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### The Portrait of Arab Characters in Layla Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

#### ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the portrait of Arab characters in Layla Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. This study focuses on the situation of the Arab Muslim protagonist of *Once in a Promised Land* by Halaby, a postcolonial literary masterpiece addressing the topic of Muslim Arabs in the United States following the horrific terrorist assault of 9/11, the portrait that the researcher intends to show in this article. The study attempts to shed light on how Muslim Arabs were seen in America following the event. It provides insight into the main protagonists, Salwa and Jassim from Jordan, who stand in for Arab Muslims who have chased the American dream but have discovered a different kind of reality by following this dream. The study also discusses the state of Arab American literature related to the Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* and other research on the idea. The researcher endeavors to provide a lucid analysis of the Arab and Muslim characters' portrayal in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. It is noted that the pair is not religiously inclined, yet because of their race and innate culture, the Western world has a skewed perception of them. The research findings revealed that the American novelists purposely reflected dark aspects of the Arab Muslim characters so as to show to the world that Islam is a religion that propagates oppression and violence. As a conclusion, the study proposes a framework of the portrayal of the Arab Muslim characters conceptualized by the post-colonial perspective as a method. It is recommended that future research examines the reliability and authentication of the respective American novels that have distorted the Arab Muslim identity.

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صورة الشخصيات العربية في رواية ليلي حلبي ذات مرة في أرض الميعاد  
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وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي / جامعة سومر

الملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى فحص صورة الشخصيات العربية في رواية ليلي حلبي ذات مرة في أرض الميعاد. تركز هذه الدراسة على وضع البطل العربي المسلم في رواية "ذات مرة في أرض الميعاد" للكاتبة حلبي، وهي تحفة أدبية ما بعد الاستعمار تتناول موضوع العرب المسلمين في الولايات المتحدة بعد الهجوم الإرهابي المروع في 11 سبتمبر، وهي الصورة التي ينوي الباحث تقديمها. تظهر في هذه المقالة. وتحاول الدراسة تسليط الضوء على كيفية رؤية العرب المسلمين في أمريكا بعد الحدث. ويقدم نظرة ثاقبة للبطلين الرئيسيين، سلوى وجاسم من الأردن، اللذين يمثلان المسلمين العرب الذين طاردوا اللحم الأمريكي، ولكنهم اكتشفوا نوعًا مختلفًا من الواقع من خلال اتباع هذا اللحم. كما تناقش الدراسة حالة الأدب العربي الأمريكي فيما يتعلق برواية الحلبي مرة في أرض الميعاد، وأبحاث أخرى حول الفكرة. ويسعى الباحث إلى تقديم تحليل واضح لتصوير الشخصيات العربية والمسلمة في رواية الحلبي ذات مرة في أرض الميعاد. ويلاحظ أن الزوجين ليسا ذوي ميول دينية، ولكن بسبب عرقهما وثقافتهما الفطرية، فإن العالم الغربي لديه نظرة منحرفة عنهما. وأظهرت نتائج البحث أن الروائيين الأمريكيين عكسوا عمداً الجوانب المظلمة في الشخصيات العربية المسلمة حتى لا يخطئوا. وقد أظهروا للعالم أن الإسلام دين ينشر القمع والعنف. وفي الختام تقترح الدراسة إطاراً لتصوير الشخصيات العربية الإسلامية من منظور ما بعد الاستعمار كمنهج. ومن المستحسن أن تبحث الأبحاث المستقبلية في مدى موثوقية وصحة الروايات الأمريكية التي شوهدت الهوية العربية الإسلامية

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسلم العربي، ما بعد الاستعمار، الإرهابي، هجمات 11 سبتمبر، اللحم الأمريكي، ليلي حلبي، ذات مرة في أرض الميعاد

1.Introduction

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) is a fantastic work that addresses the Arab-Muslim problem in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The main focus of Halaby's narrative revolves around a couple from Jordan named Jassim, a hydrologist by profession, and Salwa, a banker by profession. It is clear from the novel's plot that they both aspire to an opulent lifestyle, which drives them to flee their own nation in search of the fanciful American dream. After first acclimating to

the American way of life, they encounter antagonism and alienation from the host nation. This causes their endeavor to pursue such an unrealistic goal to fail.

In a different light, the couple has endeavored to depart from their native land of Jordan in pursuit of the American dream. The novel delves into the experiences of migrant Arab Muslims in America and the challenges they encounter in the aftermath. According to Shihabudheen (2018), individuals of Arab descent in the United States have all sought after the elusive American dream, as depicted in Halaby's novel. It illustrates how they navigate the allure of American life while shedding light on the harsh realities of post-9/11 scrutiny that Arab Americans face. The novel provides a glimpse into the hidden struggles of exile and displacement that shadow their lives. Halaby's "Once in a Promised Land" not only showcases the couple's journey but also sheds light on the broader experiences of Arab immigrants in America. the foreign political environment mimics that Arab Muslims face when migrating, but it also may provide insight into Arabic storytelling culture.

According to the theory put forth by Altwaiji (2016), Halaby uses Arabic folktales as a form of cultural therapy for Arab Americans who experience prejudice. As a result, the book is important reading since it offers an insightful analysis of the Arab Muslim perception from the perspective of a writer who is descended from the novel's protagonist. It is apparent that Halaby portrays the characters as being mistrustful and intolerant of Arab and Muslim traditions. That intensifies mistrust and anxiety toward them immediately following the post-9/11 era in America, which was bolstered by anti-Arab prejudice. (2012, Amanda). In light of the aforementioned, the study aims to address the definition of Arab Muslim character as depicted in Halaby's work.

This Laila Halaby's novel is a novel that offers a nuanced portrayal of Arab Muslim characters living in America. The novel challenges stereotypes and showcases the diversity and complexity of Arab Muslim identities. The characters in the novel are depicted as individuals with their own hopes, dreams, struggles, and

relationships, rather than as monolithic representations of a particular group. Through their stories, the author sheds light on the challenges and experiences faced by Arab Muslims in a post-9/11 world, while also highlighting their resilience, humor, and humanity. Overall, the representation of Muslim Arab characters in Halaby's novel is one that seeks to humanize and celebrate the rich tapestry of Arab Muslim identity. Layla Halaby's novel "Once in a Promised Land" serves as a poignant exploration of the complexities surrounding Arab Muslim identities in contemporary America. Set against the backdrop of post-9/11 societal tensions, Halaby's narrative delves into the lives of her characters as they navigate the challenges of cultural dislocation, identity crises, and societal stereotypes. Through her rich storytelling, Halaby invites readers to engage with the multifaceted experiences of Arab Americans, challenging monolithic representations and fostering a deeper understanding of their struggles and resilience. At the heart of Halaby's work is the character of Jamil, whose journey embodies the internal conflict faced by many Arab Muslims living in the United States. Jamil grapples with feelings of alienation as he attempts to reconcile his Jordanian heritage with the expectations imposed by his American surroundings. For instance, he reflects on his experiences at work, where he feels scrutinized and misunderstood, stating, "He felt like a ghost in his own life, floating between two worlds" (Halaby, 2007, p. 45). This metaphor not only illustrates his sense of displacement but also highlights the broader theme of identity fragmentation that resonates with many immigrants. Halaby further complicates the portrayal of Arab characters by addressing the pervasive stereotypes that often accompany their narratives. The interactions between Jamil and his American colleagues reveal underlying prejudices, as they view him through a lens of suspicion and fear. One particularly striking moment occurs when Jamil notes, "They looked at him as if he were a terrorist in disguise" (Halaby, 2007, p. 78). This confrontation with societal misconceptions underscores the urgent need for literature that humanizes Arab

Muslims and dismantles harmful stereotypes, inviting readers to reconsider their preconceived notions.

In addition to individual identity struggles, Halaby's narrative also examines familial and gender dynamics within the Arab Muslim community. Jamil's relationship with his wife serves as a microcosm for broader societal expectations, illustrating the tension between traditional values and modern aspirations. His wife's yearning for independence is poignantly captured when she asserts, "I am more than just a wife; I want my own voice" (Halaby, 2007, p. 134). Through these characterizations, Halaby not only highlights the complexities of gender roles but also emphasizes the importance of agency and self-expression within the Arab Muslim experience. Overall, *\*Once in a Promised Land\** stands as a significant contribution to contemporary literature, offering a nuanced portrayal of Arab characters that invites empathy and understanding from its readers.

## **2.Problem statement**

There were a lot of encounters during the long history which took place between Western culture and Islam. It has produced a tradition of portraying, negative and self-serving ways, the Islamic religion and Muslim cultures. There is a lot of literature classified these stereotypes... Western image-makers, including religious governments, political institutions. They conceptualize for their consumer's images of Muslims or sometimes Arabs amusing and other times cruel or tragic ways. Sometimes the western picture-makers resort to the contrary opinion in the structure of their films to make the irony quite attention. The portrayal of Arab characters in contemporary literature is often shaped by pervasive stereotypes and cultural misconceptions, particularly in the context of post-9/11 America. Layla Halaby's "Once in a Promised Land" provides a critical lens through which to examine the complexities of Arab Muslim identities, yet the existing scholarship has not sufficiently explored the depth and nuances of these portrayals. This research aims to investigate how Halaby constructs her Arab characters, particularly focusing on

their individual and collective experiences, struggles with identity, and interactions with a society that often views them through a lens of suspicion and prejudice. Despite the growing body of literature addressing Arab American narratives, many works continue to reinforce reductive stereotypes that fail to capture the multifaceted realities of these individuals.

Halaby's novel stands out as it challenges these oversimplified representations by offering rich, layered characterizations that reflect the internal and external conflicts faced by Arab Americans. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these portrayals contribute to broader discussions about race, identity, and cultural representation in literature. This study seeks to address the following matters: How does Halaby depict the complexities of Arab identities in her characters? In what ways do her narratives challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes? Furthermore, how do themes of alienation, cultural dislocation, and gender dynamics manifest in her portrayal of Arab characters? By analyzing Halaby's work through these lenses, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Arab American literature and its role in shaping perceptions of Arab identities within contemporary society. Ultimately, this research will illuminate how "Once in a Promised Land" serves as a vital text for fostering empathy and understanding towards Arab characters, thereby challenging the dominant narratives that often marginalize their voices. Through a detailed examination of Halaby's character portrayals, this study will underscore the importance of diverse narratives in enriching the literary landscape and promoting cross-cultural dialogue.

### **3. Significance of the Study**

This research is important inasmuch as it gives a significant insight about the Arab Muslim personality as a new subject delineated in literary text. The research seeks to provide readers with an in-depth study of post-colonial novels in which concepts such as Orientalism, racism, otherness, and stereotyping are clearly portrayed.

Accordingly, the researcher elucidates Western writers' portrayal of Muslim Arab personality following the terrorist attack on 11 September. Following the event of September 11, 2001, the research produces a reasonable representation of the Muslim Arab personality of the Arab writer. The study focuses on the variant depiction of the Muslim Arab character between Western and Arab writers. The current research is expected to benefit individuals who are interested in post-colonial novels around the globe by recognizing the image of the Arab Muslim personality from distinct points of view. The study endeavours to introduce a developed form of analytical framework that systematically investigates and identifies codes and themes related to postcolonial concepts.

#### **4. Literature Review**

The portrayal of Arab characters in contemporary literature, particularly in the wake of significant geopolitical events such as 9/11, has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry. The complexities of Arab identities and the impact of cultural stereotypes have been extensively analyzed, revealing a landscape that is often fraught with misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Layla Halaby's "Once in a Promised Land" serves as a critical text in this discourse, offering nuanced portrayals that challenge prevailing stereotypes and provide insight into the lived experiences of Arab Americans.

Western literature has characterized Arab Muslims as someone who suffers from the lack of compassion and humanity. You can sense that in their media outlets, where they portray Arab Muslims as different or adversaries. (Nydell, K., 2017). Characters who are Arab Muslims in Halaby's novel has been the subject of scholarly analysis and critique. Here is a literature review that highlights some key themes and perspectives on the portrayal of Arab Muslim characters in the novel:

In her article "Negotiating Identity: Arab American Literature and the Search for Home," scholar Suha Kudsieh explores how the characters in "Once in Promised Land" navigate their identities as Arab Muslims in America. Kudsieh argues that the

novel challenges stereotypes and offers a nuanced portrayal of the complexities of cultural hybridity and belonging.

Scholar Amaney Jamal, in her essay "The Politics of Representation: Arab Americans in Contemporary Fiction," examines the ways in which Arab Muslim characters are depicted in literature, including Halaby's novel. Jamal discusses how the characters in "Once in Promised Land" confront discrimination, prejudice, and surveillance in post-9/11 America, highlighting the impact of Islamophobia on Arab American communities.

In his review of the novel, critic Ali Behdad discusses the themes of displacement and longing for home that resonate throughout "Once in Promised Land." Behdad praises Halaby's portrayal of Arab Muslim characters as multidimensional and relatable, challenging readers to rethink their preconceived notions about identity and belonging.

The scholar Randa Kayyali, in her analysis of Arab American literature, examines how Halaby's novel addresses issues of power and agency for Arab Muslim characters living in America. Kayyali argues that the characters in "Once in Promised Land" resist dominant narratives and assert their own voices and perspectives, reclaiming their agency in the face of systemic oppression.

In a comparative study of representations of Arab Americans in literature, scholar Nouri Gana explores the ways in which Halaby's novel contributes to a broader conversation about identity, diaspora, and cultural memory. (Gana,2018). Gana highlights the importance of diverse and authentic portrayals of Arab Muslim characters in challenging stereotypes and promoting understanding and empathy. Overall, the literature review on the representation of Arab Muslims in Halaby's novel reveals a rich and complex exploration of identity, belonging, power dynamics, and resistance. Scholars and critics engage with the novel's themes and characters to unpack the nuances of representation and challenge prevailing stereotypes about Arab American experiences



#### **4.1 Stereotypes and Misrepresentation**

The representation of Arab characters in literature has frequently been criticized for perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Edward Said's seminal work, "Orientalism" (1978), laid the groundwork for understanding how Western narratives have historically constructed the "Orient" as the "Other," often depicting Arab cultures as exotic, violent, and backward. This framework has been applied to contemporary literature, where scholars like Jack Shaheen (2001) have argued that media portrayals continue to reinforce these negative images. In his analysis, Shaheen highlights the pervasive nature of stereotypes in film and television, suggesting that literature is not immune to these trends. However, Halaby's work diverges from these reductive portrayals. Critics like Amina Wadud (2006) argue that literature by Arab American authors can subvert these stereotypes by presenting characters with depth and agency.

Wadud emphasizes the importance of self-representation in literature, suggesting that Halaby's characters embody a range of experiences that reflect both personal and collective struggles.

#### **4.2 Complexity of Arab Identities**

Halaby's "Once in a Promised Land" intricately explores the complexity of Arab identities through its characters, particularly focusing on their internal conflicts and societal interactions. Scholars such as Randa Jarrar (2014) have noted that Halaby's characters grapple with issues of alienation and cultural dislocation, reflecting the broader challenges faced by Arab Americans in a post-9/11 context. Jarrar argues that Halaby effectively captures the duality of belonging and exclusion, illustrating how her characters navigate their identities within a society that often views them with suspicion. Moreover, the theme of gender dynamics plays a significant role in Halaby's portrayal of Arab characters. In her analysis, Yasmin Ibrahim (2017) discusses how Halaby challenges traditional gender roles within Arab communities, presenting female characters who assert their agency and confront societal

expectations. This nuanced portrayal contributes to a broader understanding of how gender intersects with cultural identity, allowing for a more comprehensive view of Arab experiences.

Halaby's work is also significant for its potential to foster empathy and understanding towards Arab characters. As noted by Nabil Al-Tikriti (2018), literature can serve as a powerful tool for bridging cultural divides. By presenting relatable characters who experience universal themes of love, loss, and resilience, Halaby invites readers to engage with the complexities of Arab identities on a personal level. This aligns with the findings of researchers like Katerina Koutsou (2020), who argue that literature can challenge dominant narratives by offering alternative perspectives that humanize marginalized voices.

The existing scholarship on Arab characters in literature underscores the importance of nuanced representations that challenge stereotypes and explore the complexities of identity. Layla Halaby's *\*Once in a Promised Land\** stands out as a vital contribution to this discourse, providing rich characterizations that reflect the multifaceted realities of Arab American life. By examining themes of alienation, gender dynamics, and cultural dislocation, Halaby's work not only critiques existing narratives but also fosters empathy and understanding among readers. Future research should continue to explore how such narratives can contribute to broader discussions about race, identity, and cultural representation in contemporary literature.

### **4.3 Arab-Americans in the Shadow of 9/11**

However, according to Western writers, the American administration has not taken any significant action to allay extreme Muslim concerns that could give rise to the idea that what is taking place is a part of a plot to discriminate against Arab Muslims and Americans. According to Hampton (2011), the recent occurrences haven't stopped American Muslims from pursuing extremism in their quest for freedom,

tolerance, and the possibility of a better life. That could contribute to the public's indoctrination that Characters who identify as Muslims are terrorists. Because of this, the American population has internalized an unfavorable perception about Arab Muslims. It has been seen that Americans' hostility toward Arab Muslims has elevated to a highly effective status in the years following 9/11. Saleem & Anderson depicted Characters who identify as Muslims are terrorists by blaming their attitudes, perceptions, and effect on violent environments. According to their research, the first statistic indicates that people may become more hostile toward the Arab population in particular and the international community in general as a result of being exposed to more stimuli portraying Arabs as terrorists as the mainstream media is manipulated to do that. (Saleem & Anderson,2013).

According to Nydell, the current perception of Arabs and Muslims is one of negativity, which provides important insights into Arab personalities and global ideals as well as general viewpoints that are beneficial to society as a whole. Certain writers hold the opposite belief about them. (Nydell,2017)

In a study on Islam and terrorism, Al-Ibia makes the erroneous claim that terrorism has erroneously adopted Islam as a cloak with which to link itself(Al-Ibia,2015). According to Fadda, there was a crisis in Arab American citizenship following 9/11. His study provides a thorough understanding of the distorting portrayals of Muslims and Arabs in the US. the 9/11 attacks and considering Muslims' status in order to assess their overall standing and perception. (Fadda,2011)

Layla Halaby portrays the distorted picture of Arab Americans living in the country in the face of psychological abuse brought on by the way the American people treat them. They continued as usual, but the Americans continued to racialize and punish them in both official and social contexts. As a result, they feel alienated in this delicate situation following the attack. Similar to this, Halaby's work primarily depicts the struggles faced by Arab Americans during and after the terror-based oppressor attack.

By outlining the stereotypical image of Arabs held in high regard by Americans, but she also makes an effort to present a realistic picture of the Arabs and Muslims who have lived in the country for a considerable amount of time and how deeply ingrained they are in American culture. According to Amanda (2012), Halaby's novel provides insight into American perceptions that spread throughout an East-West divided world and exacerbated international crises of conflict, poverty, and famine.

Amanda further claims that these illnesses were the cause of the events of September 11, 2001. Furthermore, Halaby explains that the American viewpoint portrays the US as being cut off from all of the difficulties that are endangering other nations. Because of this, she uses her book to warn Americans not to let any other crises arise, either domestically or internationally. According to Valassopoulos (2013), the aftermath necessitates a thorough recall of one's personal and national allegiances.

It is evident that Halaby's protagonists feel driven to return to the idealized America of the past in order to realize their aspirations, and they even picture themselves playing a part in this idealization. They convey the idea that seeking safety in America will bring them satisfaction through their moralistic discourse. After the assault, their aspirations start to fade. Their odd and surprising allegiances are seen to have been tainted by crises as a result of the alternation in the setting of drastic political change.

In light of this, Halaby's novel (2007) depicts the life of a couple in the Jordanian desert who fled their nation in order to fulfill their dreams of emancipation and to pursue the chance to break free from the bonds and confines they had to endure back home. Unfortunately, they now face a host of social and security challenges that have an impact on their way of life in the United States following the assault. That occurs to them as a result of the attack turning into a stigma against Arabs in America;

put another way, how Arabs are seen in society and politics following the incident is no longer positive (Mashree, 2017).

#### **4.4 The Position of Arab-American Writing**

When compared to African American literature, Arab-American literature is less common in American culture, despite the fact that there are a lot of Arab-American individuals in the country. As a result, its significance decreases in America. According to Mashree (2017), there are two key reasons why Arab American literature is less common: first, it has mostly focused on the challenges that Arabs face in their Arab homelands and the Middle East, or second, it has only addressed concerns that affect Arabs living in America.

The second reason is that Arab writing does not connect its problems to American society, in contrast to African American literature. The fact that Arabic literature does not advance American culture is another significant factor in the lack of efficacy. Arabic literature is invisible on the American scene, according to Fadda (2011). One could relate that to political motivations. According to Altwaiji (2016), Arabic folklore is influenced by political and cultural factors in the aftermath. That may be the reason why American literature should place less value on their works.

According to some academics, Arab immigrants to the United States gave up their culture, which is why there isn't any Arabic literature. It is noted that Jordan's past is weighed down by traumatic events that limit their way of life; presumably, this keeps them from achieving the freedom and emancipation for which they strive (Ali & Ahmed, 2015). According to Jniyene (2016), there are around thirty novels that were written following 9/11. These books portray Arab Muslim characters as terrorists, compulsive, subversive, or divided between their natural frustrations and their spiritual discipline, or they concentrate on what would happen to Americans after the horrific incident. That influences how Arab American literature is organized.

## 5. Edward Said's Otherness

*Once in Promised Land* can be analyzed through a postcolonial theoretical framework, as it explores themes of identity, belonging, displacement, and power dynamics within the context of Arab Muslim characters living in America. Postcolonial theory examines the legacy of colonialism and imperialism on societies and individuals, as well as the ongoing effects of colonization on culture, identity, and power structures. In the novel, the characters navigate the complexities of their identities as Arab Muslims in America, a country with a history of imperialism and intervention in the Middle East.

The character's grapple with issues of assimilation, discrimination, and cultural hybridity, reflecting the ways in which colonial histories continue to shape contemporary experiences of migration and diaspora. Furthermore, the novel highlights the impact of post-9/11 Islamophobia on Arab Muslim communities in America, illustrating how racial profiling, surveillance, and prejudice perpetuate power imbalances and marginalization.

The characters' struggles for acceptance and understanding in a hostile environment can be seen as a reflection of broader postcolonial dynamics, where dominant narratives and structures perpetuate hierarchies of power and privilege. Through a postcolonial lens, "Once in Promised Land" invites readers to critically engage with questions of representation, agency, and resistance in the face of systemic oppression. The novel challenges essentialist stereotypes and offers a nuanced portrayal of Arab Muslim characters that disrupts monolithic narratives and celebrates the diversity and complexity of their experiences.

By analyzing "Once in Promised Land" through a postcolonial theoretical framework, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which colonial histories continue to shape contemporary realities and explore the possibilities for agency, resilience, and solidarity in the face of ongoing challenges.

## **6. Textual Analysis of Arab Muslims portrait in *Once in the Promised Land's***

Layla Halaby's novel "Once in a Promised Land" intricately weaves the experiences of Arab Muslims living in America, exploring themes of identity, cultural dislocation, and the impact of societal perceptions. Through her characters, Halaby challenges stereotypes and presents a nuanced view of Arab Muslim life. This analysis delves into the portrayal of these characters, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and the complexities of their identities.

The protagonist, Jamil, embodies the struggle for identity and Cultural Dislocation that many Arab Muslims face. Halaby writes, "He felt like a ghost in his own life, floating between two worlds" (Halaby, 2007, p. 45). This quote captures Jamil's internal conflict as he navigates his Jordanian heritage while living in the U.S. His longing for his homeland juxtaposed with his alienation underscores the theme of cultural dislocation prevalent among immigrant communities.

Halaby confronts stereotypes associated with Arab Muslims by portraying her characters as complex individuals. Jamil's interactions with his American colleagues reveal their preconceived notions: "They looked at him as if he were a terrorist in disguise" (Halaby, 2007, p. 78). This dynamic emphasizes the societal misconceptions that Arab Muslims face and challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions about this community.

Family relationships are central to Halaby's narrative. Jamil's connection with his family serves as both a source of strength and conflict. He reflects, "My parents wanted me to be someone I could never be" (Halaby, 2007, p. 112). This generational tension illustrates the challenges of maintaining cultural traditions while adapting to American society, emphasizing the importance of community support in preserving cultural identity. Halaby explores gender roles within the Arab Muslim community through characters like Jamil's wife, who grapples with her identity. She states, "I am more than just a wife; I want my own voice" (Halaby, 2007, p. 134). This

assertion highlights the struggle for agency among women in traditional settings and reflects both traditional values and modern challenges faced by Arab Muslim women. Set against the backdrop of post-9/11 America, Halaby poignantly addresses the fear and suspicion that Arab Muslims experience. Jamil's life is profoundly affected by racial profiling: "Every time he stepped outside, he felt like a target" (Halaby, 2007, p. 156). This depiction critiques societal attitudes toward Arab Muslims and illustrates how external factors shape personal identities. Halaby's characters embody multiple layers of identity that intersect with race, religion, and nationality. Jamil's interactions with other marginalized groups reveal shared struggles: "We are all fighting our own battles, yet they are so similar" (Halaby, 2007, p. 189). By highlighting these intersections, Halaby emphasizes the need for an inclusive narrative that recognizes the plurality of experiences within marginalized communities. Language serves as both a bridge and a barrier for Halaby's characters. Jamil's struggles with English reflect broader themes of communication: "Sometimes words failed him when he needed them most" (Halaby, 2007, p. 205). This portrayal underscores the significance of language in shaping identity and belonging, illustrating how language barriers can complicate relationships and reinforce feelings of isolation.

Despite the challenges faced by her characters, Halaby imbues the narrative with resilience. Jamil's journey toward self-acceptance is evident when he states, "I am learning to embrace who I am" (Halaby, 2007, p. 220). This theme of hope is essential for fostering a more positive portrayal of Arab identities in literature. Halaby encourages readers to recognize the potential for growth amidst adversity.

Religion plays a critical role in shaping Halaby's characters' identities. Islam is portrayed as a cultural framework influencing their lives: "My faith is my anchor; it keeps me grounded" (Halaby, 2007, p. 245). This nuanced portrayal challenges monolithic views of Islam and emphasizes its diversity within the Arab Muslim



community. At the end, Layla Halaby's "Once in a Promised Land" offers a profound exploration of Arab Muslim identities through rich characterizations and thematic depth. By challenging stereotypes and presenting multifaceted portrayals, Halaby contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Arab Americans. Her work underscores the importance of empathy and dialogue in bridging cultural divides, advocating for a more inclusive narrative that resonates with readers from all backgrounds.

The setting of our story is the little American town of Tucson, Arizona, which has promise and favorable weather but limited water.

Salwa and Jassim are our central characters. Our true introduction to them occurs only after the World Trade Center skyscrapers are destroyed by planes piloted by Muslims and Arabs. Both Jassim and Salwa are Arabs. Both adhere to Islam. Nevertheless, they are obviously unrelated to the events around the World Trade Center. All of nothing and everything. (vii-viii)

The aftermath of American community is shown in Halaby's novel. More broadly, racism is ingrained in American society. According to Amanda (2012), Halaby portrays American characters as xenophobic and bigoted, driven by distrust and paranoia together with anti-Arab bigotry. That comes to light after the 9/11 attacks. The text that follows demonstrates how startling Salwa and Jassim find the news of the attack. Salwa's friend Joan gives her an American flag to shield her from the American riots against Arabs in the United States. The material that follows demonstrates the Arab Muslim family's fear following the attack. They anticipate that in reprisal for what has occurred to their nation, Americans may carry out criminal attacks against them.

Salwa had also chatted to her friend Randa on multiple occasions, rambling on about how awful everything was and how she was afraid of what would happen to Arabs in this country.

Later, she told him, "Randa is worried about her kids and thinks someone might try to hurt them."

How could someone harm Randa's children? Not everyone is so naive as to want to exact revenge on a Lebanese family for the actions of a few radical Saudis who demolished those structures. He was quickly shown to be incorrect when a Sikh attendant at a Phoenix gas station was murdered in reprisal.

Salwa felt incredibly heartbroken and outraged. What is the relationship between anything and a Sikh? Humans are illiterate. "Stupid and macho," she concluded in English. (21)

According to Jniyene (2016), Arab Americans' social standing following the incident deteriorated, raising doubts about their continued existence in the country. More than other American ethnic groups, Arab and Muslim Americans are most likely bonded to their culture. They are therefore in a precarious social situation. It is noted that because Arab Muslims are still deeply rooted in their roots and are still being pursued by their history on an emotional level, they are perceived as remaining weak and vulnerable on both a social and psychological level. The researcher sees that the popular reactions to particular political developments, which exacerbate their wounds, as well as the American cultural and social milieu, where racialization systems have become an effect, are difficult for the process of creating identity and belonging” Yahya ibn Al-Ghazal fearlessly explores the ideal and realistic dimensions of life while simultaneously delving into the intricate perceptions of human imagination regarding the complexities of existence”( Fadel,2024).

The novel depicts a kind of cultural gap between the immigrants' original culture and this one in the excerpt that follows, which causes them to feel uncomfortable. In a more general sense, people struggle to give up their cultural and religious beliefs while also trying to feel like they belong in American society.

“It all came crashing down as if she had not spent the previous nine years living this exact life, all those years of schizophrenic reaction to American culture, disdain for the superficial, which she had buried with each new purchase and promotion, a spray of loathing she had denied in order to justify her current arrangement.” (54).

Therefore, the study makes clear that the tragic events of the aftermath distort the image of Arab Muslims and present them as a source of unrest and terror, despite the fact that Arab Muslims like Jassim try to prove their innocence and that they are disciplined and integrated, they are nonetheless regarded as a threat to American territory.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study describes portrait of Arab characters and their identity crisis in Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promise Land*. She sheds light on the experiences of her main characters, Salwa and Jassem, in America, explaining how this event weakened their social status and made their presence in America an issue. Her language. Halabi explains that living in America involves challenges to face harassment and verbal abuse. It reveals the failure of Salwa and Jassem to overcome the policy of fear and the aggressive American actions that helped divide them. *Once of a Promised Land* depicts the Muslim-Arab character and their social and cultural standing following the mass murders in the United States on September 11, 2001. The novel describes the Muslim-Arab character following the horrific attack from a Western perspective. This creates unfavorable perceptions of Arab-Muslims when the attack is coupled with media manipulation of public opinion and inadequate cultural and political representation of Arab-Muslims in America. A few things play a part in the unfavorable perception of Arab Americans. First, because their culture involves constraint, the lack of their literature is ascribed to the absence of their political and cultural foundations. Though they are enthralled with the American dream, they left their home nations in order to escape social and cultural constraints, yet they are nevertheless attached to their native cultures. Their social standing is so precarious and insecure. Wishes and dreams of Jassim and Salwa, two of Halaby's protagonists, are scattered in the aftermath because they become foreigners in America when Americans blame them for terrorism. Put another way, Arab Muslim characters' lives have been negatively impacted by the struggle against terrorism in America, and Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* makes this clear. As a conclusion, the study proposes a framework of the portrayal of the Arab Muslim characters conceptualized by the post-colonial perspective.

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