

MASTER IN ADVANCED ENGLISH STUDIES: LANGUAGES AND
CULTURES IN CONTACT

UNIVERSIDAD DE VALLADOLID

Departamento de Filología Inglesa

2018-2019



Universidad de Valladolid

Final Master Thesis

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LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN IMMIGRANT NARRATIVES: BRIDGING
THE GAP BETWEEN ARAB TRADITION AND AMERICAN CULTURE

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VALLADOLID 2018

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master in Advanced English Studies:
Languages and Cultures in Contact

to
Universidad de Valladolid

by
Ichraq Chadli

January 2019

Approved
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
who made this dream a reality

AND

to the displaced, the Diaspora, the exiles,
and to those who long for freedom.

I had my life
figured out cold for me
only from time to time
I wake up in the middle of the night.
or maybe somewhere when the night
is just fading into day,
when the moment
is neither here nor there,
which is safe time to think
about Palestine and olive trees,
and I pity myself
and the place I came from. (Orfalea and Elmusa 198)

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Jesus Benito Sanchez. He has been such a great support and mentor to me throughout my master journey. He has encouraged me to immerse myself into the art of knowledge. And he has patiently and skillfully guided me with his wise words and advice to reach the end of my thesis.

ABSTRACT

Having a cultural identity means knowing where you come from, and that gives you a sense of belonging and a sense of self. However, when you start doubting your self-identity and feeling like you don't belong *neither here nor there*, your identity is in jeopardy. In this regard, this thesis explores how identity is expressed, constructed and negotiated in multilingual and culturally diverse settings, and assesses the roles of language and culture in this process. To this end, the thesis engages cultural studies, postcolonial theory, spatial theory and the analysis of three narratives of immigrants: American Lebanese Ameen Fares Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, American Palestinian Edward Said's *Out of Place: A memoir*, and American Jordanian Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Identity, migration, language, East-West cultural relations.

RESUMEN

Tener una identidad cultural significa saber de dónde vienes, y eso te da un sentido de pertenencia y un sentido de ti mismo. Sin embargo, cuando empiezas a dudar de tu identidad personal y sientes que no perteneces *ni aquí ni allá*, tu identidad está en peligro. En este sentido, esta tesis explora cómo se expresa, se construye y se negocia la identidad en entornos multilingües y culturalmente diversos, y evalúa los roles del lenguaje y la cultura en este proceso. Con este fin, el trabajo utiliza los estudios culturales, la teoría poscolonial, la teoría espacial y el análisis textual de las tres narrativas de inmigrantes: *The Book of Khalid* del libanés estadounidense Ameen Fares Rihani, *Out of Place: a Memoir* del palestino estadounidense Edward Said, y el *Arabian Jazz* de la estadounidense jordana Diana Abu-Jaber.

PALABRAS CLAVE : Identidad cultural, migración, lenguaje, relaciones culturales oriente-occidente.

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1. Introduction

He says: I am from there, I am from here,
but I am neither there nor here.
I have two names which meet and part...
I have two languages, but I have long forgotten
which is the language of my dreams.

Mahmoud Darwish, *Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading*

Contemporary American writers often incorporate multiple languages and identities in their narratives. These identities can be linguistic, racial, ethnic, cultural, gender or social. In the extract above, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish imagines Palestinian American scholar Edward Said in an ongoing war with his dual identities. Darwish and Said share a few similarities in their personal stories as Palestinian natives, and their friendship is expressed clearly and powerfully in this poem, where Darwish gives an acute perspective about his friend's complex identity as an individual and a writer. Darwish envisions Said's identity in crisis as a result of former colonialism and the present-day collision of the Arab culture with the American one.

In Darwish's representation of Said's plight, the multicultural present continues to be haunted by the colonial experience of the past. And it is precisely Said's *Orientalism* (1978) that powerfully explores the power of the colonial imagination and the effects it had on oriental identity. Said argues that the Europeans divided the world into East (Orient) and West (Occident), uncivilized and civilized. The imposition of such binary thinking, which Said alludes to through the term "orientalism," justified Western supremacy and colonization. To the West, the orientals were lazy, irrational, and uncivilized, and their perception of life was automatically associated with the oriental culture. In order to learn about the orientals' culture, the Europeans linked it to Western culture. For example, they thought since the religion of Christ was called

Christianity, Islam should be called *Mohammadism*. This term was completely westernized, and Muslims were not aware of it. However Orientalism today, Said continues to claim, is quite different from how it was in the 19th century. Europeans were silent observers back then, but now they take part in the orientals' lives to rule them properly. Orientalism moved from Europe to the United States after World War I. And while European colonies were lost by the end of World War II, prejudices were still very explicit. For instance, Arabs continue to be seen in the West as cruel and violent people. Said clearly proposes that instead of creating a boundary, the orientalist should at least include the orientals' "contrapuntal" perspective too (Wilson, 1994).

The power exerted by orientalist, then and now, has affected the identity of contemporary marginalized Arab minorities by alienating them from the public and causing them to continue to struggle with their sense of self. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall asserts that this loss of a stable "sense of self" is sometimes referred to as the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements— de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves — constitutes a "crisis of identity" for the individual (1996, 597). This de-centering of identity is panoptical, if we use Foucaultian terminology, inasmuch as the "other" is positioned by the "self" as a representative of real or imagined differences that might create a motive for discrimination. Subsequently, such differences are structured along a binary axis that separates the self from the other, the center from the margins, the light from the dark. Furthermore, these ideas of superior and inferior human races and cultures that are exerted on the colonized create an imposed cultural imaginary, which clashes with their own, "displacing" and "dislocating" it. This differential encounter constructs new "hybrid" expressions of culture and belonging.

This thesis explores how identity is expressed, constructed and negotiated in multilingual and culturally diverse settings, and assesses the roles of language and culture in this process. It looks particularly at the case of immigrant writings by Arab American writers in the twentieth century. To this end, the thesis adopts the qualitative method and textual analysis or deductive approach. Cultural studies, postcolonial theory and spatial theory illuminate the study of three narratives of immigrants: American Lebanese Ameen Fares Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, American Palestinian Edward Said's *Out of Place: A memoir*, and American Jordanian Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz*.

Ameen Rihani's (1876-1949) influence and cultural significance as an Arab American writer can hardly be overestimated. As an American Novelist, poet, essayist and political figure whose works examined the differences and crossings of the East and the West, he is considered to be the founder of 'Adab Al-Mahjar' (immigrant literature). In 1911, he published the first Arab American novel *The Book of Khalid*, a spiritual work that marks the beginning of Arab American literature and draws from his own experience as an immigrant to the United States at the age of 12. It portrays a typical immigrant experience to New York City of two Lebanese boys, Khalid and Shakib. Highly influenced by Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet*, the central theme of the novel is an attempt to reconcile the culture and values of East and West. This was a universal concern in Rihani's work. Khalid connects with Arabs who struggled with the Ottoman Empire and with religious conflict and intolerance.

Born almost sixty years later, Edward Said (1935- 2003) was an American writer and academic of Palestinian origins. He was one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, and one of the leading voices in the field of postcolonial studies. He was an active intellectual with devotion to the Palestinian cause and to the Palestinians. Moreover, he was a man of many

contradictions. Although he was a Christian Arab, he both defended the Islamic world and felt close to Jews. This contradiction, along with his family history is what made him feel *out of place*, as the title of his memoir claims. In his memoir (1999), Said unveils the gradual and tortured development of his moral and intellectual self-identity. He was a Christian among Muslims, an Arab among English, and a Palestinian among Egyptians. Later on, he rediscovers the Arab world of his early years in Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt.

Born twenty five years later than Said, an Arab American writer of Jordanian ancestry D. Abu-Jaber often writes about issues of identity and culture. Her father's stories profoundly influenced her imagination. As a Jordanian immigrant, his stories were mostly about himself, his country, his family and the way they perceived the world. She also learned a valuable lesson from her American mother, which is how to listen to stories. However, her father was significantly strict and traditional, as Abu-Jaber reminisces: "In America, he constantly reminded us that we were good Arab girls; we weren't allowed to go out to parties or school dances. But then he encouraged us to study single mindedly, to compete as intensely as any boy, and to always make our own way in the world." (Abu-Jaber, 2007) In her novel *Arabian Jazz* (1993), there is a conflict between traditional Arab culture and Modern American culture. The widower Matussem Ramoud lives with his daughters Melvina and Jemorah. Matussem loves American Jazz and kitschy ornaments and always listens to his sister Fatima who is obsessed with marriage. She wants both her nieces to get married, but she insists on marrying off Jemorah because she has reached her thirties. Melvina is fully committed to her work; whereas, Jemorah is lost in the midst of it all. She's not quite sure what to make of her identity. Is she Arab? Is she American? Should she really marry?

Overall, the selected texts deal with the issues of identity, culture and language. The characters in the texts reflect the authors' own immigrant experience and their cultural confrontations. Accordingly, this thesis explores how group and individual identities are shaped and influenced by language. It also analyses how multicultural literature represents and interprets the impact of the immigrant experience in regards to identity formation.

2. Identity formation: Cultural Identities Across Borders

What about identity? I asked.
He said: It's self-defense ...
Identity is the child of birth, but
at the end, it's self-invention, and not
an inheritance of the past. I am multiple ...
Within me an ever new exterior. And
I belong to the question of the victim. Were I not
from there, I would have trained my heart
to nurture there deer of metaphor ...
So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be
a narcissist if need be
The outside world is exile,
exile is the world inside.
And what are you between the two?

Mahmoud Darwish, *Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading*

One's experience of identity is constructed not only through the process of being but more particularly through the process of becoming. Identities help individuals understand themselves but also help them generate a meaning of life. However, as the postmodern cultural world has repeatedly claimed, one is not born with an identity but rather born into it. As Darwish expresses it in the poem above, "Identity is the child of birth, but / at the end, it's self-invention, and not / an inheritance of the past." Darwish is addressing Edward Said's complex identity, which was shaped upon his diverse and conflicting life experiences. Similarly, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"(1990), Caribbean scholar Stuart Hall explores the "production" of Afro-Caribbean 'black' identity and its representation in films and other forms of visual art. The article reveals Hall's personal, political and scholarly concerns. Before moving to Britain, Hall spent his childhood and youth in Jamaica, which makes this essay a reflection of complex and conflicting processes of the creation of identity. He argues that:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices they represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (1990, 222)

Rather than a fixed essence buried in a historical past, the Caribbean identity, Hall claims, is shaped by both continuity and rupture. Caribbean identities share a common history of transportation and colonization, but there is also instability, unsettlement and displacement from one's homeland as a result of slavery. This identity of difference constitutes "what we really are" or with the intervention of history, "what we have become". In this regard, cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". Cultural identities have histories of their own, but they still undergo constant changes. It is through this definition that we can fathom the traumatic disposition of 'the colonial experience'. By assimilating individuals within a system of power, colonizing cultures formed or constructed the identities of colonial subjects. These submerged histories continue to surface in the identity struggles of the present.

In addition to the long history of colonization and present postcolonial experiences, migration has greatly affected the construction of identity and triggered urban and social marginality. If colonialism was responsible for the uneven interaction between cultural groups in the past, migration in the era of globalization is keeping alive similarly asymmetrical processes of cultural contact. And in both cases, the unbalanced clash of cultures results in the impositions of categories of centrality and marginality, belonging and alienation. In "The Distant Core: Social Solidarity, Social Distance and Interpersonal Ties in Core-periphery Structures" (2001), Sociologists Bourgeois and Friedkin claim that social marginality is generated in forms of

‘geographical isolation’, which in turn produces ‘social distance’. These forms spurred the theory of bordering that includes geographic and spatial scales. The borders can both include and exclude the others. In the midst of her explorations of border experience at the Mexican-American border in her popular *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Mexican American scholar Gloria Anzaldúa represents the borderlands between Mexico and the US as “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (Anzaldúa 1999, 25). She proposed a new way of thinking of border cultures which sparked the creation of border theory, thinking, being, knowing and creating from that in between space. The border and its individuals escape easy binary categories. The inhabitants of the Mexican American borderlands are neither in nor out, neither fully Mexican nor exclusively American. For Anzaldúa, border thinking shows how cultural elements, such as Christianity, claim to be pure, but were the result of mixing. Human beings are the result of mixing and synthesizing different cultures and different influences since the very beginning of time.

Anzaldúa describes the frustration she herself feels having a confused identity and a hybrid language, ‘Spanglish’. In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice* (1997), Hall contends that “language, then, is the property of neither the sender nor the receiver of meanings. It is the shared cultural ‘space’ in which the production of meaning through language – that is, representation – takes place” (Hall, 2). In other words, meaning can be produced and circulated in a culture or different cultures through representation, while language exists in different modes other than the traditional ones “the oral and written”. The connection between language, identity and cultural difference can be understood by analyzing the relationship between both. To begin with, language and cultural difference have a close link. For Hall, a culture produces “shared meanings”. This sharing of meaning, in turn, produces and

reinforces the notion of cultural difference. Language can also embody the cultural difference in which it could act as a “signifying practice” which, as Hall suggests, “is a symbolic practice which gives meaning or expression to the idea of belonging to a national culture”. He also asserts that the cultural context gives meaning to things rather than a thing having a meaning ‘in itself’. In Hall’s viewpoint, “meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we ‘belong’” (1997, 5). In this sense, language can construct and represent identity. Body language, for instance, can imply something about someone’s identity and the community to which they belong. These meanings are not only the result of the individual’s linguistic utterance, but can also originate through different means of communication, including mass media, literary and historical narratives, pop culture and so on.

In her narrative, Anzaldua details her struggles with her conflicting language and cultural identity. She believes that she and her people are not a part of the American melting pot, but rather came together as a separate group of Americans. Her identity can be considered a relational entity that identifies not only through what it is but also through what it is not. The traits that integrate her or other individuals and unify them, also distinguish them from different identities or what is perceived as “others”.

2.1 Otherness

Where identity is open onto plurality,
Not a fort or a trench

Mahmoud Darwish, *Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading*

If we follow the Merriam-Webster dictionary, identity, from Late Latin *identitas*, means not only “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” but also “the condition of being the same with something” as well as “sameness of essential or generic character.” However, the emphasis on sameness cannot hide the crucial role of otherness in the process of identity construction. How can sameness be constructed through otherness? It is known that otherness is “the way of defining an identity in relation to others” (Dumitrescu 2014, 141). Identities serve as a refuge that provides individuals with a securing sense of belonging; they gather and create communities around the borders separating them from others. Therefore, the process of creating identity relies as much on sameness as on conflict and division. In his article “Other/Otherness”, French geographer Jean-François Staszak (2008) argues that the dividing borders can be geographical or spatial. In either case, Staszak (2008) claims,

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“The US”, the self) constructs one or many dominated groups (“Them”, other) by stigmatizing a difference, real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. To state it naively, difference belongs to the realm of fact, and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. Thus, biological sex is difference whereas gender is otherness (2).

In this sense, he asserts that the process of ‘othering’ is attributed to an ideological discursive process, functioning within a system of power that aims at maintaining the hierarchy. It emphasizes difference as a means for creating division and feeding power relations. In the same line, he states that the creation of otherness (also called othering) consists of applying a principle that allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: them and us. The out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and its lack of identity. This lack is based on stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing and obviously simplistic. The in-group constructs one or more others, setting itself apart and giving itself an identity. Otherness and identity are inseparable, like the two sides of the coin. The other exists relative to the self and vice versa (Staszak 2008, 2). In this regard, the process of enculturation and representation that one’s identity is born into is designed to polarize and divide groups. It is the quest for power and domination that urges the construction of otherness. By emphasizing particularities that characterize the self, and seeking to demonize and dehumanize particularities and differences of the other, the system of power functions.

The distinction between those whom a system views to be in-group goes far to identify the out-groups or strangers as persons who lack identity, an identity that can only be celebrated if identical to the in-groups or the “self”. The ideological discourse is built upon stereotyping against and stigmatizing the other in order to feed a hierarchical system that is established on the duality superior/inferior, “the asymmetry in power is central to the construction of otherness” (Staszak 2008, 2). Otherness has always been associated with marginalized people, with those whose voices have been mugged in the social, religious and political world. Yet, one could argue that due to their being treated as ‘other’, marginalized minorities share a sense of sameness. A sameness that urges them to form a hybridized identity in order to integrate into the new culture

and be able to function within it. This hybridized identity is a combination of elements from their home culture and host culture.

2.2 Hybridity

“Of mimicry and man: the Ambivalence of colonial discourse.”

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

In the postcolonial era, now irreversibly infiltrated by experiences of migration and globalization, the question of identity has become more critical than ever. Rather than a single unified essence, contemporary identities are irremediably invaded by the outsider, by the “other”. This view of identity as based on difference, on the incorporation of otherness within, is widely represented through the concept and theory of “hybridity.” Hybridity, mestizaje, creolization, and syncretism are terms that have been recently proposed to refer to processes of cultural and social mixing in post/colonial situations. Hybridity is a key term in postcolonial theory. Hybridity is a term that is used to describe the space of contested identities; however, the term itself is contested over. It has created serious controversies among theorists some of whom see hybridity as a site of democratic struggle and resistance against empire. Whereas, others attack it as a neo-colonial discourse complicit with transnational capitalism, cloaked in the hip gap of cultural theory (Kraidy, 2002, 316). Marwan Kraidy (2005) argues that the term hybridity swings between theorists that push and others that pull to opposing poles. Some theorists view hybridity that characterizes the third space to be a platform with an emancipatory power while others view it to emphasize imperial domination

The term was mostly associated with the work of Homi. K. Bhabha (1994) who contends that the hybrid nature of what he terms the third space of enunciation is an empowering feature that breaks through binary divisions. In contrast to the traditional binary opposition of the colonial world, he postulates a hybrid space, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a

political object that is new, neither the self, nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. Simply put, hybridity provides a critique of the binaries between the “international/modern” and “local/traditional”. Hybridity, therefore, is considered a means of merging these two worlds into a created political, economic, social and cultural world where the international and local worlds co-exist and co-produce hybrid political orders. The challenge lies in conceiving of the time of political action and understanding as opening up a space that can accept and regulate the differential structure of the moment of intervention without rushing to produce a unity of the social antagonism or contradiction (Bhabha, 1994, 25). Bhabha adheres to the school of theorists who view hybridity as a beneficial notion; he insists on carving out the third space in order to create new hybrid identities and to allow new political subjects to emerge while celebrating difference as a force of openness to new structures. For him, the hybrid space is a space where objects can deconstruct and reconstruct their identities.

However, Bhabha’s account on hybridity was strongly criticized by theorists on the basis of the lack of equality between colonizer/colonized, the fact that negates the mutual celebration of differences and rebellion against hierarchy and domination. Ella Shohat in her essay *A Note on Postcolonialism* wrote in a speculative way a critique of hybridity, underlining how it could have troubling connections to imperialism. Shohat (1992) states that “Negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the violence of neo-colonialism, is crucial if hybridity is not to become a figure for the consecration of hegemony. As a descriptive catch-all term, ‘hybridity’ per se fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (Shohat, 1992, 13). For Shohat, the asymmetry in power that characterizes the hybrid third space substantiates hegemony and reasserts power relations.

The conditions of the world today trigger deeper complexities over the notion of identity and hybridity. Just like the colonial experience before, the global village today strikes at the heart of the issue of identity. In a world defined by mobility and openness, and that transcends the physical geographical borders, hybridity is to be perceived accordingly. In this vein, Kraidy (2002) invites a new approach to analyze hybridity in cultural globalization: "I believe that hybridity needs to be understood as a communicative practice constitutive of, and constituted by sociopolitical and economic arrangements. Understanding hybridity as a practice marks the recognition that transcultural relations are complex, processual, and dynamic" (317). For Kraidy, the concept of hybridity is not to be restricted to a "descriptive device", but rather to be understood as a communicative practice, always in process. This process of hybridization is a process of "open communication and safe exchange" between the involved parties. The different shared thoughts, ideas and approaches through dialogue are likely to become hybridized (Bernhard, 13).

Whether to be considered as an emphasis of an imprisonment, or a space of refuge where one gets to deconstruct his preordained cultural fixities, or to be approached within the realm of cultural globalization that views it as a communicative process that understands hybridity with regard to context, hybridity remains a critical practice that invites a multiplicity of factors into play. The social exclusion and inclusion politics that provoke hybridity, and the new mutations that it creates within subjects, reflect serious complexities and is the focus of the analyses of the novels that follow.

3. *The Book of Khalid*: Ameen Rihani's Reconciliation of East and West

Yes, I'm calling for an intellectual revolution that sweeps away the corruption, absurdity and error, which prevail in morals, customs, traditions, and doctrines.

Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*

Our world is enduring a phase of intense crisis. We live in a time of frustration where destructive divisions enhance hostility, violence, and hatred leading to juvenile delinquency, among many other things. In his article "Ameen Rihani and the Unity of Religion: The Politics of Time and the Politics of Eternity", Suheil Bushrui stresses the urgent need for reconciliation and understanding in order to avoid dire atrocities. Bushrui draws on Rihani's stands on understanding between religions and on people. For him, there are far more humanitarian unifying communalities between religions than shattering differences. This chapter explores the author's concern to reconcile the culture and values of the East and West through "Khalid", the lead of the novel. It also explores Arab-American relations politically and culturally and explores the importance of immigration in the novel.

Shaped by the duality of his existence, Rihani's writings emphasize freedom from the fixities of borders, national identities, and religious fanaticism. Rihani's upbringing in Lebanon like his contemporaries Khalil Gibran and Mikhail Naimy enhanced the sense of diversity; in this regard, Bushrui states that "All three felt they understood Lebanon's mission—the shaping of a model interreligious society, a multi-faith community in which diversity of belief would be celebrated and respected by all alike, irrespective of individual affiliations". Rihani's essential message was that of lounging for mystical union and abandoning politicizing religion, he maintained affinity to the Baha'I faith and practiced the "politics of time", where he strongly

believed that the ills of society can only be dealt with on the material/social level (2014, 45). In contrast, Gibran also glorified the Baha’I faith but dealt with the politics of eternity. His focus is oriented to cultivating the eternal spiritual attributes that can feed and transform the soul. Both Rihani and Gibran emphasize the quest of unity and spiritual humanitarian values.

Rihani’s *The Book of Khalid* reflects his existence’ oppositional yet complementary aspects; he carries within him both the material and the spiritual dimensions. In *the Book of Khalid*, Rihani created a prophetic discourse for him. Gibran could see the prophetic dimension of Khalid and documented it in an art work for the book. Like many other writers, Gibran admired Rihani for being the first Arab writer who writes about Arab experiences using the English language. Bushrui and Joe Jenkins praise *The Book of Khalid*, arguing that Rihani’s book “has foreshadowed Gibran’s the prophet in that it conveys teachings of the west in the language of the west, and was written by an Arab who appreciated the best of both worlds”(reference). The prophet and Khalid share a lot of similarities and differences: the prophetic dimension of the main characters allows them to discuss universal issues with their audience:

Here Khalid bursts in ecstasy about the higher spiritual kingdom, and chops a little logic about the I and the not-I, the Reality and the non-Reality, -- “God,” says the Hermit. “Thought”, says the idealist, “That is the only Reality,” And what is Thought, and what is God, and what is Matter, and what is Spirit? They are the mysterious vessels of Life, which are always being filled by Love and emptied by Logic. “The external world,” says the Materialist—“Does not exist,” says the Idealist. “’Tis immaterial if it does or not,” says the Hermit. And what if the three are wrong? The universe, knowable and unknowable, will it be affected a whit by it? (“Ch I: The Disentanglement of The Me”, 119).

Rihani's Arab-American and spiritual novel *The Book of Khalid* draws from his own experience as an immigrant, and revolves around his thoughts on the great issues that shaped the twentieth-century history. Like the hero of *The Book of Khalid*, Rihani expressed his disappointment towards his country's materialism and his distress to what he regarded as the dangerous effects of materialistic values on humanity's spiritual and social development. The early twentieth century was a period of revolutions and world wars, of economic instability, and of unexpected encounters between cultures and people that remained, at that time, secluded (see Bushrui 2013). This period was characterized in British poet and essayist W.H. Auden's poem as "The Age of Anxiety", where feelings of despair, anxiety, and estrangement led to a spiritual crisis that penetrated every corner of the planet.

The Book of Khalid is divided into three sections that reflect Rihani's philosophical assumptions: man, nature, and God. He views all men as brothers whose differences are to be celebrated and embraced; he praises nature as the "Mother eternal, divine, satanic, all-encompassing, all nourishing, all-absorbing"; and he stresses that God is in the heart of people and should not be used as an excuse for division. The novel was published in 1911 after Rihani returned to New York. "Scholars have praised this novel as a foundation of a new literary trend toward wisdom and prophecy which seeks to reconcile matter and soul, reason and faith, and the Orient and Occident. It is an attempt to expound the unity of religions and to demonstrate the harmony of the universe" (Bushrui, 2013: 30).

The novel is about two young Lebanese boys from Baal or Baalbek (at that time, a province of the Ottoman Empire) in Lebanon, Khalid and Shakib, who leave their native land to look for adventure and fortune in New York. They migrated to the United States and faced all the

traditional difficulties of the poor immigrants. They went to Ellis Island by sea and moved into a room under a building in the “Little Syria” community of Lower Manhattan. They started selling religious items, “trinkets and counterfeit” from the Holy land and such, experiencing the typical Arab-American immigrant experience in America. Khalid, eventually, turned away from the retail business and immersed in Western literature and in the unconventional New York intellectual societies. *The Book of Khalid* carries the sense of an autobiography. Through Khalid’s character, Rihani reflects upon his experience as a Lebanese migrant who spent years of his life in New York. Rihani’s prime focus lies on the reconciliation of two cultures, drawing on his experience. He asserts that one can always negotiate a peaceful existence that blends two different cultures to assimilate an identity that transcends the paradoxical particularities of cultures, but also that stresses the universal values that promote human life.

Bushrui argues in his analysis of *The Book of Khalid* that Rihani’s writings revolve around religion and liberty, claiming that peace among religions is his ideal. Rihani regards religious intolerance to be the stone crippling the development of the Arab world. As an obstacle that has been created by religious leaders who politicize religions and emphasize divisions, this obstacle holds together those who are brainwashed to fear liberty and view it to shake their values. He argues that the notion of tribalism and the creation of otherness raise hatred between groups, the politics of inclusion/exclusion is what result in frustration, this obstacle can only be overcome through practicing “disillusionment”; to disillusion the metaphors established about “the self and the other”.

In the midst of his literary pursuits, he got offered a position as a functionary and a warden for the Arab community and poured his energy on party politics. He didn’t last long in the job due to an insistence on moral integrity that created a sort of enmity with his superiors. Khalid, then, found himself behind bars for ten days. After his release, he decided to go back to

Lebanon with his friend Shakib. Upon his return to Lebanon, he continued to run into trouble, such as refusing to attend church services and spreading heretical ideas. Because of this, Khalid's request to marry Najma was declined by church leaders, and he was 'excommunicated' from the church: "Disappointed, distraught, diseased,--worsted by the Jesuits, excommunicated, crossed in love, --but with an eternal glint of sunshine in his breast to open and light up new paths before him, Khalid, after the fatal episode, makes away from Baalbek. He suddenly disappears. But where he lays his staff, where he spends his months of solitude, neither Shakib nor our old friend the sandomancer can say" (1911, 97).

This exclusion left him no choice but to move to the mountains and live in solitude. However, it did help him meditate on nature and come to conclusion that his "heretical" ideas on the difficulties faced in his homeland, whether political or cultural, match what he went through in America. This realization changed something within him, and he began travelling the Arab world and became a "voice" for his people on the importance of religious unity and scientific progress, and on liberation from the Ottoman Empire. During his travels, he meets a Baha'i woman, Mrs. Gotfry, with whom he shared views about love and religion. Khalid was outspoken, and he discussed matters of religious tradition and his views about the West in the Great Mosque of Damascus. However, it got him into trouble and the Ottoman officials ordered his arrest. Luckily, he escaped to the Egyptian desert with Mrs. Gotfry and joined Shakib to Baalbek. These religious, cultural and political confrontations reflect on the future destiny of America and its connection to the Arabs and their own struggle with the Ottoman Empire. These cultural, religious and political divisions or oppositions are feeding off otherness. Along the same lines, Staszak asserts that otherness is the outcome of a discursive process whereby a dominant in-group ("US", the self) forms one or multiple marginalized groups ("Them", other) by referring to

them as ‘different’. However, being different is being real, and being the ‘other’ is being part of the discursive process (Staszak 2008, 1). In a way, Rihani wanted to bring the two cultures together and make that difference a fact, acceptable and unified rather than divided. His commitment and perseverance are illustrated in Khalid’s return to develop a philosophy that engages the Arab public directly.

Throughout the novel, Khalid is flawed in the eyes of his community, but he is seen as a hero when it comes to accepting his duties. One can conclude that this solitude and unbalanced clash of cultures resulted in the impositions of categories of centrality and marginality, belonging and alienation. Sociologists Bourgeois and Friedkin (2001) contend that social marginality is reproduced in forms of ‘geographical isolation’. Consequently, it results in ‘social distance’. Khalid, in this case, is both included and excluded, struggling to come to terms with the perplexities and disappointments he encountered along the way.

In *the Borderlands/La Frontera*, Mexican American scholar Gloria Anzaldúa represents the borderlands between Mexico and the US as “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (Anzaldúa 1999, 25). For her, border thinking shows how things, such as Christianity, claim to be pure, but were the result of mixing. Khalid’s story follows Anzaldúa’s paradigm inasmuch as it reflects Rihani’s own experiences that shaped his view of spirituality, including his suspicion of organized religion and its power. His main aim was to promote a strong and mutually beneficial relationship between East and West as in “merging two worlds to form a third country – a border culture”, and to create peace between nations and religions. And it is this particular struggle to find and advocate peace that illustrates Edward Said’s *Out of Place*. Born almost one hundred years after Rihani, Said would further

Rihani's struggle to find peace within his autobiographical writings and the critical theories that made of him a renowned public intellectual.

4. *Out of Place*: The Gradual and Tortured Development in Said's Self-Identity

Along with language, it is geography – especially in the displaced form of departures, arrivals, farewells, exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging, and travel itself— that is at the core of my memories of those early years. Each of the places I lived in – Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, the United States– has a complicated, dense web of valences that was very much a part of growing up, gaining an identity, forming my consciousness of myself and of others.

Edward Said, *Out Of Place: A Memoir*

As a displaced Palestinian, who struggled all his life with his dual identity, Edward Said got caught between two languages and traditions, which made him feel not quite right and out of place. Said's life of travel, immigration and exile shaped his identity: "to me, nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements, from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years" (1999, 217). This chapter attempts to address the paradox of Said's dual advocacy of Palestinian issues and his rigid belief that an intellectual should be "fundamentally detached from political structures". From a theoretical perspective, this chapter also discusses and analyzes Said's cultural identity and his recurrent struggle to adjust to different cultures and languages.

As if furthering Anzaldua's positions as explored above, Said's memoir testifies to the absurdity of the struggle to adhere to a single and unitary sense of self, whether culturally or nationally grounded. Instead, Said maintains a troubled, though fluid and nomadic identity, an identity that refuses to be solidified, that inexorably flows and transgresses the lines of the political and the familial, that transgresses unitary views of the national and the linguistic. Since his birth, Said lived in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment. He doesn't even remember

which language he spoke first, English or Arabic. He says that “the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other. Each *can* seem like my absolutely first language, but neither is. I trace this primal instability back to my mother, whom I remember speaking to me in both English and Arabic, although she always wrote to me in English, once a week, all her life, as did I, all of hers”(Said 1999, 4). The line reveals the close relationship Said had with his mother and the English or American schooling he received along with his career as a Professor of English and Comparative Literature.

Although born in Jerusalem, Said and his family moved to Cairo, Egypt because of his father’s prosperous business. This transition affected Said’s sense of self, and it was at that moment that he began experiencing ‘the persona of the misfit’. Concerning the language, he started to feel uncomfortable in both English and Arabic at the age of fourteen; language became “a sensitive issue” because Arabic was unacceptable at Victoria college, and English was the language of the dominating British (197). Arabic was Said’s both mother tongue and emotional language, and English was mainly the language of instruction. Nelson Mandela once said: “if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his mother language that goes to his heart”. Said, however, did not have a chance to emotionally connect with his own traditions, beliefs and culture; his life was far more complicated and unsettled. Additionally, the fact that Said’s father Wadie hated Jerusalem, fought in the American army during World War I and took pride in his American citizenship, was one of the reasons that made Said’s position much more contradictory and complex. Said says that this complexity and multiplicity of his identity is “a form both of freedom and of affliction” (1999, 12). His profound

uncertainty triggered his response to his conflicting cultural identity and to the lack of a coherent sense of belonging to a single community and heritage:

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian and so on. I found I had two alternatives with which to counter what in effect was the process of challenge, recognition, and exposure, questions and remarks like "What are you?"; "But Said is an Arab name"; "You're American?"; "You're an American without an American name, and you've never been to America"; "You don't look American"; "How come you were born in Jerusalem and you live here?" [In Cairo]; "You're an Arab after all, but what kind are you? A Protestant?" (5-6)

Although an Arab, he always felt as a foreigner to the Egyptians. Said's conflict with his identity is a reproduction of his mother's own experience. As a Danish immigrant who went to America after World War II, she always felt "out of place". His mother Hilda Said did her best to adopt the American culture and wanted her kids to be like everyone else. However, she still felt inadequate and uncomfortable. She even stopped speaking Danish at home because she once heard Said say a word in Danish while playing with his "American" friends. And that scared her even more because she thought that any sign of foreignness might exclude them during the xenophobic years. Therefore, this division is a result of a discursive process, identified as otherness. In his article "Other/Otherness", French geographer Jean-François Staszak (2008) argues that the dividing borders can be geographical or spatial, and that otherness functions within a system of

power that aims at maintaining the hierarchy. His mother's fears show that they are classified in two hierarchical classes: them and us. However, as members of a marginalized group, Said and his mother shared a sense of sameness. In turn, this sameness led them to construct a hybridized identity to adapt to the new American culture and be able to function within it.

As a hybrid individual that emerged in the public realm and an intellectual who had access to a wide range of political and aesthetic forms of representation, Said experienced a sense of difference and tension between his two cultures, but at the same time, gained a new form of hybrid identity. In this sense, Homi K. Bhabha contends that hybridity is a means of merging two worlds into a created political, economic, social and cultural world where the international and local worlds co-exist and co-produce hybrid political orders. The collapse of Palestine, the Lebanese civil war, the Nasser years in Egypt, and his family's overwhelming historical background played a huge part in dealing with the "distance and apartness" Said felt in himself:

By "complexity" I mean a kind of reflection and self-reflection that had a coherence of its own, despite my inability for some years to articulate this process. It was something private and apart that gave me strength when "Edward" seemed to be failing. My mother would often speak about the Badr "coldness", a sort of reverse and distance radiated by some of her cousins, uncles, and aunts. There was much talk of inherited traits ("You have the Badr hunchback", she would say, or "Like my brothers, you're not a good businessman, you're not clever that way"). I connected this sense of distance, apartness in myself with the need to erect a kind of defense of that other non-Edward self." (165)

During Said's childhood and teen years, his parents dissociated themselves from politics. Although this changed later, they still were very cautious about it and preferred to stay out of it. Said writes, "politics always seemed to involve other people, not us. When I began to be involved in politics twenty years later, both my parents strongly disapproved. 'It will ruin you', said my mother. 'You're a literature professor', said my father: 'stick to that'" (1999, 117). The controversial political ordeal was his mother obtaining a United States citizenship after the 40 years quest. Said, his father and his four sisters were American citizens. Ironically, his mother became an American citizen on her deathbed (1999, 117).

Out of place is mainly about Said's relationship with his parents. And his relationship with his father was more about intimidation, discipline and authoritarian patriarchy: "I called my father Daddy until his dying day, but I always sensed in the phrase how contingent it was, how potentially improper it was to think of myself as his son. I never asked him for anything without great apprehension or hours of desperate preparation. The most terrible thing he ever said to me- I was twelve then- was, "'You will never inherit anything from me; you are *not* the son of a rich man," though literally of course I was'" (1999, 18). A confession as such made Said think about having a "discrediting past" and an "immoral future". His sense of self was put into question, and once again this instability made him feel uncomfortable and out of place. One can say that Said's cultural identity was positioned within a system of power, both in the public context and in the familial environment. Additionally, his father adopted and adapted to the colonizing American culture, where he became dogmatically pro-American, raised the American flag on days of celebration, and ate thanksgiving dinner in Egypt. These biographical facts along with being 'controlled' were a major part of his identity construction. His cultural identity had a history of its own. Yet, it went through constant changes. Along these lines, Stuart Hall asserts that cultural

identity, with the intervention of history, constitutes “what we have become” or simply a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. Said’s personal history magnificently illustrates this nature of identity as processual, always in transit, always a matter of responding to and positioning the self before the discourses he interacts with.

As a political activist, Said’s constant facade was the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and there were a few Middle Eastern political events that occurred at the time he was studying in the U.S. The Lavon Affair is a case in point, insomuch as “the Israeli plot to blow up American affiliated cinemas and libraries in Cairo was devised to sour relations between Nasser’s government and the United States” (Murphy 2004). After his return to New York, Palestine was appearing and disappearing in their lives. His family adjusted to the American life style, and the city “reduced one to an inconsequential atom, making me question what I was to all this, my totally unimportant existence giving me an eerie but momentary sense of liberation for the first time in my life” (1999, 140). Later on, Said adopted different views and conflicting opinions about both Palestine and Israel. However, this newly formed perspective somewhat liberated him and shaped his way of thinking.

With that in mind, migration had also affected the construction of Said’s identity. He was in Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, and the United States and each place had a significant entanglement and connection with his self-identity. As clearly stated in his memoir from the title itself, Said always felt out of place. Because he was politically and physically excluded, he had a sense that he was not “home in his own skin”. At the end of the book, he explicitly stated that although he never felt entirely at home and was a misfit, he accepted and acknowledged the fact that being out of place compelled him to acquire a much more defined sense of self and a distinctive and liberating intellectual perspective on society and culture. For him, being out of

place is a sort of a good trait that he kept going back to: “A form of freedom, I’d like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place” (1999, 295). Along the same lines, American Jordanian Diana Abu-Jaber, who was born twenty five later than Said, has also struggled with her Arab identity. In her book *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber deals with the issue of being an Arab in America and having a hybrid cultural identity.

5. *Arabian Jazz*- Diana Abu-Jaber: What Does it Mean to Be an Arab in America?

I'm tired of fighting it out here, I don't have much idea of what it is to be Arab, but that's what the family is always saying we are. I want to know what part of me Arab. I haven't figured out what part is our mother, either. It's like she abandoned us, left us alone to work it all out.

Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*

Jordanian American author Abu-Jaber moved back and forth between Jordan and New York, where she stumbled upon cross-cultural issues and started questioning who she really was. In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber writes about what it means to be Arab, American, an immigrant, a daughter and a thirty year old woman who is trying to find her sense of self in a hybridized culture. This chapter explores Abu-Jaber's self identity and background through her relatives. Matuseem, the Jordanian father, widower and Jazz drummer annoyed by his sister Fatima, the typical Arabic aunt who is obsessed with seeing her nieces marrying Arab men. Melvina is dedicated to her job as a nurse, whereas Jemorah, who is nearly turning thirty, doubts her identity.

Having two different cultures, two families, two languages and two identities urges them to mix their individual and collective identities as Arab Americans. In this case, the protagonist Jemorah Ramoud, struggled the most. She lost her mother Nora, who was white, at the age of three on a trip to Jordan, and she was confused by her father's close relations with his relatives who lived in Syracuse's Arab community. Jemorah never understood the traditional Arab customs, and she always felt pressured to live up to them. When her aunt Fatima heard that she was turning thirty soon, she made a big fuss about it. Jeromah became the main topic of her Arab

relatives' gossip: "No time for nerves', Fatima said, surveying the room. She took a long swig on her mai tai. "Time for arranging. Husband time"' (61).

Abu-Jaber's humor throughout the novel also covers a lot of serious and important issues. For instance, the clash between the past and the present, between the ways it's done in the "Old country" and the lifestyle in the "New" one. Abu-Jaber's central focus is on Jemorah's dual allegiance, as she is pulled by traditional Arab culture and modern American culture, in a sense Jemorah personifies African American sociologist W. E. B. DuBois's sense of "double consciousness, since she experiences that sense of in a sense of "looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (B. Du Bois, 1903). Jemorah's Arab family along with her mom's death left her confused, alienated and somewhat controlled:

I've spent so much of my life not daring to look up, look around at what there might be for me. I've spent so much time trying to please her, to guess what she wanted. And listening to Aunt Fatima telling me how to be good, to please my mother, to be a good girl, which means, as far as I can tell, to shrink down into not-thinking, not-doing. Well, I don't want to waste away doing jobs that make me numb. You say our mother wanted us to live freely. I don't want to keep hanging on to a place or dream that comes from someone who is not around anymore. I'll marry to move to Jordan. And I'll be free because I'll be with people who have my name and who look like me (p.309).

The unbalanced clash of cultures results in the impositions of categories of centrality and marginality, belonging and alienation. Here, Jemorah thinks that if she went back to Jordan, she'd

restore her identity because there are people who look like her and have the same name as hers. Therefore, the geographical isolation along with the social distance formed a “border culture”, where she felt obliged to conform to the Arab customs just so she can restore her sense of self and even her cultural identity.

As an Arab-American herself, Abu-Jaber is a daughter of both cultures just like Jemorah and Melvina. Her father might represent Matuseem, who does not agree with Fatima’s traditional views of women. Two narratives “The Moon and the Gazelle”, and “Za’enti da’ar the Beauty of the house” are told by their father in the novel about immigration and a female who is obsessed with her physical beauty. The Beauty of the House is linked to Arab immigration to America, which initially begins with one person and ends with bringing the whole family to America, as if the house has burned into ashes and immigration was the solution and the getaway (96-97). The other story was about the gazelle that sees the moon in the water place, a lake, and then asks the moon in the sky about the identity of the moon in the water. The sky moon said it is her “sister moon of the water. Don’t drink her up or the fishes will swim out of the water to find her.” Then the gazelle tries to drink her, thinking that it will be beautiful like the moon and “the fishes will make parties and go dance around her”. But when the gazelle drinks the water moon, a hump comes “on her back, and turns to camel” (76-77). In other words, this story was about a woman’s reflection of how she sees her self-image, and the need to conform to beauty standards and obey. This transformation from a gazelle to a camel disturbed Jemorah’s thoughts and triggered the confusion. At first, in her dreams, Jordan was seen as the moon in the sky, but then her mother replaced Jordan and became the moon: “the moon became Jordan, the place where her father came from. Her father was the gazelle...Sometimes she woke crying from this dream, and then her mother’s face would replace the moon and her fingers like candles would smooth back Jem’s

hair. 'Hush, Hush', she said. 'Those are only stories'" (p.77). This shows the hardships she faced to get to a stable identity. She was torn between America and Jordan.

The stories imply that one should stick to one's identity and culture and there lies the contradiction. Melvina and Jemorah were Arab-Americans. They were made up of both identities, both cultures and both languages. They were both torn between Jordan and America. They can't give up half of their identity, half of who they are just to adhere to the Arab traditions. Yet, they can take advantage of being cultural hybrids, in which the process of hybridization is a process of "open communication and safe exchange" between the involved parties. The different shared thoughts, ideas and approaches through dialogue are likely to become hybridized (Bernhard, p.13).

Since Jemorah received a racist treatment and experienced alienation in America, she decided to marry her cousin Nassir and fulfill her over-controlling Aunt Fatima's wishes. "I'm tired of fighting", she said (p. 307). "I don't fit in. I haven't put together a life. I'm still living at home. I've been working at a job I hate. I'm so tired of being a child, being good, wanting people to like me. They don't like Arabs" (p.328). However, after questioning her identity "I want to know what part of me is Arab" (p.308), she eventually decides to stay in America: "She didn't think she would ever live there again. The house looked Strange as a shipwreck in a sea of country fields and telephone wires threading Euclid to the rest of the world. It could be, for Matussem, a private home, a place to create his life. But she had recognized, as the hiker turned to face her, the mystery of this fate, something she could crack only by going into it: back to school" (p. 362).

6. Conclusion

We are living in a world of constant change, where colonialism has reshuffled the world and globalization has challenged all the notions of geographical and spatial borders. In addition to this, negotiating cultural fixities has become crucial to fit the new conditions of today's world. The bitter lived experiences of colonialism together with the urge of coping with the world of "western globalization" have provoked some kind of identity crisis. Therefore, the aim of the thesis was to investigate cultural identity, as well as to offer an analysis of the various perceptions in immigrant narratives from Edward Said's struggle with his sense of self to Abu-Jaber's hybridized identity and her conflict with Arab traditions and American culture. The thesis examined the alienation of the postcolonial Arab American authors from within their homeland, alienation explored in these texts was not a geographical one but rather a spatial one that is subject to the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

The ideological divide created spatial and indentitary otherness; this notion presented a fertile platform for examining Staszack's spatial otherness that could be ascribed to cultural rather than geographical definitions. Spatial constructs and practices are based on the discursive construction of otherness to separate the self from the other, individuals who belong to the same geographical context feel dispersed due to the discursive ideological construction of otherness.

The thesis stresses the complexity and diversity of the concept of 'cultural identity'; it was stretched to accommodate the theoretical framework in which this thesis operated. The analyzed extracts declared that the experience of the ideological confrontation oriented toward obtaining power have several facets; it has political, economic, psychological and social implications that further complicate identity crisis. The present research contributes to the field of sociology and

cultural studies; it tackles identity crisis that relocates the postcolonial thoughts in the time of globalization.

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