

The Fallacies of Bridging the East and West in Tayeb Salih's 'Season of Migration to the North' and Laila Halaby's 'Once in a Promised Land'

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Abstract

Objectives: The paper examines the role of two contemporary Arab novelists, Tayeb Salih and Laila Halaby, who depict the fallacies of bridging the East and West. Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) tackle the social, cultural, political, historical, and religious factors and obstacles that resulted in widening the gap between the East and West. The aim of this study is to also trace how Salih's and Halaby's characters' attitudes towards this harmony between both cultures develop throughout the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Methods: This paper employs a socio-political and cultural approach to discuss the role of the contemporary Arab intellectual in presenting the possibility of bridging the cultural and humanitarian gap between the East and West.

Results: This study finds that there are two groups of Arab intellectuals: those haunted by violent memories of Western colonization, who are incapable of creating a harmonious relationship with the West, and the liberal Arab intellectuals who reflect a great readiness to assimilate into Western culture.

Conclusions: This study concludes that all attempts by these characters to create harmony between the East and the West are futile.

Keywords: Arab intellectuals, culture, stereotypes, Islamophobia, Arabophobia, racism.

مغالطات ربط الشرق والغرب في روايتي الطيب صالح "موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال" و"ليلي حلي" "كان في أرض الميعاد"

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ملخص

المنهجية: تستخدم هذه الورقة المنهج الاجتماعي السياسي والثقافي لمناقشة دور المفكر العربي المعاصر في عرض إمكانية سدّ الفجوة الثقافية والإنسانية بين الشرق والغرب.

الأهداف: يتحرى هذا البحث موقف ودور مفكرين عربيين معاصرين، الطيب صالح و"ليلي حلي"، من إمكانية التواصل الإنساني والثقافي بين الشرق والغرب. كما تهدف الدراسة إلى تعقب تطور سلوك شخصيات الطيب صالح و"ليلي حلي" اتجاه الانسجام بين هاتين الثقافتين خلال القرن العشرين والعقد الأول من القرن الواحد والعشرين. وعليه، سيجري التركيز في هذه الورقة على العوامل الاجتماعية السياسية والثقافية والتاريخية والدينية التي ساهمت في توسيع الفجوة بين الشرق والغرب والدول العربية. تدرس الورقة الطيب صالح و"ليلي حلي" اللذان يصوران مغالطات ربط الشرق والغرب. رواية صالح "موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال" (1966) ورواية حلي "كان في أرض الميعاد" (2007) تتعاملان مع العوامل والعقبات الاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية والتاريخية والدينية ودورها في توسيع الفجوة بين الشرق والغرب.

النتائج: تستنتج هذه الدراسة أنّ هناك مجموعتين من المفكرين العرب: المجموعة الأولى التي تعاني من الذكريات المؤلمة من جراء العنف الاستعماري، وهم غير قادرين على خلق تجانس ثقافي مع الغرب. والمجموعة الثانية التي تمثل المفكرين العرب المتحررين فكرياً الذين يبذلون استعداداً كبيراً للانخراط في الثقافة الغربية.

الخلاصة: تستخلص الدراسة أنّ جميع محاولات الشخصيات لخلق تناغم بين الشرق والغرب عقيمة. الكلمات الدالة: المفكرون العرب، ثقافة، الأفكار الخاطئة، رهاب الإسلام، رهاب العرب، العنصرية.



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1. Introduction

“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”
Isaiah 2:4

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action.”
Prophet Muhammad

The conflict between the East and West has long and deep historical roots as it extends back into ancient history with the Indo-European migrations and later with Classical antiquity. The boundaries between the East and West are not easy to define. Hence, the dichotomous concept of East-West is cultural and political rather than geographical. The division between Eastern and Western civilizations is based on each country's lifestyle, thought, and political system. The conflict emerges when one civilization is rejected by another and the superior civilization sees itself as the 'one' and regards the inferior as the 'other'. As Rasheed El-Enany puts it in *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (2011), “To justify the war against the other and the importance of subjugating him, it was necessary to demonise him, or at least to dismiss him as a sub-human species”(2).

The cultural gap between the East and West has been of great concern for many intellectuals from both divides as they addressed the causes and pernicious effects of this division. The main focus of this study is to thereby explore the problems of bridging Arab countries and the West represented by two Western countries; The United States and the United Kingdom. In this study, I will focus on the contributions of two Arab intellectuals in introducing Arab culture, thought, and history to the Western mind. The study is dedicated to exploring Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), which tackle the cultural and sociopolitical obstacles that resulted in widening the gap between the East and the West. Both Salih and Halaby create texts that portray characters, who believe in the possibility of bridging the East and West but are confronted with the bitter and harsh reality of the failure of this abridgment. In consequence, this failure can be highlighted in two aspects; the Arabs' inability to cope with the West and the West's rejection of Arab's assimilation.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih portrays the Modern Arab individual's inability to cope with and adapt to western civilization. Although Salih's major character is welcomed by English society, he fails to take advantage of all the opportunities given to him in order to live in harmony with the West. Mustafa Sa'eed's failure to accept the western society is due to his inability to forget the long history of violence between the East and West; the only image in his mind about the relationship between these two cultures is a struggle for dominance. This is clear when Mustafa Sa'eed refuses to compare himself to 'Othello' (31). In “The Different Western Perception of the Oriental Moor in the Renaissance and the Twentieth Century,” Alhawamdeh argues that Mustafa Sa'eed's ability to reinvent the powerful Shakespearean Othello and the Muslim leader Tariq Ibn Ziyad, who led the Islamic conquest of Spain from 711-718 A.D., becomes a fallacy due to the historical difference of power relations between the East and West. The Muslim Orient, as represented by Shakespeare's Othello, transforms “from a coloniser, liberator, and guide to the West ... to a colonised subject, as in the characters of Mustafa Sa'eed and the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*”(1). Likewise, Sa'eed lives the illusion that “just as Muslim Arabs were able to conquer Spain, Sa'eed fancies himself that he can conquer London” (8). In my reading of Salih's novel, the clash between the East and the West and the failure of assimilation are fostered by the existence of colonialism. The colonial discourse, which is based upon oppression and marginalization, creates moments of mistrust and fear of co-existence between the 'Self' and 'Other.'

In “The Search for New Identity in *Season of Migration to the North*” (1987), Ali Al-Shara' says that the historical conditions during the second half of the nineteenth century led Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801- 1873) to search for the modern Arab identity through his journey from the East to the West. The Egyptian scholar, Rafi' al-Tahtawi, was on educational missions to Europe to learn engineering, military sciences and medicine. He became involved in acute

intellectual arguments about the main components for the formation of modern Arab Muslim individuals capable of absorbing their history, heritage, modern science, and Europe (Al-Shara', 1987, 7-8). Based on Al-Shara's argument, the journey of Rafi' al-Tahtawi to the West resembles many Arab intellectuals' journey to the West such as the journey of the unnamed narrator to England in *Season of Migration to the North*. According to Al-Shara', the unnamed narrator represents the third generation of Arab intellectuals who are capable of absorbing western culture without being forced to separate from their Arab historical and cultural roots (Al-Shara', 1987, 24).

On the other hand, Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* deals with the Americans' rejection of the two major characters' desire to assimilate into American society. The novel focuses "on a range of sociopolitical issues involving Arab American identity, civil liberties, racism and xenophobia, and the effects of September 11, 2001, on American society (Salaita, 2007, 79). The Arab American couple strives to survive life constriction forced on them due to the political conflict between the United States and extremist groups in the East. The 9/11 attacks transform Islam stereotypically to a religion of terror and Jihadism, creating again another clash between the West and East and a state of fear of the 'other' Muslim.

In both cases, the reader realizes the futility of these attempts to bring the East and the West together. On this basis, these intellectuals gravitated to bridge the gap between these two cultures, however, they could not conceal the premonitory fact of their futile attempts; a premonition they shared with western intellectuals as well. For example, Rudyard Kipling's opening lines of "The Ballad of East and West" clearly and vigorously determine the destiny of any attempt for individuals to put aside political and cultural differences between the East and West;

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
(Kipling, *Complete Works*, 2011, 6693)

Kipling makes it clear that the two divides of the globe are destined to remain apart regardless of the numerous attempts to bring them together. However, this lack of hope did not deter intellectuals and philosophers from trying to narrow the gap between the East and West by emphasizing that people share common human traits, emotions, behaviors, problems, and expectations. Undeniably, these intellectuals exerted considerable efforts to familiarize readers throughout the world with the sum of Arab people's history and culture. Among many western scholars and intellectuals, Allen Webb plays a significant role exposing the positive side of the East to western readers. In "Literature from the Middle East: Making a Living Connection," Webb talks about his experience in teaching Middle Eastern literature to his students as they "found contemporary Middle Eastern literature to replace stereotypes, transform worldview, develop personal connections, humanize Islam and Muslim people, and learn about Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Persians, and Pushtans" (80).

Among many Arab intellectuals who dedicated their lives to diminishing the barriers between Arabs and the West is the Christian Lebanese intellectual and activist who migrated to Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Hourani. Hourani played a significant role in familiarizing modern Westerners with Arabs' civilization, culture, and history as he addressed both the intellectuals and the public in the Western world. He understood the impact of the clashes between Eastern and Western cultures on Arab countries and attempted to present Arabs as people with great civilization and cultures. In *A History of Arab Peoples*, Hourani (2002) presents the history of Arabs from the advent of Islam to the late twentieth century. The book provides an exemplification of traditions and beliefs of Muslim and Christian Arabs in a simple language, using terminology familiar to the Western thought, as it refutes many stereotypes and misconceptions about the Arab world. One critical issue Hourani tackles in his book is the harmonic relationship between Muslims and Christians in Arab countries, rejecting by that European colonial ideology that Christian minorities are oppressed by the Muslim majority; an excuse that such colonial countries used to justify their presence in the Arab countries. Hourani explains that Muslim and Christian Arabs in the twentieth century worked together to build modern societies capable of coping with the new changes in the world (343). In his preface to *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, Hourani (1983) explains Arabs' early attempts to assimilate to Western culture. He says:

Most of the prominent writers in Beirut belonged to the Christian communities of Lebanon and Syria, who played a part in the assimilation of European thought which was disproportionate to their numbers. As Christians, they reacted to western culture in ways rather different from those of Muslim thinkers, and the interaction between the two groups helps to illustrate some of the problems facing those who tried to come to terms with the power and thought of the west. (V)

It was easier for Christian Arabs to assimilate into Europe because they shared the same religion with most Europeans. Muslim intellectuals on the other hand, were more reluctant to assimilate with Europeans for more than one reason. Some of these intellectuals resisted Western influence on the Muslim society and insisted on creating a Muslim-based society. Other Arab intellectuals believed in the necessity of forming a secular society that can cope with Modernism at the same time they remained sentimentally and spiritually attached to Islam. For both groups, European colonization of Arab countries discouraged most Arabs from accepting Western culture. In fact, most Arab intellectuals, such as Mohammad Abduh, perceived European culture with suspicion and warned against falling into the pitfall of blind assimilation with the West (Hourani, 1983, 139).

On several occasions, Arab intellectuals, whether residing in the Arab world or the West, have taken it upon themselves to reject the distorted image of Arabs in the world. At the same time, these Arab intellectuals objectively addressed serious problems and flaws in the Arab World that hindered many Arabs to accept western civilization, and adapt to the drastic changes in a modern and postmodern world.

2. The Image of Arabs in the West: Islamophobia and Anti- Arabism

If we were to trace the cause for any hatred and hostility between different cultures and religions, we would not be surprised to find that it is merely political. The struggle between greedy colonial countries over power is reflected on innocent societies and nations. In this section, I argue that the conflict between the West and Arabs is caused by western government's policies in the Middle East. America's and Europe's imperial ambitions in the Middles East would not be easily carried out if western societies did not perceive Arabs as a threat to western civilization. Therefore, these colonial governments insisted on presenting Arabs and Muslims as terrorists and savages.

Axiomatically, humans are not born racist and xenophobic. In fact, people are taught to hate and fear other people of different skin color, social class, gender, and religion. Amin Maalouf tremendously states this idea in *In the Name of Identity-Violence and the Need to Belong*.

The apprenticeship starts very soon, in early childhood. Deliberately or otherwise, those around him mould him, shape him, instil into him family beliefs, rituals, attitudes and conventions, together of course with his native language and also certain fears, aspirations, prejudices and grudges, not forgetting various feelings of affiliation and non-affiliation, belonging and not belonging (Maalouf, 2003, 25.)

This same idea can be clearly perceived in the words of the American lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." Singer Richard Rodger in the 1949 South Pacific musical sings;

You've got to be taught
To hate and fear,
You've got to be taught
From year to year,
It's got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.
You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught!

Hammerstein II's lyrical poem signifies the role of adults' ideologies in impacting children at an early age to become prejudicial and xenophobic. Whether humans are born good or evil is not the concern of this study. But if we were to assume, according to some psychologists and sociologists, that humans are fundamentally evil and have tendencies to commit evil and destructive acts or sins, we certainly cannot ignore the role of religious, social, and legal authorities in suppressing or releasing these offensive acts. In the case of fueling hatred and fear in the hearts and minds of citizens, political authorities usually function as provocative forces. To state precisely, any conflict between nations and cultures would be instigated by governments. In their struggle over power, enforcing political agendas, and pursuing colonial ambitions, governments usually manipulate the concept of truth in order to win the approval and support of their people. In countries that have democratic constitutions, governments would find it difficult to pass laws and decisions that concern war and invading other countries without the consent of their people represented by parliaments and congresses. These regimes would resort to fabricating stories and inventing stereotypes about their enemies.

Perhaps the best known example in contemporary history, specifically in the twenty-first century, is the United States' justification for invading Iraq in 2003. The US government attempted to convince the entire world that Iraq possesses chemical weapons. George W. Bush, the US president at the time, campaigned for world coalition support in order to invade Iraq under the false accusation that Saddam Hussein obtains mass destructive weapons and therefore, posits a great threat to the world. On the other hand, Bush faced difficulties in winning the UN's and the powerful countries' approval and support, such as Britain's, as they realize America's imperial ambitions in this war against Iraq. In *The Bush League of Nations* (2008), James Swanson explains that "Bush's giddy decision to invade Iraq was based on lies, delusions and ulterior motives. His incompetence in building a coalition and in prosecuting the war was immoral and a fundamental dereliction of duty" (Swanson, 2008, 91). Swanson also adds that;

The Bush League is a fantasy league, whose immoral delusional owners are the Bush neocons. Among its many victims are truth, American values, and America's reputation and influence in the world. Bush's so-called coalition is the Big Lie, a fig leaf intended to hide naked Anglo-American aggression against Iraq and the region. Most of the U.S. media either, at their worst, adopted a Pravda-style role and eagerly beat the war drums for Bush (92).

Propaganda, in this case, plays a crucial role to guarantee imperial and colonial endeavors because nations are aware of the horrific consequences of wars. Wars are destructive to everyone; the cost of war is high and it is usually the citizens who end up paying with their lives and their sense of lack of peace and security. American citizens realized that "Bush invaded Iraq to benefit only himself and the Super Rich and powerful of America, not America's soldiers, not Joe Lunchpail who works for a living, and not the people of Iraq or any other nation, all of whom he holds in low esteem" (Swanson, 2008, 95.)

In order to obtain the approval of the American citizens to invade Iraq, Bush incorporated a religious rhetoric and claimed that his war is against terrorism and the enemies of freedom and the democratic world. However, most of the world did not believe these claims and understood that Bush's main purpose was to maliciously claim Iraq's Oil:

[incredibly], millions of rightwing American Christians supported Bush because they believed God communicates with him, supports him, and directs his decisions and policies. Bush and his handlers encouraged such misguided beliefs. While campaigning in Pennsylvania in July 2004 Bush said, "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job." This amazes America's allies and repulses the Islamic world. It also costs the lives of thousands of American soldiers in Iraq and elsewhere. (Swanson, 2008, 168)

Seemingly, this same rhetoric used by the American government in its campaign against an Arab country in the Twenty-first century simulates the very rhetoric used by colonial European countries in the Middle Ages to justify the Crusade wars against Arab and Muslim countries.

Apparently, the only way the American Government managed to carry out its imperial ambitions is through creating a state of hatred and fear in the Americans' hearts and minds against Arabs and Muslims. Growing numbers of Western people started to harbor unjustified prejudice feelings, and hostile attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims. Consequently, millions of Arabs started to suffer from Islamophobia and Anti-Arabism, "Whether classified as a social anxiety or a psychological trauma brought on by a certain set of experiences, Islamophobia is, in its most simple terms, the fear of Islam and Muslims. It is that fear that then leads to hatred, hostility, and discrimination" (Lean, 2017, 17). This unjustified fear is usually connected to Arab countries and Arab people. The Arab World consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa with a rich diversity of ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. Not all Arabs are Muslims as there are Arabs who are also Christians and Jews. But some Westerners, either intentionally or unintentionally, do not differentiate between Islam as a religion and Arab as a nationality. The lack of distinction between religion and nationality facilitates more stereotypes and phobias that would influence the way Westerners perceive Arabs. With the increasing numbers of people who hate and fear Muslims, more people express their fear and hatred towards Arabs, which is known as Anti-Arabism or Arabophobia.

The roots of Islamophobia and Arabophobia extend back to the expansion of the Islamic Empire which began in 622 and lasted until 1492, the year of the fall of Granada. In this period the Muslim World experienced an enormous expansion, with Islam spreading from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa and some parts of Asia and Europe (Shadid and Koningsveld, 2002, 177).

Evidently, Islamophobia and Arabophobia in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have drastically increased in the Western world. The role that western politicians and media played in propagandizing Arabs' struggle against occupation and injustice as terrorism distorted the image of Arabs and Muslims in the world. And the reaction of some Arabs and Muslims against American's and some European countries was magnified and portrayed as a threat to the West. In his Foreword to the First Edition of Lean's *The Islamophobia Industry* (2017), John Esposito exemplifies that,

Islam's portrayal as a triple threat (political, civilizational, and demographic) has been magnified by a number of journalists and scholars, who trivialize the complexity of political, social, and religious dynamics in the Muslim world. The result has been to downplay the negative consequences of Western support for authoritarian regimes, and the blowback from American and European foreign policies in the Middle East, from the Palestinian–Israeli conflict to the invasion of Iraq. Anti-Americanism or anti-Westernization (which has increased significantly among the mainstream in the Muslim world and globally as a result of these policies) is often equated simply with Muslim hatred of our Western way of life. (xv)

The different circumstances and conflicts that resulted in stereotyping and presenting Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, fanatics, primitive, bellicose, haters of the Western world, and enemies of freedom and democracy led to the emergence of Muslim and Christian Arab writers and intellectuals who resisted and confronted all the fabricated stories about the evilness of Arabs. In the following part of this study, I will present two Arab intellectuals, among many, who realized that, in most

cases, the daily interaction, communication, and relationship between the Western World and Arabs and Muslims are based on stereotypes and prejudice. These Arab intellectuals are aware of the danger of their silence in the face of continuous attacks by media and politicians to distort the image of Arabs. Their positioning as Arab-American, such as Halaby, or Arab-British, such as Salih, deem them strong representatives of modern-day Arabs as they address major issues concerning the role and image of Arabs by taking advantage of their long residency in America or Britain. Straddling two cultures is considered an opportunity that gave them firsthand experiences with different reactions of the American or British societies. In fact, they conform to Edward Said's category of the postcolonial intellectuals in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) as the modern intellectuals who exist simultaneously inside and outside the dominant regime understand both sides of the imperial divide. They "belong to more than one history and more than one group" (xxvii).

3. Arabs' Failure to Cope Culturally with the West in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North

Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* depicts some Arabs' inability to absorb Western civilization and culture in the twentieth century. In his novel, Salih deals with the political, social, and cultural obstacles that hindered Arab individuals from opening up to the modern world with its developed lifestyle and liberal ideas. Arabs in the twentieth century suffered from the burdens of the long Ottomans' struggle with Europe; a struggle that exhausted both Ottomans and Arabs financially and culturally. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire after World War I resulted in the occupation of the Arab World by colonial European countries such as Britain, France, and Italy. These colonial countries exploited Arab territories and attempted to separate Arabs from their history, language, and identity; thus, creating a huge void between Arabs and their glorious past. Throughout the twentieth century, modern Arab individuals suffered from a great sense of loss and alienation; a return to the past is quite impossible and a forward movement towards the inevitable future demands many and various sacrifices.

Season of Migration to the North deals with the narrative of an unnamed narrator who tells the story of Mustafa Sa'eed; an intelligent and diligent man, and a precocious student who was awarded a scholarship to Oxford. In England, Mustafa Sa'eed excelled in his education and career; he won the admiration of the English society. However, his whole life was built on lies and self-denial, as he confesses to the narrator when he says: "I am no Othello. I am a lie." (31). Mustafa Sa'eed exaggerated his Arabic and African roots and heritage, making up stories about his wild and exotic life only to lure women. Mustafa Sa'eed had many affairs with married and unmarried women which led to their destruction. For instance, Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, and Isabella Seymour committed suicide after he broke their hearts. Eventually, he murdered his wife, Jean Morris, and spent seven years in prison before being deported to his native country Sudan.

Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* tackles Arabs' sense of loss and alienation in the twentieth century, and deals with the factors that led to this dilemma. Ali Al-Shara' explains in "The Search for New Identity in *Season of Migration to the North*," (1987) that Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* presents a new perspective of the cultural connection between Arab intellectuals and the Western civilization (9) in Modern age. The construction of Mustafa Sa'eed's identity does not qualify him to succeed in absorbing the rapid changes at this critical stage at the beginning of the twentieth century (Al-Shara', 1987, 12.) In spite of his intelligence and his educational and professional achievements, Mustafa Sa'eed fails to rid himself of the burdens of a long history of Western colonialism that resulted in the destruction of his country's economy, culture, and values. The pernicious effects of the English occupation on Sudan culminated in the Sudanese ignorance, poverty, and oppression of each other. Axiomatically, colonization contributed in spreading social conflicts and violence in the countries that gained their independence to cause a state of unrest and instability in these countries. Because of colonization, natives suffered from social, psychological, ethnic, racial, and cultural problems. Consequently, these complexes are reflected on the splitting nature of the relationship between the colonial West and the colonized East.

Salih depicts Mustafa Sa'eed as a Quixotic character who enters Britain with the mentality of the invader, and his sexual organ depicted as his sole weapon. The cultural burden that he carries with him during his stay in London makes him believe that he needs to avenge his native land by having as many sexual relations with English women as he can. He, in fact, conforms to Frantz Fanon's image of the colonized native in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963):

The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of

possession. Every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist's table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. The colonized man is an envious man. (5)

Mustafa Sa'eed is certainly aware of this 'lust complex' as he describes himself as "the desert of thirst" (33) for the wives and daughters of the English colonizer. He believes that by preying on innocent English women, he will avenge his homeland for being colonized by the Whiteman. George Tarabishi in *East and West: Masculinity and Femininity* (1977) explains that the nature of colonial relationships is that it releases sexual emotions: the White man acts as if all colonized women are his property; as a reaction, the colonized man perceives every White woman as an object of lust, and her white complexion is an open invitation for rape (10). In this context, the only way that Mustafa Sa'eed can assert his masculinity against British colonization is by violating these English Women with his sexual organ. Having sex with these women brought to his mind the image of Arab soldiers entering "fertile Andalusia" (42).

Throughout the novel, Salih emphasizes the idea that the main conflict between the Arab world and the West is not Western countries' scientific and economic development; it is rather cultural. Arabs' inability to cope with and accept Western culture at the beginning of the twentieth century hindered Arabs' advancements in science and economy. Salih sheds light on the reality of Arabs' dilemma in dealing with modernization. Most Arabs at the beginning of the Twentieth century mistakenly believed that the difference between East and West is the latter's development in science and technology, but they definitely ignored the fact that this development is a result of the many revolts against old traditions and restrictions and the oppressions of religious institutions. The seed of any nation's flourishing is cultural awareness and social justice; two essential elements absent from the Arab world at the beginning of the twentieth century. The gradual scientific and economic progress in Sudan is not accompanied with cultural and social development. In the novel, Mahjoub meticulously explains that his native people's development is superficial and futile as long as women are not treated as human beings and seen as objects that can be bought and sold. Salih depicts this idea in the conversation between Mahjoub, one of the activists in the village, and the narrator below.

'Women belong to men, and a man's a man even if he's decrepit.'

'But the world's changed,' I said to him. 'These are things that no longer fit in with our life in this age.'

'The world hasn't changed as much as you think,' said Mahjoub. 'Some things have changed — pumps instead of water-wheels, iron ploughs instead of wooden ones, sending our daughters to school, radios, cars, learning to drink whisky and beer instead of arak and millet wine — yet even so everything's as it was' (99-100).

This same belief that women are owned by men haunted Mustafa Sa'eed throughout his journey in Europe. The dilemma of Mustafa Sa'eed is that he is detached from both his cultural heritage and the true spirit of western civilization. In fact, his double alienation from both his indigenous culture and the colonial culture makes his involvement in both cultures superficial. In Sudan, Sa'eed is seen as a colonial subject. As a child in Sudan, he received his first education at Gordon Memorial College, an English school, while most families in the country insisted on sending their children to a national school to learn Arabic and the Quran. In the English school, he was taught "how to say "Yes" in their language" (63). To use Fanon's words in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Mustafa Sa'eed has been turned into the "Man [who] is a yes that has to vibrate to cosmic harmonies" (10). During his stay in England, he isolated his native heritage from western civilization. Unfortunately, his cultural immaturity deprives him of employing his perceptiveness and intelligence to take advantage of his education in Europe to absorb Western civilization and benefit from its scientific, economic, and cultural progress. Mustafa Sa'eed confesses to the narrator:

For thirty years the Albert Hall was crammed each night with lovers of Beethoven and Bach, and the presses brought out thousands of books on art and thought. The plays of Bernard Shaw were put on at The Royal Court and The Haymarket. Edith Sitwell was giving wings to poetry and The Prince of Wales's Theatre pulsed with youth and

bright lights. The sea continued to ebb and flow at Bournemouth and Brighton, and the Lake District flowered year after year. For thirty years I was a part of all this, living in it but insensitive to its real beauty unconcerned with everything about it except the filling of my bed each night (36).

Mustafa Sa'eed's detachment from the real essence of Western and Eastern cultures increases his sense of alienation. He is a delusional figure who is incapable of enjoying the beauties of both cultures. Furthermore, Mustafa Sa'eed perceives his relationship with Europeans as a relation between colonizers since he considers his encounters with English women a form of postcolonial vengeance for all the destruction brought upon his country by England during the period of British colonialism from 1898 to 1956. For instance; he imagined himself as an Arab soldier interring fertile Andalusia, as an invader. In describing the details of his trial to the narrator, Mustafa Sa'eed reveals his stance towards the West in the following lines:

Yet each one of them in that court would rise above himself for the first time in his life, while I had a sort of feeling of superiority towards them, for the ritual was being held primarily because of me; and I, over and above everything else, I am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided. When Mahmoud Wad Ahmed was brought in shackles to Kitchener after his defeat at the Battle of Atbara, Kitchener said to him, "Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?" It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing. So let it be with me. In that court I hear the rattle of swords in Carthage and the clatter of the hooves of Allenby's horses desecrating the ground of Jerusalem. The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say "Yes" in their language. They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago. Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison which you have injected into the veins of history 'I am no Othello. Othello was a lie.' (94-5)

This quotation signifies the product of British colonization; a disillusioned man who in the midst of his destruction sees himself as a victorious soldier invading the colonizer in his own land. He is unable to rid himself of the burdens of colonization which makes him virulently opposed to any cultural rapprochement. Apparently, Mustafa Sa'eed's feelings of bitterness and resentment towards the English colonizer are expressed in a wrong way and directed towards the wrong people. These people he harmed in London were sympathetic to his cause. They were liberal Europeans who appreciated him as a successful young man.

Mustafa Sa'eed's relationships with English women reflect the futility of Arabs' assimilation in Western cultures at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, Salih exemplifies the fallacy of linking the East and West in the twentieth century through his depiction of the Mustafa Sa'eed's marriage with Jean Morris. Symbolically speaking, I would like to argue that Jean Morris represents the colonial English and Mustafa Sa'eed represents the Sudanese who emerged as the product of English colonization. Jean Morris is portrayed as violent, abusive, menacing, demeaning, and seductive. Mustafa Sa'eed is obsessed with satisfying his sexual desires and is detached from his cultural heritage. He describes his relationship with his English wife as a war between Sudan and England; a war he is certain that he is going to lose. He confesses:

I was the invader who had come from the South, and this was the icy battlefield from which I would not make a safe return. I was the pirate sailor and Jean Morris the shore of destruction. (160)

She smashed his expensive Wedgwood vase, tore an old rare Arabic manuscript to pieces, and burned the silken Isphahan prayer-rug (157). Foolishly, he allowed her to destroy all these cultural and historical valuables in exchange with a promise to have sex with him in which she never delivers. She would also rip up an important book or burn some piece of research on which he had worked for weeks whenever she felt angry. This relationship between Mustafa Sa'eed and his wife symbolizes the relationship between East and West; they cannot coexist together in peace, where the survival of one depends on the destruction of the other. One can infer that the bond between colonial England and Sudan led to the destruction of both; Sudan is destroyed economically and culturally while England is destroyed morally.

His relationship with Jean Morris differs from his relation with the rest of the women in England. While dealing with Ann Hammond, Sheila Greenwood, and Isabella Seymour, Mustafa Sa'eed feels superior and dominant. These women appreciated, loved, and respected him. They were open-minded, liberal, and modern. When he refers to these women, he compares them to fertile Andalusia; a reference to Arabs' dominance in Spain. On the other hand, Mustafa Sa'eed's marriage with a Sudanese woman was more successful and resulted in two children. While in Sudan, Mustafa Sa'eed was capable of employing his western education and experience in raising his children and managing his land. This idea is portrayed through his request that his two children be given the chance to travel and explore new worlds. Interestingly, the reference to the hybrid lemon tree that he grew on his field which produced lemons and oranges symbolizes this transformation in the younger generation's identity.

Symbolically speaking, his act of dividing the tree into two parts simply refers to the concept of flexibility; a reality that Mustafa Sa'eed was unable to accept when he was in England. His detachment from reality broadens the gap between the modern vital West and the ailing Sudan. He attempts to resist colonialism as well as his roots in cultural origins, as he believes that they are too much to bear at the same time; for he considers them to be an enormous burden that he cannot bear any longer. Hence, his disappearance when the Nile flooded; he purportedly committed suicide as implied by the narrator who was appointed as the guardian of Mustafa Sa'eed's children few days before the latter's disappearance.

Unlike Mustafa Sa'eed, the unnamed narrator reflects a better understanding of the gap between the East and West. He, in fact, represents the contemporary Arab individual who is more capable of absorbing western civilization with its modern philosophies, sciences, and technologies (Al-Shara', 1987, 22). Salih portrays the narrator as the "contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft et al.: 2007, 108); a practical individual who is aware of the evilness of the colonizer, yet he realizes the futility of lamenting the past. The only wise option that he and the rest of Sudanese have is to move forward, exerting every effort to make the best out of a horrific situation. Holding grudges and living in hatred and bitterness would only intensify the Sudanese sense of alienation from the rest of the world:

The fact that they came to our land, I know not why does that mean that we should poison our present and our future? Sooner or later they will leave our country just as many people throughout history left many countries. The railways, ships, hospitals, factories and schools will be ours and we'll speak their language without either a sense of guilt or a sense of gratitude. Once again we shall be as we were — ordinary people — and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making. (49-50)

The narrator has reached a conclusion that the only way to survive this dire situation is to move on and forget what has been inflicted on him and his people. He must "move forwards and not downwards" (167). Without doubt, resisting the flow would only result in his destruction; he would definitely meet Mustafa Sa'eed's fate.

All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning. If I am unable to forgive, then I shall try to forget. I shall live by force and cunning. (168-169)

Whether the narrator chooses to forgive the colonizer, or forget the horrors that have been inflicted on the Sudanese, he does not perceive European citizens as enemies who harbor evil intentions towards Arabs. The image of the English people the narrator formed in England differs from the Sudanese' images of the English colonizer they have seen in Sudan. The image the Sudanese formed about the English is the hegemonic version they saw in their country; the westerners who came with guns and canons to steal the land and control the people. Unfortunately, this is the image that politicians portray about their countries and their nations created by distorted images and stereotypes about the West.

After spending seven years in England to earn his education in English, the narrator returns to his native country with enthusiasm and eagerness to meet his family and people. London to him is not an alien place where he can easily disappear because he is rooted in his homeland like a "palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (2), and the faces of English people seemed familiar to him; he sees them as human beings who, like him, have human problems, fears, expectation, and fates. When asked by the people of his village to describe the English to them, the narrator says:

They were surprised when I told them that Europeans were, with minor differences, exactly like them, marrying and bringing up their children in accordance with principles and traditions, that they had good morals and were in general good people. That just like us they are born and die, and in the journey from the cradle to the grave they dream dreams some of which come true and some of which are frustrated; that they fear the unknown, search for love and seek contentment in wife and child; that some are strong and some are weak; that some have been given more than they deserve by life, while others have been deprived by it, but that the differences are narrowing and most of the weak are no longer weak. (3)

As discussed above, the narrator exemplifies the modern Arab individual who acquired enough tolerance, objectivity, and open-mindedness to enable him or her to adapt to the rest of the world with its diversity.

4. The West's Rejection of Arabs in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* tackles Arab intellectual's presentation of Arabs' desire to live in harmony and peace with the western world in the twenty-first century but fail to achieve this goal due to the political conflicts between the United States and Arabs and Muslims. Unlike Salih's protagonist, Halaby's characters strive to adapt to the western way of life by expressing a mature understanding of the cultural and technological differences between America and the Arab world. But Arab characters' willingness and readiness to adapt to the western lifestyle are aborted because they are rejected by American society.

In *Modern Arab American Fiction* (2011), Steven Salaita argues that *Once in a Promised Land* focuses "on racism, state power, and the post-September 11 crackdown on civil liberties in the United States (87.) The novel deals with a successful Jordanian couple who travelled to the United States seven years before the 9/11 incident. Jassim and Salwa are convinced that with hard work and diligence they can achieve the American Dream. To some extent, they enjoy the fruits of their success, and the hard work until the two planes hit the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11, 2001. From that moment, their lives start to take a dangerous turn; Jassim loses his job and is constantly pursued by the FBI, and Salwa gets involved with a coworker who appears later to be a racist drug addict and beats her violently and calls her all kinds of racist insults and pejoratives when she decides to breakup with him. The novel has an open-ending, but the reader can assume that the couple returns to Jordan from the narrator's insinuation that they need to go back home for healing.

Halaby's perception of the Arab's relation to the West reflects a different attitude than Arabs' in the early twentieth century. Her representation of Arabs is mature and tolerant. Arabs' openness to the West could be related to more than one reason. One important factor that can be demonstrated is that after gaining their independence, national governments paid great attention to the significance of benefiting from the advances and developments that the West has achieved in medicine, science, technology, education, economy, agriculture, and art. These governments' vision was to expose Arabs to the western world in order to gain more experience from their development.

To be independent was to be accepted by European states on a level of equality, to have the Capitulations, the legal privileges of foreign citizens, abolished, to be admitted to the League of Nations. To be modern was to have a political and social life similar to those of the countries of western Europe. (Hourani, 1983, 344)

The other factor is that postmodernism with its liberal teachings and rejection of discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or sexual orientation encouraged Arabs to get more involved in western culture. Globalization gave Arabs a chance to see another version of the west; other than what Arabs experienced with European invaders. On a personal level, people share a lot in common regardless of race, color, or religion. People start to have conflicts when politics is involved in organizing and defining their relationships. As a result, these things that people have in common will turn into ideologies in which they use to attack each other.

Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* emphasizes the drastic changes in people's lives due to politician's struggle over power and the role that these politicians play in provoking people against each other. In the novel, Jassim's and Salwa's profile does not conform to the typical Arab image. Jassim is an atheist who believes in logic and science with a dream to fix the water problem in Jordan. "From the first moment that Jassim set foot on American desert soil for his graduate education, he had been ready, willing, and able to return to Jordan upon completion of his studies, to implement all that he would learn" (62.) Disappointed with the many complications he faces in Jordan; he decides to return to America to pursue his plans in the land of dreams. "Jassim went to America a second time, still filled with dreams of saving Jordan from drought and dependency. His focus narrowed to rainwater harvesting" (63.) Salwa, who is American by birth, accompanies her husband to live in America. They actually managed to lead a normal stable life until 9/11. "Jassim and Salwa naively assume that adopting the American way will help them assimilate easier into the host culture, guaranteeing their acceptance as Americans. They nevertheless remain outsiders and potential terrorists who may threaten freedom and democracy in the world" (Al-Shara, 2020, 443).

Wearing the "white mask", to use Fanon's term in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967, 16), does not grant Jassim and Salwa the acceptance of the American society and government. Apparently, they are "unable to be assimilated, unable to pass unnoticed" (Fanon, 1967, 65). And "host countries," such as America, "sometimes have a hand in eliminating any form of assimilation as they reject Others casting them as forever aliens" (Abu Taleb, 2021, 495). After the 9/11 incident, the couple becomes a fox in a chicken coup. Like the rest of Arabs in America, every detail of their lives is scrutinized. Although Americans know that Jassim and Salwa have nothing to do with the attacks on Manhattan and the Pentagon, they still treat the Arab couple with fear and suspicion. The way that politicians and the media dealt with these attacks contributed in awakening in American society stereotypes and Islamophobia. In the novel, Salwa apprehends to what extent these provocations are harmful to the harmony of the American-Arab relationships when she hears the voice on the radio say (Al-Shara, 2020, 439):

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! Mahzlms? who are just waiting to attack us.... (Halaby, 2007, 56).

Such provocations by western media instigate open attacks on Arabs and Muslims and threaten their existence in America. The kind of racism Arabs and Muslims face in America is an official one. When the American government warns the American people against Arabs and urges its citizens to report any odd activity, racism against Arabs and Muslims becomes legalized. Without doubt, "odd activity is subjective" (Halaby, 2007, 31.) According to this point of view, Arabs' different mien and lifestyle become a reason for suspicion. The American famous motto that they are "different but equal" and "[all] men are created equal" (Greene, 1976, 5) does not apply to Arabs. This legalized racism is clearly portrayed in the incident at Wal-Mart when Jassim and Salwa were shopping shortly after the September 11 attacks. Amber, a young sales lady, calls security on Jassim just because of his Arab features. When Mandy, the supervisor, is called she explains apologetically that they were given orders to report any suspicious behavior. Although Jassim was not behaving

suspiciously and was merely looking at motorcycles in the Mall, Amber's xenophobia adversely affected her judgment. This fear gave her an excuse to express her prejudice against Jassim, a professional and successful man in his forties. According to American law, Amber's behavior towards Jassim is considered an illegal act. However, American government's official provocations against Arabs encouraged Americans to normalize discrimination and prejudice against Arabs. In *Modern Arab American Fiction* (2011), Salaita explains that

Amber is guilty of racial stereotyping, but she is merely responding to the definitions of "suspicion" to which she has been subjected, a process in which her supervisor Mandy is complicit. By telling her employees to report anything suspicious, Mandy is practically assuring that a situation like Jassim's will arise, given that the predominant definition of suspicious is coterminous with Middle Eastern ethnicity. Amber therefore did something wrong morally, but she did not do anything wrong according to the ethos of post-September 11 fear in the United States. (88)

Once in a Promised Land signifies that Arabs and Muslims are victims of American governments' foreign and domestic policies. American politicians and media intensified the threats of Arabs and Muslims on Western civilization as they are constantly portrayed as innate terrorists. In America, Arab Americans are considered "marginalized sand niggers whose social and judicial troubles are derivative" (Salaita, 2007, 19.) This institutionalized racialization of Arabs deemed them vulnerable targets for westerners' wrath and prejudice; whenever an accident happens, Arabs are invariably put in the circle of suspicion or wrongly held responsible. And a normal accident is magnified to a level of a terrorist attack. In *Once in a Promised Land*, Jassim accidentally hits and kills a boy with his car. Although the police deiced that it was an accident, Jassim was subjected to FBI investigation and surveillance and consequently lost his job.

Halaby presents her Arab characters as individuals who are eager to assimilate into the American society and enjoy a respectable lifestyle in the land of dreams. However, these attempts are aborted by American politicians and propaganda that distorted the image of Arabs and Muslims in the World. The amount of fear against Arabs and Muslims that the United States instilled in westerners' minds after September 11 attacks created a tremendous void between Arabs and the West.

5. Conclusion

Once again as depicted in both novels, bridging East and West is a fairy tale that exists only in an imaginary realm. Regardless of peoples' continuous attempts to destroy the barriers between cultures, politicians will always succeed in widening the gaps between various races and religions. Both Salih and Halaby express pessimistic attitudes towards bridging East and West.

Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* relates Arab's inability to absorb Western civilization and adapt easily with Modernism to the long history of colonization. Colonized people may never cast aside the legacy of colonialism. The brutality, superiority, and denial of the other that colonialism tried to instill come at the essence of the rejection of any attempt towards a cultural bridging between the East and the West.

On the other hand, Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* depicts Arabs' readiness and ability to absorb western civilization, but western governments' provocations against Arabs and Muslims abort all these attempts to bridge the East and West. Halaby's novel shows that Jassim's and Salwa's endeavors to assimilate into the American culture were aborted due to political conflicts between America and Muslim groups. Halaby's protagonists' open-mindedness and westernized mentality do not shield them from the Westerners' racial offences and prejudice.

Despite all the political factors that threaten to fuel conflicts between Westerners and Arab nations, Arab intellectuals continue to strive to harmonize East and West. They objectively examine the various factors and situations that contribute in aborting individuals' attempts to accept other nations' different beliefs, cultures, and traditions.

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