



Mohamed Khider University of Biskra
ISILC Laboratory
POLICA Research Unit
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The Burden of Being an Arab/Muslim in Post 9/11 America:

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007)

Dib Fatima Zohra.

Abstract

In the U.S Arabs are given honorary white category, being classified as Caucasians/White, a classification that is meant to disempower Arabs and render them invisible. Since the dramatic and tragic event of 9/11, Arab Americans who formed a minority group, all of sudden, came under the spotlight. They have become subject to discrimination, negative stereotyping, and hostility. They were otherized, profiled, and discriminated. The events widen the chasm between the East and West and revive the neo-orientalist stereotypes and biased representations against Arabs. Writers around the globe responded to the 9/11 attacks and fictionalized its impact in their writings. *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) by the Palestinian American novelist Laila Halaby is considered as the first attempt by an Arab American novelist to capture the repercussions of 9/11 on Arab-Americans and their dilemmas under anti-terrorist legislations. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine the horrendous experiences of Jassim and Salwa Haddad, a couple of Jordanian and Palestinian background, respectively, after 9/11. It highlights Halaby's representation of the precarious position Arab/ Muslim Americans occupy as a result of the introduction of the War on Terror policies. Through a close reading to the novel, the study argues that the 9/11 events and the ensuing war on terror severely affected their lives where they become the target of racial profiling, hatred, and enhanced surveillance. Being subjected to harassment, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments, and xenophobic attitudes in the country they consider as their true homeland, Jassim and Salwa come to realize the futility of their aspirations. Consequently, the novel engages in the task of debunking and demythologizing the notion of American Dream. The couple experiences in post 9/11 America subvert, interrogate, and undermine the U.S promises of harmonious and united nation, where all people regardless of their race, color, religion, and ethnicity are treated equally. 9/11 awakens the novel's protagonists to new reality of America's racism and prejudice against the Arabs and made them re-think and reposition their identities and affiliations. Drawing on post 9/11 discourse of the War on Terror, Edward Said's theorization of orientalism, and Homi Bhabha's hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence, the paper argues that Halaby's novel critiques American imperialist notion of the homeland and examines how the U.S homeland security produces a sense of insecurity and threat for Arab-Muslim characters' identities, belonging, and perception of their American citizenship.

Key words: 9/11, Arab Americans , Insecurity Laila Halaby, Orientalism