by the policewoman suggesting that they "got off pretty lucky" (60) that the men did not know that they were actually Palestinians, they leave the bar.

Once at home, Soraya puts "on headphones in my too quiet California house, tuck the Walkman into my pocket, close my eyes, and dance hard until the rage begins to fade" (60). Although Mawal describes dancing as most Arab and Muslim women's way of "show[ing] happiness and calm that they keep buried during other days" (23), it has a special function for Soraya. Dancing helps her to cope with frustrations as

meditation and prayer would help an observing, orthodox Muslim; for Soraya, dancing becomes a tool of spirituality and freedom. She expresses herself through a bodily movement that is disapproved as haram (sin) in her native community. In fact, the relationship between Soraya and her body is not a simple hegemony and counter hegemony of a woman fighting a patriarchal society. Her body for her means her freedom. She is only obsessed with the fact that she is free and she can control her body even if this freedom will lead to self destruction.

Soraya rejects any either-or constructions and limitations of categorizations like “Arab” and “American.” She narrates, “I turn to steel the soft part inside of me that wants to crumble with rage and sadness. I’m so sick of everything *haram* or *halal*, but nothing in between. *I am in between.*” (117). The emphasis that Halaby presents on the italicized words summarizes Soraya’s hybrid struggle, the “*I*,” with the binaries of either “*halal*,” that is allowed in culture, religion, and traditions, or “*haram*,” that is forbidden. Although Soraya appears as a strong young girl who refuses to be submissive, she adopts an extreme approach to rebel against categorizations; she self-exoticizes herself confirming negative stereotypes of “Arab” women as oppressed harem girls, sexualized objects, or violent terrorists instead of refuting them. She understands all the taboos surrounding women’s body in the Arab culture; nevertheless, she conceives her identity within a limited space of “forbidden” sexuality by leading a promiscuous life that ends up with an incestuous relationship with her uncle. Gloria Anzaldúa argues that “sexual behavior” is the “ultimate rebellion [a mestiza] can make against her native culture” (1987: 41). Soraya uses her sexuality to reject the prohibitions of her “Arab” heritage and the stereotyping of “Arab” women

as sexually oppressed in the mainstream Western culture. There is no place in her narration in which she does not connect her hybridity with sexuality.

In Soraya's mind, if she is hybrid; then she is sexually active and vice versa. "*I am a new breed. A rebel. My mother and her sisters can spill a story from any woman, but I can make a man talk. I am in between. Familiar ears. Safe mouth. I have men as friends, as well as lovers*" (56). Her insistence on her sexual life as the only representative of her identity reflects the many taboos that her native culture imposes on the female body. Anzaldúa refers to this struggle in the female hybrid's life as a "body awareness" in which the moment a mestiza recognizes that she has a body, she assimilates an "animal body, the animal soul," represented by a serpent (1987: 48). Anzaldúa uses the serpent to reflect on her psyche and mentality. "I realized she was, in my psyche, the mental picture and symbol of the instinctual in its collective impersonal, pre-human. She, the symbol of the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life" (Ibid: 57).

It is in this "dark" prohibited realm that Soraya struggles to define herself ignoring her other mental, psychological, and social faculties. She states,

My body is like some of those women [in porn videos]. I have a skinny girl's waist with woman hips and large breasts, I know my body is sexy; I can tell by the way men look at me, by the way men have always looked at me. I try to hide it in front of my family, and most days I go to school early so I can change out of my loose pants and elbow-length shirts into tighter clothes that make my body show more (30).

Soraya's rebellion is translated in this early body awareness of a young high schooler who realizes that her body is a battlefield of different hegemonies. However, her

extremity has confirmed the binaries between cultures/forces instead of resisting them.

For the confused, conservative Khadija, on the other hand, talking to boys is prohibited in her family let alone have any kind of relation with them. She cannot understand the sexuality of her American school friends because of the fear she lives in the family by her abusive father. She was shocked when she once accidentally witnesses her school friends' intimate relation. She narrates,

I felt horrible, like can't see and can't-think kind of horrible. My books were all over the place and I couldn't stuff them in my bag fast enough. I ran from her front door top our house. Thinking about what I saw made me feel dirty, like when you go by a car crash and look by accident and on purpose at the same time, but then you feel sick because of what you saw.
(179-180)

Unlike Soraya, who celebrates her body, Khadija feels ashamed, even dirty, of the body. While she, like Soraya, connects her identity with her sexuality, she cannot understand how to manage her hybridity away from the limited dichotomy of virgin/whore that is instilled in her via her mother's conservatism and father's abusiveness. Therefore, Khadija fails to conceive her identity, sexuality, and womanhood in the borderlands between cultures. In *Ethnic Entanglement*, Marian Helmy Gabra argues that "it is this value of virtuosity rather than her physical racial identity (located in opposition to her blond friend) that excludes her from her 'Americanness'" (214). Khadija reduces the meaning of hybridity or "Americanness" to a limited space of sexuality in which she cannot be both "American" and "Arab" if she is to embrace her body and speak of sexuality.

Khadija, who comes from a poor working-class and superficially religious family, is a failed example of hybrid consciousness according to Gloria Anzaldúa. Her father is an “extra” mechanic whose very few income and the hardships of immigration have turned him to drinking and domestic violence. Khadija narrates, “My father has many dreams that have been filled with sand. That’s what he tells me” “This country has taken my dreams that used to float like those giant balloons, and filled them with sand” (37). The family’s poverty as well as their patriarchal religious values has shaped Khadija’s hybrid experience in which she is unable to integrate both worlds to survive different hegemonies.

In his *Modern Arab American Fiction*, Steven Salaita argues that Khadija’s character “becomes symbolic of the conflicts that exist among strict religious devotion, free-market capitalism, immigration, and disparate cultural norms and values” (83). Struggling into borderlands between these hegemonies, Khadija realizes her in-betweenness, but she is unable to reconcile both sides of the hyphen as an Arab-American girl. Her identity conflict starts early at school with her Arabic name. “In America my name sounds like someone throwing up or falling off a bicycle. If they can get the first part of it right, the “Kha” part, it comes out like clearing your throat after eating ice cream” (36). While she affirms that she does not want an “American” name, she prefers an easier Arabic one.

However, her identity is constantly constructed between the two worlds in which she lives. These worlds are separated by an imaginary construction of “home” or true “Arab” identity which is reduced to the limited meaning of “virginity.” At school, she wants to “scream at [Mr. Napolitano, who makes fun of her name calling her DJ] that I am just as American as anyone here” when he “expects me to know

more than the other kids because my parents are not American, though there are lots of other kids in the class who aren't American themselves" (74). This passage reflects how identity, "Americanness" in this case, is constructed in the mainstream culture to reflect a white, middle-class existence to which Khadija does not belong. At home, on the other hand, Khadija is in constant negotiation with her mother about her identity which is also constructed within an essentialist binary opposition of "Arab" and "American." "You are Palestinian," she says in Arabic. '*You* are Palestinian,' I tell her in English, 'I am American.'... 'I can be American and still be your daughter.' 'No! No daughter of mine is American'" (74). Her mother, who connects "Americanness" with promiscuity, is rejecting the fact that her daughter cannot carry a unified, fixed identity which ignores all the forces that surrounds her and shapes her existence.

Halaby does not present a clear future for Khadija's hybridity in which she continues to struggle and resorts to an imaginary "safe" space of an "Arab" virginity. However, Khadija's dilemma appears not only in her resistance to "American" sexuality, but also in her rejection of her female body and her womanhood in general. Khadija likes to act, walk, and dress like a boy. She affirms, "those girls are so silly – always brushing their hair and listening to music. I hate dancing in front of all those people. My boy cousins are more fun, but I'm not supposed to play with them anymore because I am getting too old" (75). Nevertheless, she is not allowed to be like a boy or to talk to boys. Recalling her mother's criticism of Maysoun, Soraya's mother, Khadija states "Ma also says Maysoun criticizes others so much because she can't accept that her own daughter is practically a whore. That's another reason why it's better to be a boy, because then you don't have to spend all your time noticing what everyone does wrong" (105). Khadija's reaction to the different constructions of her

female body appears in her adoption of a male personality. She realizes that dressing and talking like a boy will avoid her confrontation with various hegemonic formulations of her female subjectivity.

However, Khadija has gained a limited form of agency at the end of the story by rebelling against her abusive father and calling the police. This temporary power represents the beginning of realization inside Khadija that her life cannot continue as it is. Family is a significant part of belonging and being “Arab.” Nadine Naber argues that, “Selfhood was often articulated in terms of a choice between ‘being an individual, being my own person, being an American,’ or ‘being connected, having family, and being ‘Arab’” (92). Khadija’s ability to call the police for her abusive father can be considered a first step in her journey of finding meanings for her life.

Virginity and sexuality have come to shape the hybrid experience of the teenage cousins in Halaby’s *West of the Jordan*. In her “Arab American Femininities,” Nadine Naber argues that “the theme of female sexuality tended to be utilized as part of some Arab immigrant families’ selective assimilation strategy in which the preservation of Arab cultural identity and assimilation to American norms of “whiteness” were simultaneously desired” (2006: 88). Naber asserts that these Arab immigrant families uses a “cultural nationalist logic that represented the categories ‘Arab’ and ‘American’ in oppositional terms, such as ‘good Arab girls’ vs. ‘bad American(ized) girls,’ or ‘Arab virgin’ vs. ‘American(ized) whore’” (2006: 88).

As Naber indicates, this dichotomy is instilled in the nationalist discourse which constructs the female identity within the binary of the “traditionalist” woman who is supposed to be a guardian of the country’s national identity in the face of the “westernizing” attempts of the colonial/imperialist forces. However, Naber coins the

term “Arab cultural re-authenticity” to refer to the employment of sexuality as a reflection of true identity. It is “a localized, spoken, and unspoken figure of an imagined ‘true’ Arab culture that emerges as a reaction or an alternative to the universalizing tendencies of hegemonic U.S. nationalism, the pressures of assimilation, and the gendered racialization of Arab women and men” (2006: 88).

This definition is in fact an assertion of the gendered and sexualized patriarchal construction of “Arab” identity which is conceived in the female members of the family who are supposed to present an “ideal” image of “Arabness” in face of a westernized model of femininity. Women are situated into a contradictory space in which they are American and not American, Arab and not Arab, at the same time. Naber indicates that this discourse “reproduced a masculinist cultural nationalist assumption that if a daughter chooses to betray the regulatory demands of an idealized Arab womanhood, an imagined Arab community loses itself to the Amerikan” (2006: 92). Therefore, virginity stands as the judgmental force for the purity of “Arabness” that constructs female subjectivity.

In *West of the Jordan*, the importance of virginity is exaggerated to represent the racial identity of a heterogeneous people. Soraya expresses this reduction of female identity repeating her mother’s words, “You are nothing without your virginity” (190). It is a “policed female subjectivity,” as argued by Nadine Naber, which should transgress all borderlands and hybrid experiences to represent one form of identity for widely heterogeneous women. However, it is a continuation of a historical discourse on the meaning of the female body amid different hegemonic forces.

However, the question of the female body is also clear in the other two characters of Mawal and Hala in Halaby’s work. While a body-talk, in the case of

Mawal, is an absolute prohibition considering the hegemonic patriarchal and colonial world in which she lives, Halaby beautifully alludes to an internal desire in Mawal to reflect on her body as she narrates:

An odd stirring creeps inside me which I can't explain, though most of my friends show hints of a similar restless quality. And now, as summer begins, I want to lie on my back and eat the sky. I want to be mischievous. I want to stare at Miss Maryam's large pointed breasts, to stand this much closer to the vegetable man who winks, to let him touch my hand when he gives me back my change. My mother has led me to believe that feelings and thoughts such as these will take me straight to hell, or make me turn out like my untame cousin Soraya, who ate too much cereal when she was young and has the foolishness of an American in her blood, and that may be true but I don't much care. I want to sit in the garden and hike my dress up to my knees so my legs can feel the sun as it kisses them. (19)

The sun kissing provides her with a comfortable touch, an aspect she misses in her reality. These feelings speak to the already constructed borderlands in the lives of these young women at "home." Speaking of expressing the female body is considered as part of the "undivine," as Anzaldúa indicates, which represents the "the animal impulses such as sexuality, the unconscious, the unknown, the alien" which people are made to fear by culture and religion (1987: 39). However, Mawal is clear that she does not want to adopt a sexually promiscuous life (like Soraya), she only wants to embrace her female body and to celebrate her femininity as a young girl at the threshold of womanhood. Being "mischievous" for her means spreading her legs out in the sun; a female dream which explains the distinction between sexuality and the female body for these women. The patriarchal and colonial constructions of "Third World" women's identity have presented a confused representation of these two concepts. Celebrating

the female body within the patriarchal discourse is interpreted in terms of “forbidden sexuality.”

On the other hand, “Arab” and “Muslim” women are sexualized in the colonial/orientalist discourse which reduces their female bodies into sexual objects. However, the warning against a female body-talk by Mawal’s mother is an example of the patriarchal construction of religious discourse. She not only is bringing shame to the family, but also is going to hell. The use of religion is one approach that has been used by different patriarchal, nationalist, and colonial hegemonies to control people and construct social roles.

Within the western misrepresentations of “Arabs” and Arabic culture, religion, specifically Islam, has become the only representative of “Arab” women identities. While Arabs are religiously heterogeneous, all “Arab” women are stereotyped as oppressed because they are “Muslims.” However, “religion cannot and should not be seen independently of the socioeconomic and political context within which it unfolds,” as argued by scholar Nawar Al- Hassan Golley in her “Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?” (522). This contextualization explores the processes by which religious values and symbols are manipulated and distorted within each hegemonic discourse which reflects both individualized as well as institutionalized modes of power. Nadine Naber asserts that “Religion (Christian or Muslim) alone does not determine the processes by which Arab American femininities are imagined and performed” (89). Instead, “religious identity” should be situated “within the context of intersecting coordinates of power (race, class, nation, and so forth) and historical circumstances” (89). Therefore, poor uneducated families, like Khadija’s, are more

prone to adopt patriarchal religious manipulations about female subjectivities than others.

Unlike Khadija and Soraya, Hala, who moves to the U.S. for high school, goes back to Jordan to see her dying grandmother, and returns back to the U.S. for college education, has been able to develop a negotiable consciousness about the two cultures she finds herself in between. Her moving back and forth between these two worlds has situated her in a borderland space in which she gradually realizes that she cannot be one and not the other. This in-betweenness has created a number of cultural conflicts through which Hala is able to question any either-or construction in her journey towards a new identity consciousness.

Halaby presents Hala as carrying a double vision through which she is able to question the realities and refute the myths about the “Arab” and the “American” cultures. Supported by her parents (her mother had a short education in the U.S), Hala is sent to live with her uncle and his American wife in Arizona to finish her high school. Uncle Hamdi, who is presented as an “Americanized” workaholic college professor, has introduced Hala to an upper-middle-class lifestyle unlike her cousins.

In a chapter titled “White,” Hala narrates her return back to Jordan wearing “blue jeans and ‘extremely unfeminine dresses’ and having short hair with no makeup which are expected from her to prepare herself for marriage. These features present her as a “western white” girl to her people. She announces, “I am unconnected” (77). While she is able to critically examine the people’s conservativeness, the patriarchal constructions of her life, and the country’s poverty, Hala enjoys many aspects of her family’s life that she misses in her “American” house in Arizona. “There is comfort to be in my own house,” she narrates, “to wake up in my own language, but all those

faces I've carried with me for so long wear suspicion in their eyes as they greet me. I have walked so far away from them" (77). Hala's visit to Jordan appears as a discovering journey of the country and the culture to which she belongs, but she cannot find herself fully represented within. Part of this discovery is Hala's recognition of her femininity and her female body. Hala recounts,

Each morning I take my time getting dressed, something I never paid much attention to before, I have become self-conscious, not in a pretty/ugly way, just aware of myself and my body. I notice everything, and not just in me. Colors are sharper. All sensations are exaggerated. Food is delicious or vile. Sights are magnificent or hideous. Smells are divine or nauseating. I cannot explain what is happening to me. Sharif is like my brother and is making me see my country in a way I never have... and then there is this extrabeating feeling, which I cannot even begin to explain. (134)

Hala is able to adopt a different more feminine look than the one she came with from the U.S. as she becomes aware of her female body. Additionally, this passage explains Hala's recognition of binaries and borders.

Everything is dichotomous in this phase of Hala's life, from food, colours, sights, and smells to her brother/lover relationship with Sharif. It is a transitional stage, as discussed by Gloria Anzaldúa, in which the female hybrid subject starts to realize the essentialist binaries between cultures. Anzaldúa says, "In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, [*la mestizaje*] is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries ... Rigidity means death" (101). At this stage, Hala starts her hybrid journey which could have not been complete without a critical rediscovery of the "Arab" side of her identity.

Hala's gradual hybridity requires her resistance of many cultural formulations of her female subjectivity. With her decision to return back to the U.S. for her college education and her rejection of a traditionally arranged marriage, Hala presents a new form of female resistance to patriarchal constructions of gender roles within her "Arab" culture and preconceived stereotypical images of submissive "Arab" girls in the mainstream western culture. Back to Arizona, Hala brings a new light to the "American(ized)" life of her uncle. "I am starting over, starting over," she announces upon her arrival to the U.S. in which Hala brings together all parts of her identity to form her new space in the borderlands.

III.3.3 Travelling Memories in Shaping Female Identities

Early in the novel, Halaby makes it known to her readers that her childhood memories were already filled with the taste of another land, hence her sense of displacement and homelessness. In spite of migration, food and family provided her with the *home* she needed to have as a child. However, now that she is in a completely different culture, all she has as home are her memories and news she can get from whomever travels to and from Jordan. She expects the addressee's suitcases to be filled with many stories heard in "the house where a meal and a family waited for [her] with loud kisses and streaming plates" (1). The randomness and variety of her memories, however, result in complex and conflicting emotions, affecting how she feels about her current, adopted home country as her memories "come back to you at the wrong time, at the right time, at times that make you hate where you live, or love it more than you can make your words describe" (2). As the memories make her feel conflicting emotions, her current, adopted country also provides her with contradictory experiences, which in turn affect how she feels about those memories.

While she loves her “sweet house with the desert outside”, “the hostility around” her in Tucson, Arizona, reminds her constantly that she is not at home (2). The conflicting memories of her native culture and contradictory experiences in her adopted culture create an amalgamation of emotions that eventually affect her constantly evolving identity.

Memories generally function as tools that connect us to what we have lost; sometimes the same memories indicate an ongoing mourning for the lost item or person and determine the way we live our lives. Mieke Bal explains the strong influence of past memories on our present life style:

To be sure, memory can also be so habitual that it appears to be just automatic, just as it can be manipulated by others. When walking in a wet street, for example, one avoids stepping into a puddle, not because of a conscious decision but because “somehow” one knows that not avoiding the puddle results in wet feet. This knowledge comes from memory. Such background memories help the subject survive in a community where the behaviors they inform are part of —normal life. (vii)

Until Hala returns to Jordan to see her dying grandmother, Hala lacks the memories, especially of her mother, that would help her not only to survive but also to create her own space in America. The “memory of loss” shapes Hala’s life in America as well.

Sent to America to live with her Uncle Hamdi and his American wife Fay while her mother was still struggling with cancer, Hala could not be with her mother in Jordan when she died. However, her journey back to Jordan to visit her dying grandmother gives her the opportunity to learn the stories that shaped her mother’s life. In *West of the Jordan*, when Hala and her cousin Fawziyya climb to the top of the

mountain Petra -the mountain with an ancient sacrifice temple, where her mother always wanted to go but never got the chance- they feel that they are alone with God and a lizard. When the girls mention this lizard to Abu Salwan, Hala's uncle and Fawziyya's father, it reminds him of the story in which Hala's mother interprets a scar on the shoulder of Fawziyya's mother (who is now also dead) as a lizard. After telling the story, Abu Salwan thinks that "the lizard [they] saw in Petra was a reminder that [their] mothers are always with [them]" (162). With this story, Hala starts feeling that her mother is with her more than ever. Listening to the memory of her mother enables Hala to reconnect with her mother in the present. For Hala, stories about her mother form memories she would otherwise not have.

In the States, where she lacks her mother's memories, stories about her mother eventually enable her to feel complete and more comfortable with her Arab identity. This change is signified by the difference between the dresses she wears on her way to and from Jordan and how she feels in them. In the first chapter titled "Going Home" Hala is on the plane traveling back to Jordan to visit her dying grandmother. Her "gray ankle-length dress scratches [her] everywhere" (5):

It tickles my bottom and has a scooped back and scooped front, so people can peek from all angles. I thought the dress would give me confidence – mostly covering me, but pretty – but instead I told myself, hunch, and calculate whether a tiny airplane bathroom is big enough to hold me as I change my clothes. (5)

With this dress, she cannot feel comfortable in her "regular-class, no-frills seat" on the plane (5). Her struggles with the dress represent the struggles she expects to encounter in her transition into her native culture. Unlike the comfort and relief that the title, "Going Home," connotes, she will experience something memorable yet different for

her. Her once-familiar and dear home Jordan now holds unpredictable experiences for her after three years of living in the States.

The uncomfortable dress furthermore represents her being uncomfortable with her Arab identity in the United States, which is also evidenced by the way she describes her neighbour on the plane. Hala does not feel happy talking to her even though they are from the same culture:

She glares at me and clutches a cardboard box with pictures of hypodermic needles. “Can you please have a woman from the plane come here.”

I pull my scratchy, gray shoulders up so they almost reach my neck, stretch my arm up, and push the button for the stewardess.

A slender, manicured finger pushes the button off and green eyes peer into mine. “Yes?”

The Syrian woman sits silently.

“She wanted me to sign for you,” I say.

“What do you need, Auntie?” asks the stewardess, whose name tag reads “Nadia.”

“I want you to know that I have to take these every day,” she says, holding up the box of needles. “I don’t know how to do it, so could you please get the plane’s doctor to come and give me an injection.” She smiles, exposing two gold teeth.

We stare at her. Nadia looks at me.

“We just met now,” I say in English in case she thinks we are related. (6)

Their conversation and Hala’s description of the woman depict Hala’s opinions of her as a bizarre, traditional Arab woman who cannot care for herself. Her discomfort is such that she does not want to be associated with her.

On her way back to the States, however, despite her father’s objections, she wears “a *rozga* that [her] grandmother made for [her] mother as a part of her trousseau” (203). Her mother mostly wore —western clothes or western dresses — but at home

she likes *dishdashas* and this *roz'a*" (203). Hala remembers her wearing the dress and being happy in it. Having on her mother's dress on her way back to America, she concludes that "[it] is time to start something new, and something old, not to fix something unfinished" (204). She is now able to have a clearer resolution for the next chapter of her life. Her mother's stories and dress, which embody her mother's memories, now enable Hala to combine the old and the new to create the third and unique way of using the two cultures. She will —watch the right way, to see the underside of things, the thinking things and the forgetting things, as [her] mother used to say" (204).

The memories attached to her dress now allow Hala to bear the loss of her home in the States. At Uncle Hamdi and Fay's house, what never bothered her before, such as "high-class American blah, no soul, no colours, only outside walls that wandered in and stayed" (216), now looks bare to her compared to her "mother's house" where "every nook and cranny filled with something: a plant, a book, a statue, a flower, and every wall was covered with religious plaques, calendars, photographs. [...] Always somewhere to look to take you somewhere else, to make you think" (217). Now she longs for "a home that doesn't exist anymore" (217), so all she has to do to feel home is to close her eyes and be with the memories. Just as her mother used to say, remembering for herself and for her tomorrow makes her "day new and old" (218). With her memories, the white walls of Hamdi and Fay's house become "softer" (219). Only when she makes her memories visual with her family's pictures from Nawara, Jordan, do "the bare walls [become] bearable, lively, different and familiar" (220). She sits on the floor and stares at these pictures, then closes her eyes, "it is deep night time in Amman — and in Nawara — and I have tucked my memories under a

scratchy blanket, wishing them the sweetest dreams” (220). When she opens her eyes, the world around her is now “new, but not unfamiliar” (220). By following her mother’s style of decorating her room in America, she creates a third space for herself where she can be in Jordan and America at the same time. Memories enable her to create a third space that is both physical and mental in order to cope with the loss of her home.

The idea of memory is also expressed within the novel through the character of Mawal, who stands as a history narrator and a safe-keeper of women’s stories at home and in diaspora, is described as an embroiderer of Nawarese “rozās,” the village’s traditional dresses, “with both Palestinian and western stitches and patterns” (15). She states, “So many women come spill their secrets and their joys and their agonies because they know my mother – and I – will keep them safe and do no more than stitch them into the fabric of our *rozās*” (17). These rozās of female stories represent the collective memory of Palestinian women whose constant displacement and repositioning have put them in confrontation with different identity questions. Questions they cannot answer, avoid, or change as Mawal describes them. Halaby indicates in an interview with scholar Steven Salaita, “Love of land, loss, exile, forcible removal, the physical beauty of land being bitter-sweet because it is so often seen through memory rather than today’s life.”

This exact picture of “home” throughout Mawal’s narrative and the memories of the older generation in the novel is what distinguish a Palestinian woman’s journey into hybridity, migration, and borderlands from the experience of other diasporic subjects. Being Palestinian casts a different historical, geo-political, cultural, and social meaning on the life of an Arab-American female hybrid like the young women in *West*

of the Jordan. Within this particularity of the socio-political position of a Palestinian diaspora in the U.S., the historical forces of gender, race, class, and religion have come to play a different role in the life of each female character in *West of the Jordan*.

III.3.4 Juxtaposing Stereotypes

In addition to their continual struggle with the inter/intra ethnic borderlands they are at the crossroads of, Halaby's four characters have to deal with the effects of Arab men's struggles in the new world. Madelaine Hron, the author of *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture*, observes that immigrant writings are "laden with suffering, tragedy, and feelings of alienation, anguish, and loss" (2009: x). She explains that both in immigrants' real life and fiction, "feelings of alienation are often accompanied by symptoms of depression, such as feelings of emptiness, uselessness, lack of energy, restlessness, or irritability" (2009: 30). Khadija's father feels useless, for he does not have a stable job, and this feeling makes him easily irritable so he takes his anger out on his family. Likewise, Uncle Haydar tries to fill the emptiness with constant, meaningless sex and flirting, while Uncle Hamdi resorts to work. Loss, as the main part of immigrant experience, determines these characters' psychological well-being in the United States, as they continuously mourn for the objects of loss such as "home, familiar food, native music, accepted social norms, maternal language, childhood surroundings, and loved ones, but most importantly their old selves" (2009: 29).

Khadija's father suffers not only from loss of home but also of his dignity in America. His mourning for his loss manifests itself in his physical abuse on his family. His working as the third mechanic, which means that "he is extra and gets called if they have a lot of business" (37), takes its toll on him, turning him into a hopeless,

dreamless man. As he puts it, living in a foreign culture “has taken [his] dreams that used to float like those giant balloons, and filled them with sand” (37). This immigrant father cannot connect with his daughter who is already confused about her place and identity in her new home. The father’s drinking results in his taking his frustrations out on his children, beating them at every opportunity, sometimes even creating scenarios to have an excuse for beating them.

Similarly, because he grew up in refugee camps in Lebanon, Uncle Haydar, Riad Fancy-Dance, struggles with the loss of his home, which continues in America. As he puts it, “losing a country makes your eyes dance” (115). Soraya sees his agony because “[h]e lost his country more than any of us, but what I see [in his eyes] ain’t dancing; it is searching, like looking for his own self and not being able to find a mirror” (117). In his search for a mirror, he goes through meaningless relationships until he finds it in his niece Soraya, which eventually leads him to have an incestuous affair with her as she represents his native culture and home to him. Their relationship, however, gives Soraya false hope and a false sense of control in her life, leading her to thinking that she “choose[s] what [she] does. We are in America now, so maybe Haydar could give me freedom, could get me to a life I can control” (190). She considers this incestuous relationship as her choice and believes it will lead her to freedom from traditions that would have confined her to a life she does not want.

Although at first sight Uncle Hamdi may be considered problem-free, a closer look reveals that he has difficulties that he channels into other directions, like work. He is married to an American lady and loved especially by Hala and Khadija. He is very understanding and compassionate – unlike Khadija’s father – and has a stable job and home – unlike Uncle Haydar. However, Hala’s narration reveals that Uncle Hamdi

is a workaholic. He works so much that he “is too busy with his American life, with his American wife, to come to say good-bye to his dying mother” (137). When considered from a western perspective, he does not fit the strict, oppressive Muslim male stereotype. However, from the Arab perspective, he is not Arab anymore as he does not care about keeping close family ties. Just like Uncle Haydar who fills the void by excessive sex, Uncle Hamdi fills it with excessive work.

Instead of dismissing these men as stereotypical, oppressive Muslim men, Halaby makes sure to remind her readers that their aches come from immigration experience and are not based on religious or cultural tradition. Connecting these men’s depression and aggressive, immoral behaviours with immigration, Halaby suggests that many Muslim male stereotypes in the western mind result from these men’s immigrant experience and the way they respond to it. She differentiates between Muslim men in the novel. The men who live in the Middle East, such as Hala’s father and brother, are calm and mild, not oppressive, albeit traditional, although they have to negotiate between their progressive thoughts and the conservative small town they live in. The men who immigrate, however, lash out against their families, and Halaby appears to blame their irrational behaviour on these men’s unresolved feelings about their conditions as other in a foreign country.

Hala’s father is an open minded Middle Eastern man who knows how to balance progressive thoughts with social expectations of the conservative small village of Nawara. When Hala was still young, he was conservative; he did not approve of Hala’s reading extracurricular books. He encourages her reading as long as she reads books approved by the education system. He is a product of his culture, so when Hala returns to Jordan for her mother’s funeral, he expects Hala to “plan to put [her] roots

here [in Jordan] as a woman” (45). Hala explains that her father wants to continue tradition: the daughter replaces the deceased mother with a husband. In spite of this, Hala convinces him to allow her to return to America. However, Hala finds him even milder when she returns home for her grandmother’s funeral. He is more respectful of her. After so many years of thinking and living without his wife, he now sees his daughter not only as an adult but also a different person because of her immigrant experience in a totally different culture: “Hala is a stranger to me. She has learned to live in another culture and I no longer know what to do with her. [...] [She] is a kind girl and [...] very different from the others. She has her mother’s spirit” (195). Furthermore, he is now open to new ways of thinking and seeing the world, as evidenced in his taking Sharif’s advice when he tries to marry Hala to Sharif. Sharif refuses the offer by explaining that “[i]f I have true love for her, which I must in order to marry her, I must allow her to be free” (195). Even though these men never ask Hala what she wants, they know that they cannot have traditional expectations for her. They respect her difference and desire to live and study in America.

Juxtaposed to the stereotypical, strict image of Middle Eastern men is also Hala’s supportive, understanding older brother, Jalal. He is one of the male characters who grow up in the Middle East, but he contradicts the stereotypical image of the Middle Eastern man as traditional and unbending of will. While the whole family is debating Hala’s reading non-canonical texts, Jalal sides with the mother and encourages her to read. Hala remembers dearly that he often defied the father’s attempts by bringing her books he thought she would like, “usually about animals or folktales from other countries” (8). Even though Jalal has never left the Middle East

for a western country and has always been immersed in the Muslim tradition, he is open-minded and supportive of his sister's interest in reading to the point of defying the father's authority.

Unlike the male characters who become even stricter or sicker, living away from home, those who remain in the Middle East are portrayed as nice men who are supportive of their daughters' and sisters' education while still expecting these women to live traditional lives. By establishing the difference between the two groups of Arab Muslim men, Halaby claims that most of the stereotypes about Muslim men in the west are derived from immigrants who experience the common, traumatic side effects of immigration. She creates context through which her western audience is led to understand that there are open-minded Muslim men as well as conservative women in the Middle East just as in any given society. Being the products of hasty generalizations based on only a few examples outside their native contexts, stereotypes prevent us from understanding the psychological as well as cultural motivations behind the behaviours of individuals

III.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have explored a significant voice of Arab-American female writer who struggle to resist these discourses of binarism, racism, and exclusion and present the heterogeneous experiences of Arab-American female hybrids as situated within the various historical forces of race, gender, class, religion, and nation, and affected by the hegemonic discourses of colonialism, nationalism, imperialism, and capitalism. I have used a transnational feminist critique as a historically oriented approach, as conceptualized by postcolonial feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Caren Kaplan, and Gloria Anzaldúa, to examine the multiple aspects of

resistance that this writer adopt to present a completely different image of the Arab American Women.

Arab-American women's lives in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* have transgressed the mainstream constructed boundaries that position them within an endless cycle of essentialist formulations which hijack the reality and heterogeneity of their experiences. I have examined a new meaning of cultural identity, hybridity, and female subjectivity that disclose the many manipulations and distortions of the colonial, national, patriarchal, and imperial power structures. Most of the Arab-American women writers and their female characters in general are in constant negotiation of their identity amid different hegemonies in order to create a form of political consciousness in which they will be able to resist the essentialization of and discrimination against their existence. While they may represent other "Arab" or Arab-American women from similar backgrounds and in identical situations, they are in no way a tool of generalization about all Arab-American female hybrids as any attempt of generalizing about Arab or Arab-American women will obliterate their diverse histories and heterogeneous lives. I have also focused on the various meanings that the different Western, nationalist, cultural, and religious forces cast on the female hybrid's body which is constantly constructed to meet different personal and political interests.

Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* presents a rich examination of the lives of four Palestinian young women who are struggling in the borderlands between patriarchies, cultures, and political agendas. The fragmented narratives of Soraya, Hala, Khadija, and Mawal reflect their diversity although they come from the same family. Between heterogeneous religious beliefs, cultural traditions, gender politics, and colonial/postcolonial locations, these Palestinian women are in constant shifting

within intra ethnic as well as inter-ethnic borderlands. I have examined Laila Halaby's exposition of different patriarchal, national, colonial, and imperial hegemonies which continue to situate these women within limited essentialist constructions. The focus on the intra-ethnic borderlands has explored the multiple processes of border-crossing for these women even before the beginning of their diasporic experience. Halaby rejects all attempts to universalize the experience of hybridity and border-crossing in the lives of immigrant and diasporic subjects. In fact, Laila Halaby tries to build a political hybrid consciousness in these women through which they can resist their invisibility, exclusion, and discrimination in the mainstream American culture.

Chapter Four

Bridging Two Worlds: Transculturality in Shaping Women Hybrid Identity in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*

IV.1 Introduction

Unlike Arab American literature, which tends to explore issues and problems associated with the Arab American community and find in hybridity an uncomfortable identity, the Arab British literature tend to foreground a transcultural dialogue and cross-ethnic identifications for which transculturation is delineated as a humane fruitful interaction between diverse cultures.

It is in this sense that the present chapter will examine how the Arab British novelist Ahdaf Soueif celebrates hybridity as fusion of different cultural backgrounds that allows the self to coexist with the other in her novel *The Map of Love* which present themes of love, marriage, travel, and immigration and highlight the fertility of cross-cultural encounters. My focus while exploring the text will be on the way the writer instigates dialogue with her Arab, British and American characters resulting in a full recognition of the one's culture and that of the other, which gave birth to a self identity that flows from the fusion of values and ways of life and styles from both cultures through an act of transculturality..

IV.2 Reviews of *The Map of Love*

Ahdaf Soueif constructs and presents a modern/postmodern disjunctive hybrid identity in which the Egyptian woman does not valorise either Egyptian or English culture, location, or identity, but rather engages them equally, allowing a new hybrid identity to be constructed upon an in-between imaginative constructive cultural space that accepts the conflicting paradoxes of this hybrid identity. It is only when travel

occurs in Soueif's narrative that a strong female narrative voice and subjectivity emerges independently.

In *The Map of Love*, as James Clifford notes, travel “emerged as an increasingly complex range of experiences: practices of crossing and interaction that troubled the localism of many common assumptions about culture” (1997: 3). Soueif argues that practices of human crossing and interaction become “constitutive of cultural meanings [...] The cultural effects of European expansionism, for example, could no longer be celebrated, or deplored as a simple diffusion outward—of civilization, industry, science, or capital. For the region called ‘Europe’ has been constantly remade, and traversed, by influences beyond its borders” (*ibid*).

The Map of Love explores new applications for the genre of travel writing beyond even “cultural comparison” or “global comparisons”: references like “‘culture,’ ‘art,’ ‘society,’ ‘peasant,’ ‘mode of production,’ ‘man,’ ‘woman,’ ‘modernity,’ ‘ethnography’—get us some distance and fall apart [... We] learn a lot about peoples, cultures, and histories different from your own, enough to begin to know what you’re missing” (39). Soueif finds in using the genre of travel writing a suitable medium to review the current politics of reception and representation of Arab women's texts in Western culture. Her novel comes as a contribution of an Arab women elite who experienced spending all of her life between two cultures and who wishes to share her knowledge of meanings of the local and the global.

Ahdaf Soueif's discussions of orientalist's stereotyped representation of the Arab female, particularly in the context of comparisons between Soueif herself and the white Western female, take up the predicament of the novel's possible affiliation to

postcolonial studies, which reproduce orientalists' concepts of hierarchies, hegemony, and center-periphery relations. In her essay, "Fictionalising Post-colonial Theory: The Creative Native Informant?" Anastasia Valassopoulos provides a critical reading that places Soueif's novel *The Map of Love* within the arena of post-colonial studies. She argues that Soueif's novel is a contemporary text that participates in an apologist and orientalist discourse (2004: 33), that it artificially adopts interdisciplinary approaches such as history and politics in order to "correct history" and "act as a revisionist historian, or set the record straight" (35), and "borrows from other literary genres, in particular the travel writing genre, a fixture in the history of the construction of post-colonial theory" (39). All this work proclaims the position of Ahdaf Soueif as deliberately marketing herself as a contributor to the Western canon by acting as a creative native informant. Furthermore, Clarissa Burt and Bruce King's review describes *The Map of Love* as "a post-colonial counter discourse which recasts the nature of colonialism" (Burt, 2001: 153) and "a Harlequin Romance for the anti-Western intelligentsia...modeled after and a critique of the 'Oriental tale'" (King, 2000: 453).

In a careful counter-argument (specifically to Bruce King), Wail Hassan (2006) explains that this novel does not attempt to be a nativist "postcolonial" text nor to adopt the travel narrative genre uncritically but rather is told from the perspective of "immigrants as distinct from that of travellers...in whose case the 'encounter' remains between cultures that are presumably separate and discrete" (158). Although Soueif uses the genre of travel narrative, her novel "denotes an identity that is fused, hybrid, straddling and subversively mixing together constructs that can no longer be imagined as monolithic" (158). From the perspective of cultural impact, Hassan confirms that

the experience of the writer-immigrant “is one of cultural admixture and interpretation, not to mention the multiple complex loyalties that the traveler or temporary resident does not always or necessarily share. The immigrant experience adds extra dimensions to the task of cultural translation that the ‘encounters’ depicted in travel literature may lack” (158). *The Map of Love* becomes a model of a transnational literary text that consciously “provides a way to theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history...to construct a real notion of the universal and of democratization rather than colonization” (Mohanty, 1991: 518).

The novel adopts various narrative strategies and styles to revise the discourse used in 19th-century English travel writing, particularly narratives written by English women travelers. Soueif’s preference for this genre in writing *The Map of Love* is multifaceted. Her first intention was to highlight the role and impact of this genre in the construction and spreading of the discourse of “otherness” associated with orientalist activities in the Arab world since the late 17th century. The novel, thus, becomes as an exemplary text that investigates the relationship between literature and forms of cultural imperialism. The novel also provides a contemporary critical reading of the nature of transnational-cultural communication and its impact on (national) identity transformation. The revision of the genre of Western travel writing introduces a contemporary vision of a future world as one space inclusive of all and where interaction between cultures in this growing globalized conception of the world is based on equality and compromise. In her reply to the criticism that her novel introduces an unperceivable vision of the world amidst the increasingly conflicting global relations, Ahdaf Soueif argues that history itself has presented examples of cultural overlap and healthy interaction. She confirms that the generation she belonged

to firmly recognized an affinity between the best of Western and the best of Arab culture.

Ideals of social justice, public service, and equality, identified in modern times as Western, are to be found in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him). If science flourishes in the West now, it had flourished in the Arab and Muslim lands from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. The Principles of objective scientific enquiry described by Roger Bacon in 1286 are the same as those expressed by al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham in 1020. Taxation and philanthropy produced free health care in Baghdad in the tenth century as they did in New York and London in the twentieth.

In both cultures a system of patronage had been the midwife to great architecture, literature, and music. And as the European Renaissance had blossomed in the sixteenth century out of the mix of Europe's availing itself of Arab science while discovering its own classical heritage and enjoying an economic boom, so the Arabs looked to build their twentieth-century renaissance on their adoption of Western science and the rediscovery of their own classical heritage. According to Soueif:

Generations of Arab Mezzaterrans⁴² had believed what Western culture said of itself: that its values were universalist, democratic and human. They believed that once you peeled off military and political dominance, the world so liberated would be one where everyone could engage freely in the

⁴² The word "mezzaterra" is an original term; Soueif creates it by combining the two Italian words for "half" or "middle" (mezza) and "world" or "ground" (terra), thus literally invoking the middle ground, an expression of compromise and balance and the global potential for this concept. A meeting ground, no less, which is never quite complete as the "half" or "mezza" indicates. Soueif uses the term primarily as a state of mind, indicating the various facets that make up who we are. Mezzaterrans, according to Soueif, inhabit "an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into the other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening, because they were foregrounded against a backdrop of affinities" (*Mezzaterra*, 7). It is also the title of her book of essays published in 2004

exchange of ideas, art forms, technologies. This was the world that my generation believed we had inherited: a fertile land; an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into the other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening. (Soueif, 2004: 7)

As the threat of political and military tension between the West and the East has not vanished yet, Soueif's novel appears within the context of transnational literature, in other words, literature that opens a cultural dialogue. The novel prompts a revisionary reading of history, forms of hegemony, cultural formation, and knowledge transformation. One aim of Soueif's writing is to expose how post-colonial studies constructed packages of stereotyped representations, such as the oppressed exotic oriental woman and the life of the harem, for the purpose of marketing it to the Western reader. The novel extends an interest in the implications of this continuing complicity of modern studies, particularly postmodern and feminist studies, in stereotyping modes of representation of oriental literature; thus called into question also is the involvement of more professional circles, such as higher education, media, publishing, and ethnographical and anthropological studies, in the representation process. From this perspective, the presence and representation of world literature in a global reach requires just such a re-evaluation of knowledge as Soueif provides in her novel to achieve a transparent view of transculturation.

IV.3 Anna: Finding Self in the Other

Standing at the crossroads of cultures, *The Map of Love* unravels a unique journey to Egypt that Lady Anna Winterbourne, a widowed Englishwoman, embarks on at the end of the nineteenth century and the life she leads there. Genuinely

articulated in personal records, the novel celebrates the physical, spiritual, and cultural spaces that Anna crosses and bridges between the East and West.

Anna's exclusive journey to Egypt begins with a state of physical in-betweens that she experiences upon her arrival in Alexandria. There as she expresses in her journal, she comes across a city that fuses European style with Egyptian identity, and endorses two seemingly different spheres. The grand celebrations that escort both the arrival of the new patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church and the khadive's return from Europe give Anna the impression that it is possible for the East and the West to coexist in an intermediate space of cultural encounters. Her observation, in fact, reflects Alexandria as a "Contact Zone" which as Pratt emphasizes, "invoke the spatial and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (1992: 6)

The impact of the locale of Alexandria on Anna appears in the psychological state of liminality that befalls her, enabling her to recover, months after her Husband's death. Her writing to Sir Charles that "I am better in health and spirits than I have been for a long time" (61) demonstrates the city as a distinguished place of elsewhere; that is, the place where one finds composure. In addition, her stay in Alexandria which she describes "to have more of the Europe of the Mediterranean....than anything else" (58) blurs the limitations of estrangement or displacement she might feel, being an outsider within. More important, this contact zone or "third space" adds a new thread to Anna's hybrid identity in formation, endowing her with the ability to traverse and negotiate the British image of Egypt as a land of "fanatical wickedness" (61) and the welcoming "smiles and kind looks of the natives" (61) she receives.

Anna's interaction with Egypt extends as she opens to the quotidian life and practices of its indigenous inhabitants. Lady Winterbourne sets out on a cultural

journey to the Bazaar and Abdin Palace where she understands more about the ancient land. The protagonist interest in the exotic scene of the *soûq* is conspicuous in the detailed description she records. She writes in her journal that “the merchandise [is] so abundant, the colours so bold..... [and] people are constantly calling out to you and urging you to buy their wares.....I have no experience in conducting that transaction. No doubt I will learn” (67)

Despite its banality, the diary entry underpins Anna’s anti-conquest role which Pratt defines as “the claim to the innocent pursuit of knowledge” (78). Her remark reflects a growing belief that it is through objective observation and unprejudiced interaction with the Other, rather than abiding by hegemonic depictions and claims that her personally formed opinions prove innocent and sound. Anna, in other words, realizes that in order to learn more about Egypt she has to learn more about and from its inhabitants, through mutual interaction. In this respect, reciprocity becomes a genuine goal of desire at the Bazaar and later a reality achieved in the Khedive’s Ball in Abdin Palace.

Though the Khedive’s Ball provides limited chances to converse and directly interact with Egyptian notables, it gives Anna the opportunity of seeing which itself operates along lines of reciprocity. Apparently, the protagonist is aware that her continuous glances at the elite natives, none of whom she has met before, are returned on behalf of the women who watch from behind the grille. In a similar way, the imperative of reciprocity Anna experiences at the Ball opens her eyes to certain aspects of the Egyptian way of life. She, for instance, writes to her friend Caroline of how “Egyptian women do not seem to attend such ceremonies, and how the native notables “Kept to themselves,” and avoid dancing” (94). Apparently, Anna is able to

discern cultural and social discrepancies between the East and West. Nevertheless, her regard for Islamic traditions, which appears in the decent attire she chooses to wear, believing that “it would provide me with an adequate covering and would not cause offense” (94) underscores her respect for a different, yet commensurate culture.

Anna’s respect and tolerance towards the Egyptian way of life render her dialogic, seeking out rather than defying local traditions and customs. Her unprejudiced observations give rise to a vehement cultural critic, best articulated in her objective travel accounts, which surely follow Pratt’s description of the unbiased travelogue as:

A hetroglossic dimension, its acknowledge comes not just out of a traveller’s sensibility and powers of observation, but out of interaction and experience usually directed and managed by “travelees” who are working from their own understandings of their world (1992: 135-6)

Furthermore, Anna’s travel accounts bear a hetroglossic dimension as they explore experiences of immersion in learning and utilizing another language. In her attempts to communicate with the Egyptian people on their own terms, the protagonist expresses her wish to learn Arabic, and is consequently tutored through translation. Anna records upon her arrival in the *Mu’allaqa* church in Cairo that “*allaqa*” means “to hang” and the *Mu’allaqa* is named thus because it is hung on the ancient gateway of the Roman fort” (90). More important though is the impact translation plays in Anna’s realization of the linguistic and the spiritually implied connection between Islam and Christianity. She recognizes the association between her favourite Egyptian church and the House of God, the *Ka’ba* where the *Mu’allaqat* were hung. The English woman’s awareness of the resonance between Christian embodiment and central Islamic icon affirms her anti-fanatical and non essentialist perspective. In effect, this

spiritual journey adds to Anna's "sense of increased spaciousness....a deep –and I pray enduring- peace" (90-1)

Similar to Alexandria, the religious tolerance and welcoming climate that join the churches and mosques of Cairo reflect on Anna and deepen her conviction in coexistence. She acknowledges that Egypt does not accommodate different religions only, but it celebrates differences as essential components for survival. This realization is generated, to echo Stuart Hall "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference: by hybridity" (1990: 235)

Apparently, Anna's crossing "the beyond" motivates a gradual elimination of the single norm against which to judge the Other. Rather than adopt the colonialist discourse and attest to the differences that favour the metropolitan Self at the expense of the colonized. Anna becomes conscious of cross-cultural similarities that establish a common ground between the East and West. She learns that Egyptians crave for education so as "to be able to govern themselves" (99) and is informed that their "effendis" strive for "the country to be governed, like ours, by means of an elected Parliament and a Constitution" (159). In effect, Anna's apprehension of the human and political rights of Egyptian natives marks a development in her character as she questions the parochial attitudes of the colonial community she belongs to and forms a counter-ideology uttered in the travelogue she employs in her letters and secret journal.

Along with the many disciplines Soueif uses in *The Map of Love*, including history, politics, and sociology, the Arab-British writer borrows from the travel writing genre which Valassouplos describes as "a fixture in the history of the construction of

post-colonial theory” (2004: 39). Obviously, colonial views and ideologies issues sweeping indictments of the sub alternative Orient, over determining it from without as Edward Said asserts, the imperial self has fabricated an “irrational, depraved, childlike and different” image of the Other to affirm its own western “rational, virtuous, mature, normal” self image (1978: 40). Conversely, post colonial theory acts as a counter discourse, which reconstructs the East from within, deconstructing its western made presentation.

The role that the travelogue plays in relation to post colonial theory is demonstrated in Soueif’s decision to make “Anna’s letters and journals the prime source of “colonialist” views in this book..... [and] an anti-colonialist discourse, an alternative travel writing genre” as Valassouplos comments (2004: 40). As the protagonist attends and listens to colonial discussions, she report to Sir Charles the way the Egyptian character is projected as “not lost” but “degraded” (98). Again, she writes of the racial bigotry of the British community in Egypt and expresses her rejection of and liberation from the negative image it draws of the natives, being perceived with “neither integrity nor moral fiber, being too long accustomed to foreign rule” (99)

Soueif’s strategic choice of travel writing to present an anti-colonial ideology is, in fact operable in many aspects of Anna’s Egyptian journey. It extends the recreation of her role as an outsider traveller to that of an insider when she, disguised as a French man, ventures into Sinai and is mistakenly adducted by some enthusiastic nationalists, to be taken afterwards to the home of the al Baroudis. In this respect Bruce King assumes that this dramatic episode reaffirms the novel to be “ at times both modelled after and a critique of the ‘Oriental Tale’ [which] can be read as literary criticism, a

criticism of Western readings of the Arab world” (2000: 430). Still, I believe that this incident registers transitional as well as translational shiftiness, and catalyzes the protagonist’s permanent transformation and understanding of Egypt. It, in other words, bestows on Anna a lifetime opportunity to reach out and partake of travel culture through personal and interpersonal relationships that cultivate her hybrid identity.

Despite its political motives, Anna’s detention turns the purview of *The Map of Love* from international relations of power resistance to personal fruitful ones that overcome cross-cultural and political differences. At the climax of the novel, this incident emphasizes the change in Anna’s journey, which moves from an investigation of Egyptian life and history to a transcultural writing of her story there. Moreover, Anna’s movement from the position of mere observation to that of mutual interaction with Layla and her brother Sharif entails an actual transgression of intellectual boundaries and ushers in a plurality of thought and feelings.

During and after Anna’s detention, an immediate intercultural friendship grows between her and Layla and consolidates their mutual understanding. As the two tell each other about their respective lives, they open to one another “[feeling] our way towards each other as though our ignorance, one of the other, were the one thing in the world that stood between us and friendship” (136) as Layla writes in her journal. Both women reflect on the power dynamics of the colonial situation of Egypt, exchanging personal thoughts and conclusions. Besides, Layla explains to her English friend more about the country’s internal affairs: the Nationalist demand for independence, women’s education, the veil, and the New Women.

Equally significant is the role Layla plays in correcting Anna's concept of the harem, showing her its true image which deviates completely from "The Siesta". Invited to the Harem of Nur al-Huda Hanim, both meet highly educated women writers who publish "several articles on the 'Women question'" (237) and short biographies of notable ladies like Queen Elizabeth and Victoria. There Anna attends intellectual discussions that open her eyes to the radical contradictions between the fabricated image of the harem and the true picture she herself beholds. Notably, Anna expresses that "all in all, I do confess, I found the company and conversation pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of the life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor" (237)

Commenting on this confession, Clarrisa Burt maintains that as a postcolonial novelist; Ahdaf Soueif "inserts her web of fictional details into well researched treatment of social and political history in order to....redeem British post colonial guilty by showing British opposition to colonial exploration" (2001: 154). In the same respect, Valassouplos contends that the writer stresses the apologist vision by "including sympathetic British characters the question the moral implications of colonialism".

Here I believe that the impact of Anna's newly formed perception of the harem gatherings does not highlight her sympathetic nature only, but it also reflected deeply on her character. As her confession indicates, the protagonist's interaction with Egyptian notable ladies enables her to sift through her thoughts and amend her vision of the harem to fuse it with its true value. Doubtless, Anna continues to see the setting of the harem as pleasing and enchanting. Yet, as she opens her heart and mind to see from within. She understands the intellectual richness of its women which adds

to the beauty of the place and that of Egypt. Still, it seems apt to say that Anna's true understanding of the ancient land is beautifully reflected when she unframes "The Siesta" and replaces it with her hand made tapestry of Isis, Osiris, and Horus⁴³, an appointment that will become perceptible later when her vision of Egypt is crystallized and framed through transculturation.

Despite the linguistic and cultural differences that separate Anna and Layla, their mutual understanding grows into one of peaceful co-existence after Anna is married to Sharif. Unaware of Egyptian customs and traditions, the protagonist turns to her sister in law who guides her in the new way of life she decides to adopt. For instance, Anna writes of the "Henna Day" and the culturally different arrangements which are to precede her wedding expressing that since the ceremonies will not be held in "the old church of Horsham.....I told Layla that I leave myself in her hands and she is to arrange all things as she would for her sister" (311). The strong bond of sisterhood that joins the two women appears also in the genuine concern Layla shows throughout Anna's pregnancy considerate enough, she writes that "our sensibilities constantly urged us to compensate her for the absence of a mother or a sister who would naturally have been with her at this time" (397)

⁴³As with much of the ancient Egyptian mythology, there are various versions of the story of Isis and Osiris, but basically it runs as follows Osiris was an earthly ruler, who was popular with his subjects. His brother, Set, was jealous of this popularity and plotted against Osiris. Set's plans to be rid of his brother started when he secretly obtained his brother's measurements and had a magnificent casket made to fit. This casket was in the form of a human shaped box. Set then organised a large feast to which Osiris and a number of others (usually given as 72) were invited. At the height of the festivities Set produced the casket and announced that it would be given to whoever it fitted. All the guests tried the casket for size, but none fitted until finally Osiris stepped into the casket. Set immediately slammed the lid closed and sealed the casket shut (with molten lead). The sealed coffin was then thrown into the Nile. Isis was devastated at the loss of her husband and searched for the casket throughout Egypt and then overseas. She eventually found it where it had come to rest in the roots of a massive tree. Isis then returned the coffin to Egypt for a proper burial. For safe keeping she concealed it in the marshes beside the Nile Unfortunately for Isis Set found the casket while out hunting and was so enraged he chopped the body of Osiris into pieces, and scattered the parts throughout the land of Egypt. Poor Isis had to then set out again looking for the parts of her husband. Eventually she found all the parts except one and reassembled Osiris and wrapped him in bandages. In some accounts Isis breathed life back into Osiris' body and it was then that Horus was conceived. This was a more magical event than it seems, considering the one part of Osiris Isis couldn't find. The young Horus then went out to battle his uncle Set and to avenge his father's death. After a series of fights detailed in 'The contentings of Horus and Set' neither god was able to secure an overall victory. Ultimately Osiris was declared king of the underworld, Horus king of the living, and ruler of the deserts as the god of chaos and evil.

Anna's life among her new family adds another thread to her hybrid identity. As she communes and mingles with Layla and her mother, Zeinab Hanim, the protagonist fuses two ways of life; British and Egyptian. Happily she participates in domestic chores and household activities, as one of the family members. For example, she accompanies her mother in law "into the kitchen and the storerooms and the linen room" (349) where she watches, learns and shows how "I would have things done" (349). In a similar way, the personal touches she adds make "the ordinary things of my life a new to me" (284) as Layla expresses. Also interesting is Anna's cross dressing in Egyptian and European fashions which does not reflect a superficial gesture but a clear image of her belief in the idea of cultural convergence.

Anna's genuine acceptance and love for her new family are reflected in her unique ability to intermingle with Sharif's recluse father who has been completely withdrawn since his participation in Urabi's failed revolt against the British controlled army decades before. The way she learns Arabic from him as he recites the Qur'an while she weaves a triptych tapestry at her loom shows her willingness to reach out to a different, yet welcoming world. Her reflection that old Baroudi Pasha twines and untwines the silken threads up and "helps [s] me with Arabic word when I am in need" (385) depicts the human bond that brings two seemingly distant worlds together through peaceful co-existence.

Again, the protagonist blends in as she joins the Baroudis on Islamic occasions which they cherish, including the month of Ramadan, the "simple iftar" (464) and the Eid. Still, it must be stressed that although she participates in such occasions, Anna does not renounce her Christian convictions and rituals. On the contrary, she, encouraged by her husband, continues to celebrate Charismas. The fact that Anna

identifies with Islam without relinquishing her religious convictions reflects a clear articulation of hybridity and transculturation. By celebrating certain Islamic events together with Christmas ones, Anna assimilates without effacing herself. She in other words, succeeds in fusing with another nation without losing her religious services in church affirms a genuine respect for her beliefs and a wilful determination to help her maintain self identification. Intriguingly, Soueif makes of intercultural cohabitation a virtue of necessity and a reality translated in the familial relationship that joins Anna with al Baroudis, in addition to her meaningful marriage to Sharif. The novelist uses this commitment to present a revolutionary subtext that impedes the meta-narrative of colonialism, echoing Fernando Ortiz's conviction that cultural clashes can be resolved in interpersonally peaceful relations.

Throughout their interracial marriage Sharif and Anna cross cultural, political, and social spaces of international antagonism and hatred and bridge them with compassion. Both acknowledge the critical colonial situation that draws and defines a "map" of power relations between their countries. Nevertheless, they see into each other and realize a mutual readiness to defy, and consequently to redefine this map, redrawing its curves with love. Before and after their trip to Sinai, Sharif thinks highly of Anna's defiant and adventurous character that is "so insistent on making up [her] own mind" (212). He discovers in her determination to personally experiment with Egypt away from her British compeers, "a partner.....to whom I can turn, confident of her sympathy, believing her when she tells me I'm in the wrong, strengthened when she tells me I'm in the right" (151). Obviously, Sharif finds in Anna a challenging, kindred spirit that is willing to accept another culture: one that is open to love and life. Likewise, throughout their interaction, Anna conceives to Sharif as a "man of

influence by reason of his position, his integrity, [and] his patriotic stance” (159). She respects his strong resolution to improve and contribute to the development of his country, by defying those who oppose the construction of the School of Fine Art and who resist women’s education. Above all, Anna admires Sharif’s willingness to co-exist and partake of the Other, undeterred by their differences, so far as the interaction is conducted within “ the legitimate commerce of humanity” (484).

In spite of their linguistic differences and the power-saturated relations that govern them, Anna and Sharif discover in French a common ground of communication and a language of harmonization. Both engage in conversations that are conducted in a language between two languages; English and Arabic. This third tongue is thematically deployed to assure an equal status that defines their interpersonal interaction away from colonial considerations. In this respect, Lindsey Moore suggests in her article “At the Heart of All Things is the Germ of their Overthrow: Translating Desire in Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love* (1999)” that Soueif echoes what Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg describes as a “new humanist perspective [or] alternative....to an antihumanist celebration of unmediated difference in language” (2005: 6) From another standpoint, the novelist’s use of French as a common language between Sharif and Anna can be investigated through Jessica Benjamin’s psychoanalytic theory of inter-subjectivity which she posits in her book *the Bonds of Love*.

Although Benjamin bases her theory on research findings on infants and parents, an interesting parallel is basically evident in one form of Anna and Sharif’s cross-cultural integration; that of language. In *The Map of Love*, Soueif uses French as strategic method to engender a co-feeling of linguistic estrangement between Sharif

and Anna and to counteract the conflictual interactions of both their dominant and dominated countries, from which subject-object relations emanate. For instance, Sharif's affirmation that "it [French] makes foreigners of us both. It is good that I should have to come some way to meet you", (157) touches upon the inter-subjective effect of the third language on the couple. As they interact in French, both Anna and Sharif realize a mutual feeling of linguistic otherness and mutual recognition, in the course of which each conceives of the other as "also a self, a subject in his own right" to use Benjamin's words (1988: 23).

This common feeling, as Benjamin argues, becomes a route of attunement and co-presence that is clearly manifested in Anna and Sharif's peaceful marriage. Here it has to be stressed that the cross-cultural attunement or "the pleasure of being with the other" (1988: 31) as Benjamin explains, is neither associated with the process of entirely assimilating into nor regulating one another. In other words, it entails neither acculturation nor deculturation, but a state of co-existence. Henceforth, it can be argued that the liminal language Sharif and Anna exploit enables them to share intentions without losing their individual voices. Language in short, becomes a creative force of transculturation.

As a hybrid writer, Ahdaf Soueif accentuates the question of language at the heart of dialogue of cultures in *The Map of Love*. Her interest in blending Arabic words and registers with English is conspicuous in the way she transliterates many words like *baksbeesh*, *khalas yakhti*, and *alfa mabrouk*, which reflect the dialogic language of the novel. In this respect, Soueif explains her intention of linguistic fusion in an "interview with Joseph Massad", expressing the notion that "in *The Map of Love* there is a constant attempt to render Arabic into English, not just to translate phrases, but to

render something to the dynamic of Arabic, how it works, into English. So, there is this question of how to open a window into another culture” (qtd in Luo, 2003: 78). Significantly, the novelist literally translates certain idioms in Anna’s conversations with her family to reproduce her ability reach out and merge with the Egyptian locale. Both Arab readers and non Arabphones can sense such linguistics diversity in the scene where she joins Layla, Zeinab Hanim and their Ethiopian servant as they discuss the New Woman issue:

- Al Mar’ah al Jadida, “The New Women”
- “Well done!” cries Layla, clapping her hands “see how well she is learning Mama?”
- “She’s quick, the name of the Prophet guard her” (375)

Interestingly enough, the linguistic polyphone and diversity Soueif employs underpins the hybrid colouring of *The Map of Love*. Parallel to its syncretic structure which intertwines epigraphs extracted from the archives of European and Arabic literature, and Anna’s journal entries with letters and news clippings, the novel celebrates language as a medium of cultural negotiation. Though it operates as “ a successful way to foreground cultural distinctions” as Bill Asheroft et al. Argue “ so it would appear more profitable to attempt to generate an “interculture” by the fusion of the linguistic structures of two languages” (2001: 66). Together with its multilayered structure, the hybrid language of the novel contributes to recreate lives and histories and to create a world of coalition and co-habitation.

Again, the theme of hybridity is unfolded in Soueif’s exploitation of hybrid metaphors and symbols, the most important of which is Nur-Al-Hayah, Sharif and Anna’s child. Symbolically, Soueif uses the infant who, as Layla describes, “had her

[Anna's] fair colouring and her violate eyes, and she had my brother's dark hair" (400) to present hybridity as a fruitful result of transculturation. Likewise, the novelist harps on this vital link again in the sub-plot Anna's great grandchildren Isabel Parkman and Omar al Ghamrawi's love affair, which also results in the birth of Sharif, Nur's male counterpart, as will be further explored in the coming section. Along with hybridity, the novelist figures the role of the half blooded child through an economy of expression. Once translated into English, *Nur Al-Hayah* or "light of our life" (401) 'lightens' and alleviates the hardships that hinder her parent's intercultural marriage.

In spite of their peaceful marriage, the life of Sharif and Anna does not pass without obstacles. Naturally, their coming from two different realms imposes certain doubts questions and uncertainties. At the first, both are afraid that they are inventing each other. Sharif contends, after escorting Anna in her Sinai trip, that an understanding between the two would be hard to come about, thinking that for her "he would have receded into an exotic part –a remote part- of her Egyptian journey. A better kind of 'Native' she had travelled with in the desert and spoken with one night in a moonlit garden" (248). Likewise, Anna suspected that " for him I was nothing more than an eccentric Englishwoman to whom he was obliged to be courteous while she was in his care" (248). Similarly, the cross-cultural matrimony is enmeshed in cultural misunderstandings and worries which Sharif and Anna strive to overcome.

Anna's transcultural marriage crystallizes her personal vision as it allows her to see through the eyes of the Egyptian native informants. Through listening to Sharif's conversations with other Egyptian notables, including Sheikh Mohammad Abdou, Mustafa Kamel and Qasim Amin, she is able to see the colonial situation from the perspective of the colonized. There, she learns how "the British presence has had the

sad effect of dividing the national movement” (383) and the way its economic intervention has complicated the relation between the people and the khedive. Apparently, through her interaction with these native, Anna’s transcultural and co-habitual life enables her to negotiate and juxtapose the British imperial discourse and its Egyptian nationalist counterpart to cultivate an objectively humane opinion rather than a politically biased one. She manages to form a personal perception of Egyptian British relations. Reflecting that “indeed they [Egyptians] would be more willing to be *guided* by Britain in economic and financial matters if the guidance were that of an elected Friend rather than an imposed *Guardian*” (400) (my emphasis)

In spite of her knowledge of the powers that muffle the Egyptian voice from being heard overseas, Anna’s clear vision generates a strong belief that Egypt’s cause must reach the British conscience, the way it has reached hers. In her correspondence with Sir Charles, She underpins the absence of a platform from which Egyptian notables can speak for their country, and the difficulties they come across with language. She truly wishes that “there were someone, an Egyptian who would address the British public opinion in a way that it would understand.....Someone who would use the right phrases.....strike the note and so reach the hearts and minds of the British people” (399). Still, Anna proposes translation as a primary route between the East and West to transmit the Egyptian voice overseas.

Out of her confidence in the British public opinion, Anna translates Sharif’s political articles which address the West into English. In one of the most central scenes of *The Map of Love*, Sharif presents a dense view of the colonial situation and its relation to Orientalism. He sheds light on the “economic” and “religious, historical, [and] romantic” attractions the East holds for Europe (481). Equally important are the

options he believes to be open to the European as he meets the Orient and its people; be they to “stay and try to ignore them....try to change them.....leave....or try to understand them” (481). Significantly, his comment on the last “option” being harmless “but...never chosen. Unless it be by individuals” (482) has its reflection in Anna’s solidarity and unique experience in Egypt.

Throughout his article, it is apparent that Sharif writes of the imperial agenda as a postcolonial native informant, tackling its Oriental propositions in a way that pertains to Edward Said. Related to this, King comments on Soueif’s deliberate choice and the resonance she creates between Said’s Orientalism and Sharif’s article, saying that “the later parts of the novel turn into a Saidian lecture” (Valassouplos, 2004: 32). Truly, Soueif builds on Said’s post-colonial and anti-orientalist discourse, yet deviates from it. Unlike his argument that Self and Other; i.e. East and West, cannot peacefully commune, and consequently presume power relations of domination and resistance. Soueif conceives of a peaceful relation built on “the legitimate commerce of humanity” (484) that Sharif expresses and incorporates in his cross-cultural marriage to Anna.

As part of her “legitimate commerce with humanity” Anna’s role as an interloper between two different cultures bestows on her the ability to transmit the Egyptian cause to the West as well as to move the British public opinion, even if slightly, put differently, her active role offers an intercultural benefit of translating Egyptian vision and turning the lens of the West to re-envision the “living world which [they] are refusing to see or even hear about” (240). Still, it must be stressed that this humane task does not define Anna as a mere translator of words from which she detached, for by translating Sharif’s article, she translates an entire culture she has

witnessed and lived, and the personal impressions she builds throughout her transcultural experience. In short, Anna voices herself through voicing Egypt.

Parallel to the effective role she plays in conveying Egyptian anti-imperialist discourse to her homeland. Anna succeeds in presenting a positive image of the west, through lecturing on western art at the Egyptian School of Fine Art. There she proves that her transcultural experience surpasses its domestic sphere to reach a phase of cultural exchange with the Egyptian society itself. Equally significant, by lecturing in western art, Anna affirms that her intercultural convergence neither detaches her from her western and British roots, nor deprives her of the artistic propensities that have originated in South Kensington Museum and have shaped her personal identity. Instead, her transcultural experience allows self-expression through painting, travel, writing, and above all weaving.

While Anna translates her conceptions of Egypt with colours and words, she incorporates her crystallized vision in Egyptian flax and silk. Some months after she is married to Sharif, the protagonist begins to weave a triptych tapestry of goddess Isis, her consort brother Osiris and the infant Horus. With the Qur'anic verse 'He brings forth the living from the dead' written above. Commenting on this symbolic gesture, Moore argues that "the tapestry.....mirrors the two genealogically connected triads within the narrative: on the one hand, Sharif, his sister Layla, and Anna's baby on the other hand Amal, her brother Omar and Isabel's baby, " the great grand children whose intergenerational bond with their ancestors is explored in chapter three" (4). What renders the weaving also significant, as I believe, is the new image it presents of the East. Instead of the harem and "The Siesta", Anna finds and reflects through the pharaohs a true understanding of the most ancient civilization, that of Egypt.

Similar to painting and writing, weaving allows Anna to author her own life and write her own Egyptian story, showing that women are Creators by nature”, as Alice Walker expresses in “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (1985: 2381). Anna Winterbourne shows creativity in turning her artistic work into an inspiring text and a timeless hieroglyphic. She, in this sense, becomes a writer of her own.

For Anna, weaving is a way of immersing herself in the Egyptian life around her. Her expression that “when I work at the loom, I am still part of things and it seems as if the sounds and the smells and the people coming and going all somehow get into the weave” (385) reflect show weaving functions “as a shorthand for an idea of art as both aesthetically beautiful and socially engaged” as Emily S. Davis expresses (2007: 11). As Anna points out, her tapestry does not allow her to maintain a sense of her surroundings only, but it can also be used. Moreover, it projects her passionately made panels as an expressive trope of her transculturation in the Egyptian world which, like the tapestry, begins with her marriage and is completed before Sharif Assassination.

With its interesting juxtaposition of “pagan” images and sacred inscription of an Islamic verse, Anna’s tapestry presents a hybrid piece of art and a convergence of traditions. By intertwining pharaonic iconography with Islamic text and joining them a multicoloured mosaic that carries touches of western art, Anna writes the last chapter of her Egyptian story and weaves the last thread of her hybrid identity. Showing that it is not only writing, weaving, and painting that she has excelled at but she has also become adept at the art of living. By doing so, she translates her hybridity into a timeless map of love that overcomes barriers and celebrates coalition, one that is reassembled and followed by her great grandchildren a century later.

IV.4 Isabel: Crossing the beyond

In a self-consciously repetitive structure, Ahdaf Soueif harps on the theme of transculturation, re-introducing it in the love affair that joins Isabel and Omar, Amal's brother in the subplot of *The Map of Love*. Together, the two contemporary lovers engage in an intercultural romance which resembles, to a certain extent that of Sharif and Anna, finding in love an enduring way amidst the unsteady relations that control the Occident and the Orient. Primarily, Isabel starts her affair with Omar, the "Molotov Maestro ... the Kalashnikov Conductor,"⁴⁴ (17) questioning the likelihood of his involvement with terrorists, being an Arab. Aware of Omar's political orientation, having participated in the fighting in Amman in 70's and a member of the Palestine National Council with which he broke after Oslo Accord, Isabel inquires whether Omar belongs to fundamentalist groups like " Hamas, or Hizbollah in Egypt" (178) justifying her assumption by saying that, "that is what they [the media] say about you" (178). In his response, Omar replies that "not so long ago, Hillary Clinton would have been called a communist for her views on public health," (179) implying the exaggerated and distorted image the media transmits, reassuring Isabel that "of course I'm not [a terrorist]" (179).

Beyond doubt, Anna's lifetime journey to Egypt has a rippling effect on Isabel. As she listens to her foremother's story, she patterns after her in the transcultural quest she embarks on for interaction with Egypt and Egyptians, and is consequently schooled in the art of co-existence. Apparently, Isabel's conceptions of the East,

⁴⁴ Several critics have interpreted the character of Omar as an homage to Edward Said, given that he is nicknamed "Molotov Maestro" and "Kalashnikov Conductor" (17) in a similar way to Said, who was famously labelled "Professor of Terror" (Davis; Heilmann and Llewellyn 92; King 147). A supporter of Palestine against Israeli occupation, Omar is deeply disillusioned with the political forces at work in 1990 Palestine (356-57)

represented in Egypt, are gradually modified upon her interaction with its international native informants and indigenous inhabitants. Following in the footsteps of her great-grandmother, she endeavours and manages to learn more about Egypt through converging with its people. While she merges with Omar, the diaspora intellectual and Egyptian émigré, Isabel opens her eyes to a different image of Arabs. Rather than a stringent backward, she sees in Omar a world class conductor, an open-minded and sophisticated writer, and a man of principles, all of which urge her to reconsider the stereotypical views that predetermine Arabs as fanatical people. In a relative sense, fluctuating between the East and West enables Isabel to cross the beyond, to turn the lens to see Egypt with fresh eyes, and to understand its internal and external issues of concern better.

In addition to the intensely engaging conversations she shares with Omar, Isabel is informed of the actual conditions of the fellaheen themselves. As she accompanies Amal to Tawasi village, she learns more about the precautionary measures the government takes after the bombing of Luxor, arresting innocent men and accusing them of terrorism. More interestingly, the wives of the fellaheen express to Isabel their belief that the American government is the one to blame for their helpless situation, believing that “everything that happens they say Amreeka wants this: they cancel the peasant cooperatives, Amreeka wants this,” (176) and wondering “isn’t Amreeka the biggest country now and what she says goes?” (176).

Besides being tutored in the art of co-habitation, Isabel’s probing into Anna’s tradition of love she is bequeathed guides her in her love affair with Omar. As she envisions the solid and successful marriage that joins Anna and Sharif across cultures, Isabel wishes her interracial with Omar to be the sequel of their ancestors’, seeking it

to be as prosperous. Inspired by Anna's active role in supporting her husband and translating his essays for the British press, Isabel decides to stand by Omar and help send his voice out all around the globe, proving as the Turkish writer Ayla Kulta indicates that "in order [for the daughter] to understand where she stands and who she can be, she starts searching into the lives of the women who came before her" (qtd. In Dilek, 2002: 10). Fully aware of how much Omar's music and writing mean to him, she "had created a home page for him and linked it with several information sites, and now his articles went across the world and into cyberspace the moment they appeared in the paper," (481) as she informs Amal.

Through Isabel, Ahdaf Soueif skilfully re-marks the map of love that Anna draws at the beginning of the century, announcing its timelessness. Isabel's decision to bring out Omar's articles and musical compositions signals a commemoration of the legacy of her spiritual mother and a commitment to the plea her great-grandfather, Sharif, had articulated in his final essay, ensuring the validity of transculturation and its continuity as a humanitarian concept that joins rather than separates cultures and human beings. In a similar fashion, Isabel guarantees the survival of Anna's transcultural map of love as she, inadvertently, reassembles the triptych tapestry that Anna weaves a century before. In a bizarre scene of magical realism⁴⁵, she complements the Isis and Osiris panels with the long-missing panel of Horus which is miraculously deposited in her handbag, showing that "the reactivation of myth and legend sometimes partakes the magical," (1999: 4) as Hala Halim notes in her article

⁴⁵ A literary mode rather than a distinguishable genre, magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a so-called rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society. It aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites; for instance, it challenges binary oppositions like life and death and the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present. According to Angel Flores, magical realism involves the fusion of the real and the fantastic, or as he claims, "an amalgamation of realism and fantasy".

“Translating Egypt.” The tapestry symbolizes ancient and modern Egyptian culture, and Isabel has provided the missing piece. She therefore unites the past and the present by completing the partial message. In a sense then, the tapestry—like the various letters, documents, and conversations that make up the plot of this fragmented novel—becomes a meeting ground that acknowledges and demands the interaction of all characters. Sharif provides the phrase and inspiration, Anna weaves it, Omar and Isabel hold the pieces, and Amal recognizes the relation between the three different pieces and their oneness, as they all form part of one tapestry. No one character’s action is more important than the other’s and only through the collaboration of all characters does the tapestry come to life.

Along with the travel writing genre which Soueif borrows to inject her novel with an anti-colonialist discourse, magical realism is employed, though slightly, to serve the same end which is an effective decolonizing strategy and a central element of post-colonial theory. In this respect, Stephen Slemon offers the basis for considering magical realism as one form of representation of post-colonial discourse. In his article “Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse,” he proposes that:

In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems [those of the colonizer and colonize] takes place, each working towards the creation of a different kind of fiction world from the other. Since the ground rules of those two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other’ situation which creates disjunction with each of the separate discursive systems...” (Qtd. In Faris : 2).

This disjunction between two discursive systems serves to mirror the post-colonial situation in which the dominant colonial discourse is disturbed by that of the colonial

subjects. In the hybrid mode of magical realism, the colonial power reflected in realism, which has a longstanding power of representation in the West, is fused with, and as a result, destabilized by, fantasy and myth, which symbolize the undermined culture of the subjugated. This irreducible element of hybridity that appears in the amalgamation of the real and the fantastic renders magical realism “a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the bases of its authority, its rules of recognition,” as Bhabha contends (112, 14).

Soueif reiterates the ontological continuity of trans-historical convergence that magical realism reflects in Isabel’s symbolic pregnancy by Omar that occurs a little while after she finds the lost panel of Horus, the child of Isis and Orisis, and later, in the birth of Sharif, their mix-blooded son. Like Nur al-Hayah, this hybrid infant shows the fruitfulness of humane co-existence and its possibility, regardless of time and space. Through Sharif, the novelist reassembles two seemingly distant generations, uniting the living with the dead, and reassuring that “from the dead come the living,” and “the Nile divides and meets again” (516). Again, through Sharif, Soueif perpetuates the bond that grows between the living, just as Anna’s narrative does.

Likewise, Sharif’s birth ensures and consolidates the continuity of Isabel and Omar’s relationship, despite his reluctance to commit to his beloved, being perceptive of the neo-colonial and hidden agenda of the American government. In this respect, it is argued that the fact Soueif vigorously champions the concept of transculturation throughout *The Map of Love* does not abrogate her full awareness of the difficulties and obstacles that hamper its fulfilment. Underlining Omar’s fluctuation in his relation

with Isabel, the novelist clarifies an intrinsic truth about transculturation, showing how complex it is, being steered by powerful forces at the macro-political, economic, and cultural levels. Yet, with the birth of Sharif and the completely new look Isabel sees on Omar's face, realizing that "he belonged to little Sharif forever," (480) Soueif hints at an ultimate resolution at the interpersonal level. Doubtless, one can sense that the cross-cultural understanding will continue to be handed in so long as Anna's map of love continues to be reassembled, read, and followed one generation after the other.

IV.5 Amal: Self Recovery through Memoir

The story in *The Map of Love* started with a trunk for Amal el Ghamrawi, a trunk full of memoirs written in both English and Arabic, documents in Arabic and newspaper cuttings in addition to other personal properties. It is Isabel Parkman, Anna's great granddaughter, who, on the advice of Amal's brother, Omar, brings this trunk from America to Egypt with the hope that Amal would help her in translating those memoirs and documents written in Arabic into English. Later on, the process of translating the journals and the other documents turns into a process of self recovery through Anna's memoirs.

Through the course of the novel, it is Amal that pieces together and narrates Lady Winterbourne's life in Egypt. Her knowledge of the familial and political history of the era enables her to "edit" Anna's past and urges her to fill the gaps that are left unwritten in her journal. In order to reassemble and fully acknowledge the life of her great grandaunt, Amal expresses her need to "know who the people are of whom she

speaks, to paint in the backdrop against which she is living her on the page in front of me” (26). As a result she begins her journey into Anna’s past, joining its loose threads by diligent research and sympathetic conjecture, in the course of which she grows more and more obsessed with Anna’s Journal.

From the beginning of the novel, the narrative unfolds the similarities Amal realizes between her life and Anna’s. Primarily, it is Anna’s unsuccessful matrimonial experience which Amal herself undergoes and the co-feeling of desperation both women go through that strengthens their transcultural relation. As she reads in her great-grandaunt’s memoirs, Amal identifies with Anna’s troubled heart and her regret over the fact that she might have failed her marriage by letting her husband join the British Expedition. In a similar way, Amal speaks with clinical detachment of a broken matrimony in England that she escapes in order to return afterward to her homeland. She comments that “once upon time I lived with a family, a husband and children. That was in England. In a house out of a Victorian novel” (45).

Amal’s identification with Anna grows stronger the more she reads her personal records. She discovers a clear resemblance to Anna in the religious visit she pays to the Mu’allaqah church which Anna goes to by the beginning of her Egyptian Journey. Like her great grandaunt who attracted to the virgin Mary’s painting, experiments with her eyes to see whether they would follow her, Amal admits that “once on a school trip many years ago, I too experimented with the virgin’s eyes. I wanted them to follow me, but I can’t really say they did” (88). Likewise, Amal shows a similar interest to that of Anna in the details the two behold in the church. Both Anna and Amal are aroused by the magnificent pulpit, the wooden ceiling, and the multicoloured mosaics that ornament the walls of the Mu’allaqah. Amusingly, while Anna refers to the wooden

ceiling which looks like “an upturned boat” (87) and the inlaid wood work panelling and the pulpit, Amal elucidates that the “wooden rafters of the ceiling symbolized Noah’s Ark “(88) and explains that “the thirteen marble columns supporting the pulpit were for Christ and the twelve disciples” (88). By showing Amal’s attention to details, Ahdaf Soueif explores the artistic tendencies that the two women enjoy as the common ground that joins them. The main purpose of Ahdaf Soueif’s use of the temporal travelling strategy, between past and present, is not only to investigate more “about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty whether the past is really past, and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps” (Said, 1993: xi).

Although Amal is living in contemporary Cairo, she is unable to resist her obsession with the story of Anna, as she reads Anna’s diaries and letters. Amal confesses that: “I am obsessed with Anna Winterbourne’s brown journal. She has become real to me...I need to fill the gaps, to know who the people are of whom she speaks, to paint in the backdrop against which she is living her life here, on the page in front of me” (26). Obviously, through reading Anna’s memoirs, Amal’s sense of herself is strengthened rather than weakened, for looking back into the past enables her to re-envision her own story and evaluate her life. Moreover, Anna’s narrative provides Amal with an escape from her own past. She probes into the world of beauty memories and sentiments that characterize the cross-cultural romance of Anna and Sharif to isolate herself from reminiscences of her failed marriage.

After spending more than fifteen years in London, Amal chooses to relocate her residence to Egypt. Despite that long stay in a foreign country, Amal was unable to adapt to the Western culture, yet returning to Egypt proves difficult too, and, she

isolates herself in her apartment after she returns to Cairo, limiting her communication to those who provide her with her daily needs as she narrates “I, who have placed myself more or less under house arrest, moving from the living room to my bed room to the kitchen – avoiding my children’s room” (59). Through listening to Anna’s troubled heart and editing her journal, Amal reveals a profound understanding of herself and begins to re-envision her own life and welcome changes and possibilities she has avoided for years.

The tentative and gradual change that befalls Amal is mirrored basically in her receptive attitude to love, which paves the way to her spiritual rebirth. Throughout the novel, the narrator is totally absorbed in the love story of Anna and Sharif, which she does not only piece together but she also imagines across time. The way she listens to her exuberant voice that aspires to “hear some news of him” (235) reflected Amal’s ability to look deeply into Anna’s impatient heart, rejuvenating it with love. As a result she comments that “I find a changed and invigorated Anna now. Each morning she expects something new and good from the day. The ‘something at the heart of it’ which had eluded her now beckons her in” (237) denotes how Anna helps Amal crystallize her vision of love that has become foggy after the failure of her marriage, and the way she turns to appreciate it as a source of, and a key to, happiness.

Indeed, it is Anna’s romance that awakens and motivates Amal to experience love by herself. Remarkably, while she excavates the entries of her heroine’s journal. Bringing her love story out of “Pandora’s box” (7) Amal reflects on contemporary intimate relation that revitalizes between her and Tareq Atiyya, an old friend whom the narrator contacts to re-open a family school in the village of Tawasi, restoring an old love affair in return. In spite of its brevity, Amal’s commentary on her relationship

with Tareq, projects the strong impact of Anna's personal experience on her. Above all, the fact that she opens to love again, years after locking "that door we spend lifetime battering ourselves against" (44) as she writes down, signal her spiritual rebirth.

By the new experience she undergoes with her old lover, the narrator sees into herself the way her great grandaunt does at the turn of the century. Like Anna, who secretly writes about a new sensation she experiences in her relation with Sharif, writing down that "it is as if my body has been absent and now it is present. As though I am for the first time present in my own body" (335) Amal is inspired to show more appreciation of her own body. Preparing to meet Tareq, she examines her look in the mirror "with more interest than I have done for a long time" (338) a confession that reflects her newly gained aptitude to identify with herself and a new sense of self realization that grows steady within her.

Interlocking the personal with the political, Soueif delineates the intimate relationship that builds up between Amal and Tareq, like the one that joins Anna and Sharif, to be enmeshed in politics. The two old friends discuss Egyptian internal and external affairs that have shaped the past and continue to govern the present. Throughout their conversation, Amal strongly disagrees with the eagerness her lover shows for the normalization of Egyptian-Israeli relations and the transactions the two countries aspire in the near future. Shocked by Tareq's decision to lie on an Israeli team to help redesign the infrastructure of his land, Amal reminds him that it is "to get Egypt. To get into the whole area", that Zionist movement plans (202). His allegiance doubted, Tareq assures her that he does "more for my country by strengthening its economy than I would by sitting in a rut and hoping things will take the course I want

somehow” (202); Still Tareq and Amal stay deeply attracted to each other, in spite of their different political opinions, affirming that love can bring together what politics divides.

Discreet though she appears to be about her feelings for her married lover Amal engages with Tareq in the love affair that remains unresolved throughout *The Map of Love*, bringing them together and joining the past to present in return. Significantly, following their short affair, the protagonist has a dream during which she fluctuates in a confusion of times and places. In her wet fantasy, Amal is relocated in Anna’s world, where she visualizes her affair with Tareq incorporated in Sharif’s character. Writing down her dream, she expresses that “I dream I am holding to Sharif Basha al Baroudi. I kiss his face, his eyes, his shoulders. I lie by him on the great bed in my grandmother’s room and I sob with relief at having found him....Against his chest I feel I have come home” (446). Apparently, Amal’s dream mirrors how deeply ingrained the story of Anna in her mind. It reflects the state of unity she feels with her spiritual mother which is cultivated through reading and grows to the extent of envisioning their subjectivities overlap. Moreover, I believe that by picturing herself with Sharif, Amal occupies a liminal space and spiritual contact zone between different generations, where she meets and communes with Anna, her prototype. By fusing the past with the present, Amal becomes the present day embodiment, or the reincarnation of Anna, who grows into an extension of her

Unlike Anna, Amal does not need to travel any further between geographical spaces while reading, as her journey does not require observation of new places and inhabitants of those places to compare with her experience of living in an old location as opposed to a new one. Travelling through time -from past to present, back and

forth- while reading Anna's and Layla's diaries and letters serves to generate reconciliation for Amal and re-construction of her ethnic identity too. The process of reading and questioning allows Amal to compare herself to representations of her female ancestors and the stereotyped images of Western culture.

Amal's investigation of Anna's documents, which raise questions about Amal's new identity, bring her closer to the lower-class workers and farmers of Egyptian society. Before becoming involved in the reading of Anna's diaries and letters, Amal, who considers herself a middle-class intellectual, could not come closer to people outside her work circle in higher education. She only comes in contact with people from a less well to- do class for service needs: Tahiyya, wife of Am Madani who is the building keeper where Amal lives, Am Abu el-Ma'ati, chief man of the farm that belongs to Amal and her brother, and Mansur, the parking attendant near her work. When Amal finally reconciles with herself and her past, she is able to visit Tawasi, her home town in Upper Egypt. Amal admits that: "Here in Tawasi, I reflect on my English life and I find myself wondering if there is some sense in which this, Anna's Egyptian life, will only be fully real to her once it has been linked with her older one, witnessed by someone she has known and cared for from her earliest days?" (465). While investigating Anna's old life in London and the changes she encountered after her stay in Egypt, Amal in fact evaluates her life journey—her past in London and her current life in Cairo.

In the character of Amal, Soueif introduces two paradigms to the Western reader the first represents an Arab female elite who at some point of her life comes in contact with Western culture, and the other is an ethnic character who is proud of her nationality. The reader can compare Amal who appears in the beginning of the novel

as a Westernized intellectual identifying every aspect of her culture as worthless, with the result that she detaches herself from the world outside her apartment thanks to Anna's memoirs.

The character of Amal who appears at the end of novel is confident of her national identity and becomes more involved in the life of the *falabeen* (farmers) in Tawasi. Amal becomes more involved in the problems of the people in her village, as she promises to help in the reopening of the closed school which was built in the village by her great-grandfather and his nephew Sharif Basha and used to offer classes for children, literacy classes for women, and to serve as a clinic. The school had been closed by the "governorate" (the state's office of general oversight), which claimed that the instructors and volunteers of the school teach the young generation to be "terrorists and [are] ruining the students minds" (124). Strategically, Soueif creates a character that "bridges the dislocations between a... privileged intellectual like Amal and the reality of her people" (Malak, 2000: 147). The transformation in Amal's identity thus introduces the reader, particularly the Western reader, to two representations of the Arab female intellectual. On the one hand, there is the figure of the Arab female elite who identifies with Western values and standards and adopts the revisionist and apologist approach in her representation of her culture. In this way she participates in the construction of stereotyped images of the East that satisfies the Western reader's expectations. On the other hand, Soueif represents an Arab female elite who is fully aware of her history and her position in her society and her society's position within the international scope.

The novel traverses time and geography to find connections between cultures. Soueif's novel is not writing back to defy the colonial ideology of the "Other"; rather

it is a revision of a conflicting relation and aims at the end to provide a reconciliatory perspective for these cultures. *The Map of Love* is a rendition of multiple travel stories in time and location. The travel of the trunk through centuries, from Cairo to London, then to New York, then back to Cairo, brings with it stories of travel, relocation, and transculturation.

IV.5 Conclusion

Emanating from a physical and sometimes spiritual “contact Zone” where cultures meet and often clash, transculturation opens new routes for exchanging and channels for a two way communication through which the self speaks yet also listens to the Other’s voice. *The Map of Love* explores successful cross-cultural encounters and a new kind of understanding between cultures through cross-cultural love, cross-cultural female relationships and inter-cultural marriages. It also presents the reader with a positive view of intercultural encounters by mingling English and Arab culture in language. Rather than reinforcing binary distinction between the British and the Arabs, the novel constantly undermines these differences and plays on the commonalties between the two cultures.

By involving and presenting a variety of view points from England, Egypt, and America, *The Map of Love* focuses on the complexity of the encounter and participates in a sort of nation building. This search for identity in a transnational world, however, is fragmented and layered, and it can only be fruitful if we explore the whole picture and forge alternative bonds between cultures. There are no isolated histories and private individuals; rather we are all caught up in each other’s (hi)stories as we participate in and engage with each other.

The Map of Love investigates meaningful encounters and highlights the fragmentary and interactive nature of such a process. Once we present the possibility of understanding and sympathizing with the other on an equal level, we need to incorporate a variety of elements. Only a pastiche will do justice to the varied components that influence and shape our identity. To think of ourselves as isolated beings who are rooted in one culture, one language, one history, has become more and more unrealistic. Even if we remain in our countries and never aim to go beyond our familiar horizons, we are not spared foreign influences. We may be selective in what we consider to be our histories and national identities, but novels such as *The Map of Love* point to the futility of such narrow mindedness, without idealizing these encounters between strangers. While it certainly envisions the concrete possibility of creating lasting and meaningful relationships across cultures and languages, it is not blind to the dangers inherent in these endeavours. Too often the immersion into another culture means the expulsion from another, and yet it is impossible to know one's identity without being trapped in national, political, or linguistic markers.

On more than one level *The Map of Love* also presents the implausibility of stable identity markers that separate people from each other. It refuses to be categorized as purely romance, travel writing, or historical fiction; it certainly lends itself to all of these readings if one chooses to approach the text selectively, but the final strength lies in the incorporation of all these elements and issues. By transcending boundaries in content and form, *The Map of Love* constitutes a Mezzaterra, a meeting ground among cultures, where we temporarily recognize and understand the other and thereby recognize and understand ourselves.

General Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have studied the heterogeneous identities of Arab women in the United States and United Kingdom, through the selection of two novels by contemporary writers. My study has attempted to demonstrate the critical strategies that Arab women writers in both sides of the Atlantic deployed to assert their diversity and multiple perspectives into American and British literary and cultural landscapes. Though my examination has not taken a directly comparative approach, it has treated the Arab populations of Britain and the United States as two distinct social compositions with respect to historical circumstances and ideological endeavours in order to delineate thematic differences between these two sets of writers as a result of different localized experiences and unclear positions they occupy within the racial hierarchy in their host countries.

I have argued that despite the fact that these writers belong to the same diaspora; they have adopted different strategies to express their hybrid identities. Unlike Arab British women novelists who foreground and advocate a transcultural dialogue strategy by creating links between the Arab characters they depict and other characters from different cultural backgrounds, the Arab American novelists tend to employ literary strategies in order to resist stereotypes and misconceptions about Arabs in the American culture. They tend to highlight the experiences of Arab characters as members of an (in) visible Arab community by focusing on Arab American daily experiences, especially anti-Arab racism and prioritize this investigation over other themes. Thus, while non-Arab characters are key players in Soueif's work, the major characters in Halaby's work are Arabs. This major difference between the

two sets of writers, I believe, is a result of the different ways in which Arabs immigrated and eventually settled in the two countries.

Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* presents a rich examination of the lives of four Palestinian young women who are struggling in the borderlands between patriarchies, cultures, and political agendas. The fragmented narratives of Soraya, Hala, Khadija, and Mawal reflect their diversity although they come from the same family. Between heterogeneous religious beliefs, cultural traditions, gender politics, and colonial and postcolonial locations, these Palestinian women are in constant shifting within intra-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic borderlands.

I have examined Laila Halaby's exposition of different patriarchal, national, colonial, and imperial hegemonies which continue to situate these women within limited essentialist constructions. The focus on the intra-ethnic borderlands has explored the multiple processes of border-crossing for these women even before the beginning of their diasporic experience. Halaby rejects all attempts to universalize the experience of hybridity and border-crossing in the lives of immigrant and diasporic subjects. She tries to build a political hybrid consciousness in these women through which they can resist their invisibility, exclusion, and discrimination in the mainstream American culture.

The Arab-American women literature, as exemplified in this dissertation, cannot be studied without integrating a reflection on the anti-Arab racism that these women live in the U.S., on one hand, and the world-events that are constantly changing the political, social, cultural, and economic scene in the host countries as well as in these women's "homelands," on the other. While the new generations of Arab-American women immigrants consider the U.S. their homeland, as they do not know

any other “home,” being born and raised in the U.S., their lives are constantly reshaped by the historical and contemporary conditions in the countries from where their families come from. However, their lives are in constant shift between the “white” American national identity and their position as minority women of colour.

In her “Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland,” Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that, Arab Americans are confused regarding their racial classification within the US Census, though they are classified as White people, this group has no legal position within the spectrum of minority cultures from which it can legally articulate its communal concerns about discrimination (188). This confused racial categorization has increased Arab-American marginalization in the U.S. cultural arena as indicated by many Arab-American feminists. In this context Lisa Suhair Majaj in her “Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race,” points out that because of their exclusion from the rosters of minorities of colour as well as of white ethnic groups, Arab Americans debate whether to lobby for a categorization as ‘Arab’ or ‘Middle Eastern’ or to continue to struggle for inclusion as white Americans on other than merely ‘honorary’ grounds (320).

This “honorary whiteness,” as Majaj describes it, has created an unstable racial identity within which Arab-Americans are constantly categorized in the borderlands between “white” and “non-white.” Therefore, Arab-American women writers as Laila Halaby are aware of a perpetuated confused labelization which they try to refute by confirming the heterogeneous identity of Arab-Americans.

In contrast to Halaby’s *West of the Jordan*, which depicts, examines and critiques some aspects of the social life of Arab American community, through the narratives of four Arab teenage maternal cousins who undergo different experiences of

displacement. Soueif's novel traces the shared histories of Great Britain, the United States, and Egypt over a century through personal, political and historical encounters; it focuses on the significance of trans-cultural dialogue. Through travel, immigration and exile, women from different cultural backgrounds interact, exchange ideas and contextualize their differences. *The Map of Love* interweaves three narratives which are linked to the central female characters of: Anna Winterbourne, Amal al-Ghamrawy, and Isabel Parkman, and foregrounds two cross-cultural romances separated by almost a century, breaking down cultural and national boundaries as well as those of space and time.

As I have shown in chapter four, the concept of cross-cultural dialogue female friendship in the text is powerful enough to unite women across the divide of centuries. Layla's relationship with Anna as well as Amel's relationship with Isabel are providing a template for fully human productive relations between different ethnicities in contemporary British and Egyptian societies. All four female characters conquer grief and find hope as well as more meaningful life with and through the other, echoing Bhikh Parekh's postulation that Human beings are attached to and shaped by their culture and their self-respect is closely bound up with respect for it (196). The novel explores successful cross-cultural encounters and a new kind of understanding between cultures through cross-cultural love, cross-cultural female relationships and inter-cultural marriages.

Unlike Arab American authors, who are a combination of first, second, third and fourth generation citizens, Arab British writers, are predominantly first generation exiles, refugees, professionals and academics as demonstrated in chapter two. Therefore, this hyphenated identity, is of great importance in creating a space for the

two cultures to interact. For such a reason, these writers present throughout their works Arab and non-Arab women characters that are keen on linking their experiences to other characters from different cultural background. Through *the Map of Love*, Soueif is juxtaposing the different experiences of Anna, Amal and Isabel's hybrid identities construction who despite their differences, they self identified through the other. Difference, in this context, becomes a site for understanding the needs of each other and finding a way for cementing coalitions through the fruitful process of transculturation. *The Map of Love* constitutes, therefore, a Mezzaterra, a meeting ground among cultures, where the recognition and understanding of once self requires the temporarily recognition and understanding of the other.

Through depicting the experiences of these women and exploring the fertility of trans-cultural dialogue, Soueif reflect the tendency in Arab British women literature to foreground coalitions and alliances that bypass national, racial and ethnic boundaries. This tendency is a partial by-product of their racialized immigration and settlement experiences in the host land. Despite their longstanding settlement in Britain Arabs, in using Nagel words, are neither 'assimilated into the social and ideological structures of "mainstream" Englishness and whiteness nor into publicly recognised categories of "race", "multiculturalism" or "diversity"', They are, instead, as the census reveals, the 'Other-Others'.

In addition to Anglo-Egyptian border crossings, I attempted to show how *The Map of Love* breaks down borders between languages. Although Ahdaf Soueif's command of English is perfect, the novel is full with countless greetings, idioms, words and phrases such as, "May your bounty have increased," "May your hands be saved," "May the name live long," "God will compensate your patience.", these words

carry heavy socio-cultural meanings that would have been lost if represented by an English word or phrase Soueif also transliterates many words like *marhab* (welcome), *khalas yakhti* (enough my sister), *alfa mabrouk* (a thousand congratulations), thereby the novel seems to be a patchwork that pieces together the different scraps of Soueif's hyphenated and fragmented identity.

Written in English words to transmit an Arab culture the text works as an example of cultural and linguistic hybridity, this language shift helps growing intimate relationships between British and Egyptian characters. Moreover, that shift reflects a physical shift, the migration of the author from an Arabic language environment to a non-Arabic context. Critic Radwa Ashour has written about this merging of Arabic and English in an analysis of Soueif's novel: "Vocabulary, proverbs, wise sayings and linguistic devises are disseminated into the foreign language, bringing with them something of the soul of the nation and the culture" (Ashur 1993:265).

Through the writing process of this dissertation, I have found that the study of Arab women writers and their texts, whether in the US or in the UK, has for a long time been dominated by orientalist and colonialist thinking, which positions the Arab world as an inferior exotic place and registers its culture and civilization in the Western mind with stereotyped images. Contemporary Arab women writers attempt to resist such a representation by giving a totally different image of themselves. While Laila Halaby tried to build a political hybrid consciousness in her women characters through which they can resist their invisibility, exclusion, and discrimination in the mainstream American culture. Ahdaf Soueif worked consciously on a project that included the publication of her novel to address continuing neocolonialist ideology that still dominate many major western institutions devoted to preserving the stereotypical

image of the Arab world. The preservation of these images in the minds of Western recipients—generation after generation—has required the collaboration of different institutions of power, which are responsible on directing the production of knowledge. Her novel came in an attempt to break this chain of domination over publication and dissemination. In many occasions she insists on the role of the Arab elite as well as the Western in collaboration on deciphering the tension between different conflicting parts of the world.

It is worth mentioning in this context that despite the fact of being separate minor traditions, Arab British and Arab American literatures construe Arab diasporic identity as a reflection of their historical experiences and their emigration to the host lands as highly contested, complex, heterogeneous, and multiply connected. To this end Arab writers in the west are confront to negotiate the challenges and multiple questions of an Arab identity formation and belonging, which they do from different positions and perspectives, Arabness, therefore, is another common issue shared between both literatures.

In this dissertation, I have tried to show the different strategies adopted by Arab women novelists in both sides of the Atlantic to self identified within the western mainstream. These writers reflect the diversity of the Arab women which cannot be reduced into the negative image of a harem girl, a belly dancer, or an oppressed veiled victim. Their lives and identities are vastly positioned into a historical, cultural, and political context which renders any essentialist construction of their experience a distortion of reality.

The next step of any future research within the field should continue to investigate Arab women diasporic identity construction from other perspectives such

as: the investigation of their works from a transnational feminist viewpoint to integrate the local into the global and to examine feminist practices crosses borders. This will entail studying Arab diasporic women's lives within wider global capitalist hegemonic structures; like, labour, economics, immigration and naturalization laws, and discriminatory international agreements for women. Furthermore, an emphasis should continue on the intra ethnic hegemonies as well as cross cultural relations which explore women's position within a multiplicity of gendered and racialized hierarchies.

I propose also to depict the image of Arab diasporic women within the works of Arab American and Arab British male writers. In addition to a thematic investigation of the literary works produced by another set of writers such as Arab women authors from France and/or Canada will surely bring new dimensions to the subject.

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Appendices

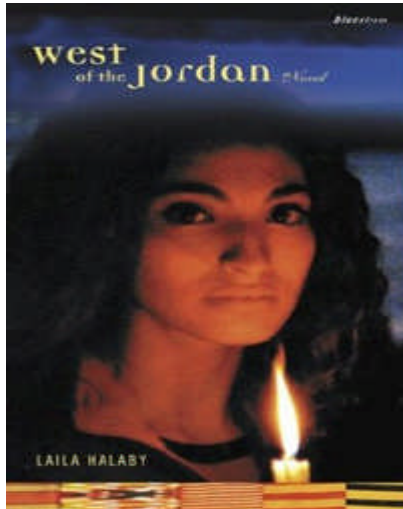
I. Biography Laila Halaby:

Born in Beirut to a Jordanian father and an American mother, Laila Halaby, grew up mostly in Arizona, have traveled a fair amount, and have lived for bits of time on the East and West Coasts, the Midwest, and in Jordan and Italy. Her education includes an undergraduate



degree in Italian and Arabic, and two Masters Degrees, in Arabic Literature and in Counseling. Currently she works as an Outreach Counselor for the University of Arizona's College of Public Health. *my name on his tongue*, is her most recent publication, it is a memoir in poems. Her novels *West of the Jordan* (winner of a PEN/Beyond Margins Award) and *Once in a Promised Land* (a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Authors selection; also named by the Washington Post as one of the 100 best works of fiction for 2007) were both published by Beacon Press. Besides fiction and poetry, she writes stories for children, including a (as yet unpublished) book entitled *Tracks in the Sand*. This was her first serious writing project, it is a collection of Palestinian folktales that she gathered from children during the year she was living in Jordan and studying folklore on a Fulbright scholarship.

II. Synopsis of *West of the Jordan*:



Four young women from Palestine and Jordan contend with issues of identity in this debut novel from Arab-American author Halaby. Hala, who has just finished high school in Arizona and intends to go to university, returns to Jordan to spend time with her dying grandmother. She finds herself at odds with her conservative older sister and her father, a traditional man much older than her independent mother, who died two years earlier. As she spends time in the country of her childhood, she forges a relationship with her older cousin, Sharif, and faces tough choices about her future. Hala's cousin Mawal has remained in the West Bank village of Nawara and leads a passive existence, living with her mother and listening to the many stories of villagers and relatives who have left for Jordan or the United States. In Los Angeles, two more cousins, Soraya and Khadija, attempt to integrate themselves into American life while facing prejudice and coping with their parents' traditional expectations; Soraya rebels with her sexuality, while Khadija faces a drunken and abusive father. The themes of choice and independence are very much at the forefront of the story, and much of the news revolves around loss: of homeland, of family, of traditions. Halaby's choice to alternate the narratives of the four young women offers real characterizations to latch onto, and her prose, often lyrical—particularly when the speakers relate other peoples' stories—deepens the complications of history and heritage. Contemplative and lush, this coming-of-age tale resonates with the challenges of cross-cultural life.

III. Biography Ahdaf Soueif:

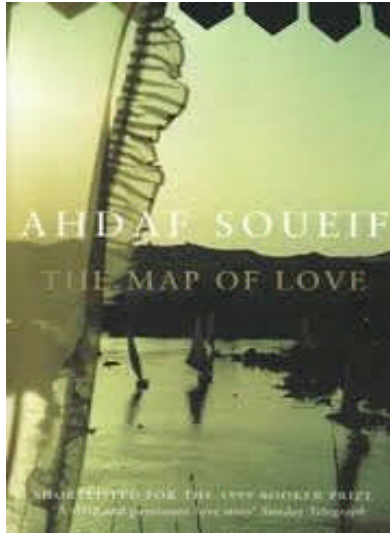
Soueif was born in [Cairo](#), where she lives, and educated in Egypt and England. She studied for a [PhD](#) in linguistics at the [University of Lancaster](#).

Her [debut novel](#), *In the Eye of the Sun* (1993), set in Egypt and England, recounts the maturing of Asya, a beautiful Egyptian who, by her own admission, "feels more comfortable with art than with life." Her second novel *The Map of Love*



(1999) was [shortlisted](#) for the [Man Booker Prize](#), has been translated into 21 languages and sold over a million copies.^[3] She has also published two works of short stories, *Aisha* (1983) and *Sandpiper* (1996). She translated [Mourid Barghouti's](#) [I Saw Ramallah](#) (with a foreword by [Edward Said](#)) from Arabic into English. Along with her readings of Egyptian history and politics, Soueif also writes about Palestinians in her fiction and non-fiction. A shorter version of "Under the Gun: A Palestinian Journey" was originally published in [The Guardian](#) and then printed in full in Soueif's recent collection of essays, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground* (2004). Ahdaf Soueif is also a cultural and political commentator for the [Guardian](#) newspaper and she has been reporting on the [Egyptian revolution](#). In January 2012 she published *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* – a personal account of the first year of the Egyptian revolution. She was married to [Ian Hamilton](#) with whom she had two sons, [Omar Robert Hamilton](#) and Ismail Richard Hamilton.

IV. Synopsis of *The Map of Love*



The *Map of Love* tells the story of an artistic and articulate Englishwoman, Anna, who visits Egypt as a balm for the wounds of widowhood. Egypt is a land she has heard much about and whose sights she has admired in museum paintings. Anna is too adventurous to be content with the staid tourism of the late 19th Century, and dresses in men's clothing to see the Pyramids and Mt. Sinai. On the latter trip, allies of a political protester recently jailed kidnap her. The wife of the protester, Layla, and Layla's attorney brother, Sharif, to whose home Anna is taken, are indignant for her sake, befriend her, and Sharif vows to help Anna reach her original goal. In the desert of Sinai, where Anna dresses as an Arab man, and particularly in the garden at St. Catherine's Monastery, where Anna is an Arab woman, she and Sharif develop deep feelings for each other. He is silent upon their return, and Anna resolves to return to England. Layla points out her brother's mistake and he proposes marriage. They set aside the many problems this will create for each - Anna will be shunned by fellow Britons in Egypt, and Sharif will be suspected of British bias by his numerous political enemies - marry, and move into the old house with Sharif's mother Zeinab and hermitic father al-Baroudi, twenty years ago a rebel against the British. Anna assimilates to Egyptian culture, learns Arabic, and is drawn into the nationalist movement as translator, intermediary with anti-colonialists in London, and finally spokesperson with foreign visitors. Sharif works hard to fight the British Occupation legally and legislatively. They have a daughter, Nur al-Hayyah - literally the light of their lives - and, ten years after their marriage, Sharif begins thinking about retiring to private life. He is thinking of this when unknown assailants open fire on his carriage. Sharif dies and Anna keeps her promise to take Nur to

England. Contact is lost with her Egyptian in-laws. This story emerges from research performed by Amal from a trunk load of journals and letters discovered in New York City by an American, Isabel Parkman. At a party she mentions the find to a prominent older musician, which is sent to his sister, Amal, in Cairo. Amal becomes engrossed in the characters, and Isabel falls in love with Amal's sister 'Omar. The anti-terrorist, anti-Islamist policies of Egypt's President Mubarak cause problems on the family lands, and revive Amal's late-1960s radicalism. 'Omar is deeply involved in Palestinian politics. Only after making love with Isabel does 'Omar realize he was her mother's lover in 1961 and thus could be her father. They have a son, Sharif. Part of the treasures in the trunk is one panel of a tapestry depicting Isis, Osiris, and Horus, ancient Egyptian deities. Anna finishes weaving the panels just before Sharif is assassinated. One panel goes to Anna and Nur, and thus into Isabel's trunk. A second goes to Layla and reaches 'Omar through his and Amal's father, Ahmad. A third panel is never accounted for. Isabel discovers it in her camera bag when she returns to Cairo after a long visit to the U.S. She claims it was put there by a mysterious woman, Umm Aya, whom she claims to have met in al-Baroudi's old cell. Conservators of the museum that once was Anna and Sharif's old house deny anyone could have gotten inside the cell and any knowledge of an Umm Aya. Amal cannot accept Isabel's explanation, but finds no other.