International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research
Vol.10, No 3, pp.49-59, 2022
Print ISSN: 2053-6305(Print)
Online ISSN:2053- 6313(online)

The Exclusion's Legality and Normality in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Dr. Met'eb Ali Alnwairan (Corresponding author)
Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature,
Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts & Sciences, University of Nizwa, Oman

Dr. Osman Hasan
Assistant Professor of TEFL,
University of Nizwa, Oman

Dr. Mahmoud Abuoaf
Assistant Professor ofEducation and Applied Linguistics,
Univeristy ofTecknology and Applied science, Oman

Dr. Menia Mohammad Almenia
Associate professor of English Literature and Criticism,
Department of English and Translation, College of Arabic Language and Social Studies,
Qassim University, Saudi Arabia

Citation: Met'eb Ali Alnwairan, Osman Hasan, Mahmoud Abuoaf and Menia Mohammad Almenia (2022) The Exclusion's Legality and Normality in Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land, *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, Vol.10, No 3, pp.49-59

ABSTRACT: *This paper is devoted to dissecting the emerging aspects of exclusion and otherness that characterize Post-Modernity by referring to the specific context of the US culture as presented in Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land (2007). What is remarkable about this exclusionary spirit of our times is its increasing legality and normality. The paper deals with exclusion and otherness by building on Michel Foucault's perceptions introduced in his seminal book History of Madness (1961). Foucault examined the history of exclusion in early modern and modern eras and provided a new understanding of the development of the modern institutions of the Western world. In this paper, we build on Foucault's position on exclusion and otherness to reveal a wider scope of interpretations that this theory can provide. We argue that Halaby's novel pinpoints a new generation/manifestation of the exclusionary spirit that Foucault diagnosed. The protagonists of Halaby's novel are excluded from their social and political context through dynamics that legalize and normalize their exclusion.*
KEYWORDS: Laila Halaby, *Once in a Promised Land*, Foucault, exclusion, otherness.

INTRODUCATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The political scene of the third decade of the twenty-first century still shows increasing levels of violence and hatred toward refugees and immigrants. Perhaps it is important to note here that the emphasis this paper pays to the US context does not mean that the racial disparity is exclusive to one particular country or nation. For example, the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia has brought to the front, once again, the stubborn issue of racism against refugees in much wider perspective than what was known before. As in most conflicts of this century, images of refugees trying to flee the war-torn country to neighboring countries spread all over the world in a matter of seconds. What is equally striking, though, was the voluminous footage and reports about racial discrimination in the evacuation operations. People of color have found it more challenging than white refugees to board the evacuation trains and buses, or even cross the borders on foot. Numerous reports showed an unequal application of evacuation aid according to nation of origin and ethnicity. Ukrainians and Europeans were given the highest priority while people from India, the Middle East, and Africa were ignored and mistreated (Bajaj and Stanford, 2022; see also Ray, 2022). While witnessing the practice of discrimination was hard to bear, even more shocking were the racial justifications made by some Ukrainian officials and international journalists. These exposed the purposeful nature of the unequal valuation of human life, the attitudes evolving from deeply-rooted racial bias and exclusionary attitudes.

That said, this paper exposes the new universal trends of exclusion's legality and normality by examining the US context as an example. The United States ermerged as one of the biggest multi-ethnic nations today which has been always subject to nemoerous challenges concerning accommodating people from different backgrounds, reiglions, and races. Despite the fact that American institutions developed ambitious social and political mechanisms to ensure harmouny and justice amonge the citizens, contemporary fiction writers warned of the increasing tendency of hatred and discrimination toward the Other through literature.

Several recent studies were conducted on the exclusion and discrimination of migrants and refugees around the world in general, and in the West in particular. For example, Elena Ortells Montón (2017) tackles issues of cultural othering in modern diaspora fiction. Her study highlights the manifestations of racial discrimination in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. Montón's analysis of the lives of fictional protagonists highlights the fact that the immigrant/refugee body has developed into a battlefield for global confrontations and controversy. Montón's study offers as resolution how works by writers such as Halaby "can contribute to the annihilation of any glorification of radicalisms and can be used as a vehicle to circulate an absolute critique of brutality and ruthlessness" (p. 30).

Lloyd (2012) points out that Halaby brings to the fore many controversial topics in American society and unearths "the relentlessness of American paranoia and prejudice" (p. 38). Lloyd argues that the general American fear of everything Middle Eastern reflects the fact that Americans overreacted to the events of 9/11, creating a gap between the two sides that is not likely to be bridged soon. Interestingly, Lloyd asserts that what is remarkable in Halaby's novel is that she inverts the classic Oriental formula on its head and shows the Eastern gaze upon a Western society. The technique, in turn, emphasizes America's own Western gaze upon Arab world; in doing so, she represents the American setting as "conspiratorial and inundated with religious zealotry" (p. iv).

A series of recent studies have enriched the discussion about Halaby's novel by tackling topics of cultural hybridity, un/belonging, hatred, institutionalized racism, and the general change of attitude in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11 (Chandio& Sangi, 2020; Valassopoulos, 2014; Mashree, 2017). These studies analyzed how Muslim characters had to cope with the power dynamics in American society. The protagonists of Halaby's novel show an extraordinary ability to develop allegiances and flexibility in response to sweeping changes in the political atmosphere in the States. Accordingly, America ceased to be the "Promised Land" for many, and having to endure the bigoted and racist treatment, made refugees to the United States reconsider their plans for the future.

Other studies like Nunez's (2013) "War of the Words: Aliens, Immigrants, Citizens, and the Language of Exclusion" directly address notions of exclusion in modern fiction. In her study, Nunez sheds light on the way terms like "immigrant," "alien," and "citizen" are used in the modern-day United States. This analysis is based on texts in various media like newspapers and magazines, academic texts, and fiction writing. Nunez concludes: "The connotations associated with "citizen," "immigrant," and "alien," reinforce a narrative in which citizens are tragic heroes being displaced by invading aliens and in which immigrants are characterized by their vulnerability" (p. 1562). Nunez's conclusion supports my current study in the sense that the language we use to describe the world around us, especially the language of immigration and politics, adds another layer to this new type of exclusionary spirit that has been developing in recent decades.

Susanna Mills' (2018) study assesses Western representations of immigrants through transnational literature and examines topics like globalization and the increasing flows of migration. Mills argues that in recent decades the literary canon has marginalized the writings of transnational writers and has become a significant challenge to multi-ethnic writers' self-representation and expression. Mills points out that as immigration is usually perceived as a threat to Western societies, "the representations within the media and literature of the immigrant or diaspora as threat both shape and are shaped by legal, educational, political and other societal institutions that benefit from a unified national identity" (p. 29). Mills' perception of this binary structure shoulders my interpretation of the ever-increasing notions of hatred and exclusionary discipline practices in our modern times.

The existing body of criticism on Halaby's novel tackles the issue of immigrants' identities and their struggle in the American cultural context as well as other issues of globalization. However, in spite of the fact that the above-mentioned studies have discussed issues and concerns that migrants to the United States encounter, they did not focus on the deeper dynamics of systematization and institutionalization of exclusionary practices we witness today. This study, in a way, links these practices to their historical and political contexts and benefit from Foucault's ideas on exclusion in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of the development of the modern exclusionary sprit and its effects on the individual and society.

Theoretical Framework

The exclusionary trend we discuss was first examined and diagnosed by Michel Foucault, particularly in his seminal book *History of Madness* (2006), first published in (1961). Foucault's discussion in his book revolved around the modern phenomena of social exclusion. He starts his survey with the exclusion and confinement of lepers during the Middle Ages. Foucault argues that once leprosy had gone, leper houses were used as places of confinement for the mentally disabled. Foucault's research showed that, during the 17th century, the gap

the lepers left was immediately filled with the "insane." Foucault wondered why the French, all of a sudden, discovered that there is a considerable population of "mad" people who must be banned from normal life. Foucault examined the history of madness by referring to philosophers like Descartes and the practices of 18th- and 19th-century psychiatrists like Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke. What is remarkable in Foucault's work is that he focused, perhaps for the first time in history, on the social and cultural aspects of madness that were overshadowed by the previous scientific and medical studies of madness (Foucault, 2006).

Foucault explains that at the end of the 18th century, specialized medical institutions were created to keep mentally unstable individuals under the control of medical institutions. Foucault adds that apart from the attempt to cure the insane people, those institutions became centers for "confining" socially undesirable people. Foucault argues that the modern "scientific" approach to dealing with the mad followed the same authoritative methods of the medieval treatments for insanity. In the preface to the 1961 edition of Madness and Civilization, Foucault writes:

> *The constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly, in which the exchange, between madness and reason, was carried out. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason about madness, could only have come into existence in such a silence. (Foucault, 2006, p. xxviii*)

Foucault takes the discussion about madness further in another influential book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), first published in 1975. The book is primarily a study of a new type of exclusion carried out by the modern penal system. Foucault argues that the construction of the great prisons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked a new type of social exclusion. In this new type of exclusion, "prisoners were confined and subjected to the scientific dynamic of one-way surveillance and observation that lead to coercive objectification of the self in exclusionary and disciplinary practices" (Peters & Besley, 2014, 102). Foucault concludes his discussion about the vices of the modern types of exclusion by observing:

> *The prison cannot fail to produce delinquents. It does so by the very type of existence that it imposes on its inmates: whether they are isolated in cells or whether they are given useless work, for which they will find no employment, it is, in any case, not 'to think of man in society; it is to create an unnatural, useless and dangerous existence'. (Foucault, 1995, p. 266)*

Foucault expands his views about prison surveillance to include other major institutions in our modern world. He argues that similar to the structure of prisons, modern schools, medical institutions, and factories developed rigid systems of surveillance (Foucault, 1995, p. 228). Foucault explains that our modern societies organize "what might be called 'disciplinary careers' in which, through various exclusions and rejections, a whole process is set in motion" (Foucault, 1995, p. 299). This process excludes the people kept within its doors from the outside life. In view of this, this paper builds on Foucault's conceptions about exclusion to propose an explanation if the globally increasing tendency of discrimination and racism we witness today. These concepts of social exclusion, otherness, and racism are further discussed while analyzing the struggle of Halaby's protagonists in the United States.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Immigrant characters who are alienated and excluded from social space in their host countries are becoming more common in the twenty-first century. This trend is undoubtedly applicable to Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. The 9/11 attacks draw a borderline between two different states of being for the major characters in the novel. Before the attacks, Jassim and Salwa, the novel's protagonists, had a successful and prosperous life in Tucson, Arizona. The good and stable days of the couple were short as the airplane attacks turned their lives upside-down. Due to their Middle-Eastern origin, the couple became the target of both official and public censorship. The novel shows how the attacks changed the lives of thousands of people in the United States – and the West in general -- as those individuals found themselves excluded from the lifestyle they were used to and estranged from the county they once belonged to. These drastic consequences of 9/11 on the "fragile" immigrant identity led to the eventual destruction of Jassim and Salwa's marriage. Halaby's novel exposes the dominant double standards towards immigrants in the West.

In the novel, the narrator reflects on the bigoted and racial treatment that immigrants of Middle-eastern origin received after the attacks:

> *Our main characters are Salwa and Jassim. We really come to know them only after the World Trade Centre buildings have been flattened by planes flown by Arabs, by Muslims. 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. (Halaby, pp. vii-viii).*

Halaby shows how the problems these Arabic characters face in America could be attributed to their identity as Arabs living in Western society. Danielewicz explains identity as, "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and others (which includes us)" (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 10). According to this understanding, Jassim and Salwa were distinguished as outsiders in Western social relations, especially in post-9/11 America. Ethnicity, language, and religion are markers for the couple's status as outsiders. This understanding is supported by Craith (2007) who asserted that clashes within civilizations derive from linguistic and religious implications.

Halaby reflects on the trauma people like Jassim experienced as a consequence of the officially legalized targeting of immigrants. Halaby's narration dives deep into the psychology of the excluded individual. The "naïve" beliefs of the "promised land" are violently shaken as:

> *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 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-whispered voice: with or against. But was he not with? I understand American society, he wanted to scream. I speak your language. I pay taxes to your government. I play your game. I have a right to be here. […] His breathing slowed as he closed out everything but that which was more powerful. (Halaby, p. 234)*

Here, Halaby highlights the presence of new power relations in the post-9/11 world. Jassim feels oppressed and wants to scream that by any practical definition, he is as American as he can be. The FBI's behavior towards Jassim is closely connected to his identity as a Muslim and an Arab. Along the same line, Grewal (2005) declares that the events of 9/11 engendered

multiple paths of discrimination in America. Jassim finds himself in a relationship with FBI officials that is similar to those Foucault describes; he is subject to 'disciplinary mechanisms' that exclude him from his adopted society (Foucault, 1995).

In the novel, Jassim and Salwa feel insecure and find themselves needing to declare their Americanism to avoid the increasing hostility towards immigrants. This is clear when Joan, Salwa's friend, gives Salwa two American flag decals with the advice to "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" (Halaby, p. 55). Even the most sympathetic characters with Salwa can be seen as controlling her. Joan's advice to Salwa could be interpreted in the light of Foucault's idea that Joan, as an American citizen, believes that she has the right to speak and position herself as a wise woman who can give pieces of advice; at the same time, she is trying to control Salwa as she tells her what to do. Accordingly, Salwa seems far from reaching any level of self-regulation. In Foucault's (1972) terms Joan is practicing power over Salwa. Joan's identity appears is well constructed in the novel, while Salwa's is still undeveloped yet.

Halaby skillfully depicts how fear of the other shakes the very basic assumptions of human brotherhood and harmony. Everything that is not American is targeted after the attacks. Salwa tells Jassim about her friend Randa who is deeply concerned about her kids' security:

> *"Randa is worried about her kids, thinks someone might try to hurt them," she told him later. "Why would anyone hurt Randa's kids? People are not so ignorant as to take revenge on a Lebanese family for the act of a few extremist Saudis who destroyed those buildings." He had promptly been proved wrong when a Sikh gas station attendant in Phoenix was killed in retaliation. Salwa's outrage and sadness was immense. "What does a Sikh have to do with anything? People are stupid. Stupid and macho," she finished in English. (Halaby, p. 21)*

Although she is an American, Randa is worried about her children who might be a target of harassment or threat of physical force. Randa is thinking of her relationship with society in an unexpected way that derives from evidence she perceives of changes in those around her. Foucault (1980) explains that the processes of exclusion led to the production of a new discourse. Therefore, the desperate discourse of Randa can be understood as originating from her conclusion that her family has been excluded and hated. The Sikh, according to Salwa, has been killed out of hatred; he was mistaken for a Muslim because of his appearance. The logical extension for this mother is to ask: what will people do to actual Muslims? The answer is obvious. However, terrible as that is, the subtext of how such actions are justified by American society is even more so.

The novel then involves the reader in the daily challenges Jassim and Salwa encounter. These situations remind the couple that they do not belong to the place they once considered home. In the mall, Jassim was looked at as dangerous and suspicious. Amber, a clerk, calls security because she considers Jassim a threat. Salwa arrives and demands an explanation for why her husband was treated as suspicious. Amber answers:

> "*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. (Halaby, p. 30)*

As Graham (2011) explains, language is the instrument through which people express their

ideas and successfully communicate between individuals or other groups. In the mall, Salwa and Jassim were treated according to a racial bias, especially Jassim who was followed around by security. The utterance "He just scared me" reveals to what extent the identity of the Arab could be imposed by the Americans. That sentence expresses exclusionary spirit and hatred toward certain races. Salwa does not like the attitude of the security personnel and expresses her anger by saying, "I see. You thought he might want to blow up the mall in his Ferragamo shoes" (Halaby, p. 30). Salwa's speech reveals that she realizes the stereotype Amber and the security had of the Arabs.

Halaby makes the "mall" scene central to her narrative about the declining acceptance of multiracial identity. The attitude of uncertainty and doubt within Amber reflects the trending view of many Americans toward everything different or not American. Salwa expresses her disappointment:

> *"I am sorry to hear that. Are you planning to have every Arab arrested now?" She paused for just a second. "Do you not use your brains? This country has more than fifty million people in it, and you're worried about your tacky little store. But now you'll have a lot to talk about in school. You can say you saw a real live Arab and had to call security on him." (Halaby, p. 30)*

The dialogue between Amber and Salwa illustrates the two different perspectives on the same identity, making clear that Amber does not perceive Salwa as a true American. Amber's statement could not conceal her feelings toward Salwa. Foucault (1972) defined the "statement" as a "special mode of existence" (p. 100). Halaby demonstrates how language expresses the multiplicity of existences that exist in perception. Salwa, by her rejection of the behavior of the security personnel, is defending her version of her existence and her right to be treated like other American citizens. What Salwa stated clearly illustrates her rejection of the exclusionary attitudes and reveals that she is aware of the hostile attitude toward immigrants. Amber's discourse is the key for Salwa's understanding; as described by Foucault (1978), discourse is:

> *an instrument and an effect of power […] a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (p. 101).*

This description of discourse shows that Salwa's resistance and self-esteem go in line with the Foucauldian conception of the self. Her deep awareness of her being encourages her to defy the racial and exclusionary attitudes of people around her.

Halaby's novel dives deep into everyday thoughts and perceptions. The conversations the protagonists have with "white" Americans reveal the alienation and othering the new immigrants face. Mary Parker talks to Jassim about her son Evan:

> *"You're Arabic?" "Yes, I am an Arab." Silence […] See, when 9/11 happened, Evan was freaked out, totally freaked out […] he did then, ranted and raved about how Arabic people should all be kicked out of this country, rounded up, herded up, and thrown out […] We were all scared those people were going to blow us all up. Then he started talking about how he wished he could kill an Arab—my own son talking about killing someone! (Halaby, pp. 200-1)*

This discourse shows how the aftermath of the September attacks encouraged and exacerbated existing racist tendencies. This feeling is inherently directed towards races/peoples other than

Americans, especially Arabs. Halaby portrays the Arabs on American soil as being ostracized by fellow citizens. Such a discourse shows how hated and unwanted the Arabs were. What Halaby tries to show could be interpreted through Foucauldian thought in terms of power, knowledge, and discourse. Foucault (1980) claims that power and knowledge are joined in discourse. Discourse in his opinion is an instrument and an impact of power. Foucault adds that discourse communicates and produces power by reinforcing it. On the other hand, discourse may undermine and expose power. The dialogue Halaby creates between Mary and Jassim clearly illustrates the role discourse plays in transmitting power and how, at the same time, it could be a point of resistance.

Halaby depicts the nation's failure to avoid overgeneralization and stereotyping after the attacks. Arabs in general were looked at as suspicious and guilty regardless of their ideological stances. The novel presents many examples of that mistrust and suspicion. A dialogue between Marcus, Jassim's friend, and his wife, Bella, conceals the widening gap between two close friends. Bella asks Marcus: "Do you think he could do somethin? …" I mean do you think Jassim is capable of doing something bad to the water supply?" (Halaby, p. 236). Marcus tries to defend Jassim but, "Not for the first time, his wife had brought to the surface the very thing that was nagging at him, harvested that vague doubt that had been lodged way back in his brain, undercutting the faith he had in others" (Halaby, p. 237). The implied accusation of Marcus against Jassim and the FBI's investigations of Jassim's life are in line with Foucault's ideas about discipline and punishment. The discourse here is a clear reference to the use of institutional power to exclude unwanted individuals. Even at work, Jassim is considered an intruder in Marcus's view, while Marcus considers himself a native. According to Foucault (1986), power is exercised, not possessed. Therefore, Marcus exercises power in his institution to construct identity through social relations and cultural practices.

The alienation and exclusion from both husband and society force Salwa to seek compensation in a sexual relationship with Jake, an American college boy. That Salwa has a young partner may reveal that she started to assimilate in the American community. However, this relationship shows another power discourse between the two. Salwa finds refuge and a sense of belonging to American soil in her relationship with Jake, while the latter finds it an opportunity to exploit Salwa's weakness. When Salwa decides to return to Jordan, Jake reveals his real feelings about her and all other immigrants: "Bitch! Goddamn fucking Arab bitch! You ruined everything!" (Halaby, p. 322). Jake represents the extremist stream in American society who look down on everything that is not American: "So you're running back to the pigsty?" (Halaby, p. 320). The scene ends with Jake physically assaulting Salwa "as she felt her blood being pumped out of her body, spilling into the grass." (Halaby, p. 323). In the novel, Salwa's short affair reflects her desire to retrieve her true self and her identity by establishing a relationship with a "white" American who, in the beginning, admired her culture. The end of the relationship not only affects Salwa's body but also shakes her belief in the American Dream and her hopes to be part of America.

In addition to the references to exclusion as expressed internally and through interaction among characters, Halaby's novel sheds light on the dynamics of the exclusion's legality and normality in the world of today. In the novel, Halaby exposes anti-immigration sentiments and propaganda by reflecting on the role of mass media in spreading fear and uncertainty by racializing the post-9/11 moment. Penny, Jassim's friend, stands for the typical American citizen who is charged by American officials' venomous sentiments broadcast through mass media:

Nightly Penny watched the late news as well as the evening news; she had become

> *obsessed by it ever since the Twin Towers had been destroyed. Each time the president spoke about the War on Terror she was outraged, sickened that there were people so sinister that they would want to harm innocent Americans (Halaby, p. 280).*

Georgiana Banita (2010) argues that Halaby chose to focus on the so-called "war on terror" in order to evaluate the long-term consequences of the September attacks on small racial groups in America. The Bush administration's behavior in the aftermath of the attacks, according to Banita, created "what may be called moral racialization, that is, the articulation of a racially suspicious enemy figure propagated through the visual media and intended to imbibe and redirect as much public resentment as possible" (p. 245). Banita concludes that Halaby's protagonists "have fallen one step behind other social outsiders, being branded not only as second-rate citizens but also as social hazards […] and whose goals must be foiled at any price" (p. 246). Salwa and Jasim's lives turns unlivable as their marriage faces lots of troubles. Salwa gets depressed and in an attempt to escape it, she starts an affair with an American young partner while Jasim is reported to the FBI. Their stay in the US was sabotaged by the exclusionary practices of the age.

On more than one occasion, Halaby depicts how "moral racialization" was influential and widespread in America, to the extent that hate speech was openly shared on radio stations. While Salwa is driving, she turns on the radio to hear "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! Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us" (Halaby, p. 56). In the novel, Salwa suspects that the racial prejudice fellow Americans feel is patronized by the government itself: "I hate to think what sort of retaliation there is going to be on a governmental level for what happened" (Halaby, p. 21). Salwa predicts that there is some kind of revenge being conspired against them. For all Salwa knows, they might be under surveillance or may even be penalized because they are Arabs. The whole community seems to be conspiring against the couple as Halaby shows in her novel.

Many post-9/11 works show a considerable amount of interest in the reaction of the excluded and alienated. Along that same line, Halaby elucidates that the protagonists of her novel try desperately to assimilate, and cope with the power shift after 9/11. They try to show they belong on America's soil. An FBI agent asks Jassim: "What was your reaction to the events of September 11?" (Halaby, p. 231). Jassim answers: "I was shocked, saddened, unsettled. Probably much the same as most people in this country. It was so unexpected." (Halaby, p. 231). When the questions changed to discussing his religious beliefs, Jassim tries to detach himself from being a passionate Muslim.

Eventually, the couple concluded that they were betrayed by the fake ramifications the American dream. Halaby describes Salwa's feelings:

> *Out of nowhere, a thought louder than any of the voices popped into her head, thought that she had not had before: We cannot live here anymore. 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 – it all burst forward as if she were seeing it for the first time, as though she had not spent the past nine years living this very life. (Halaby, p. 54)*

Halaby wants to show how Salwa reached a conclusion that she is, as an Arab, unwanted and unwelcome in America. Halaby's novel sheds light on some actions that might stir racial

hatred, especially towards Arabs and Muslim immigrants. It seems that Salwa is looking for some form of resistance against different forms of power exercised against her and her husband.

Halaby alludes to the fact that, while hatred, disdain, and doubt dominate group dynamics in multi-ethnic societies like the American society, the continuity of minority groups will be a point of doubt. Salwa's miscarriage is a hint that there is no future for the couple in the United States: At the hospital, Salwa reevaluates her experience in America and concludes that "this was the life she had chosen, but it was not the life she wanted" (Halaby, p. 91). Salwa, through the narrator's voice, shows her disappointment in her presence in the United States and that she still feels herself a stranger even after living in America for many years.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, *Once in a Promised Land* illustrates the emerging aspects of the processes of exclusion and otherness in the post 9/11 US sociopolitical context. The novel affords significant insights on the increasing legality and normalization of racism and hatred in the US in particular, which in turn are reflected also in broader international social dynamics. The study dealt with exclusion and othering by drawing on Michel Foucault's theories on these constructs. The researchers argue that Halaby's novel illustrates a new trend of the exclusionary spirit that already Foucault diagnosed. Halaby's novel depicts how immigrants in the US are excluded from their social and political context through various exclusionary practices, especially after the 9/11 attacks. The consequences of the exclusion of individuals from public life led to the eventual dissolution of marriage ties as well as the end of the protagonists' experiment in the US.

References

Bajaj, S. S., & Stanford, F. C. (2022, March 11). *The Ukrainian refugee crisis and the pathology of racism*. BMJ. https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/376/bmj.o661.full.pdf

Banita, G. (2010). Race, risk, and fiction in the war on terror: Laila Halaby, Gayle Brandeis, and Michael Cunningham. *Literature Interpretation Theory*, *21*(4), 242-268.

Chandio, M. T., & Sangi, M. K. (2020). Locating Muslim Female's Agency in Post-9/11 Fiction: A Reading of Once in a Promised Land and Saffron Dreams. *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *48*, 35-54.

Craith, M. (2007). *Language, power and identity politics*. Palgrave.

Danielewicz, J. (2001). *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education*. State University of New York Press.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish* (2nd ed.). Vintage. (First published in 1975.)

Foucault, M. (2006). *History of madness*, J. Khalfa (Ed.). Abingdon: Routledge. (First

published in French in 1961.)

Graham, L. J. (2011). The product of text and 'other'statements: Discourse analysis and the critical use of Foucault. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *43*(6), 663-674.

Grewal, I. (2005). *Transitional America: Feminism, Diaspora Neoliberalism*. Duke University Press.

Halaby, L. (2007). *Once in a Promised Land: A Novel*. Beacon Press.

Lloyd, A. (2012). *Reverse Orientalism: Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Cleveland State University.

Mashree, A. S. (2017). The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land. *Journal of Raparin University*, *4*(13), 93-104.

Mills, S. (2018). Helen Oyeyemi and Border Identities: Contesting Western Representations of Immigrants through Transnational Literature. *Student Publications, 605,* 1-32.

Montón, E.O. (2017). The Forgotten Victims of 9/11: Cultural othering in Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land and Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist. *Studies in the Literary Imagination 50*(2), 17-34. doi:10.1353/sli.2017.0010.

Nunez, D. (2014). War of the words: Aliens, immigrants, citizens and the language of exclusion. *Brigham Young University Law Review*, 1517– 1562.

Peters, M. A., & Besley, T. A. (2014). Social exclusion/inclusion: Foucault's analytics of exclusion, the political ecology of social inclusion and the legitimation of inclusive education. *Open Review of Educational Research*, *1*(1), 99-115.

Ray, R. (2022, March 3). *The Russian invasion of Ukraine shows racism has no boundaries.* Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2022/03/03/the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-shows-racism-has-no-boundaries/

Valassopoulos, A. (2014). Negotiating Un-Belonging in Arab-American Writing: Laila Halaby's Once in a Promised Land. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *50*(5), 596-608.