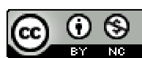
***GNOSI:* An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis**
Volume 4, Issue 2, June, 2021
ISSN (Online): 2714-2485

Resistance and Counter-Hegemonic Discourse in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan*

Nawel Meriem Ouhiba
[1,] Department of English language and literature
Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts
Dr. Tahar Moulay University,
BP 138 cité ENNASR 20000, Saida, Algeria.
Email: ouhiba.nawel@gmail.com[1*]

(**Received**: Feburary-2021; **Accepted**: March-2021; Available **Online**: March-2021)



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ABSTRACT

Arab Americans have been subject to decades of racism, discrimination, negative stereotyping, and hostility in the United States. These problems have motivated Arab American cultural leaders and creative writers to put forward in their texts the challenges that they face in the United States. These problems have also encouraged Arab American writers to try to find their place and identity in the American community. Knowing that most of the key texts in contemporary Arab American literature are written by women as counter-narratives to the Western negative stereotypes and a reflection to the difficulties they face because of their feelings of gender discrimination and their sense of possessing hybrid identities or hyphenated identities. It should be noted that their writings are playing an important role in creating insurgent women who not only are deconstructing the several modalities of female identity for Arab women in the West, but also rejecting their homelands' patriarchal, nationalist, and anti-colonial emancipatory discourses and resisting Western imperial hegemonies. The present paper examines how Laila Halaby in *West of the Jordan* is transgressing a normative paradigm already conceptualized in the mainstream Western culture for the Arab-American woman hybrid. Her characters are living a transformational experience that leads them to challenge hegemonic constructions of the dominant knowledge, resist the different contradictions and ambivalences of their native patriarchal cultures, and find a political voice to fight their invisibility and oppression.

Keywords: Arab-American women; Diaspora; Identity construction; Hegemony, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

Arabs constitute a minority group in the United States that has recently and suddenly come under the spotlight after 9/11 (Selod 2018). Before that date Arabs were largely invisible; when they were acknowledged at all, it was usually with ridicule dismissal, or outright racism. Therefore, very scarce information was available about this minority group. The main source of information about Arabs is TV, movies, or popular media, and these sources repeatedly convey mostly stereotypical images of who Arabs are. So for most people in the West, Arabs and their lifestyle are frozen in history; this is an image that seems to resist any kind of change (Said 1979; Steet 2000; Muhtaseb 2020). Hence, for Western people Arabs are backward, and Muslim Women are oppressed and degraded (Ahmed, 1982; Al-Galissy & Jadhav 2020)

Suleiman (1999) discussed the types of images of Arabs and Muslims that are available in the US and described that at times, images of "poverty, filth, the desert, sheikhs and harems are emphasized; at others, the view changes and the desert gushes with oil, the sheikhs are wealthy beyond belief their "spot" (other than sex, of course) is to destabilize Western economies and ruin the world in order to master it" (p. 1). While the images of Arab women in American culture include those of belly dancers, harem girls or submissive women clad in black from head to toe. "They have no identities whatsoever, and they are always mute" (Shaheen, 2002, p. 6), similarly Ali (2005, p. 33) explains " In America we've come to see these women as timid creatures, covered from head to toe, who scurry rather than walk. They have no voice, no rights and no place outside the home".

Some studies that concentrated on issues of marginality of Arabs as a minority group in the West and the prevailing images of Arabs and Muslims in the mainstream drew from Said's (1979) work *Orientalism*. In his work, Said (1979) defines Orientalism as "the system of knowledge" about the East through which everything about Arabs and Muslims is filtered, a system that "remained unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign service institutes)" for centuries and through which images and statements about Arabs and Muslims proliferated into the general culture (p. 6). Said saw orientalism as a deliberate discourse intended to present the Arabs and Muslims as "The Other" a discourse that "is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power" including cultural, intellectual, political and moral powers (p. 12).

The discourse of orientalism is dependent upon a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the Western in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (p. 7). As a result, Said sees that the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arabs or Muslims is very strong indeed" (p. 27). After 9/11, Arabs were suddenly ultra-visible, with negative images that intensified in relation to political events and the turmoil that swept and continues to sweep over different parts of the Middle East. In addition to being seen as backward, post 9/11, the portrayal of Arabs as enemies of democracy and modern life, as well as terrorists intensified.

To counteract such ostracizing treatment on the hands of the majority of the society; Arabs had come to realize the importance of exerting self-representation to achieve social, political, and religious equality in their host courtiers. By doing so they repeatedly fight to posit themselves as a variable and important segment of the US

culture, negating the constant "Outsider" treatment and attempting to correct the misconceptions and stereotypes that fix them in a devalued position within the terrain of racialized ethnic groups. In this regard, Omi and Winant (1986) note, the value of individuals creating collective identities and collective subjectivities by offering group members an alternative view of themselves and their world, should not be underestimated in the struggle for group recognition; using their words, individual consciousness and practices "shapes the universe of collective action" (p. 68).

NEGOTIATING ARAB WOMEN IDENTITY IN CONTEXT

Arab women in the West are faced with difficulties unique to their gender, in that they must negotiate between sets of values and cultural ideas that often seem incompatible (Bunni et al., 2018). Their identities embody the "demarcation of possibilities at particular junctures" and a heritage of difference that is constantly negotiated (Majaj in Kadi, 1994). American Arab women are often confronted with cultural boundaries that are in constant motion, subject to the external setting of their environment, and internal factors of heritage and embedded traditions (Alreshoud 2019). Arab women in the West embrace identities and roles that cannot be defined as a coherent whole but have many contradicting layers that are constantly changing, depending on the generation, social setting and political climate of their host country.

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

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

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

ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN RESISTING HEGEMONIES

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

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

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematizes the very authority and

> authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity,' lays claim. (Rutherford 1990, p. 236)

Therefore, even a hybrid's claim of carrying a bi-cultural identity is challenged in this context since both sides of the hyphen are incomplete, unrepresentative, and inauthentic. In other words, an Arab-American female identity, for example, is preconceived in our minds as a universal construction in which a woman-carrier is positioned to differentiate her from other mono-cultural subjects. She is granted this imaginary unified status in which she incorporates and borrows from two identified cultures. Furthermore, an imaginary standard of "purity" is employed in this case to measure the hybrid's level of true representativeness of each culture. But the question remains, what makes a specific culture, and who puts the belonging criteria to determine representation and misrepresentation of each culture.

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

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

Therefore, culture and cultural identities are conceived as already existed authorities to whom one can refer to determine sameness or otherness. This discourse, which excludes the individual from the particularities of history, location, and time, perpetuates all forms of essentialism and stereotyping about heterogeneous ethnicities. "Arab" or "Muslim" women, for example, are constantly depicted as powerless, submissive, and ignorant, an "entity without agency," as Steven Salaita (2007) states in his *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics*, who lives outside all the historical forces of race, gender, class, and religion unaffected by colonial, imperial, national, and capital hegemonies.

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

Although *West of the Jordan* focuses on the hybrid experience of three Palestinian women struggling with different forces in the U.S., the "West" in the title refers alternately

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

WOMEN IN BORDERLANDS: HER BODY BETWEEN BOTH SIDES OF THE HYPHEN

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

For Soraya, Hala, and Khadija, this liminal space represents their history of the struggle between worlds which is the only "home" they know. Their hybrid experience resists the essentialism of both Arab/Palestinian and American cultures and exposes the contradictions deeply instilled in them. Soraya lives an experimental life, which does not fit her Arab community's expectations for a good woman. In Hala's words, "people say ―vicious things about Soraya because ―she does things people are scared of" (p. 82) like dancing at weddings as she does at Hala's brother wedding, p.

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

Soraya's dance, which her Arab Muslim community considers sin and the West exotic, has a different function for Soraya. It is her proper way to express her freedom and reduce her frustration and anger, Soraya dances even if only in her mind. After reflecting on everything being considered as haram or halal, Soraya "drive(s) home with the windows down and the stereo blasting, and although she can't close her eyes, in her mind she danc(es) the rage away" (p. 117). Dancing helps her to get rid of her rage after she and her

friend Walid, who wears a jacket that makes him look like a Mexican, get beaten up at a bar by a group of men who think they are Mexicans. Assured by the policewoman suggesting that they "got off pretty lucky" (p. 60) that the men did not know that they were Palestinians, they leave the bar.

Once at home, Soraya puts "on headphones in my too-quiet California house, tuck the Walkman into my pocket, close my eyes, and dance hard until the rage begins to fade" (p. 60). Although Mawal describes dancing as most Arab and Muslim women's way of "show(ing) happiness and calms that they keep buried during other days" (p. 23), it has a special function for Soraya. Dancing helps her to cope with frustrations as meditation and prayer would help an observing, orthodox Muslim; for Soraya, dancing becomes a tool of spirituality and freedom. She expresses herself through a bodily movement that is disapproved as haram (sin) in her native community. The relationship between Soraya and her body is not a simple hegemony and counter-hegemony of a woman fighting a patriarchal society. Her body for her means her freedom. She is only obsessed with the fact that she is free and she can control her body even if this freedom will lead to self-destruction.

Soraya rejects any either-or constructions and limitations of categorizations like "Arab" and "American." She narrates, "I turn to steel the soft part inside of me that wants to crumble with rage and sadness. I'm so sick of everything *haram* or *halal*, but nothing in between. *I* am in between." (p. 117). The emphasis that Halaby presents on the italicized words summarizes Soraya's hybrid struggle, the "*I*," with the binaries of either "*halal*," which is allowed in culture, religion, and traditions, or "*haram*," that is forbidden. Although Soraya appears as a strong young girl who refuses to be submissive, she adopts an extreme approach to rebel against categorizations; she self-exoticizes herself confirming negative stereotypes of "Arab" women as oppressed harem girls, sexualized objects, or violent terrorists instead of refuting them. She understands all the taboos surrounding women's bodies in the Arab culture; nevertheless, she conceives her identity within a limited space of "forbidden" sexuality by leading a promiscuous life that ends up with an incestuous relationship with her uncle. Gloria Anzaldúa argues that "sexual behavior" is the "ultimate rebellion (a mestiza) can make against her native culture" (1987, p. 41). Soraya uses her sexuality to reject the prohibitions of her "Arab" heritage and the stereotyping of "Arab" women as sexually oppressed in the mainstream Western culture. There is no place in her narration in which she does not connect her hybridity with sexuality.

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

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

Unlike Soraya, who celebrates her body, Khadija feels ashamed, even dirty, of the body. While she, like Soraya, connects her identity with her sexuality, she cannot understand how to manage her hybridity away from the limited dichotomy of virgin/whore that is

instilled in her via her mother's conservatism and father's abusiveness. Therefore, Khadija fails to conceive her identity, sexuality, and womanhood in the borderlands between cultures. In *Ethnic Entanglement*, Marian Helmy Gabra argues that "it is this value of virtuosity rather than her physical racial identity (located in opposition to her blond friend) that excludes her from her 'Americanness'" (p. 214). Khadija reduces the meaning of hybridity or "Americanness" to a limited space of sexuality in which she cannot be both "American" and "Arab" if she is to embrace her body and speak of sexuality.

In his *Modern Arab American Fiction* (2011), Steven Salaita argues that Khadija's character "becomes symbolic of the conflicts that exist among strict religious devotion, free-market capitalism, immigration, and disparate cultural norms and values" (p. 83). Struggling into borderlands between these hegemonies, Khadija realizes her in-betweenness, but she is unable to reconcile both sides of the hyphen as an Arab-American girl. Her identity conflict starts early at school with her Arabic name. "In America my name sounds like someone throwing up or falling off a bicycle. If they can get the first part of it right, the "Kha" part, it comes out like clearing your throat after eating ice cream" (p. 36). While she affirms that she does not want an "American" name, she prefers an easier Arabic one.

However, her identity is constantly constructed between the two worlds in which she lives. These words are separated by an imaginary construction of "home" or true "Arab" identity which is reduced to the limited meaning of "virginity." At school, she wants to "scream at (Mr. Napolitano, who makes fun of her name-calling her DJ) that I am just as American as anyone here" when he "expects me to know more than the other kids because my parents are not American, though there are lots of other kids in the class who aren't American themselves" (p. 74). This passage reflects how identity, "Americanness" in this case, is constructed in the mainstream culture to reflect a white, middle-class existence to which Khadija does not belong. At home, on the other hand, Khadija is in constant negotiation with her mother about her identity which is also constructed within an essentialist binary opposition of "Arab" and "American." "You are Palestinian,' she says in Arabic. '*You* are Palestinian,' I tell her in English, 'I am American.'…'I can be American and still be your daughter.' 'No! No daughter of mine is American'"(p. 74). Her mother, who connects "Americanness" with promiscuity, is rejecting the fact that her daughter cannot carry a unified, fixed identity that ignores all the forces that surround her and shapes her existence.

Halaby does not present a clear future for Khadija's hybridity in which she continues to struggle and resorts to an imaginary "safe" space of "Arab" virginity. However, she has gained a limited form of the agency at the end of the story by rebelling against her abusive father and calling the police. This temporary power represents the beginning of realization inside Khadija that her life cannot continue as it is. Family is a significant part of belonging and being "Arab." Nadine Naber argues that "Selfhood was often articulated in terms of a choice between being an individual, being my own person, being an American,' or 'being connected, having family, and being 'Arab'" (p. 92). Khadija's ability to call the police for her abusive father can be considered the first step in her journey of finding meanings for her life.

However, the question of the female body is also clear in the other two characters of Mawal and Hala in Halaby's work. While a body-talk, in the case of Mawal, is an absolute prohibition considering the hegemonic patriarchal and colonial world in which

she lives, Halaby beautifully alludes to an internal desire in Mawal to reflect on her body as she narrates:

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

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

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

Within the Western misrepresentations of "Arabs" and Arabic culture, religion, specifically Islam, has become the only representative of "Arab" women identities. While Arabs are religiously heterogeneous, all "Arab" women are stereotyped and oppressed because they are "Muslims." However, "religion cannot and should not be seen independently of the socioeconomic and political context within which it unfolds," as argued by scholar Nawar Al- Hassan Golley in her "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?" (2004). This contextualization explores the processes by which religious values and symbols are manipulated and distorted within each hegemonic discourse which reflects both individualized as well as institutionalized modes of power. Nadine Naber asserts that "Religion (Christian or Muslim) alone does not determine the processes by which Arab American femininities are imagined and performed" (p. 89). Instead, "religious identity" should be situated "within the context of intersecting coordinates of power (race, class, nation, and so forth) and historical circumstances" (p. 89). Therefore, poor uneducated families, like Khadija's, are more prone to adopt patriarchal religious manipulations about female subjectivities than others.

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

Halaby presents Hala as carrying a double vision through which she can question the realities and refute the myths about the "Arab" and the "American" cultures. Supported by her parents (her mother had a short education in the U.S), Hala is sent to live with her uncle and his American wife in Arizona to finish her high school. Uncle Hamdi, who is presented as an "Americanized" workaholic college professor, has introduced Hala to an upper-middle-class lifestyle unlike her cousins In a chapter titled "White," Hala narrates her return back to Jordan wearing "blue jeans and 'extremely unfeminine dresses" and having short hair with no makeup which are expected from her to prepare herself for marriage. These features present her as a "Western white" girl to her people. She announces, "I am unconnected" (p. 77). While she is able to critically examine the people's conservativeness, the patriarchal constructions of her life, and the country's poverty, Hala enjoys many aspects of her family's life that she misses in her "American" house in Arizona. "There is comfort to be in my own house," she narrates, "to wake up in my own language, but all those faces I've carried with me for so long wear suspicion in their eyes as they greet me. I have walked so far away from them" (p. 77). Hala's visit to Jordan appears as a discovering journey of the country and the culture to which she belongs, but she cannot find herself fully represented within. Part of this discovery is Hala's recognition of her femininity and her female body. Hala recounts:

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan* presents a rich examination of the lives of four Palestinian young women who are struggling in the borderlands between patriarchies, cultures, and political agendas. The fragmented narratives of Soraya, Hala, Khadija, and Mawal reflect their diversity although they come from the same family. Between heterogeneous religious beliefs, cultural traditions, gender politics, and colonial/postcolonial locations, these Palestinian women are in constant shifting within intra-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic borderlands. I have examined Laila Halaby's exposition of different patriarchal, national, colonial, and imperial hegemonies which continue to situate these women within limited essentialist constructions. The focus on the intra-ethnic borderlands has explored the multiple processes of border-crossing for these women even before the beginning of their diasporic experience. Halaby rejects all attempts to universalize the experience of hybridity and border-crossing in the lives of immigrant and diasporic subjects. Laila Halaby tries to build a political hybrid consciousness in these women through which they can resist their invisibility, exclusion, and discrimination in the mainstream American culture.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to acknowledge that some part of this research paper is extracted from my thesis submitted as a requirement for Doctorate Degree in Sciences: Anglo-American Literature in the year 2017.