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Female Identity Quest in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Abu Jaber's *Crescent*

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Abstract

Arab-American and Afro American women's deplorable plight in the American society and their secondary status have sparked much interest and countless debates in political and literary fields. It is worthwhile to mention that man-woman relation became questionable with the dawn of civilization but it became more problematic in the case of Afro-American and Arab American women who have struggled to make sense of their identity. The latter is a recurrent theme in most American literary works including the ones written by American writers of African and Arab descent. The quest for female identity has been a shared preoccupation for African American women and their Arab American counterparts in the United States of America. The two ethnic minorities have suffered from marginalization and stigmatization in a country where whites represent the majority that has dominated the political, social and economic American life. African American women writers along with their Arab American fellows have sought to humanize respectively Americans of African and Arab descent through their adoption of protest literature through which they shed light on the moral flaws that cripple the American society and inhibit the two minorities towards living and realizing the American Dream. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye (1970),* Alice Walker's *Meridian(1976),* Leila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent(2003)* are protest novels in which the novelists try to subvert the stereotypes associated with the two ethnicities, and seek to present a dignified picture of African Americans and Arab Americans. In doing so, they cast light on the American society's failure to live up to the ideals of the American Constitution which stipulates that all individuals have access to happiness and freedom regardless of their race and faith. Literature seems a cement that consolidate the two minorities' efforts to triumph over white supremacy and bigotry that have been upheld by American mainstream culture including literature and the mass media.

Key words: identity, quest, ethnicity, supremacy

Résumé

La quête d'identité est un thème récurrent dans la plupart des œuvres littéraires américaines, y compris celles écrites par des écrivains américains d'origine africaine et arabe. Aux États-Unis d'Amérique, la quête de l'identité féminine constituele dénominateur commun principal des femmes afro-américaines et leurs homologues arabo-américaines. Ces deux minorités ethniques ont souffert de marginalisation et de stigmatisation dans un pays où les blancs, qui représentent la majorité,ont dominé la vie politique, sociale et économique. Les écrivaines afro-américaines ainsi que leurs confrères arabo-américains ont cherché à humaniser respectivement les américains d'origine africaine et arabe en adoptant une littérature de protestation par laquelle elles ont mis en lumière les défauts moraux qui paralysent la société américaine et les empêchent de vivre et de réaliser le rêve américain. The Bluest Eye de Toni Morrison, Meridian d'Alice Walker, Once in a Promised Land de Leila Halaby et Crescent de Diana Abu Jaber sont des romans de protestation dans lesquels ces romancières tentent de renverser les stéréotypes associés ces deux ethnies et cherchent à présenter une image digne des afro et arabo-américains. En fait, elles mettent en lumière l'échec de la société américaine à être réellement à la hauteur de la constitution américaine qui stipule que tous les individus ont accès au bonheur et à la liberté, et ceci quelles que soient leurs races et leurs fois. La littérature semble ainsi un ciment qui consolide les efforts de ces deux minorités pour triompher de la suprématie blanche et du sectarisme qui ont été soutenus par la culture dominante américaine, y compris la littérature et les médias de masse.

Mots clés : identité, quête, ethnicité, suprématie.

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Chapter Four :The Loss of identity and the Collapse of the American Dream in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

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General Introduction

The loss of identity and the quest for it have been the pervasive themes in contemporary Arab American and Afro-American literature. African American and Arab American novelists have respectively "written back" against prejudice and the Americans' misconception about Americans of Arab and African descent. They have countered the narrative of misrepresentation of Arab Americans and Afro-Americans in mainstream American culture and mass media which have deepened the cultural and social rift between whites and minorities especially colored and Arab Americans.

African American as well as Arab American women writers have been respectively the spokespersons of African Americans and Arab Americans who underwent the same plight of discrimination despite the fact that Americans of Arab descent were classified in 1943 by the Immigration and Naturalization Service as white persons.[1] Likewise their African American compatriots who were the target of racist behavior even after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed racist practices in the United States of America, Arab Americans have been discriminated against not because of their color since they have been ranked white citizens, but on account of their religion. Whereas Americans of African origins have been accused of tending to Africanize America, Americans of Arab origin have been charged with sympathizing with Islamic extremists. Due to their shared predicament, many Arab American and African American women writers encouraged unity and alliance between the two minorities to face common challenges.

This thesis studies four novels written by ethnic women novelists: two African Americans and two Arab Americans who, respectively, explore the plight of African Americans

[1] - Mona M. Amer and Germine H. Awad. *Handbook of Arab American Psychology*. Routledge: New York and London. 2016 p.22

and Arab Americans in White America. The principal objectives of this study are to explore the theme of identity quest and the way it has been treated in four different literary texts, two novels written by African American women novelists: Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), and two other novels written by two Arab American women novelists: Leila Halaby's *Once in the Promised* (2007) *Land* and Abu Jaber's *Crescent* (2003). Throughout their novels, the novelists endeavor to project the reality of African and Arab Americans' experiences in the unwelcoming United States and how they have tried to cope with their dual identity. The four novels provide a platform to analyze the workings of stereotyping and their destructive effect on shaping the individual's identity. Thus, this study focalizes on the novelists' different approaches to the question of identity crisis and the way forward to handle this problem. It is worth mentioning that Arab immigrants as well as African immigrants have suffered from a lack of self-pride and identity crisis when the two came to USA seeking economic opportunity and the betterment of their livelihood.

Due to the prevalence of white supremacy and hegemony, Americans of Arab and African descent were deprived from their identity and self-hood. The fraught conditions experienced by these two ethnicities have been the subject matter of many African American and Arab American women writers and critics. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have become icons for the Blacks due to their distinguished handling of the issue of racism and marginalization of the black race; therefore, they are considered the most influential and popular women writers of the period from the 1970s onwards. Both won the Pulitzer Prize and their works have influenced not only African American literature but World literature. Through their fictional and non-fictional writings, Morrison and Walker have verbalized their concerns of white hegemony in white dominant American society. Similarly, Leila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber are among the

outstanding Arab American women writers who have exposed the harsh experiences Arab Americans have undergone in American society. Throughout their constant literary struggle, they have showed an unwavering endeavor to dismantle walls of racism and bigotry to build bridges of tolerance between races. They tend to employ literary strategies to deconstruct and counter stereotypical images associated with Arabs as one monolithic group. They also tend to look at the Arab American community from within through laying out the difficulties Arab Americans encountered to make sense of their identity.

Toni Morrison and Alice Walker's objective has been to present a different picture about black women in general and Afro-American women in particular. Throughout their literary product, they have raised concerns about the dehumanization of African Americans in American society. They have lambasted white American writers for depicting a derogatory image about African Americans in their writings which have contributed in depriving black race from a fair representation. As a counter-reaction, they have tried to exhibit a respectful image about Afro-Americans and show their unacknowledged worthiness. Their primary concern has been to change the mainstream image of ugliness and backwardness rooted in the mind of many whites who have internalized an undignified image about the blacks.

As far as Arab American literature is concerned, American women writers of Arab descent have taken the chance to work hand in hand with their Western counterparts to make their voice heard and challenge the mainstream popular culture. In this respect, Dalal Moustapha Sarmous remarks: "Side by side with their Arab compatriot male writers and their Western counterparts of both genders, the Arab women writers have found a space for their original

literary writings and for the specificity of their complex identity as being Arabs, women and writers".[1]

Being emboldened by the achievement of a variety of women writers, Arab American women writers have become paramount figures in the field of Arab American literature empowered by feminism that has enabled them to voice their preoccupations. It is worth mentioning that in the last two decades literary works written by Arab American women novelists have exceeded the literary works penned by their men counterparts.[2] In their writings they focalize on thorny issues as alienation, racial prejudice, marginalization, hybridity and identity crisis which have been experienced by other groups of color. Their interaction with different minorities especially African Americans with whom they have shared the same feeling of ostracism and marginalization has encouraged them to get confidence in their endeavor toward asserting the self. Undergoing the same plight of racial discrimination has paved the way for mutual understanding and cooperation between Arab and African American women. Hoping to change the status quo of Arab Americans, Michel Sharif underscores the importance of solidarity between Arab American women writers and other women of color:

> Arab-Americans belong to both cultures and therefore they occupy a unique position. We can and we must help this dialogue develop. Our struggle, like all women of color, includes overcoming racism as well as sexism. By joining women's groups in the United States, we can put issues such as anti-Arab racism and agenda. Our time for recognition and respect in western feminist movements has come.[3]

Among those prolific and prominent figure who characterized Arab American literature during the last two decades are Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber who chose to make their texts means

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[1] - Quoted in Abdelwahid Abbas Noman, "Woman Voice in the Arab American Literture". An International Peer- Reviewed Open Access Journal. ISSN 2349-5189 . 2015 p.494

[2] -Ibid p.494

[3] - Michelle Sharif, "Global Sisterhood: Where Do We Fit In?"Food For Our Grandmothers: Writing by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists. Ed. Joanna Kadi. Boston: South End Press, 1994 p.159

to present a good image about Arab Americans and showcases the dilemma of what it meant to be half Arab and half American in an unwelcoming American society.

Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber have worked to expose the struggle of Americans of Arab origin to cope with their hyphenated identity, and the failure of the American Dream in the United States of America especially after 09/11 attacks which have been a turning point in American history and has triggered off worldwide interest in the Arab World and those of Arab origin to understand the specificity of Arab culture. Coincidently, likewise their African American counterparts, Arab Americans have been otherized and racialized on the basis of their religion. Despite the fact that Arab Americans have been classified white[1] in the American Census of 1943, they have been racialized and subjected to diverse hate crimes and longstanding bigotry. In this regard, Jonna Kadi points out: "As Arabs, like other people of color in this racist society, our race is simultaneously emphasized and ignored. For long periods of time no one can remember that Arabs even exist".[2] They have endured plight of remoteness and cultural subjugation, a subject matter that is vividly reflected in the work of many Arab American writers.

Identity crisis has been the subject matter in many African American literary texts and Arab American ones. The novelists Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are writers of tremendous talent and accomplishment. They have been prolific and influential writers exposing the loss of identity and the sense of belonging. In most of their works, black characters are described striped from their instinct identity in the dominant white society which has contrived to degrade and

[1] -- Mona M. Amer and Germine H. Awad. *Handbook of Arab American Psychology*. Routledge: New York and London. 2016 p.22

[2] -Kadi, Joanna. *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings By Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists.* Boston, South End P 1994. P.xvi

dehumanize them on account of their black color and origin. Such idea is traced back to the era of slavery when blacks were considered subhuman and superstitious.

It is worth noting that black women suffer more than black men. If the latter have been victims of white society, black women have been victimized by both black man and white man alike, which have made black women bear the brunt of double burden. The impact of this double burden has been tremendous to the point that the black man and woman have internalized the whites' degrading view towards himself/herself, and developed a kind of fear and phobia and loathing towards his/her own black race. In this regards Frantz Fanon states: "We must see whether it is possible for the black man to overcome his feeling of insignificance to rid his life of the compulsive quality that makes it so like the behavior of the phobic."[1]

Likewise Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber opted for identity crisis as the major theme in their works. They have tried to raise awareness to the impact of Arabophobia on Arab Americans and their psyche. In many ways, their literary works may be considered a caution to raise public awareness of the unbearable life difficulties Arab American have undergone in America.

The four novelists have opted for counter-narrative writing to denounce the official narrative or the Master Narrative that dominates the whole literary field. The counter-narrative " counters not merely the grand narrative, but also the official and hegemonic narrative of everyday life".[2] The French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, was the first one who introduced the term "Master Narrative" or "Official Narrative" in his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Arab contemporary novelists have written against the

[1] -Franz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Mask*. London: Plutto Press.1986 p.50
[2] -Michael Peters, and Colin Lankshear, "Postmodern Counternarratives," in *Counternarratives: cultural studies and critical pedagogies in postmodern spaces*.New York: Routledge.1996 p.02

marginalization of Arab immigrants through their adoption of counter-narrative which stands against "Master Narrative" in which "*Evil*, of course, means *Arabs*. Or, at the very least, it insinuates that evil is exclusive to the Islamic world while the United States has a divine monopoly on goodness".[1]

The four novelists flesh out the journey of the four female protagonists towards reconciling their hyphenated identity in a society that ostracizes and otherizes them. This study is an attempt to draw the borderlines between the propagated negative view of Arab and American women and the contrasted approach of worthiness showing intrinsic human values of these two ethnicities. Although this study addresses the construction of African American and Arab American women identity in the USA, it is importance to speak about the heterogeneity of the two communities' experiences to figure out the context in which their identity has been fashioned .To embark on a literary analysis of the four novels, the latter will be analyzed in the light of feminism in addition to Edward Said's Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's "hybridity". Since the four novels were written by female novelists, adopting a feminist approach helps in digging deeper into the characters' psyche. Feminism appeared as a political movement to seek a better life for women in a patriarchal society.

In the post-colonial context hybridity is a discourse of power and a disruptive strategy against assertion of particular identities that would defy Western hegemonic culture as it is well-argued by S. Sayyidi in *Hybridity and its Discontents, Politics, Science, Culture (*2000). He highlights that hybridity is a way of inscribing a universal culture that is attached to the unique nature of Western particularity which is in opposition to other particularities as the African and Arab ones. From this perspective, Western particularity is hegemonic and consuming of other

[1] - Steven Salaita. *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today*. London: Pluto Press, 2006 p.40

particularities which make of Western culture a reflection of Western power and imperialism. In this respect, Sayyid points out:

> This understanding of universalism means that it cannot be seen as merely the other of particularity: universalism is not external to the particular but, rather, it is the expansion of one particularity, so that it can consume other particularities. What distinguishes the universalised particularity from any other particularity is empire, in other words historical and contemporary forms of power relations.[1]

One prominent theorist of hybridity is Homi Bhabha who theorized for the relationship existing between the colonizer and the colonized. From an analytical point of view, Bhabha's theory of hybridity had been lauded as it projects the colonizer'psyche and questions the authenticity of his so called "civilizing mission" to help indigenous people to pull themselves from the clutches of ignorance and backwardness and embrace the colonizer's culture. In this respect Bhabha states:

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities, it is the name for strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is the production of discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity of authority) . Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effect .It plays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination.[2]

However, this approach triggered controversial debates and counter-reaction from many authors such as Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and Benita Parry who lampoon Bhabha for establishing a post-colonial theory which overlook post-colonial realities of former colonies. For them Bhabha' theory of hybridity foregrounds for the colonizer's so called "civilizing mission" to justify his expansionist mission of Western imperialism and the distortion of existing identities.

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[1] - Avatar Brah and Annie E. Coombes. *Hybridity and its Discontents, Politics, Science, Culture* London, New York: Routledge.2000 p.261

[2]- Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge .1994 p.159

The adoption of Bhabha's theory of identity helps in delving deeper into both the mentality of white Americans and ethnic groups. From Bhabhian perspective, the white Americans are bearers of dominant and host culture; thus, they are empowered and entitled to uproot other minorities such as Arab Americans and African Americans from their heritage by fusing their identity in mainstream American culture and discrediting their instinct culture so that they become mixed types; Arab Americans and African Americans who respectively feel neither their Arabness nor their Africanness. They have straddled two cultures and two identities pushing them to negotiate a "third space" which is one of Bhabha's concepts of hybridity.

The two diverse ethnicities, Arab Americans and Afro Americans, have found themselves sandwiched between two irreconcilable cultures. In other words, they have ended up suffering an identity crisis. Their instinct identity had been rejected by the dominant white society considering them outcasts and intruders who should adjust and conform themselves with white culture to forge a space for their existence. That is to say, they are deemed as "the Other" or "them". The "otherization" of Arab Americans and African Americans is quite visible throughout the development of American society. The concept of "otherization" is one of the themes in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in which he criticizes the Orientalist discourse presenting the Orient as "them" and "Other". In this regard, Said's Orientalism is quite fitting in understanding and analyzing the white American's mindset and their degrading view of "the Other". Through his groundbreaking theory of "Otherization", Said digs deep into the psyche of Westerners and how the latter have constantly kept their derogatory view of Orients either after the colonial eras or during their stay in Western diaspora where they have been looked at as intruders or foreigners. Orients' desperate situation has been exacerbated when struggling to survive between two cultures; their original and ancestral heritage, and the host culture. In other

words, they have lived in a " median state, neither completely at once with new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments".[1]

In fact the premise of Said's Orientalism and Bhabha's Hybridity collide and share the same regard toward "the Other" or "the Orient" as a receiver of host culture whereas " Us" as a dominant and omnipresent voice . The "other" has lived between two conflicting dreams; on the one hand, he has striven to become an integrated and vivacious part within the host land, the United States of America. On the other hand, he has endeavored to preserve his ancestors' heritage to keep his identity and sense of existence. Nevertheless, the second endeavor has become an unreachable dream as the dictates of the host society have contradicted his ambition of reconciling the two cultures. Such unfeasible quest would create a character with a double identity or a hybrid character who finds himself within an internal conflict since he can claim neither his entire belonging nor his full integration. He has ended up as a hybrid "Other" stripped of his genuine identity and denied to become an integrated body of mainstream identity.

The theories of Orientalism and Hybridity are of a paramount importance in understanding the psychological differences existing between the white Americans, and their Arab and African counterparts. The latter are ethnic minorities who have lived for a long time under oppression and they are discriminated against. Despite being hardworking, intellectuals and even war warriors who fought for the dignity of the American nation, they found themselves victims of Otherisation and racialization which resulted in pushing them back to live on the margin and the edges of American life in the so-called "promised land" where all citizens are supposed to have access to happiness and freedom regardless of their race, color or ancestral belonging.

[1] - Edward Said. *Orientalism* , London : Penguin Books. 2003 p.34

Americans of Arab and African descent strove to forge a place for themselves hoping to become full citizens with equal rights within the American social spectrums. However, such a dream has been overshadowed and shattered by the social environment bred by the whites's sense of superiority. Indeed the two minorities descending from different backgrounds hoped to live and secure a better future inherent in the spirit of "American Dream"; nevertheless, the dream became a nightmare for the majority of ethnic groups. It has been blurred by the entrenched and embedded legacy of discrimination within the American society considering the so called new-comers as "them" and outsiders.

This paradigm of "Us" and "Them" is a cornerstone in Said's Orientalism. Said urged the white Americans to question their moral conscience and their stand toward American lofty idealism. He stressed the fact that despite pretending to preserve equal rights to all citizens regardless of race, the Americans have failed to stand true and loyal to the legacy of the American Dream by rejecting their fellow citizens who intrinsically do not share with them the same biological features or religious faith. By doing so, Said uncovered the falsehood of American society swerving away from the adherence to the American Constitution which guarantees liberty and happiness for the different spectrums of American communities. Americans of African and Arab origin have been identified according to their roots, rather than their contribution, actual residence and nationality. Minority groups have been regarded as "the other" even those who were born and spent a great part of their life in America whatever their contribution because "being born in America does not mean you are American".[1]

Likewise Said's Orientalism, Bhabha's Hybridity helps to question the extent to which American white society has acted as a dominant force compelling ethnic minorities as it is the

[1] - George Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*. New York: Grove Press. 1990 p.26

case of Arab Americans and African Americans to discard the importance of their heritage and hybridize it within white culture to embrace white values as an alternative to theirs. Such process of forced adaptation had led to the creation of hybrid communities in which the individual suffers from constant identity crisis due to the irreconcilable gap existing between the past and the present.

The mainstream American literature has played a very pivotal role in foregrounding the stereotypes about and against "the other". As a counter-reaction to such biased writings and narratives, many Arab Americans and African Americans emerged as resounding spokesmen and spokeswomen for their respective races. They endeavored to narrow the chasm between the existing narrative discourse and the true picture of the so called "Other". In other words, they strove "to write back" and correct the tarnished image of their ethnic groups. Among these pioneering authors, there are Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, Percival Everett and Maya Angelo as African American novelists. The latter's Arab American counterparts are Leila Halaby , Monica Ali and Diana Abu Djaber who are considered canonical novelists pinning against the established narrative in which the Other is depicted as an intruder and a suspect. To polish their race's blurred picture, they wrote differently from the prevalent mode of writing. In this regard, Edward Said states:

> Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change……it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation , and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision.[1]

[1] - Edward Said , *Orientalism* .op.cit., p.241

This thesis has been divided into a general introduction, five chapters and a general conclusion. The introductory chapter is a theoretical part in which a general overview about feminism has been projected. It is also about the origin of this movement and its different objectives to uplift the status of women in different fields. It is worth pointing out that feminism was created for the betterment of white women in Western society; therefore, many non-Western scholars and activists did not consider it suitable in uplifting the veil of burden of non-Western women. Among these activists there is Alice Walker who created her own female movement called womanism as an alternative to "White" feminism. Through this chapter, the divergence and convergence between the two female movements are highlighted.

The second chapter analyses how color helps in fashioning identity. It also focalizes on blacks' split identity and underscores that the latter is the result of the imposition of whites' norms of beauty and worthiness. In other words, blacks have been compelled to acquiesce to the demand of white society and internalize the claim that they are inferior in contrast to tireless efforts they have done to prove their worthiness. This constant dilemma created in the black individual a sense of double-consciousness, a hyphenated identity to be black and behave according to the expectation of white society. On this ground, Toni Morrison, through *The Bluest Eye*, suggests a new version and reconciliatory understanding of beauty that endorses blackness as a symbol of beauty. That is to say, the novelist's narrative is aimed at enabling the black people to embrace themselves and their heritage to achieve self-assertion. Toni Morrison's insight and prolific works enabled her to become the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993.

The third chapter focuses on Alice Walker' s different understanding of feminism and her creation of womanism to safeguard the whole not just black women but white mankind

of both genders. Through her *Meridian* the novelist employs unconventional and rebellious black characters who struggle to fight back white supremacy and assert themselves not just as blacks but also as American citizens with self-pride and dignity. Her spokeswoman and protagonist shows an unwavering commitment to the blacks' cause by her engagement in the Civil Right Movements as a way to make her voice heard and show her rejection to the blacks' status quo.

The fourth chapter of this thesis studies Laila Halaby's *Once in the Promised Land* (2007), which is considered as one of the leading literary works addressing the outcome of 09/11 attacks on Arab Americans in the United States of America. It also displays the failure of the American Dream in the U.S especially after 09/11 attacks, and sheds light on the plight of Arab Americans in the aftermath of 09/11. Because the perpetrators of this attack were Arab and Muslim, Arab Americans have been regarded as sympathizers and conspirators with theses attackers. Such victimization had a tremendous impact on the life of Americans of Arab descent who were victims of hate crimes and physical backlash. Through her *Once in the Promised Land Land* , Laila Halaby tries to expose the fact that America of post 09/11 is no more the Promised Land where everyone is supposed to have access to freedom as it is enshrined in the American Constitution. Furthermore, she exposes the fact that Arab Americans have lost both their Arab identity due to physical detachment between the host land and native land, and their American identity because they have been considered as the "Other" and a threat to the nation.

This chapter also traces the journey of an Arab American couple's ambition towards achieving the American Dream through their adoption of the American lifestyle and abandonment of their Arab traditions and heritage. Through this chapter, the researcher dives into the psyche of the couple and their failure to enjoy the American Dream, which is retraced to

the antagonistic atmosphere created after 09/11 attacks that have triggered public stigmatization of Arab Americans.

The fifth chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the analysis of Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent.* It proffers a close reading of the novel and highlights the author's strategies of resistance to correct the negative portrayal of the Arabs in American popular culture including literature, music fashion, films and cartoons. In this respect, the focus is on the literary strategies adopted by Abu Jaber to subvert the propagated negative image of the Arabs in mainstream Western literature and media. Impressed by her Arab origin and culture, the novelist endeavors to enhance the images of their Arab fellows by her attempt to deconstruct the stereotypical images of Arabs. In American popular culture, Arab men have been portrayed as aggressive, awkward, rich oil cheikhs and worst sadistic terrorists; whereas, Arab women have been represented as belly dancers for a roomful of horny men, and victims of an archaic patriarchy.

In an attempt to correct these stereotypical ideas about Arabs, Abu Jaber exhibits an interesting image of a humanized Iraq, pointing out its heritage and ancient civilization. This chapter investigates the journey of the hyphenated characters and their strategies in forging a decent place in American society through gathering in Am-Nadia's restaurant which becomes the emblem of relief and contact zone as it eases their homesickness. Furthermore, it also displays the importance of food as a "human connector" narrowing the gap between different ethnic groups.

In her quest to enhance and restore the image of her Arab fellows, Abu Jaber engages in a literary dialogue with some Western classic literary texts such as Shakespeare's *Othello* which is considered as one of the canonical texts in Western literature. Her adoption of intertextuality

is interpreted as a literary strategy and resistance "to write back" and counter the mainstream narrative in order to restore the identity of Arab Americans.

Through their respective texts *The Bluest Eye* and *Meridian*, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker criticize the American public and institutions for the dehumanization of Americans of African descent on the ground of their black skin and racial belonging which has been denigrated by white supremacists and popular culture. On their part the Arab American novelists; Laila Halaby and Abu Jaber, endeavor to wipe out the image of barbarism and awkwardness associated with Arabs. Through their respective texts *Once in the Promised Land* and *Crescent*, they present a dignified picture about Arabs, showing the humanity and the worthiness of the Arab individual. More importantly, they provide a platform for their fictional and hyphenated characters to make sense of their hyphenated identity in multiethnic America. The four novelists bring into focus the outstanding role played by African and Arab American literatures in reinforcing the sense of belonging in their respective communities. My target is to highlight the importance of these literary texts in drawing public attention and providing approaches different from the ones given by other researchers.

Chapter One

Feminism and its Impact on Addressing African American and Arab American Women's Issue

"The situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures nevertheless finds her living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other"[1]

Toril Moi

[1] -Linda Micholson. *A Reader in Feminist Theory.* London and New York: Routledge.1997p.17

Introduction

For many centuries women had been oppressed and subjugated to different types of violence and exploitation; therefore, feminism emerged first in Europe in the 19th century to put an end to the misery of women in Europe and liberate them from the tentacles of patriarchy and male dominance. Western feminists' chief aim was to abrogate patriarchal traditions in society and make woman an equal partner to man.

Feminism is a contemporary social and political movement based on the belief that a society is in favor of patriarchal principles which make men regard themselves superior to women, and this "results in discrimination against women in public and private life".[1] Despite its emergence two centuries before, it is still a debatable and controversial issue. It "became the recalcitrant, rebellion and persistent source that created a revolution in thinking in the common - communication world".[2] In the19th century it had been considered as one of the most important chapters in the American history, it was a period of remarkable change for American women. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the American society and the position of men with respect to women witnessed a drastic change that became the subject matter of scholars and feminists.

Women in France started their struggle to get their civil rights at the beginning of the 19th century. The ultimate aim was to get the same opportunities given to men in terms of education and occupation. Two centuries before women were considered as second class citizens who should succumb to the dictate of a male-dominated society and stick to patriarchal values, which

[1]- Jelena Vukoičić. "Radical feminism as a discourse in the theory of conflict" Naučnoudruženje Sociološki diskursp.2013p.33

[2]-Meenakshi Sharma Yadav, Manoj Kumar Yadav."Aspects of Feminist Writing: A Presentation of Common Issues".King Khalid University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia :Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics. 2018 p.58

reduce "women to the status of men's property".[1] They suffered from some unfair treatments in society, and they were socially, economically and politically deprived. Because of their gender, women were degraded and maltreated; they were considered as mothers, housekeepers and wives as Martin Luther states:

> Women should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children. A women is, or at least should be, friendly, courteous, and a merry companion in life, the honour and ornament of the house, and inclined to tenderness, for thereunto are they chiefly created, to bear children, and to be the pleasure, joy and solace of their husband.[2]

Women rebelled against these social patriarchal norms and sought to prove themselves in an attempt to change their *status quo* and forge a decent social status. They challenged men's degrading view by struggling to release themselves from male control to achieve happiness, selfhood and fashion their identity.

Before the 19th century women were excluded from different walks of life, their daily life was basically limited to domestic chores which made their voice unheard. This fact shaped the first viewpoints of civil right activists and feminists. Due to the prevalent patriarchal norms, women were seen as "the Other" and outsiders who should acquiesce to the demand of their man-master. Thus, the prevailing male chauvinistic culture is an expression of patriarchal standards.[3] Most of the oppression exercised against women was justified under the name of social norms, customs, morality and values. These patriarchal standards which were detrimental to the woman's development left women with no clear cut individuality and identity. A woman

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[1]-Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd, "Feminism". Downloaded from manchesteropenhive.com at 08/21/2018 02:00:19AM p.304

[2] -Martin Luther. *Luther's Table Talk; Or, Some Choice Fragments from the Familiar Discourse of That Godly Learned Man, and Famous Champion of God's Trut* . London: Longman, 1832, pp. 33-34

[3]- Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd. *Understanding Political Ideas and Movement*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press p.302

was defined according to the orientation and whims of man who most of the time did not regard her as his equal. Most of the time she was trained to be submissive and in need for man. She was playing this subordinate role for ages to the extent it seemed an inborn duty to play the maiden's role to serve her male partner. In this context, German Greer in *Female Eunuch* stresses: "Women have been charged with deviousness and duplicity since the dawn of civilization so they have never been able to pretend that their masks were anything but masks".[1] During the 19th century and in contrast to the laws that were enacted to lift women's status quo, their struggle were overshadowed by patriarchal social practices. The woman was trained to mold herself according to the prescribed role dictated by man and the one who refused to succumb was cast from the society and regarded as a bitch or a witch.

Even though women struggled to satisfy their ego and meet the society's expectations, they were left with no choice but to be "ideal women" serving man. This incessant oppression created an inner turmoil and anguish in them, and made them live on the periphery of society. Women's assigned marginal role is reflected in being forced into over-dependence, submissiveness, self-condemnation and self-doubt. It also made their identity defined according to man's feeling of superiority which results in making them play the role of the "Other" whose presence was important in shaping the man's identity. For women with less education and financial support, getting married and having children are, more often, their primary concern and dream as Betty Friedan stresses:

> The identity issue for the boy is primarily an occupational-vocational question; he will be a husband and father (his sex role identity) but he will also and centrally be a worker, while the girl's identity centers more exclusively on her sex-role whose wife I will be, what kind of family will we have. [2]

[1] - Germane Greer. *The Female Eunuch*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006p. 129
[2] -Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001p.129

Nowadays women are still struggling to be treated equally in all walks of life. However, till now their biggest obstacle toward liberating themselves is the society imposed identity. This imposition of false identity hinders them from expressing themselves and forging a socially dignified status, which results in self-rejection. Because of the ongoing plight of self-loathing, they become impersonal beings lacking sense of self-assurance and identity. For many generations playing the role of an "ideal woman" has been the only role left for women.

Because of all these patriarchal standards, feminism has emerged to lift the veil of burden over the woman. Patriarchal ideology has so long encouraged the ill-treatment of women as "sex object", "commodity", "thing" and "other". So, feminism has come forwards to tackle and challenge the patriarchal standards endorsed by man. It has endeavored to challenge patriarchy in society and persuade men to leave women space to earn dignified social, political and cultural status; and more importantly establish their female identity. In addition to that, it questions man's patriarchal view and stressed the need for gender equality as the only way forward to change women's social status quo. It also accentuates the importance of the autonomy of the women and the dismissal of all social imposed and prescribed role for women. It urges women to transgress all social constraining codes that contribute in making them the "other" sex. In this regard, the feminist Simone de Beauvoir stresses: "one of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to announce that a woman is an individual being. She is neither the ―other; nor an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own".[1]

The concept of feminism has developed significantly; however, the word feminism is still confusing to many due to the different definitions adopted by some feminist scholars and its overlapping with other disciplines. The history of feminism is more complicated because of the

[1] - Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage, 2010 p. 48

different approaches and concept attributed to it. Feminism as a term and concept emerged first in France and then spread all over Europe and America. According to Marya Cheliga-Loevy , a great number of critics and scholars argued that the term feminism was first coined in France in the 1830s by Charles Fourier, the French socialist philosopher. The first "self-proclaimed feminist" and the women's suffrage advocate in France was Hurbert Auclert who first started using "feminism" as synonymous to "women emancipation" in her periodical *La Citoyenne* in the 1890s.[1]

The term feminism became recognizable and overused during the early 1890s.[2] It was not just the concern of philosophers and feminists, French journalists too used the term when speaking about women's issues. This use helped in its spread and acceptance by French elite including politicians who made women's plight one of their priorities and concerns. Due to the unprecedented use of the term by the press, it entered the political arena and became a frequent word among politicians. By 1894-95 the term crossed the border and reached Great Britain and before the end of the 19th century it was adopted by many neighboring countries among which Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece and Belgium.

It was not till the 1910s that the term feminism became prevalent in the United States of America which witnessed the emancipation of women during the beginning of the 20th century. At the beginning of this century the term became equivalent to "women emancipation" since it shared many points with feminism. Sympathizers and adversaries of the movement used the term to verbalize their views regarding women's need for social healing and equality. Not having a consensus over the use of the term, politicians as well as civil right activists used it

[1] - Karen Offen. *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988 p.126
[2] - Ibid, p.126

differently to serve their objectives, yet their ultimate goal was to guarantee the constitutional rights of women in different fields rather than their rights to be equal to men.

Actually there is not one unique and standard definition of feminism. The latter is multi-dimensional and an umbrella term. There has been disagreement around the definition of feminism among feminists themselves. However, they have all agreed that the heart of their task is to combat injustice in society; however, there was no agreement over the nature of injustice and a part of society that should be prioritized to reach social justice. Indeed, the main objective of feminism was to establish justice within society as Susan James remarks:

> Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantageous by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program.[1]

Despite the fact that it has been difficult for scholars and feminists to provide a unilateral definition of feminism, they all agree that the word "feminism" comes from the French word "Feminisme". A number of critics and scholars working on women studies agreed that the term feminism was first used by the French philosopher, Charless Fourier, in his *Theory des Quatres Mouvements et des Destinees Generales*in 1837. Despite the fact that the term 'feminism' was not mentioned in this book, Fourier was qualified as a "feminist ideologist" thank to her adoption of ideas defending women's causes and civil rights.

Etymologically, feminism is a Latin word derived from "Femina" which means "woman". It appeared as a protest movement against male oppression of women. For centuries, women were deprived from their basic civil rights, and feminism appeared to abolish man's exploitation of his second half. Women have been regarded as second class human beings in

[1] - James Susan, "Feminisms". London: Routledge, 1998 p.576

relation to men not because of their different innate biological features but it is the outcome of social codes and traditions. In this regard Simon de Beauvoir highlights:

> One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.[1]

De Beauvoir also distinguishes and proposes that gender is "an aspect of identity gradually acquired" whereas "gender is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation".[2] De Beauvoir' s above statement was embraced and supported by outspoken writers among whom Michal Walace, Lillian Smith, Elaine Showalter ,Naomi Littlebear, and Kate Millett, in addition to the novelists Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Djaber. The latter's selective novelists are the focus of this study. The four novelists endeavored to voice their concern over man's oppression of women in their respective works *Meridian, The Bluest Eye, Once in the Promised Land* and *Crescent*. They all address the issue of lost female identity in dominant white American society. They also focalize on the issue of gender, race and sexual difference. These feminist literary works emerge as a response to social patriarchal standards and white racism constraining women within a secondary role.

Feminism is a polarized term which has triggered controversies among critics and scholars. It has convergences with many disciplines; thus, it was classified into different types as radical feminism, social feminism, male feminism, integral feminism and others.[3] Such

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[1] -Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*. Hardmondsworth: Penguin. 1952 p.301
[2] - Judith Butler. "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex". The United States of America:Yale University Press, 2019 p.35
[3] -- Karan Offen. *Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach*. The United States of America:The University of Chicago Press. 1988 p.128

taxonomies prove that there is no consensus over the definition of feminism. So, the latter cannot be recognized as one mainstream ideology.

Feminism also appeared as a movement to assert women's identity and raise concerns about their suffering. Feminists' different engagements resulted in multiple strands of feminism. On this light, it is unreasonable to speak about a unitary definition of feminisms. For feminist scholars, the task has been to offer unilateral definitions because some of them are not just divergent but contradictory. So, defining feminism may not seem practical, and the alternative is to try to show the common features and characteristics that combine divergent feminisms. The baseline definition of all feminisms is that all have been concerned with the way forwards to fight women's inferior status and discrimination within society in which woman is given a secondary status. Generally feminists call for change in social, economic and political sphere to bridge the chasm between white and color people in U.S.A. This definition is too general because it does not cover up other common ground between the diverse strands of feminisms.[1]

It is worthwhile to mention that at first female civil right activists did not call themselves feminist before the use of the term. However, it did not mean that activities done by them did not qualify them to be "feminists". For example, in the U.S.A the Seneca FaLL Convention 1848 resulted in declaring women free and equal to men. Its tenets had already been reinforced in the Declaration of American Independence. Furthermore, during the 1840s Britain witnessed the resurgence of the suffrage movements. Even before the emergence of the suffrage movements, female activists had been writing and fighting against social injustice and inequality. Despite the fact that female activists either in Britain or U.S.A struggled to overcome obstacles and marginalization facing women, they were not named feminists. It is so important to

[1] - Jane Freedman. *Concept in the Social Science* .Philadelphia: Buckinghan University Press,2001 p.2

differentiate between feminist, female and feminine. The first concerns with "a political position, the second a matter of biology and the third is a set of culturally defined characteristics".[1]

Even though the term feminism was coined long before, female civil right activists did not call themselves feminists. In fact the term was recently adopted by them to distinguish those campaigning for the betterment of women's life. In this regard, Jane Freedman states:

> It is only more recently that the label feminist has been applied to all women's right groups indiscriminately, and this no-coincidence between these groups' self identification and subsequent labeling as feminist clearly relates to the problem of what criteria are to be used in deciding whether a person, group or action is feminist.[2]

It is highly controversial to name or qualify an act or person as a feminist. For example, Could we consider any work defending women's rights either intentionally or unintentionally as feminist? Such interrogation makes it difficult to categorize a given activity as a feminist work. It cannot be taken for granted to call peace movements 'feminist'; otherwise, the term swerves away from its meaning. Feminist scholars focused on the history and the nature of feminism and show its boundaries. To do so, they pointed out the different historical periods of feminism by dividing them into three distinctive waves.

I-2- Waves of Feminism

The first period of feminism (1830-1930) is coined the first wave feminism. It refers to the women's suffrage movement in the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. It is regarded as a suffrage movement or suffragist period which was concerned with gaining equal vote rights for women. The struggle for women's suffrage embodied one of the resounding fights of women because the denial of

[1] - Peter Barry. *Beginning Theory-An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 1995 p. 85

[2] - Jane freedman.*Concept in the Social Science*. Philadelphia: Buckinghan University Press. 2003p.3

vote right to have a say in legislative institutions signifies the relegation of women to second class citizens. For centuries men were frequently regarded as adversaries bearing animosity towards women; therefore, this predicament triggered intense debates and controversies among female activists who doubted some male activists' honesty to fight for the betterment of women's lifestyle with the same determination. Aside from radical feminism, middle class feminists recognized the importance of liberal men and their involvement in women's movement especial men who had strong ties with political institutions or occupied prominent political positions.

Most importantly, the First Wavers focused on the right of women to participate in political activities and make their voice heard by giving them the right to vote. The suffragists regarded women's participation in politics as an important sign to accept women in society and improve their daily lives. To do so, they struggled to abolish patriarchal laws entrenched in American society. In this regard, it is worth noting that the feminist suffragists underscored and argued that women were morally superior to men. From this standpoint, patriarchy was considered a failure that was not fruitful and rational. It aggravated woman's societal status and made of her a symbol of deficiency. In terms of politics, this view led to the assumption that women should be treated equally and given the same political opportunities regardless of their biological differences.

The fight for women's suffrage represented one of feminists' fundamental social and political battles. The First Wave feminists asked for the rights of women to vote in the United Kingdom and later in the United States. In the latter, after the First World War, women rights activists challenged the government of U.S.A and its commitment to democratic values. As a proponent of freedom, they highlighted the paradoxical behavior of some politicians and

questioned the premise of freedom enacted in the American Constitution. In other words, they questioned the mainstream culture and the compliance with the Constitution with regard to the deprivation of women from the right to vote. The United States' embracement of liberal values contradicted its disenfranchisement of half of its citizen-women. Thus, civil rights activists strove to enable American women to vote via creating the National Women's Party. Their struggle triumphed in the allowance of American Women to vote in 1920 after the signature of the Vote Act.

Suffragists confronted a series of social challenges mainly the fight against stereotypes used against women. They embarked on public persuasion which was considered a masculine act, and as Campbell states "No true women could be a public persuader"[1]. Indeed women either black or white during the beginning of 20th century were looked at as housewives looking after domestic chores and husband:

> Those days dedicated that a true woman's place was in the home, meeting the needs of husband and children. Women were further required to be modest and to wield only indirect influence, and certainly not engage in public activities. So, when a women speak in public, she was by definition, displaying masculine behaviours. She was even ignoring her biological weaknesses- a smaller brain and a more fragile physique- which she was supposed to protect in order to ensure her reproductive abilities.[2]

This claim stems from the belief that women have a natural tendency towards domesticity and motherhood. To contradict this patriarchal culture, women rights activists argued that the participation of women in politics would enrich the political life with their "innately" female preoccupations. Moreover, their inclusion in politics would also enhance their performance as

[1] -Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen. *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: from Silence to Performance*, London: Sage,2005 p.5
[2] - ibid., p.5

housewives and mothers.[1] This means that the appropriation of women in political sphere would raise their social consciousness as a pivotal part in society. Women's feeling of double responsibility has affected their psyche and reinforced their fervor to satisfy the need of house as well as their professional life.

Furthermore, feminists focalized primarily on the right of women to possess properties, to decide about her future and to bring up her own children without giving the husband the right to deprive her from her property in case of divorce. They also focused on promoting the rights of women in different spheres and rejecting chattel marriage by which the women were regarded as properties and objects for the husband as Margaret Waters states: "For a married woman, her home becomes a prison-house. The house itself, as well as everything in it belongs to the husband, and all fixtures the most abject is his breeding machine, the wife. Married women are in fact slaves, their situation no better than that of Negroes in the West Indies".[2]

During the 19th century women were dealt with as slave servants who should follow the instructions of their bossy male master because in male-dominated society, as in the United States of America, American woman was no more than a loving wife and a housekeeper who should look after her children and husband. This downgrading view was rejected by some feminists as Marion Reid who remarks, in her essay "A Plea for Women"," woman was made for man, yet in another and higher she was also made for herself".[3]As a feminist and scholar Reid stands against the traditional role laid down to woman as a loving wife devoted to her husband, and a housekeeper taking care of children and doing domestic chores. She supports the view the

[1] -ibid., p.5
[2] - Margaret Walter. *Feminism*: *A very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 2005 p. 44
[3] -ibid., p.42

parents should help each other in upbringing and rearing their children. Scholars and writers did not struggle for equality between man and women but sought to get the recognition of women's potential and innate potency in different walks of life.

In spite of some initiatives made by some female activists, the latter did not make a great impact in making the voice of deprived women heard because their efforts were not united. The second half of the 19th century civil rights movements emerged and fought for the amelioration of women's daily life in terms of health services, education, and opportunities to work in any place. They succeeded in pushing governments to amend laws in favour of women. Such amendment improved women's marital status and most importantly granted women the right to vote.[1]

"The Ladies of Langham Palace" was one of the female groups who struggled for the betterment of women's life through education in order to increase women's opportunity to get employed. Its name comes from their meeting place, it was led by Barbara Leigh Smith. The group also endeavored to change women's debased marital status since women were deprived from their possessions when they got married.

The mainstream patriarchal culture has been rejected by female civil rights activists. From a liberal point of view, women were to be complementary partners to men. The concept "equal-opportunities feminism" or "equity feminism"[2] blurred the distinction between gender and sex. Despite the biological differences between men and women, their innate difference was downplayed by some activists as Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen who state: "Even though biological differences were understood to form the basis of social gender roles, they were

[1] -Ibid., p. 41
[2] - Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen. *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: from Silence to Performance*, London: Sage,2005 p. 06

not considered a threat to the ideal of human equity, and biological differences were therefore not accepted to as theoretically or politically valid reason for discrimination".[1]

In spite of their attempt to integrate women in politics by the end of the 19th century, the suffragists did not succeed in convincing the British Parliament to pass any law allowing women to vote and becoming members of Parliament arguing that women should not have much influence in politics because, in their eyes, that would lead the country to "hasty alliance with scheming neighbors, more class cries, permissive legislation, domestic perplexities and sentimental grievances".[2]

The suffragists did not make too much progress despite their efforts to enable women to become a vital part in politics during the end of the 19th. However, they remained adamant to achieve their objectives. One of the prominent figures of British suffragists was Emily Davies, who participated in promoting female educational status. She believed that man and women should take part in grabbing women from the vicious circle of illiteracy. She believed that men and women should have the same opportunities in terms of education.[3] Her success was pointed out in many ways such as allowing women to accede Queen's and Bedford Colleges which culminated in awarding them with degrees in 1878, after three decades women became an integrated part of Oxford University.[4] Another leading British campaigner was Emmeline Pankhurst who played a significant role in the suffragist movement. Emmeline was a radical and influential figure in British political life. Her whole family members were civil right

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[1] - Ibid., p.6

[2] - Margaret Walter. *Feminism:A very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University, 2005 p.42

[3] - Deirdre Raftery. "The Opening of Higher Education to Women in Nineteenth Century England: Unexpected Revolution or Inevitable Change?" The United kingdom: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2002, p.342

[4] - Martina Halirova, *The Development of Feminism in English Literature of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Unpublished Dissertation, Palacky University, 2016 p. 10

activists who too played a noteworthy role in the suffragette movement. Pankhurst's efforts culminated in 1903 in establishing The Women's Social and Political Union[1] that gradually became public institutions. It played a significant role in passing The Representation of the People Act in 1918 allowing women to vote if they had over thirty years and later the required age for vote had been decreased to twenty one. After World War I, women achieved a great political success embodied in having access to Parliament and becoming members of this significant institution that would enable them to have a say in any law that may affect their life.

The second wave feminism marked a new era in the history of feminism. It was regarded as a continuation of the first wave of feminism and classified as a radical movement associated with women's liberation movement as its soul. It was named the women's "liberation movement"/ or "liberal feminism" which emerged after the Second World War characterized by the resurgence of feminist activities in the late 1960s and 1970s. It shifted the entire debate from political to psychological, cultural and anthropological fields.[2]

One of its core principles was to enable women gaining the same social and legal equality as men. Ending discrimination was considered as a primary principle of its premise. The second wavers struggled to put an end to discrimination against women not only in terms of politics but also in different walks of life and raise out the problem of sexual harassment which became a haunting matter for a lot of women. Their struggle was twofold; political and social. They struggled to make women's concerns politically recognized by enabling them to participate in political life but they also strove to enable women decide about her private life: right to abortion and divorce. In this context, the second wavers seemed in agreement with the

[1] - Emilie Hogagard. "WSPU Rhetoric: Justifying Militancy". Aarhus: Interdisciplinary Journal in English. 2017, p.6

[2]-Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd. *Understanding Political Ideas and Movement*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, p.298

engagement of women in politics as a springboard to fight for women's rights. They also considered women's cultural and political inequalities as "inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structure".[1]

The American feminist Betty Friedan, among others, argued that women were directed by "a cultural myth" that made them entitled to take care of their family as the primary role in their private sphere. Americans' long struggle for the betterment of women's status culminated in the signature of a series of acts, among which, the Abortion Act (1967), the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) which afforded women a legislative platform to decide about their private life and decrease male dominance.[2]In their endeavor to nullify the objectification of American women in the United States of America, the second waver feminists criticized the way women were presented in the annual event of the Miss America Pageants in which the female participants paraded as "cattles" in a show to be merchandised.[3] This event had reinforced the stereotype of looking at women as sexual objects.

It is worth noting that second wave feminism led to the emergence of radical feminism. Radical second wavers defended women's ownership of their body which meant that "sexuality that is disconnected from the obligations of marriage and motherhood".[4] Radical feminists believed that men were an oppositional force to women; they were enemies who controlled and dominated their life through their misconception of sexual and family relation. In

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[1] - Quoted in Martina Halirova. *The Development of Feminism in English Literature of the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Unpublished Dissertation, 2016, p. 11

[2] - Ibid p.302

[3] - Bonnie J. Dow. "Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology". Georgia: Rhetoric and Public Affairs p.128

[4] - Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen. *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: from Silence to Performance*, London: Sage,2005 p.10

patriarchal society man was a force of domination whereas a woman was a tool of human reproduction. In the same regard, the man was regarded autonomous and biologically stronger whereas the woman was the weakest part who should succumb to man's dictates and whims.

Gender, sexism and racial class could be erased when individuals are free to fashion "their body and identities within the culture with choice and freedom".[1]Therefore, radical feminists have worked to raise self-consciousness among women to embrace their innate biological traits, God-given character, and withstand patriarchal culture. Owing to the pressure of patriarchal social codes, cosmetic surgery, dieting, foot binding were adopted by women to live up to the norms of beauty in a male society. Radical feminists have highlighted that women have been psychologically structured and molded to serve man's desire and maintain patriarchy; therefore, they strove to fight patriarchy and make women equal to man to preserve their identity and lift their social status. Alongside their request to alter the existing social system, radical feminists encouraged women to cooperate and engage in a juridical fight to enact laws permitting women of all social spectrums to get contraceptive bills for free. More importantly, they longed to institutionalize radicalism as a new movement to counter racism and classism.[2] Among those radical feminists was Harriet Taylor Mill who sought change in the patriarchal marriage system and the nullification of chattel marriage. She argued that women had the right to keep guardianship in case of divorce and retain financial support from divorced father.[3]

It is worthwhile to mention that the First and Second Waves of feminism did not achieve too much progress and failed in many ways. Society always regarded women as child-bearers and housekeepers; who should do domestic chores and look after children. This fact

[1] -Kalpana P.Nehere,*The Feminist Views:A Review*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/30388964, 2016 p.13
[2] -ibid. , p.13
[3] - Susan Mendus. "John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor on Women and Marriage". Oxford: Oxford University Press.1994, p.295

proves that men and women were not equal with women on the social level; therefore, the enactment of new family laws became important to provide women with childcare facilities. Nevertheless, new legislatures may not have been sufficient as the crux of the problem lay in the patriarchal indoctrination of society which required a change in people' s mindset; man and woman should share family responsibilities including domestic chores and looking after children.

As a reaction to the failure of the two previous waves, in the 1980s and the 1990s the Third Wavers came through hoping to correct the path taken by the previous Wavers. In many ways the third wave feminism can be regarded as a counter-reaction to the two previous ones. A common term for third-wave feminism was "grrl feminism" and in Europe known as "new feminism" standing against violence, body surgery and human trafficking; and most of all it opposed the projection of women as sexual objects in media through fashion industry. Interestingly, third wave feminism seemed more tolerant tending to deal with the sexual abnormal tendencies of lesbians, gays and transsexual. In this respect, Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen remark: "Queer and transgender feminists attack what they see as the crux of the problem: heteronormativity. They call for recognition of queers: not only gays and lesbians but also drag queens, drag kings, transsexuals, masculine women, and feminine men".[1] Emi koyama deals with these concerns in "The Transfeminist Manifesto"[2] in which he highlights the importance of accepting one's own identity and incentivizes society to accept women's different sexual disposition. Transfeminists argued that the individual should be granted the right to decide about his/her sexual freedom to build his own gender identities without the interference of medical establishments or cultural institutions. They also endorsed

[1] - Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen. *Gender Communication Theories and Analysis: from Silence to Performance*, London: Sage, 2005 p.19

[2] - Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003.p162

the different sexual tendencies of women within the framework of public institutions and social areas.

The third wave movement, also named ‘‘post-feminism’’, fought for the same belief adopted by the two previous wavers. Despite the convergence between the latter and the third wavers, there was a significant shift in the third wavers’ focalization on the individuality of the person and his/her self interest and identity. In addition to that, the two first wavers were white middle class, but the third wavers were civil right female activists descending from different ethnicities including black minority.

The third wave of feminism has broadened the working scope of the feminists. It concentrated more on racial minorities’ need for social justice and questioned the nature of lesbians’ sexual tendency. Furthermore, it tried to show the convergence between gender and race. The Third Wavers claimed that the first and the second wavers paid less concerns to the problems facing colored people and those descending from ethnic backgrounds and having different religious affiliations; moreover, they coped with issues related to middle class white women.

It is worth noting that the Third Wavers struggled for more representation of women in political life and encouraged them to occupy senior positions as ministers and members of parliament. They also advocated protection for women against domestic violence` and sexual harassment. Furthermore, they struggled to guarantee the woman the right to get maternity leave and decide when having childbearing. Moreover, they encouraged dialogue between women throughout the world to enable them exchange their views and build alliances as a way to deal with globalization. Such dialogue between women of different origins, nationality and ethnicity is known as transversalism.

During the 1990s women made too much progress in terms of civil rights. They competed men in different fields especially in education, politics and management. In the course of this decade British women were given the same opportunity as men to serve as teachers with salary equal to that given to men. Such progress has downplayed the social derogatory image associated with women as second class citizens.

The different waves of feminisms have also played a considerable role in the path towards freedom and made women's voice heard. Nonetheless, these movements nowadays do not have the same impact as in the past, as they have become less visible in political and social arenas because they have been regarded by some women as old-fashioned and separatist movements focusing mainly on women's issues. Therefore, in its attempt to bridge the gap between men and women in terms of gender equality, the United Nations launched a campaign under the slogan *HeForShe*, in 2014. The primary concern of this movement was to achieve gender equality by encouraging men to cooperate with women to bridge the gap between the two sexes socially, economically and politically. In this regard, Emma Watson stressed in one of the conferences animated during this campaign: "How can we effect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation".[1]

I-3-The Intersection of Feminism with other Discipline

Feminism as a movement and theory overlaps with many disciplines such as Marxism, Liberalism and Structuralism. Some female scholars divided feminism into liberal feminism, radical feminism and Marxist feminism. Liberal feminists tended to guarantee equal rights for women within the liberal states where women were able to embrace equal civil rights

[1] - " Emma Watson at TheForShe compaign 2014-official UN Video posted by UN Nations, September22 , 2014

with men and, most importantly, they maintained that women should be granted equal citizenship.

Second, Marxist feminists regarded capitalism as the source of women's suffering and marginalization. As far as Marxists were concerned, the capitalist system helped in the division between man and women by creating a rift due to the fact the two sexes did not get equal salaries. They rebuked the fact that women should do domestic chores and work outside the house. They also struggled to achieve "equal pay for equal work" as women were paid less than men for the same job, which widened gender division and contributed in the maintenance of society's contemptuous image of woman. Moreover, they argued that equality between women and men could be achieved only by the nullification of capitalism and the establishment of socialism by which women can depend on themselves and be productive workers in society.

Marxist feminism tends also to address the issue of gender discrimination in workplace. It advocates a united struggle to emancipate women worldwide from "the burden of motherhood''. Marxist feminists and socialist feminists have addressed the issue of gender inequality which could be solved only by an overall change in societal conditions that could be improved only through addressing the issue like family laws, chattel marriage, patriarchal social codes and segregation in workplace. They endeavored to abolish capitalism which, in their view, hindered the progress of women and reinforced patriarchal social norms. In this regard, Kalpana P. Nehere points out:

> Marxist and socialist feminist feminists claimed that power has nothing with sex, but class, wages and property, family maintains patriarchal and class inequality, capitalist agenda is an obstacle in the way of women's struggle for equality, and therefore, capitalism and modernity as the main enemies for feminism.[1]

[1] - Kalpana P.Nehere. "The Feminist Views: A Review". Maharashtra: Feminist Research. 2016, p.8

They also disregarded the biological difference between man and women, and downplayed the impact of some common misconceptions associated with women as sex and gender sexual relation. Unlike capitalists who argued that a woman is the property of her husband, Marxist feminists regarded marriage as "incontestably a form of exclusive private property".[1]

From a Marxist perspective, the unpaid domestic labor provided by women was regarded as domestic slavery exercised by male-dominated society against women. To guarantee his domestic need, man was always in quest of a wife who was socially, religiously and traditionally regarded as a servant. Therefore, Marxist feminists raised the question of the inequality that existed between the man who was regarded as the head of the family and the woman who was considered as the heart of the family. On this background, Marxist feminists supported the need for women's nomination in high positions, the nationalization of private property, cooperation between man and women concerning child rearing.[2] Social/ Marxist feminists led by Emma Golden in the U.S.A focused primarily on working class women and their working conditions which were mostly derogatory. They also raised the issue of discriminatory system and women's exploitation in working places hoping to enable women to preserve their identity.

However, Marxist feminism has been criticized for its focus on productive labor and the delegitimization of domestic labor assigned to women. Furthermore, it was also lambasted for its advocacy of friendly marriage and mutual dependence between wife and husband, which demolished traditional marriage and made the couple uncomplimentary. In other words, Marxist feminism has not helped in the preservation of traditional bondages of marriage. Marxist feminists criticized the exploitation of women in the industrial workplace but they failed to handle exploitation at personal and intimate level within the house.

[1] - ibid., p.9
[2] - ibid., p.8

Radical feminism was a feminist movement that focused on the oppression of women by men, and proposed radical changes in patriarchal marriage system. Radical feminists consider men's dominance over women as a direct result of patriarchal system in which women occupy a secondary status due to some traditional masculine values and social codes engraved in the society. Therefore, they were against the integration of man within women's movements. It is generally agreed that feminism tends to defend women's civil rights and combat social injustice; however, some radical feminists have rejected the inclusion of man in the movement despite the fact that men sometimes proved to be as ferocious fighters and advocates of women's rights as women. In this respect Poskas Anderea underscores:

> Apart from the radicals, feminists and especially middle and upper class women, realize and admitted that friendship and support of men in influential political positions and important connections could offer a boost to the advancement of women's right.[1]

I-4-The Equal-Different Debate

Equal different debate sparked a great attention due to the constant questions triggered by feminists and civil right advocates: to which extent women are equal to men? Should feminists disregard the biological difference between the two genders? Some women civil right activists campaigned to enable women get the same rights as men regardless of biological differences. Others argued that the sexuality of women was a matter of fact and their sexual difference should be revalued.

Women and men's different sexuality have played a major role in shaping an overview about the two sexes. In many ways women were regarded as "closer to nature"; for this reason, they were considered emotional and unable to hold high public positions. While women were considered as "closer to nature", men were perceived as "closer to culture" which meant they

[1] - Puskas Anderea. *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespare*, Bedapest: Unpublished Thesis, 2010 p.33

were an integrated part of society suited for "public role"- decision makers. Consequently, women were relegated to a secondary status in society. They were assigned as baby-sitters and house-keepers deprived from any participation in public life.

It is unquestionable and undeniable that men and women are biologically different. Due to the complexity of this given fact, feminists tried to untangle this issue of differentiation. They agreed that sexual difference between the two genders should be ignored and women's biological difference should be revalued. The claim of the superiority of man over woman should too be reconsidered. In other way, man should not declare himself superior to woman for any proclaimed privilege. In this regard, Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine state :

> The response to difference on the part of women varies: there are those who exalt it by embracing a certain biology- and a certain eroticism. There are also those who deny it, or rather, who seek to defuse the power of difference by minimizing biology and emphasizing cultural coding: on some level, these responses are saying 'women would be the same as …….if only'. A third strand states, like the first group, that women are indeed different from men, but for feminist reason they add: women are also better than men. This group's reason would not be biological: as outsiders and nurturers, women do things differently from, and better than, men.[1]

They demonstrated that there were three different views regarding the two sexes' biological difference. The first group of feminists endorsed this difference and considered it as a blessing and privilege for women. Men and women should accept this difference and complement each other for the survival of the whole. The second group tried to minimize and trivialize such innate difference since social division and hierarchy were cultural and man-made; it was a matter of culture not innate assignment. Unprecedentedly, the third group claimed that women were better

[1] - Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine. *The Future of Difference*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 1988 p.xxv

than men for their ability to work as breast-feeders and their pliable mighty to embark in any activities including politics.

For many centuries, women's innate and biological differences have been seen as a determined factor in assigning a secondary social role for women. Because of their biological structure, women were seen as housekeepers, breastfeeders and sometimes even chattels. The dogmatic perception of having less physical strength also determined their role within a male-dominated society. They were regarded unfit to work outside the domestic sphere; therefore, looking after children and breastfeeding them were considered suitable tasks for women. Consequently, these social assigned duties restricted the prospect of playing public role. They were seen unsuitable to occupy public positions for being more emotional and less reasonable to make decisions, which means that women use their heart before their mind-showing tenderness when dealing with facts.

Unexpectedly, such unfair judgment was supported by some philosophers and political theorists, and substantiated by anatomists. The latter, as specialists in decomposing the structure of human body, worked on the measurement of women and men's organs. They showed the difference between men's brain size and women's brain size claiming that the sizable difference between the two brains of the two genders referred to the dissimilarity in intelligence. Despite the fact that this harsh kind of scientific perception is nowadays considered baseless and debunked, there is still a tendency to downgrade women and belittle their role relying on this twisted scientific truth.

For believers in God, woman and man were created by God with some biological and physical differences in body to make some attraction between the two sexes and preserve human race from extinction. It is worth mentioning that during the ancient time there was not

such question of man-woman relationship. It is only when human being adopted the system of nuclear family and started to live collectively in groups the question of their relation was raised. It is also unquestionable that the endorsement of civilization and redemption from the barbaric life had a positive impact on human life. But at the same time the adoption of new system was disadvantageous to women.

To a certain extent, feminists have succeeded in preserving women civil rights such as suffrage, property rights, equal pay for women and reproductive rights which have enabled women to organize pregnancy and to decide about abortion. Feminist activists have also succeeded at safe-guarding women of sexual misconduct and harassment. The outcome of feminists' campaign has been great but not enough. Feminists have, to a certain extent, won the battle of gender equality in different walks and domains of life, which has attracted the attention of many African American and Arab American women writers and activists.

I-5-The Black Feminists'Stand to Western Feminism

Black feminism is a philosophy that revolves around the idea that "Black women are inherently valuable, that [Black women's] liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because our need as human persons for autonomy".[1] It emerged to tackle racism and oppression exercised against Afro American women who found themselves victims of both white supremacy and black male bigotry. Afro American women were regarded as a non-dignified race by white racist society at the same time they were failed by their black counterparts. Some patriarchal African American men downplayed the importance of black women and in many ways looked down on them as being just bread-makers while men were regarded bread-eaters in

1 - Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. *How We Get Free : Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Chicago, Illinois : Haymarket Books. 2017 p.8

the house. Their experience of wretched conditions pushed them to fight back. Hankering for independence from black men and abusing white society, African-American activists have striven to be self-supporting and self-sufficient. More importantly, they endeavored to secure a "happy married life" and a dignified career through writings and involvement in the political life. Furthermore, some of them have tried to follow the same path taken by white female activists to better their life conditions.

White women created feminism to ask for equal rights with man and get rid of the patriarchal system. However, African American women had to fight against racism, classism and patriarchal regulations. It is noticeable that the objectives of feminism are not consistent with black women's endeavor to struggle against racism and classism. While white women were subjugated to the dominance of white man, black women suffered from multiple predicaments mainly patriarchal dictates along with racism. Since the causes leading to the emergence of feminism were not the same with the ones that led to the suffering of black women, feminism as a movement did not seem relevant to black women's fight to put an end to their Otherization by the whites.

Many Afro-American women rejected the term "feminism" on the grounds of its inclusiveness and association with whiteness. They opposed the double standard of white feminists who advocated for the betterment of women's life regardless of race, but practiced discrimination within their movement, which made black women doubtful about white feminists' campaign for "global sisterhood".[1] It is worth noting black women who were members of this white movement were intellectuals and academics, they experienced marginalization due to their color. Bell Hooks, a member of the movement, vehemently criticized the practice of segregation

[1]-Malika Bouhadiba, "The Womanist Counter-Hegemonic Discourse". Oran:LAROS.2016, p.464

conducted by white members stating that white women did not " see [blacks] as equals and did not treat [them] as equals".[1] Therefore, Afro-American women activists regarded feminism as a segregationist movement in which the skin color played a significant role in shaping relationship. Hooks also marked that whites' writing is riddled with racism as she states "racism abounds in the writings of white feminists reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries".[2] In this respect, Hooks lined with Afro-American activists who denounced the fact that feminism worked in tandem with Americaness and whiteness which, in many ways, were perceived as antitheses of Afro-Americaness and blackness. Therefore, feminism cannot logically be a relevant philosophy by which Afro-American women rest their thought to heal their wounds of racial oppression and identity crisis in an antagonistic white society.

Exclusiveness of feminism was a subject matter for some Afro-American women literary scholars who refused the status of their representation in American life in general and the field of literature in particular. Its exclusiveness became evident via the white feminists' refusal to include African American literature in their survey of American literature during the 1970s and the 1980s. Alice Walker criticized her white colleagues Patricia Spacks and Phyllis Chesler for rejecting to include Afro- American women writers in their survey of all literary works written by American writers. They justified this exclusiveness by claiming that the experience of colored women and white women were different which, in their eyes, required a different scope of work.[3] Such justification seemed baseless since they included works written by British women writers in their survey when the two categories of women did not undergo same experiences.

[1]-Bell Hooks. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. London: Pluto Press. 2000 p.12
[2] -Ibid., p.3
[3]-ibid. p308

Unpredictably, Spacks and Chester argued that Third World Women possess " a special psychology which scholars have to master in order to be able to write about their works".[1] The two previous examples highlight the deliberate intention of white feminists to exclude Afro-American women along with their works from the spectrum of the mainstream literature.

Afro-American feminists yearned to carve out a new path different from the one taken by their white counterparts to expose a dignified picture about black women and humanize the black race in the U.S.A. Their ultimate concern has been to deconstruct and erase the existing picture of black female identity and draw an honorable one reflecting the worthiness and humanity of black people. In an effort to meet the needs of African American women who felt discriminated against by white feminism and oppressed by the Black Liberation Movement, African American women activists formed the Black Feminist Movement.

Adherents of white feminism came under bitter criticism from some outspoken critics such as Allan Jita and Gayatri Spivak who rebuked them for being new cultural imperialists tending to impose their own thought and ideology on the rest mainly on black colored women. For Jita and Spivak, Western feminists perpetuate their role of colonizer towards subalterns by their ethnocentric outlook of women's issues and assumption of the homogeneity of women's experiences. According to the two feminists, Western feminism embraced the axioms of imperialism inherent in its belief in individualism as one of its tenets and by which feminists perceived Western whites as first class citizens and subjects, whereas colored people as second class citizens and objects.[2] That is to say, feminists were regarded as a colonial force making colored women their target. They did not want to include colored women and Third World

[1] - ibid p.308
[2] -Aleksandera Izgarjan, Slobodanka Markov, "Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspective Past and Present" Novisad: West University Press. 2013 p.307

Women in the scope of their framework that downplayed the importance of feminism as a universal movement. In his discussion of white feminists' ignorance of black women's racial struggle, Liu points out:

> A key aspect of white women's privilege has been their ability to assume that when they talked about themselves they were talking about all women, and many white feminists have unthinkingly from their own situation, ignoring the experiences of black women, or treating them as marginal and "different". Many have also projected western concerns and priorities onto the rest of the world, measuring " progress" according to western liberal standards and identifying a global system of patriarchy through which " differences are treated as local variations on a universal theme.[1]

The practice of many white feminists did not rise up to the ideal of feminism as a cultural body standing against the deprivation of all women worldwide regardless of their color. Moreover, feminism remained immersed in the bigotry of some racist feminists who voided it of its humanist values. Well-known African American writers and academicians as Mary Hellon Washington, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker argued that racism became an imbedded part of feminism. As a result, most Afro-American women considered it as a distorted cultural body hijacked by some white female activists to serve their own agenda. " [It] is often viewed by both black and white as the cultural property of white women"[2]. Therefore, Alice Walker established another feminist movement coined "womanism" in 1983 as an alternative to feminism which, according to her, did not defend the cause of black women.

I-6-Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's Different Reaction towards Feminism

[1]Quoted in ibid., p.307

[2] -Patricia Hill Collins, "WHAT IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and beyond" Taylor and Francis, Ltd.http//www.jstor.org/Stable/41068619, 2017 p.13

Many female activists, writers and novelists such as Morrison and Walker regarded black women as the most deprived and marginalized segment of the American society. For that reason, they maximized their efforts to uplift upheavals which have exhausted their black fellows. In contrast to the debased picture drawn around black women in white literature and mass media, they contrived to present black female characters inundated with humanity, vivacity and love for life.

Morrison and Walker are the founding mothers of black feminism, a movement which came to reality as a reaction to white feminism. Black feminism emerged during the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement in which Afro-Americans and some marginalized and downtrodden groups fought for their civil rights and dignity deprived from them for the mere fact of being racially different or not being white enough to climb the ladder of Americaness.

Due to their overt physical difference, black women suffered from a variety of social and economic deprivations. Their plight is doubled because of their race and gender. Being black in white American society caused them oppression from white racists; whereas, being black women in the male-dominated American society engendered gender discrimination by both back and white males as well. That is to say, as black women they have been twice oppressed as they are black and women.

All these unbearable and pitiful life conditions paved the way to the emergence of some outspoken African American female scholars who spoke out against racial prejudices and social injustice crippling the blacks in general and black women in particular. Amongst those female literary scholars are Alice Walker and Toni Morrison whose primary concern has been the enhancement of black women's image in the mainstream white culture. Both have highlighted the evil effect of racism on black women's identity and the way forwards to liberate themselves

from oppression and put end to the distortion of black identity. Even though they addressed the same theme of female quest for self-hood and identity, they chose a different path to fulfill their objectives. In many respects, Toni Morrison is deemed a black feminist whereas Alice Walker is regarded as a womanist. Morrison did not disassociate herself from feminism and kept fighting from within the movement but Walker shied away from it and proposed a new female ideology embracing every individual's concern regardless of race. Feminism has been lambasted by many black female critics for not covering up black women's concerns with honesty and impartiality. It is regarded as a 'white'movement created to handle issues confronting white women who suffered primarily from white man's patriarchal authority. While white women suffered from the dominance of white men over all spectrum of life, black women endured both racism and gender discrimination with the black community.

Owing to the stark divergences in the way black and white women suffered, the adoption of the same version of feminism created by white women do not seem feasible from a practical point of view. Because of its focus primarily on white women's issues, feminism does not seem applicable to black women's preoccupations. Many African American female critics disagree with feminism and associated it with whiteness; therefore, they racialised 'feminism' by adding the term 'black' to become "black feminism". One of the prominent black feminists is Toni Morrison who endorsed the ideology of "black feminism" and strove to struggle to make black life meaningful in a world of racial hatred. She seems an integrationist who always sees light at the end of the tunnel; therefore, she prefers to fight from within 'feminism' to show and expose the plights her black fellows endured and give credits to their struggle. However, the term "black feminism" was not the term of consensus. Alice Walker prefers "womanism" to "black

feminism". In fact, the two terms sometimes work in tandem with each other and they become exchangeable as Barbara Omolade underscores:

> Black feminism is sometimes referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggle against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's effort to achieve equity and liberty.[1]

Throughout their literary career, the two novelists seem feminists, but they have not endorsed all what feminism stands for. The two, as many Afro-American writers, did not regard feminism as a movement able to address all issues encountering the black women. They considered feminism as a cultural pattern used to handle the causes that led only to the deprivation of "white" women within the patriarchal white society. That is to say, the primary concern of feminism is to uplift the status quo of "white" women; hence, feminism is always associated with "whiteness". In this regard, Patricia Hill Colin states, "Even though majority of African Americans may support the very idea on which feminism rests, large numbers of African American women reject the term "feminism" because of what they perceive as its association with whiteness"[2]

The previous quotation highlights Afro-Americans' lack of trust in feminism. They doubt its support of the blacks as race and black women as gender. On the contrary to what has been expected, as Patricia Collins argues, white feminists have contributed in tarnishing the image of black women when claiming that the latter lack "female consciousness".[3] Such a racist attitude spurred many Afro-American activists to swerve away from feminism as an unfit cultural body standing only to defend the rights of white women. Alice Walker was one among

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[1] - Quoted in Alice Walker. *In Search ofOur Mothers' Gardens*, Florida: Harcourt, 1983 p.10
[2] - Patricia Hill Collins."WHAT IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and beyond" The Black Scholar, ProQuest Research Library .1996 p.13
[3]- Alice Walker. *In Search ofOur Mothers' Gardens*, Florida: Harcourt, 1983 p.374

many who shied away from white feminists and criticized her white counterparts for practising racism within feminist organizations.

Unlike Alice Walker, Toni Morrison did not spurn feminism entirely, but she tried to fight from within without losing track with the cause of her people. Since feminism stands for the betterment of women, Morrison grasped this positive side and tried to adapt her concerns with feminist ideology to sort out the problem of racial identity and "double-consciousness". Quite on the contrary, Walker swerved away from the premise of White feminism and created her own version of feminism called "womanism".

Walker disassociated herself with the white feminists for her unwillingness to fight for the establishment of a just world where white women along with their black counterparts can lead a deracialised life. She especially blamed the white feminists of deepening the racial rift between black and white races via their bigoted vision of not considering black women as women but different species.[1] As far as Walker is concerned, the white feminists detached themselves from colored women to deny them the same rights and the same prerogative of womanhood. Walker also criticized them for disassociating themselves in order to get rid of their moral responsibility of helping the downtrodden black women. In this respect, Walker argues that it was the desire of the white feminists to shy away from their responsibility towards women of color and their children which resulted in the denial of their rights.[2]

The term "womanism" was coined by Alice Walker as a black version of feminism. It is derived from the word "womanish" which means a grown up and strong-minded woman.[3]

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[1] - AleksanderaIzgarjan, Slobodanka Markov. "Alice Walker's Wamanism: Perspective Past and Present" The United States of America: Univeristy of South California, Versita.1996. p 307

[2] - ibid p.307

[3] - Soma Das. **"**Gender Politics: A Womanist Reading of the Short Stories of Alice Walker". India: Scholar Publications. 2014 p.224

Furthermore, it was "a counter-hegemonic discourse that set out to dismantle Eurocentric supremacism. Like other post-colonial discursive practices, it was an attempt to "write back" to empire".[1] It was a counter-discursive strategy by which Walker responded to the appeal of depressed women in the whole world as Helen Tiffin states: "womanism involves a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumption and the dismantling of this assumption from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified local".[2] Unlike a girlish woman, a womanist is capable of asserting herself and defying all the odds of life. Dolores Williams defines womanist theology in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (1993) *as* follows:

> Womanist theology is a prophetic voice concerned about the well- being of the entire African American community, male and female, adults and children. Womanist theology attempts to help back women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impending black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and well-being. Womanist theology opposes all oppressions based on race, sex, class, sexual preference, physical ability and caste.[3]

It is worth noting that Walker has forged a fivefold definition of womanism. The first stage of womanism is represented in the idea that a womanist should be "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior".[4] Contrary to a black feminist woman, a womanist should embrace herself and challenge the world around her for the sake of asserting herself in spite of

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[1]- Malika Bouhadiba."The Womanist Counter-Hegemonic Discourse". Oran. LAROS. 2016 p.463

[2] -B Ashcroft, G Griffiths and H Tiffin. *The Post-colonial Reader*. Oxford: Routledge. 2006 p.201

[3] -Delores Williams. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk.*New York:Orbis Books. 1993 p.67

[4] - Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden. Womanist Prose.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovie. 1983 p.xi

white hostility. These womanist attributes are exposed in most of Walker's literary works mainly *Meridian*, *The Color Purple*, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. *Meridian* is one of Walker's most appreciated literary works which illustrates her ideology of womanism.

The second stage of Walkerian womanism is represented in the fact that a womanist is "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/ or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility".[1] It means that womanism advocates lesbianism in society, which made the movement an outcry against heterosexuality. Walker's positive stance on lesbianism made of her a subject of dire criticism from some black conservative activists and theologians for encouraging sexual disorientation and abnormality among black women. Her inclusion of lesbianism as a part of womanist philosophy is considered the most striking dissimilarity between feminism and Walkerian womanism.

This revolutionary idea of same sex was striking to patriarchal American society in general and Afro-American community in particular. It is worth mentioning that lesbianism is refuted in all orthodox societies, but Walker as a womanist desired to show her "outrageous" thinking and defiance to the established patriarchal system and social restrictive codes. More importantly, by supporting lesbianism between black women, Walker sought to break black man's sexual hegemony over black woman since they were victims of sex exploitation. By doing so, Walker also undermined the importance of conventional marriage in order to free colored women from male sexual dominance.

The third stage of womanism is represented in the idea of love. A grown up woman is a womanist who "loves music. Love dance. Love food and roundness. Love struggle. Love the

[1] - ibid, p.xi

folk. Love herself. Regardless".[1] In other words, a black woman should express her feeling and be proud of her culture, racial belonging and importantly her blackness.

In addition to the need to feel proud, Walker adds the fourth stage of womanism which stipulates the fact "womanism is to feminist as purple to lavender"[2], which implies that black women are superior to and more valuable than white women. It also argues that black and white women have lived in the same territory; however, they have not been treated and regarded the same due to their different racial belonging. She extols the colored woman and compares her to the strong color of purple often described as the royal color among the different colors. It also means that there is a common ground between white feminists and womanists as it is the case of purple and lavender sharing the same garden, yet they differ in many respects. Thus, Walkerian womanism provides a vision that white and black women should co-exist as flowers in the same garden, yet maintain their racial specificity and distinctiveness. Because of its endorsement of such separatism, womanism lines with nationalism. However, womanism doesn't seek a physical separation but a racial recognition of the black race.

The final stage of Walkerian womanism is exposed through the idea of wholeness which means the survival of the whole community irrespective of color or gender. Womanism stipulates that a womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female".[3] While white feminism seeks to address the issues facing white women, womanisn contrives to cope with issues confronting the entire people. In other words, while feminism advocates gender separatism, the womanists welcome their Black and White fellows. This

[1] -ibid, p.xi
[2] -ibid, p.xi
[3] -ibid, p.xi

global vision makes of Walkerian womanism a universal and pluralist movement addressing issues hindering both genders: black and white.

Contrary to feminism, Walkerian womanism rests upon inclusiveness and support of all women of different minorities regardless of race. It is not only about Afro-American women but all subjugated and marginalized women worldwide including Third World Women who suffered from dual oppression exercised by African male-dominated society as well as economic power which was at the hand of man. Interestingly, womanists seek to challenge all dominant powers which have contributed in downgrading the oppressed mainly colored women and inhibiting their human development. In this respect, womanism decenters feminism which focuses primarily on gender inequality. "Not only did womanism distance itself from feminism, it also presented itself as stronger and more original thus applying the feminist strategy of distancing in order to underscore the restrictiveness of their paradigm".[1] Such stance makes of it an original and innovative movement seeking to broaden the scope of female struggle.

In contrast to feminists, womanists advocate solidarity among subjugated people all over the world not only in the dominantly white American society. That is to say, they aim at creating an inclusive society where everyone is served on equal terms. In their opinion, women should be self-sufficient and self-confident, but also pluralists in their endeavor for the betterment of all women worldwide. Due to its global vision, wamanism has gained exponents from the different corners of the world. Many Afro-American alongside Latin American scholars endorsed the universality of womanism and lined themselves with womanists. They spurned feminism on the grounds that they viewed it as too "Eurocentric" focusing on gender issues and

[1]-ibid, p.308

ignoring daily problems such as unemployment and racial violence exerted on the people of color.[1]

"Womanism" as a concept and ideology has gained momentum and support among a large number of Afro-American activists. The latter prefer " womanism" to " feminism" due to the fact that the former enabled them to shy away from some white feminists and racist ideologies embedded in white feminist organizations. By doing so, they distinguished themselves in an attempt to establish a genuine ideology through which they could find solution to their various female issues. Such separation with white feminism lines them with black nationalists who too advocated separatism and specificity of black race.[2]

Walker does not handle issues facing only black women, but also black men. By doing so, Walker shows her willingness to help both genders. She looks at the black society as a community in which both men and women should live and coexist in harmony and interact with each other; that is why, the theory of womanism is not separatists but integrationist. In addition to that it does not discard white women from her text, which proves that womanism is a universal movement emerged to create harmony within the whole society. Thus, it grew up from an answer to the exclusiveness of feminism into the global movement which provides the framework for the empowerment of not only black women but also women from different ethnic minorities in the whole world. Womanism and feminism's claim of "global sisterhood" raise a question about the place of Arab Americans with respect to the two movements.

[1] - Walter, M. Feminism. *A Very Short Introduction.*Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005 p. 118
[2] -ibid, p.13

I-6- Arab American Women's Standpoint of Western Feminism

Like African American feminists, Arab American feminists do not consider white feminism as a reliable body able to defend their basic rights. Through their representation of Arab women, Western feminists portray Arab women as submissive, silenced, docile, veiled, male dominated and seductress. Western feminists' assumption that all Arab women constitute a homogenous group and therefore they have undergone the same experiences. Such characterization was rejected by critics like Suha Sabbagh who argues in her introduction of *Arab Women between Defiance and Restraint* that the stereotypical images represented in Western popular culture have very little to do with the real lives of Arab Women.[1] In fact this Western misconception of Arab women is directly attributed to misinterpretation of Islam in the West especially after 09/11 terrorist attacks; therefore, the tasks of Arab women authors either in their homelands or host countries were completely different from those of Western feminists. Their engagement was twofold; first, they had to subvert the mainstream narrative about Arab women in Western popular culture; second, they had to ask for the lifting of obstacles which crippled Arab women and Arab American women in different walks of life.

It is worth mentioning that after 09/11 attacks, the West has shown a remarkable interest in the Arab world and the true nature of Islam.[2] However, Susan Muaddi Darraj argues that the West has not yet given much importance to the social and religious tenets that govern the Arab world. Moreover, the West treats the problem of Third World Women especial Arab women from a western perspective without taking into account the differences in religion, race, gender, and culture. According to Darraj, the core problem is that :

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[1] - Suha Sabbagh. *Arab Women between Defiance and Restraints*. New York: Olive Branch Press. 2003 p.11

[2] - Rasha A. Abdullah. "Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism in Post-9/11 Arabic Discussion Boards". Cairo: Journal of Coputer-Mediated Communication.2009, p.1036

> Despite recent interest in the Middle East, following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the West has not made significant progress in its understanding of either Arab culture or of the role of women in Arab society and within the Arab community in America. In fact, the image of the oppressed, silenced Arab woman is frequently used by some as proof of the barbarity of Arab culture, and even to justify the West's foreign policy toward the East.[1]

Due to the Western feminists' assumption that all women in the globe were the same, transnational feminism came to light as a reaction to this Western feminist stance. Transnational feminists have defied Western feminists'claim of universalism to defend Arab women's cause and speak on behalf of them.

Many transnationalist feminists as Gayati Spivak and Gloria Anzaldue have refuted the Western assumption of universalism because the Western claim of "global sisterhood" has not been feasible since Western feminists' interests have been incompatible with those of Third World women. As far as Spivak is concerned, many Western feminists have been one-sided and have not understood the social and the religious forces that shaped Third World women's lives, especially Arab women; therefore, Western feminist's privileged claim to speak on behalf of all women worldwide has seemed illogical and incomprehensible.[2]

It is worth mentioning that Western women and Third World women have undergone diverse experiences especially in Arab Muslim countries where religion and cultural traditions have a great impact on shaping the character of the Arab woman. In the same vein, Western feminists have contended that Arab Muslim women have been demonized by Islamic patriarchal teachings without trying to get a deeper understanding of Islam and have a real interpretation of the religious text and avoid total rejection of Islamic culture for its alleged oppression of woman.

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[1] -Maha Yahya. *Gender Nation and Belonging-Arab and Arab American Feminist Perspective*. The Mit Electronic Journal of Middle East Study.2005, p.159

[2]- El Ouardi Fettah and Sandy Kebir. "Third World Women Representation in Western Feminist Discourse: A Critical Study"AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies, Volume3, Number1. February. 2019 p.130

It is interesting to note that before the advent of Islam to Arabian peninsula, women were considered as chattels and housekeepers, not equal partners. They were even deemed as a disgrace; therefore, the new born females were buried alive. Such practice was abrogated and condemned by Islam which liberated women from the brutality of Arab traditions and gave them the right to live as dignified human beings.

However, the West maintained stereotypical picture about Islam as an oppressor of women. Such western trend had a greater negative impact on their representation of Arab women in Western mainstream culture. In her criticism of Western feminists' failure to understand the cultural fabric of Arab societies, Gloria Anzaldua stresses:

> Because white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, and 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.[1]

That is to say, the leading transnational feminist Anzaldua challenges western feminists' universalism to speak on behalf of all women regardless of racial, social, cultural and religious differences. For Anzaldua and Spivak, Western ideology perpetuates a supremacist attitude towards Third World women to maintain the oppositional binaries "us" and "them", "the West" and "the Orient", " the advanced" and "the backward" which resulted in their ignorance of Third World women's cultural legacy and the maintenance of Western hegemonic culture over the world. The two transnational feminists did not consider Third World women as victims of their male-dominated society, and reprimanded Western feminists for not taking into consideration Third World women's own particularities. In the same vein, Fettah Elourdi and Kebir Sandy state:

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[1]- Quoted in El Ouardi Fettah and Sandy Kebir. "Third World Women Representation in Western Feminist Discourse: A Critical Study"AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies, Volume3, Number1. February. 2019 p.133

> One of the basic reasons beyond western feminist failure to help their sisters, as they have claimed, is the fact that they have approached and theorized third world women from western perspectives and values. By doing so, they have trampled on third world women's own particularities such as religious, cultural and traditional tenets along with neglecting the conceptualization of gender relations, historical and economic, and most importantly the history of colonialism.[1]

For many critics, through their universalistic ideological perspective, Western feminists aim at maintaining a Western privilege of white supremacy over Third World women and women worldwide. This Western assumption of universalism was highly objected by Spivak who proposed a consistent defiance of Western feminism for homogenizing and tearing down the image of Third World women instead of enabling them to voice their concerns and interests. As far as Spivak is concerned, Women throughout the world are not homogenous as Western feminists have claimed; rather they differ in specificities, culture, language and religion. Needless to say that all women are a monolithic entity experiencing same hardships and gender inequalities; therefore, it is very difficult to adopt one united global ideology to promote the status of women without taking into account the differences mentioned above. Third world women and transnational feminists criticized their white sisters for their assumption about the homogeneity of women's experiences and the universality of their struggle against injustice.

Transnational feminists' influence on Arab American women was great due to the fact that they positioned Arab Americans as a minority whose civil and constitutional rights should be maintained in American public institutions. They aligned them among minorities who suffered from marginalization and Otherization. Like African American women, Arab American women did not consider Western feminists truly their representatives who privileged themselves to be in "a mission of civilization" to enable Arab American women get rid of their "barbaric culture".

[1]-ibid, p.130

Likewise their African American counterparts, Arab American women endeavored to have their own kind of feminism that should not be an extension to Western feminism. Feeling that they were ostracized and downplayed by mainstream Western feminism, Arab American women found themselves compelled to have their own understanding of feminism to tackle their issues. Arab American feminism played a prominent role in enabling Arab American women to voice their concerns and counter Western misconception about Arab women. Arab American feminists such as Susan Muaddi Darraj, Naomi Shihab, Nadine Naber, Rabab Abdulhadi, among others, have used their writings to show the fallacy of the image presented in Western media and mainstream Western literature about Arabs. Indeed, Arab American women writers, through their writings, have striven to write back against the distorted images about Arabs; meanwhile, they sought to bridge the gap between their two worlds; the homeland and the host country.

Navigating a space between two cultures or identity is the premise of Homi Bhabha's theory of a "third place" where the individual struggles to make sense of the culture of his origin and that of the host country.[1] Bhabha contends that negotiating a third place results in hybrid culture that is a mixture of a couple of cultures. In this respect, the individual oscillates between two cultural boundaries to articulate identity that is not a reflection of one culture. In this same vein, for Arab American women, this means expressing their double heritage, Arab and American. However, having such hyphenated or double identity is somehow troublesome for some of them due to the fact that being Arab is usually associated with being submissive, harem girl, religious fanatic and a potential threat to the nation especially after 09/11 terrorist attacks.

A myriad of Arab American women expressed an ambivalent feeling when associating themselves with Arabness in American society. For instance, the Arab American women writer

[1]- Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994 p.312

and feminist Susan Muaddi Darraj showed how she was treated by Arab fellows and American counterparts: “while Americans thought I was a "foreigner," Arabs regarded me as"Americanized”.[1] Feeling Americanized and Arab at the same time created what Du Bois called “double-consciousness” which hampered the integration of Arab Americans in American society. Their assimilation was obstructed by being Otherized by White Americans, which caused identity crisis and consistent feeling of double-consciousness. According to Du Bois, such feeling of identity split was due “ to looking at oneself through the eyes of other, [ ] one ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warning ideals in one dark body”.[2] Even though Du Bois, in this respect, speaks about the African Americans’ attitude of looking at the self through the lenses of the White (the Orient), this concept is applied to Arab Americans who cannot escape the hegemony of Western popular culture in which all Arabs are Muslims, fanatic, terrorists, oppressors of women and backward. After decades of stigmatization, Arab Americans have internalized Western’s distorted image about them and started to look at the Orient as the mirror. Such feeling of double-consciousness has pushed Arab American women to negotiate a third place to construct their identity.

However, in the process of identity construction, Arab women are caught in two worlds and two cultures or more. Meanwhile, their task in this process has been to resist Western cultural hegemony and their misrepresentation in American popular culture. In their discussion of the way Westerners look at Arab Women, Abdulwahid Noman and Sailly Yasthana highlight:

> According to popular belief, all Arab women can be divided into two categories. Either they are shadowy nonentities, swathed in black from

[1]- Susan Muaddi Darraj. *Csheherazade’s Legacy: Arab and Arab American on Writing*. Connecticut: Praeger Publisher. 2004 p.01

[2] - W.E.B Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Thrift Ed.1984 p.09

> head to foot, or they are belly dancers –seductive, provocative, and privy to exotic secrets of love making. The two images, of course, are finally identical, adding up to a statement that all Arab women are, in one another, men's instruments or slaves.[1]

In this connection, it is worth noting that that Arab Americans, like their African American counterparts, have undergone social marginalization and misrepresentation in the United States discourse. Because of such convergence in terms of racial exploitation and prejudices, some Arab American women feminist encouraged alliance between them and women of color as African American women to challenge Western dominant culture and carve out a dignified place for both races in mainstream American culture**.** Among the prominent Arab American feminists is Michell Sharif who suggests the need for unity and cooperation between Arab American women and women of color to fight racial injustice. In this regard, Sharif points out:

> Arab-Americans belong to both cultures and therefore they occupy a unique position. We can and we must help this dialogue develop. Our struggle, like all women of color, includes overcoming racism as well as sexism. By joining women's groups in the United States, we can put issues such as anti-Arab racism and agenda. Our time for recognition and respect in western feminist movements has come.[2]

African American and Arab American women have gone through the same plight of social oppression and identity problem in the United States of America; therefore, African American and Arab American women writers have been united by the same preoccupation of healing women' wounds in fragmented American society. On this ground, the four novels under study: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Abu Jaber's *Crescent* are united by the novelists' handling of the theme of identity

[1] - Abdelwahid Noman, ShailYasthana. "Woman Voice in Arab American literature". An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal.2015p.494
[2] - Quoted in ibid p.495

crisis. In other words, convergence between the four literary products is more likely as there is affinity in the setting of the four novels.

Conclusion

Western feminists were pioneers in claiming the rights of women; therefore, they considered their engagement as a universal "civilizing mission" to uplift the veil of misery from women in the world. They assumed that women as a whole a homogenous group who should be emancipated following the same measures undertaken to liberate Western women regardless of differences in culture, race and religion. Such assumption of universalism was rejected by ethnic minorities in the United States of America including African American and Arab American women.

African American women's suffering was not the same as whites'; therefore, this lack of affinity required a different understanding and response. On this ground, feminism which was created to uplift the status of Western women in society may not have been feasible to civil right advocates of African descent. Therefore, the latter created their own movement called black feminism ; however, the African American feminist Alice Walker regarded "black feminism" as an extension to White feminism which pushed her to fashion "womanism" as a philosophy advocating for the survival of the whole regardless of gender, race or color; whereas, Western feminism's premise was first the survival of white women.

The lack of affinity between women of ethnic minorities and white women made it impossible to adopt the same strategies. Feminism cannot serve black women because it was created to enable white women to fight gender inequality while black women suffered from both white racism and black man's oppression. Such feminist exclusiveness and denial paved the way to the emergence of Walkerian womanism as a new movement and ideology. In many respects,

womanism can be regarded as a counter-movement to feminism to address primarily black women's issues for the survival of the whole.

Western feminists' assumption of universalism was also rejected by Arab American women who refuted to be represented and spoken about by Western feminists. Arab American feminists rebuked their Western counterparts for trying to preserve Western hegemonic culture and downplay the value of Arab woman as "poor" and submissive, acquiescent, unthinking and harem girls.[1] For many Arab feminists, Western feminists have positioned themselves as privileged feminists and custodians of women's rights without taking into account the differences in race, culture and religion.

[1]-Susan Muaddi Darraj. *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American on Writing*. Connecticut: Praeger Publisher. 2004 p.4

Chapter Two

The Impact of Color in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

Introduction

Since the era of slavery in the U.S.A, black women had been victims of white supremacy and bigotry. Black womanhood had been subjected to image distortions and abuses upheld by mainstream American culture. African American women writers have written profusely in a response to white subjugation and oppression of their black fellows. Their objective was twofold; first, they countered the negative image presented by the whites about the blacks. Second, they contrived to make back women's voice heard in mainstream American literary product. Among those eminent writers and literary scholars were Barbara Christian, Mary Hellen Washington, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelo, Paul Marshal, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker who have attempted to handle enduring problems African American women have gone through in their life. In their entire works, either prose or poetry, they have raised the question of female identity in many aspects of black life. Toni Morrison is one of the inspirational figures who wrote about the suffering and dehumanization of African American women and how the latter have lost the very essence of identity. Morrison's major concern in *The Bluest Eye* is to shed light on the destructiveness of white beauty and the latter's impact on the African Americans. This chapter is aimed at showing how Morrison in her *The Bluest Eye* attempts earnestly to address the issue of identity crisis and raise black and white consciousness in the American white male-dominated society.

To raise black female consciousness, most of Afro-American writers opted for black feminism as a literary movement and a mode of writing. The primary focus of black feminism has been to tackle issues like gender inequality, white racism, male oppression, and raise women's status in all walks of life. Black feminism is "the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities-intellectual,

political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic".[1] The objective of Toni Morison is twofold; on the one hand, as a black feminist she aims at establishing a decent place for black women in the patriarchal oppressive society in which women of color suffer from white prejudice and black male dominance. On the other hand, she has worked to show the journey of self-assertion undertaken by black woman in the dominant white American society where color is a pivotal constituent of self worth. Most interestingly, she embarks on a kind of investigation of identity crisis and double-consciousness experienced by black women.

Toni Morrison is one of the prominent African American women writers who have combated racism, sexism and ostracism via their fictional and non-fictional works. She proves to be the most stunning and practical writer who "does not always write in ways other wish" but "has to solve certain kinds of problems in writing"[2]. In most of her literary writings, she handles the theme of identity crisis inflicted on African Americans and causing them mental torment and self-contempt. *The Bluest Eye* is considered one of best novels portraying the gravity of black individual's internalization of derogatory images associated with "blackness" in mainstream popular culture. In this sense, Manuala Lopez Ramirez stresses

> Social and racial minorities experience insidious trauma as a result of the cruelty inflicted by the dominant group, usually the whites. Hence, they internalize feelings of inferiority and self contempt, which are projected onto them by the patriarchal Western discourse.[3]

The pivotal idea in the novel is the exploration of the pernicious impact of American narrow standards of beauty on the blacks. *The Bluest Eye* portrays the life of the black

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[1]-Quoted in Patricia Hill Collins. "WHAT IN A NAME? Womanism, Black Feminism, and beyond". ProQuest Research Library. 1996 p.12

[2] - Toni Morrison and Nellie McKay. "An Interview with Toni Morrison". Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press. 2015 p.417

[3] - Manuela Lopez Ramirez. "The Theme of Shattered Self in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and a *Mercy".* Journal of English and American Studies. 2013 p.76

community in the United States in the 1940s and how racism had disadvantaged the alleged "Other" and prevented him from enjoying "the American Dream". It narrates a sad story of shattered African American girl named Pecola who has undergone adverse calamities of marginalization and exclusion in Lorain, Ohio where Morrison spent most of her childhood. The whole story is interwoven around Pecola who is just 12 years old black girl descendent from a poor family who live on the margin of American society. She is an adolescent black girl who falls victim of her internalization of Western white standards of beauty and her immersion in white culture which has engendered an alter ego to fit into the dictates of her hostile and unwelcoming society. The acquisition of blue eyes becomes Pecola's priority one in her life to secure a decent status and conform herself with the mainstream American culture of beauty. Nonetheless, her dream becomes a nightmare after being raped and impregnated by her father who has participated in aggravating his daughter's social status and preventing her from getting a toehold in society. Such incestuous rape is the ultimate breach of trust of fatherhood and the most abhorrent form of violation. Having been raped by her indifferent father, Pecola becomes a taboo figure and sinks into madness and accept her inevitable fate. Cholly's rape of his daughter is a testimony that he cannot nurture fatherly love for Pecola. Being raped by her own father and unable to fit white beauty standards, people either black or white despise and stigmatize her. The social and parental rejection Pecola experiences cause her identity crisis and mental disorder-schizophrenia. Pecola and most black people in the novel learned to abhor themselves; therefore, they did not succeed to have happy life.

Pecola as well as most Afro-American women lost their genuine self and identity which resulted in developing a wrong understanding of the self embodied in looking at the self through the eyes of the other, the whites. That is to say, they developed "double consciousness" which is

a term used by Du Bois in his conceptualization of blacks' inner feeling when identifying themselves. Du Bois underscores the fact that the blacks lack self-esteem and self-worthiness which lead to looking at the self via the whites as he states: " This sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity".[1]

The African American feminist writers pioneered by Toni Morrison have striven to handle the problem of double-consciousness and make the black community aware of the importance of restoring the black identity. Most importantly, the black women writers and feminists contrived to strengthen African Americans' humanity and enable them to address double-consciousness and get rid of internalized inferiority as the case with Claudia in *The Bluest Eye.*

II-1-Double-consciousness and Internalization in *The Bluest Eye*

Due to the longstanding racial pressure exercised by the dominant white society, the blacks have lost self-confidence and start looking at themselves through the eyes of their white counterparts. The concept of double-consciousness was originated by Du Bois in his outstanding book entitled *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Regarding Du Bois, Afro-Americans have developed dual personalities due to their African origin and actual citizenship as Americans. That is to say, they live "twoness" of split identity-Americaness and Africaness. On the ground of this double personality, they embrace "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder".[2] Toni Morrison explores the theme of double-consciousness in *The Bluest Eye* to display the dilemma of living as black and American in American white society. As a practical and self-critical writer,

[1] - W.E.B Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Thrift Ed,1984. p.xiii
[2] - ibid, p.xiii

she delves deeper into the black individual's psyche and addresses his need to make balance between the white culture and his African American heritage.

The plight of double-consciousness remained a primordial concern to the black empowerment movement, from " The publication of James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobigraphy of an Ex-Colored Man* (1913) through Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988)"[1] and *The Bluest Eye* (1970). The latter addresses the black community's appropriation and internalization of white culture and European standards of beauty and their destructive impact on the black individual.

Because of their skin color, Afro-Americans in *The Bluest Eye* have not been considered full citizens but outsiders who have always been subjected to suspicion and rejection for their racial and cultural differences. Their instinct identity had been rejected by the dominant white society considering them outcasts and intruders who should adjust and conform themselves with white culture to carve out a "Third Space" for themselves. However, their conformity with white standards of beauty is infeasible due to the fact that "the Breedloves are "the very antithesis of the standardized, ideal (white) American family."[2]

African Americans had been coerced to judge themselves through the whites' lens. Such attitude led to a split in their identity, they were no more in harmony with the self when trying to behave white in an attempt to feel secure and gain the acceptance of white American society. To safeguard themselves, they sought to hide their black identity and live in disguise. In other words, they endeavored to mask their true identity to conform to the white standards of living. Thus, Afro-Americans have suffered from a psychological turmoil due to the split in their

[1]- Andrew Baily,Samantha Brennan, Will Kymlicka,Jacob Levy, Alex Sager,Cark Wolf. *Broadview Analogy of Social and Political Thought*. Toronto: Broadview Press. 2008 p.144
[2]-Quoted in Manuela Lopez Ramirez"The Theme of Shattered Self in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and a *Mercy"*. Journel of English and American Studies. 2013 p 78

identity as Africans by nature and Americans by citizenship. Consequently, they have been denied their Africaness as well as their Americaness.

Seeing themselves through the eyes of whites incarnates the Du Boisian concept of double-consciousness which indicates the relation between the black individual and community, and also the past and the future. Most black characters in Morrison's fictions, mainly in *The Bluest Eye*, think about their future life and imagine how their entire life would change if they were white and able to get rid of haunting thought of being in opposition to the whole society. They always fear being ostracized by the dominant white community which makes them isolated and disassociated from the mainstream American life. To draw public awareness, Morrison "dramatizes the devastating effect of chronic shame on her characters' sense of individual and social identity, describing their self-loathing, self-contempt, their feelings that they are, in some essential way, inferior".[1] Actually Pecola' s fervent desire to look white and avoid been ostracized by having blue eyes makes her prone to madness. In many ways, *The Bluest Eye* is a manifestation of whites' objectification of the blacks exemplified and epitomized in the character of Pecola. As Cynthia Davis emphasizes: "Pecola is the epitome of the victim in a world that reduces persons to objects and then makes them feel inferior as objects".[2]

The blue eyes Pecola yearns to get would change how the society would see her and how she would see the society. Ironically, she hungers for a great physical transformation not just to look beautiful like a doll with blond hair and white skin, but to be the most beautiful in the whole world by possessing bluest eyes ever in order to get an extreme conformity with Western standards of beauty, which makes her jump into craziness and lose her sense of Blackness. "By

[1]- J. Brooks Bouson. *Quite as it is kept, Shame Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison.* New York: State University of New York Press. 2020 p.04
[2] -Davis Cynthia. "Self, Society and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction," The United States of America: University of Wisconsin Press.1982 p.330

looking at themselves through the eyes of a white culture, the Breedlove family lose all notion of their own black identity".[1] Her sense of identity is "split, broken, and dispersed into its abjected images, its alienated representations".[2]

The imposition of white culture on the black individual and the denial of his black culture resulted in self-hatred and contempt. It develops in the individual a sense of unworthiness. Such imposition has been promoted through popular culture which has coerced the blacks to hate their black legacy and God-given skin, which leads to cultural disassociation. Discussing the marginalization of minority culture in the dominant white society, Pia Kohler explains:

> It is the dominant culture's denial of its multicultural nature. The ideals of the minority culture are ignored and not presented in the realms of mass media or at schools, which begins to force the minority to assimilate with the popular at large, and devalue its own system.[3]

The most noticeable part of the novel which exhibits Pecola's suffering from double-consciousness and loss of identity is in page 49 when the narrator portrays her appearance: "So the distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (49). The quote also suggests that the rejection of blackness has been internalized by the desperate protagonist.

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[1] - Timothy B. Powell. "Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page". Pennsylvania: Penn Libraries. 1990 p.751

[2] - Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave,2001p.78

[3] - Pia Kohler. *Realisation of Black Aesthetic in Toni Morrison'sThe Bluest Eye*, Unpublished Thesis, University of Tampere. 2006 p.24

Internalization is the process of adopting or incorporating norms and values of someone else to be yours.[1] For post-colonial authors, internalization means the adoption of the values of the "white" dominant culture and religion, and in this case is African Americans' adoption of European and Christian values. A variety of white norms and values have been internalized by black individuals in *The Bluest Eye* and most of these values are related to Christianity which, for its part, is based on oppositional binaries of "the differences between good and evil, righteous and unrighteous, believer and non believer, are clearly demarcated"[2]. This dualism stands in a blatant contrast to the African theology in which good and evil are interrelated.[3] On this ground, "[i]n order to adapt [to the white culture], both Pauline and Pecola have to embrace the Western concept of dualism—of believing that life is divisible, that good is distinguishable from evil, that the past, present, and future are disconnected".[4] Such dualism is omnipresent in *The Bluest Eye* which pinpoints that black characters are deeply influenced by Christianity as a symbol of white culture. Pauline and her daughter Pecola have been inspired by Christianity, and that inspiration is manifested in their view of the world as an oppositional dualism that results not only in a split in personality but also the loss of identity altogether.

In *The Bluest Eye*, internalization of white narrow standards of beauty is one of the outcomes of white racism against black minority. To safeguard herself, the female protagonist Pecola hankers for anything in compliance with the white standards of beauty including bluest eyes:

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[1]-Patrick Philips, Ben francis. Suzanne Webb and Victoria Bull. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.Eighth Edition. Oxford University Press.2010p.815

[2] - Alexander, Allen. "The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." *African American Review*. 1998 p.294

[3] -Ibid p.297

[4] - Ibid p.300

> It has occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those that held the pictures, and knew the sights-if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. Her teeth were good, and at least her nose was not big and fat like some of those who were thought so cute. If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly [her father] would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove [her mother] too. Maybe they'd say, '' Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes.(46)

Having been stripped from their blackness and Americaness, African Americans have gone through self-destruction and self-contempt. They became no more in harmony with the self as it is the case with the female protagonist Pecola who hankers for blue eyes, since the bloom of her youth, in order to look white as whiteness is the yardstick of beauty in mainstream white culture. She believes that beauty and self-worthiness are associated with whiteness and blue eyes and, consequently, she is desperate to be blessed with them. Her adoration for this emblem of white beauty and repulsion of Blackness reflect a split in her character that is white in disguise, which underscores her detachment from the self and suffer from identity crisis that cause mental and psychological traumas. With a torn identity it is difficult to get a positive image of the self as Pickering suggest: "an intense struggle – not only against external images and representations of you objectified as Other, but also against all you have internalized from those images and representations, absorbed into your own twoness,your own torn self."[1]

Such torn self and identity crisis seem an immediate outcome of double-consciousness from which Pecola suffers a lot. Having two entities or halves in one body engender an internal conflict the protagonist manages to allay its impact by trying to get rid of her black halve in order to live up to the ideal of white beauty and change the outlook of people towards her. As Shelby Steel rightly points out "to be black was to be a victim; therefore, not to be a victim was not to be a black".[2] It is worthwhile to mention that Pecola drinks too much milk from Shirly Temple

[1]-Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave,2001p.77
[2] -Steel Shelby, "Black Consciousness in Perspective," The American Review. 1989 p.58

glass in order to acquire the whiteness of milk and the beauty of Shirley Temple doll. She also eats Mary Jane candies thinking that by doing so she ingests Mary Jane's beauty then looks pretty herself: " To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane"(50). Such obsession and unthinkable behavior highlight the fact that Pecola undergoes identity crisis of self-loathing. In this process, Pecola chooses to internalize the Western standards of white beauty and superiority and forces herself to function according to those social standards. She averts to look black since blackness and ugliness work in tandem with ugliness in the dominated white society. Pecola's plight to live with the paradoxical binary "whiteness versus ugliness" leads to disastrous consequence. In this respect, Morison points out:

> When the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble ... The concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the western world, and we should have nothing to do with it. Physical beauty has nothing to do with our past, present or future. Its absence or presence was only important to "them", the white people who used it for anything they wanted.[1]

Pecola's passive attitude of compliance with the white standards of beauty leads to an undesirable outcome, she lives as a pariah and fails to change her fate. She does not succeed in moving the racial veil which prevents her from exposing and embracing her black identity, which makes her detached not only from the society but from herself too. This internal turmoil paves the way for her painful downfall. All her attempt to look white ends in vain since her wish of acquiring a blue eye to look beautiful is unreachable, unfeasible, and more hallucinatory. It is quite pitiable that she is unaware of the practicability of her quest in a society that indoctrinates its inhabitants with white supremacy.

[1] - Quoted in Monika Cupta, *Women Writer in the Twenty Century Literature.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2000.p 65

The Breedloves are not able to surmount the conflicting values of white supremacy they endure on a daily basis; both Pauline as well as Cholly are frustrated by their status quo and miserable life. Their disappointment leads to frequent violence between the couple who cannot mend their broken marital relationship. “No less did Cholly need her. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires”(42). Cholly averts Pauline for not being able to be his model, while Pauline abhors Cholly for not being her savior and protector. The relationship between Pauline and her husband Cholly symbolizes the relation between the “Primitive Other/Object” and the “civilized subject” in a sense that Pauline regards Cholly antithetical to her own presumptive goodness.

Like her daughter Pecola, Pauline too internalizes the white standards of beauty and denies her own in an attempt to live up to the standards of Western version of beauty. To allay her assumed ugliness, she detaches herself from her African American heritage by imitating the white Other and finds “beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise” (127) in the Fishers’ house which represents for her an alternative realty to feel happy. She feels delighted with her stereotypical role as a maid: “She became what is known as an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all of her needs.”(127)

Pauline’s internalization of the white standards of beauty and lifestyle drive her to show interest in makeup, hairstyle and clothes. Such behavior causes family internal conflicts and angers her husband Cholly who cannot resist his wife’s blind obsession with white beauty because she does so for the sake of conforming herself with whites’ approach of beauty not to please him. In a desperate attempt to save herself, Pauline tries to revolutionize her lifestyle by looking white:

> I'member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed my hair up like I'd seen hers on a magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time. I thought I'd see it through to the end again, and I got up to get me some candy. I was sitting back in my seat, and I taken a big bite of that candy, ant it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth. I could of cried. I had good teeth, not a rotten one in my head. I don't believe I ever did get over that. There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a fron tooth gone. (123)

Pauline's culture as well as her family become the "Other" as she acquiesces to the dictates of white society and accept to play the stereotypical role of "ideal servant"(127). Having internalized the idea of white superiority, Pauline immerses herself in white culture in which being white is being blessed. "The movies are the primary vehicle for transmitting these images for public consumption."[1]In an attempt to escape white prejudice she tries to look like movie stars so she can be accepted and appreciated, which engenders identity fragmentation. "By looking at themselves through the eyes of a white culture, the Breedlove family lose all notion of their own black identity."[2]

Not being aware of social codes that govern American society and culture, Pauline makes of herself a subject of mockery. Her ardent desire to transgress the reality of blackness does not level her up in the social racial straddle. She too, like her daughter, has double-consciousness reflected in her attempt to have two faces or halves in one character. Despite her best efforts to carve out a decent place among her white fellows, she is doomed to failure even when behaving white. By looking at themselves through the eyes of white culture and people, Pauline dreams to become a movie star as Jean Harlow or Clark Gable, which is a conspicuous manifestation of her detachment from black identity and family's loss a sense of their black

[1]-Malin LaVon Walther. "Out of Sight: Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty". *African American Review*: Louis University. 1990 p.776

[2] -Timothy B. Powell. *Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page*. Pennsylvania: Penn Libraries.1990 p.751

identity: "It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question." (39)

Undoubtedly, the two female characters Pecola and her mother are victims of their influence by white culture and obsession with overt white beauty. Pauline is an extension to her daughter's foolishness with white values; she is highly haunted by her obsession with movie stars who represent white standards of female beauty. Her hallucination with whiteness pushes her to mould herself according to what she experiences in the cinema, where she thinks "she learned all there was to love and all there was to hate" (122). From the films she internalizes the myth of white beauty and lifestyle which constitute a dualistic opposition with the myth of blackness and the black Primitive. As far as Pickering is concerned, the early non-European studies about Primitiveness stress that "the Primitive was nomadic rather than settled into a territorial state; sexually promiscuous by cultural sanction rather than monogamous and grouped in nuclear family units."[1]

The profundity of movies on her character is immense to the extent she spends most of her leisure in theatre watching movies. Unpredictably, her foolishness with movie white stars drives her to disdain her own daughter Pecola whom she looks at as a reminder of ugliness and misery. It is important to note that she is not content when she gives birth to Pecola because of her internalization of the assumption that the black woman is "the antithesis of American beauty".[2] Unpredictably, she regards her firstborn ugly as she states " But I knewed she was ugly. Headful of pretty hair, but lord was ugly" (126). She cannot give Pecola an unconditional motherly love because she evaluates her according to her overt physical beauty, and Pecola cannot meet her mother's obsession with whiteness. Indeed, Pecola symbolizes to her mother the

[1]-op.cit., Timothy B. Powell p.52
[2] - William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage*. New York: Bantam. 1968 p. 33

unachievable dream of desired overt beauty. On this ground, Pauline is considered one of the figures who transmit a sense of self hatred to Pecola, whom she considers as a symbol of failed expectation and desire.[1] It is worth noting that despising their image stems from the negative role played by the mass media and society that promote twisted white beauty standards. Pauline's fascination with white standards of beauty leads her to dislike her daughter Pecola and lavish all her love and tenderness on the daughter of her white mistress. Pauline's lack of parental interest and emotions are depicted in the scene when making a pie in her mistress's house. She hits Pecola for tipping over a pan of blueberry cobbler and dropping it on the floor. Because of Pecola's scream, Frieda starts crying and Pauline comes to comfort the baby of her mistress, but she overlooks her own daughter. She becomes furious as she bursts out:"Crazy fool…..my floor, mess……look what you ……work……get on out….now that……crazy…..my floor, my floor……my floor" (109). After that "Pecola picked up the laundry bag, heavy with wet clothes, and we stepped hurriedly out the door. As Pecola put the laundry bag in the wagon, we could hear Mrs. Breedlove hushing and soothing the tears of the little pink-and-yellow girl" (109). Pauline's attitude radically changes when she turns to white baby to calm her down with tender and loving words. Her obscene treatment of her daughter and motherly tenderness towards the white baby emphasize her ardent endeavor to disconnect herself with anything in relation with blackness.

Pauline and Cholly are brokenhearted characters who are destroyed by their obsession with white beauty and values. They enjoy their life in the South where their heritage has been preserved, but their life turns upside down when they moved to the North where people and culture are different, they face the lack of support from the community in which they are

[1] - Seema Bachir. "Colour as Identity: Colorism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye".* India*:* The Creative Launcher.2018 p.527

bombarded by the worthiness of white values and the triumph of white standards over black ones. The Breedlove regards themselves unattractive and worthless.

> The master had said, " you are ugly people". They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said: " You are right." And they look the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (p 39)

The detrimental impact of systematic racism is immense to the extent Pauline averts her black heritage and belonging. She transfers that hatred to her daughter, Pecola. In this sense, self-loathing becomes transgenerational transmitted from mother to daughter and from generation to generation.

Pauline is unable to stand up to white domination and protect her own family; quite on the contrary, she opts for the glorification of white American values and considers her family members a source of everything she dislikes. In other words, Pauline loses her true identity as a black woman and tries to develop a false womanhood as an "ideal servant" to the Fishers. When she is in the latter's mansion, she behaves as a respected employee enjoying luxurious life of white beauty and privileges. Pecola in the eyes of her mother is a reminder of ugliness and lifelessness. Pauline does not care about her and denies her rights for mother's love, which dramatizes her repulsion of black race. In this respect, the narrator, Claudia, states: " As long as Pecola looked the way she did, as long as she was ugly, she would have to stay with these people. Somehow she belonged to them. Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored and despised at school, by teacher and classmates alike" (45). At school she is bullied for being black by contemptuous boys with whom she shares the same race. Furthermore, teachers do not treat Pecola and her likes on equal terms, which encourages her classmates to mock and play tricks against her.

Contempt made by Pecola's schoolfellows is another concrete example of the traumatic experiences she has undergone. Her difficult life conditions along with her mother's hatred push her to leave home in search of peace of mind. However; she feels trapped outside as she faces a twisted version of beauty that is similar to the one nourished by her mother.

Pecola's life is undesirable either at home or outside as she is rejected by her family members and outsiders. She is non-existent and invisible in the hateful eyes of those who have absorbed white standards of overt attractiveness as it is the case with Mr. Yacobouski, a store seller. The latter is unable or unwilling to recognize Pecola's presence in his store because he considers her an ugly object unworthy of looking at and not worthy for touch. His staunch despise of black race is reflected in his impulsive decision not to look at his client Pecola:

> Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary. (48)

Yacobouski's condescending behavior is a model of racism and white bigotry that have plagued American society. He represents a tiny quintessential picture of the mainstream mindset when dealing with "the Other". In a racist country as it is the case in the U.S.A the individual "gains presence by how one looks rather than by being there".[1] According to Yacobouski, Pecola is not worthy of respect owing to the fact that her looking does not correspond with the white standards of beauty. For him she is invisible and unrecognizable as it is highlighted by the narrator:

[1] - Malin La Von Walther. "Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty",http://about.jstor.org/term, accessed 19 Feb2017, p.778

> She looks up at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness. (49)

Mr Jacobowski is the quintessential figure of hatred and bigotry who does no regard Pecola worth seeing because it is blackness that accounts for and creates the vacuum in his fateful eyes. Instead of treating her as a human being, he objectified her in a derogatory manner. His act of selling Mary Jane's with their blue eyes represents white society's sense of white superiority over non-black people. By doing so, he instigates her odium of her black identity and downgrades her self-estimation. In other words, selling Mary Jane candies symbolizes whites' sale of self-loathing to black people.

Jacobowski's patronizing behavior and lack of decorum make Pecola feel stigmatized and condemned for being black and ugly. Thus, in addition to the pernicious impact of white hegemony Pecola endures, the latter' situation worsens after being the subject of her family hatred and underestimation.[1] For that reason, she longs to disappear from this world through attempting to hide her natural appearance and look white as she demonstrates:

> 'Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away.... Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (45)

[1]-Paul Douglas Mahaffey.*"The Adolescent Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class in Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye"* Race, Gender & Class Journal. : http://www.jstor.com/stable/43496824.p.158

Morrison tries to unravel the impact of racism on black women through the painful portrayal of Pecola's suffering, and inquiry of the damaging outcome of Pocola's effort to integrate in the American society and the undesirable reward embodied in her rejection as a pariah and an outsider. Even though she is sympathetic with Pecola, Morrison rebukes her foolishness with the white standards of beauty and her conformity with one sided concept of physical beauty and attractiveness. She also spurns Pecola's internalization of white version of beauty and implicitly urges African Americans to question and embrace the overt reality of their body. Through her projection of the undesirable outcome of double-consciousness and racial internalization, Morrison seems a cautionary novelist who exposes the gravity of the American white society's association of beauty and Americaness with whiteness.

The internalization of white image of beauty is not problematic for black women only, but for black men too. Morrison digs deeper into the black characters' psyche and tries to figure out the impact made by white culture. In her *Song of Solomon* (1977), the protagonist Milkman detests Hagar's curly hair in contrast to the light silky hair of his new girl friend. From the whites' standpoint of physical beauty, having silky hair is an attribute of beauty. Because of the leverage of mass media and dominant culture, Milkman as many black characters, males and females as well, imbibes the white defined image of beauty. Such norms of overt beauty serve the interest of white supremacists and do harm black women and hinder their assimilation in the dominant white society in spite of their longstanding endeavor to be a respectable constituent of American society.

Pecola as well as Milkman struggle to acquire racial identity; however, both encounter obstacles when grappling with two paradoxical racial identities: black and white. They disgust their race and skin color because, in their eyes, blackness is the antithesis of beauty. Their

internalization of unworthiness of black race makes of blackness an antithetical pattern of physical beauty which remains hard-acquiring and dreamlike for many black individuals. By employing true to life characters as Pecola, Pauline and Claudia, Morrison urges her black fellows to be themselves and embrace authentic black beauty since adopting white standards of beauty proves catastrophic on the individual and communal level. More importantly, as a response to help her fellows to reconcile with the self, she offers an alternative definition of female beauty which "insists upon racial identity as its cornerstone".[1]

II-2-Toni Morrison's Redefinition of Beauty and Racial Identity

In her fictional and non-fictional works, Toni Morrison tackles the issue of female beauty and its formulation in the public sphere. Her writings have sparked feminists' interest and paved the way for the reconsideration of mainstream standards of beauty. From her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, to *Song of Solomon* and *Tary Baby*, and interviews and articles, Toni Morrison tries to demystify the concept of popular white beauty and show its pernicious impact in shaping the black individual's identity. Her criticism is based on rejecting the imposed standards of white beauty and propose another concept of beauty that does not separate black women "from reality"[2].The blacks have been inculcated that beauty is a white entity with blond hair, blue eyes, keen nose, and thin lips. Such standards of beauty do not correspond the instinct natural looking of the black individual who finds himself lost in such hostile environment that is riddled with racist acts and irreconcilable realities. Gena Elise Chandler argues that such beauty is less possible to be obtained for women of color than for white women.[3]

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[1]-Ibid, p.782

[2]-Malin La Von Walther, "Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty",http://about.jstor.org/terms, accessed 19 Feb2017 p.776

[3]-Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu. *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia.* London: Green Wood Press.2003 p.196

The Bluest Eyes is the embodiment of Morrison's endeavor to reshape public consciousness and the importance of embracing Blackness instead of Whiteness that makes the black individual a hater of blackness. It is noteworthy that the novel was written when the struggle for justice was at its peak and Civil Right Movements were active at different political and social angles. More interestingly, "Black is Beautiful" was one of the slogans adopted by these movements; therefore, Morrison's attempt to redefine mainstream standards of beauty can be regarded as a reaction to theses movements whose agenda was to raise black-consciousness and give strength to the black's self-esteem.

Morrison provides a new insight into beauty that is useful for the survival of the black community and attached to its reality; in contrast, any immersion in white culture may lead to self-deconstruction as it is the case with Pecola. By demonstrating Pecola's dichotomous world of racial oppression, Morrison critiques the existing notion of white beauty standards and "white logos". She underscores the unfairness of such hegemonic definition of beauty which suits only the white majority and makes white supremacy a living reality.

As a leading advocate of race, Morrison voiced her objection to the way beauty is defined by white consumer culture because it separates black women "from reality". She blamed white artists, writers and mass media for drawing an unrealistic and hegemonic image about beauty and projecting standards of beauty that fit only white society and make the life of the blacks unbearable. In his discussion of the need for the creation of fiction that stands in contrast to the hegemonic American literature, Timothy B. Powell lines with Morison as he stresses:

> The battle becomes, for the critic and novelist of Afro-American literature, to de-center the white logos, to create, a universe of critical and fictional meanings where blackness will no longer connote absence, negation, and

> evil but will come to stand instead for affirmation, presence, and good-a struggle for the right/write/rite of Afro-American literature to exist.[1]

Mainstream culture and media help in imposing this hegemonic white image to denigrate black beauty. For example, in most of literary products written by white literary scholars, black women are depicted as ugly with "callous hand", "curly hair" and "tired feet" and "to be beautiful one must have soft hands and dainty feet".[2] Associating these features with blackness demonstrates that many blacks as Pecola cannot consider themselves beautiful unless there is a change in the mindset of white society or in the way beauty is defined. However, Morrison disagrees with the white's association of black features with ugliness. Inversely, she regards these features an authentic representation of genuine beauty:

> When Morrison comes to redefine beauty in her later work, she connects it firmly to reality, the reality of the body and racial experience. She moves from claiming that black women are OK with short neck, callous hands, and tired feet to claiming that these attributes are beautiful and more authentic than popularized standards of white female beauty, because they reflect women who are useful and real.[3]

Obsessed with white beauty and its associated privileges, black women lost a sense of racial belonging leading to longstanding identity crisis. Their shattered identity was reflected in their split personality. They lost self-confidence and became blind imitators of their white fellows in an attempt not to be the "Other" but "Us" and part of the American social fabric. Highlighting Morrison's effort to promote consciousness of racial identity within black community, Malin Walther states:

> Morrison redefines female beauty by demanding that it be grounded in racial identity. Black must love and desire racially authentic beauty, rather

[1]-Timothy B. Powell. "Toni Morrison: The Struggle to Depict the Black Figure on the White Page" Pennsylvania: Penn Libraries: 1990 p.748
[2] - Malin La Von Walther. "Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty",http://about.jstor.org/terms, accessed 19 Feb2017 p.776
[3]- Ibid p.776

> than imitating other races' forms of beauty. To do anything less is to deny oneself. For Milkman to love Hagar's hair is to love himself and his racial identity. [1]

Throughout the development of the different scenes in *The Bluest Eye*, the reader figures out Morrison's embracement and adoption of the above definition of beauty. Such adoption is reflected in Claudia's pride of her race as an honored black female. Though she experienced the same living fraught conditions as Pecola, Claudia survives and triumphs over racial prejudices due to the fact her parents have "the inner strength to withstand the poverty and discrimination of a racist society and to provide an environment in which their children can grow".[2] She prides herself on her racial identity and dislikes her fellows' tendency towards internalizing the white criteria of female beauty as she stresses when she breaks down a baby doll: " What made people look at them and say Awwwww, but not for me? The eye slide of black woman as they approached them on the street and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handle them" (23).

Unlike Pecola and Pauline, Claudia is a gallant woman who does not succumb to the dictates of white culture. She has an innate adoration of black race and identity. More importantly, in spite of the constant uneasiness with white dominant culture and the exploitative mentality of a society conditioned by patriarchal values, she remains stern and does not descend to her fellows' madness with white standards of beauty which detach them from the physical reality of their body. As an unconventional character, she remains attached to the reality of her body which contributes to a great extent in her survival. She rejects what stands for white beauty such as the white doll which, in her eyes, works as a model of physical white beauty; therefore, she dismembered it in a defiant act to the mainstream presentation of beauty. By doing so, she

[1] -- Ibid, p.782
[2] -Klotman Phyllis. "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*" in: *Black American Literature Forum*. 1979 p.124

presents herself as an archetypal character who challenges the imposed form of identity and adheres to blackness as an instinct identity.

Through Claudia, Morrison sets up standards of black beauty. Instead of confirming herself with the white criterion of beauty, Claudia rebels against the orthodox notion of beauty and conform with beauty which reflects her racial and corporal reality "because black beauty is firmly connected to reality".[1] Unlike Pecola, she feels in harmony with her black body and refuses to be objectified by her white fellows. By doing so, she ascertains that transcending whiteness is a way forwards to self-celebration, which make of her the antithesis of Pecola who is doomed to failure due to her obsession with whiteness that is the yardstick of personal worthiness in American society. Morrison makes of Claudia the direct opposite of Pecola by whom she has been able to manifest her understanding and approach of female beauty. Her support of Claudia and critique of Pecola can respectively be interpreted as the failure of the latter and the success of the former. Claudia and her compassionate family exemplify the ability of African Americans to counter and rebel against racial oppression.[2] That is to say, she has a distinguished and strong character that helps her to reject the internalization of white values.

Most importantly, the rebellious Claudia seems antithetical to American standards of beauty. In stark contrast to Pecola who hates anything connected to black race, Claudia embraces her black heritage and hankers to be accepted for what she is. She finds comfort when considering herself black. Such self-acceptance and self-reconciliation help her to survive and resist white oppression when Pecola is doomed to failure.

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[1]- Malin La Von Walther. "Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty",http://about.jstor.org/terms, accessed 19 Feb2017 p.776

[2]-Manuela Lopez Ramirez."The Theme of Shattered Self in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and a *Mercy"*. Journel of English and American Studies. 2013 p.75

In spite of being black, living in the dominant white and racist society, Claudia is able to develop positive self-consciousness when breaking a white doll presented to her during Christmas. She does not fall in the trap of dual personality, but she is adamant to be herself. She overcomes the constant feeling of double-consciousness and makes herself in equal terms with her white counterparts. Unlike Pecola who idolizes white beauty, Claudia detests the white standards of beauty as she abhors Pecola's obsession with bluest eyes and finds strength when she looks at herself without making a mediator to judge her racial worthiness. Here Morrison "redefines female beauty by demanding that it be grounded on racial identity. Blacks must love and desire racially authentic beauty, rather than imitating other races' forms of beauty".[1]

Morrison presents Claudia as a counterpart to Pecola. The former does not wish to be white or look white. She is the only character who fights the imposition of white beauty standards. She hates her life conditions but she also dislikes white standards of beauty. Unlike Pecola, she is a revolutionary character who is proud of being black. Such pride is manifested in her anger and disenchantment when she receives a white blue-eyed baby doll for Christmas:

> I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, older girls, shops,magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured.(20)

Claudia's resistance of white beauty standards is manifested in dismembering the blue-eyed dolls given to her in the occasion of Christmas. Unlike Pecola, she is puzzled by other kids' obsession with having white dolls, and wonders how all adults think that they would be wonderful gift. Claudia' objective beyond dismembering these dolls has been to discover the reason why

[1]-Malin LaVon Walther. " Out of Sight: Toni Morrison's Revision of Beauty". The United States of America:African American Review.St. Louis University.2014 p.782

everyone seems fond of them. The rejection of white toy by Claudia can also be interpreted as an alert by Morrison to her black fellows to be aware of blind imitation and assimilation.

The distribution of these white dolls as gifts is more problematic than it appears as it implies that the blacks cannot be considered beautiful. By dismembering the white blue-eyed doll, Morrison makes of Claudia a rebel who deconstructs the concept of white superiority and every notion of white beauty as Malmgren: "the text composed by the adult Claudia, *The Bluest Eye*, carries on the same discovery procedure on a grander scale; it undertakes the deconstruction and demystification of the ideology that makes those dolls beautiful".[1]

Her refusal to become the "outsider" and her instinct self-loving help her to triumph over racial prejudice and white beauty standards represented in these dolls. In order to survive and heal her daily racial wounds, she links herself to her African American root as she does not long for white beauty and if anyone asks her about the gift she would hanker for Christmas, she would say:

> I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been, "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" I could have spoken up, "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and, since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward. (21-22)

Instead of admiring white beauty and swimming in the sea of whiteness as all black adults and kids, Claudia wants to be connected to her black community and African American roots. She yearns to be familiar with Big Mama's kitchen and enjoy listening to African American songs. As Cat Moses argues, such attachment to and admiration of ancestral heritage is

[1] - Carl D Malmgren. "Texts, Primers, and Voices in Toni Morrison's *The BluestEye".* In *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations – Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye.*New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007 p.154

fundamental in the survival of Claudia and her family[1], which proves, on the other side, that Pecola and her family's failure is due to their disconnection with their African American heritage.

In stark contrast to the Breedloves, the MacTeers are compassionate and self-caring with a great sense of self-loving and self-independence. Mr. and Mrs.MacTeer both are hardworking and loving parents who do their best to provide for their children Claudia and Frieda. Unlike the Breedloves, they are not hallucinated by the unreachable American Dream and values; they always focus on their reality and try to be themselves no matter the challenge. On this ground, the Macteers represent Morrison's quintessential example and ideology for the blacks to survive and triumph over Western lofty ideals and life-style. Claudia's family is able to overcome their hybrid cultural consciousness and make balance between their Americaness and Africaness.

In many respects, Morrison seems a racial strategist showing the outcome of adopting one version of beauty and its impact on the backs. Throughout her literary career, she critiques white-defined image of female beauty and proposes a new conception of beauty that is "black" as a substitute to white beauty. To do so, she creates unconventional and positive characters exemplified in Frieda and Claudia whom Morrison presents as defiant characters to mainstream culture. The issue of the blacks'internalization of white standards of beauty is just one facet of identity crisis the blacks experienced in the United States of America. The other facets are otherization and colorism which are the focus of the following sections.

[1]- Cat Moses. "The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye"*. In *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations – Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007 p.132

II-3-Otherization in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

On account of their otherization by their white fellows, black people have endured psychological torture and identity crises. The "Other" is always subjugated to denigration to serve the subject and acquiesce to his dictates. Therefore, according to Michael Pickering, the concept of the other "heightens attention both to the subjugation of the stereotypical Other, and to those who produce the stereotypical object and thereby by implication define themselves as subjects".[1] The concept of the "Other" can be easily incarnated in the behavior of white people towards black people, mainly African people during the previous few centuries. In his analysis of the concept of the "Other", Pickering talks about "the white racial phantasm of the Primitive" that he calls the "Primitive Other"[2]. According to Western European, the Primitive represented those who were weak and about to lose struggle because they were "lacking in the capacity to evolve", whereas the subject or the people with the fittest individuals dominate the weak [3]. In this respect, the Primitive symbolizes the polar opposite of Western Civilized Nations. Pickering highlights:

> Western societies [of the late 19th century] classifying themselves as modern and civilized relied heavily on the contrast between their own sense of advancement and the idea of racially backward and inferior societies. Those who were conceived as *inferior* in this way became *interior* to national identity in the West by becoming its Other, its decivilised counterpart.[4]

In the same manner, the Primitive became "the conceptual opposite of the civilized subject"[5]. In her *Playing in Dark*, Toni Morrison lines with Pickering's conception of the "Primitive Other" represented in the African American individual. Morrison suggests that

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[1] - Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave, 2001p.71
[2] -ibid, p.51
[3]-Ibid, p.54
[4] -ibid, p.51
[5] -ibid, p. 52

American identity has always been defined by its dual opposition with Africaness[1], making of the African American "the ultimate not-me", an object. Africaness has always been considered inconsistent with Americaness which has been associated with whiteness and superiority. "[Most African Americans] assume that "whiteness" is normal and synonymous with "American" and that members of other racial groups are abnormal exceptions"[2]. According to Joseph T. Skerrett, white Americans established themselves superior; while, they considered non-white Americans especially people of color as "exceptional" or the Other.

Despite the destructive nature of the process of otherization, the Other is fundamental to the creation and formation of the subject's identity. Oppositional dualism between "me" and "not me" is needed for the maintenance and the strength of the subject's identity to strike balance between "us" and "them"[3]. It is worth noting that the stereotypical Other is always identified as an object; whereas, those who make this object regard themselves subjects. "The Other is always constructed as an object for the benefit of the subject who stands in need of an objectified Other in order to achieve a masterly self-definition."[4]

The process of identifying the self as the "Other" triggers, according to Pickering, an identity crisis African Americans have suffered from, which proves that they have internalized the idea of Othering that engenders a split in the individual's identity. In this perspective, Pickering aligns himself with Du Bois' notion of double-consciousness as he states:

> The indelible effect of this recognition of yourself as Other creates a twoness of vision that allows you to see yourself only through the eyes of

[1] - Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992 p.52
[2] - Joseph T. Skerrett JR.. *Literature, Race and Ethnicity: Contesting American Identities* Virginia: Longman,2002 p.1
[3] - Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave,2001p.72
[4] - Ibid, p.71

> others, leaving your own, secret striving for a more independent sense of identity bereft in 'a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.[1]

Du Bois's concept of double consciousness recalls Edward Said's approach of otherization in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) in which he discusses the West's misconception of the Orient who has been Otherized for geographical, historical and racial reasons. In *Orientalism* Said argues that the Orient is represented in relation to the Orient in the binary opposition of "US" versus "them" or the Orient verus the Occident. In many respects, Orientalism is related to the concept of the Self, i.e the Occident and the Other, i.e the Orient. According to Ashcroft, Orientalism is "a Western invention, knowledge which constructs the East as the Other".[2] "The Orient is imposed as everything that the West is not"[3] , but the Occident is the civilizer who is in a mission to civilize the Other. The former is presented in Western mainstream culture as exotic, dangerous, uncivilized; whereas, the latter stands for everything good and appreciated.

According to Said, such binary opposition constitutes a kind of hierarchy in which one is honored/ privileged and the Other is undignified/ unprivileged. Binarism is extended to include binaries such as the colonizer/colonized, light/dark, civilized/uncivilized, and white/black. The latter binary is omnipresent throughout the sequence of the events in *The Bluest Eye* in which American society and The Breedlove constitute two oppositional entities of white versus black or "US" versus "THEM". The main female protagonist Pecola is otherized and ostracized because of her skin color which, from an Orientalist perspective, symbolizes backwardness, otherness and strangeness. Her skin color is the most influential factor to her vulnerability.

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[1] -Ibid, p.77
[2] -S. R. Moosavinia, N. Niazi and Ahmad Ghaforian, "Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the Study of the Self and the Other in Orwell's *Burmese Days". Studies in Literature andLanguage* Vol.2 No.1, 2011 p.105
[3] -Ibid, p.105

Although African American women were born in the United States of America and raised according to American ethics, they were not considered as American. They suffered from mistreatment, repression, depression and domination because of their gender and race. Such marginalization pushed them to behave as whites and adopt white culture so to earn society's respect. African Americans' reaction recalls Frantz Fanon's approach of the psyche of the colonized in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* in which he portrays the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon examines how the latter internalized white superiority which constitutes "inferiority complex" as he states "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality"[1]. In this respect, Pecola is the colonized who hankers to have blue eyes to look white and get rid of his racial belonging in an attempt not to be the "Other".

The otherization of black individuals by whites has distinguished the relationship between the two races for centuries. In *The Bluest Eye*, the "Other" is constructed through the dualism of "me" and "not-me" or "the other". The white dominant Americans in Lorain have perceived themselves as subjects or superior to the black who have been regarded as objects or representative of an inferior race. Their objectification of the black "Other" is in the hope of identifying the self and strengthening their identity. In her discussion of the relationship between the Self Americanism and the Other "Africanism", Morrison stresses in *Playing in Darkness:*

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.[2]

[1] - Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* London: Pluto Press, 2008 p.ii
[2]-Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard UniversityPress. 1992 p. 52

Africanism, to Morrison, does not mean only the experiences of those who have lived in Africa but also those Africans who came to the United States of America three centuries before when the trade of slavery was at its pick and the purchased slaves were no more than slaveholders' properties. According to Morrison, such historical dimension has played a tremendous role in shaping American consciousness and Americanism which had been regarded as the antithetical of Africanism and embodiment of freedom. That is to say, the dualism of Africanism and Americanism has been a determinant factor in understanding the Self represented in white Americans and the Other incarnated in black Americans. "Africanism is inextricable from the definition of Americanness"[1]. Throughout her *The Bluest Eye,* Morrison creates a similar structure based on blackness and Americaness in a community where the degrees of otherization are diverse.

The black community in *The Bluest Eye* suffers from otherization not only from white society but also from within. The construction of Pecola as the Other in her community depends overwhelmingly on "me"/"not-me"dichotomy which is clearly manifested in Claudia's confession about the victimization of Pecola:

> All of us [...] felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used—to silence our own nightmares.(205)

In her black community, Pecola is the Other who represents everything her black fellows dislike. African Americans' making of Pecola the Other enables them to strike balance between the self and its opposite which strengthen their identity and make them feel privileged. In other words, Pecola's ugliness helps African Americans in Lorain appreciate and have a sense of their

[1] - Ibid p.64

beauty. In this regard, Pecola also represents "the Primitive" Other in the black community as well as the white one. Such dualism between the Primitive and the civilized has always existed in the psyche of black community but at the same time it has been a kind of fantasy and illusion. African Americans' identity formation via the construction of the Other is a mere fantasy as Claudia confesses:

> we were not strong, only aggressive; we were not free, merely licensed; we were not compassionate, we were polite; not good, but well behaved. We courted death in order to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life. We substituted good grammar for intellect; we switched habits to simulate maturity; we rearranged lies and called it truth, seeing in the new pattern of an old idea of the Revelation of the Word. (205)

Claudia's above confession implies that the dualism between the Primitive Other and civilized subject is based on fantasy; however, some African Americans' belief in illusionary Primitiveness helps them to act as "the white oppressor". Most of the characters tend to imitate the "privileged" white and detach themselves from the Primitive other. Even though "the primitive society ever existed"[1], most of black people in *The Bluest Eye* believe in this myth which "allows racism's damaging after effects to operate and accumulate in the black communities."[2]

In the eyes of oppressed blacks, being white means you are privileged while being black means you are uncivilized and backward. For centuries, such racist tone has been institutionalized in America. Owing to the fact that the blacks have encountered a tremendous pressure of racial oppression, they internalized the idea of white superiority and back inferiority.

Most of the characters in the novel regard themselves inferior to whites who are defined as masters; therefore, they wish to get rid of their skin or bleach it so they look white.

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[1] - Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave, 2001p.75
[2] - Tuire Valkearki. *Religious Idiom and the African American Novel*.Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007 p.77

Eurocentric lofty ideals often associate worthiness with whiteness especially external standards of beauty. Throughout the text, Morrison lays bare this theme and shows the black characters' development of overwhelming self-hatred nourished by white standards:

> It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master has given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "you are ugly people". They looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement, saw, in fact,support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every move, every glance. (39)

Minority culture as black one was degraded and racism against the blacks was institutionalized even in schools and public facilities. Because the impact of racism has been immense, black students at early age internalized such desirability and over-valorized Western values; meanwhile, they despised their culture. For example, institutional racism is first manifested through Jane and Dick's reading assignment that is based on a primer written by William Elson and Wlliam Gray in the 1930s and used by American public schools to teach children how to read. Since their childhood, black children frequenting public schools had been indoctrinated with white values as shown in the following excerpt taken from the primer:

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (02)

Obviously, the primer corresponds to a privileged white American family leading a happy life and living in a comfortable house. The two Dick and Jane are white characters with blue eyes. Being taught such examples from their early age, children in the United States of

America learned about the norms/standards of a good American who should be white with happy parents. Evidently, those who did not correspond to this portrayal felt excluded as they were told implicitly that they could not be Americans as something about them did not correspond to the identification of an American. What is striking about the primer is the absence of the representation of black family members in America, or rather, the deliberate refusal to portray black people when representing the American society, which implies that their very existence was not worthy of representation.

It is clear from reading assignments that Americaness is associated with living in a pleasant house and having caring white parents with a number of pets and children. Most importantly, it also implies that happiness is related to their whiteness; being white means being happy. This excerpt is a conspicuous manifestation of white supremacy and privilege over the blacks who feels condemned for their racial features. Schools as public institutions reinforce the myth of whiteness by exposing black children to systematic racism during their early age, where they are supposed to bloom, makes most of them hate their racial-belonging.

The preface gives us an idea that the characters will go through harsh racial treatment. The text intended to show children either black or white, the everyday lives of " true and brave American boys and girls" and teach them how themselves could " become helpful American citizens".[1] Jane and Dick fit in white beauty standards; therefore, they are presented as role models to be appreciated and imitated by others. They represent a self-fabricated American image which embraces the dominant society's standards and its tendency to make every citizen subjected to American lofty idealism.

[1]- Quoted in Debra T Werrlein. "Not So Fast, Dick and Jane". In *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations – Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye – Updated Edition*, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007 p.196

Immediately following the first prime section, the same text is rewritten but this time without capitalization or punctuation. The text seems confusing but readable. It is followed by the third paragraph that is more confusing with no capitalization, punctuation and space between letters. It is unintelligible and chaotic. Since these three different paragraphs are set with different structures in the outset of the novel, that may give the reader an overview about the main characters' psychical development.

The first paragraph, written in formal English, can bear witness to the "ideal" and the perfect life of white American family represented in Dick and Jane. The second paragraph with less formal English can be related to the MacTeers who suffer from racism but survive. The third paragraph, with illegible English, can be related to the Breedloves whose life is troubled and meaningless as the written words make no sense or meaning.[1]

The use of Dick and Jane primers in public schools seemed destructive to black kids in multiple ways. First of all the use of positive image only about white kids as Jane and Dick and presenting them as role models might lead black kids believe that they were not concerned since they were black. Second, the exclusion of black kids to be represented in the primer could lead them to internalize white supremacy and black inferiority which would be fatal to their psyche as they are told and indoctrinated that they will never achieve the status of the white Americans because of their black color, as it is the case with Pecola who descends into madness after longstanding internalization of white beauty standards.

Jane and Dick reflect and stand for the materialistic American society; by contrast, the black children Pecola and Claudia do not have any reading assignment or public representation.

[1]- Carl D. Malmgren,"Texts, Primers, and Voices in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye".* In *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations – Toni Morrison's The Bluest.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007 p.152

Such systematic racism contributes in the degradation of black image in the dominant white society and creates self-hatred in black children. Its impact is tremendous on the individual and his destiny. For example, Pecola feels lost; therefore, she adores to look white, to be white and behave white to secure herself and feel accepted. She dreams having a blue eye that every girl child treasures so she can enjoy the privilege of whiteness and would be accepted into the world of "green-and-white" house. She even prays to have blue eyes and fulfill her dream of becoming lovely and loved. Like most black girls, Pecola thinks that " There is always the hope that if one fits the prescribed pattern, one will be seen as humane"[1];however, her dream has been snuffed out.

Morrison shows the reader the destructive impact of systematic racism ant its evil practice within American society in which being black is synonymous to being the rejected "Other". Through Pecola, the novelist presents a destructive example of African American society's self-contempt and self-detestation. She also sends us a message that self-hatred is a way towards self-destruction. Pecola is the victim of self –prejudice and self-loathing which have been dramatized by the brutality of her mother and father.

Through *The Bluest Eyes* Morrison attacks the prevailing concept of physical beauty. She criticized systematic racism for its impact in destroying the weak individual like Pecola. She shows its vicious circle of making the blacks develop a negative self-image and leave them no alternative but to hate themselves and their black identity.

As an advocate for the black race, Morrison tries to expose these problems and brings into awareness the issue of injustice and oppression exercised against the blacks. *The Bluest Eye* breaks the cycles of innocent silence and project the traumatic effect of racism on the black

[1] - Davis Cynthia. "Self, Society and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction" University of Wisconsin Press: The United States of America.1982 p.325

individual. More importantly, it brings to light the negative role played by institutions in dehumanizing the black and striping them from their identity. She also shows how otherization becomes a crippling social phenomenon within the black community, which is the subject to be explored in the next section.

II-4- Colorism-Intra-racism and Scapegoating of the Other

Through the different chapters of *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison tries to portray how the black female individual has been a victim of self-loathing and systematic racism that have torn her life asunder. Racism brings about colorism to the extent the black make hierarchy of skin colors. The novelist discloses how colorism is engraved in the psyche of African American people who are not subjected to racism but also use it against their own people. Walker defines " colorism" in her book *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour" [1] which mean some black people are racist against their own black fellows. The root of such prejudicial behaviour is not just racism, but "the internalization of the racist ideas"[2] . A portion of black people, especial light skinned ones, did not just idealize and internalize the European standards of beauty, but also made themselves superior to dark skinned people.

Due to the heterogeneity of black Americans, and to avoid being tainted "niggers" or "ugly", some blacks have developed a kind of hierarchy of black color. The more the individual is light-skinned the more he/she is respected by the whole society. Although these light skinned girls are under aged, white physical standards of beauty has a negative impact on their psyche. Light skinned girls regard themselves superior and beautiful when compared to other blacks;

[1]-Alice Walker. *In Research of Our Mothers' Garden. Womanist Prose*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic. 1983 p.287

[2]- Seema Bachir. "Colour as Identity: Colorism in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye"*.India*:* The Creative Launcher.2018 p.526

therefore, they downgrade and look down on their black counterparts. Such behavior has paved the way for the reinforcement of intra-racism and color hierarchy among the blacks themselves. For instance, Maurean, who is a student and originally black but light-skinned, is respected and by default loved by the whole black community on the account of being closer to the white standards of beauty. She is regarded beautiful by virtue of her color that entitles her to live up to the standards of physical white beauty as the lighter a girl is the prettier she is. Such false norms of beauty are manifested after the arrival of Maureen to the school:

> When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. She never had to search for *The Bluest Eye* -anybody to eat with in the cafeteria. (63)

According to Eurocentric norms, Maureen is considered beautiful. Her long hairs along with her white skin add to her attractiveness. The most brutal form of colorism is manifested through Pecola who is extremely impressed by Maureen since the latter possesses what is needed to be beautiful in the dominant white society. The insidious effect of the imposition of white standards on the blacks has engendered self-hatred and coerced them to judge themselves through the standards and the eyes of the Other who sustains his hegemonic culture through media. In this regard, *The Bluest Eye* Morison manifests her rejection of the practice of intra-racism which exacerbates the black's reconciliation with the self. Those who are mixed races take pride in their white lineage and try to quell the black side of their persona to associate themselves with whiteness.[1] Most of the light skinned characters abhor black color and underscore their yearning to get rid of their black heritage on the ground that they would be welcomed by the larger white society. Such theme of self-hating is manifested in most of

[1]- ibid p.226

Morrison's literary works such as *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. The protagonists in these novels feel confident and powerful when they disassociate themselves with black people and their black identity. Like Mr Dead and Jadline in the above mentioned novels, Pecola doesn't feel proud of her black heritage but ashamed because of the debilitating effect of color hierarchy within the larger community whether black or white.

Pecola is at the bottom of the social ladder and a victim of whites' supremacy as well as light skinned blacks'sense of privilige. The light skinned regard themselves superior due to their feeling of being an accepted "Other" in the circle of whiteness. Consequently, Pecola , like many black fellows, cannot escape the circle of colorism or intra-racism that stifles her and impedes her progress. She does not get sympathy even from her parents who instill in her hatred of blackness.

Colorism engenders an intra-racism within the Afro-American society in which African Americans " have formed a black hierarchy based on skin-color"[1]. Those who are light skinned blacks tend to regard themselves superior and do not associate themselves with their black fellows. Among those who are racists towards blacks is Geraldine who is a light skinned black individual trying to get rid of her African belonging and black identity. The mixed race characters such as Geraldine and her likes make a difference between people of color and a "nigger", which alludes that they deny their inborn blackness and half-African identity. To Geraldine, Pecola exemplifies "an ultimate embodiment of impurity and 'Funk'"[2]. Pecola is haunted by the myth of blackness that is associated with impurity and ugliness; that is why, she wants to get rid of "the dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of

[1] - Ibid, p.28
[2]-Tuire Valkearki. *Religious Idiom and the African American Novel.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007p.86

the wide range of human emotions" (83). In the mainstream American culture, this particular racial myth of blackness which denies reason is always associated with emotion and irrationality; whereas, the myth of whiteness is associated with purity, reason, and goodness.

Geraldine and her likes abhor and shy away from their cultural heritage by embracing the myth of whiteness and cleanliness instead of embracing their black race. They struggle not to look like black Americans and, in Valkeakari's words, "Living in a cultural environment that scorns and ridicules blackness, they have learned to survive by imitating whiteness".[1] This fact is manifested clearly when Geraldine underestimates her black "negroes"with "[h]air uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt" (91) whereas, she urges her son to behave and look as a white man by wearing blue trousers and white shaving hair "cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool" (87). She immerses herself in the white American culture and makes herself a model in the eyes of other mixed race women as she states: "white blouses starched, blue skirts almost purple from ironing" (82). Unlike the protagonist Pauline who has dressed in white stylish manner to satisfy her ego, mixed race women have trained themselves and their family members how to look white to please and serve their white husband. In the same vein the narrator states:

> They go to land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement: home economics to prepare his food; teacher education to instruct black children in obedience; music to soothe the weary master and entertain his blunted soul. (83)

However, Geraldine and other mixed race women's effort to dilute their black culture make them look mere blind imitators and slaves serving their "masters". As a light skinned person, Geraldine establishes a boundary between herself and the likes of Pecola to disassociate herself from blackness, because she believes that "the line between colored and nigger was not always

[1]-Ibd p.83

clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant" (87). That is to say, Geraldine as a descendent of mixed race finds it difficult to deal with the black Other and her hyphenated identity as black or white. She looks at Pecola as the undesirable Other; therefore, she does not want to be classified within the same category as Pecola to preserve that notion of othering. In the same vein, Pickering stresses: "The ideological function of othering is to attempt to make the relation stable, to give it a static and durable shape and temporally to fast-freeze the configurations of difference and similarity it constructs."[1]

The othering of Pecola and the likes of her do not come only from Geraldine but the latter extends that to her son Junior .She even inculcates in him a sense of self-hatred and advises him to distance himself from dark black children or what she calls "nigger". "White kids; his mother did not like him to play with niggers. She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud."(87)

It is interesting to note that intra-racism becomes a social code that prevents intermarriage between black families and those who are light skinned. Some light skinned black families struggle to preserve their lighter bloodline by getting married with each other despite the fact this intermarriage produces generations with permanent diseases. For instance, Soaphead Church is a light skinned black with biological features. His family distances itself from intermarrying with dark skinned family in order to make their bloodline lighter and enjoy the privilege of whiteness. They have been inculcated to separate themselves " in body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa; to cultivate the habits, tastes, performances that her absent father in law and foolish mother in law would have approved" (168). To keep their bloodline

[1]-Michael Pickering. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. London: Palgrave, 2001p.72

lighter, they get married with each other without exposing their dynasty and lineage to the possibility of getting darker. Despite this risk of producing family members suffering from mental disorder and permanent disfiguration, they prefer this practice because, in their eyes, it is worth doing to make the family acceptable in the dominantly white society.

Another form of intra-racism is manifested in scapegoating those black who are vulnerable and dark-skinned. Soaphead tricks Peccola when she asks him help her having blue eye. Pecola considers him as a savior who is able to save her and afford her wishes. Unexpectedly, he plays with her naivety and considers her quest for blue eyes logical. He uses her blind confidence in him to show her that he can play God. He asks her to give poisoned meat to a dog and if the latter behaves in an eccentric way or dies, this is a sign that her dream of getting blue eyes will come true. As expected the dog dies and the poor Pecola convinced herself that now she has blue eyes. Soaphead behaves in a condescending way and considers himself superior for the mere raison of having light black skin. He plays God in a complex gesture of superiority. “I did what You did not, could not, would not do: I looked at that ugly little black girl, and I loved her. I played You. And it was a very good show!”. (182)

While Soaphead feels lost in his pride of meeting the standards of physical white beauty, Pecola is lost into insanity due to her unattainable dream of having blue eyes. She longs for getting blue eyes to be respected and recognized by her parents and community as well. More interestingly, she thinks that if she gets those blue eyes she would see the world with different perspective and the society would change its negative view about her. However, she falls into madness in a society where blackness is equated with ugliness, and whiteness with beauty. Most of the characters disgust her black identity including her parents, Mr. Yacobowski, Soaphead and Geraldin. Her uncaring mother Pauline scapegoats and pushes her toward insanity and does not

shower her with motherly tenderness. Actually, she is devoid of the slightest maternal feeling for her daughter and regards her as a curse and a chain round her neck.

Pecola is made a scapegoat by her parents and the mulattos in the novel. Her state of mind degenerates as she grows up and gets shunned by almost everybody for her blackness. For instance, Mr. Yacobowski does not recognize her presence in his shop while Geraldine regards her worthless and ugly. Soaphead uses her naivety by showing her he can play God and fulfill her dream of having blue eyes. In general, Pecola is the embodiment of invisibility in a community that nourishes self-hatred. Unlike Meridian in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, her quest for identity is met with serious hurdles and ends in a failure which is attributed to the moral corruption of American society that abandons one of its members for being something she has no control over. At the end of her condolences to Pecola, Claudia recognizes how the black and white communities have contributed in the suffering of Pecola and made her a scapegoat :

> All of us - all who knew her - felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt santified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humour. Her inarticulateness made us generous. Even her walking dreams we used — to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. (205)

Being one of the weakest and fragile circles in the American society, African American community in *The Bluest Eye* has internalized the dualistic mode of thinking incarnated in "us" versus the superior "other" which has resulted in scapegoating Pecola. Scapegaoting is similar to othering in its exclusion of the weakest person and making him an object. In this respect, after being scapegoated by the white society for their alleged inferiority, the black community scapegoats Pecola for her presumptive ugliness and God-given black skin. In this sense, Tuire Valkeakari suggests that the white society's harsh treatment of Pecola follows the structure of

scapegoat ritual: "scapegoaters symbolically transfer characteristics that they despise in themselves onto a scapegoat and then reject the victim."[1]

After being scapegaoted by white Americans, a portion of black community becomes targets to intra-racial scapegoating and intra-communal brutality. Valkearki maintains that the stigmatization of blacks is twofold: "while portraying an African American community that victimizes one of its most vulnerable members, *The Bluest Eye* ultimately presents this intracommunal black cruelty as originating with the racially discriminatory values and practices of white society"[2]. In other words, the African American community has internalized not only the dualistic mode of thinking of white superiority and black inferiority, but also the practice of otherization manifesting in scapegoating the self represented in Pecola. In this respective, scapegoating can be considered as a "strategy of victimization" adopted by a portion of black community to exercise othering against a weak and presumptive "undesirable" segment of their community so to prove their superiority like whites and clean their alleged "sins" of being black. According to Valkeakari, Morrison's handling of this social phenomenon is twofold: "both to criticize racial discrimination and to reveal mechanisms that allow racism's damaging after-effects to operate and accumulate in the black communities".[3]

The stigmatization and scapegoating of Pecola make of her, from Christological perspective, a Christ figure who takes the burden of black community on her shoulders to clean their "sins" of being black. The blacks in *The Bluest Eye* symbolically cleans themselves on Pecola hoping to purify themselves of their "ugliness" that is synonymous with "blackness". However, Pecola does not represent the Christ "the savior" as she failed to resurrect her fellows.

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[1]- Tuire Valkearki. *Religious Idiom and the African American Novel*.Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007 p.81
[2] - Ibid p.78
[3] - Ibid p.77

She is "a scapegoat whose tragic social death cannot save, redeem, or purify a community suffering from anti-black racism and racial self-loathing."[1] Unlike the real Christ, the stigmatization and scapegoating of Pecola do not redeem the blacks but make the scapegoat ,Pecola, and the scapegoaters, the blacks, have the same undesirable fate. Such failure can be interpreted as a message from Morrison to black society as well as white one that the way to survival is the resurrection of the whole community weak or strong, black or white.

Conclusion

Morrison's critique of the dominant white culture and Western narrow standards of beauty are vividly reflected in her first novel *The Bluest Eye*. The latter is a rejection of the one-sided definition of physical beauty and its impact on the blacks in general and black women in particular. It discloses the crippling effect of white standards of beauty on a black female teenager named Pecola and her embittered mother Pauline.

Light skinned people's abhorrence of black people has been immense to the extent of hating their biological features which do not help to have access to the circle of white standards of beauty. Therefore, those who are white or light black skinned claimed a higher position, which reinforces the dark blacks' odium of themselves. Most of the characters are hallucinated by their look and value themselves according to their degree of blackness. Pecola and her likes are stigmatized and victimized for their black skin. This has led them to look timid and embarrassed when dealing with their white fellows.

Throughout *The* Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison attempts to reflect the oppression and demonization African Americans had to undergo in their life. Through her writing, Morrison tries to depict that barrier or what Du Bois called a "veil" between Whites and Blacks which

[1]-Ibid p.90

prevent each faction from understanding each other. Straddling two worlds and two cultures, African American women feel lost as people of color are misrepresented and unwelcome on the ground of their God-given skin colour. Such grim reality gave birth to shattered individuals who, to be acceptable citizens, should look like their American white compatriots, which have engendered a sense of double-consciousness and hyphenated identity.

Identity crisis is what characterizes Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye.* The novelist also raises concerns over racism, classism, sexism and the African American community's internalization of black inferiority and white superiority. The prolific novelist Morrison seems to have a mandate and literary responsibility to write for the sake of awakening the reader as well as the black individual to be aware of the gravity of immersing himself in white culture. She also aims at displaying the brutality of whites against their black fellows, which means that the novel functions as a cautionary literary work to raise public consciousness and to give a voice to the silenced reality of depression for black women. In this context, Morrison is a socialist not a modernist who writes for art's sake.

In *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison tends also to counter the mainstream culture through her adoption of revolutionary characters such as Claudia who does not succumb to the dictate of white society. Contrary to all black figures, Claudia undergoes introspection by challenging the mainstream culture and adhering to black heritage. The survival of Claudia and the failure of Pecola can be interpreted as a message from Morrison to the blacks to embrace their cultural heritage and be themselves to overcome life difficulties in a society where racism prevails. Her message is also a warning to her black fellows that the immersion of the self in white culture is doomed to failure as it is the case with Pecola. By her exhibition of the life of a shattered and denigrated character as Pecola and her mother Pauline, the novelist attempts to restores the

humanity of victimized back women by showing that their “insane” behaviors is due to their exposure to the process of dehumanization exercised against them by white hegemonic American society which should be held accountable for its racist acts.

The novelist sheds light on the undesirable outcome of adopting Eurocentric ethics by some African American women and urges them to stop internalizing white values and dualistic myth of blackness and whiteness. In many aspects, the novel exposes the importance of self-loving and the gravity of dreaming to enjoy white luxurious life in a society where skin color determines your social rank. As far as Morrison is concerned, the blacks are victims of both their underestimation of themselves and the society’s imposed identities. The dramatic effect of racism within the American society results in the otherization of a portion of African American community especially adolescent girls as they are the most vulnerable in the female sector.

Colorism is an offshoot of racism and it is considered as another debilitating factor that has led to the emergence of intra-racism within the black community. Morrison sheds light on the detrimental effect of this social phenomenon and its negative role in widening the gap between the blacks themselves. In this respect, some black people regard themselves privileged owing to their light-skin, which increases the social split within the black community.

As an alternative, Morrison proposes changes in the mindset of the black community by reconsidering its connection with African American heritage as music and storytelling which give strength to young African American women and help them overcome difficulties. It is worth mentioning that the survival of Claudia cannot be accidental as the main difference between her and the Breedloves is her admiration of black heritage that has been transmitted to her by her self-proud mother. However, Pecola and her family have neglected their African American roots

and immersed themselves in white culture and preached the white standards of beauty which have precipitated their downfall. If Pecola thinks that her survival and healing are based on her possession of blue eyes, Morrison proposes that a healed identity will be realized through the protagonist's connection to her black community, and this is the message the novelist intends to convey to the reader and the black community as a whole. She also suggests that beauty is not reflected just in whiteness but also in blackness, and the path towards racial survival starts with the black individual's embracement of his/her overt and covert identity and any attempt to reject this physical reality may result in self- destruction.

Chapter Three

Alice Walker's *Meridian*: Different Paths towards Restoring Female Identity

Introduction

A writer and womanist, Alice Walker is known for her literary products that offer great insight into African American life and frequently focus on women. Unlike the modernists, she does not believe in the maxim "art for art's sake". In other words, art for her is functional. It is used to serve humanity, tackle social plights and enlighten the reader. She considers art as a means to uproot any form of oppression and human exploitation. In this respect, she states: "It is, in the end, the saving of lives that we writers are about. Whether we are "minority" writers or "majority". It is simply in our power to do this. We do it because we care [....] We care because we know this: *the life we save is our own"*.[1] This quotation reinforces the assumption that Alice Walker, as a womanist, writes in order to offer an alternative to what should be done in order to secure the black individual's dignity and identity. In other words, Walker seems in a mission to counterattack some stereotypical images about African American women as being "the tragic mulatto, the hot blooded exotic whore and the strong Black Mammy"[2] and even "a mule, picking up the burdens that everyone else has thrown down and refused to carry"[3] which are cliché images upheld by the mass media and mainstream literature. As a Womanist, she aims at reconsidering these images of ugliness and backwardness that are generally associated with blackness, and drawing other ones that reflect the inner beauty and intrinsic courage and worthiness of black women.

This chapter aims at shedding light on the way Alice Walker differs from Toni Morrison' s handling of the theme of female identity in her novel *Meridian.* It focuses on Alice

[1]Alice Walker. *In Search ofOur Mothers' Gardens,* Florida: Harcourt, 1984p.14
[2]-Jasmine Ahmed Choudhury ."Black Woman as Mother in two selected novels of AliceWalker- *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and *Meridian".*India: Dept. of Bengali Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam.Website: www.thecho.in. 2013p.66
[3]-Ibid p.66

Walker's celebration of the black self through her adoption of outspoken and adamant characters mainly the female protagonist who embarks in a journey to assert a basic sense of dignity in stark contrast to the canonical white text in which the black character is portrayed as meek and submissive. This chapter also shows Alice Walker's disagreement with Toni Morrison in their approach and understanding of black woman's journey towards self-celebration.

III-1-Alice Walker's *Meridian* as a Womanist Reaction to Black Feminism

As discussed in the first chapter womanists and feminists forged a different path to fulfill their objectives**.** Womanists seem more universalists in their thinking and socially integrationists whereas feminists are somehow separatists who excluded a large segment of American society represented in black women. They rebelled against the authority of white feminists and their ethics. In other words, they disrupted white feminists'tendency of marginalizing the blacks on the ground of their color. Hence womanism has been regarded as "a strategy based on racial nationalism by Black female scholars in search of voice, agency and empowerment".[1] Most of Alice Walker's concept of womanism is vividly reflected in her novels *The Color Purple*, *Pressing the Secret of Joy* and *Meridian.* The latter which is one of the primary resources in this study exposes the idea of womanism. *Meridian* bears the undeniable stamp of Alice Walker's womanism. The story is interwoven around the womanist protagonist named Meridian Hill who behaves in an audacious, outrageous and courageous way throughout the sequence of the events. There is a direct correlation between the tenet of womanism and the characterization in the novel.

Alice Walker voices her worry of her black fellows' *status quo*. She uses *Meridian* as a mouthpiece in her struggle against racial oppression and black dehumanisation. To reach her

[1]- Malika Bouhadiba. "The Womanist Counter-Hegemonic Discourse". Oran: LAROS.2016 p.463

objectives of restoring justice, dignity and identity, she adopts unconventional characters who are tenacious to break social norms. Her spokeswoman Meridian is a Civil Rights activist who seized the opportunity of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to be the voice of the voiceless. The ultimate target of this movement was to put an end to the corrupt system by which the blacks were crippled to lead a meaningful life void of racial oppression. The way forward to the fulfillment of this objective is traced in the plot of *Meridian*.

It is worthwhile to mention that the suffering of Meridian Hill is doubled due to the fact she is black by color and woman by gender. As many black fellows, she faces physical and psychological tortures. She is subjugated to racism for not having the same color shared by the white majority, and to patriarchal oppression for being a woman in a world where women's voice is unheard and disparaged. Nevertheless, Meridian is a heroine who does not surrender to the dictates of back patriarchal community and the bigotry of white society.

Most of Meridian's characteristics entitle her to be a womanist. In contrast to a feminist character, Meridian is a revolutionary character who is committed to her struggle for blacks' rights and integrity. Her participation in the Civil Rights Movement transforms her life and helps her voice concerns over gender discrimination and racial prejudices. Her impulsive involvement in civil rights protests makes of her a remarkable figure in the process of deracializing American society and uprooting the burden of racism. In many ways, Meridian proves herself a womanist who stands in defiance to social norms and the different odds of life. It is interesting to point out that her defiance of a tank during a civil right march is a reflection of her courage and womanist character. She risks her life by exposing herself to the danger of getting knocked down by a tank as the narrator stresses: "Meridian did not look to the right or to the left. She passed the people watching her as if she did not know it was on her account they were there. As she approaches the

tank the blast of its engine starting sent a cloud of pigeons fluttering..” (07). Meridian offers herself as a martyr sacrificing her own life for the cause of her black people. This gesture proves to her black fellows along with her white compatriots that the black woman is “audacious” and gallant enough to defend her rights even at the cost of her own life.

Walker as a womanist encourages women to love each other non-sexually too. This idea is too manifested via Meridian’s love of her female fellows regardless of their race. Strikingly, she seems more forgiving even towards those who ruin her life as Lynne who spoils her marriage with Truman. She forgives Lynne and does not retaliate against her for being the cause of her divorce with Truman who has left her when she has been in need of sympathy. Most importantly, her support of the couple especially after having their first child is unpredictable. This humanist and tolerant act is indicative of a wamanist behavior which makes of Meridian an ideal and a lovely character with a good and forgiving spirit.

Furthermore, Meridian lives up to the ideal of womanism when she sympathizes with the homeless Wild Child who does not have shelter and a family to look after him. Despite the restrictions imposed by the campus administration not to bring foreigners, Meridian risks her accommodation and offers Wild Child shelter. Such a womanist behavior asserts the fact that Walker via Meridian seeks the survival of all people irrespective of their social status. In this regard, Meridian serves as a mother to the whole black community, which reflects Walker’s idea of wholeness and the survival of the whole community. Through her kind and courageous deeds, Meridian proves to be a fearless womanist committed to the survival of all.

In many respects, *Meridian* seems autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. There are many events in the novel experienced by Alice Walker herself when she was a fervent supporter of civil rights during the 1960s and the 1970s. They both lived in the same place

Georgia, and were abused and bruised during civil right protests. More importantly, both were active politicians and registered black voters in Mississipi and Georgia. Thus, both asserted themselves gallant womanists committed to the survival of the downtrodden with fearlessness. Furthermore, they too lacked sexual knowledge resulting in an unwanted pregnancy when they were teenagers. However, Meridian does not establish a meaningful and healthy relationship with her mother while Walker was fond of her mother.

In a stark departure with feminism, Walker incorporates the philosophy of womanism in her novel *Meridian*. Such incorporation is manifested in the protagonist Meridian's behavior. Meridian is reported audacious, stubborn and committed. Similar to her fictional creator Walker, and unlike Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, she is a womanist who does not have a defeatist view towards life and social difficulties she went through. Unlike Pecola who complies with the social standards dictated by the dominant white society, Meridian rebels against restrictive social codes showing the hidden aspect of black consciousness. She is capable of fulfilling her objectives through her life choices. More importantly, likewise Walker, her engagement in the Civil Rights Movement has been a model triumph embodied in registering her black fellows in votes which reflects her contribution towards disentangling colored people from the yoke of institutionalized racism and enabling them to fulfill their constitutional rights.

From the above ideas, it is quite conspicuous that Alice Walker via *Meridian* desires to report her experiences as a womanist and an active figure fighting against racial injustice, and an existentialist who is able to make life choices. Moreover, she proved herself a committed writer dedicating her literary and non-literary life to raise concerns over sexual abuse, racial oppression and patriarchal teaching. She combines her aesthetic skills with her social preoccupations to flesh

out the protagonist Meridian's journey from self-doubt and isolation to self-assertion and identity confirmation.

At the end Meridian becomes a mature woman with full responsibility towards herself and her community. Her engagement in the fight against racial oppression via the political means enables her to discover herself and the world around her. Interestingly, and in a stark contrast with Pecola, Meridian at the end emerges a different and triumphant woman succeeding at overcoming double-consciousness, restoring her lost identity and determining her essence through her free life choices. In this context, Walker through Meridian succeeds at challenging the whites' view towards the black as "the other".

III-2-Breaking Away From Traditions for the Sake of Asserting Identity

Meridian, like Alice Walker, is a rebellious character who is adamant to transgress her social codes and unbearable reality. She strives to break away from traditions and social codes which impede her progress towards wholeness. Indeed, she tends to be a challenger who dares to overturn racial boundaries by engaging in politics and abandoning motherhood.

Unlike many of her African American fellows, Meridian does not like to be a mother because she considers motherhood similar to slavery. She wants to relieve herself from the burden of maternity which is a work assigned to women. Before giving birth to her baby, she thinks of killing her, but after birthing she changes her mind and gives her away to avail of a scholarship to study at Saxon College in Atlanta. In this way, she breaks one of social traditions and fail to fulfill her mother's wish of serving her child; meanwhile, she feels guilty for not meeting "the standards of motherhood that had gone before''(91). Unexpectedly, Meridian confesses that she feels guilty for "stealing her mother's serenity, for shattering her mother's emerging self...though she was unable to understand how this could possibly be her fault" (30).

Feeling pity for been mothered by her mother bears witness to her dislike of and ruptures with black patriarchal traditions which idealize motherhood and upbringing children. However, her hatred of motherhood has been inherited from her mother who mothered her children because she did not have choice but to be in accordance with the patriarchal teaching of black community. Meridian's mother, Mrs. Hill, after having children, she dislikes motherhood and cannot forgive the people around her for not "warning her against children" (29), which shows that motherhood somehow has been a burden black women endeavor to get rid of.

Meridian's unorthodox behavior of giving away her child embodies the first step she makes in her quest for her identity and essence.[1] However, her decision of breaking social codes has a great impact on her and causes her constant nightmares. She suffers from agony of inner conflict which leads to feeling of guilt from which she recovers after she asks her embittered mother pardon and gets reconciled with her in a dream. When sleeping, Meridian confesses to her mother that she has made a terrible mistake and asks for forgiveness as she tells her: " Mama, I love you, let me go" (125). Meridian wakes up feeling joyful after making reconciliation with her mother and getting back her strength. Nevertheless, she feels alone but determined to establish her identity and find out the essence of her racial belonging.

As an archetypal character Meridian refuses to acquiesce to the dictates of her society by not playing the role of a "happy mother". She does not believe in happiness that can be acquired from motherhood. S.Kaniselvi and M.Phil explain that "Meridian rejects the role of the happy mother, recognizing that happiness is merely an empty sign that accompanies the equally

[1]--Madhumita Purkayastha."Heroic Mothers, Troubled Daughters: Re-defining the "self" vis-à-vis African-American Motherhood in Alice Walker's *Meridian"*.D.H.S.K.College: India. 2015 p.08

empty role of young pregnant wife".[1] Alice Walker stresses in the chapter entitled " The Happy Mother" that the association of happiness with motherhood is a matter of conventionality and loyalty to social norms. However, unlike other women figures in the novel, she defies the current to defend her individuality and assert her identity. Meridian's refusal of these social norms is devastating; she loses the respect of her entire family, including her mother and her community. Owing to her instinct rebellious character, she can't find explanation why she must give up what she believes the right act to do. She undergoes an introspection of herself, and assesses her social statue not only in the past but also in the present. She rebels against social codes as motherhood which she considers an impediment toward discovering her identity. This rebellious act can be considered as the first step towards self-celebration that what makes her a distinguishable woman and an independent human being standing on her own right. Unlike many female characters, she stands against the social norms in an attempt to assert her individuality and a basic sense of dignity, which are not easy tasks in such unwelcoming environment. In her discussion of the difficulty of standing against the current, Germaine Greer highlights: "It takes a great deal of courage and independence to decide to design your own image instead of the one that society rewards, but it gets easier as you go along."[2]

Meridian finds difficulty to get rid of the mythic image of motherhood which, in her mother's eyes, is considered as a blessing from God. Meridian's mother rejects her daughter's decision to join Saxon College after abandoning her child. She has lashed Meridian: "I just don't see how you could let another women raise your children"…. she continues vehemently " Though I never wanted to have any, and I have raised everyone myself" (61). In other way,

[1]-S.Kaniselvi and M.Phil. "Celebration of Self in Alice Walker's Meridian" www.languageinindia.com.2016p.97

[2] - Germaine Greer. *The Female Eunuch*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006 p.25

Meridian gets rid of identity of motherhood laid down to her by society. Unlike many women figure in the novel, she does live for the sake of the others: children, parents, husband or society. She struggles heroically to achieve a space where she is not compelled to wear masks of identity which do not reflect her true self.[1] In other words, she does not tolerate others to enter her private space to determine her identity.

Nevertheless, she feels trapped between her feeling of guilt for leaving her child for adoption and her determination towards self-assertion. This sour reality causes her inner conflict between conscience and personal aspiration. Meridian feels unable to sacrifice herself for childbearing and breaks away from the traditional role of mother through her untraditional approach of maternity and her determination to have self-control over her body and life.

She rejects the idea of being a sexual object to please her husband. Her stifling feeling of the notion of " maternal unadequacy" defies her assigned black identity because, as stated by Sampada Chavan: "African America women were burdened with the idea that they had to become a mother in order to fulfill a notion of ideal women".[2] In other words, she breaks out the mould that has been constructed by the society for African American women, and by doing so, she transgresses the boundaries of social egregious stereotypes against women. In this respect, Lynn Pifer highlights " [She] stops living by other's standard and learn to bloom for herself".[3] Thus Meridian wants to embrace her own identity without adhering to the dictate of social

[1]-Madhumita Purkayastha."Heroic Mothers, Troubled Daughters: Re-defining the "self" vis-à-vis African-American Motherhood in Alice Walker's *Meridian"* D.H.S.K.College: India. 2015 p.02

[2] -Sampada Chavan. "Natural Women, Unnatural Mother: The Convergence of the Motherhood and the Natural World in Alice Walker's *Meridian*". Journal of International Women's Studies. Jostor. 2015 p.189

[3] -Lynn Pifer, "Coming to Voice in Alice Walker's *Meridian*: Speaking out for the Revolution" African American Review, Joster1992 p.84

stereotypes. Such behavior makes Meridian a womanist character who tries to celebrate the self from within not without.

As a response to her dissatisfaction with social codes and stereotypical assignments, Meridian joins the Colleges and engages in political activities in an attempt to defend the constitutional rights of black people. She joined Civil Right Movement which emerged in the 1960s during which Meridian's moral principles had been challenged by Black Nationalism and Black Power which were radical movements advocating violence against white oppressors. The radicalization of political activities meant new understanding of racial bounds and gender role. Black radicals refused feminist activists to be part of the Civil Right Movements because their loyalty to egalitarian cause was questionable. Furthermore, Black women were considered as subordinates to black men, the stance that was upheld by black militants who relegated them to secondary social position. Because of this interracial, racial and patriarchal tendencies adopted by black militants, Meridian finds herself in internal conflict. She faced the dilemma of engaging in political activities and abiding with her ethical principles of defending the rights of black people without plunging into violence.

Meridian proves herself as a woman of principles when she is asked whether to "kill for the Revolution". She feels destabilized and provoked by black militants' violent tendency. She asserts herself a different pacific person when she refuses to answer with " a positive yes" (14). In Lynn Pifer's view, Meridian's rejection of any involvement in violence reflects her stance that tyranny produces more tyrannical acts. Her stance of not engaging in violence makes her line with Martin Luther King who too believed in soft power to establish beloved community.[1] Meridian's retreat from revolutionary act does not mean a lack of courage or commitment,

[1]-Paul Tewkesbury. "Keeping the Dream Alive: *Meridian* as Alice Walker's Homage to Martin Luther King and the Beloved Community" Seoul: Koninklijke Brill N, Leiden,2011 p.608

rather, it reflects Ghandi's and King's philosophy "that choosing nonviolence over violence is *more* courageous than choosing to kill." [1]

Meridian new approach to life emboldens her to refuse the radical movement's request to kill for freedom. She contemplates the act of killing, something she grapples with throughout her work for the Civil Right Movement as she states: "I have been allowed to see how the new capacity to do anything, including kill, for freedom—beyond sporadic acts of violence- is to emerge, and flower, but I am not yet at the point of being able to kill anyone myself, nor will ever be"(200). Meridian understands her fellows' wrath to kill for freedom but she admits that life as a whole is sacred and being a part of "One Life" she is unable to kill. This policy of nonviolence policy stances in consistence with Martin Luther King who too struggled against racism and white supremacy using the soft power of his oratory skills to raise public conscience. Her anger with racial exploitation motivates her to continue her struggle and immerse her in black culture which enables her to fashion new identity. The latter provides her with strength to continue her fight for freedom.

Unlike black radical militants, Meridian states that "even revolutionary murder is murder" (14) which underscores her respect of universal values and embracement of peaceful struggle. That is to say, her engagement in political activities is not at the cost of her ethical principles. Furthermore, Meridian dislikes Black Nationalist ideology due to its relegation of black women to secondary position which is a reminder of slavery era. In this respect Roberta Hendrickson states: "at that time, some black and white women, like their foremother in the Anti-Slavery Movement, began to see, in their relationship to the men in [Black Nationalist]

[1] -Ibid p.617

Movement, an analogy to the racist oppression of black people".[1] Owing to its adoption of patriarchal oppression and violent tendency towards black women, Black Nationalist Movement did not win the support of some black women among whom was Meridian who detached herself from it but kept fighting peacefully. In this context, Meridian presents herself as a distinguished womanist person who wants to be herself and stands adamant to her principles to preserve her identity and assert her selfhood without subjecting herself to the dictates of the movement and its violent principles.

Unlike Pecola, Meridian sacrifices herself for the sake of reaching spiritual strength. Despite the deterioration of her health, she resists and engages in political activities and defies the mainstream ideology that degrades black people and put her life at risk, which makes of her a martyr. Putting the cause of black people above anything else and "offering herself as a martyr for her people"[2] qualifies her as a messiah. Despite the fact that Meridian does not believe in any religion, many of her distinguished characteristics associate her with a religious martyr; therefore, she is revered by black people who regard her as a model "to the extent Meridian is compared by them to God".[3] It is fair to say that Meridian has triumphed over selfishness and succeeded in transgressing the racist line drawn by white racist society. In other way, Meridian's willingness to sacrifice herself is the reflection of her new mystical identity she has fashioned during this journey from self-submissiveness towards self-discovery.

Unlike Pecola, Meridian demonstrates her strong character when she is left by her husband Truman with no convincing explanation. She does not feel the need to tell Truman that

[1] - Roberta Hendrickson." Remembering the Dream: Alice Walker, Meridian and the Civil Right Movement", Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States 1999, Jstor. 2016 p.113
[2] - Ibid., p.115
[3] - S. Kaniselvi and and M. Phil "Celebration of Self in Alice Walker's Meridian" www.languageinindia.com.2016p.9

their future child needs a father. Unexpectedly, she rejects to play the role of mother that is sanctified by society and aborts her baby in defiance of social norms. Meridian undergoes a painful abortion:

> Later, as the doctor tore into her body without giving her anesthesia and she saw stars because of the pain, she was still seeing them laughing, carefree, together. It was not that she wanted him anymore, she did not. It enraged her that she could be made to endure such pain, and that he was oblivious to it. (112)

Meridian considers having a child as an impediment towards freedom and self-celebration. By doing so, she breaks one of the entrenched social norms embodied in the need of female individual for motherhood. She breaks out taboos to free herself from social bondage. In their discussion of Meridian's rejection of motherhood and social norms, Kaniselvi and M.Phil highlight Meridian highlights:

> Abortion and sterilization symbolize her final liberation from the bondage of sex and motherhood. Freed from the compulsiveness of traditional role-playing and awakened to the complexity of living, Meridian passes from her feelings of inadequacy and guilt to a new sense of self-confidence. She now wants to meet Truman on equal terms. Within the fabric of the complex relationship of Meridian, Truman and Lynne, Walker thus how the forces of racism and sexism work together to humiliate the black woman who, in order to be fully human, has to face the challenges of life with courage and strength. She also shows how forgiveness can bring all people together.[1]

Despite being harmed by Truman who leaves her without explanation and builds a new relationship with Lynne, Meridian remains a friend and a source of advice to Truman. She also maintains a good relationship with Lynne and comforts her after the death of her child, Camara. Though no one alleviated her burden after abortion and the loss of her baby, now she acts as a mature and a forgiving lady who is able to feel and heal another mother's pain. This proves that she is a womanist who consolidates with other for the survival of the whole nation,

[1]-S.Kaniselvi and M.Phil's "Celebration of Self in Alice Walker's Meridian".www.languageinindia.com 2016 p.104

which is also the philosophy of Martin Luther King who called for "the solidarity of the human family".[1]

After getting rid of unwanted pregnancy and sexual weakness, Meridian becomes a mother figure for all children she comes cross. In other words, she rejects to play the role of biological mother and tries to be the society's mother. This is reflected in her merciful character in many occasions such as when she takes care of the Wild Child after her first arrival to College. Helping black children becomes priority one during her work for the Civil Right Movement. She risks her life when she stands confronting a tank in a protest against banning black children from viewing a visiting Marilene O'Shay exhibit. Though the show contains nothing of worthiness, Meridian defends the right of black children to have access to satisfy their curiosity as their white fellows. Indeed, Meridian's selflessness and engagement with the oppressed black people and enduring the brunt of racial suffering for the sake of the survival of the whole society embody the core principles of Walker's philosophy of womanism.

III-3-Meridian's Political Engagement as a Womanist Response to Racial Subjugation

In most of her literary works Walker repeatedly depicts the struggle of African American women against racism that is reinforced by political authority. She shows female African Americans'determination to play a crucial role in their emancipation from social injustice backed by public institutions. They have struggled a lot to carve out a place for themselves in the American society and make themselves visible, as most of them feel invisible when interacting with their white fellows. She also explores the convergence between the struggle of African Americans for freedom and the personal struggle for emancipation at social and political level. "Unlike many white women writers of these period, African-American

[1]- Martin Luther King. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*Ed. James M. Washington. New York: Harper Collins, 1991 p. 121

women writers related the personal issues of their communities to global political issues. In effect, they insisted that personal and political issues could not be separated into exclusive categories."[1]

African Americans have been subjected to racism in different walks of life. Their suffering dates back to the era of slavery when people of African descent were considered as sub-humans forced to obey the dictates of their masters. To get rid of the unbearable legacy of slavery and prove their social status, they engaged in the Civil Right Movement during the 1950s and the 1960s. A great number of African Americans became political activists participating in marches and protest to show their anger and resentment of discriminatory policies. Alice Walker was one of the outspoken Civil Right activists committed to change the status quo of her black fellows and help them assert a basic sense of dignity.

Walker vehemently believes in the importance of political emancipation in improving the life of African Americans. Gaining political recognition is a means towards avoiding physical confrontation with whites, and engaging in peaceful quest towards self-assertion. Therefore, her political endeavor became an intensely personal matter which would enable her to transcend the past and move towards better future for the whole; black, white, children or adults.

In many ways, Meridian is the voice of Alice Walker. Like Walker, Meridian engages in politics by taking part in Civil Right Movements. She believes too much in the policy of nonviolence to raise public consciousness which is endorsed by this movement; therefore, Meridian considers it inspirational. She regards the movement as a means to demonstrate her black fellows' dissatisfaction with their social status.

[1] -Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self" in *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. 1983, p.93

Meridian's personal experiences are interconnected and interwoven with her political engagement to achieve egalitarian society and assert her identity. Meridian consecrates her life to uplift the chained burden of racism but in a peaceful way. Her bitter experience with racism and hatred lead her to reject violence which ruins everything worthy and appreciated in this life; therefore, she detached herself from mainstream ideology of Black Power and Black Nationalism. Her rejection to be a puppet at the hand of the radical movement asserts her willingness and adventure to fashion a new identity different from the one laid down by white society and black radicals.

III-4-Meridian's Masculinity as a Mask for a New Identity

As an ambitious and a revolutionary character Meridian tries to snatch spaces for herself and establish relations with others; however, her gender constitutes an obstacle for self-assertion in dominant male society. After losing respect with her mother, she endeavored to make relations outside the circle of her family. Meeting Truman and falling in love with him seems a great chance to heal her frequent psychological scars. Unfortunately, her apparent intimate relation with Truman has not been successful and crumbled in a matter of months. Truman's betrayal of her and marriage to Lynne have been a shock causing a psychological torture. Truman proves a dishonest man who gets married with Lynne to experience the privilege of white people and get rid of Meridian when the latter was in need for help. At this point of the novel, she starts to reconsider her passion and emotion. Feeling hampered by the dominance of man and patriarchal teaching, she tries to get rid of her feminity and embrace masculinity.

In order to look masculine, she decides to cut her hair off to get rid of her feminity and transform her gender. Deborah A. McDowell highlights the importance of Meridian's need to transform herself to a masculine character as follows:

> The fact that she is physically unattractive does not concern Meridain, an unconcern contrary to conventional notions of womanhood. Not only does Meridian look like a male, but she also acts like one. She is decidedly out of her place as a woman in her demonstration of unwavering leadership qualities, those generally associated with a male. Thus a symbolic inversion of roles occurs in this scene and Meridian can be said to triumph over tradition and authority.[1]

Meridian's new adopted masculine identity is accompanied with the realization of the significance of her black heritage which becomes an inspirational source for her and "that the respect she owed her life was to continue against whatever obstacles to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own. And that this existence extended beyond herself to those around her because, in fact, the years in America had created them One Life."(200)

Her immersion in black culture enables her to get rid of society imposed identity. She is no longer ashamed or feels guilty because "She was strong enough to go and owned nothing to pack"(219). After such long quest and struggle, Meridian becomes a different individual facing obstacle with determination and resolve by which she overcomes her passionate urge of emotional baggage. She becomes mature enough to make sense of her existence, "finally knowing who and what she is..... she was truly born again"(426). Her feeling of loneliness vanishes due to her embracement of her heritage and her daring to do the impossible to fulfill her will. She is not connected to Truman, who fails her and abuses her trust, but to her ancestors' heritage in which she finds comfort. Ironically, unlike Truman who feels alone with the departure of Meridian, the latter does not feel socially isolated thanks to her determination not to build intimate relation with men, instead she decides to make her own journey by following the path of Martin Luther King who preferred to die than live undignified life.

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[1] - Quoted in Susan M. Fey. "Rebellion and the Quest for self: Masculine Women and Tomboys across Race in The Member of the Wedding by Carson McCullers and Meridian by Alice Walker". Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 2002 p.29

At the end Meridian seems the embodiment of Martin Luther king's personality. Like King, Meridian joins the fight for freedom to exist, which enables her to get rid of her weak personality and prescribed identity. She embarks in an endeavor to find her sense of being and values that are not linked to Lynne or Truman but to something more valuable embodied in the fight for freedom and the embracement of black heritage.

Meridian, to greater extent, is Walker's masculine and womanist character. She has succeeded in getting rid of society prescribed identity and making of herself a strong black female activist. Indeed, she is the embodiment of Walker's Womanism for being "responsible, in charge, and serious".[1] She has also succeeded at stepping out of the role of being Truman's Meridian and lady/lover into someone who is independent with personal conviction and love of her racial belonging. In this respect, Mc Dowell states: "Thus, the self has bloomed, Meridian has found her identity, an identity fashioned not from western tradition, but rather from the artifact of her own heritage."[2]

Meridian's new identity as a black masculine woman tears apart the stereotypical picture drawn in American fiction about black women. Unlike her white literary fellows who portray the colored woman as a subhuman and acquiescent, Walker presents her as a resolved and strong-willed model who is able to transform herself when facing obstacles. Buncombe explains the progress and transformation of Meridian as follows:

> Meridian finds her true self only when she sheds the old stereotypes. She sloughed off the super imposed roles of long-suffering, supportive wife and black matriarch; of the black woman scorned by the black man for a white woman; of the white-gloved black lady outfitted for a white racist

[1] - Alice Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden. Womanist Prose.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovie. 1983 p. xi

[2] Quoted in Susan M. Fey. Rebellion and the Quest for the Self: Masculine Women and Tomboys Across Race in *the Member of the Wedding* by Carson McCullers and *Meridian* by Alice Walker. Iowa: Iowa State University Capstones, 2002 p.30

> society.. The androgynous look symbolizes her freedom from a past of hypocrisy and ignorance, of shibboleths and inhibitions.[1]

Despite odds and stumbling blocks, at the end Meridian is born as a new human being daring to challenge social inhibitions that impede her to progress and push her to change her gender. Unlike Pecola, Meridian pursues her dream with courage, honesty and determination. Surprisingly, Truman at the ends craves for Meridian and requests help from her, which indicates Meridian's triumph and success in building a respectful character. After being shattered by Truman's relation with Lynne and got divorced, Meridian does not bear any antagonism towards the new couple. She emerges as an angel of forgiveness and moral support after Truman and Lynne lost their daughter Camera. In a gesture of a womanist, she worked hard to alleviate their pain and give them comfort to overcome their agony. "It was Meridian they both needed, and it was Meridian who was, miraculously there"(188). Truman confesses that reconciling with Meridian makes him feel "healthy, purposeful"(140). Once again her forgiveness is a demonstration of her womanist character and acquisition of new identity.

Walker through *Meridian* tries to free black society from the bond of social norms and religious restrictions. Meridian is depicted as a model character who overcomes social constraints that are respected by her mother. That is to say she rebels against her mother's teaching of acquiescing to the dictates of American society:

> It seemed to Meridian that her legacy from her mother's endurance, her unerring knowledge of rightness and her pursuit of it through all distractions, was one she would never be able to match. It now occurred to her that her mother's and her grandmother's extreme purity of life was compelled by necessity. They have not lived in an age of choice. (124)

[1] - Marie H. Buncombe. "Androgyny as Metaphor in Alice Walker's Novels." College Language Association Joumal (1987) p.426

In other words, Meridian wants to follow a path different from the one taken by her ancestors by challenging conventionality and irrational social norms. Walker's unshakable belief in constructing society unfettered from discriminatory tendencies pervades most of her works mainly *Meridian* and *Color Purple*. She believes in cosmopolitanism by which individuals can love each other regardless of their origin and race. As a womanist she considers that the individual should not hate or take revenge, but forgive for the sake of the whole. Walker, through *Meridian*, wants to pave the way for the realization of cosmopolitan world where everyone regardless of his color lives in peace and tranquility for the "survival whole".

Conclusion

The study reveals that what assembles the two novelists Toni Morrison and Alice Walker is their choice to handle the theme of female identity, but what diverges them is the different path they follow to do so. The two prove that they are committed women novelists, but Morrison is a black feminist whereas Walker is a womanist. The former adopted a mode of writing which is different from the one opted for by the latter; Morrison has opted for a feminist mode of writing while Walker has immersed herself in womanist ideology.

Alice Walker's adoption of womanist ideology in *Meridian* seems a blatant attempt to answer back her colleague Morrison. She is more authentic and original since she has adopted a strategy of her own creation, and appropriates a new version of female protagonists who are unconventional in their acts and thought. Nevertheless, such assumption does not undercut the importance of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* through which the novelist proposes a redefinition of beauty. Most importantly, Walker focuses on brave behaviors and rebellious acts to disclose that the alternative for black women to get back their racial dignity and restore their identity is not to look and behave white but to be themselves and audacious. Walker's female protagonist

Meridian is not cliché and a stereotypical character as colored women used to get represented in the mainstream white culture, she is rebellious, gallant and defiant to her unfavorable environment where she faces all types of bigotry and contempt. She serves as a role model whom black women should follow to taste the beauty of black life. Even after encountering many storms in her journey from childhood to adulthood, she does not perish but pursue her path towards maturity. Her defiant character is what helps her to triumph over bigotry and racism, and more importantly results in restoring her split identity. Meridian's success to restore her identity is also Walker' success to adjust and gloss over the debased picture of backwardness attributed to black women by the mainstream culture.

Thank to her creation of womaninsm, Walker provides black women with the vision that colored women should struggle and cooperate together to change their living, but also struggle for the betterment and the survival of all people of different ethnicities and backgrounds. That is to say, womanism has a global vision towards helping all subjugated women all over the world. The focus of womanism has been multidimensional; it proposes new ways to colored women to cope with political exclusion, racism, classism and sexism.

Chapter Four

The Loss of identity and the Collapse of the American Dream in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Introduction

The United States of America has been regarded by oppressed people and freedom seekers around the world as "a promised land" which evokes a place of happiness and success; on this ground, many people have travelled there hoping to have a better life. Such concept dates back to the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 proclaiming that all citizens of the USA are entitled to " life, liberty and happiness"[1] which implies that everybody regardless his origin or race can enjoy happiness and achieve the American Dream as long as he is hardworking. The American Dream as a concept has resonated in many parts of the world and attracted the attention of many freedom seekers. James Adam defines the American Dream as follows:

> [the American Dream] is that dream that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyman with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement…it is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.[2]

Among those who travelled to America were Arabs who, as many ethnicities, struggled to carve out a better future in the New World since the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] However, their arrival was fueled by the spread of negative images of Arabs in America and the West as a whole. Arab-Orientals were downgraded by Westerners who were immersed in an orientalist ideology ingrained in the Western mind across the decades, and which shaped their view of the West as "rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, and capable of holding real values without natural

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[1]-George M. Fredrickson. "The Historical Construction of Race and Citizenship in the United States". The United States of America: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.2003 p.01

[2] - James Adams. *The Epic of America*. Safety Harbor, FL: Simon Publications.2001 p.404

[3] - Anwesa Chattopadhyay. "The Arab Oriental in Post-09/11 America: a Reading of Laila Halabi's *Once in a Promised Land*". India: An American Research Journal. 1993 p.02

suspicion"; whereas, the Orient was "none of these things."[1] These conceptions reflect Edward Said's Orientalism that is defined by him as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[2] In the same vein, Jameel Alghaberi stresses that "the oriental material culture is frequently appropriated and reproduced to confirm to the stereotypical images in American popular culture."[3] Following the events of 09/11, Arab American writers wrote back against the mainstream narrative in an effort to humanize Arab Americans and break down common orientalized images of Arabs.

Arab Americans' dream of better life got crushed by ideological demarcations and the repercussions of the 09/11 tragic attacks. Against the backdrop of these tragic events, Americans of Arabic descent have been stigmatized due to the multiple negative associations assigned to Islam, which have resulted in stripping them of their social status and identity as American citizens. In their discussion of the general reaction of Americans to the 09/11 attacks, Wahida Abu-Ras and Soleman H. Abu-Bader state:

> ….due to the nationality of the 9/11 perpetrators, the first reaction of the majority of Americans was to blame Muslim and Arab citizens for the attack. As a result, the Arab American community felt itself in the "enemycamp and automatically excluded from the larger American grieving process.[4]

Arab Americans' loyalty to American values and endorsement of American identity have been questioned in public places especially when religious signifiers and markers as hijab, niqab or long beard is manifested. The 09/11 attacks propelled Arab Americans out of the circle of

[1] - Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1987 p.49
[2] -Ibid p.03
[3] - Jameel Alghaberi. "Identity and Representational Dilemmas: Attempts to De-Orientalize the Arab" https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340345467 2020 p.154
[4] - Abu-Ras Wahida, and Soleman Abu-Bader. "The Impact of September 11,2001, Attacks on the Well Being of Arab Americansin New York City". *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 3, 217-239.https://doi.org/10.1080/15564900802487634. 2008 p.226

"invisibility" to "highly visible community that either directly or indirectly affects America's so-called culture wars, foreign policy, presidential elections, and legislative tradition."[1]

In many ways, Americans have perceived Muslims as a danger to the American way of living, American values and Western civilization in general. In the aftermath of the 09/11 terrorist attacks, Arab Americans and Muslims residing in the United States of America became subjects of fear and suspicion due to the fact that most Americans considered Islamic values incompatible with American ones, which led to many hate crimes and physical attacks. Thus, Arab Americans felt stripped from their American identity and denied the privileges of social citizenship. According to the US official records, Americans of Arab descent were deemed white by law since 1944;[2] nonetheless, they were not considered integral constituents of mainstream American culture especially in post 09/11 attacks. A variety of Arab American authors like Laila Halaby, Diana Abu Jaber, Frances Khirallah Noble and Alia Younis responded by employing characters attempting to term with the complexity of having hyphenated identity as Arabs and Americans. Post-09/11 Anglophone Arab literary works provides contemporary readers with new representation of Arab Americans as well as a critique of the dominant Orientalist narrative of "the Other". As Morey and Yaqin observe "there is a gap existing between representation and reality"[3] especially when it comes to Muslims and Arabs. In this regard, this fictional alternative should be identified as a literary and political reaction to the othering of Arab Americans in post-09/11 America.

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[1] - Steven Salaita. *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 p.110

[2]- Khaled A. Beydoun. "Boxed In: Reclassification of Arab Americans on the U.S. Census as Progress or Peril". The United States of America: Loyola University Chicago Law Journal. 2016 p.693

[3] - Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin . 2011. *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11*. Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press. 2011, p.01

Arab American intellectuals and writers felt the need to reverse the orientalist and distorted image of Arabs and Muslims in the aftermath of post-09/11 attacks. The latter's repercussions have left indelible imprint on the psyche and the imagination of Arab American feminists as it is reflected in their counter-productive literary works. Since these attacks, some of them published literary works portraying Arab American characters struggling to keep their Arab identity in a country riddled with anti-Arab racism. Among these authors were female novelists who have endeavored to correct the wrong assumption that Islam is a danger and its adherents are anti-Americans and anti-modernity. They also strove to make themselves visible in the American literary landscape, and highlight the egregious conflation between Islam and terrorism which resulted in the de-Americanization of Arabs. The process of de-Americanization and racialization of Arab Americans urged them to question the truth of the American Dream after the 09/11 attacks. In other words, they underscored "the false inclusiveness promised by the American Dream"[1] which has been reflected in the disconnection of Arab Americans from their Arab as well as American cultures. Their writings problematize the idea that America is "a promised land" where the individual can feel free and prosper no matter what religion or group he belongs to.

IV.1 The Racialization of Arab Americans

The racialization of Arab Americans in the United States of America has been considered as one of the growing and haunting plights experienced by Arab minority. This process overshadowed the lives of Arab Americans in two historical watersheds of American history; the first one was at the wake of 1909 after the amendment of Immigration Act; whereas,

[1] - Quoted in Md Abu Shahid Abdullah. "Muslim in Pre-and Post-09/11 Context". Australia: Australian International Academic Centre. 2015, p.57

the second one occurred in the aftermath of September 11 attacks which resulted in the collapse of the World Trade Center. These horrific attacks have been a turning point in the history of the U.S and the life of Arab Americans in particular.

In the wake of the Twentieth Century, after a great political struggle and perseverance, some immigrants originating from the Arab World were granted American citizenship as far as they lived up to a part of American idealism epitomized in embracing Christianity as a religion and proving belonging to the circle of American whiteness. Unprecedentedly, the mainstream perception and outlook of Americans towards Arabs living in the U.S were based on Orientalist stereotypes and some cliché images which have been sustained through literature, films, and various U.S.A media outlets. One of the pervasive misconceptions was that all Arabs were Muslims and all Muslims were Arabs.[1] Whiteness was associated with Christianity; nevertheless, not all white Arabs were Muslims or Christians. They embraced eclectic faith; most Arab immigrants to the U.S were Christians, but they were perceived Arabs and denied American citizenship. Ironically, they were required to prove the authenticity of their Christian faith.

Such conflation between Arabs as a tiny ethnicity and Islam as a religion has played a negative role in the integration of Arabs within dominant white American society and hampered their naturalization since only Arabs of Christian affiliation and faith were legible for citizenship. Such disparity and uneasiness between Arab Americans and Western ones can refer to the spread of hegemonic and Orientalist culture among Orients. Indeed, Edward Said makes it clearly that

[1] - Jeffrey Guhin, "Colorblind Islam: The Racial Hinges of Immigrant Muslim in The United States". Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles. 2018 p.89

"the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony."[1]

Despite the fact that Arab immigrants embraced eclectic and diverse religions including Judaism, Islam and Christianity; they were perceived as faithful Muslims whose chief and hidden objective was to Islamize the West in general and America as a leading power in particular.[2] Such mixture of religious affiliation and racial belonging was regarded as one of the leading factors hindering the acquisition of American citizenship. Furthermore, Americans of Islamic faith have been identified with their religious identity with a total disregard to their national belonging. In this respect, Saher Selod states: "Muslim Americans are narrowly defined by their religious identity, making their national identity invisible, insignificant and irrelevant to the rest of society."[3] In other words, Muslims have been racialized not because of their color but due to their Islamic faith which has been vilified at public level.

In addition to embracing Christianity as a prerequisite for American citizenship, accessing to the circle of whiteness was another precondition for Arab Americans to become documented American citizens. Although Arabs were officially recognized by The US Census Bureau as white,[4] they were denied access to the enjoyment of white privileges and allegedly considered *Honorary Whites.*[5] In other words, being white of Arab origin in America did not guarantee full access to Americanness by virtue of ancestral belonging, religious affiliation and

[1] - Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1987 p.05
[2] -Muna Ali. *Young Muslim America. Faith, Community and Belonging.* The United States of America: Oxford University Press.2018 p.04
[3] -Saher Selod. "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women post-9/11". http://crs.sagepub.com/ 2014p .5-6
[4]-Carol Fadda-Conrey: "Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representation of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 09/11". The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2011 p.550
[5] -Reina E. Chehayeb. *The Honorary White Population: Fighting for Self-Identification*. Central Florida : Stars Library.2019 p.23

widespread stereotypes about Arabs as being irrational, barbaric and lustful. Muslims have not been perceived as full Americans owing to the mainstream misconception that Islamic values are fundamentally against American ones. Their religion has been given negative connotation that has been most of the time propagated by the media. It is very important to mention that racialization is not linked with the skin color but it extends to language, outfits and beliefs. "Racialization is understood as a process where new racial meanings are ascribed to bodies, actions and interactions. These meanings are not only applied to skin tone, but other cultural factors such as language, clothing, and beliefs."[1]

Because of their Islamic faith, Arabs had been under a public scrutiny from private citizens who acted as "gatekeepers to citizenship"[2] and maintain its boundaries under the guise of securing the nation. They have been inspired by Bush's call to act as ears and eyes of the nation. By doing so, they contributed in boosting daily discrimination of white Americans vis-à-vis their Arab American fellows. The latter found themselves under the mercy of unfounded allegations resulting in their denial of naturalization and citizenship. In fact, the gap between the two communities widened due to the spread of an orientalist view-"us versus them"-among white American majority towards Arab minority. In this respect, Maha El Said argues that the 09/11 terrorist attacks have rejuvenated the Orientalist representation of Arabs and have re-established a division between "good" or "evil", "us" versus "them", "Self" and "Other".

> In the midst of this new schism, Arab-Americans, who are a mélange of Arab and American, become trapped in an attempt to redefine their

[1] - Saher Selod. "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women post-9/11". http://crs.sagepub.com/ 2014p.03
[2] -Ibid., p.02

> identity, and reconstruct a hybridity that seems impossible in a world that is dividedinto 'we' and 'them'.[1]

There have been two different reactions to the 09/11 attacks; the first one has been a total rejection of all what is Arab and in relation with the Arab World. The second one has been represented in the attempt of a great part of Western society to understand the specificity of Arab culture and the motivation of the 09/11 attackers.

The blind conflation of Islam as a religion and Arabs as a racial belonging has worsened the *status quo* of Arab Americans in their host country. Americans' misunderstanding of their Arab compatriots resulted in the victimization of the latter as being potential terrorists. In other words, they have been racialized as disloyal citizens for the mere fact of being Muslims who mostly found themselves in dilemma to accept the homogenous form of national identity as a requirement for American citizenship. In other words, Arab Americans have been under pressure to wipe out their racial and religious identities so to pave the way for the Americanization of the self to acquire citizenship. In the same vein, Saher Selod emphasizes that "The de-Americanization of Muslims because of their religious signifiers constitutes a form of racialization involving maintaining racial and ethnic boundaries of social citizenship."[2]

Interestingly, such antagonistic view and outlook towards Americans of Arab descent has been fueled by the mainstream mass media which played a detrimental role by explicitly propagating against Islam and Muslims as an impending threat to the very existence of Western civilization in general and Judeo-Christian culture in particular. They glossed over the true nature of Islam and avoided spotting light on the core causes of terrorism as a global phenomenon.

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[1] - Maha El Said ."The Face of the Enemy: Arab-American Writing Post 9/11". Studies In The Humanities-Indiana-www. academia.edu/…/The_Face of_the_Enemy_Arab-American_ Writing_Post-9_11. 2003 p.3

[2] - Ibid., p.04

Terrorism as a growing phenomenon has been associated with Islamic dogmatic thinking which led to the racialization of Arab Muslims. This association triggered animosity between Americans and their Arab counterparts who have been perceived as dormant agents of Islamic indoctrination and anti-Americanness. That is to say, the unfriendly relationship between the two communities is a reflection of Edward Said's Orientalist discourse of "us versus them" which became highly entrenched in the mainstream consciousness of Americans specifically after 9/11 attacks embodied in the drop in the likelihood of Americans' co-existence with Arab ethnic minority. It reflected the rift between two communities especially after the 9/11 attacks which marked the second phase of Arab American racialization. While Arabs were deemed as the "Other" and outsiders before these terrifying attacks, they had been configured as "racialised Other" who found themselves under unprecedented public limelight in the aftermath of these attacks. Such racialization was a result of decades of stereotyping and orientalization transformed into blatant racism and hate crimes after 09/11. In the same context, Fadda-Conrey postulates that the "Orientalist discourse has taken on an additional policing role after 9/11, portraying Arabs and Muslims as perpetual aliens, volatile extremists, and potential or actual terrorists (in the case of men) or oppressed, silenced, and disenfranchised subjects (in the case of women)"[1]

As a response to Americans' prejudices against Arab Americans mainly Arab American women who have been long represented in the mainstream culture as male dominated, a myriad of Arab American women writers emerged to foster a better understanding of their experiences and to enhance their people's image within American society and the spectrum of

[1] - Carol Fadda-Conrey . 2014. *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. New York: New York University Press.2014 p. 02

American literary traditions. Their prime concern was to write back against injustice and white supremacy by showing the worthiness of Arabs and their contribution in developing U.S.A as a nation. Their works have been perceived as counterproductive to the mainstream American literary and non-literary works. Among those who have been pioneers in confronting white supremacy and dogmatic behavior were Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Djaber who respectively wrote *Once in a Promised Land* and *Crescent.* In the former text, the novelist portrays the American character's xenophobic attitude towards Arab Americans and discloses anti-Arab racism they experienced in post 09/11.

Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* portrays a bleak picture about Arabs in post-09/11 era. The novel revolves around the story of Arab American couple in the wake of the 09/11 attacks. It also addresses the challenges faced by Muslim and Arab Americans in post-09/11 America characterized by racial and ideological tension which positioned different communities as internal enemies. Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* traces the life of an Arab American couple, Salwa and Jassim, who left their motherland Jordan in the hope of achieving their dream and having a prosperous life. The couple enjoys a luxurious lifestyle by buying expensive cars, towels, and silk pajamas. Because of their intellectual level as university graduates, they get the opportunity to have lucrative jobs. Jassim works as a hydrologist in a company in Arazona while Salwa works as a banker and an estate agent in the same state. That is to say, both have secured themselves financially, which makes them respectful and privileged. Being rich is one of the features of Americaness and the American Dream; consequently, they are regarded successful and good models in the eyes of Oriental dreamers who hanker to achieve the American Dream.

Unexpectedly, the couple's life turned upside down after the tragic events of 9/11 since they became subject of suspicion. Unpredictably, Jassim plays down the repercussion of the

events on his life as he regards himself a pure and loyal American. Because the perpetrators of these devastating attacks were Arabs and Muslims, Arab Americans become the objects of distrust and phobia in the eyes of Americans who think that Arab Americans identified with the hijackers. Such tendency has been nourished by their misconception of Islam as a source of terrorism. Salim Al-Ibia points out how Islam and terrorism became interchangeable terms:

> Thus, it does not matter if you are a Muslim or non-Muslim American; Arab-Americans are usually associated with Islam which becomes an alternative definition of 'terrorism' in the wake of 9/11th. They are all terrorists by default and can never be considered fully patriotic citizens of the US.[1]

Stereotyping Americans of Arab descent existed even before the 09/11 attacks and it dates back to 1400 years but it intensified after this accident.[2] Because of the wrong-doing of a handful of Islamic extremists who committed suicidal mission resulting in the killing of more than 4000 innocent people, Muslims and Arabs have been easy targets as they share the same religion with the perpetrators of the 09/11 attacks. The backlash of the events have affected their daily life and made them self-conscious of their Arabic and Islamic identity. "Although stereotypes and discriminatory actions were nothing new to them, the post-9/11 backlash was relentless, overwhelming, and heartbreaking."[3]

IV.2-Stereotyping against Arab Americans as a reaction to the 09/11 attacks in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Muslim Arabs have been represented in derogatory manners in the West either in the media or literature. The media have played a negative role in disseminating stereotypical ideas against Muslims and Arabs who have been depicted as uncivilized, camel straddlers and demon

[1] - Salim Al-Ebia, "Islam and Terrorism in post 09/11 Literature". Jordon:Al al-Bayet University. 2015 p.22

[2] - Md Abu Shahid Abdullah. "Muslim in Pre-and Post-09/11 Context". Australia: Australian International Academic Centre. 2015 p.56

[3] -Anny Bakalian and Mehdi Bozorgmehr: *Backlash 9/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans respond.* California: University of California Press. 2009 p.03

terrorists.[1] Such defamation has been intensified in the aftermath of 09/11 during which Muslims and Arabs have been identified as villains and fundamentalist. The mass media has helped in the intensification of a binary Orientalist discourse which identifies the West as "us" and the East as "them" or the uncivilized "Other", and "over there versus over here". This binary configuration is highly explored by Edward Said's *Orientalism* in which the writer shows the rift existing between the Western and Eastern civilization.

The Western media has helped in creating false identity about Arabs and Muslims who have often been stereotyped as irrational, hot-tempered, barbaric and Anti-Americans. According to the post-colonial critic Homi Bhabha, stereotypes have been used by colonial authority to justify that the colonizer is ruled due to the colonizer's innate superiority.[2] In the same vein, Americans of European descent are, in many ways, inheritors of that colonial discourse by which they consciously or unconsciously tend to control their fellows of Arab origin.

Laila Halaby has been critical to the vilification of Islam as a religion and Arabs as race. As a counter-reaction to the West's defamation of her people, she wrote *Once in a Promised land* to mirror the traumatic experiences Arab Americans went through and point out the falsity of the American Dream. She also explores the reason behind the social marginalization of Arab community. Halaby's nationality as an Arab American helps her to scrutinize the catastrophic aftermath of 09/11 and its destructive impact on mainstream Arab Americans. In this context, she first urges the readers to stop creating Orientalist images of Arab Americans as the vilification of this community has been based on fake representations. In her opening she asks:

> Before I tell you this story, I ask that you open the box and place in it any notions and preconceptions, any stereotypes with regard to Arabs and Muslims

[1] - Najm A. Najm Negative Stereotypes of Arabs.The Indian journal of social work. https://journals.tiss.edu/ijsw/index.php/ijsw. 2019 p.95
[2] -Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994 p.43

> that you can find in your shirtsleeves and pockets, tucked in your briefcase, forgotten in your cosmetic bag, tidied away behind your ears, rolled up in your underwear, saved on your computer's hard drive (viii).

Halaby spots lights on the criminalization of Arabs as one homogenous group. Right from the beginning, she declares the couple innocent but they are publically condemned: "Salwa and Jassim are both Arabs. Both Muslims. But of course they have nothing to do with what happened to the World Trade Center. Nothing and everything" (viii). The last phrase is tricky as the word "Nothing" implies that the couple are innocent and have nothing to do the attack, but the word "every thing" insinuates that they bear a collective responsibility with the hijackers for having the same religious faith. In the same vein, the couple as many Arab American Americans have to bear what Howell and and Shryock terms "collective guilt."[1]

Most Arab American characters condemn and abhor this heinous incident including Jassim who states: "What entered into someone's mind to make him (them?) want to do such a thing? It was incomprehensible"(20) and "Salwa had talked to her friend Randa several times … about how horrible it was" (21). These two statements assert that the couple do not support the perpetrators but condemn their fanatic ideology. In spite of their total condemnation of this terror attack, they have been victimized and considered untrustworthy for the mere fact of sharing the same religious or cultural background with the hijackers. For instance, Jassim has been regarded as a threat when he and his wife enter a mall. Jassim's staring at the motorbike for a long time at this shopping center evokes suspicion in the shopkeeper Amber who calls the security guard to get Jassim out of the mall making Salwa gets angry. Salwa asks Amber to justify what drives her to do so:

[1] - Sally Howell & Andrew Shryock, "Cracking Down on Diaspora: Arab Detroit and America's "War on Terror"". *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76(3), 443-462. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2003. p.444

> Why did you call that security guard on my husband?' […] 'He just scared me. […] He just stood there and stared for a really long time, like he was high or something. And then I remembered all the stuff that's been going on.' Here the girl stopped and looked at her as though she were checking to make sure her reference was understood. The words slid into Salwa's understanding, narrowing and sharpening her anger. 'I see. You thought he might want to blow up the mall in his Ferragamo shoes.' […]Amber's face changed in blotches. Something seemed to be building up in her, and she blurted, 'My uncle died in the Twin Towers.' Salwa knew something like this was coming, had been waiting for the moment when it became spoken. 'I am sorry to hear that. Are you planning to have every Arab arrested now? (29-30)

The above dialogue between Salwa and Amber reveals the hostile atmosphere created after 09/11. Amber calls the security guard because Jassim seems of "Arab phenotype"[1] and stares at her, which are baseless evidences asserting the spread of Arabophobia in post 09/11 America. The dialogue also shows the direct effect of the 09/11 attack on the Arab individual branded by Americans a terrorist threat and danger for the stability of the country.[2] Arab Americans found themselves in dilemma of racial conflict with white Americans regarding all Arabs as conspirators; therefore, any person becomes a potential terrorist if he seemed of "Arab phenotype". In other words, any person who has Arabic biological features has been branded suspicious on account of his ethnic identity.

This case is conspicuous during a dialogue between Jassim and Jack Franks who regards Americans of Arab origin Islamic fanatics. After knowing that Jassim is Jordanian, Franks tells Jassim that his daughter ran away with a Jordanian man with whom she is married. He states that her life would have changed drastically due to the big chasm between the two cultures. Franks cuts all contacts with his daughter for marrying an Arab guy. He declares: "She married a

[1] -Mudasir Altaf Bhat. "Broken Promises in a 'Promised Land': Race and Citizenship after 9/11 in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*".Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab (India).2014 p.109

[2] - Jeffrey Guhin, "Colorblind Islam: The Racial Hinges of Immigrant Muslim in The United States". Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles. 2018 p.90

Jordanian. Not one like you, though. This one was from the sticks – or the sand, as the case was. […] She converted. She's an Arab now. Probably still lives there. […] Haven't talked to her for years" (06). Jack has a stereotypical idea about Arabs as radicals when he excludes Jassim from this category when saying: "Not one like you" meaning that all Arabs are religious fundamentalist except Jassim who looks more American than Arab. Franks' disapproval of his daughter's marriage with an Arab man shows that he has a personal grudge against Arabs.

Jack's association of hidjeb with Arab women is another egregious stereotype that pervades Western societies. Indeed, hidjeb is one of the religious signifiers, but has been misconceived by Westerners as a symbol of oppression against women. It cannot be taken for granted that the marriage of Jack's daughter with an Arab man transforms her identity as Jack thinks after the marriage of his daughter with Jassim. She could convert to Islam but not Arabness.

Furthermore, the dialogue between Jassim and Jack before the 9/11 attack shows that stereotypes about Arabs have already existed even before this dramatic attack. Jack symbolizes a general picture Westerners have drawn about Arabs. He reflects Orientalist thinking which has been reinforced by the mass media.[1] Jack makes conflation between Islam as a religion and Arabness as racial belonging; in his view as many Americans think, being Arab is equal to being Muslim when, in fact, not all Arabs are Muslims. Many Arabs are Christians, Muslims or atheists. Such essentialist and rigid perceptions have served as a platform to fight against terrorism after 09/11. In this regard, the redemption of the world from terrorism cannot be seen morally acceptable and just since it criminalizes one specific category of the community for the deeds done by a couple of extremists. In his discussion of "war on terror" Michel Welch, as one

[1] -Katharina Motyl. "No Longer a Promised Land- The Arab and Muslim Experience in the U.S.A after 9/11" p.230

of the criminal justice scholars, invokes "the need for purification that goes beyond ridding the world of terrorists deemed not only dangerous but also morally tainted."[1]

It is noteworthy to point out that "war on terror" had created a specific social and political atmosphere within the American society resulted in the creation of "citizens patriots" who had been entitled by the Bush government to report any suspicious act. Such urgency to be vigilant had been misinterpreted and the focus had been on those who have different culture and identity as Arabs and Muslims since the attackers were Arabs. Jack as a citizen patriot keeps vigilance and scrutiny on Jassim whom he reports to FBI. He seems galvanized by the instructions of Bush administration as he reports Jassim who, in his view, "was not the man he portrayed himself to be, though he was not necessarily sold on his being a terrorist. He had already talked to his FBI friend Samuel about him. Twice. Would continue to keep him posted as Samuel had suggested" (173). In this sense, Jack regards Jassim, who proves to be a good citizen dedicated to his work, as an undesirable "Other" who jeopardizes the security of the nation.

The nature of Jassim's work as a hydrologist makes him a target not only for Jack but also to Bella. The latter is Jassim's co-worker and a receptionist who spies on him. Bella, like Jack, thinks that by reporting Jassim to FBI serves her country and protects it from "outsiders", "the Other". Like many Americans, she regards Jassim as an enemy and a threat to her homeland; therefore, she "wanted to get revenge and [she] wanted to be involved in that revenge"(271).

Bella seems affected by the general patriotic discourse created in the aftermath of 09/11; for that reason, spying on Jassim and reporting against him to FBI as "a suspicious rich

[1] - Quoted in Mudasir Altaf Bhat. "Broken Promises in a 'Promised Land': Race and Citizenship after 9/11 in *Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land*". Punjab (India):Punjabi University Press, 2014 p.108

Arab with access to the city's water supply" (271) can be regarded as her patriotic duty. She even reports Jassim's behavioral change which coincides with the accidental killing of Evan and Salwa's miscarriage. In this context, Anita, Jassim's co-worker, clarifies to Jassim:

> It didn't take long before [Bella and Lisa] landed on you .Bella called the FBI on you a couple of days after it happened, told them you were a rich Arab with access to the city's water supply and you didn't seem very upset by what had happened. It seemed the FBI was not interested at first. Bella started to keep a notebook on you. She wrote down everything you said, what you wore, how you seemed.hen two months or so ago she said that she thought something was wrong, that your behavior changed. That you seemed bothered and that she was going to call the FBI on you again. Report you. (271)

FBI's investigation reveals the fact that Jassim is singled out as a potential enemy within the nation; therefore, Bella strives to put him in jail. She also works to tarnish his reputation by contacting and informing his clients that their contractor Jassim is under FBI investigation, which has paved the way to his expulsion. Hence, Halaby underscores that the Othernization of Arab Americans becomes more visible and noticeable after 9/11.

One of the consequences of the 09/11 attacks is the assumption taken by mainstream Americans that Islam is synonymous to terrorism. Jassim and Salwa become hyper-visible as they find themselves victims of the conflation between terrorism and Arabness on the one hand and terrorism and Islam on the other hand. For example, Jassim is suspected as a terrorist after he accidently hits and kills a teenager boy, Evan, on his skateboard by his car. The police come and investigate with him thinking that this is a terrorist attack against an American citizen. The FBI investigators visit his working place hoping that they would find evidence to condemn him as a demon terrorist; they even investigate with his co-workers in an attempt to disclose any affiliation between Jassim and terrorist organizations.

Significantly, despite their tireless efforts to integrate within the American society and embrace its cultural values, Jassim and Salwa suffer from the yoke of racism which is reflected

during this FBI unwarranted investigation. Due to the general atmosphere of mistrust created in the aftermath of 9/11, FBI agents don't investigate just the car accident but strive to make him guilty in any way since they find no evidence that Jassim hits the teenager intentionally. They even ask him about his view about his "reaction to the events of September 11?... How often does [he] pray in a mosque?" and, more strikingly, they questions him "*Did you ever meet any of the hijackers personally*?" (224) in a conspicuous violation to the investigation procedures and an attempt to stigmatize him at any cost. Failing to find any wrong doing, the FBI agents try to spoil his work as a water quality controller since his Arab identity becomes a matter of uneasiness to the investigators. The latter cast doubt on the credibility of Jassim whom they pigeonhole as a potential terrorist and conspirator who may commit a mass murder with poisoning public water to which he replies:

> Means is one thing, motive is another. I am a scientist. I work to make water safe and available. I am a normal citizen who happens to be an Arab. Yes, I have access to the city's water supply, but I have no desire to abuse it. The mere fact that I am an Arab should not add suspicion to the matter.I have spent my entire life trying to find ways to make water safe and accessible for everyone. Just because I am an Arab, because I was raised a Muslim, you want to believe that I am capable of doing evil. (232)

His testimony highlights the anxiety his religious identity causes because it situates him as someone from an enemy nation when in fact Jassim has sacrificed his Islamic identity to look American. The FBI agents do not care about the warm words of Jassim as they consider him as the racialized "Other". They cannot accept the fact that Jassim is an honest employee even though this boss guarantees that Jassim is a good Arab American who is "apolitical and unreligious a person as I know" (224). Being inflamed by 09/11 hate discourse, they doubt Jassim's professional conscience and think that public health is under serious danger as long as Jassim works as a water quality controller. Unexpectedly, during their visit they contact his clients and co-workers and ask about his behavior and personality, which destabilizes

clients'trust in Jassim and later pave the way for the nullification of their contact with him. Jassim feels lost as he does not understand the behavior of his clients. The reader feels shocked and bewildered by Jassim's unexpected fate in the company as the narrator declares:"Jassim had done nothing wrong and this was America and there should have to be proof of negligence on his part for his job to be whispered voice." (234)

FBI unprofessional investigation tarnishes the reputation of Jassim and costs him his thriving career despite his feeling of allegiance towards his adopted country. Jassim's boss is disgusted by the fact that his employee becomes the subject of "witch hunt" (224). Owing to the toxic situation created as a consequence of FBI inquiry, the secret pregnancy of Salwa and unintentional killing of Evan, Jasssim becomes less interested in his job which paves the way for his firing. In this respect, Banita stresses:

> affected. People,companies, the city, shouldn't be able to pull accounts on the basis of his being an Arab. Yes, finally he saw what had been sitting at the back of his consciousness for some time in a not-so-These personal troubles consist in Salwa's secret pregnancy and miscarriage, as well as an accident in which Jassim runs over and kills a young boy on a skateboard. As a result of these misfortunes, both of which Jassim could have done nothing to prevent, he begins to neglect his professional duties, thus endangering his position and making it easier for his employer, and even for the FBI, to single him out as a potential danger to the community.[1]

Against the backdrop of this belligerent atmosphere, Jassim's boss decides to fire him despite his previous excellent record with the firm. Even though that Marcus has defended Jassim in many occasions in case one of his co-workers tries to spoil Jassim's work, this time he decides to sack him thinking that Jassim has betrayed his trust. Actually it is not a matter of betrayal as it is accentuated since the killing was not deliberate. The new undesirable incidents do not work in favour of Jassim who has not been given the chance to defend or correct his behavior as Marcus

[1] - Georgiana Banita. "Race, risk, and fiction in the war on terror: Laila Halaby, Gayle Brandeis, and Michael"Cunningham. Routledge. 2010 p. 247

is the manager who is usually tolerant and gives his employees a second chance to live up to the working requirements.

Due to the unfriendly atmosphere piling up in the aftermath of 09/11, Marcus cannot be tolerant with his employees especial those of Arab origin. He thinks that it is a matter of moral obligation to expel him, which is the outcome of "imperative patrioticism" as Salaita stresses "imperative patriotism relies on a perceived pragmatism in order to command moral legitimacy."[1]

Influenced by the new concept of patriotism, Marcus can't identify with Jassim since the latter is an Arab Muslim who may work against the interest of the company and its clients. In this sense, Jassim's Islamic identity has been racialized and his life turned topsy-turvy. From the Saidian Orientalist perspective, Jassim, like many Americans of African descent, is the "Other" and a pariah, he is the Other with a new imposed identity. After being a successful person, he becomes, in the view of Marcus, "unprofitable". In this case, Marcus acts as an allegory for liberal Capitalism.[2] Like a liberal capitalist, he does not accept minorities in case their recruitment does not generate extra production. It is clear that Marcus is under the influence of anti-Arab discourse that is the outcome of the 09/11 attack.

Like Pecola and Meridian, Jassim and his wife are pariahs and the "Other" who are caught in a hyphenated identity that is composed of Arabness and Americaness. According to Heba Sharobeem, the notion 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

[1] - Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today*.London: Pluto Press, 2006, p.90

[2] Katharina Motyl. "No Longer a Promised Land- The Arab and Muslim Experience in the U.S.A after 9/11" p.232

> belongs to. Such questions often loom large in the minds of immigrants, those who leave one country to another, one culture for the other.[1]

Arab Americans live in two worlds and yet belonging to neither. Despite their loyalty to the American values, they always feel a sense of loss and dislocation; therefore, they have to negotiate their identities and belonging especially in the aftermath of 09/11 attacks when the binarization of Arab and American identifications was consolidated.

IV.3 Americanizing the self in an attempt to fulfill the American Dream

Belief in the American Dream is a pivotal tenet of American society and culture. The United States of America has become strongly associated with this dream that has garnered the attention of freedom-lovers and oppressed people throughout the world. It has been extolled and admired by many critics but it has also been criticized by some other critics for its materialistic and consumerist nature. Among those critics are Scott Fitzgerald and Stephen Matterson, not to mention many, who criticize the American way of life and its consumerist nature that originates from the American Dream. In this perspective, Matterson highlights its materialist flaws as follows:

> The material aspect of the dream is a corruption of its social vision; that it is an illusion through which inequalities are maintained and class realities are concealed; that it fosters individual achievement at the expense of social progress; that it supports ruthless plutocracy; that it equates personal fulfillment with material gain, and that it results in a narrowly selfish definition of success.[2]

The materialist nature of the American Dream has been one of the driving forces that have driven people through the world to America that has been viewed as a land of limitless opportunities and prosperity. On this ground, Arab immigrants struggled to reach the American shores to fulfill their American dream. In an attempt to prove that they are fully Americans, immigrants and freedom-

[1] -Heba Sharobeem."The Hyphenated Identity and the Question of Belonging: AStudy of Samia Serageldin's *The Cairo House*". Alexandria University Press. Egypt.20037.01

[2] - Stephen Matterson. *American Literature: The Essential Glossary*. London: Arnold, 2003 p.10

seekers have given up their culture and sacrificed their social belonging as the case with Jassim and Salwa. The latter when reaching the shores of America, they disconnect themselves from their native land and become uninterested in their ancestral heritage and identity. In this respect, Alixa Naff highlights the immigrants' hankering to get rid of their cultural roots as follows: "In their eagerness to succeed, the immigrant generation neglected to preserve their cultural heritage."[1]

In spite of her parents 'failure to fulfill their American dream, Salwa is not discouraged by their experience. She keeps regarding the place of her birth, USA, as a land of everything she aspires to. Her determination to succeed in her journey shows her strong character to do what her parents have been unable to do and rectify their failure to realize the American Dream. Salwa's obsession with America has increased when she attends a lecture entitled "Water is the key to our survival" by Jassim, a hydrologist from America. During the lecture, Salwa is mesmerized by the lecturer who stands for everything she admires. It is very important to mention that Salwa is not interested in the lecture itself but in the lecturer whom she expected would help her in her quest for new future and identity.

Travelling to America is what makes the female protagonist Salwa accept Jassim's offer of marriage meanwhile she breaks up her relationship with her boyfriend Hassan whom she promises to marry. The author emphasizes the idea that Salwa is not in love with Jassim but she is interested in the idea of leaving her homeland to America, and her refusal to get married with Hassan reflects her efforts to untether from her Arab community and belonging.

Unlike Salwa, Jassim seems in love with her. He is fascinated by the idea that Salwa has an American citizenship that would enable them to stay in America as long as they want: "At the very

[1] - Alixa Naff. "Arabs in America: A Historical Overview." *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*. Ed. Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham. Detroit: Wayne State University. 1983 p.35

back of Jassim's mind, in only the faintest lettering, was the idea that Salwa's American citizenship would enable them both to stay. Forever, if he chose" (70). From this perspective, Jassim and Salwa seem good Arab American partners who show interest in each other and are united by their love for America and pursuit of the American Dream.

Salwa and Jassim desperately try to assimilate into American culture so they get 'whiteness status'. They are completely immersed in American consumerist culture; however, they abandon their Middles Eastern heritage and try their best to wipe out their past. In other words, they engage themselves in the process of Americanizing the self which results in a split in their identity. They sacrifice their Arab identity seeking to snatch places in their adopted country. To do so, they also abandon Islamic rituals and indulge themselves in the luxurious American life thanks to their profitable thriving job.

Jassim's fascination with the American way of living leads him to forget about his ancestral values especially religious rituals and teachings. He is a non-practicing Muslim behaving as a pure American with blood and mind. For example, instead of performing dawn prayers, Salat Al fadjer, he drives his fifty-thousand dollars Mercedes towards the Fitness Center to swim. By substituting his dawn prayer with swimming, Jassim gives up a part of his identity which later would increase his feeling of emptiness. He seems Muslim by nature giving the fact that he disbelieves in the existence of God as the narrator states: "Jassim did not believe in God, but he did believe in balance" (03). On this ground, he substitutes dawn prayer with swimming rituals to make "balance", but the more he practices swimming the lesser believer he becomes: his "lung capacity increased as his belief in God dwindles" (46). In short, Jassim has done everything possible to Americanize the self and have access to the zone of the American Dream; however, the process of Americanization has not been in his favor.

Unlike her husband, Salwa does not overtly confess that she is a disbeliever in God but she is a non-practicing Muslim who tries to look more American with her expensive clothes and a money-minded character. Salwa and Jassim seem to sacrifice everything that may contribute in making them "the Other" who, according to Edward Said, are considered by the Occident as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different";[1] therefore, in addition to sacrificing their Arab heritage, they work hard for the sake of accumulating money to enjoy American consumerist culture which is reflected in their purchase of "a giant house filled with desired items, cars too large to fit in their owners' garages, fine designer clothes to decorate the manicured body and all to cover the shel." (101)

Salwa and Jassim dismiss their native culture from their life and surroundings, which is reflected in their luxurious house that does not reflect in any way their Arab Muslim identity. The house does not create a nostalgic atmosphere in the house but makes the individual feels coolness:

> in the coolness of his house, Jassim removed a gleaming glass from a glossy maple cabinet and filled it with the purest spring water money could buy, delivered biweekly up the hills by a gigantic complaining truck he never saw … he pulled the trashcan out from under the right side of the sink (the spot where 92 percent of Americans keep their kitchen trashcans, he remembered hearing somewhere, though he doubted the statistic) so that he could reach the recycling basket, into which he deposited a handful of direct mail and ads (except for Salwa's overpriced-underwear catalogue. (24)

The above statement underscores the couple's detachment from their Arab identity and immersion in American consumerist life. She is fond of shopping different types of pyjamas to the extent that she is named by her family " Queen of pyjamas" since her childhood. If someone looks for the origin of pyjamas, he will find it western. She is an American shopaholic who spent most of her time in shops and malls buying different kinds of garments and texture. By submerging herself in

[1] -Edward Said. *Orientalism.* New York : Vintage Books, 2003 p.40

American consumerist culture, Salwa reinforces her Americaness and distances herself from Arabness.

The couple's embracement of the American Dream and American consumerist lifestyle make them unsympathetic towards their Palestinian compatriots who engage in political activities to fight for the liberation of their homeland. For example, Salwa as a "Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship"(70) does not take part in any political debate or manifestation in support to her Palestinian fellows. Being Palestinian and refugee in Jordan does not incentivize her to speak against the injustice exercised against her homeland by the Israeli occupation. It seems that enjoying American life is more important for her than any supportive act for the Palestinian, which may be a reminder of her past that she hopes to leave behind. This break-up of her relation with her homeland is also embodied in her betrayal of Hassan whom she jilts and marries Jassim instead. In the eyes of Sirine, Hassan is a "symbol of Palestine" (240) and misery while Jassim is a model of prosperity and happiness. Salwa seems anti Arab even before her return to America as her father humorously says the day Jassim asks him for the hand of his daughter: "Salwa is Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship. That is why she uses so much water and has a taste for luxury. We tease her that she is really first world .We tease her that she is really first world. A colonizer."(70) His statement insinuates that his daughter's double citizenships as an American and Jordanian positions her among the imperialists and the powerful which means that she cannot accept herself among the oppressed, the Palestinian. Wasting water and planting followers are attributed to her love of American culture that is somehow eccentric to the Jordanian mainstream society. One of the first deeds of the colonizer is to introduce new customs in the colonized land and uproot established social practices. In this

regard, Salwa symbolizes the colonizer due to her overuses of water and plantation of flowers which are Western practices.

The deterioration of Jassim's and Salwa's relationship has pushed the latter to find an alternative to fill that emptiness. To do so, Salwa engages in an affair with an American guy named Jake. Even after being kissed by him, she at first gets anxious about his unexpected act which is permissible in American culture but forbidden from her basic Islamic perspective. However, Salwa changes her mind and thinks "That was the American way, after all, wasn't it? Let your soul get sucked out but work hard in the meantime" (189). In other way, she regards Jake's conduct as a part of Americanizing the self and showing a greater level of cultural assimilation.

Jassim, like Salwa, is engaged in the process of Americanizing the self. Along with abandoning religious rituals, he gives up Middle Eastern traditional food. He prefers American fast food that he likes a lot: "Thankful for the luxury of living in a country where any kind of food was minutes away, he got the pile of menus from a drawer beneath the counter and began picking through" (131). Furthermore, his wife does not help him to keep his appreciation of Arab food as a source preserving one's identity. Their abandonment of traditional Arab foods increases their detachment from their native culture and help in the process of Americanization. In this respect, Nathalie emphasizes the importance of food in increasing the sense of belonging as she states: "Arab immigrants consider that if their children and grandchildren eat Arabic food and like it, this confirms that they have embraced their roots and that they belong to that civilization and honor it."[1]

The two protagonists' loss of their Arab culture consolidates their false sense of belonging to America and increase their disconnection from their mother country. Jassim keeps his

[1] - Handal Nathalie. *Arab Americas: Literary Entanglements of the American Hemisphere and the Arab World*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006 p.140

identity defined within a white social context despite his loss of white privilege when he is fired from his thriving job. He does not want to be identified as an Arab. In other words, he does not want to look at himself as a marginalized "Other" or racialized "Other"; for that reason, he does not accept Penny's sympathy for him. When penny questions him " do people give you a hard time these days ?" Jassim disapproves and replies " No, not so much"(156). Another example of Jassim's identification of himself as a white American is when he and Penny came across an impoverish couple whom Jassim disregards while Salwa sympathizes with them as she says " I bet people give her a lot of grief these days" (279). Jassim's unwillingness to identify with his Arab fellows asserts that he still contextualizes his identity within a white context and denies the fact that he belongs to lower class category. From Frantz Fanon's perspective, Jassim is the oppressed who wears 'the colonizer's mask' to secure himself and survive. In this sense, he behaves as a white American by hiding his Arab identity and adopting American one so to be acceptable within the mainstream society.

Nonetheless, his American fellows and co-workers categorize him as an undesirable Arab which causes him a great grief and frustration. In his state of protest he declares: "It's crazy they're not looking at who you are as a person, at all the great work you've done [...] they're looking at the fact that you're an Arab" (301) which suggests his decline to the 'social hazard' of Georgiana Banita's words.

It is reasonable to say that Halaby disapproves of the process of Americanization that results in the Haddads' hatred of their culture and the embracement of American values. She regards that the United States of America had driven many dreamers and freedom-seekers away from their native values in return for a new life based on wealth and extravagance. In this respect, Jassim and Salwa are good models who have been mesmerized by the materialist and consumerist

nature of American life which result in the abandonment of their Arab identity and the embracement of American ideals represented mainly in the accumulation of money, but with no feeling of social membership. In this sense, Halaby underscores the falsity of the American Dream during the Twenty First Century. She also shows that freedom in America is a mere ideal image that has been propagated by the mass media. In this respect, Halaby lines with Aida Ebrahimian who too considers that "it is only an illusion that you are free [in the United States] and nobody interferes in your life!"[1]

By doing so, Halaby exposes the moral emptiness and hollowness of the American Dream that turns to American nightmare. In her portrayal of immigrants' lives, Halaby draws our attention to their blind adoption of American lifestyle and values; however, their assimilative tendency has not been sufficient to carve their own path in a white society inundated with anti-Arab sentiment especially after 9/11. Their sacrifice of Arab traditions has proven insufficient to make themselves American citizens on account of their ethnic and religious identity.

IV.4-The Failure of the American Dream in *Once in a Promised Land* in the aftermath of the 09/11 attacks

The Promised Land is a religious reference given to Abraham by God and his adherents to enjoy good life.[2] People worldwide have regarded the United States of America a promised land where justice and prosperity are served; that is why, some Arab Americans migrated to the U.S.A hoping to enjoy happiness and luxurious American lifestyle. However, the title of the novel, *Once in a Promised Land*, implies that it is just once in a lifetime but not now, which makes the novel as a cautionary literary work to "transcend binary discourses [Us and them] in order to

[1] - Aida Ebrahimian. "Amplification of Third Spaces after September 11th in Halaby's Selected Works".Islamic Azad University, Iran 2016 p.15

[2] - Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundation for Expository Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans 2007. p.225

avoid further crises from escalating either within or beyond American borderline".[1] In this context, from the title the reader predicts that the U.S.A, the setting of the events, is no more the land of dreams, prosperity and good lifestyle but a land that has been demonized by evil and human prejudices especially after 09/11 attacks. The latter is considered as a turning point in the history of the U.S.A for the shock it has caused for people throughout the world.

Americans of Arab origin found themselves accused of conspiracy and disloyalty to the American values when most of them condemned this attack and acquitted themselves with any involvement with Islamic fanatics. The collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center symbolizes the fall and the decline of Jassim's and Salwa's relationship. It is remarkable that "the disintegration of Jassim's and Salwa's lives is accelerated by the fallout of the September 11th attacks."[2]

The moral emptiness they have undergone and the detachment from their homeland's cultural values make them unprepared to face the challenging up-coming events of 09/11. More importantly, the lack of moral and cultural attachment impinges on their relationship that becomes more fragile in the subsequent events. This fact makes the couple strangers to each other and compels them to look forwards to build new ties with the American community. Therefore, they endeavor to redefine their relation with the American and Arab Americans hoping to ventilate the tension created in the aftermath of 09/11 trauma.

The couple does not adhere fully to their Islamic identity but strive to fashion for themselves a new identity to look more integrated in American society. In short, the couple does

[1] -Amanda Lloyd. "Reverse Orientalism*: Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land"*.Cleveland State University. EDT Archive.2012 p.IV

[2] - Mudasir Altaf Bhat. "Broken Promises in a 'Promised Land': Race and Citizenship after 9/11 in *Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land*". Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab (India).2014 p.106

not pay too much attention to the homogenizing stereotypes about Muslims as dogmatic, fanatic and conservative. Jassim convinces himself that his senior job will save him from anti-Arab racism and entitle him to full American citizenship. Though they endeavor to make balance between their hyphenated identity: Americaness and Arabness, Jassim and Salwa are branded not just pariahs and the "Other" but enemies- "Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us." (56)

Over-racism experienced by Salwa and Jassim does not make them over-conscious only of their Arabic identity but makes them feel a sense of inferiority when compared to other ethnicities in the U.S.A. The couple tries in vain to prove that they are good citizens to redeem themselves from the shadow of racism and a sense of feeling guilty. They even tend to hide their religious faith and political tendencies to look acceptable in the mainstream American society. In other words, "They neutralize their political and religious identity to achieve social equality."[1] In this context, they try to de-Arabise and Americanize the self to make themselves socially acceptable; however, they remain confused and stymied by their mixed identity. The two are struggling in the crossroads between Arabness and Americanness. The contradictory experiences they have undergone in their host country create an amalgamation of emotions and double consciousness which eventually impact their identity.

Alongside her suffering of double consciousness, Salwa feels lost in her "promised land" after sacrificing everything: leaving her homeland, putting an end to her relation with her boyfriend whom she promises to marry, disconnecting herself from any contact with her Arab culture. She is failed by her wealth and silk pyjamas that have been unable to fill up the emptiness pervading her life. In an attempt to make sense of her consumerist life and the need to fill up that spiritual emptiness, she decides to have a baby and stop taking birth control pills but

[1] - Salim Al-Ebia, "Islam and Terrorism in post 09/11 Literature. Jordon:Al al-Bayet University". 2015 p.23

without informing her husband. For the first time Salwa admits the futility of American lifestyle as the narrator states:

> Salwa's Lie covered a glorious underbelly. It was not *I didn't take my* birth control pill but instead a much more colorful For a few years now I've felt that I've been missing something in my life. That's why I got a real estate license. It wasn't enough, though. I think having a child will fill that void. I am going to try to get pregnant, even though Jassim says he doesn't want a child.(10)

Pitiful life conditions experienced by Salwa get worse when the gap between the couple starts to widen. Jassim is infuriated by the fact that her wife is pregnant without telling him about her decision to stop taking her contraceptives and her intention about the need for a baby in their life. Unpredictable, her miscarriage has exacerbated her already complicated life and increased the emptiness that she endeavors to fill up by having a baby. The difficulty of her life leads her up to question her decision to get married with Jassim who "offered her the best opportunity" (100), she feels deceived by the illusionary appeal of the American Dream and ends up admitting that "this was the life she had chosen, but it was not the life she wanted." (91)

The new difficult life creates in Salwa a sense of emptiness and nostalgia for her homeland Jordan. She, like many Arab Americans, comes to realize the lifelessness of American life: "Out of nowhere, a thought louder than any of the voices popped into her head, a thought she had not had before: *We cannot live here anymore."*(5)

Through Salwa, Halaby expresses the bitterness many Arab immigrants have undergone during their stay in the United States of America and how they struggle to make sense of their mixed identity in an antagonistic atmosphere created in a post- 09/11 context. Contemplating about the lifelessness she experiences, Salwa questions her journey towards self-discovery and realize the fake belonging to her birth place America as she admits:

> America pulled and yanked on her from a very young age, forever trying to reel her in. Only the America that pulled at her was not the America of her

> birth, it was the exported America of Disneyland and hamburgers, Hollywood and the Marlboro man, and therefore impossible to find. (49)

The only success she makes with her husband Jassim is the accumulation of wealth and the enjoyment of luxurious life but with no true sense of identity and belonging. In other words, Salwa feels deceived by the "promised land"; therefore, she does not want her future child have the same fate as her as she states: "It is different now, she thought. If I am pregnant, I cannot raise my child here, away from everything I know. If I am pregnant." (54)

Jassim's and Salwa's discomfort increase with the new form of patriotism adopted after the 09/11 attack. The couple feels stifled by Salwa's boss Joan when the latter hands them two American flags, one for her the second for Jassim, asking them to hang them on their car as a gesture that they stand with the troops overseas and avoid any anti-Arab reactions. In a gesture of comfort Joan justifies and explains that as "imperative patriotism", "You should put one on your car, on the back window. You never know what people are thinking, and having this will let them know where you stand."(55) While Joan's major concern is the safety of the couple, his undeclared intention is to imposed a new form of patriotism[1] which Steven Salaita terms "imperative patriotism."[2]

Hanging an American flag on their car is considered a compulsory gesture to show their eternal love to American values and assert that they are with "us" not terrorists "them": which is an ethos reiterated many times by the ex-President of the United States of America George Bush. In his discussion of the spread of patriotic discourses in the aftermath of 09/11 attacks and the importance of showing sympathy with the nation, Salaita states:

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[1] - Steven Salaita. *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Syracuse University Press. 2011 p.89

[2]-Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today*. London: Pluto Press. 2006 p.40

> Hanging the American flag on one's car in the week following the events of September 11 might mean many things: solidarity with the victims of the attacks; a token of mourning; support for the government; a metaphorical blank check for the use of military action. But no matter what their inspiration, most of those who hang flags assumed that a particular meaning would be transmitted and understood. [1]

According to Joan, Salwa and her husband Jassim should display their patriotism by hanging flags on their car to show up that they stand with the Americans in their tragedy and fight against terrorism. Joan's act of "imperative patriotism" makes the couple feel trapped in a paradoxical world. Indeed, Salwa finds herself compelled to distance herself from her Arab American fellows and her Arab racial belonging to secure her life. By doing so, she sacrifices her Arab identity for the sake of survival. Salwa is flabbergasted by her boss when handing her an American flag as she longs to be an integrated American, not part of the racialized and stigmatized group.

For many Americans, it has become a matter of urgency "to act as the eyes and ears of the government"[2] which was a phrase reiterated by Bush, ex-President of U.S.A, to galvanize the people. Such rhetoric has been propagated by the mass media which makes Jassim and Salwa feel discriminated against. In the same context, Salwa is puzzled by the message of dislike broadcast by a radio station: "Is anyone fed up yet? Is anyone sick of nothing being done about all those Arab terrorists? In the name of Jesus Christ! They live with us. Among us! Muslims who are just waiting to attack us. They just want." (56) In other words, Arab Muslims, like African Americans, have become second class citizens and outcasts. The new situation leads

[1] - Steven Salaita. *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Syracuse University Press. 2011 p.89

[2] - Amanda Lloyd. "Reverse Orientalism: Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land" 2012. ETD Archive.https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/2012 p.11

Salwa to be aware of the false sense of belonging to America where she admits she is "killing time, not living."(56)

Unlike his wife, Jassim does not expect any retaliation from his American counterparts due to his belief that he has nothing to do with Islamic radicals or the perpetrators of this tragic attack. Jassim minimizes the repercussion of the attack on his life as he persuades himself that his senior position as a hydrologist would guarantee his safety. Because of his professional position and his adoption of American materialist identity, Jassim thinks that the mainstream Americans would never think that he is supportive of and sympathizer with 09/11 attackers. Later on he gets confused by the reality of the county he admires a lot: "for the first time he felt unsettled in his beloved America, vaguely longed for home, where he could nestle in the safe, predictable bosom of other Arabs." (165) Contrary to what he expects, Jassim notices drastic changes in the behavior of his co-workers including the secretaries, which leads him for the first time to reconsider his relation with his American fellows :

> He'd probably not given them this much thought in the entire time he'd worked with them, and here they were in his thoughts in the swimming pool and in the shower.Why? Surely not because of what happened in New York? He had as little connection to those men as they did, and there was no way he could accept that anyone be able to believe him capable of sharing in their extremist philosophy. No, he was not indulging this notion. (22)

Jassim cannot understand the change in the behavior of his office secretaries who, during a meeting a day after the attacks, "stared and scribbled notes to each other. It was clear that he was the subject of these notes." (25) They play against him, which annoys him as he has not done wrong and he always keeps good relations with all his co-workers. Despite what happens during the meeting, Jassim tries to forget about his secretaries' misconduct and rely on the good intentions of the Americans. He does not let phobia has an impact on his life since he regards himself an integrated white American. He plays down the repercussions of attacks as he regards

himself as a white American who has done everything possible to melt himself in America culture.

Nevertheless, the accident has been an awakening call for many Arab Americans including Jassim who comes to realize that he embraces false identity and his sense of belonging is a mere illusory reality. Halaby spots light on the futile efforts made by some Arab immigrants to make themselves Americans. Although they sacrifice everything including their Arab identity and they "build their image in implicit compliance with the assimilative criteria that guarantee the good Arab American label, [they] were victims of suspicion and downright racism."[1] Through her protagonist Jassim, the novelist reveals to the reader the true face of America that is no more the promised land after the 09/11 events. Jassim comes to realize that he is, like Meridian and Pecola, a pariah by virtue of his ethnic and religious identity. All his efforts to look American have been a failure. His identity remains invisible and unrecognized by mainstream American society no matter how hard he tries to distance himself from his original culture and religious values.

Jassim, like many Americans and Arab Americans, has been shocked by the fall of the Twin Towers which remains a haunting picture in his mind. For days after the attack,

> [When] he was in the pool and swimming that his mind wrapped around the pictures of those two massive buildings collapsing to the ground so neatly beneath the columns of smoke, that he returned to the impossibility of what he had seen. What entered into someone's mind to make him (them!) want to do such a thing? It was incomprehensible. And unnatural—human beings fought to survive, not to die. And had they, those many people who seemed to join together in crazy suicide, had any idea that they would cause such devastation? That both buildings would collapse? Lap after lap found him turning this over in his mind, the planning of destruction and the extent of that destruction. (20)

[1] - Mudasir Altaf Bhat. "Broken Promises in a 'Promised Land': Race and Citizenship after 9/11 in *Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land*". Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab (India).2014 p.106

The collapse of the twin towers symbolizes the disintegration of the relationship between Salwa and Jassim who feels frustrated when Salwa confesses her pregnancy and miscarriage. His practice of swimming is no more a healing and spiritual process as the image of his wife's miscarriage and a baby do not escape his mind. He feels betrayed both by America and his close partner Salwa who worsens his already difficult life. He returns home feeling "sweat occupying the space between his hands and the polished steering wheel, the first sign that he and the car are not really One" (116.117). Owing to this uncomfortable situation, he makes a car accident when he knocks down Evan Parter on a skateboard. This accidental killing exacerbates his life to the point that he is no more in control of his life; he begins to neglect his professional duties and distance himself from his wife.

The two tragic subsequent events make him feel guilty and add the lack of balance in his already shattered life. These destabilizing conditions make him lose control of his life as he states:

> *I have no control*, Jassim answered back. *No control. It's gone. My life is no longer in my hands*. This thought overpowered a quieter wish for God, for belief, for an answer, or at the very least Balance. He lay at the edge of the bed, his thought a crowded pile of characters competing for space on the marquee: *Salwa Shops for Pajamas, Jassim's Child, Water, Swimming, Officer Barkley*… (14)

On this ground, it is reasonable to say that the couple has failed to lead a better life due to their submersion in American culture and neglect of Arab traditions. The couple discovers with anguish that the American Dream they are obsessed with is a mere illusion. In this respect, it is relevant to argue that through the couple, Halaby draws our attention to the process of Americanizing the self which leads to failure and disillusionment with American way of life. As an alternative, she presents Randa as an exemplary Arab American woman who has succeeded to have a good life with her husband and children due to her attachment to Arab traditions and homeland. She has been able to set a balance between her commitment of her adopted country

and her commitment to her homeland. Likewise Meridian in Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Randa's attachment to her native culture is a healing process that enables the individual to overcome obstacles; therefore, she asks Salwa to go home in order to recover from the loss of the self as she declares : "It will help you to see things as they are, and it's been years since you visited. Right now is a good time…and being home will be good for you."(288)

IV.5 Laila Halaby's Incorporation of Arab Folklore to Reinforce Literary Representation and Individual Identity

Arab American fiction stresses the importance of speaking against silence, ordeal and identity crises Arab Americans went through in their adopted country, the United States of America, especially in the post-09/11 era during which the West as whole became interested in reading about Arabs. Zuzana Tabačková notes that "September 11 attacks mark the beginning of a post September 11 reader who becomes interested in works written by Anglophone Arab writers whose names begin to appear more frequently in American bookstores."[1]Arab American literary writers endeavor to uplift the burden of their Arab fellows and help them to overcome their homesickness in the diaspora by returning back to Arab folktales from which the individual can learn from his ancestors' experiences and make sense of his identity. In this context, through *Once in a Promised Land*, Halaby seeks to help the Arab American reader to make sense of his double identity which is a combination of his past as an Arab and his presence as an American. In other words, the novel is aimed to help the reader to have an identity which, in Yekenkurul's words, is "constructed through narrative memory. Remembering the past connects us to history, and that remembering forms a tradition."[2]

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[1] - Zuzana Tabačková. "The Thousand and One Tries: Storytelling as an Art of Failure in Rabih Alameddine's Fiction." *Journal of Language and Cultural Education* 3 (3): 112 24.https://doi.org/10.1515/jolace-2015-0025. 2015 p.205

[2] - Senem Yekenkurul. "Broken Narratives in the Immigrant Folktale" *Current Narratives*, 3, 2011,54-63 p.55

Laila Halaby's incorporation of the Arab folk tradition is an effort to reinforce the presence of Arab culture in the American literary landscape so to make possibility of self-assertion. This incorporation is also to counter the dominant narrative in which Arab Americans are almost invisible and insignificant in the eyes of the Self/ the Occident. By doing so, she problematizes the idea of Othering Arabs or Orients which is embedded in the psyche of Western Americans. In his discussion of Laila Halaby's inclusion of Arab folktales in *Once in a Promised Land,* Reem M. Hilal underscores:

> [Laila Halaby] utilizes the Arab folk tradition in novels on Arab and Muslim American experience to counter the dominant narrative that simultaneously erases their extensive history in the United States and juxtaposes it with a forced visibility that is marked by Otherness, threat, and distrust.[1]

By using folkloric figures and structure, Halaby attempts to adjust the position of Arabs in narratives that describe them as "the Other" or problems. This folkloric appropriation shows the possibility of foregrounding culture mobility which reinforces the multiplicity of identity in 'melting pot' America in which a lot of cultures collide and fuse together. By doing so, Halaby emphasizes the hybridity of American culture from which a dialogue can be established between different communities with the creation of what Homi Bhabha termed 'the third space' that helps in breaking the ground of the cloudy relationship between Arab Americans (the Other) and their fellow Americans (The Self). As far as Bhabha is concerned, it is within this space that the bearers of a "Hybrid identity" would be "free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference."[2] The creation of 'the third space' would mean setting a fresh ground on which different individuals can interact with each other and create a space where they can reconcile and articulate their cultural difference. Indeed, most

[1] -Reem M. Hilal. Mirroring hibridity: "The Use of Arab folk tradition in Laila Halaby 's *Once in a Promised Land* and Alia Yunis *The Night Counter".* Pluto Journals.2020 p.251
[2] - Homi Bhabha .*The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge .1994 p.55

of the characters in *Once in a Promised Land* are hybrid characters attempting to deal with their mixed culture to forge a 'third space' between homeland and their host country. For example, Randa is a model Arab American who has succeeded in reconciling her hyphenated identity as a proud Arab by origin and American by citizenship. In this sense, Halaby shatters and contradicts the image of the helpless Arab woman propagated by US popular culture.

Halaby blends her plot with Arabic folktales to address Arab Americans' reality in a post-09/11 context. She weaves the story with the tale of 'The Ghula" which is entrenched in the mind of Arabs worldwide. The Ghula is a fairy creature with mesmerizing power and who cheats children by her temptation, after that she eats them. Salwa's grandmother narrates to Salwa the story of "Nus Nsays" which means half on the halving. In the story, Nus Nsays is a small character but he has been able to defeat the Ghula on account of his determination and cleverness. It is clear that the novelist invites the reader to re-contextualize "The Ghula" to be useful in the new context of post-09/11. Based on this ground, it is clear that the Ghula as a character stands for America and the materialist nature of its dream; whereas, Nus Nsuys stands for Salwa who strives to achieve the American Dream. However, there is a stark discrepancy between the two characters as Salwa does not defeat America but she was mesmerized and swallowed by its dream. Also, another difference is that Salwa is the opposite of Nus Nsays as the latter refused to believe in the maxim that happiness is associated with material gains.

The success of Nus Nsays and the failure of Salwa can be interpreted as an invitation from Halaby to the contemporary Arab American reader to delve deeper into his Arab heritage and deal with his reality. In other words, the novelist fictionalizes the American reality by mixing fact with fiction to find ways forwards to deal with the complexity of living in post-09/11 America. More particularly, Halaby' employment of the Arab folk tradition in the story on

Arabs and Muslims is a step forward to destabilize the dominant narrative of the American Dream and dramatize the concept of ' American idealism' which has been unattainable for a great part of American society especially Americans of Arab descent in post-09/11 era.

More significantly, Halaby's reference to Arab folklore tends to put Arab American writings in transnational framework which may pave the way for the possibility of connecting Arab Americans to their Arab homeland and, in Faddi-Conrey's words, allows for a recognition of the "imaginative connections to both the US and the Arab homeland as well as the spaces of physical travel and mobility between them."[1] To de-orientalize the Arab, it is very important to foreground intercultural understanding and construct a hybrid transnational identity that reflects the nature of American society. In many ways, *Once in a Promised Land* is a transnational literary work that erases geographical demarcation and helps in bridging the gap of cultural differences and addressing the complexity of Arab American experience in a country where people of different origin try to reconcile their diversity. In other words, Halaby tries to "de-territorialize America" as Richard Gray underscores:

> These fictions resist the challenge of silence by deploying forms of speech that are genuinely crossbred and transitional, subverting the oppositional language of mainstream commentary . . . And they respond to the heterogeneous character of the United States as well as its necessary positioning in a translational context.[2]

More importantly, Halaby's writing style seems to go far beyond the simple narration of the couple's life as the goal of her mode of writing is twofold: on the one hand, it reinforces the readership of Arab literary products within the western context; on the other hand, it helps in the recovery of the narrative itself as Salaita argues: " We are not searching here solely for

[1] -Fadda-Conrey Carol . *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. New York: New York University Press.2014 p.09

[2] -Quoted in Reem M. Hilal. Mirroring hibridity: The Use of Arab folk tradition in Laila Halabi's *Once in a Promised Land* and Alia Yunis *The Night Counter*. Pluto Journals.2020 p.253

affirmation. We are searching for the humanity of those who dehumanize us and seeking to recover the human from dehumanization."[1]

Through the inclusive nature of her writings, Halaby invites the reader not to misunderstand but delve deeper into the particularity of Arab Americans' experiences and explore the hidden aspects of their lives. By revisiting Arab oral traditions, Halaby attempts to gain access to American popular culture and attach the reader with Arab heritage. By doing so, she seeks to discredit the common misrepresentations of Arabs and their culture within the American society and mitigate the ongoing tension between Western Americans and their fellows of Arab origin. *Once in Promised Land* suggests the possibility of blurring the borderline of binary opposition of West superiority versus Orient inferiority. In this context, the incorporation of the Arab oral tradition has helped in undermining and destabilizing the textual authority of the dominant narrative. It also helps in cultural understanding which may bridge the gap between different communities as "what defines the Western and the Eastern borders is merely fiction."[2] Based on this conception, *Once in a Promised Land* offers an important literary model that "accommodate co-existing identities"[3] which reflect the mosaic fabric of American society as "melting pot".

Conclusion

The novelist has succeeded to a greater extent in drawing the reader's attention to the plight experienced by Muslim Arabs in the aftermath of the 09/11 attack. American descendants from Arab countries have been racialized and Otherized due to the general conflation of Islam with

[1] - Steven Salaita. *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2007 p.17
[2] - Jameel Alghaberi. "Identity and Representational Dilemmas: Attempts to De-Orientalize the Arab" https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340345467 2020 p.
[3] - Ibid.,p.157

terrorism. Considering Islamic values as anti-Americaness and modernity has led up to the otherization and de-Ameicanization of Arab Americans. Muslims had been viewed as suicide bombers who might detonate themselves at any moment. Such victimization also resulted in many hate crimes and xenophobic aggression against Muslims and Arabs. As a consequence, Muslims had been stripped from their national identity and their loyalty to American values has been contested. Furthermore, patriotic citizens had accosted and put their Arab American fellows under scrutiny in the guise of safeguarding America from potential attacks. Encouraged by the Patriotic Act, xenophobic Americans make it difficult for Arab Americans to have access to social citizenship not because of "cultural factors such as language, clothing, and beliefs"[1], but their religious identity. Religious differences became qualifiers to be excluded from mainstream American identity.

Arab Americans have endeavored to carve a niche for themselves in post 09/11 America by de-Arabising and Americanize the self; however, they became targets of anti-Muslim hatred and their Islamic identity had been questioned due to the spread of Islamophobia and Arabophobia. Such trend had been reinforced by the media's dissemination of Orientalist stereotypes against Muslims. The 09/11 attacks made Islamic identity hyper-visible but vilified as many Americans considered Islamic values incompatible with American culture.

Once in a Promised Land underpins the paradox existing in the propagated American Dream and how race and origin have been a stick yard to the type of life the individual would get there. Through the journey of the two protagonists Jassim and Salwa, Laila Halaby gives us a full picture about the collapse of the American Dream which does not work in favor of the couple. The latter are representatives of Arab Americans who have got disillusioned with the "Promise

[1] -SaherSelod. "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim American Men and Women post-9/11". http://crs.sagepub.com/ 2014p .03

Land", the United States of America. It seems that they are configured as outsiders and "the Other" despite renouncing their religion and Arab identity to integrate in the mainstream American society as Andrew and Nabeel stress:

> [Arab immigrants] will not fit in here unless you behave appropriately, and this will be possible only if the differences that set you apart from us – your language, your culture, your religion, your attitude – are somehow naturalized, normalized, muted, consigned to another time, or linked to a place and a way of life you have left behind.[1]

Once in a Promised Land reveals the falsity of the American Dream and the misconstrued version of patriotism. The novel also underscores the complexity of belonging especially in the aftermath of 09/11 when "imperative patriotism" as described by Salaita became a determiner of who belongs to the nation and who is configured as "the Other". While Halaby seems to regret the failure of her two protagonists for immersing themselves in American life, through Randa she presents an alternative embodied in the importance of keeping attached to Arab traditions and heritage for the sake of survival. In other words, through Randa the novelist tries to de-Orientalize the Self and challenge the mainstream narrative of Arabs and Arab Americans. Her incorporation of the Arab tradition and deployment of a challenging character as Randa can be interpreted as an indirect manner to ask contemporary readers to deactivate their negative stereotypes of Arabs and deconstruct the Orientalist legacy.

The two protagonists, like many Arab Americans, are sandwiched between two cultural spaces that lead them to failure to build a better life in their beloved America. Halaby via the couple mirrors Arab Americans' lack of belonging to America and their native country which results in their failure to construct their identity as Arabs, Americans or both. By doing so, she

[1] -Andrew Shylock and Nabeel Abraham, *Arab Detroit: from margin to mainstream*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000 p.17

sends a cautious message about the negative impact of migration on the individual who is not prepared to remain attached to his heritage in the host country.

Blending the plot with Arab oral traditions is an attempt to disrupt the dominant narrative that reinforces the orientalization of negative images of Arabs especially after the 09/11 attacks which were fueled by stereotypical images about Muslims and Arabs as one homogenous group. In other words, the novelist makes of her Arab heritage as a source of inspiration to destigmatize the self and deconstruct the broader dominant narrative in which Arabs or Arab Americans have been identified as a "potential threat" or the "Other". In one sense, Halaby seems proud of and obsessed with her Arab heritage, and tends to remind Arab American readers with their cultural roots. In another sense, by injecting her novel with folkloric Arab figures, she functions as cultural informant who wants to reinstate the Arab American community within the larger US community. Thematically, through representing the daily experiences of a couple of Arab Americans and showing their struggle to look ordinary successful Americans, *Once in a Promised Land* subverts stereotypes about Arabs and Arab Americans propagated in US popular products. In this sense, the novel reflects Salaita's call on Arab American writers to humanize "Arab Americans by mere virtue of proclaiming [their] worth as participants in cultures and politics beyond [their] own ethnic milieus."[1]

[1] - Steven Salaita. *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 p.38

Chapter Five

Abu Jaber's *Crescent* as a Protest Novel

Introduction

Diana Abu Jaber, one of the most prominent and praised writers of contemporary Arab American literature, writes back against stereotypical and cliché images associated with Arabs in the mainstream popular culture. Through *Crescent*, Abu Jaber strives to correct Western misconception of Arabs, and flesh out the particularity of the Arab American character's journey in his struggle to make sense of his life in a society inundated with anti-Arab racism. In this novel, she employs her creative writing skills to serve the Arab American community and handles the issues it faces from within. She raises many questions about Arab Americans' homesickness and their struggle to cope with their hyphenated identity. She tends to look at the Arab American community from within to address some of the issues Arab American encounter on a daily basis. In the process of handling the issues of identity crisis and hybrid cultural-consciousness, Abu Jaber adopts a symbiotic narrative by intertwining intertextuality with food and memory to help the reader gain a better insight into Arab Americans' construction of identity and their struggle to deal with their hybrid characters.

The novel revolves around Sirine, a 39 years old Arab American woman born to an Iraqi father and an American mother who died in Africa when working for the American Red Cross. Her mixed biological entity has impacted her lifestyle in the United States of America. Since her childhood, Sirine has striven to strike a balance between the host country's lifestyle and her homeland's traditions. To soothe her longing for home and love for Arab, Sirine joins Um Nadia's Café where she works as a cook. Her cooking of different Arab dishes account for her reputation in the suburb of Los Angeles in the district of Teherangele which is inhabited mostly by Americans of Iranian descent in addition to some Middle Eastern ethnicities. Many Americans of Arab origin and some White Americans gather in Um-Nadia's Café to speak

about their daily life and taste Arab food. Among the regular customers are shop-owners, students, teachers and exiles from the neighborhood; among the remarkable regulars of this restaurant is Hanif, a university teacher of linguistics and a refugee from Iraq, who later falls in love with Sirine. Hanif eases Sirine's feeling of homesickness and helps her cope with her sense of double consciousness and in-betweeness. In spite of the fact that she is an Arab by origin and American by citizenship, she does not speak Arabic and does not practice Islamic rituals. Most of the events of the novel circle around Sirine's romantic relationship with Hanif and her struggle to maintain her double identity of Arabness and Americaness in a society rife with Anti-Arabism. At the beginning, Sirine who is half-Arab and half-American is sandwiched between two different cultures, but with the sequence of the events she starts to make sense of her world. At the end, she comes to full maturity with her disillusionment in American idealism.

Abu Jaber's adoption of "crescent" as a title of the novel has a great symbolic importance in insinuating the transformation and the development of the characters. It is interesting to say that "crescent" symbolizes a new journey and start. That is to say, Abu Jaber adopts "crescent" as a title to trace and investigate the gradual transformation of her characters from ignorance to self-awareness and self-discovery.

"Crescent" is a strong cultural signifier for Muslims who consider it as a religious symbol reflecting their religious identity. In an interview with Robin Field , Diana justifies her adoption of "crescent" as a title as follows:

> ....none of the cultural or social implications of claiming Islam, or even the idea of Islam as a way of identifying yourself as an Arab, even if you're not Muslim. Christians will sometimes take on an identity affiliated with Islam just because it has such a powerful, symbolic nature. And that was one of the reasons why I chose the crescent moon as such an important symbol for the book. It's not

> supposed to be a Muslim book, but it is supposed to be a book that draws on those rich cultural signifiers.[1]

Like many African American women writers who wrote to humanize the image of African Americans, Abu Jaber struggled to picture a positive images about Arabs in mainstream American popular culture. She writes back against the American hegemonic narrative to tear down stereotypes and misconceptions commonly associated with Arabs in the US. To do so, she opts for a literary resistance strategy in an attempt to counter her American literary fellows and show the positive side of Arab Americans' experience. Her writing is in many ways considered a counter-narrative which plays a two-fold role in diasporic Arab discourse. On the one hand, it counters the mainstream narrative, on the other hand, it functions to offer a space for alternative narrative through which a debate about the subject matter can be established. In this context, it suggests an alternative representation of the identity of the oppressed and ostracized. The chapter sheds light on the desire of the oppressor to represent the oppressed, which, according to Gayatri Spivak, is unfeasible because it is based on the assumption that "the political desire of the oppressed and the political interests of the intellectual are identical, and [. . .] it falls back on a fixed and stable notion of the self that is prior to representation"[2], Gayatri Spivak stresses:

> The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. [3]

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[1] - Robin E. Field. "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber". King's College.2006 p.220

[2] - Stephen Morton. *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity, and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason.*Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007 p.108

[3] - Gayatri Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. by C. Nelson, and L. Grossberg .Basingstoke: McMillan Education, 1988 p.308

In many ways, Abu Jaber's writings try to answer back Spivak's call on "postcolonial critics and intellectuals [. . .] to invent a new idiom that is appropriate to articulate the singular histories, practices and agencies of the subaltern."[1] As a post-colonial intellectual and novelist, she tends to offer an alternative narrative through which she re-represents the subalterns, oppressed Arab Americans within the global space and especially in American literary spectrum.

This chapter attempts to shed light on Abu Jaber's creative strategies to deconstruct essentialist perceptions and stereotypical images drawn about the oppressed Arabs. It explores the strategy of resistance as a narrative adopted by Abu Jaber in her address of the Arab American experience in a society riddled with cliché images that push Arab Americans to the rim of American society. Among the literary strategies used by the novelist is intertextuality and storytelling that function as alternatives to counter mainstream white literature in which Arab Americans are considered as "the Other" regardless of the efforts they have made to integrate in the America society.

Furthermore, investigating the protagonist's ardent quest for identity and his endeavor to reconcile his past as an Arab and present as an American will be the focus in this chapter. More importantly, the chapter discloses the importance of food and cooking in narrowing the gap between different cultures and forging a "third space" which foregrounds co-existence between communities. This part of the study will also emphasize on the importance of food as a cultural medium through which people can communicate to downgrade their differences.

With her mixed identity as Arab and American, like Laila Halaby, Diana Abu Jaber pinpoints what it means to be an Arab in dominantly white America. She does not only expose

[1] -Op.cit, p.123

anti-Arabism that Arab Americans face on a daily basis, but adopts a counter narrative as a resistance to the propagated stereotypes associated with Arabs. According to Gregory Orfalea, "humanness has been so lacking in American novels that treat Arabs in English [. . .] the Arab American novelist has indeed a mission beyond the normal one of making moving art."[1]On this ground, Abu Jaber's aim, Oraflea maintains, is to expose what "the stereotyper wants to blur."[2] In many ways, Abu Jaber has strived to deconstruct the mainstream narrative, and picture a positive image of Arabs different from the one presented in most white literature and Hollywood films.[3] She defies the gloomy picture about Arabs in the media as well as in white literature. In an interview with Robin Field, Abu Jaber stresses that she has been eager to scrutinize stereotypes associated with Arab Americans as she "deliberately presses on these long-held clichés as a way of perversely testing them."[4] In this regard, Abu Jaber's approach of stereotype is similar to Bhabha's understanding of it as a matter of ambivalence. Bhabha emphasizes that "stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive."[5] Both Bhabha and Abu Jaber urge the western audience to question stereotypes through investigating the orientalist discourse in which they have been created.

V-1-Stereotypes and double-consciousness

The representation of Arabs in American movies and literature have been mostly dehumanizing and demonic. It has been influenced by the existing dichotomies of the center and the periphery, the oppressor and the oppressed, the self and the other, Occidental and Oriental. These binary

[1] - Gregory Orfalea. "The Arab American Novel" .The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). 2006 p.117
[2] -Ibid., p.117
[3]-Robin EField. "A Prophet in her Own Town: an Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber"King College, 2006 p.208
[4] -Ibid., p.211
[5] - Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994 p.70

oppositions have characterized the orientalist discourse of West and East that has resulted in misrepresentation of the Orient or Arabs in the Western world. In this way, Abu Jaber comes to the realization of the complexity of being an Arab in America as she states: "No one ever wants to be the Arab—it's too old and too tragic and too mysterious and too exasperating and too lonely for anyone but an actual Arab to put up with for very long. Essentially, it's an image problem." (38) In many respects, Abu Jaber lines with Jack Shaheen who lambastes stereotypes about Arabs in US mass media especially movies. Shaheen conducted a survey on more than nine hundred movies made by Hollywood filmmakers whose premise is "all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs" and they regard all Arabs as "heartless, brutal, uncivilized, religious fanatics."[1] Shaheen's study shows that this essentialist perception has hijacked the reality and heterogeneous experiences of Arabs. The biased portrayal of Arabs adopted by filmmakers has led the American public have a narrow and debased vision about Arabs. Shaheen rebukes these filmmakers who "effectively show all Arabs, Muslims, and Arab-Americans as being at war with the United States."[2]As a counter-reaction to the ongoing stereotypes, Abu Jaber writes back to debunk such false representation that is built on an orientalist discourse. Through reading *Crescent*, the reader feels that there is a tendency to re-represent Arabs/Arab Americans and build a common ground on which different ethnicities can reach mutual understanding. In the same vein, Carol Fadda-Corney argues that in *Crescent* Abu Jaber tends to incorporate the "works by and about Arab Americans in the ethnic studies

[1] - Jack Shaheen. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Northampton: Olive Branch Press. 2001 p.171
[2]-.Jack Shaheen."Hollywood's Muslim Arabs", *The Muslim World*. 2000 p.31

category, suggesting ways to bridge the barriers separating Arab Americans from other ethnic minorities."[1]

Through the course of the novel, Abu Jaber demonstrates the unfriendly atmosphere created after each incident taking place in the Middle East. For example, during the First Gulf War Arab Americans who frequented Um-Nadia's Café have been spied on by C.I.A agents. Consequently, the regulars of this restaurant have stopped going there after feeling that they are under C.I.A surveillance:

> One day, after a month of sitting at the counter, the two men took the cook aside and asked if he knew of any terrorist schemes developing in the Arab American community. The poor man's eyes grew round, his hands grew slippery with sweat and cooking grease, he squeezed his spatula till it hurt his palm; he saw the twin images of his own frightened face in the dark lenses of one of the stranger's glasses. He'd never heard of such a thing in his life. He and his wife liked to watch *Colombo* at night: that was all he knew about intrigues or crime. He thought he was living in America. (8)

Because of the negative portrayal of Arabs in America, Sirine feels that she is a target of skepticism. After finishing her work as a chef in the restaurant, "Sometimes she used to scan the room and imagine the word *terrorist*. But her gaze ran over the faces and all that came back to her were words like *lonely*, and *young.*"(03) In this respect, Abu Jaber shows the imprint of anti-Arabism in shaping the Arab character who feels torn apart by a double cultural consciousness. On the one hand, the Arab American character regards himself as an Arab American and on the other hand he tries to deal with the new identity assigned to him by his American fellows.

As an Arab American Abderahmane feels that being Arab is being the "Other" who is torn between two identities but no one is confirmed. He does not feel his Americanness because every one suspects him as a terrorist or a bomb that is going to explode any time. He comes to

[1] - Carol Fadda-Conrey. "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*", MELUS, 31. 2006 p.187

realize the burden of being Arab on American soil where he is stripped of his Arab identity; "No one ever wants to be the Arab—it's too old and too tragic and too mysterious and too exasperating and too lonely for anyone but an actual Arab to put up with for very long. Essential, it's an image problem." (22)

Such a bitter atmosphere and environment of skepticism, in which Americans of Arab descent are regarded as suspects and the Other, creates in the Arab American characters a sense of identity loss in white America. In her handling of the theme of identity crisis, Abu Jaber exhibits some incidents showing Sirine's feeling of being caught in two worlds: the Arab and the American World. Sirine, who is half Iraqi and half American, doubts her identity and belonging as she finds herself oscillating between two dichotomous worlds. In this respect, Sirine is the reflection of Duboisian concept of "double-consciousness":

> She stares at the portrait of herself in the metal-framed mirror. All she can see is white. She is so white. Her eyes wide, almond-shaped, and sea-green, her nose and lips tidy and compact. Entirely her mother. That's all anyone can see: when people ask her nationality they react with astonishment when she says she's half-Arab. I never would have thought *that*. They say, laughing. You sure don't look it. When people say this she feels like her skin is being peeled away. She thinks that she may have somehow inherited her mother on the outside and her father on the inside. (119)

Sirine tries to cope with a sense of towness as her employer Abu Jaber who too is half American and half Arab. The issue of having double identity and the way Arab Americans have tried to cope with misrepresentations are themes of this text. Abu Jaber tends to cover up these themes on the light of her outlook of feminist representation.

V-2-Feminist Representation in *Crescent*

As a feminist and pro-Arab American activist, Abu Jaber gives too much importance to gender issues in the American context. According to the American popular belief, the Arab woman is submissive, oppressed, sexually abused, swathed in black from head to foot, backward and belly

dancer. This monolithic view constitutes a problematic theme for many Arab American women writers including Abu Jaber who employs charismatic, industrious and successful Arab American characters who are proud of their Arabness as well as their Americaness. For example, Um Nadia is an unconventional charismatic character and a hardworking figure who never stops moving forward. She is the owner of a Café from which she gains a social status as a dignified woman respected and appreciated by both white Americans as well as her Arab American fellows. Her success to gather people of different backgrounds in her Café foregrounds the possibility of coexistence between different ethnicities and reinforce the general assumption of America as 'a melting pot' country.

Um Nadia, as an unorthodox and committed character, relies on herself to be productive in her community. Being financially independent, she positions herself as a challenge to the widespread perception of Arab women as male-dominated. Her financial independence is also a glimmer of hope for Arab Americans to be proud of themselves and resolved to do what is good for them. Most interestingly, Um Nadia's success is combined with her love of her Arab origin represented in food which is cooked in her restaurant.

It is worth mentioning that her chef Sirine is attached to her homeland by cooking different types of food including Arab traditional food which symbolizes her pride of her Arab traditions. Despite the fact that she shows a blatant love of her Arab heritage, Sirine is not totally immersed in her Arab heritage and tries to make a balance between Arab and American social codes. For instance, she swerves away from Arab religious dictates to join American liberal life style by having an intimate relationship with Han. Such conduct is the most despicable thing a girl could ever do in a society ruled by strict patriarchal traditions. By having an affair with Han, Sirine crosses the red line which separates Arab and Western mainstream lives. However, by

transcending that red line, she strikes a balance between her modern diasporic life in America and that of her Arab ancestors.

V-3-Intertextuality as a Literary Strategy to Deconstruct Stereotypes and Assert Identity in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent*

Through her attempt to deconstruct misconceptions about Arabs/ Arab Americans, Abu Jaber opts for intertextuality as a literary strategy to address the monolithic and orientatlist discourse about Arabs. Intertextuality is aimed at deconstructing the twisted representation of Arabs in the U.S media and offer a new humanized image which bears witness to their goodness. In her definition of intertextuality Linda Hutcheon points out:

> [Intertextuality] replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text, one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself. A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance.[1]

In this respect Linda agrees with Jonathan Culler who denies the originality of the text and emphasizes that the text cannot be interpreted unless the reader engages in a reading of "discursive space" with other text and figures out the combination between the targeted study text and related text. He maintains "that to read is to place a work in discursive place, relating it to other texts and to the codes of that space, and writing itself is a similar activity: a taking up of a position in a discursive space."[2] This leads us to Ronald Barthes's view about the nature of literary writing. According to Barthes, the literary writing is not only the product of the writer's imagination. He emphasizes that: "the writer's only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones

[1] - Quoted in Nawal Zbidi. "Postmodernist Generic Transgressions, Fragmentation and Heteroglossia in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent".* Tunisia: University of Sousse. 2015 p.667

[2]-Jonathan Culler. *Presupposition and Intertextuality.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.2010 p.1382

with others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them."[1] It means that the construction of the literary text does not depend only on the writer's internal creative skills but also in part on other writer's text through the process of borrowing or appropriation; therefore, the reader's interpretation of the text should not rely only on his internal reading of the text but relates it to other texts.

Crescent engages in dialogue with some Western canonical texts and raise some questions about stereotypes, misconceptions and images about Arab/ Arab Americans. Through *Crescent* Abu Jaber enters in dialogue with Shakespeare's *Othello* (1565) and Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Making *Crescent* engages with these two texts, the novelist challenges part of Western canonical literature in America and Britain. Through the literary misreading of the two texts, Abu Jaber gives too much importance to her work since Shakespeare and Fitzgerald are respectively canonical scholars in British and American literature.

Stereotypes about Africans and Arabs existed in English discourse while Shakespeare was writing his plays as Emily C Bartels argues: "English discourse was [. . .] already filled with stereotypes of Africans as embodiments of evil, blackened by sin, driven by lust, and hungry for murder and revenge."[2] Shakespeare calls Arabs "Moors" and depicts them as jealous, irrational and superstitious, which contributed to the distortion of the Arab image in mainstream Western culture. By contrast, Abu Jaber depicts Han as genuine and faithful in his love of Sirine. Unlike Othello whose love of Desdemona is ruined by jealousy and superstition, Han is a charismatic man and an admirable lover who is able to demonstrate sincere love to his beloved Sirine with rationality. Halaby's portrayal of Han as a good lovely man with charismatic and steady

[1] -Roland Barthes. *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath .New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. pp.146-147

[2] -Emily C. Bartels. "*Othello* and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered", *The William and Mary Quarterly*. America: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. 1997 p.53

character alerts the reader to the fact that Arabs and Arab Americans have been stereotyped, and hence he is invited to reconsider presentation of Arabs in the Western literary text.

Unlike Othello who is irrational in his behavior, Han is an intellectual and Iraqi university teacher who is successful and friendly with his students. Owing to his charismatic and sagacious character, Han has captured the attention of Sirine during his first visit to Um-Nadia's Café. "[Sirine's] main impressions of Hanif are of his hair, straight and shiny as black glass, and of a faint tropical sleepiness to his eyes. And there is his beautiful, light accented, fluid voice, dark as chocolate. His accent has nuances of England and Eastern Europe, like a complicated sauce." (04)

The main plot of the novel is structured around Han's love of Sirine. In stark contrast with the protagonist Othello who is somehow heartless, Han is so kind with every one especially Sirine whom he invites to his home to dinner with him for a couple of days. They listen to music while eating after that they move together to the balcony: "The moon comes out and turns red. They're back sitting side by side on the tiny balcony, eating frozen chocolate layer cake straight from the box and spoonfuls of vanilla ice cream from the carton, and drinking from one cup of Lipton's tea, which Han says is the great colonial tea bag." (35) Such good atmosphere between them makes them look compatible partners. During this lovely atmosphere Han starts telling stories to Sirine about his personality and current career. This part of the novel constitutes Abu Jaber's engagement with Shakespeare's *Othello as* the romantic moments between Han and Sirine recalls Othello's love of Desdemona. Othello, like Han, narrates stories of his past to Desdemona. He is a knight with extraordinary love for adventures, which leads Desdemona falls in love with him. Desdemona loves Othello not only for his tenderness but the adventures he narrates to her as he states:

Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd;
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used:-
Here comes the lady; let her witness it"23

By incorporating some characters that are similar and dissimilar to those in Shakespeare's *Othello,* Abu Jaber challenges one the canonical texts in Western literary hemisphere by showing an ideal image about Arabs different from that presented by Shakespeare or other Western literary writers. Via the literary strategy of intertextuality, *Crescent* deconstructs some of the orientalist stereotypical ideas associated with Arabs. Her adoption of intertextuality helps in subverting misconceptions and lines herself with Jonathan Cullar's view about this literary strategy:

> In its designation of a discursive space and its assertion of the primacy of this space for any systymatic study of discourse. Intertextuality is a theoretical construct of the first importance , and it is not without a direct prarticalconsequences.It leads one to think of a text as a dialogue with other texts, an act of absorption, parody, and criticism, rather than as autonomous artifact which harmoniously reconciles the possible attitudes towards a given problem; it alerts one to the artifice of literature, the special conventions and interpretive operations on which it is based; and it makes one particularly sensitive to the special referentiality of literary works.[1]

Through intertextuality, not only convergences are figured out but also divergences. For example, handkerchief is used by both the playwright Shakespeare and the novelist Abu Jaber in their respective literary works *Othello* and *Crescent;* however, in the former it is used to reinforce stereotypes about Arab or "Moors" but in the latter it is a symbol of love and loyalty. In *Othello* it is a source of anxiety and irrationality. When Desdemona loses it, Othello asks

[1] -Jonathan Culler. "Presupposition and Intertextuality" Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins University Press, Comparative Literature . 1976 p.1383

Desdemona with rage and emphasizes the importance of the handkerchief. In this respect, *Othello* reinforces misrepresentation about Arabs/Moors as irrational.

Unlike Othello's handkerchief, Abu Jaber uses Han's handkerchief to humanize and burnish the negative image associated with Arabs and embedded in most of western literary texts. It is a source of beauty and happiness and " [its] material is so soft between her fingers it feels like dipping her hand into water."(59) Unlike Othello, Han regrets his initial reaction after the loss of the scarf. In this regard, Abu Jaber tries to disrupt stereotypical idea of irrationality embedded in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Han's scarf was a souvenir sent by his aunt while he was studying in England. It is a portrait that reflects specific image represented in his mother's village."This is the traditional pattern of my mother's village in the south. All the villages have their own design. If you study them, you can figure out where a certain embroidery stitch has come from." (81) In this sense, the scarf is a reminder of his identity and belonging, which makes it a priceless piece of clothing. Interestingly, it is also a reminder of his father's first encounter with his mother as he states: "My mother was wearing this when my father fell in love with her." (82) Han's genuine love of his beloved Sirine stands in juxtaposition with Othello's irrationality.

The two protagonists Othello and Han react differently to the loss of handkerchief. In *Crescent*, Sirine gets anxious when she loses the handkerchief at the thanksgiving dinner. Han suffers from psychological pain after the loss of the scarf :

> Where is it?" [Han] says…"The *scarf*. What did you do with the scarf I gave you? Why don't you ever wear it?" Her mouth opens but she stammers, her voice rattling in her throat. "I guess-I just-I haven't had-"…"I trusted you with that one thing, just that one small thing, Sirine." He looks away from her. "How could I have been such a fool?" His eyes return to her and now they are flat, sharp stone. "How could I have trusted something so precious with someone like *you*?" (147)

Despite the fact that Han's reaction to the loss of the scarf is somehow similar to that of Othello, Abu Jaber via *Crescent* defies Shakespeare's misconceptions about Arabs. Unlike Othello who

gets angry and shouts at Desdimona, Han apologies for getting resented. It is in this point that Othello and Han differ. In contrast to Othello, Han feels deeply sorry for getting angry and tries to undermine the loss of the scarf. In this respect, he seems more rational than Othello as he placates Sirine by saying: "The scarf was just a thing. If you have lost it or not, things are things and that's it. A scarf is a scarf, right? You, on the other hand, are the whole world." (151) In a conspicuous demarcation with Othello whose love to Desdemona is irrational and marred by jealousy and superstition, Han displays a genuine love towards his beloved Sirine. By re-writing the scarf scene, Abu Jaber revises the Western canonical text and defies the society imposed identity on Arabs/Arab Americans.

Another juxtaposition between the two texts is the dissimilarity existing between Othello'mother and Abdelrahmane's mother. In *Crescent* Arab Women characters play important roles in their lives. They are employed to correct the image of submission and passivism pervasive in Western literature and media. While Shakespeare associates Othello's mother with superstition, Abu Jaber portrays Abderahmane's mother as resourceful and tenacious. She is a challenger who travels around the world in search of her lost son. Aunt Camille is tenacious, strong-minded and "perspicacious women" (54). Via this strong female Arab American, Abu Jaber tries to shatter the negative image of the submissiveness and self-victimization.[1]

Han's handkerchief is a portrait that reflects specific image represented in his mother's village as Han sates: "This is the traditional pattern of my mother's village in the south…If you study them, you can figure out where a certain embroidery stitch has come

1-Yousef Awad. *Cartographies of Identities: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers*. Manchester, Non Published Thesis.2011p.184

from."(81) In this sense, the scarf is a reminder of his belonging, his origin and identity, which makes it priceless. In this sense, it softens his feeling of homesickness and exile which, as he explains to Sirine, is "bigger than everything else in my life. Leaving my country was like—I don't know—like part of my body was torn away. I have phantom pains from the loss of that part—I'm haunted by myself. I don't know—does any of that make any sense? It's as if I'm trying to describe something that I'm not, that's no longer here." (93)

Abu Jaber's representation of Han as a charismatic character and a lover of his Arab identity is interpreted as another attempt to counter western narrative about Arabs. In this regard, the novelist endeavors to reinstate Arab American community and preserve its identity within the lager spectrum of American society. Through presenting Arab Americans as productive and dignified citizens, Abu Jaber succeeds at disrupting some of stereotypical images associated with Arabs/Arab Americans in US literary products and popular culture.

In addition to his appropriation of *Othello*, Abu Jaber appropriates Scot Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1952). In the two novels the protagonist are caught between their haunting past and difficult present. Han's love of freedom and the luxurious life he dreams to enjoy in America recalls Gatsby's belief in the American Dream and the opportunities offers in the United States. Thus the affinity between them is reinforced by their ardent belief in the American Dream.

Appropriating Shakespeare's *Othello* and making parallel between a charismatic American character and an Arab protagonist who behaves in an idealistic way, Abu Jaber presents a burnished and humanized picture about Arab Americans to make Arab American community acceptable in the American society. Her appropriation of Scot Fitzgerald is also an attempt to deconstruct stereotypical images about Arabs and show that Arabs are proud of their

culture and identity. In addition to her adoption of intertextuality as a strategy of resistance, Abu Jaber opts for Arab folklore to fulfill her objective to show Arab Americans' pride of their identity. She makes use of Arab cultural references throughout her novel in a way that evokes nostalgia for the Arab homeland.

V-4-Food and Storytelling as a Reflection of Identity Assertion

Abu Jaber is a fan of Arabic food as she demonstrates that in many of her literary works including *Crescent* (2003), *The Language of Baklava* (2005) and *Birds of Paradise* (2011). Food is one of the main themes in *Crescent* (2003) as it is omnipresent in the narrative structure. Her passion for cuisine pushed her make of food and cooking tools to handle different topics like identity, community, love and bridging differences. Her love of food was the outcome of her upbringing during her childhood when she discovered the secret power of Arab food as she stresses in an interview with Rana Jarrar:

> never intended food to occupy so much of my creative work… But the obsession with food filled my childhood... In America, my Jordanian father spent decades cooking professionally and pursuing his dream of a restaurant, and it was one of the central ways that he explained himself to his American children.[1]

Food plays a critical role in the survival of human beings as it provides the body with fundamental needs. Cooking food is not just part of everyday practice, and eating is not limited to physiological need, but they have a significant social function. In his discussion of the social importance of food, Carol Bardentstein argues:

> the ways food consumption, preparation, and transmission of knowledge about food has figured in how individuals conceive of themselves, affiliate and identify with home, homeland, and a range of social groupings, and how the earliest and most persistently retained

[1] -Randa Jarrar. "Diana Abu-Jaber: Race, Food, and Cultivating Selective Deafness" *Guernica: a Magazine of Arts and Politics.* 2011 p.1

> sense memories are profoundly incorporated into the creation and structuring of collective memory and cultural identity.[1]

In this context, food plays an irrefutable role in shaping our identity as it is a reflection of tradition and heritage in a given country. "[It], like language, is used as a vehicle for expressing culture."[2] Through the language of food, Abu Jaber handles the complex issue of identity and points out how to make balance when the individual has a hybrid heritage as it is the case with the protagonist Sirine. More importantly, it is one of identity makers. "[Food] is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy and organization, but also, at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently".[3] Food is vital to individual identity as it has a biological, psychological and social effect on human beings.[4] In other words, it affects the individual's entire life. It evokes the characters' memory, taking them back to their origin and ancestors' past .In a world of political struggle and homesickness, Abu Jaber uses food to forge spaces wherein the characters can figure out the possibilities of love, peace and self-reconciliation.

Abu Jaber's characters are haunted by their past which functions as a reminder of their identity and roots. More often the past acts as a source of consolation, relief and most importantly as a strategy of resistance, and sometimes as a healer of wounds that trigger the feeling of loss and homesickness. Furthermore, the past and memory are used to deal with the

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[1] -Carol Bardenstein. "Transmissions Interrupted: Reconfiguring Food, Memory, and Gender in the Cook book-Memoirs of Middle Eastern Exiles." *Signs: Gender and Cultural Memory.* 2002 p.356

[2] - Riya Shah. "Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural and Personal Identity".Benglore: Christ University.2018 p.01

[3] - Claude Fischler. " Food, Self and identity". Social Science Information.http:// Ssi.sagepub.com 1988, p.01

[4] - Ibid p.01

present in a constructive way to overcome daily difficulties.[1] In this regards, Laila Maghmoul points out: "Abu-Jaber uses memory and the journey to the past of her female fictional characters to devise a constructive way of dealing with the present."[2] Moreover, the idea of food cannot be reduced to what is placed on the table but it is a reflection of human character. In this respect, the sociologist Claude Fischler states: "Food not only nourishes but also signifies."[3] More significantly, it has a double functionality. On the one hand, it satisfies the basic biological need of our body; on the other hand, it serves as a reflection of culture. Therefore, it is relevant to say that food is a tool to express identity and reinforce it.[4] It is a vital part that reflects the individual's identity as Riya Shah points out:

> Food is central to our sense of identity and is strongly linked to our memories; our histories and small pieces of information about a person's food choices can reveal views, passions, background, knowledge, assumptions and personalities. The idea of food --is never reducible to what appears on a plate; it is an omnipresent aspect of society that can be conceptualized in a multitude of ways and this research aims to explore the relationship between eating identity type and the affinity for particular foods, food groups, or eating patterns.[5]

Moreover, the kind of food the individual chooses to eat, ingredients he uses to prepare a certain dish sometimes could determine his identity and cultural belonging. For example, couscous is associated with Maghrebians, olive oil is associated with Tamazigh, Italian and Greek culture, while tortillas, pasta and curries are respectively associated with Mexican ,Italian and Indian cuisine. The proverb " you are what you eat" embodies the importance of food in

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[1] - Laila Maghmoul," Identity Quest through Memory in Diana Abu-Jaber's*Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003) and Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007)".Algeria: University of Guelma .2016. p172

[2] - Ibid,p.172

[3] - Opcit. Claude Fichler, p. 02

[4] -Robin Fox. "Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective" Britain: Social Issues Research Centre.2015 p.02

[5] - Riya Shah, "Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural and Personal Identity". Benglore, Christ University.2018 p.2

shaping our identity and revealing who we are. That is to say, the types of food you eat could determine your identity and cultural belonging. In this context, Savarin and Anthelme underscore: "Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are."[1] The wealthy people may prefer to eat in a five star- restaurant whereas middle class eat in a normal restaurant. In this sense the kind of food we eat determine our social class. Thus, food has a symbolic role in determining our social class and it maintains its mechanism in identity construction.

Most of the scenes in *Crescent* are about food since the protagonist Sirine is a cook at Um- Nadia's Café. Through cuisine, Sirine has been able to explore her hyphenated identity and her legacy. Her parents have instilled in her the love for food that has been reflected on her job as a cook in Um Nadia's restaurant. In fact, cooking has reconnected her to her parents' memories and reminded her of her Arab heritage.

> Sirine learned about food from her parents. Always said his wife thought about food like an Arab. Sirine's mother strained the salted yogurt through cheesecloth to make creamy labneh, stirred the onion and lentils together in a heavy iron pan to make mjeddrah, and studded joints of lamb with fat cloves of garlic to make roasted kharuf. Sirine's earliest memory was of sitting on a phone book on a kitchen chair, the sour-tart smell of pickled grape leaves in the air. Her mother spread the leaves flat on the table like little floating hands, placed the spoonful of rice and meat at the center of each one, and Sirine with her tiny fingers rolled the leaves up tighter and neater than anyone else could—tender, garlicky, meaty packages that burst in the mouth. (36/37)

Despite the fact that Sirine does not speak Arabic, she has been able to express her Arab identity through cooking. The above statement shows Sirine's love of Arab food which is linked to the memorable life she has spent with her family. The images of cooking remain vivid in her memory that helps her to reconcile her present with her past. In other words, "by

[1] - Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture.* New York: Scribner. *2003*p.182

cooking Arab food or telling stories, [Sirine] makes a journey to the past in their quest for identity."[1]

As far as Sirine is concerned, cooking an Arab food keeps her in touch with her origin and double identity when all other means fail to reconcile her hyphenated identity.[2] Food for Sirine and other female characters become a means and a connecter through which they express their plight and struggle against the patriarchal system and racist American society. For her, the Cafe is a good sanctuary where she finds comfort when facing uncertainty and identity crisis. Moreover, the establishment of specific Arab American atmosphere in Um-Nadia Café by its regulars who mix English with Arabic while discussing their daily life drives Sirine to question her true identity:

> Nadia's Café is like other places—crowded at meals and quiet in between—but somehow there is so usually a lingering conversation, currents of Arabic that ebb around Sirine, fill her head with mellifluous voices. Always there are the same groups of students from the big university up the street, always so lonely, the sadness like blue hollows in their throats, blue motes for their wives and children back home, or for the American women they haven't met. (03)

Sirine comes to realize that the best way to find comfort in this hostile environment is through cooking Arab food by using her parents' recipes which have attracted a great number of Arab American regulars of Um-Nadia's Café. Arab food prepared by Sirine like Knaffea and tabbouleh creates in them a sense of belonging. Those dishes revive and triggers in them the feeling of homesickness and longing for their families whom they left behind. "For many of them the Café was a little flavor of home."(05) In other words, Sirine's food functions as a

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[1]- Laila Maghmoul," Identity Quest through Memory in Diana Abu-Jaber's*Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003) and Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007). Algeria: University of Guelma.2016 p.172

[2] - Lorraine Mercer and Linda Strom, "Counter narratives: cooking up stories of love and lossin Naomi Shihab Nye's poetry and Diana Abu-Jaber's crescent" *MELUS*, Volume 32, Issue 4, 2007 p.40

medicine for Arab American immigrants to alleviate the pain triggered by homesickness and diminish the sense of displacement. Furthermore, food also serves as an identity maker which combines different elements from other identities but without subverting the whole identity. For example, Sirine's Thanksgiving feast is a combination of Arab traditional and American food with an Arab flavor as it is stated by the narrator in the following:

> [Serine] looked up Iraqi dishes, trying to find the childhood foods that she'd heard Han speak of, the sfeehas—savory pies stuffed with meat and spinach—and round mensaf trays piled with lamb and rice and yogurt sauce with onions, and for dessert, tender ma'mul cookies that dissolve in the mouth. She stuffed the turkey with rice, onions, cinnamon, and ground lamb. Now there are pans of sautéed greens with bittersweet vinegar, and lentils with tomato, onion, and garlic on the stove, as well as maple-glazed sweet potatoes, green bean casserole, and pumpkin soufflé. (111)

Most of the time Sirine's food is a reflection of her overlapping identity as an Arab and American. The incorporation of ingredients of both American and Arab food is a deep reflection of American identity that is the result of melting many cultural elements from different cultures. Moreover, the use of food in the novel has been the best way to enable the character to question his identities and assess his diasporic life in the host country. Sirine's use of her mother's recipes remind her of her origin and Arab belonging. Thus, by cooking, the character conducts a journey to the past in quest for his identity.

Sirine's love of Arab traditional food enables her to retain the second part of her identity that is Arab. Despite the physical detachment that separates the host country and the lost homeland, Sirine tries to narrow that gap through cooking to her clients diverse Arab meals. In this respect, Abu Jaber's focus on food and its link with the past of marginalized individuals underscores the fact that our connection to each other should not be limited within geographical boundaries.

In addition to the use of food as a vital part in preserving the character's overlapping identity, Abu Jaber intertwines her text with stories which look like subtexts. Her use of storytelling embellishes her writing style and makes the novel a hybrid product that combines between Arab folklore and western literary techniques. She adopts the storytelling techniques through Sirine's uncle who narrates stories about the magic world of Salahadine while Sirine cooks. In this regard, Mercer and Storm states: " the two trajectories [food and storytelling] intersect in the kitchen, where she [Sirine] feeds him the Arabic food he loves and he [her uncle] feeds her the Scherazadelike tale of his great Aunty Camille and her son Abdelrahman Salahadin"s adventures in a fantastical Arabian landscape."[1]

Storytelling plays a crucial role in helping the female protagonist to overcome her identity crisis and soothe her thirst for Arab heritage. The adoption of this technique shows the ability of Arab folk culture to be an integrated part of mainstream American culture. It is also an attempt from the novelist to challenge the Western techniques of narration. Abu Jaber has a special approach and vision towards storytelling techniques as she highlights:

> Storytelling was very important when I grew up. My father and my uncles are all great storytellers, and they regaled us with jokes, fables, and reminiscences about their growing-up years .And that storytelling, along with food, was one of the great pillars of my own cultural education. Thus it was really important to me to try to bring some of that format into *Crescent*. I wanted the uncle to be telling Sirine, his niece, a story throughout the course of the book. I wanted the story to have the flavor of the oral narrative, and the surprises and the nuances of the spoken voice. And I wanted it to function as a kind of looking glass for the characters, that would in some way reflect upon the motifs of their reality in an indirect way.[2]

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[1] - Quoted in Nawel Zbidi. "Postmodernist Generic Transgressions, Fragmentation and Heteroglossia in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent"*.Tunisia: International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies. ISSN 2356-5926, 2015 p.665

[2] - Robin E Field. "A Prophet in Her Own Town: An Interview with Diana AbuJaber".The United States of America: The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). 2012 p.221

Both food and storytelling become a vital part in the character's quest for identity as the two trigger a sense of homesickness towards the native land and console the soul. As far as Rodney and P. Carlisle are concerned, Arab Americans, "While they have become assimilated into American society over time, [they] tend to retain certain cultural traditions [such as food ways of homeland and storytelling] that reflect their unique heritages."[1]

The uncle's storytelling is so important in the plot structure. The incorporation of storytelling makes the plot have non-linear shape which bears witness to the inconsistency in the characters' lives. The stories are intertwined with the main plot so the reader is unintentionally captured by them. The narrator declares that these stories are transferred from Bedouins and they reflect reality which awakens in the Arab American reader a sense of belonging. In this sense, the reader is taken in a journey to discover his ancestor's past and culture.

Am-Nadia's Café is not just a place to which Arab students, teachers, exiles and immigrants flock to enjoy "Real True Arab Food" (9), but it is a source of happiness and cultural gathering where many people of different ethnicities gather there to speak about their daily issues and discuss possible solutions. In this sense, Abu Jaber uses the restaurant as a platform "to bring together the self and the other in order to get incorporated within the larger ethnic and multicultural American culture."[2] In many ways, it is considered as a homeland for many immigrants who come there seeking peace and cherishing their feeling of homesickness. All the characters are aware of their unbearable situation in the U.S and all carry their native land stories to Um-Nadia Café which turns out to be "the symbol of a recreated home in the

[1] - Rodney P Carlisle. *The Arab Americans*. New York: Facts On File, 2011p.144
[2] - Nawel Zbidi , "Postmodernist Generic Transgressions, Fragmentation and Heteroglossia in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent"*.Tunisia: International Journal of Humanities and Cultural StudiesI SSN 2356-5926. 2015 p.662

midst of a foreign and alienating culture."[1] In this respect, Svetlana Boym states that "to feel at home is to know that things are in their places and so are you; it is a state of mind that does not depend on actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world."[2] On this ground, the concept of home is more than a geographical place as it is related with intimacy and familiarity. That is to say, home is a place where the individual feels familiar with his environment. In this sense, Am Nadia's Cafe becomes the symbol of re-created home that provides its regulars with the intimacy and the familiarity of their homeland. It is a special place welcoming Americans of Arab origin as well as Arab immigrants and helping them feel home thank to that nostalgic atmosphere that reminds them of their lost homeland in the United States of America:

> At Nadia's Café, there is a TV tilted in the corner above the cash register, permanently tuned to the all-Arabic station, with news from Qatar, variety shows and a shopping channel from Kuwait, endless Egyptian movies, Bedouin soap operas in Arabic, and American soap operas with Arabic subtitles. There is a group of regulars who each have their favorite shows and dishes and who sit at the same tables as consistently as if they were assigned. . . . There are students who come religiously, appearing at the counter with their newspapers almost every day for years, until the day they graduate and disappear, never to be seen again. And then there are students who never graduate. (10)

Despite the multifariousness of American culture, the characters especially those who are customers of Um- Nadia Café manage to forget about their cultural and ethnic differences and challenge the oppositional binary "us and them". To borrow Mercer's and Srorm's words "Food forms a kind of contact zone"[3] as it is the case with Nadia's Café which becomes a

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[1]- Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu- Jaber's*Crescent"*Oxford University Press on behalf of Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). 2006 p.05

[2] - Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001 p.251

138 - Lorraine Mercer, Linda Storm. "Counter Narratives: Cooking up Stories of Love and Loss in Naomi Shihab Nye's Poetry and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent." MELUS* 32. 2007, p.39

"contact zone" not just for immigrants of Arab descent but also of different ethnicities. In short, Nadia's Café becomes a homeland where those who feel homesickness find peace of mind. Immigrants demonstrate their ardent longing for their home by creating similar place to that of native land over food parties at Nadia's Café which represents an ideal corner for making homeland substitute as depicted in the novels: "The men spend their time arguing and being lonely, drinking tea and trying to talk to Um-Nadia, Mireille, and Sirine. Especially Sirine. They love her food—the flavors that remind them of their home."(03) As a matter of fact, "For many of them [Um-Nadia's] café was a little flavor of home."(10) In this respect, Um-Nadia's Café echoes Homi Bhabha's concept of "gathering" spaces that are converted into a homelike haven connecting immigrants and exiles. As an exile, Homi Bhabha has experienced that act of "gathering" and its importance in making the individual feel home in the host country as he states:

> I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and *emigres* and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language;……..gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.[1]

"Gathering" spaces as Um-Nadia's Café evoke memories and help its regulars make cultural interchange. Furthermore, food in this "contact zone" functions as a bridge for cultural dialogue to bring immigrants and exiles together. Indeed, they choose Um-Nadia Café to engage in intercultural dialogue to overcome their differences and pave the way for coexistence. In this regard, Faddaa Conrey emphasizes: "instead of pitting different ethnic characters against each other by marking what keeps them apart as individuals and communities, *Crescent* resists the 'us

[1] - Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994 p.139

versus them binary' that might characterize some minority cultures' conception of each other."[1] Food becomes a language through which immigrants communicate love and exile. It also brings people of different backgrounds together to share their daily experience and alleviate the pain of their exilic suffering. In this sense, it works as a metaphor and a platform for intercommunication between characters of different ethnicities. In an interview with Shalal-Esa, Abu Jaber highlights the importance of food as follows:

> Food is such a great human connector, it's so intimate…let the food be a metaphor for their experience…that's why food has been such an important metaphor. To me, that's one of the most immediate and powerful ways of creating the metaphor of the hearth and a gathering place, a place where the collective forms.[2]

As a testimony to the importance of food in life of individuals, Arab food creates a feeling of being home among Arab Americans and other ethnic minorities. The food shared by immigrants creates a kind of communal life when their daily life outside Nadia Cafe is characterized by a sense of remoteness and cultural detachment. It seems the only means that unites these immigrants together. More remarkably, all of the regulars do not care about ideologies or religions, which means that food is a driving force that brings them together and helps in narrowing the gap between them.

Students, immigrants and exiles who are customers of Um-Nadia's Café feel lonely and desperate, not only because they are homesick but also they find difficulties to integrate in a society where Arabs are undesirable. The spread of negative conceptions of Arabs have made the latter feel unwelcome "Other" in the country he has flocked to hoping to fulfill his dreams. Consequently, Um-Nadia's Café becomes a homelike sanctuary where visitors can exchange

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[1]-Op.cit. p.09

[2] - Andrea Shalal-Esaand Diana Abu-Jaber, "The Only Response to Silencing is to Keep Speaking", Interview with *Al Jadid Magazine*. *Al JadidMagazine* .Spring 2002. p.02

ideas and share their feelings. The intimate atmosphere in the Café provides immigrant regulars with the opportunity to express their preoccupations and concerns about the political instability in the Middle East and its impact on their daily life in the United States of America.

More significantly, Abu Jaber through Sirine makes food a means of resistance by her association of Arab and Mexican food. The latter is characterized by the use of a lot of spices; therefore, Sirine's use of a lot of species when cooking makes her food look more Mexican than American. By doing so, she challenges American cuisine and implies that groups of different ethnicities can, like spices, come together, cooperate and challenge obstacles they find in their way to fulfill full American citizenship. In this context, Victor, Sirine's Mexican friend stresses: "Your cooking reveals America to us non-Americans. And vice versa"…… " Chef cooks like we do. In Mexico, we put cinnamon in with the chocolate and pepper in the sweetcakes, so things pull apart, you know, make it bigger." (115)

The association between Arab and Mexican food exemplifies an intercultural encounter between Arabs and Mexicans. It shows and implies that the two ethnic groups have almost the same fate and challenges they must overcome to fulfill their self-assertion. It also bears witness to the cultural richness of American society where many ethnicities either Arabs, Mexicans or any group can co-exist. More particularly, it indicates the importance of accepting the "Other" for the sake of co-existence. In his discussion of U.S as an ethnic borderland, Fadda Corney emphasizes:

> *Crescent* creates a physical and psychological ethnic borderland in which different ethnic communities coexist and communicate. The basis of such acts of interethnic bridging, however, encourages a search for commonality that is anti-essentialist, since it is engaged in an informed understanding of the inherent differences within and between ethnic communities. Only through such strategies can the ethnic borderland transcend exclusionary

> limitations and become a transformative site extending beyond what Castillo describes as "the refused other".[1]

As mentioned earlier, Um-Nadia's Café serves as a gathering place with its power to unite people from different ethnic backgrounds. It is the site of constant border crossings between people of diverse origins, which recalls Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of borderlands that "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different cultures occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."[2] In addition to Arabs and Americans of Arab descent, this inter-ethnic site is frequented by white Americans, Hispanics and Turks:

> There are Jenoob, Garb, and Schmaal – Engineering students from Egypt; Shark, a math student from Kuwait; Lon Hayden, the chair of Near Eastern Studies; Morris who owns the newsstand; Raphael-fromNew-Jersay; Jay, Ron, and Troy from the Kappa Something Something fraternity house; Odah, the Turkish butcher, and his many sons. (10)

From this perspective, the restaurant becomes a territory of cultural encounter and negotiation. In this context, the novelist situates Arab American communities within the multiethnic reality of their new adopted home, America. It is convenient to point out that "within this matrix of these intersecting cultures, an intercultural encounter between the members of the same society might involve the meeting of multiple differences, even when a shared membership in one group tends to obscure or overwhelm those differences."[3] Through cultural encounters and intersections exposed in the novel, Abu Jaber tends to respond to the misrepresentation of Arab and Arab American communities in mainstream America and show the heterogeneous nature

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[1] -ibid,. p 203
[2] - Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007 p.19
[3] - Susan Friedman. *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*. Princeton:Princeton UP, 1998 p.19

of its society, thus the importance of borderland strategy to reach coexistence between different ethnicities. Thus, it is relevant to point out that

> contemporary Arab American writers such as Abu-Jaber and others articulate stories about individual and group identities, locating strategies by which the ethnic borderland becomes a space of communication for different minority groups, a space that ultimately leads to the transformation of ethnic relations……. Recognizing the differences among and within minority groups becomes an essential part of Abu-Jaber's delineation of the ties that unite them within *Crescent*'s ethnic borderland.[1]

In many ways, food and memory are interrelated when the theme of identity quest is addressed. Food takes the character back to the past and memorable souvenir of childhood, adulthood or family gathering. For example, Abu Jaber's protagonist tries different types of foods but she is haunted by food prepared by her mother during childhood; therefore, she starts cooking traditional Arab food which makes her more comfortable and drives many clients of different ethnicities to Nadia's Café. Sirine's cooking of Arab food symbolizes Arab Americans' return to their culture and origin which plays a role in enable them to alleviate their burden because a return to one's root help ease the pain of being "othered". Interestingly, Arab traditional food remains one of Sirine's best cultures after trying diverse types of world dishes:

> Sirine learned about food from her parents. Even though her mother was American, her fatheralways said his wife thought about food like an Arab. Sirine's mother strained the salted yogurt through cheesecloth to make creamy labneh, stirred the onion and lentils together in a heavy iron pan to make mjeddrah, and studded joints of lamb with fat cloves of garlic to make roasted kharuf.Sirine's earliest memory was of sitting on a phone book on a kitchen chair, the sour-tart smell of pickled grape leaves in the air. (22)

Food remains the only link that bonds her with the country of her father, Iraq, to which she has travelled. By cooking Arab food, she wants to be identified as Arab. Despite the fact that she is American by birth, Sirine's love of her Arab identity enables her to perfectly cook different

[1] - Carol Fadda-Conrey. "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*." *MELUS* 31.4. 2006, p.194

types of Arab dishes thank to her mother who taught her during her childhood how to cook different kinds of Arab food. It is important to mention that Sirine's mother is not Arab but American and her Arab husband taught her to cook Arab cuisine. This fact bears witness to the importance of food in helping different people from different ethnicities co-exist

Food is one of the means by which the protagonist Sirine expresses her identity and origin. The kitchen becomes a sanctuary where "she attempts to clarify her origin and forge her identity".[1] Sirine cannot detach herself from her past and memory especially the souvenirs that remind her of her mother's method of cooking Middle Eastern traditional food. The following excerpt shows the memorable moments in the kitchen when her mother prepares Arab food:

> Sirine's earliest memory was of sitting on a phone book on a kitchen chair, the sour-tart smell of picked grape leaves in the air. Her mother spread the leaves flat on the table like little floating hands, placed the spoonful of rice and meat at the center of each one, and Sirine with her tiny fingers rolled the leaves up tighter and neater than anyone else could—tender, garlicky, meaty packages that burst in the mouth. (14)

Nadia's Café exemplifies a better and inspirational place for Sirine to work on her Arab identity. When she starts working at Nadia Café, "she went through her parents' old recipes and began cooking the favorite-but almost forgotten-dishes of her childhood. She felt as if she were returning to her parents' tiny kitchen and her earliest memories." (04) The unforgettable and precious moments during her childhood in the kitchen have enhanced her cooking skills and talents towards her use of Arab recipes. The moments have also worked as a solace, inspiration and sanctuary when facing the dilemma of identity crisis. Sirine has been influenced by her father's love of Arab cuisine and recipes which he considers as a flavor

[1]- Quoted in Leila Maghmoul. Identity Quest Through Memory in Diana Abu JAber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003) and Laila Halaby*'s Once in a Promised Land* (2007).Guelma University : Annales of Letters and Languages. 2016 p.197

reminding him of his Arab legacy and homeland. For him Arab food is a source of joy, delight and relief. The same feeling is reflected through Sirine's love of Arab food and cuisine. In addition to the contribution of her mother in instilling in her a sense of love for Arab food, Sirine frequent meeting with Han also trigger in her a sense of belonging reflected in cooking for him Arab food with Iraqi flavor. She spends too much time preparing "Iraqi dishes, trying to find the childhood foods that she'd heard Han speak of, the sfeehas-savory pies stuffed with meat and spinach-and round mensaf trays piled with lamb and rice and yogurt sauce with onions, and for dessert, tender ma'mul cookies that dissolve in the mouth." (111)

In many ways, the Arab food prepared by Sirine becomes a bridge connecting the regulars of Nadia Café to their homeland. Abu Jaber makes of Nadia's Café a home substitute where the Arab American character along with others of different ethnicities satisfy their hankering for their homeland, and make them feel homeness as portrayed in the novel: "The men spend their time arguing and being lonely, drinking tea and trying to talk to Um-Nadia, Mireille, and Sirine. Especially Sirine. They love her food—the flavors that remind them of their home."(03) The restaurant facilitates communication between different ethnicities through breaking the barrier of cultural differences which has worked as a stumbling block to achieve communal life. This fact is reflected through some Latin ethnic minorities' help of Sirine to prepare food. For example, Victor and Cristol, who are Latin Americans, help Sirine in the kitchen, which bear witness to the possible cooperation of immigrants to live in one united community. In other words, food reinforces coexistence and understanding between people of different backgrounds as Victor stresses:

> Chef isn't an American cook,"......"Not like the way Americans do food-just dumping salt into the pot. All the flavors go in the same direction. Chef cooks like we do. In Mexico, we put cinnamon in with

> the chocolate and pepper in the sweetcakes, so things pull apart, you know, make it bigger?. (114)

Food plays a two-fold role. On the one hand, it helps immigrants of different ethnicities to co-exist and cooperate with each other for sake of building one united community. On the other hand, it enables immigrants to resist full assimilation in the American culture. This is reflected through their unwillingness to immerse themselves in American cuisine. They resist eating "butter instead of olive oil; potatoes instead of rice; beef instead of lamb". Accoding to Han, such choice and "a shift of ingredients [is] like a move from native tongue into a foreign language." (33) In this respect, Han regards Arab food as his native language by which he can negotiate his attachment to Arab identity.

Arab food becomes the only favorite heritage for Sirine after trying different types of world food. Thus proves her pride in and attachment to her Arab root which serves as an index of the return to her Arab culture. In this perspective, Arab cuisine becomes a source of relief and the best culture to which she demonstrates an unflagging pride as the narrator describes:

> Sirine learned how to cook professionally working as a line cook and then a sous chef in the kitchens of French, Italian, and "Californian" restaurants. But when she moved to Nadia's Café, she went through her parents' old recipes and began cooking the favorite—but almost forgotten dishes of her childhood. She felt as if she were returning to her parents' tiny kitchen and her earliest memories. (04)

The female protagonist, Sirine, finds a sanctuary in cooking food that enables her to lessen her suffering after losing her parents and leading an exilic life. Furthermore, sharing food with different groups of different ethnicities creates a sense of possible resurrection and coexistence between all Americans no matter what religion or ethnic group they belong to. That is to say, food functions as a vehicle for communal understanding and cooperation for the sake of the whole.

Conclusion

Annoyed by the distorted image of Arab Americans and the mainstream Americans' ignorance of Middle Eastern culture, Abu Jaber incorporates Arab folk culture to flesh out the beauty of Middle Eastern heritage. The novelist attempts, through *Crescent*, to challenge the misconceptions and widespread stereotypes about Arab Americans which have played a detrimental role in widening the chasm between Arab Americans and white Americans. Most explicitly, *Crescent* handles the cultural encounter between the East and the West, between homeland and host country. It addresses the multicultural diversity characterizing American society and the importance of bridging the gap between different cultures and ethnicities to promote a peaceful coexistence in the diaspora.

Throughout the sequence of the events, the novelist has traced the difficulty the characters encounter and how they cope with the predicament of swaying between two cultures that do not completely mesh together. Meanwhile, she shows the possibility of coexistence between different minorities when the individual succeeds at bridging the gap between the past and the present.

This chapter examines Abu Jaber's exposition of different patriarchal and imperial hegemonies which hinder Arab American women to have a decent life, and locates them within limited essentialist constructions. As a counter reaction to the ongoing essentialization of Arab and Arab American women, Abu Jaber has opted to narrative resistance by adopting different strategies as intertextuality and storytelling to contradict the orientalist discourse about Arabs.

Intertexulaity and storytelling are literary devices that enable the novelist to show the heterogeneity of Arab Americans' experiences in their adopted country. By incorporation Shakespearian text as *Othello* , Abu Jaber tends to question one of the Western canonical texts

in which Arabs are portrayed as vicious moors. In stark contrast to the negative image associated with Arab man, Han is antithetical to Othello for his sincere love of Sirine and his rationality when dealing with emotions.

Abu Jaber's use of oral Arab traditions demonstrates her pride in her origin as an Arab and forge a literary space for Arab culture in mainstream American literature. By doing so, she emphasizes her attachment to her Arab heritage and the importance of the latter as a mirror through which the Arab American can reevaluate himself and make sense of his life in his adopt country.

Another technique of "writing back" adopted by Abu Jaber is the invocation of memories though food, by which Arab Americans commit themselves to Arab culture to find relief especial when encountering difficulty or feeling homesickness**.** Food plays a double role, on the one hand, it helps in erasing borderlines between different ethnicities as it is the case in Um- Nadia's Cafe; second, it shows the possibility of co-existence in America as a 'melting post' where different communities bypass their ethnic and racial belongings. Abu Jaber's use of food and storytelling as mediums of self-reconciliation is an attempt to debunk stereotypes and cliché images engraved in the mind of American people.

Food and cuisine play a pivotal role in the narrative's structure of *Crescent* since the female protagonist Sirine is a cook at Nadia's Café which, in many ways, serves as a "contact zone" where people regardless of their origin and nationalities gather to ease their feeling of homesickness and coexist with white American culture. More importantly, food and storytelling trigger memory about childhood and family gathering which encourage Arab American individuals to negotiate a "third space" and find a place within the larger multicultural mosaic of American society. Accordingly, through her adoption of symbiotic

and multilayered structure, one can say that Abu Jaber has succeeded in giving her readers a close image about Americans of Arabian descent.

The novelist's positive portrayal of the female protagonist Sirine reverses the negative representation of Arab women in American popular culture. This depiction stands in harmony with Abu Jaber's prime objective to re-represent Arab women in a more realistic and acceptable way to the American public, and hence helping them carve a dignified position in the American community. In many ways, the novelist reverses distorted images of Arabs through readjusting "what the stereotyper wants to blur."[1]

[1] - Gregory Orfalea. "The Arab American Novel" .The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). 2006 p.117

General Conclusion

African Americans and Arab Americans have encountered the same fate to fight against white hegemony and racial hatred exerted by the dominant white society; therefore, African American women writers and their Arab American counterparts followed almost the same path to re-represent their people. This study has been an attempt to explore the extent to which fiction produced by African American and Arab American women writers ventilate tension between home and belonging, and subvert negative perceptions about the two communities. It also reveals commonalities between Arab Americans and African Americans when it comes to addressing the issue of stereotypes and identity.

Throughout the writing process of this dissertation, the researcher tends to show the novelists' tendency to write against the American hegemonic narrative of white superiority. Their literary works are counter narratives which have two functions; firstly, they counter the official narrative; secondly, they tend to carve out a space for alternative narratives. Their ultimate goal has also been to familiarize their readers with the struggle of women of different origins towards self-assertion in American society. In doing so, they aim at bringing visibility and recognition to Arab American and African American women and subvert stereotypes associated with them and engraved in the American psyche. The study focalizes on the quest of African American and Arab American women for identity in a society rife with racism against the two communities.

Through the writing process of this dissertation, I have found that the study of literary texts written by African American and Arab American novelists have been respectively dominated by post-colonialist and orientalist thinking. African American and Arab American women writers felt mandated to speak out against oppression and invest in the field of literature

to occupy an advanced place in mainstream American literature. They use their literary writings to defy oppression, marginalization and racism in their host country the United States of America. They also expose the hyphenated identity of their communities and subvert the stereotypical images of backwardness and debasement entrenched in the mind of white Americans about African Americans as well as Arab Americans. The study is an example of how racial consciousness in African American and Arab American community has determined the way they interact with each other.

Among the most important contributions to African American women literature and Arab American women literatures are respectively Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Alice Walker's *Meridian*, Leila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent*, which have been the focus of this study. The four novels portray the lives of ostracized and marginalized characters who struggle to cope with dominant culture and reconstruct their identities but they find themselves straddle two cultures, identities, and two contradictory worlds. African Americans like their Arab American counterparts have been "The Most Invisible of the Invisibles"[1]; therefore, bringing back issues of injustice into public awareness has become an important subject matter to these women writers. Through their literary writings, the four women writers tend to give visibility to the lamentation and experiences of African American women and Arab American ones.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is an insightful testimony and a painful portrayal of the brutality of white Americans against blacks. It provides a deep insight into the idealized approach of the European notion of beauty through a thorough investigation into the psyche of the female protagonist and black women characters who are manipulated by popular culture that

[1]- Carol Fadda- Conrey. "Arab American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersection in Diana Abu Jaber's *Crescent*". Oxford: Oxford University Press.2006, p.187

upholds whiteness as a measuring scale for beauty. The journey of the protagonist seems a failure but it is a warning sign to the American society as a whole. Her inability to look and behave white lead to self-awareness and self-acceptance which enables her to be herself and prepare her to embark on a different journey to assert herself and determine her essence. Moreover, Morrison's adoption of such characters can be interpreted as a message for blacks to have introspection and understand what it means to be a black American in America.

Toni Morrison is one of the prominent African American novelists as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison who have revolutionized African American literature through her innovative style of giving too much importance to the psychological development of the character and showing the gravity of living as the "Other" in society where racism has been institutionalized. The study focalizes on the thematic structure of the four texts from feminist and post-colonial perspectives.

Through the analysis of the protagonist's psychology, the second chapter shows Pecola's turmoil and struggle to cope with the reality of being ostracized "Other" after being downgraded by black and white communities, which resulted in her internalization of white hegemonic values and "logos". These values are based on the traditional myth of blackness as evil and associated with ugliness and whiteness as good and associated with beauty. The study also highlights that the internalization of those myths results in scapegoating Pecola.

Othering in *The Bluest Eye* is one of the major themes that has been dealt with by Morrison through exposing American society's bigotry and demonization of African Americans because of their black skin. The study gives evidence that the black characters' internalization of hegemonic white values lead them to see themselves as the "Other" and outsiders, which engenders a destructive impact on the formation of their identity and the appreciation of the self.

As a black feminist writer, Morrison shows us the harmful impact of ostracizing black women and the need for self-retrospection. Her criticism of hegemonic values has not been passive, but she has endeavored to contradict blacks' self-loathing and propose a different understanding of beauty through which the black individual finds comfort by engaging in self-reconciliation and self-assertion. Morrison urges her blacks to find strength, beauty and self-esteem from within as it is the case with Claudia who does not succumb to the dictate of white society and succeeds at asserting herself as a black woman proud of her black identity.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* throws light on moral decadence in American society especially when it comes to the establishment of racial equality. Morrison has used stereotypes in an excessive manner to ridicule and draw public attention to the danger of racial prejudices in their long term effect on the individual and the fabric of American society. Morrison's adoption of explicit and disgusting portrayal of racist acts is an attempt to stigmatize not only American society, but also the black people who have internalized white ideals and victimized their own selves.

The novelist, through her female brokenhearted protagonist, exhibits also the gravity of self-loathing which is the outcome of cultural appropriation and deterritorialization. Morrison makes of Pecola the epitome of failure for her immersion in white standards of beauty and rejection of her blackness. Meanwhile, she employs Claudia as Pecola's antithetical character who is comfortable with her racial and cultural belonging and embrace all what is black. Morrison's employment of a powerful and fearless character as Claudia is an attempt to clear the way out to African American women to take Claudia as a role model and correct their path towards self-assertion. The success of Claudia can be interpreted as the novelist's attempt to show the possibility of self-resurrection for the depressed blacks, who find themselves trapped

between hope and despair, to change themselves from within and appreciate their God-given skin color.

Unlike Toni Morrison, Alice Walker swerved away from the traditions of Western feminism and established her own version of feminism named womanism as a reaction to Western feminists'failure to address issues facing women of color. Walker's womanism champions self-celebration, self-pride and self-reliance, which are vividly reflected in the character of Meridian who shows pride in her skin and struggles to subvert derogatory images associated with black women.

Inculcating a sense of self-pride has been the subject matter in Alice Walker's *Meridian* in which the novelist projects a different understanding of gender through her attempt to blur the line between females and males who traditionally and socially have been trained to play different roles. Through her depiction of her female protagonist as extremely masculine, Walker destabilizes the traditional notion of femininity and masculinity, and proffers somewhat a reversed ideology of gender relationship. Unlike Morrison's Pecola who looks victimized and stigmatized, Meridian is a gallant character who stands against racist social norms and white hegemony. Like Morrison's Claudia, Alice Walker's Meridian becomes the embodiment of hope and self-celebration through her social and political engagements. By doing so, Walker contradicts the mainstream American narrative about black women who are portrayed as vicious, docile and passive.

Like their African American women compatriots, Arab Americans have been misrepresented in the mainstream American popular culture. To deconstruct those degraded images about Arab American women that are deeply rooted in the American psyche, some Arab American women writers "write back" to re-represent Arab American women and show the

worthiness of Arab individual and Arab culture. This study shows the commitment of two Arab American women novelists Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber to dramatize the fate of Arab American women in their respective works *Once in a Promised Land* and *Crescent.* The study also reveals their literary hankering to deterritorialize Arab Americans by looking at the Arab American community from within and addressing the knotty issues of being Arab and Muslim in dominant white and Christian America.

Arab American women writers have encountered criticism from Western feminists and Arab American community. The former have criticized them for not having enough courage to condemn and reject some patriarchal practices in Arab culture either in America or in their homeland; whereas, the latter has accused them of cultural betrayal for lining themselves with Western feminists' agenda. The fear of being accused of disloyality to their Arab culture has haunted Arab American feminists and women writers.[1]

The two Arab American novelists Laila Halaby and Diana Abu Jaber opt for a literary resistance strategy represented in the incorporation of Arab folklore and the use of intertextuality to make Arab Americans feel attached to their native culture in a world of adversity and diversity. Laila Halaby has intertwined the plot structure with Arab folklore to help contemporary readers get in touch with Arab culture and reinstate the position of Arab culture in mainstream American literature.

Through *Once in a Promised Land*, Laila Halaby tries to demystify some orientalist and stereotypical images of Arabs as being anti-democratic, hot-tempered, irrational, lustful and barbaric. Her novel is a reaction to the 09/11 terrorist attack and its traumatic impact on Americans of Arab origin. The novel offers insight into the difficulties Arab Americans faced in

[1] - Abdelwahab Abbas Noman. "Woman Voice in the Arab American Literature. An International". Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal: India. 2015 p.496

post-09/11 America. Halaby's characters are victims of mainstream assumption that all Arabs are Muslims and complicit with Islamic fundamentalists; and that they deserve some blame for the 09/11 attack. Throughout the course of the events, the novelist exhibits anti-Arab racism Arab Americans experienced in post-9/11 because of conflation between Arabs and Islam which, in the eyes of many Americans, has become an inspiring force inciting extremists to carry out barbaric deeds. Such amalgamation of Islam with terrorism and Arabness has a drastic impact on the daily life of Arab Americans who were "viewed as if they [were] disloyal and a threat to national security."[1]

Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* explores the theme of cultural duality and identity, and exhibits the main characters' experiences of displacement and deterritorialization in a country built on diversity and whose constitution guarantees human integrity and decent life for all people regardless of their origin or color. Paradoxically, Halaby examines how white Americans have failed to live up to the ideal of the American Constitution. Arab Americans have been stripped of their humanity and regarded as the terrorist "Other" on account of their faith and origin. Halaby's Salwa epitomizes the failure of the American Dream; meanwhile, she debunks the fact that American idealism is accessible to everyone regardless of his origin.

Diana Abu Jaber's objective of opting for intertextuality is twofold; firstly, it is used as a creative medium of resistance to show that American women writers of Arab origin are able to create literary works that juxtapose Western canonical texts; secondly, it helps in humanizing Arab Americans and debunking stereotypical images associated with Arabs in general and Arab women in particular. By doing so, the novelist makes a noticeable shift from the previous narrative in terms of the plot structure and the style she opts for.

[1] - Saher Selod. "Citizenship Denied: The Racilization of Muslim American Men and Women post09/11".Critical Sociology: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270638815 2014, p.02

Likewise Laila Halaby, Diana Abu Jaber defends the worthiness and integrity of Arabs but in her own way. As she was brought up in a family that sanctified Arab heritage, Abu Jaber incorporates Arab folklore and cuisine in her novel, which indicates that she is proud of and attached to her Arab origin. The incorporation of storytelling indicates that she refuses total assimilation in American culture and encourages co-existence between different ethnicities. The novelist makes use of her admiration of Arab heritage to help her protagonist Sirine find a path forwards to assert her identity.

The omnipresence of food and eating in *Crescent* plays a symbolic role as they are used as a cultural bridge connecting the homeland to the host country, the United States of America. Thus, they become incentives for self-recovery through invocating memories, which enable the Arab individual soothe his feeling of homesickness. More importantly, by appropriating Arab folk tales in her literary texts, Abu Jaber has succeeded in integrating part of Arab heritage in the mainstream American form of writing. Furthermore, she challenges the prevailing assumption that literature is an elite Western discourse.

Um-Nadia's Café takes on the role of a site of memory; and a reconstruction of the self/ identity that is based on a combination between the experience of the past and the present. Eating Arab food in a "contact zone" forms a kind of "ritual" to heal the soul. Consequently, food is not just an element of heritage but it is also a memory trigger and a healer enabling Arab Americans to make sense of their experiences in the adopted country, America.

To sum up, this study highlights the plight of African American women as well as Arab American women who have experienced a sense of identity crisis. The texts under study are interconnected by the four novelists' option to address the theme of identity crisis which is the result of the ongoing misrepresentation of the two communities. The study also shows the

complexity of being a deprived invisible citizen in a country where the individual is supposed to have access to happiness and freedom regardless of his color, faith or origin. It also reveals the ardent desire of the four novelists to humanize their two minorities and instill in them a sense of self-pride and cultural assertion. In this respect, it is relevant to say that Diana Abu Jaber, like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Laila Halaby, urges her people to assert their identity and be proud of their racial and cultural belonging.

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