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**Identity Crisis of USA Arab Immigrants in  
Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* (2019)**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirement for an **M.A. Degree in English Literature and Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work

to my dear parents for their support, love, and understanding

to my twin sister Yasmine for her endless love and her considerable contribution in this work

to my siblings for their encouragements

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First and foremost, praises and thanks to God Almighty for his help and blessing to accomplish this work.

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## Abstract

Postcolonial identity issues continue to be contested in the modern times and are still relevant to the current context of immigration. This dissertation attempts to study this issue in Laila Lalami's novel *The Other Americans* (2019). The novel pinpoints the modern day immigration as it explores the immigrants' life in the host lands by highlighting the Arab Americans struggle after 9/11. In particular, this study investigates the way the selected characters (Driss, Maryam, Salma, and Nora) who emigrated from Morocco to the USA mirror displacement's consequences which ultimately lead to identity crisis. The analysis borrows the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry as explained by Homi K. Bhabha.

**Key Words:** *The Other Americans*, Arab American Literature, identity crisis, postcolonialism, immigration.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

*TOA: The Other Americans*

AAL: Arab American Literature

## **General Introduction**



## **General Introduction**

From the dawn of humanity, immigration has been an important human characteristic and it played a major role in the progress of culture and civilization. In basic terms, immigration has been defined as the movement of people from their original habitat to a destination outside the borders of their origins purposely to settle. It can be voluntary as it can be forced, and it can be temporary or permanent. (Oucho and Williams 2). Historically, humans have been on the move since the movement of Homo erectus out of Africa across Eurasia about almost two million years ago. In the past, people immigrated searching new places for hunting and fishery. After, they immigrated in search for fertile lands and create new settlements (Montiglio). However, in the last five decades immigration turned to be a trend since the world witnessed large episodes of immigration due to the growth of the globalization process. Besides, the political unrest and the economic hardships that take place in the under-developed countries have all contributed to enormous migratory flows towards rich countries all over the world.

Regardless of the nature and the reasons behind immigration, it has several economic, social, and cultural implications on both the host and the original countries. Yet, the precarious position immigrants occupy is the most tangible implication. Immigration is a decision that impacts the immigrants from different angles. In fact, immigrants face many challenges such as the changes in immigration policies, the struggle of assimilation and adoption of the new culture, and the problematics of identity. It is worthy to note that the latter becomes a serious matter in the new environment as it is impacted in three aspects that raise the following questions: 1) how are the immigrants perceived by others? 2) How do they view themselves in terms of individuality? And 3) how are social and cultural differences involved in self-determination?

Identity crisis is one of the automatic results of immigration. Immigration doesn't mean only the process of moving from a country to another, it also means the process of moving from one culture to another. When two different cultures come into contact many problems emerge, due to racial and cultural differences. The most important issue is that both the first and the second generations of immigrants undergo some psychological changes that effect their consolidation and integration into the host countries where they are obliged to speak its language, adopt new cultural practices and values and must behave like the natives of these countries. Yet, they are still regarded as the "Other," segregated and stereotyped. The attachment to their homelands intensifies this issue by the constant feeling of nostalgia that creates another real dilemma. Hence, their identity sways between two different poles.

Modern day immigration issue can be observed in various literary works. Many writers around the globe wrote about it and among them the Moroccan writer Laila Lalami who also lived the same experience. Thus, she catalogues the experience of immigration and its effects on the immigrant's identity by offering a real image about their unsteady position in her novel *The Other Americans* (2019).

This research seeks to highlight the struggles of immigrants around the world through the story of the Arab immigrants in USA, and how they are displaced because of political conflicts, and the difficulties related to assimilation, and above all the battle of identity formation. Hence, the overall purpose of this dissertation attempts to expose immigration's impact on people's identity.

The selection of this novel as the main corpus of the current study supports the area of investigation and shows the consequences of immigration on the immigrant's identity. It handles the agony of Arab immigrants in USA after the 9/11 attacks and the burden of dual identity of being an Arab American. Thus, the significance of my humble contribution lies in the field of Arab American literature by selecting a novel that is rather recent, and thus,

unexplored. It attempts to identify the postcolonial dimension in the novel by examining the theme of identity crisis in the modern day immigration discourse.

A set of objectives are determined in this work. This dissertation seeks to provide the reader with an overview about the Arab American and Postcolonial literature. It also explains the most known concepts of the Postcolonial theory such as identity, hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. In addition to that, it attempts to provide an insight about Arab immigrant's intricacies and the challenges they undergo in the USA. Moreover, this study aims to analyze and investigate the theme of identity crisis bearing in mind the contemporary postcolonial world and the hybrid nations with lenses afforded by the Postcolonial theory in the light of Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence through the analysis of *TOA*.

In *TOA*, the selected characters are Arab immigrants who fled to USA seeking for security. But once there and after a span of time they encounter problems in the identity formation. This crisis floated at the surface as a result of the imposed conditions of immigration and the difficult circumstances that Arab immigrants in USA underwent before and after the 9/11 seeking to determine their own identities. So, this dissertation attempts to answer the main question of how the issue of identity is portrayed in Lalami's novel. In order to conduct my research, I will address the following sub questions:

- How does Lalami picture the experience of immigration and its consequences in *TOA*?
- What are the difficulties that Arab immigrants encounter in USA before and after the 9/11?
- How do the first and the second generation of Arab immigrants react to the adopted American culture?
- Are the postcolonial issues still mirrored in the modern time society through the discourse of immigration?

Lalami's novel is newly published, and to the best of my knowledge I can say that there is a lack of scholarly criticisms and academic documents except for some reviews. So, I attempted to collect the following sources. A review published in *Sciendo* entitled "The Weather as a Storyteller in Lalami's *The Other Americans*" (2021) by Youcef Awad and Amal Al-Khayyat explore the self-nature relationship through tracing the key role that the weather conditions in the novel play in narrating the protagonist's story. The writers highlight how weather conditions echoes Nora's deep emotions and reflects her inner thoughts and feelings in the light of her relationships with others and how reading weather conditions informs the reader about Nora's self-perception, love affairs, career development and aspirations. They conclude showing how the weather turns out to be telling Nora's story of self-actualization throughout the novel.

The second review is written by Aymane Edouihri in *The African and Black Diaspora an International Journal* entitled "Othering and disillusionment in Lalami's *The Other Americans*" (2021). He studies the issue of a Moroccan immigrant family whose hope of an American dream comes to break on the shores of a reality of being 'Othered,' relegated to a lower status by the white-dominated society. It highlights the relation of the issue of disillusionment to the articulation and negotiation of 'new identities.'

However, these reviews failed to pinpoint the impacts of immigration and the attacks of 9/11 on Arab people's identity formation in USA. I will focus on these impacts on the selected Arab characters in the novel.

The present work will be based on the postcolonial theory since it is going to describe, analyze and interpret the issue of identity crisis in the selected characters of the novel. This theory is chosen, because it allows us to effectively explore Lalami's novel that deals with the postcolonial issues, which are now entangled in the present and are manifested in the

discourse of immigration. So, Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry are used to scrutinize the issues of self-identification in the selected novel.

This research is divided into two main chapters. The first one is about the socio-historical context of the novel and the theoretical framework of the study. The first section is concerned with an overview of the Arab American literature. This part focuses on its origins, the way in which it has evolved over time, its recurrent themes, and the most significant authors who have shaped this field while giving more space to the themes that are relevant for the present dissertation. In doing so, it introduces the author of the chosen novel by providing her biography and her literary influences, and then the summary and the sociohistorical background of the novel *TOA* is provided. The second section is devoted to discuss the most important concepts of postcolonial theory as developed by Bhabha and that are will be used in the second chapter of my analysis.

The second chapter deals with the theme of identity crisis in *TOA*. It analyzes the selected character's struggle for self-identification. It begins with a glimpse about the dilemma of identity crisis. Then, it moves on to the main objective which is the analysis of the echoes of identity crisis in Lalami's *TOA*

## **Chapter One**

# **The Literary, Historical and the Theoretical Background of the Study**

## **Chapter One**

### **The Literary, Historical and Theoretical Background of the Study**

#### **Introduction**

The United States of America has a long history with immigration and abundant journeys were made since the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. America has been and is still the perfect destination for many people from various parts of the world who chose to flee their homelands for several reasons that might be political, social, economic, or religious. These immigrants played a major role in giving birth to considerable contributions in many fields particularly in the fields of art, literature, philosophy, and humanities (Daniels 6). Their social and cultural diversities that melted heterogeneously within the American society have generated a new American culture. In describing this autonomy, a term has been coined known as “the melting pot.” It is a metaphor that proved to have traces back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century used by a French-American writer named J. Hector St John Crevecoeur claiming, “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.” (Crevecoeur 55).

The melting pot came to describe the process in which multiple and unmatched cultures are blended together shaping a new culture. This heterogeneity put in few letters, ‘Assimilation. Other critics came to disclaim the previous ideology arguing that America is a spot where immigrant populations and their cultures are not blended together. They are solely transforming America into a multicultural country. However, no term and nobody can capture the complexity of the ethnic mechanism in the US, a country that was originated by immigrants. Thus, it is definitely evident to be a multicultural and a multiethnic country where these people and these cultures appose each other. As a result, endless and various literary forms emerged among them the Arab-American literature.

This chapter is a literary, historical and theoretical examination which attempts to provide a historical overview about AAL since the present research pertains to this field, it explores the AAL as a newly spotlighted area of study that tackles various themes linked to the issues of Arabs in America. In doing so, I introduce Lalami as a contemporary Arab American writer. I refer to her biography, bibliography and her literary influences as a starting point to become familiar with Lalami. And then, I introduce her novel *TOA* by offering its summary to give a glimpse of the story along with the socio- historical background that helped in shaping the novel. Furthermore, I briefly review the postcolonial literature, and the postcolonial theory referring to Bhabha's main postcolonial concepts identity, hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence that are used in the coming chapter to analyze Lalami's *TOA*

## **1. Arab-American Literature: An Overview**

### **1.1. The Emergence of Arab-American Literature**

The last decades have witnessed the emergence of AAL across diverse genres, through an increase of publication by Arab-American writers. Arab-American literature is highly complicated to be defined since it is a specific genre by itself that nevertheless exhibits thematic links and shares commonalities with both Arabic literature and US ethnic literatures.

This burgeoning literature reflects the social, the political, and the historical context and the process of shifting from Arabs to Arab-Americans and this pushed them to switch from the background to the foreground shaping their own *hyphenated* spaces, and creating new urgencies for expression to make their voices heard. In this respect, in her "New Direction" L.S. Majaj points that AAL, "has typically been expressed as tilts towards one side of the hyphen on the other" (124). Arab American writers write both about their Arabic origins and their immigration and existence in the U.S. As it is mentioned above, it mirrors



the pattern of Arab-American history which scholars divided into three major phases based on the three waves of Arab immigrants to the United States of America.

The story of AAL arose with the first wave in the early 1800s when the first Arab immigrants reached the American coasts seeking economic opportunities. They were from the Syrian province, basically from what is now Lebanon, and also from the Palestinian province, which were both the subjects of the Ottoman Empire. They were called ‘The Greater Syria.’ These immigrants were made up of Greek Orthodox, Maronite, and Melchite Christians. It is worthy to know that these Christians came primarily as sojourners, not immigrants. They settled in colonies such New York and Boston with an intention to return at home again (Ludescher 93).

These Arab Christians were illiterate and unskilled; many of them worked as itinerant peddlers, fanning across the country and spending months on the road. (Ludescher 93). This stimulated the amalgamation of the Arab and American cultures because it provided a plenty of opportunities to learn English and mix within the local populace. Later, the Syrians spread in dispersed communities all over America where many opened family businesses and shops which flourished later to stores and department stores that were acknowledged achievements. Therefore, these immigrants who were claimed as sojourners enthusiastically embraced the American values. Naff points out that first Arab immigrants were “given the economic opportunities and the system of values in the United States, Syrians became success-oriented free-enterprisers.” (qtd. in Karoui Ghouaiel 17). Subsequently, the Arabs sojourners found themselves living in a heavily assimilationist U.S. context which led them to question the ways to respond to such dilemmas and how to maintain the Arab identity which was an important matter.

Indeed, The Naturalization Act of 1790 had granted the right of citizenship to what it designated as “any alien, being free white persons.” But, in 1900s this act changed; what was

meant by “white” became a subject of fierce debate. Thus, Arab immigrants together with other ethnics became restricted by the Naturalization Laws giving the right to citizenship for the non-Asiatic identity. It was provided to the Europeans who had resided in the U.S at least two years and their children under 21 years of age and also to children born abroad to U.S citizens. Through a series of court cases called “Prerequisite Cases,” petitions for naturalization were challenged and, in some instances, denied on the basis of whether or not individuals are qualified as “white.” In her "Arab American Literature: Origins and Development." Majaj points out, “These cases not only decided the fate of individual immigrants, but also set precedents for the inclusion or exclusion of entire ethnic groups” (Majaj). These cases denied the eligibility for citizenship of some ethnics among them Arabs based on their dark skin color, their origin in the Asian continent, distance from European culture, and proximity to Islam. Thus, the Arab immigrants were threatened to lose their citizenship. They battled to assert their ‘whiteness.’

In the process of asserting their whiteness, they stressed their Christianity, and also their origins, arguing that they are civilized rather than being just a stereotyped ‘Asiatic’ or ‘Black.’ Despite discrimination and racism, Arab immigrants insisted in grasping Whiteness. However, this fight ended up in the 1920s by becoming officially Americans classified as ‘Foreign-born white population. As Naff states in her book *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (1993) that, “This status was strengthened by the 1920 census, which identified Palestinians and Syrians, separately, under the category of ‘Foreign-born white population’ (117).

During the 1910s Several Arab American literary journals, literary associations and organizations were created. In his essay "Children of Al Mahjar: Arab American Literature Spans a Century," Abdinar asserts, “Arab Americans were among the first immigrant writers to organize as a literary force by the broad U.S literary community (Abdinar). The most

significant organization is 'Al Rabita Al Qalamiyya' (The Pen League) that was found by Jobran Khalil Jobran, Ameen Rihani, Mechail Naimy, and others. They wrote mainly in Arabic and in English in order to bridge the gap between the East and the West and also to make links between cultures and ideologies, which is mainly seen as a form of assimilation. These philosophical literary writings were known as Adab Al Mahjar (The Literature of Immigration) which depicts the unique blending of Arab and American cultures (Majaj). Mahjar writers centered their writings on love, criticism, philosophy and nostalgia for the past. Alienation, marginalization, oppression, social injustices, and stereotype were the major characteristics of their poetic reference, due to the hard circumstance of exile and immigration in America. Thus, they composed poems and novels showing their feeling of homesickness. In this vein, in their book *Arabs in America* Suleiman asserts that,

The challenges that Arab American have faced in their new homelands increased the sense of nostalgia and homesickness. Among the most important issues that faced them in the United States is the definition of who they are; their sense of identity as people, as they have continually encountered and continue to encounter bias and discrimination in their new homeland. Their new identities have been shaped by many factors but especially by continuing interactions between conditions in the old and new homelands by the interplay between their perceptions of themselves and how other see themselves (11-12).

In their writings, nostalgia was the only refuge that releases Arab Americans from the burdens of insecurity, oppression and non-belonging. It is the safest place where they recall memories to keep them alive and to transmit them to the second generation.

The second wave of immigrants started a decade after the Second World War. Unlike the first Immigrants, these ones were mainly educated and skilled professional Muslims who fled due to the catastrophic 1948 Arab-Israel War. They wrote about their Arab backgrounds

and their ethnic identity. Due to the 1924 Johnson-Reed Quota Act that limited immigration, their writings reflected their assimilations to the American culture rather than embracing their ethnicity because they positioned themselves outside the Arabic Diaspora. During this period, “although there was not a complete dearth of literary production, [the second generation of] Arab American writers wrote about their Arab background with hesitation and through self-distancing narrative strategies” (Majaj). The prominent novelists who have embodied this assimilation and this ambivalence in their works are Vance Bourjaily and William Peter Blatty. Starting with Vance Bourjaily, he is the son of mixed marriage between a Lebanese father and an American mother. He showed through his works the ambivalence towards Arab identity. In his autobiography entitled *Confession of a Spent Youth*, he explored the issue of ethnic identity, the invisibility of Arab immigrants and the issue of non belonging.

William Peter Blatty who was overwhelmed by ethnic identity issue in his *The Exorcist* and in his comic autobiography *Which Way to Mecca* portrays his own experience and his embarrassment of his Lebanese heritage, as Majaj states “William Blatty is challenging [of] both racial hierarchies are as difficult as challenging Orientalist stereotypes” (329).

The third wave of immigration spans from 1990s to the present day. The Lebanese Civil War caused the flight of hundreds of refugees towards America. Indeed, the immigrants that fled after the Second World War were highly politicized and conscious of their own Arab ethnicity. They embraced their origins and their identity as well. However, things started to take another flow once U.S encouraged the Israel War in Palestine. Arab Americans were disappointed by the U.S not only for the official support for Israel, but also for the negative presentation of Arabs and the influence of the Civil Right Movement. These tensions pushed Arab Americans to rethink their identities, by calling themselves ‘Arabs’ as a sort of response

to the representation of U.S medias and as a form of solidarity with all Arabs who are stereotyped and misinterpreted.

These events played a major role in the transition of AAL from assertion Americanism to embracing Arab American ethnicity dealing with issues of Arab identity. In addition to the emergence of new noticeable literary styles such as the Arab American Feminist writings, in which a growing attention is oriented to big issues such as race and class. For example, the novel of the Lebanese American novelist Diana Abu-Jaber *The Arabian Jazz* has explored cultural and identity issues.

## **1.2. Contemporary Arab American Literature**

Contemporary Arab American writers differ from the earlier ones. They broke from their ancestors as it is highly manifested in their writings and their subject matter. A solid emphasis was put upon identity devoid of attachment of the homeland and nostalgia. In her “New Directions: Arab American Writings” Majaj states, “as any other hyphenated individuals, Arab Americans seek to integrate to the different facets of their identities, experiences, and heritages into a unified whole” (123). In fact, along before the 9/11 Arab-Americans have been subjected to severe scrutiny in the US. From this perspective, Louise Cainkar notes how “Arabs have experienced the double burden of being excluded from whiteness and from mainstream recognition as people of color” (qtd. in Karoui Ghouaiel 55) They are not only considered not quite white but also not of color enough. The ostracizing treatment on the hand of the U.S majority made the Arab American identity more visible. As a result, the Arab Americans realized the necessity of self-representation in order to assert their presence, achieve social, political, and religious equality in the US. (Majaj 128).

The period between the 1960s to 1980s witnessed the emergence of writers like Samuel Hazo, D.H. Melhem, Etel Adnan, Noami Shihab Nye and Joseph Geha who

presented themselves as Arab Americans, in his article “Children of Al Mahjar,” Abdinar states,

initially as writers independent of ethnic categorization who later donned the cloak of the Arab American identity . . . [These writers] have paved the way for the current generation of Arab American writers, of which they are still very much a part...[and these writers] were not only a bridge between the two highly enculturated generations, but also direct links between Arab American writing and the American literary canon" (Abdinar).

It is important to note that Arab American women writers faced their own particular set of problems. They struggled to negotiate what Majaj refers in her “Of Stories” as “dual burden of both the cultural and gender ambassadorship” (qtd. in Kaid 75). They are burdened the task of challenging both the negative practices within their own groups and the stereotypes projected on their own ethnic women writers from the outside. Arab American women criticized the patriarchal nature of their society. Thus, they are often accused of abandoning their own culture and adopting Western modes of thought (Kaid 75). Indeed, feminism is a sensitive issue in the Arab world but when Arab women writers criticized the Arab’s patriarchal system, Westerners used it as a weapon to attack Arabs and to reinforce the anti-Arab stereotypes (Ludescher 107).

Arab Feminist writings were one of the imperialistic tools to force the colonial dominance on Arab countries. In his “The Third world,” Darraj notes that “feminism is associated with Western imperialism and is therefore viewed as anti-religious and anti-nationalist (qtd. in Ludescher 106-107). The western misrepresentation and misconceptions of Arab women as being docile, silenced, and male dominated are far from reality. In her *Arab Women between Defiance and Restraints* (1996), Suha Subbagh comments that Arab women were cast as “quite essential victims of the beastliness and backwardness of Arab men. This

stereotypical image of Arab women has very little to do with the lives of real Arab women” (Subbagh 11-12). So, Arab American women literature centers on both feminist and postcolonial themes.

Since the events of 9/11, Arab Americans have been subjected to a severe surveillance in the U.S. They were a subject to intensified forms of racial profiling, hate crimes, as well as cultural and religious discrimination. These terrorist attacks have highly impacted writers and intellectuals who spent their lives in correcting the negative stereotypes (barbarians, savages, and exotic) that the West attributed to the East, and then associating them with the worst one (Terrorists). So, many writers such as Elmaz Abinader, Suheir Hammad, Lawrence Joseph, and D. H. Melhem.s thought that the Arab American community should review its blind loyalty to the political discourse of the Arab world and defending “any position taken by the Arab states” (Ludescher 107).

In fact, despite the variety of topics tackled in the Arab American narratives, some authors like Laila Halaby, Alia Yunis and Laila Lalami attempted to evoke the influences of the 9/11 on the lives of immigrants in general and Arab Americans in particular. An example of Arab literary text, which tackles the issue of hyphenated identity of Arab Americans, and casts their communalities and experiences as alienated minority is Lalami’s *TOA*.

## **2. About The Author and The Novel**

### **2.1. The Biography and Bibliography of Laila Lalami**

Indeed, there are numerous Arab writers who generate revolutionary literary works especially in the modern times. One of the contemporary writers who attempted to make her voice heard and her words recognized is the Moroccan Laila Lalami. She is a Moroccan American novelist, essayist, and professor of creative writings in California, U.S University (*World Literature Today*). Lalami is like any other contemporary Arab American writer who tackles issues such as the problem of identity, anti-Arab racism, marginalization, and

immigration, situations of refugees, nostalgia, and exile. She foregrounds other issues of oppression, stereotype, and social injustice. Kuyucu notes that, “Lalami is interested in writing about the invisible and marginalized exiled. In general, she copes with postcolonial literature, celebrates and values the richness of the local Moroccan culture in her writings” (Kuyucu 55).

Laila Lalami was born in Rabat, Morocco, in 1968, in a Darija speaking home and to a working class family. She studied Standard Arabic and French at school. Her passion towards literature started at an early age because she was raised in a house overwhelmed with books and within avid reading parents. Lalami’s early exposure to the former colonial language, French, which is the second official language in Morocco led her to admire French literary works. She started by reading French comics at the age of six. At the age of nine she could finally put pen to paper and started her journey of writing stories in French, adopting the colonial gaze and style of writing, since she was immersed to that world rather than hers. In her says in her essay “So To Speak” she says that, “The characters names, their homes, their cities, their lives were wholly different from my own, and yet, because of my constant exposure to them, they had grown utterly familiar.” (*World Literature Today*). Despite the Arabic native tongue of Lalami, she had attended a French school. This contributed in the colonization of her imagination and the contradiction in her perception of what is familiar and foreign. Because of some financial constraints, she couldn’t pursue her studies in a private school. So, she entered Oum Al Banin High School where she collided with the real world, to which she belongs. She started to perceive the proper Arab language constructions.

Oum Al Banin High School granted Lalami the chance to come across Arab literature. She encountered many Arab writers such as Jubran Khalil Jubran, Elia Abu Madhi, and other pioneers of classical Arabic literature like Taha Hussein, Al Khansa and Al Mutanabbi. During her teenage hood, she continued writing poetry in French, and then she started reading



Moroccan writers such as Mohamed Choukri, and Driss Charibi whose works centered on Moroccan characters (*People pill*).

Lalami studied and earned her Licence ès Lettres in English from Mohammed V University in Rabat. In 1990, she received a British Council fellowship to study in England where she completed an MA in Linguistics at University College of London. After graduating, she returned to Morocco and worked permanently as a journalist and a commentator. In 1992 she pursued her studies in Los Angeles, where she graduated with a PhD in Linguistics. Lalami had an intention to go back after her graduation but, she became a naturalized immigrant and married to a Cuban American giving birth to one daughter, and holding the profession of a professor of creative writing in California.

Throughout Lalami's journey as a student in U.S where she considered herself a temporary foreigner, she started becoming aware of the critical issues that took place in the U.S, and later on when she obtained her citizenship, she started paying more attention to the way she was perceived by the mainstream Americans. Later, Lalami began her writing career to unveil the injustices of U.S government and population against Arab Muslim immigrants, refugees, and exiled. She wrote numerous recognizable essays such as "So To Speak," "Immigrants Assimilation," "Islamophobia," and "Whiteness and Identity." She exploded her anger imposing her point of view concerning the continuous dilemma of stereotype and violence. Laila Lalami fought with her pen to reconstruct history and to represent reality. Her five novels *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), *The Secret Son* (2009), *The Moor's Account* (2014), *The Other Americans* (2019) and *Conditional Citizens* (2020) are revolving all around Moroccan characters who struggle in the shackles of racism, discrimination, identity conflicts, assimilation, and in-betweenness.

Her first novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* published in 2005 is a collection of stories. It tells the story of four Moroccan immigrants who try to cross the Straits of

Gibraltar on a lifeboat. This novel tackles a very sensitive issue of illegal immigration or what is known in Arabic 'Harraga.' They fled their homeland in a flimsy boat across a dangerous strait of Gibraltar seeking a better life. In doing so, Lalami depicts the struggles of the people of the third world and the hard conditions that forced them to choose crossing borders and oceans through the path of death towards the unknown. Lalami's second novel *Secret Son* published in 2009 centers on the main character, a Muslim youth named Youssef El Mekki, who comes from one of Casablanca's slums and becomes surprisingly rich thanks to his father's fortune. Then his life turns upside down again to take him back to the shackles of misery to terrorism. In her novel Lalami reveals the social conditions of Morocco exploring the complexities of life in contemporary Morocco and the motives behind terrorism.

*The Moor's Account* is Lalami's third novel published in 2014. It is a historical epic as she defines it. It is narrated from the perspective of Estevanico, a Moroccan slave who is documented as part of the ill-fated Narváez expedition of 1527 and was one of four survivors to reach Mexico City in 1536. Later, he led expeditions as the first black explorer of America. This historical novel is a representation of the truth of Muslim Arabians point of view about some historical events.

In 2019 and 2020, Lalami wrote *The Other Americans*, and *Conditional citizens*, the latter exposes the contradictions of a system that tends to grant some legal status to all American citizens, but in reality, Arab Americans and some other ethnic groups are nothing but conditional citizens. They are repeatedly segregated, targeted, and suspected. She insists that Muslim identities are present but silenced. She wrote what is left in former novel which is *TOA* in which she goes beyond political issues of contemporary Arab Americans struggling with big issues (negotiation of different identities, discrimination and so on) to engage with their everyday concerns (work, money, housing, social relations, religion, homeland, Nostalgia, fear, and fight). These novels are regarded as revolutionaries in contemporary

AAL. Lalami won many awards and was the finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Notably, her works came to existence through a long journey of exploration, personal experiences, research and several literary influences that are explored in the coming section.

## **2.2. Lalami's Literary Influences**

The works of Lalami came into being particularly through everything she experienced, thought, witnessed, and everything read. She had journeyed to the edge of the world traversing not only the U.S, but also the symbolic space between periphery and center along social, familial, and psychological problems. Lalami's series of eye-opening experiences as a stereotyped and marginalized immigrant in U.S and then an outsider American made her develop her character and all the step backs and the grief she endured helped in her marching onward to rebel against injustice, cruelty, and inequality that surrounded her and her fellow Arab Muslims in every side in the U.S.A.

According to Lalami, all her literary works arose due to her personal experiences which brought a clear vision towards the issues she treats in her works. Being born in a bilingual society and her exposure to literature since childhood have enlightened her to write first in French, because her earliest influence was mainly by French writers such as Jules Verne, Alexandre Dumas, and Georges Bayard.

The real formation of her literary work started once she was exposed to classic Arab literature and Moroccan literature in high school as it is mentioned previously. As a matter of fact, all Lalami's readings center on postcolonial issues. Hence, her early influences are Arab classic literatures by prominent authors from different backgrounds; Egyptians, Lebanese-Americans, and Palestinians. Starting by the Egyptian writer Taha Husein, he is dealing with themes of social injustices, studying the Egyptians social problems and addressing modern issues including female emancipation. Lalami is also influenced by Mahjar writers such as the Arab Americans Jubran Khalil Jubran and Elia Abu Madi; the former is one of those rare

writers who transcended the barrier between East and West. Jubran is highly and indelibly affected by his origins, thus his writings revolve around love, death, loss of connection to nature, and longing for the homeland (Bushri). Elia Abu Madi has a political and philosophical vision, he addresses issues of Americanness, and Arab American identity and he images cultural representations (Assaf). Within the same scope of postcolonial issues, she is also influenced by the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish who dedicated his pen to mirror his struggles with his own personal identity. Therefore, his writings are highly focused on identity and self-identification, he tries to find answers to his arduous question ‘who Am I, without exile?’ shifting from his heritage and genuine love for what he is and his works are the reflection of his fluid character (*Grade Saver*).

Lalami’s desire to explore the world she belongs grows up with her. Thus, she explored many French Moroccan writers who used the colonial tone, and whom she highly appreciated, among them Driss Charibi. The latter examined themes such as colonialism, culture clashes, generational conflicts and women’s problems within the Islamic society. Tahar Ben Jelloun is her other influence. He depicts in his novels the problems of North African immigrants in France exposing the plight of marginalization and xenophobia. When Lalami moved to London to study, she became more familiar with the postcolonial discourse. She was highly influenced by Edward Said and his perceptions. She delved into Oriental and African studies which opened her mind towards not only cultural, social, and political issues but also to linguistics issues, exploring the relation between language and power. From this prospect of postcolonial discourse, Lalami was influenced by many African authors such as the Nigerian Chinua Achebe and the Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiongo and other writers such as the Polish British writer Joseph Conrad, the south African- Australian J.M. Coetzee and above them all, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin, “whose are writers that [she] consider of the

highest caliber, and that [she] looks up to. Every time [she] read their work, [she] find (s) something new to enjoy and new to discover” (*Morocco world News*).

Undeniably, Lalami has built a strong connection towards the colonial and postcolonial discourses at an early age when she started to recognize and embellish her humble origins and troubled background. Then later once she became a naturalized American citizen, she collided with the bitter reality of the world, the effects of colonialism, globalization, and the huge importance of geographical positions, immigration and ethnicities. She was lost in the dilemmas of estrangement, alienation, injustice, xenophobia and racism. Hence, she held her pen, backing up other writers to unveil injustices making herself the representative of the weak and the marginalized minorities of the U.S. She centers her novels on Moroccan characters, settings, and backgrounds. In the interview reported in *Al Jadid*, she says,

As far as representation, it’s an interesting word. It conjures up some kind of necessity for me, I write what I know. I’m Moroccan so I write Moroccan characters characters. I write in the specific, not with the burden of representing an entire Moroccan immigrant’s experience, but just those of my often very-flawed characters I write in their specificity, with their unresolved conflicts and flaws, and that is how I expect to have any hope of reaching readers and showing some kind of truth that resonate with them. (Gulshan)

All Lalami’s books engage with displaced characters who find themselves starting their lives anew somewhere ending up being deeply changed by this new unfamiliar place. This dilemma is highly depicted in her recent novel *TOA* that tells the story of Moroccan immigrants from various angles and tremendous insights.

### **2.3. The Summary of the Novel**

*TOA* is Lalami's fourth full-length novel. Unlike her previous novels that featured stories set at least partially in Morocco, this novel centers on members of Moroccan Diaspora as they make home in California. The story begins with a glimpse to its plot; the suspicious death of a Moroccan immigrant in a late night hit-and-run accident in a small town near Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California. The story revolves around the unfolding murder investigation told by the nine characters that are all connected to the Moroccan victim. Driss Guerraoui, including his family members, neighbors, the witness, and the detective, exposing lies, secrets, and the legacy of political violence and its effects on their lives in America in general and their psyche in particular.

Lalami's novel opens with a family tragedy. Driss Guerraoui, a husband, a father, and a grandfather fled his homeland, Morocco, in 1981 with his wife Maryam and his daughter Salma due to the economic crisis that took place during that time causing political violence. In the pursuit of the American Dream, they immigrated to the U.S where Driss started his business by establishing a small restaurant in Mojave Desert. He has two daughters, Salma, who is a successful dentist and married to a Moroccan man living in America with her children, and Nora, a musician and a jazz composer who is single and living in Oakland. Driss's life seems to be peaceful till he was knocked down by a speeding car on the highway causing his death. The accident turns everything upside down. His family suspected that Driss is killed, relating this crime to the attacks of 9/11, since Arab Muslims were and are still targeted. Nora Guerraoui, as the main character in the story is sure that her father was killed. She suspects Anderson Baker, a white American and the owner of a bowling alley in Mojave Desert near Guerraoui's restaurant because the two were always in dispute. Nora is completely certain that he is behind her father's death. Her grief is always awakened by memories and souvenirs due to the continuous family dispute with her sister Salma and her

mother who are always compelled by disappointments with her choices that were approved by her father.

The struggle to overcome his death didn't stop Nora from unraveling the mystery of her father's death and to keep his restaurant up and running. In her quest for justice and through the investigations headed by the detective Coleman, many lies and secrets are revealed. Driss Guerraoui had a love affair with a woman of the age of his daughter, which leads Nora to great disappointments and questions which led her to re-examine her father's image. In the tides of frustration, she decides to keep fighting for justice, but the investigations ended by another disappointment that her father's death was only an accident. During this plight a love story flowers between Nora and her former classmate, Jeremy, who is a veteran in Iraq, but their relationship gets fragile and tenuous when he admits his hidden mission in Iraq.

The story takes another flow when a witness comes forward to testify. Thus, the case of Guerraoui opens again. This witness is Efrain, a Mexican undocumented immigrant whose fear of deportation prevents him from coming forward. Yet, the memory of Driss haunts him and his wife pressure pushed him to give a statement to the police. After his statement the investigation takes place again to find out that Anderson, as it was suspected, is behind the hit-and-run. He confesses that it was accidental, and he is then freed with a financial penalty. In the court Nora meets A.J, Anderson's son, Nora's former classmate. This made her remember her bitter days at high school being a victim of bullying. Nora returns to Oakland to find out that she is invited to music program in Boston. The experience is refreshing but it was stained by racism. She comes back and she finally reconciles with her mother after she realizing that her mother was aware of Driss love affair. Few days later, Jeremy finds out that A.J was the one who was driving the car. The story ends with Nora reconciliation with Jeremy moving to the Desert together and having a baby.

## 2.4. The Socio-Historical Background of the Novel

*TOA* is a match of several books at once: a gripping literary thriller, a complex love story, and a sharp critique of today's America that is wretched by war and hatred, occupied by fragmented communities and disintegrated individuals. Lalami plunges into the lives and the deep psychological upheavals of fictional yet persuasively real individuals who are in a constant battle of who is fully American. This revelatory novel is set in modern time America, the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the nature of war changed from nuclear to ideological. During this period, the American society underwent massive political changes and significant social events. The most apparent are the growth of immigration which is a contentious issue in the heart of American politics, the 9/11, 2001 terrorist attacks and Islamophobia, and the spread of polarization. These salient issues have split America to make it a very dangerous territory and the spotlight of multicultural, multigenerational complexities make the nation wrestle with its own identity.

Lalami explores in her works dilemmas such as identity, racism, and immigration. Her stories are set mainly in Morocco. Her recent novel *TOA* centers on many thematic concerns such as immigration, subjected individuals defined by skin color, culture, race, religion, and class, and the meaning of home. Hence, it is a compelling portrait of race and immigration in America as it depicts the timely divided America that is highly concerned with the clash of inclusion and exclusion. Importantly, she reveals what unites and what divides Americans today, shedding light on immigrants as they form a considerable part in the American community especially those of Arab Muslim backgrounds who struggle since the events of 9/11, showing that all political is personal and all personal is political. Hence, Lalami depicts America after those devastating events and the political status of immigrants in the Trump era.



### **2.4.1. Post 9/11 Attacks and Islamophobia**

The morning of Tuesday, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 stands as one of the most tragic days in modern U.S history. It is stored in the mind of millions of Americans who witnessed the horrifying crumple of the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia that resulted in the death of more than 2600 people. Similarly, for Muslim Arab Americans ‘9/11 events’ signify a dreadful day that marks the turning point in the lives of this minority to become the spotlight of backlash. These horrifying devastating events gave birth to hatred, divisions, atrocities, profiling, and discrimination (retrieved from. Hairech 77). 9/11 didn’t not only reinforce the negative stereotypes (barbarians, savages, and exotics) that the West has attributed to the East, but it also added the worst one (terrorists). It generated a new dichotomy to not separate between Arabs and Americans, but to differentiate between good and bad Arabs (retrieved from Hairech 78).

Muslim Arab American community shifted from invisibility to hypervisibility (Majaj). The Arab Americans were an unrecognized minority in the U.S they started to do so starting from the 1970s. After the 9/11 attacks, an exaggerating surveillance was put upon them and they become suspects and targets. After these terrible attacks they lived a psychological shocking war. They were traumatized by the events and the backlash they received from their counterparts in the American population and the US government.

The U.S government has set a bunch of severe policies against Muslim Arab minority. This situation was known as ‘anti- terrorism policies’ that are launched in the first 12 months after the attacks. To illustrate this, on November 2001, the Justice Department interviewed 5000 Muslim Arabs who had no immigration visas. They were questioned about their knowledge of terrorist activity. On June, 2002 people from Muslim Arab backgrounds were required to report to the government to register and to be fingerprinted. These initiatives spread to infiltrate Muslim student, and put Muslim-owned businesses, restaurants, and

community organizations under surveillance by New York Police Department. Besides, many legislative acts were launched such as “The USA Patriot Act: Preserving Life and Liberty that facilitated information- sharing and cooperation among government agencies, and allowed law enforcement to use surveillance” (qtd. in Kaczmarek et al 2-3). However, U.S government’s protection expanded even to put severe restrictions on immigration policies in order to avoid any sort of external forces especially in Trump’s years.

#### **2.4.2. USA Immigration Policies in the Trump Era**

The U.S has a long history with immigration, and its relationship with its immigrants has long been ambivalent. The Statue of Liberty is one of the primer symbols of the U.S that is known as the symbol of immigration and opportunity. In her poem *The New Colossus* Lazarus writes that it welcomes “your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” (11-12), but U.S and its constitution has always been contradicted. Limitless policies were revealed to restrict, reduce, or even ban immigration especially during Trump era (Hollified 271).

Obama launched several programs and acts that offered legal protection for both documented and undocumented immigrants by contrast, Trump imposed sharp policies to restrict immigration. Through Executive Orders (EOs) Trump made it clear that he intended to implement extreme immigration measures. It is said by Pierce et al that in his first week he announced “A series of orders promising major cuts to legal immigration” (qtd. in Kaba 323). He ordered many aggressive deportations of undocumented immigrants and legal immigrants with minor legal visas such as student visas, employment visas, and refugees accepted in the USA. Then “he called for constructing a wall at the U.S-Mexico border, a selective travel ban, and expansion of nation’s detention capacity and expedited removal practices (323). These orders didn’t exclude Muslims since Trump officially banded immigrants from selected Muslim countries including permanent residents (Green Card). In addition to all these orders,

Trump ended Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents. According to Pierce et al, Trump "singled its plans to end Obama's administration to give work authorization to spouses of H-1B visa holders (temporary visa granted to immigrants in certain professional categories)." Consequently, "these measures have already begun affecting immigrants, their families, employers, and communities in which they reside." (323- 324).

The effects of both 9/11 and Trump immigration policies are highly portrayed in Lalami's *TOA*. It is an exploration of the Arab migrants' conflicts in America that mainly lead to identity problems of being an Arab and an American at the same time. Thus, this novel is taken under study to explore identity problems the character suffers from, using the Postcolonial Theory and Homi K. Bhabha's concepts as it will be explored in the next section.

### **3. Postcolonial Literature: A Background**

The world has witnessed tremendous thundering fluctuations since the 16<sup>th</sup> C up to this day which led enormously to the rise of infinite dilemmas, on the ground of Colonialism and its impacts. Sixty years ago, almost all the world was dominated by European empires. European Colonialism as a special form of general ideology of imperialism went beyond the holy justified mission that stands as the justification for the colonizers' practices onward the sea to turn the world upside down not only geographically and historically but also culturally, socially, politically, ideologically, and even psychologically.

As a matter of fact, the European colonial powers tend to be the most devastating in the history of humanity. They didn't only exploit and occupy inhabited lands seeking territories for mainly economic, religious or civil reasons, but also forced several brutal policies and massive changes on the native's culture and traditions which were radically replaced by theirs. The native inhabitants struggled with the newly integrated foreign culture

and all of its beliefs, values, and traditions. In addition, the negative colonial discourse insisted to present them as demonic, barbarian, and uncivilized.

Even after the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when almost all the colonized countries got their independence, the phantom of colonization overshadowed the post-colonial era. It serves as a new period that attempts to examine the effects of colonialism on postcolonial political, cultural, and social development. Indeed, it is an era of the continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. It highlights the implication and the challenges that former colonized suffered from the moments of colonization till present day which led considerably to the emergence of literary writings as a process of writing back to the empire that serves both as a reaction to the discourse of colonialism and as a vehicle to represent and reconstruct the social, cultural, and historical realities under the broad term of 'Postcolonial literature.'

#### **4. Postcolonial Theory**

Basically, the term 'postcolonialism' is defined in several ways by several scholars and theorists. Postcolonialism which "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and Societies" (Ashcroft et al 186). It appeared first in the mid-1980s in the scholarly journals in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory in Post- Colonial Literature* (1989), then by the mid -1990s. The term was familiar in the academic and non-academic discourses. This term seems to have traces back to the late 1970s in the texts of Edward Said which gave rise to the colonialist discourse theory in some scholars' works' such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. However, the existence of postcolonial theory proved to have traces back before even the term is used according to Ashcroft et al. As soon as colonized people had reasons to reflect upon and express the tension which arose from the colonization and powerful imperial experiences, postcolonial theory came into being (1).

Postcolonial theory is a theoretical approach in literary studies which attempts to critically analyze the political, aesthetic, economic, and historical effects of European colonialism on the world. It analyzes the power relationship between the colonizers and colonized people. It is highly influenced by literary theories such as Marxism and Feminism, and even the notion of the power of Foucault as it focuses on power relations in the colonial world. It studies cultural details of the superior, colonizer and the inferior colonized to reveal how culture and social life undergo changes and displacements under the process of colonization. This theory was the culmination of twentieth's century preoccupation with the theme of identity in novel studies since it centers on issues of imperialism, identity, and values of colonized people, culture and economic forces in the colonies. So, postcolonial theory involves discussions, thoughts, ideas and views about various topics such as slavery, suppression, representation, race, gender, place, and importantly the basic experiences portrayed in the literary works of both the colonized and the colonizer.

#### **4.1. Bhabha's Postcolonial Concepts**

Homi.K. Bhabha is one of the most dominant figures in postcolonialism. He is an Indian English scholar and a critical theorist and currently a Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University and a director of Harvard Humanities Center. His contributions are eminently recognized. He has developed various and effective concepts such as Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Difference. These concepts are mainly inspired by the psychoanalytical theory of both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. His first major work *Nation and Narration* (1990) involves the meaning of these conceptions of nation, nationalism and nationality set during the Enlightenment era. His second book *The Location of Culture* (1994) is a collection of essays from the 1980s and early 90s. He examines the complex cultural and political boundaries which exist between spheres of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Bhabha developed many interesting concepts in

postcolonial theory. They are discussed in the following part since they are pertinent to my analysis.

#### **4.1.1. Identity**

In postcolonial context, identity is problematic because of its flexible state. It is strongly linked to the so-called 'Other' which means the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and their interrelationship of 'Us' and 'Other.' Meaning that, the one can recognize himself / herself with the existence of the other. In his significant essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1996), Stuart Hall describes identity as being "not transparent or unproblematic as we think, it is "a production which never complete, always in process" (Hall 392).

Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) gave a brief overview about identity shedding light on the impact of colonization on both the colonized culture and identity, stating that cultural hybridity leads to identity crisis. As Mercer clarifies, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (43). Bhabha introduced the new term Hybridity that challenges the authenticity of the identity of both the colonizer and the colonized as I shall explain.

#### **4.1. 2. Hybridity**

Hybridity is an important term in postcolonial discourse. It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference." (Hoogvelt 158). Hybridity refers to the creation of new transcultural forms in amalgamating two cultures produced by colonization. In his book, *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces the term "Hybridity" which he considers it as a result of the process that is undertaken by the colonial authority to convert and change the colonized national identity 'the

Other' into their own who gradually became incapable to go beyond the limits of the colonial discourse. He declares that, "Hybridity is the sign of the revaluation of assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity affects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacements of all sites of discrimination and domination" (160).

Furthermore, Bhabha links the term hybridity to the so-called "Third Space" where one lives caught between two different spaces and two different cultures which bring a person a blurred mixed identity. For him "The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to him is 'The Third Space' which enables other positions to emerge" (211). This gives birth to mixed race because it creates "a third wholly indistinguishable category where origin and home are indeterminate" (Bolatagici 76).

#### **4.1. 3. Mimicry**

Mimicry as a term means imitation and it is a significant concept for theorists and thinkers. From a postcolonial perspective, this term come into being to describe the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Aschroft et al 154). Mimicry reveals the aim of the colonial powers to make the colonized be like the colonizer. In doing so, it affects both the colonizer and the colonized, because when the colonized imitates or is encouraged to imitate the colonizer, the boundary between the two starts to blur. Thus, the colonial rule over the colonized and the colonial hegemony will be disappeared sooner or later.

Mimicry is an ambivalent site in which both colonizer and colonized give and take qualities from each other. Indeed, this process of imitation is not "a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer that can be quite threatening. This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever, it mimics to produce 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 86). "Mimicry

therefore locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the colonized” (Ashcroft et al 155). Subsequently, the authority of the colonizer over the colonized is menaced, because mimicry gives the colonized the power to resist. The discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence as it is stated by Bhabha in his “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” “mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (126). This ambivalent state makes the colonizer perturbed realizing that he is no more the dominant one since the paradigm is shifted from the colonizer to the colonized. Undeniably, during this process of mimicry the identity of both colonizer and colonized turn to be in crisis.

#### **4.1. 4. Ambivalence**

The term “Ambivalence” is first coined by the psychoanalytic Young in describing “a state of mind in person who wants one thing and its opposite simultaneously” (161). The term is adopted by Bhabha in the colonial discourse theory to describe “the complex mixture of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that, some colonized subjects are ‘complicit’ and some ‘resistant’” (Ashcroft et al 13).

According to Bhabha, ambivalence comes from mimicry (91). The colonized mimics the colonizer to get recognition, but generally the mimicry is not done perfectly as a result of their love and attachment to their culture and native identity. They love and try to behave like the colonial, but at the same time they don’t abandon their cultures, values, and traditions. So, the two feelings grow and increase inside the colonized, leading to complicated feelings of love and hate. As a result, their identity becomes indeterminable.



## Conclusion

Although AAL dates back to the early twentieth century, it began to hold a considerable recognition just recently and it increasingly makes its voice louder. Since AAL mirrors the pattern of Arab American's history, it revolves around their experiences in the U.S from the early twentieth century till the present day. The Arab immigrant's experiences in U.S were depicted in their stories through both poetry and prose using mainly the English language to represent them, and to cast aside issues of assimilation, discrimination, identity, alienation, origins, and diaspora. One of the noticeable writers who dedicated her pen to expose the above issues is the Moroccan writer Laila Lalami. In her recent novel *TOA* she gives the reader a compelling portrait of race and immigration in America and the agony of Arab immigrants especially after the 9/11.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Identity Crisis in *The Other Americans***

## Chapter Two

### Identity Crisis in *The Other Americans*

#### Introduction

One positive facet of immigration is the fusion of creative literary works from various cultures of the world. They offer a comprehensive look into immigration intricacies and immigrant's predicaments. From Racism, and Islamophobia Lalami sets out *TOA* to explore immigrant's political issues in the U.S. But the main thread running through this multilayered narrative goes beyond profiling the immigrant's citizenship status. Through her novel Lalami represents the tangled lives and the dizzying experiences of immigrants in order to evoke the theme of identity problems. Thus, almost all the characters of *TOA* are displaced persons who have their own reasons of being confused. Thus, they continuously realize that their identity is caught between the superior and the inferior, the Arab and the American identity. The characters suffer from identity crisis. They all try to cope up with the situation in their own way.

Therefore, this second chapter is the analysis of the selected characters of the novel (Driss, Maryam, Salma, and Nora) using the postcolonial approach which was the area of focus in the previous chapter with accordance to Homi Bhabha's concepts of Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Mimicry that are all related to identity crisis of these characters as I shall argue in this chapter.

#### 1. Identity Crisis

Recently, AAL emerged with various literary writings that put a great emphasis on the issue of displacement. It is an established truth that displacement turns to be a major issue because of its intensive consequences on the human being. In general, this term denotes the fact of moving or being out of one's own place. As such, it is an action that may be voluntary

or involuntary depending on the circumstances in which it happens. But specifically, the state of displacement is problematic for immigrants. The immigrant suffers a “triple disruption: he loses his place, he enters into an alien language, and he finds himself surrounded by beings whose social behaviour and codes are very unlike, and sometimes even offensive to, his own” (Rushdie 277-8). In the process of abandoning originalities such as home, family, and culture to assimilate with new ones, immigrant suffers from identity crisis.

Identity constitutes “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (Hogg and Abrams 2). Thus, it is the way in which individuals identify themselves in relation to others. Nevertheless, identity becomes a subject of study in one case. According to Mercer, “it only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed; coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (43).

Identity crisis is a term which is coined by the theorist Erikson and it refers to the self-analysis that is conducted by a person about himself and also about the perception of himself. In fact, identity crisis has become a very important issue for debate. In the modern world with the increase of immigrant’ numbers, hybrid nations, and the mixture of countries with different cultural backgrounds, the question of identity floated to the surface. The question of “Who am I and where do I come from” that are the words of the great American writer W.E.B Dubois are the questions that are repeatedly raised by migrants who always suffer under the dilemma of self identification. Therefore, this experience is well suited to be represented through the medium of literature as it cannot be ignored by the writer especially the Arab American writers who write mainly about their hyphenated identities that are the result of displacement.

Lalami's *TOA* deals with the struggle of identity and self-determination of the characters. She attempts to portray the complexity of immigrants' experience of both the first and the second generation through the process of assimilation to the American society. Driss Guerraoui and his family lived the hard experience of what is meant to be an immigrant in USA. Thus, Lalami describes the life of these hyphenated selves who succumb to an identity crisis, and portrays multiple postcolonial issues such as Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Mimicry.

## **2. Identity Crisis in *TOA***

### **2. 1. Cultural Hybridity**

Homi K. Bhabha explained the term as the place whereby different cultures meet and alter each other which leads to cultural negotiations in establishing new cultural identities. This is considered as the portrayal of transculturalism in which people are allowed to negotiate in, and adopt cultures. He contends that "all cultural statement and systems are reconstructed in a space called 'The Third Space of enunciation'" (Bhabha 37). According to Bhabha cultural identity is always haunted by ambivalence and controversial space, so culture's originality cannot be sustained (Ashcroft et al 136). In fact, blending two different mainly Eastern and Western cultures can be interpreted as both positive and negative. This phenomenon can evoke confusion for people who lived within this in-between space which leads to cultural issues such as identity crisis.

In the *TOA*, Lalami explores the issue of people who get caught in the space of in-betweenness where they faced cultural clash between the East and the West. In her novel, the author pictures this issue through the Guerraoui's couple, Driss and Maryam, who are the first generation of immigrants. They are torn apart from the original and the adopted culture. This leads them to establish a new culture that involves the characteristics of both cultures.

Abraham claims that this is the process of “transformation of the native into something other than himself a westernized native or at least one who is in crisis regarding his /her own cultural identity” (3). From this respect, the aforementioned characters show hybridity through the transition set from the Arab (Moroccan) culture to an American one to represent a unique transcultural distorted identity.

Driss and Maryam immigrated due to the economic unrest in Morocco in 1980 to face many problems of assimilation in USA. Morocco during that time suffered of the third world worst problems which led to a general strike and protest that caused violence. Thus, the government took repressive measures against protesters. Thousands were killed, injured and arrested. While the conflict is turning on, bringing unrest and fear to Driss and Maryam minds, immigration was one of the effective ways to avoid such unrest. In reporting the government hostilities during that time Driss says, “I remember thinking. This is the end of the regime. “How could it survive when it was killing its own children in broad daylight” (Lalami 42). They couldn’t be able to resist especially Maryam who “All [she] ever wanted is to keep [her] family together” (79). The image of home changed, the comfortable home turned to a fearful and scattered place, and the feeling of security has been disappeared. Immigration was the only remedy for such agony. However, once in the USA they suffered to assimilate into the American culture and struggled with cultural differences.

It is worthy to note that assimilation is defined according to Park and Burgess as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and group, and by sharing their experiences and history are incorporated with them in common cultural life” (qtd. in Mundal). Through this process, the first generation of immigrants encounters many problems of *maladaption* and incompatibility between the two cultures which led to the creation of hybrid culture that is

transmitted to the second generation and beyond. In *TOA*, Driss and his wife Maryam attempted to melt into the American culture and to assimilate to their new environment in order to cope with change. Therefore, they represent the cultures in-between, because they are trapped between two different cultures that formulate their hyphenated identity. Their position in society is different and alike in the same time, it is called by Bhabha the third space that immigrants create for themselves or they discover — “the others of ourselves” (Bhabha 56). This space is going to be explored in the following paragraphs through the character of Maryam and Driss.

Along the way, the influence of the new culture on Driss and Maryam signifies who they become. The hybridity of these characters represents social and cultural contradictions as they were the product of two divided cultures. Driss suffers from the loss of his real identity which is manifested in many aspects: religion, life style, love, and political concerns. He rejects his own original culture in favor of the American one. He attempts to be an American man through mimicking their attitudes. Driss suppresses his Moroccan identity and gradually becomes a stranger to his original culture, to his wife, and even to himself.

The confrontation of two cultures makes Driss offensive due to his hybridized cultural situation. He is not only aware of what Bhabha calls “the original moments from the third emerged” (qtd. in Huddart), but he even insists that his culture particularly the religious beliefs were wrong. Driss confirms finally, once in USA, that all his old doubts about Islam are realities, this appeared through his conversation with the little boy Qassim, the Imam’s son, justifying his position, his change, and the reasons that led him to abandon his religion of being not logical, he says: “Over the years they [my doubts] grew, until one day they were all I had,”(Lalami59). The influences of the American culture expand to create intensive doubts towards his wife Maryam. Driss regrets his marriage to Maryam, he assumes that their life

was built on rights and obligations rather than love and passion. His love affair with the Mexican girl made him realize that he “had been traveling down the road from birth to death with the wrong companion. But now [he] had found the right one, and [he] didn’t want to give up on her” (111). Thus, although Driss decides to cast aside his old religion and even his past relations, the question we can ask is: can he be a part of the culture he chooses to embrace?

In this incident, despite Driss’s desire to be American, he remains the “Other,” in the eyes of those Americans. The pursuit of the American Dream leads him to accept all the humiliations of the white American, “the humiliation he had to suffer through sometimes, working in the restaurant and waiting people” (124). 9/11 attacks have resulted negatively. The American citizens became more intolerant towards immigrants of Muslim backgrounds; due to this, Driss Guerraoui had labored hard experiences. The burning of his shop “Aladdin Donuts” in Mojave Desert, California makes him realize that race and socioeconomic status play a great role in America and immigrants can never be a part of the American mainstream. Driss recognizes that safety is still questioned even after immigration. Nora describes her father Driss when his shop burnt in the following extract: “He shook his head in disbelief. I think he was just realizing that he had moved six thousand miles for safety, only to find that he wasn’t safe at all” (36). Besides, the disputes that he continuously ignores with Mr. Baker who symbolizes the anti-immigrant attitudes who believes that immigrants have stolen the jobs, and the opportunities that are supposed to be theirs.

All Driss’s attempts in establishing an American identity have failed. He is neither American nor Moroccan. Although he abandoned his Moroccan culture, he couldn’t be fully American. Even his death was suspected to be a murder couldn’t achieve justice, Nora says that he, “had been killed in cold blood” (156). Driss worked hard and overcame all his obstacles in order to establish a sense of stability and security that the political upheaval of



Casablanca denied his family from. He labored to establish his new diner to show himself as friendly and all-American outpost, but things didn't work the way he planned as Nora admits, "I knew something terrible would happen" (25). Through her conversation with Jeremy, she explains that her father was always threatened, "You remember his business was arsoned after September 11th? They never found out who did it. And then he put up a huge flag outside his restaurant, like he had to prove he was one of the good ones" (25). That shows the real position of Driss in the American society; even the flying- flag he put in his shop to ensure his national belonging after 9/11 couldn't make him an American. Therefore, Driss spent his life negotiating between his old culture and the American culture which mirrors his hyphenated Arab American identity that contains the characteristics of both.

In the same vein, the writer keeps explaining the process of cultural hybridity through the character of Maryam. Immigration proves to be a wrong step for Maryam, though it was her own decision. Through her narration, she lies to her husband in order to convince him to immigrate to USA, "I am not proud of what I did, how else was I going to convince him that he was putting his family in a grave risk and that we needed to leave right away" (79). Maryam suffers from the hardships of assimilation which are manifested in the store when she finds the woman that seemed to be Arab, but she is surprised by the truth that she is not. This disappointment shows her regret because it is harder than she imagines, she narrates, "That's were Driss found me later, crying next to the frosting. 'What's wrong?' he asked, taking my hand. I didn't know how to explain to him that nothing was wrong, and yet, everything was wrong" (32). The feeling of estrangement haunts Maryam in America that's why she pins a hope that she may have a friend from an Arab background with whom she shares the same attitudes and beliefs to feel less strange.

Cultural differences prevent Maryam from finding an arrangement between the American and the Moroccan culture. She tries with her husband to learn English and build up their life anew by starting a business. Their efforts were fruitful they could have a better life; a house, a car, and two daughters. But the feeling of difference never leaves her. She was the victim of a cultural shock between the Arab and the American culture, Maryam was surprised by the huge difference between her Moroccan life style the American one. She says,

When we moved to America thirty-five years ago, many things took me by surprise, like gun shops next to barbershops, freeways that tangled like yarn, people who knocked on your door to talk about Jesus, twenty different kinds of milk at the grocery store, signs that said DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT PARKING HERE. I remember pointing them out to Driss: they even have signs that tell you what you can't think! But above all, I was surprised by the talk shows, the way Americans loved to confess on television. Men talked about their affairs or addictions or gambling problems, women talked about their weight or plastic surgeries or the children they had outside marriage; even teenagers had something to say, mostly about how terrible their parents were—and all of it like it was a normal thing. I couldn't stop watching (30).

Maryam is aware of the cultural differences between the two above mentioned cultures even in the simplest things as the adoption of her husband's name "my name isn't Maryam Guerraoui, it's Maryam Bouziane, but so many women in this country take on their husband's names that I had long ago given up explaining that we were different" (123). Thus, it was not easy for her to adopt the alien culture.

Contrary to Driss, who abandoned his origins, Maryam prefers to keep her native culture inside the western one. Maryam symbolizes the Arab woman who valorizes her traditions, religion, and values. She challenges outside influences and even her husband to

raise her two daughters in Islam and Moroccan values. She introduced them to Islam and their origins at early age, even after they grew up, she insists to make them have a good job and marry an Arab man. She craves for a simple undistorted life. Nora reveals her mother simple yet impossible dream saying,

my mother, too had been imagining a world that might be have been: a nice house on the western side of Casablanca, a husband who taught philosophy at the university, one daughter is a dentist and the other is a doctor, both married to men who were *comme il faut* (274).

In this regard, the effects of forced immigration are embodied in the character of Maryam. Leaving one's country puts the person in a critical situation of negotiation. She has to act like an American and think like a Moroccan which leads to a dual life and the presence of this gap between the two cultures makes her with no position. So, she doesn't feel belonging, and this put, her identity in crisis. This situation of the 'third space' clarifies the hardships of immigrants facing home conflicts since they don't lose touch with their place of origins. Maryam cannot inhabit the past nor can she fully embrace the present. Rather, she grew between the past that signifies Morocco and the present that signifies America where she never experienced the feeling of belonging, "For me, the hardest thing about living in America, being so far away, it was like being orphaned" (31). As a result, her identity is merged as the elements of two cultures are always present. She attempts to bridge the gap between cultures that proves to be different. Her true identity is lost for, it is divided between diverse cultures: the native culture and the mainstream community.

In fact, belonging paves the way to discuss the feeling of attachment to and her longing for the homeland. Maryam is a solid representation of home longing. Home for her is a precious object even after departure. In the absence of homeland, nostalgia and memory

become the effective tool to confirm Maryam's real belonging, because the remembrance of the past protects her from the bitterness of rootlessness. What overwhelm the sense of belonging to Maryam are the nostalgic memories. They increase the sense of belonging that appears through the "Maryam" sections of the novel. This sense is not only for the homelands, but sometimes it is related to belonging to people and the feeling of loneliness. Maryam always compares her life in Morocco where her family is to America where she has nobody except her brother; she says, "In Casablanca, I had my two sisters, three uncles, and eight cousins, but here in California, my brother was the only family I had, and he lived a hundred and thirty miles away" (31). Nostalgia and memories are connected in the sense that when remembering the events of the past, the person feels nostalgic. Sometimes memories push the person to feel like an outsider and even have regrets. Nora describes her mother's messed feelings in what follows, "For my mother, things were forever not the way they were supposed to be. She had left her country with her family, but she still longed for everything else she hadn't been able to bring with her. She missed her old house, her childhood friends, the call for prayers..." (53).

The decision that thought to be temporary generates the feeling of homeliness as Bhabha claims "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (9). Maryam's battle of home longing and belonging puts her in the profound chasm that contains both worlds. Thus, return was her holy dream to end up her fight in preserving her Arab identity inside an American society. Since she moved for safety, once things changed in Morocco she wants to get back. But unfortunately, it was too late; she already established a new life and wealth that her husband refused to give up, despite the hard circumstance of racial discrimination and the injustice they all labored as Arab Muslim migrants. Maryam and

Driss had disagreed always about return; Nora describes the constant cold war between her parents,

Nora: We should go back, my mother says

Driss: Go where?

Maryam: Home, Casa

Driss: We can't go back Maryam

Maryam: Of course we can, Morocco had changed, my mother insisted things were different now. But my father didn't think was true

Maryam: We'll move to Marrakech, you have always liked it there

Driss: No, no. we can't move (37)

Yet, Maryam's battle of self-identification continues and the more she grew up, the more she becomes the target of cultural dilemmas which lead towards the position of duality and in-betweenness.

To conclude this section, we can say that the importance of cultural hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerge, rather hybridity to me is the third space which enables other positions to emerge as Bhabha explains (211). In *TOA*, cultural hybridity has touched both of Driss and Maryam in this novel. Driss mirrors the process of hybridization that many of the Arab immigrants have experienced inside the western societies. He is torn apart between two different cultures that made him create a new identity that belong neither to the native identity nor to the alien one. In contrast Maryam preferred to keep her native identity inside the alien land struggling with where she truly belongs and where she currently lives.

## 2. 2. Ambivalence

Ambivalence is the complex mixture of repulsion from and attraction to something at the same time. In the colonial discourse Bhabha believes that there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. The ambivalence has a dimension of splitting the feelings between positive and negative attitudes towards the colonizers (Sersour 701). So, it brings feelings of hatred and love for the same thing simultaneously. It is stated that,

Exposure to different culture can also create ambivalence regarding one's own cultural identity. The resulting situation challenges all to face the same heart.

Wrenching questions that haunt the immigrant who am I? Where do I belong? (qtd. in Akhter et al 128).

The above quotation shows that the feeling of ambivalence mainly leads to identity problems. This is going to be explored in the coming paragraphs through the characters of Nora and Salma.

In *TOA*, Lalami represents what Bhabha calls ambivalence of colonial discourse through the characters Nora, and Salma who suffer from a sense of ambivalence which leads to identity crisis. Lalami portrays how migration can bring serious problems. It reveals the condition of second generation of Arab Americans. They are living in a cultural conflict between East and West. And they are being confused to develop their own self-definition enduring hostile and negating identities that are imposed by the outside white supremacist society through the racism of many white Americans. Consequently, this condition generally leads to the birth of ambivalent feelings that make them live in a contradiction, confusion and frustration that ultimately form merged identities.

Lalami embodies through Nora and Salma the life that is characterized by irreconcilable dualities. They have to experience the feeling of being the daughters of Arab

immigrants in US. They are the daughters of Driss and Maryam. They grow inside a Moroccan Muslim family and in American society where dual perception of who they are is negotiated, whose positions are racially inferior in the white American society. The dilemma is rooted in the feeling of appreciation of the American society where they grew up and which affords all means of happiness. Yet, they remain subject to racism and otherness. And they are haunted by the feeling of non belonging. Thus, this conflict gives space to the emergence of ambivalent feelings of love and hatred for the Americans. In this regard, W.E.B Dubois used the term “Double Consciousness” (8) to describe the division that happens inside the individual’s identity. Hence, Salma and Nora undergo the same critical ambivalent experience, but they react to the situation differently.

Salma Guerraoui grows ambivalent feelings towards her immigration to USA and all that it brings. She is the oldest daughter of Driss and Maryam, she immigrated to America at an early age. After college, she went to dentistry school at Loma Linda. And then she got married to an immigrated Syrian man practicing dentistry together, and she is a mother of twins, Aida and Zaid. Salma mirrors the good daughter who has a perfect life, but deep inside she is fragmented. In fact, immigration is a challenging decision since the immigrant experiences the feelings if he had not immigrated, he might never have experienced feelings like desiring and hating the same thing simultaneously. This is what Lalami explains in Salma’s section, due to all the things she went through. She feels a special burden and blessing of her Arab American identity.

Immigration was a decision taken by her parents; she was put in a position where she needed to restart a new life in a totally different place and culture and cope up with it; she says, “all what you had to do was take the plane.” (194). Salma’s paradoxical feelings started once they first arrived to the airport. Her first impression about her uncle who welcomed them

he, “laughs easily, like [her] father. Yet not like [her] father at all” (194). It shows Salma’s ambivalent feelings of unfamiliarity and familiarity towards her uncle. These feelings mirror her relationship with America which is both familiar and strange at the same time.

Bhabha claims in his theory that the colonized tends to mimic in order to be equal. However, this mimicry causes ambivalent feelings of acceptance to be like the colonized, but they still love their own culture. This is what Lalami depicts in the character of Salma using a second person narration which is a postmodernist trait used to immerse the reader into the narrative as a character involved in the story. It is used by Lalami to make the reader feel the difficulties derived from immigration. During the first encounter between Salma and the world she was put in, the feeling of difference invaded her. So, mimicking her cousins who were basically Americans was the solution for her to feel similar. Lalami writes, “The children are supposed to play outside, but most of the time you have no idea what your cousins are saying, so you mimic the way they talk, the way they laugh, and finally the way they walk” (194). Salma mimics and imitates to be equal and to get recognition. She worked hard to comply with American cultural life, and she learnt English alphabet and the pronunciation of some words before she goes to school to answer correctly whenever she is asked to. Salma’s imitation led her to appreciate what she achieved and how she resembled more American. Yet, living in a house within Arab parents also pushes her to be attached to her Moroccan culture; she is bound to both cultures. She loves and tries to be American without denying her love for her Moroccan identity. Thus, the two feelings grew with her, leading to a combination of love and hate to her life in America and migration in general.

The mixed sense of blessing and curse that Salma felt in her childhood has grown inside her. It intensified during her voyage to Morocco when she turns twenty. When the political unrest in Morocco ended, Salma traveled with her parents to Morocco to visit their



family. Once there, she felt the strong bound that links her with her birthplace, even though she doesn't recognize anything and anyone, she narrates, "A year later when you finally travel to Casablanca with your family, you do not recognize your grandmother, nor does she recognize you. How it is possible to miss someone you don't remember? And yet you do" (196). This example highlights the idea that Salma is attached to Morocco, the feeling strengthened after her visit to her grandmother and the feeling of missing she felt. Growing up in America doesn't mean she is merely American and after the death of her father that was suspected to be a murder, Salma becomes aware of migration and its consequences and fluctuations.

The feeling of appreciation for what she could achieve in America and the feeling of dissatisfaction for all the conflicts, changes, and complicated feelings she traversed were irresistible. This is shown through her addiction to pills. Salma's life is a bunch of two contradicted feelings as it is described by Nora, "for the first time, it occurred to me that the perfection my sister wore like an armor was starting to show some cracks." (249). Therefore, Ambivalence traps her in hanging feelings, so her identity becomes hard to determine whether she is an Arab or American. She lives in an American way, but with the sense of non-belonging.

Lalami presents another character that I shall analyze to show the issue of Ambivalence in the novel. Nora, the youngest daughter of Driss and Maryam was born in America. When she grew up, she went to a medical school then changed her mind to apply to music at Mills College to become a Jazz composer who tries to accomplish her own career and life in America where race is an important issue. Nora can be an example of Bhabha inter-cultural gaps categories through race, class, gender, and cultural practices that bring ambivalence for people who live in western Societies. In this dimension, Loomba states that,

“In reality any simple binary opposition between 'colonisers' and 'colonised' or between races is undercut by the fact that there are enormous cultural and racial differences within each of these categories as well as cross-overs” (105). As a Moroccan, Nora was born and grew up in America; she lived her life within contradictions between her native and her adopted culture, and between prejudices and reality. Thus, Nora feels always ambivalent about her life, decisions, and thoughts. She admires America, its life style and opportunities and hates it for all the subjugation, racism, and stereotype she endured.

In the immigrant’s life, the clash of assumption versus reality gives birth to ambivalence. Nora’s difference from the Americans makes her a victim of bullying at school. She was the Muslim alienated girl that differs from others. Her name reveals many things about her background as it is showed through her narration:

Nielsen cheerfully read the children’s names on the roster, but couldn’t bring herself to say ‘Nora Zhor Guerraoui’ twice she started on the middle name started on the middle name and stopped, frowning at the consonant cluster. The class grew silent, united in its curiosity about the word that had made the teacher falter. Then Mrs. Nielsen lowered her reading glasses over her nose and peered at me. “What an unusual name. Where are you from? At recess, the kids formed out and gathered again in small groups-military kids, church kids, and trailer-park kids, hippie kids- groups in which I knew no one and no one knew me (17).

Nora experiences what it means to be different and alienated within Americans. She was regarded as an ‘Other’ stereotyped with “Raghead,” “Talibans,” and “poop eater” due to her appearance and name that sounds strange but it says a lot about her and carries many prejudices. Her Moroccan “Zaalouk food” (cooked Moroccan salad that is made from eggplants and tomatoes) that is disgusting only because it is different. All of these indicate

that it is hard for a person to deviate from the dominant stream and to establish his or her own identity in the States. Nora couldn't have any friends at school due to her difference. The only one she could have was the Indian Sonya Mokharjee since they were both bullied due to their skin color, names, and origins, which makes Nora feels less "Other" and more united with "Sonya Mokherjee, a girl who didn't fit in with the others, either she says, "By time I started the first grade, I had one friend" (19). The feeling of being different and inferior to the people she lives with increases as Nora grows up "Yet, the sense of being different never completely went away" (20).

On the top of the ethnic slurs at school, Nora tasted as a little girl the bitterness of racism that increased after 9/11. The unexplained arson at her father's doughnut shop that was associated with the ongoing war of terror threatens Guerraouis' acceptance in America. Fear and lack of safety staked by the attack on her father's shop, and by the deepening culture of anti-Muslim bias in California, have traumatized Nora then she began to see her father's investment as a threat. She explains this dissonance to Jeremy when he comes to visit her in what follows:

I knew something wrong will happen. You remember his business was arsoned after 9/11<sup>th</sup>? They found out who did it. And then he put up a huge flag outside his restaurant, like he had to prove he was one of the good ones. I had told him over and over that he should sell. But he refused, he loved it. God only knows why? (25)

Her unblessed childhood has made her bear in mind that her father was not killed in a hit-and-run accident, instead it is a murder. Nora's return to Yucca Valley from Oakland and her determination to pursue justice and keep the restaurant up and running shows the tensions and the resentments of racism immigrants go through. Nora is sure that her father was killed because he is a Muslim and it was expected because of the arson of his shop that happened

years ago. During the investigations of her father's death, Nora notes that the detective Coleman's questions imply blame of her Muslim father and does not accuse the one who killed him. Instead of questions that help in investigating the case and to find "who has driven the car and how did they hit him and why did they flee the scene" (6) to find the killer. Unfortunately, the questions reflect the position that Arab Muslims occupy in America. This position that becomes more perilous as Arabs have been stereotyped as terrorists after the attacks of the twin towers in New York. It gets even worse after Trump's anti-immigrants' discourses and policies that rendered them more a subject of misinterpretation (see the first chapter). Following the investigation, Nora's doubts proved to be true; Mr. Baker is behind this crime, the D.A (district attorney) has agreed to bail which wouldn't be the case if it was the opposite. Nora explains Anti-Muslim bias in America and Americans who believe in a single vision of Americanness by saying:

But if the roles were reversed on the night of April 28, and Mohammed Driss Guerraoui had killed a man he'd been fighting with for many years, would he have been charged only with a count of hit-and-run? I had a long ago learned that the savagery of a man named Mohammad was really questioned, but his humanity always had to be proven (165).

The tensions between Nora's identity as an American and its labeling as 'Other' in the war on terrorism intensifies when Nora reconnects with an old friend from high school, Jeremy, a sheriff's deputy who was in a military tour in Iraq. When Nora started to have a love story with Jeremy, she discovered his mission in Iraq. She tore apart the new found intimacy that brings them together in a time of crisis she says, "he wasn't the sweet kid I knew at school; he had fought in brutal war, a war I hated" (206). Nora is disappointed by

Jeremy. He is no less than a merciless enemy because she becomes traumatized by her experience on either side of racial ‘frontiers.’ In fact, her relationship with Jeremy mirrors her relationship with America; they are both build up on confusion between love and hate and a battle between leaving and staying.

Being an “Other” means being always in conflicts. This is shown through “Nora’s sections; she is the real representation of this agony. Besides her experiences with racism at school, she couldn’t succeed in her music career and even when she is randomly selected for screenings she is unfortunately put down by TSA (Transportation Security Administration) at airports. Her American citizenship doesn’t matter; her darker resemblance prescribes her “Otherness.” As a response, she lives in limitless chaos where her identity is fragmented into two; she is neither fully American nor fully Arab. It is the never-ending sense of non-belonging and it is this ambivalent feeling of who am I? And where my home is?

The contradictions between the native and the adopted culture evoke an ambivalent feeling of belonging and non-belonging. This inner conflict is vividly articulated through the story of Nora and her relationship with her mother. Nora portrays the struggle of the second generation of immigrants. She diverges from the native tradition of her parents’ homeland and struggling to please her mother who expected something altogether different from her life in America which demands a total assimilation especially after the harsh childhood she lived. Through her dual identity, Nora serves as an “intermediary” between the white and Arab culture. She is bound to both cultures; she was regarded as “Other” in the eye of the Americans and this prevents her from succeeding her own music career because she is an Arab and is regarded as “different” through her mother’s eyes because she is assimilated within the American lifestyle with no consideration of her Arab Muslim backgrounds. Her

relationship with her mother reflects the ambivalent experiences of belonging and non-belonging.

The distance between the mother and the daughter is the measure of Nora's distance from her Arabic culture, and this makes her swaying between the two worlds. The conflicts with her mother started once she left the medical school to join the music one and become a jazz composer who fails to achieve a successful career. Her Moroccan mother wants a steady honorable job and Arab husbands to both her daughters. But Nora rebels living according to her mother dictates. This doesn't only distance her from her mother, it also distances her from her own culture and religion which led her to the ignorance of the basic things, and this is depicted during her father's funeral when the services seemed strange to her. Nora grows up to be against her mother's expectations that used to tell her, "Why do you have your head in the clouds" (20). However, Nora's interaction with the white world produced feelings of appreciation for westerner's lifestyle. So, she was stuck between two different worlds and her identity remains on the hyphen. She feels her culture through the religious and the traditional practices in her family, but she inhabits and appreciates a totally different world that is reflected in her attitudes and American way of thinking. Hence, these unmatched dualities produced a feeling of non-belonging, and always in search for home what she has along desired and her mother wanted for her, "I prayed for her greedily, for the things I had given up years ago and never found again. Home" (269).

Nora's life is a clear image of Arab Americans life in USA after the events of 9/11. She portrays the ambivalent feelings of love and hate, belonging and non-belonging, and native and adopted cultures which all contributed in her struggle for self-identification, so she is neither Arab nor American, yet an Arab-American. Nora's confusion ended at end of the

novel; she reconciles with her mother and Jeremy and finds 'home' in the Desert, even if it is still a periphery in USA.

To end up, both Salma and Nora experienced ambivalence that prevents them from self-determination. Salma's ambivalent feeling towards immigration for its positives and negatives consequences. Concerning Nora, she is invaded by confused feelings of hate and love for the Americans, and belonging and non-belonging. As a result, they both suffer from a merged identity that negotiates between two unmatched identities.

### **2.3. Mimicry**

Colonialism didn't only destroy the native culture, but also forced the natives to abandon their culture by imitating the colonizer. According to Bhabha the ex-colonized people face a challenge in crossing cultural boundaries, which is an identity issue. He claims that people who come mainly from the ex-colonized countries tend to show admiration towards the colonizer. Therefore, they try hard to imitate them. This process of being like the colonizer is called "Mimicry." He states that,

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it distinct from what might be called an itself behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage ... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare (99).

That is to say that the imitation of someone else's culture, language and manner is nothing but a camouflage and this impacts ones identity.

Lalami shows the negative consequences of immigration and the negative influence of Western culture on Arab immigrants. The relationship between Arabs and Americans is based on imitation. This is manifested through the character of Driss Guerraoui who believes that Assimilation in the American society is a necessity. Thus, he imitates the American attitudes.

Driss Guerraoui is a true incarnation of imitation since his pursuit of the American dream makes him blindly follow the American culture through imitation. His Arab identity is questioned from the moment he reached America because he is easily assimilated into the American culture by starting a business. This latter was one of the surprising and the challenging things that show Driss's interest in imitating the Americans way of thinking since he always hated the system of Capitalism. He is even aware of the step he took, "She [Maryam] couldn't believe that the graduate student who spoke so frequently about the plight of workers laboring under the boot of capitalists suddenly wanted to start a business" (43). Yet, he did because he deeply believes in the American Dream that is why he worked hard for it and insists to make his business work even after the arson in his first shop, Nora comments on the idea saying, "I think he liked the story because it had easily discernible arc of the American Dream: Immigrant crosses ocean, starts business, becomes a success" (35).

Moreover, Driss is desperate to assimilate into the American culture as he worked hard to learn English and make it perfect just to resemble the Americans because his white skin encourages him to do so. In describing his efforts in learning English Maryam says, "Usually, he was in lounge chair doing his crossed puzzles, that was how he improved his English, he was obsessed with finding all the answers, and hardly ever looked up when I walked past him on my way to the kitchen" (33). Driss obsession towards learning English reflects his desire to be an American, his unawareness of his wife presence once solving the puzzles is a depiction of the beginning of the establishment of the American identity and of abandoning his Moroccan identity.

Driss blindly follows the American culture abandoning and rejecting his native Moroccan culture. His cultural shift is resulted out of the dichotomy of the inferior and superior one because he views his Moroccan culture of being inferior to the American.



Bhabha notes that, “the powerful influence of a different culture will cause a tension between the desire of identity stasis and the demand for a change in identity; and mimicry represents as a compromise to this tension” (86). This is relevant to the situation of Driss through his attempt to be an American. His manners are emptied of any Arab Muslim traits while Maryam turns to be more attached to Islam and difference creates a gap between them and leads to fights which Nora calls “the cold war” (37).

Driss’s total assimilation to the American attitudes and abandoning his religious principles are shown through his life style. He turns to drink which is forbidden in Islam, he changes and he is confident of his choice to be American not an Arab Muslim any more. This is manifested in the novel sections called “Driss” and in “Nora” as she narrates, “Every morning, my mother would take the beer out of the fridge, pour it in the sink, and toss the bottles into the trash bins, and every evening my father would bring home another six packs” (37). He is aware of the change and insists to follow what he believes is good. Moreover, Driss doesn’t only abandon his religion, but even his life partner. He leads a double life; his love affair with the Mexican woman makes him notice the shortfalls of his wife and who was he and where he truly belongs. Abandoning his wife justifies his abandonment of the Moroccan identity. His obsession to be fully American that goes through mimicking the Americans makes him forget who is he and where does he come from. Yet, whatever he does, he remains an Arab in the eye of the Americans. Thus, he is apparently American, but deep inside he is a Moroccan.

To conclude, no matter how hard Driss fights to cut all the connections with his Arab culture and even with his own wife, his name and his racial background remain a reminder. Hence, Driss’s attempts to a complete assimilation and the pursuit of the American Dream were achieved through the process of mimicry.

## Conclusion

Lalami denounces the consequences of immigration on people's identity focusing on the Arab ones. The author tackles this issue of immigration that causes identity crisis by relying on old-fashioned storytelling; switching point of views, feelings and testimonials to get her message across and also by conjuring up the murder mystery of the Moroccan immigrant, Driss Guerraoui (*Middle-east-online*). During this pivotal moment: an accident that may or may not be a crime, she reveals that the postcolonial dilemmas have not ended rather they are manifested in the modern times through the experiences of the first and the second generations of immigrants in their identity formation.

After giving an overview about the issue of identity crisis, I have tried to analyze the selected characters of the novel in the light of Bhabha's postcolonial concepts (hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry) for the sake of highlighting the impacts of immigration on people's identity. I began with the concept of cultural hybridity; I have analyzed this concept through the characters of Driss and Maryam who are the product of a cultural blend that impacts their identity by creating a mixed distorted identity. Then, I have studied the concept of ambivalence through the characters of Salma and Nora to show that immigration creates a dual identity based on the state of confusion and contradiction set by the two divided identities. Finally, I discussed the issue of Mimicry under the immigration discourse referring to the character of Driss who has deformed his original identity as a Moroccan in favor of the American one to produce a 'blurred copy' of the American man, he is neither American nor Moroccan.

## **General Conclusion**

## **General Conclusion**

The present research explores the issue of identity crisis in Laila Lalami's *TOA* according to Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry under the modern time immigration discourse. The first chapter is the theoretical framework of the study. It is divided into three parts. The first part foregrounds the AAL and its emergence in order to establish a familiarity with the dominant themes of the selected literary work. The second part comprises the biography of Lalami and her literary influences to provide the motives behind the birth of her literary works since any author's writings are filtered through his/her experiences. It contains also the summary and the socio-historical background of the novel to give a better understanding of the context in which it takes place. The third part deals with postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory explaining the most important concepts proposed by Bhabha that were used in the second chapter of the analysis.

The second chapter is dedicated to the application of Bhabha's concepts on the selected novel to analyze the issue of identity crisis which is the subject matter of this study. In fact, I applied Bhabha's concepts on the selected characters of the novel (Driss, Maryam, Salma, and Nora) in order to find out to what extent identity crisis is portrayed in the novel and to evoke the impacts of immigration on immigrants' identity in general and Arabs in particular. In this regard, the aforementioned characters constitute the Arab family that embodies the experience of the first and the second generations of immigrant in USA depicting the factors that lead to identity problems.

Therefore, Bhabha's concept of hybridity is introduced through the characters of Driss and Maryam as they live a double identity. The concept signifies the blend of two different cultures which enables the third to emerge. Thus, I endeavored to emphasize the impact of cultural hybridity on the immigrants' identity formation as it obliges the immigrant to lead a dual life built on negotiation in which the feelings of homeliness, nostalgia, and

difference are emerged and it also produces the third position where the migrant subverts the dualistic categories and goes beyond the realm of the binaries of 'us and them.' Ambivalence highlights the inner confusion and the paradoxical feeling of attraction to and repulsion from something at the same time. So, I attempted to show the reasons behind these paradoxical feelings of belonging and non-belonging and the way they lead to identity crisis through the characters of Salma and Nora as being the second generation of immigrants in USA. Furthermore, the character of Driss represents the process of mimicry which happens when the minority groups in society imitates and adopts the dominant culture. I tried to discuss how the process of mimicry reflects the migrant's demand to possess the dominant identity and to highlight the inability to do so due to cultural and racial differences and political issues.

After analyzing identity crisis as a core theme in *TOA* in relation to Bhabha's postcolonial concepts, I reached to the following conclusions. First, immigration opens space to the postcolonial dilemmas to proceed and identity crisis is one of them. Second, Arab Americans undergo some difficulties in self-determination especially after the 9/11 that redefined their position as an Arab minority in becoming different from other US minorities. They were entangled with a web of religious, political and cultural differences and confined in one label where they become the subject of racism, discrimination, and stereotype. From the standpoint of identity, the first and the second generation of Arab immigrants in USA face different problems. Third, and as the analysis of the concept of hybridity has attested, the first generation of Arab immigrants struggle more with cultural differences and the difficulties of assimilation as they cannot easily adopt the American identity instantly. Thus, in their attempt to do so, many issues come into existence such as identity crisis. Leaving the country of origins leads to a partial loss of their Arab identity regarding their culture. However, their identity can be affected in two ways. Identity can be affected through the process of negotiating between the host land's culture and the original culture. The immigrant lives a

life of a dual focality as they try to preserve their roots in a very different frame. So, they try to synthesize between the 'present' and the 'past', and between the 'here' and 'there.' Their identity is affected also through the process of inclusion. In order to achieve a full inclusion in the cultural mass that existed in the host country; Arab immigrants deny their origins and mimic the Americans. In the process of mimicry, the Arab immigrants stand undefined. They lose their original identity while they can't adopt the American one because of cultural difference, socio-economic status, and political issues that prevent any fully integration of Arabs in the American society.

The second generation of Arab immigrants in USA grapples more with the issue of self-determination. It grows ambivalent feelings of love and hate towards immigration and all that it brings due to some reasons. First, these immigrants are trapped between social and family realm because they are obliged to confront the labels of their parent's origins and those of their country of birth. Second, they endured hard experiences in the shackles of racism and inferiority being Americans of Arab Muslim descendants. As a result, they live in an infinite process of self-creation and their identity remains in question.

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## Résumé

Les questions d'identité postcoloniale continuent d'être contestées à l'époque moderne et sont toujours pertinentes au contexte actuel de l'immigration. Par conséquent, cette dissertation tente d'étudier la crise d'identité dans le roman de Laila Lalami, *The Other Americans*. Le roman aborde le thème de l'immigration en explorant la vie des immigrés dans les pays d'accueil en mettant en évidence les problèmes que les Arabes immigrés rencontrèrent en Amérique surtout après les événements du 11 septembre 2001. Cette étude examine la façon dont les personnages (Driss, Maryam, Salma et Nora) qui ont immigré du Maroc aux États-Unis reflètent les conséquences du déplacement qui causent une crise d'identité. L'analyse emprunte les concepts d'hybridité, d'ambivalence et de mimétisme expliqués par Homi K. Bhabha. Ainsi, la présente recherche est divisée en deux chapitres. Le premier s'agit du contexte historique du roman et le cadre théorique de l'étude tandis que deuxième chapitre se concentre sur l'analyse du roman en se concentrant sur la question de la crise d'identité des personnages utilisant les concepts de Bhabha.

## الملخص

لا تزال القضايا المتعلقة بالهوية التي أثارت جدلا كبيرا في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار موضع نزاع في العصر الحديث و ذلك خلال صلتها بالسياق الحالي للهجرة. لذلك ، تحاول هذه الأطروحة دراسة هذا الموضوع في رواية "الأمريكيون الآخرون" للكاتبة المغربية ليلى لعلمي. تسلط هذه الرواية الضوء على الهجرة الحديثة حيث تصف حياة المهاجرين في الدول الأجنبية من خلال تسليط الضوء على المهاجرين العرب في امريكا و نضالهم بعد أحداث 11 سبتمبر 2001. لذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة الي تحليل انعكاسات الهجرة عامة و الاحداث المذكورة سابقا خاصة و ذلك من خلال تحليل الشخصيات المختارة (إدريس ومريم وسلمى ونورا) التي هاجرت من المغرب إلى الولايات المتحدة. هذه الهجرة و الاحداث أدت في النهاية إلى أزمة في الهوية الأصلية. من أجل إتمام هذا التحليل، قام الباحث باستعمال مفاهيم التهجين والتناقض والمحاكاة التي اقترحها هومي ك. بهابها. هذا البحث الحالي مقسم إلى فصلين. يقدم الأول الخلفية التاريخية للرواية والإطار النظري للدراسة بينما يركز الفصل الثاني على تحليل الرواية مع التركيز على قضية أزمة الهوية