Diaspora and Multiculturalism in Reconstructing the Cultural Identity of Arabs in America

Abdalwahid Abbas Noman[a],*

[a]Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University. Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India. Abdalwahid Abbas Noman is a Ph.D. research scholar at Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad, India. He received bachelor's degree in English language from IBB University- Yemen 2003, and a master's degree in English literature from B.A.M. University, Aurangabad, India, 2013. His current working is in the cultural studies. He is interested in Arab-American writings, cultural and ethnic studies and media. He was a visiting lecturer of Mass Communication and Soft Skills in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, B.A.M. University, Aurangabad, India and media.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

Diaspora and multiculturalism have been playing an important role in reconstructing the cultural identity of Arab immigrants in America. This paper attempts to highlight the roots, values and beliefs of Arab culture and explores how Arabs understand their culture and identity. The significance of the study is to draw attention to the original culture of Arabs and understanding the religious, cultural and social influences on the lives of Arabs in America. It attempts to take a deep dive into their culture, daily life, customs and traditions and highlights the issues that negatively cause the cultural perplexity among Arab-Americans from a socio-political perspective. Additionally, it sheds light on the history of the Arab immigration to the United States and hardly brings together essential efforts to present an important description of Arab culture for the reader, mainly for those who are non-Arabs, to know more about Arabs. Moreover, another focus of this study is to bring a space for an Arab culture in the multicultural communities and have a closer scrutiny on the historical background of Arab-American culture and identity. Finally, the paper aims at focusing on a role made by the western hegemonic discourse in redefining Arabs and their culture in America.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Arabs in America, their daily life experiences, and their writings lead the researchers to realize that there is an immense influence of diaspora and multiculturalism on the cultural identity of Arabs in America. Arab-Americans have been viewed by the West as a monolithic population; yet, recent studies have shown that the Arab-Americans are heterogeneous and of diverse culture. On the other hand, the Arab culture, as one of the richest and oldest cultures in the world, can be considered a bridge not only between Arab-American generations but also between Arab-Americans and American culture. In the case of Arab immigrants in America, multiculturalism and its celebration of cultural diversity have aligned with the positive image of Arab-Americans as a successful minority due to their cultural values and ethnic attitudes. An important element of the study is to explore the cultural identity adopted by Arab-Americans in the host society. Under the umbrella of 'diaspora', the study will engage with the position of Arab culture in diaspora, the impacts of multiculturalism and the issues relating to identity, domination, and oriented media. The focus of this research also requires an in-depth investigation of the inclusion of immigration of Arabs to America, their diaspora, Arab culture and positive contributions to evaluate the effects of Western hegemonic discourse in redefining their culture.

Regarding the construction of culture and identity, the study focuses on how the Arab immigrants and their descendants reconstructed their cultures and identities away from home. The theme of the cultural identity of the Arab Diasporas discussed in this study provides a reading of the complex transnational processes and influences which have shared in reconstructing their identity. At the same time, the study provides an insight into how Arab immigrant identities, once created, are contested, including the strength of these identities, and their impact on relations with other minorities in an ever-changing American society. Hence, the growing interest in the Arab culture and history and the critical and cultural studies of racial and ethnic groups call for an understanding of the concept of the Arab diaspora. The study is based on a descriptive analytical method. It has been guided by a number of studies, research and articles which have dealt with the concepts of diaspora, multiculturalism, culture and identity.

1. WHO ARE ARABS?

The term "Arab" refers to more than three hundred million people living in more than twenty-two countries. It is not simply a race as there are white and black Arabs; it is not language, as there are Arabic-speaking Jews who are not considered Arabs; and it is not a religion as Arabs can be a part of any religion from Islam to Christianity or even atheism. There is no clear definition of Arabs and this lack of a clear definition results from the diversity of people from the Middle East. From an anthropological standpoint, an Arab could be defined as anyone born in the Middle East or anyone who speaks the Arabic language and claims a connection to Arab culture (Young & Shami, p.113).

Nuha Naim Abudabbeh in her essay "Arab family" writes "If asked to define "the Arab Nation", most Arabs would say it includes all peoples who speak the Arabic language and claim a link with nomadic tribes of Arabia, whether by descent, affiliation, or by appropriating the traditional ideals of human excellence and standards of beauty" (p.333). "The term 'Arab' is a linguistic and cultural term representing those who share a common first language, a culture and a history. [it is] an area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast" ("Arab World").

The aforementioned definitions about Arab as a nation are related to cultural, social and geographical aspects. Hence, what is meant by the term "Arab-American"? Michael Suleiman, an Arab-American scholar, in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future* (1999) indicates that the term "Arab-Americans" refers to the immigrants to North America from the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and their descendants whose states are members of The League of Arab States and have some Arabic-speaking populations (Suleiman 1).

2. ARAB IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

America has been one of the most attractive destinations for Arab immigrants for a long time due to their belief that it is the land of salvation. It is a place where they can enjoy the social justice, cultural and religious diversity away from the social oppression they are facing in their homelands. They have believed that it is a land of liberation and the best place to escape from wars and poverty. An overview of the history of Arab-American immigration to America provides us with information on the challenges they have faced and the success they have achieved. It highlights other factors which have influenced the formation of their cultural identity. Michael W. Suleiman indicates that Arabs immigration to the United States can be divided into two major waves of Arab immigration to the United States (1). The first lasted from the 1870s to World War II in 1940. The second extended from World War II through present day. Most of the immigrants of the first wave were from the Greater Syria region of the Middle East and were predominantly Christian. Most of those immigrants became peddlers once they arrived in the United States. This was an attractive profession for them because it did not require much training or knowledge of English. A majority of this group was uneducated. Before the World War I, issues that were close to Arabs in their homelands were also very salient in their new home. Many remained connected to the issues that were plaguing their countries of origin. The second wave consisted mostly of people with college degrees or those seeking them (Suleiman, pp.1-9). An increase in civil war and conflict in the Middle East forced many to immigrate to America. During the decades of the second wave, there were also improvements in communication and transportation. This group originated from all over the Middle East. The religion shifted as well. Most of the people in the second wave were Muslim. A factor common to both of these waves was an emphasis on family as the most important institution (Abudabbeh, pp.333-337).

3. ARAB DIASPORA

The word 'diaspora' or *Al-Shatat* in Arabic means to be exiled, scattered or dispersed. The *Cambridge Dictionary,* an online dictionary, defines Diaspora as: "the spreading of people from one original country to other countries". The original term of 'Diaspora' as Cohen Robin in *Global Diasporas* mentions: "The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb speiro (to sow) and the preposition dia (over)". "It signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in

exile" (ix). William Safran in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" points out that the term has its Western beginnings in the Jewish diaspora communities, extending to groups "such as the Armenian, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Kurdish, Palestinian, Parsi, and Sikh, whose experiences of expatriation, institution building, cultural continuity, and refusal to relinquish their collective identities have demarcated them from mere immigrants" (p.36). Vijay Agnew in *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* mentions that 'diaspora' indicates "the dispersion of a group of people from one center or two or more peripheral places, as well as to the collective memory" He goes further to state that "Diasporas are usually communities that have been unwillingly dispersed by slavery, genocide, war, expulsion, indentured labour, political exile or refugee exodus" (p.193).

The concept of diaspora in the Arabic discourse is no longer confined to the Palestinian diaspora, which happened in the last century after the Palestinian *Nakba* (Catastrophe), but it is rather used to refer to recent geographical spaces of Arabs who live permanently in countries other than their country of origin. The main causes of the Arab diaspora are either wars or economic and social instability. Hence, the wars and security incidents are dramatically increasing in different countries in the Arab world. The results of these events have forced millions of Arabs to escape the scourge of war and to take illegal ways and means to reach the exile. In narrating the story of the Arab diaspora one cannot ignore the Middle Passage, the journey from the Arab World to the Americas or Europe, especially whose journeys were accompanied by horrors and sufferings like Palestinians in 1948 and Syrians after 2011. For the Arab immigrants and refugees who have left their countries to pursue their dreams or to seek safe places in America or Europe, migration has been created as the agency to connect them not only to the global community but also to the places of their original ancestors. These immigrants, displaced people and their descendants who have resettled around the world constitute the modern Arab diaspora.

Figures and estimates recorded by human rights organizations on the large numbers of Arab refugees in diaspora are tragic and unimaginable. The total number of Arab population abroad is approximately 60 million living in different countries in the world. The largest groups of them live in Indonesia, where about 15 million Indonesians are of Arab origins. Brazil comes as the second country with 12.5 million of Arabs. ("Arab diaspora"). Berry's organization estimates the total Arab-American population to be closer to 3.6 million in America. (Wang). Phillip Connor in his article "Conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen" mentions that "Between 2005 and 2015, the number of displaced migrants in the Middle East grew fourfold, from about 5 million to about 23

million. Much of this rise was the result of the recent conflict in three countries – Syria, Iraq and Yemen).

The story of the Arab diaspora began in 1948 when most of Palestinians were expelled outside Palestine. That massive displacement is known in the Palestinian history and literature as *Nakba*. The *Nakba* is defined as "the process of ethnic cleansing in which an unarmed nation was destroyed and its population displaced to be replaced systematically by another nation" (PCBS). It is the main reason for the Palestinian diaspora. Most of these dispersed people went to Arab countries and still live there as refugees in camps. The rest of them went to foreign countries and they cannot come back home until today. Statistical reports estimate that three-quarters of Palestinians left their homes in 1948. In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said, an Arab-American academic and thinker, writes: "According to the most precise calculation yet made, approximately 780,000 Arab Palestinians were dispossessed and displaced in 1948" (p.14). *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* estimates the number of Palestinian abroad are 5.46 million in Arab countries and around 685 thousand in foreign countries (PCBS). The Jewish historian, Ilan Pappe, in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* describes the Nakba as the "mechanism of the 1948 ethnic cleansing" "the crime the Zionist movement committed against the Palestinian people in 1948" (xvi).

Therefore, the Nakba is the traumatic event that occupies a significant attention of the Palestinian history, memory and literature. Zahia Salhi in her study "Defining the Arab Diaspora" remarks that ironically, as if the land of Palestine is the source of dispersal, the gathering of the Jewish Diaspora in Israel meant the dispersal of the Palestinian nation across the world to become the modern days' Diaspora (2). Edward Said in elucidates, "Perhaps this is the most extraordinary of exile's fates: to have been exiled by exiles, to relive the actual process of up-rooting at the hands of exiles. ("Reflections on Exile", 187). Recently millions of Syrians, Yemenis, Libyans and Iraqis have left their homes as a result of civil wars in their countries. "There are so many refugees fleeing for their lives. Half of the 23 million population of Syria have been forced from their homes, with four million becoming refugees in other countries. Some 2.6 million Iraqis have been displaced by Islamic State –Isis– offensives in the last years and squat in tents or half-finished buildings. Unnoticed by the outside world, some 1.5 million people have been displaced in South Sudan since fighting there resumed at the end of 2013" ("Refugee Crisis").

The Western world seeks to create a global culture which dominates the culture of the 'Other'. They use all advanced technical mechanisms that have brought communication between nations and peoples to spread the Western culture and lifestyles among the peoples of the third world. For instance, Americans view their culture as a global culture that must become part of the lives of

other people. They want the others to be like them in their behavior and appearances. They have to dress like Americans, speak English, adopt Western customs and traditions, etc. Because of the intensive marketing of Western culture, a group of Arab-Americans call for the alienation of their nation. They want to strip Arabs of their identity, religion, language, traditions and lifestyle. They consider that culture is like other goods and products that can be bought and used.

Therefore, the Western governments are now more aware of the assimilation of immigrants from all nationalities and from different cultures, including Arabs and Muslims. The governments coordinate their efforts and share experiences through ministries and specialized organizations to integrate the immigrants into Western societies. They aim at making them easily adapt to the cultures and values of the West. As a result of the Western integration policies, today millions of Arabs suffer from an intellectual crisis, which is a serious threat to Arab identity. Thus, Arabs in America today who feel they are Americans of Arab origin, will not exist in the next two or three decades. Their future children will either be Arab-Americans if they maintain their cultural and religious identity, or pure Americans just remember that their parents or grandparents migrated from Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Lebanon, etc. This is because the current American administration has already closed the doors of immigration from some Arab countries. This situation means that the Arab presence will not be provided with new members who have mature identities as they did in the previous decades of last two centuries.

4. ARAB CULTURE: ROOTS, VALUES, AND BELIEFS

Arab culture is the real image that reflects the social and intellectual values of Arabs. It contributes to the sustainability of the values and civilization of Arab society. It is an umbrella of the collective socio-historical heritage comprises of language, beliefs, arts, music, literature, gastronomy, attitudes, morals, laws, habits, values, customs, etc. These concepts are acquired by the Arab nations whether individually or in a group. The roots of Arab culture existed in the history thousands of years ago. In pre-Islamic times, Arabs were nomadic people inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Al-Sham, Egypt and Arabian Maghreb (Noman 182). Therefore, Arab culture is associated with the concept of civilization. When the study mentions Arab civilization, it refers to all components and factors that led to the emergence of that civilization; the culture is one of these important components. Culture is considered the main guide in building Arab civilization. Arabs created nations and built civilizations throughout different periods of time. They had their own culture and lifestyles and practiced them in

all aspects of life. Some examples of the ancient States and civilizations of Arabs come to mind like Sumerians (2159-2350 BC), Akkadians Empire (2350–2170 BC), the Babylonians (1594-1894 BC), Assyrians Empire (1250 BC–612 BC), Chaldeans (539- 626BC), Nile Valley Civilization (3150- 332 BC), Sheba (1200-275 BC), Himyarite Kingdom (110 BCE- 525 CE), etc. (Noman 182).

The reciprocal roles of Arabs as a nation and Islam as a religion create essential efforts to empower both. Therefore, Arabs were the carriers of the Islamic civilization and Islam is the soul and the core of the Arabic culture. It should be noted that with the advent of Islam in the 17th century and its expansion into parts of Asia and Africa, culture and Arabic language spread at the same time. Millions of people spoke Arabic and adopted Arab culture in their own lives. Therefore, Islam made a profound influence on the Arab world. It became a center that affects their activities, thoughts, feelings and regulates their everyday life through its positive commandments. During the investigation the Arab culture, the study has found slight differences in the cultural styles of Arab communities from one country to another. These differences may be due to the attitudes of Arabs in accepting or resisting the colonial culture. The most important means that have helped Arab culture resist the imperial culture are Islam, language, and tribal customs and traditions.

Hence, Arab culture still has a lot of features and relations to the previous culture regardless of the decorations of modernity and globalization. It is not easy for the researcher to cover all aspects of Arab culture in one research paper due to its various values, beliefs and rich backgrounds. In this context, some of the major pillars of Arab culture such as language, religion, family, marriage and divorce, parent and child relationships, sexuality and hospitality will be discussed.

Language
Arabic is the language in which the Holy Quran was revealed to prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Qur'an has played a great role in the dissemination and protection of the Arabic language over thousands of years. Allah says, "We have, without a doubt, sent down the Message (Qur'an); and we will assuredly guard it (from corruption)" (15:9). Therefore, Arabic has gained a great importance in its strength, craftsmanship, and the depth of meanings and words. It is one of the most widely spoken languages around the world, and many non-native speakers are interested in studying it. It was the literary language in the pre-Islamic period and in the 6th century it became the ritual language of Islam. It is the sixth official language in the United Nations and the fourth most widely spoken language in the world. More than 295 million people speak Arabic as an official language. At present, the number of speakers in Arabic has increased

particularly in the Muslim world and this situation leads to preservation of the Arab culture. The Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonizing the Mind* believes that language is the driving force, the spirit behind people, and the "carrier of culture" (13). He emphasizes that "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature; the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (16). The first task of the colonizers was to destroy the native culture of colonized counties by destroying their language. During the colonial era, the Arab culture was deliberately weakened, targeted, and ignored in some Arab countries. Thiong'o remarks:

> For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or. the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised. (16)

According to Roger Savory "The most important formative factor creating the Arab consciousness is the Arabic language, which is the bearer of their culture, the vehicle of their history and the sacred tongue of the religion of the majority" (147). So, Arabization was accomplished by intermarriage, conversion to Islam, or adoption of the Arabic language. As a result, some populations as the Christian communities of Copts in Egypt and Maronites in Lebanon are Arabs by speech, not by race or religion (qtd. in Nobles et al. 184-190).

Religion

For many Westerners, Arab culture is synonymous with Islam. Although the historical roots of Islam reside in the geography of the Arab world, these two ideas have become associated in ways that can be distracting. A large majority of Arabs are Muslim, but approximately 8% to 10% of Arabs are not (Macgregor & Godfrey 4). The binary between Arab and non-Arab existed, and cultural difference was recognized. Nonetheless, people belonging to different ethnic, religious and cultural background co-existed because these differences did not cause problems in daily life. People were respected to follow their beliefs. Moreover, Christians, Jews and Muslims would use each other's amulets when theirs did not work (Mazower, p.86).

Arabs have many virtues and moral values. Islam plays an important role in promoting and strengthening these values, maintaining good morals and eliminating negative ones. In her study "Gender, Race, and Symbolic Boundaries: Contested Spaces of Identity Among Arab American Adolescents" Kristine J. Ajrouch examined the ethnic description children of Lebanese and Palestinian immigrants, second-generation immigrants, who must negotiate between the cultures of the parents and the host country. According to the study, cultural norms are informed by religious norms among Muslim-Arab Americans in the United States. She found that the values of Islam have shaped and confirmed Arab cultural values and thus, continue to influence, however indirectly, the expectations of those who do not participate directly in religious activities. She also found that Arab-American girls must negotiate between two worlds and two sets of cultural values that often seem incompatible. Restrictions on girls' behavior represent a social practice whereby boundaries emerge to designate in-group membership. However, these social practices do not go unchallenged (pp.387- 388).

Moreover, Islam has played a major role in the cultural and civic changes in the Arab history and societies. It has contributed to the development and dissemination of a culture of diversity among nations. In the golden ages of Arab civilization, while Westerners killed each other for religious reasons, Arabic civilization established a society surrounded by the social justice, peace and coexistence. They lived in peace with the multi-religious people including Jews. They were doing this to comply with the commands of Islam that calls for coexistence, cooperation, peace and freedom of choice and beliefs for every individual in the world. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an "For every one of you we appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So live with one another in virtuous deeds."(5:48) "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:148). For that people will know each other and live in peace. Allah says: "O mankind, surely we have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware" (49:13). So, what is happening today in the Arab world of terrorism and bloodshed comes as results of the deviation of true teachings of Islam. There is also a clear role of the imperial intelligence to distort the image of pure Islam, the religion of peace and mercy even with animals.

Family

In the Arab culture, family is one of the most important aspects of building a society. The Arab society is known for its strong relations and multiple forms of family. The relations between women and their relatives continue despite their separation from their families. Beitin et al in "Family Values and Traditions" mention that "Traditional Arab families have many members who live in close proximity and depend upon each other for many reasons such as social needs, economic support, and cultural and religious maintenance"(69). There are three types of family units in the Arab societies; the first one is the nuclear unit, which consists of father, mother, and children. The second family unit is the *Aila*, an extended family. It consists of father, mother, unwed children, as well as married sons and their wives and children. Unwed

paternal aunts, and, sometimes, unmarried paternal uncles are also a member in the *Aila*. The third type of family is the *Ashirah*, which means clan. It consists of all individuals and families who claim descent from the same paternal ancestor.

The saying "heaven is underneath the feet of mothers" is a clear evidence for the place of the mother in the Arab culture. The position of mother holds a great amount of respect among the Arabs. Kristine Ajrouch remarks that "Women are viewed with high status with respect to their child-rearing and domestic functions, while their engagement in the public sphere may be relatively limited or valued less. On the other hand, men adopt the primary economic responsibility of the family" (qtd. in Amer, p.165). Breastfeeding is traditionally encouraged within Arab societies. Islam exhorts women to breastfeed her child for two years. Among Arabs, both birth and death are usually met with great community and family participation. In the context Arab cultural norms, these two occasions are events in which support is expected from the extended family unit and the wider community.

Marriage and Divorce

In the Arab cultural values, men and women are created as a company for each other, so that they can build a family and live in peace and tranquility. Allah in the Holy Quran says: "And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Undoubtedly in these are signs for those who reflect" (30:21). The age of marriage for women is low in comparison to the other cultures and many Arab women have married during their teenage years. Unlike other cultures, marriage between two first cousins is socially acceptable in Arab culture and Islamic contexts. The polygamy is allowed in the words of Quran. Marriage is sometimes arranged to build relations with other families. "Couples typically meet and marry through family negotiations. If families are not drawing up the terms of the marriage, they are in close consultation with the bride and groom about major decisions. This influence is connected to family honor. The choice of marital partner is discussed by the larger community as a positive or negative reflection of one's parents and family legacy" (Beitin, p.72).

In the course of divorce, two fundamental generalizations may be made about it. First, obtaining a divorce is often more of a man's privilege. Secondly, the problem of divorce has never been as great in the Arab community as it is in many other parts of the world. The Prophet says "with Allah, the most detestable of all things permitted is a divorce" (Dawud). Divorce is very rare among Arabs, especially in rural areas where marriage is considered a relationship between two clans, rather than two individuals. Islam teaches that reconciliation is better and it recommends to its followers that if they fear a breach between a couple, they have to "appoint a judge from his people and a judge from her people; and if the two desire an agreement, Allah will effect harmony between them" (Qur'an 4:35).

Parent and Child Relationships

The birth and care of children play a very important role in Arab culture. In general, children are highly obedient to their parents. They understand this obedience as a lifelong commitment that supersedes all other social commitments, including marital allegiance. Children are encouraged to live in the parents' home until marriage. "Well-defined cultural norms dictate that the oldest son be trained at an early age to become head of the extended family. He is given every privilege, according to the means of the family, with the expectation that, as an adult, he will care for his aging parents and younger siblings, especially any unmarried sisters" (Najjar, p.41). It is shameful and unacceptable in the Arab cultural standards to place parents in a nursing home instead of providing the care for them within one's own home.

Sexuality

The realm of sex and sexual relations is an extremely personal and sensitive area in the lives of Arabs. The sex impulse of both men and women is strictly suppressed before marriage. Moreover, a woman who commits any sexual offense loses her honor forever and destroys not only her own but her family's reputation. She is accountable for her actions before the law and the local community. As a rule, Arab women, are expected to be virgins on their wedding night.

Hospitality

Arabs are famous for their hospitality. On the invitation to the home of an Arabic family, the visitor is not expected to bring a gift despite it is appreciated. The visitor should expect to drink juice, tea or coffee during his or her stay and may receive a gift before his or her departure. For Arabs, hospitality and generosity are so closely related so that they have the same meaning, for instance, guests never leave a home, shop, or business without being offered something to drink. Social ceremonies and rules of etiquette are very important in Arab society. Good manners constitute one of the more salient factors in evaluating a person's character, (Nydell, p.57).

5. MULTICULTURALISM AND WESTERN HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE

The concept of multiculturalism refers to the right and freedom of ethnic groups to practice their cultural heritage and to represent them in the society in which they live. It is an ideology aims at creating equality, coexistence, justice and tolerance. It calls for acceptance of the cultural diversity in society and the rejection of

all forms of exclusion against minorities. The concept of multiculturalism is mainly related to the phenomenon of diversity, which is reflected in the reality of a society in which there are many cultural, sectarian and ethnic origins. It is, therefore, a sign of equality where all citizens have the right to preserve their identities, languages, cultures, traditions and sense of belonging to the national identity at the same time. It refuses to integrate into the dominant group on the one hand, and the discrimination and isolation against minorities on the other. Thus, multiculturalism is a social phenomenon occurs as a result of the cultural diversity of the human society. It is a part of the fruitful interaction between groups in a society which, in fact, leads to respect for tolerance and coexistence without imposing the dominant culture or ignoring the native cultures.

The different definitions of multiculturalism reflect the varied backgrounds of writers and theorists who have written about the concept. Multiculturalism is defined as "an ideology advocating that society should consist of, or at least allow and include, distinct cultural and religious groups, equal status (Watts, p.166). It is a leftist political ideology that sees all cultures, their mores and institutions, as essentially equal. No culture is considered superior or inferior to any other; it is merely different (Schmidt, p.3). Theodore Dalrymple opines that "all cultures are equal and that no fundamental conflict can arise between the customs, mores, and philosophical outlooks of two different cultures" (p.208). Dalia Abdelhady in her study "The sociopolitical history of Arabs in the United States" believes that multiculturalism refers to the context of the most popular form of pluralist approaches that allows the integration of immigrants into ethnic minorities. It emphasizes that ethnic groups retain their distinguishable character (such as language, culture, social behavior, or public sphere) from the majority population within a larger multicultural society" (p.18).

This part of study tries to investigate the actuality of Arab culture in the American society and exposes the claims of acceptance and implementation of multiculturalism in the Western society and the real situation. It exposes the roles made by media and Western discourse in redefining Arabs and their culture. Media plays an important role in shaping the society's attitudes and directing its responses and relations. The negative perception of Arabs and Muslims in Western media has increased particularly after the events of September eleven. Nadine Naber in Arab San Francisco writes: "while the U.S. media highlighted September 11 as the moment that provoked hate crimes against persons who were assumed to be Arabs or Muslims, the racialization of Arabs and Muslims has been 'decades in the making'" (1). In his famous book Orientalism (1978), Edward Said notes that "both the electronic and print media have been awash with demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny (p.297).

Moreover, Edward Said in Covering Islam refers to the role of media and the experts' monolithic effect when they interpreted Islam for others' consumption. The result of this effect was not only a misunderstanding of the subject matter but also a mistrust of the people of this faith. His advice was clear– not to defend Islam per se, but to be critical in one's understanding of Islam, and of other religions for that matter (qtd. in Alatas v). Charlotte Gallagher in his study "Arab/American Relations And Human Security, Post-9/11" refers that "the present dynamic of the media is a key crosscutting theme and, as such, exacerbates trends in racism, discrimination, and Othering between Arab and non-Arab peoples" (p.55). For the past 50 years, as media expert Shaheen observes, American media have projected negative stereotypes of Arabs, leading to a general public misunderstanding of Arab Americans. A number of recent media studies looking at aspects of comparative media treatment of Arab people have substantiated this empirically (qtd. in Gallagher, p.55).

Furthermore, the neo-imperialism uses media to impose their culture on Arab societies. Western media views the culture the Third World with contempt. For instance, the American children books present the Oriental according to Western thought and values where Arabs are shown as inferior to the West in their culture and civilization. Many representations of Arabs presented in the Western media are dependent on stereotypes and racial myths that take root in the past. If an American child was asked about a definition of an Arab, the answer was the Arabs are evil. Considering the basis of these stereotypes is a means to fight this "cultural assassination" Arabs are seen by Westerners as: irrational, violent and mistreat women (Kamalipour & Carilli, pp.115-291).

In this regard, Edward Said notes that the Western culture imposed isolation on the others. He found himself an outsider influenced by both Arab and American cultures, yet, belonging to none. In *Orientalism*, Said writes that the relationship between the East and the West is based on hegemony and domination and it- Western culture – considers the eastern culture as an inferior. Said maintains that the differences between East and West, the Orient/Occident, that the Western culture maintains in the discourse of power relations, construct a web of racial and cultural stereotypes, power relations and dehumanizing ideology that dominate the Arabs and the Muslims in the West. He is aware of that the correlation of "knowledge" and "power" in the Western culture constructs "the Oriental" as an Other, and as such, is, in a sense, "obliterating him as a human being". All throughout his life in exile and diaspora, Said was very conscious that he is an outsider 'other.' Whereas the Self/Other relation is a major premise in colonial discourses, this hegemonic relation is broken in Said's personal reflections on his own realities as formed and shaped in different and uncompromising exiles (pp.27-28).

Hence, the study finds two different perspectives on the status of Arab-Americans with Western culture. The first view states that Arab-Americans find it difficult to integrate into the western society and accept the American culture. This view is supported by Meleis when she emphasizes that acquiring a second culture can create great ambivalence in Arab Americans as they strive to maintain their cultural roots, of which they are proud while trying to become familiar with and integrated into American culture (Meleis12, pp.365-377). This situation creates cultural tensions and they feel that they are unable to identify emotionally with either culture; Arab Americans can find themselves clinging to the traditional Arab culture even though they feel that modernization is desirable. This conflict can pull them apart, and the task of therapy is to help integrate the conflicting forces into a new and more fruitful cultural configuration and bicultural identity (Nobles et al, p.452).

The other view indicates that Arab Americans are able to coexist with the two social, psychological, and physical worlds. Abraham in his article "*Arab Americans*" believes that Arabs are able to stay in touch with their country of origin through advances in telecommunications; this reinforces their sense of Arab community and tradition, intensifying a preference for living in ethnic Arab neighborhoods or near other Arab Americans in the suburbs. Finding their ethnic identity and religious traditions alien to the dominant American culture, they prefer to stay withdrawn in order to prevent assimilation. He emphasizes that Arab Americans who engage with the dominant culture tend to have distant ancestral ties, be successful, and have high leadership positions, advocate secularism, or identify with Christianity. Concerned with acceptance into the dominant society, they emphasize the commonalities between Arab and American cultures, or between Islam and Christianity. They identify themselves as Americans who happen to be of Arab ancestry (qtd. in Nobles and Daniel, pp.182-191).

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at investigating the actuality of Arab culture in the Arab society as well as in the Western society. It has presented the effects of diaspora and multiculturalism in reconstructing the cultural identity of Arabs in America. The study has found that the main causes of the Arab diaspora are either wars or economic and social instability. The study has attempted to bring some examples of the values of Arab culture and found that Arab culture is one of the richest and oldest cultures in the world. It can be considered a bridge not only between Arab-American generations but also between Arab-Americans and American culture. The study has shown that the negative acts in the Arab world reflect accumulations of mistakes, deviation and misunderstanding of Islamic values and principles. These mistakes also happen because of the lack of freedom, dictatorship and the transgressions of human rights.

Along with the effects of the exportation of Western values through globalization, particularly from media, the study realizes that Arab culture will undergo profound changes in the future. The information revolution, spreading of education, technology, internet and social networks, will create a significant impact on global culture. The paper also has discussed Western discourse and the role made by media in redefining Arabs and their culture. The negative perception of Arabs and Muslims in Western is made by oriented media and the Western hegemonic discourse. These conditions have led to the "cultural tensions" among Arab-Americans. Finally, the study has found two different perspectives on the status of Arab-Americans with Western culture. The first view thinks that Arab-Americans find it difficult to integrate into western society and accept the American culture while the other mainstream views the possibility of co-existence and acceptance the culture of the West.

REFERENCES

__ (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

__ (1980). *The question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage.

__(2000). *Reflections on exile and other essays*. Harvard University Press.

__. (2005). Arab families: An overview. *Ethnicity and family therapy*. M. Agnew, Vijay. *Diaspora, Memory and Identity: A Search for Home. Toronto*. U of Toronto.

__. (2017). Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society (1st ed.) Dearborn: Arab American Museum. Web. 31 Mar. 2017. goo.gl/kkVl28

__. (2017, Mar 31). *Arab world. En.wikipedia.org*. N.p. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_world

__. (2000). Place, age, and culture: Community living and ethnic identity among Lebanese American adolescents. *Small Group Research, 31*(4), 447-469.

"Cambridge Dictionary | Free English Dictionary, Translations and Thesaurus." *Cambridge Dictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2016 https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/diaspoa

"Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics" - State of Palestine. Web. 19 Dec. 2016. http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=1111&mid=3171&wversion=Staging

"Refugee crisis: Where are all these people coming from and why?" http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/refugee-crisis-where-are-all-these-people-coming-from-and-why-10490425.html

"The Arabs of Brazil" http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200505/the.arabs.of.brazil.htm

"The Holy Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary." 1991/ 1411H. al-Madinah: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex.

Abdelhady, D. (2014). The sociopolitical history of Arabs in the United States: Assimilation, ethnicity, and global citizenship. *Biopsychosocial Perspectives on Arab Americans* (pp.17-43). Boston, MA: Springer.

Abudabbeh, N. (1996). *Arab Families*. In M. McGoldrick, J. Giordano, & J. Pearce (Eds.), *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*. New York: Guilford.

Ajrouch, K. J. (2004). Gender, race, and symbolic boundaries: Contested spaces of identity among Arab American adolescents. *Sociological Perspectives Sociol Perspect, 47*(4), 371-391.

Alatas, S. F. (Ed.) (2005). *Covering Islam: Challenges & opportunities for media in the global village*. Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs.

Amer, M. M. (2014). Arab American acculturation and ethnic identity across the lifespan: Sociodemographic correlates and psychological outcomes. *Biopsychosocial Perspectives on Arab Americans* (pp.153-173). Boston, MA: Springer.

Barakat, Halim Isber. (1993). *The Arab world: Society, culture, and state*. Berkeley: U of California.

Beitin, Ben K., & Aprahamian, M. (2014). Family values and traditions. *Biopsychosocial perspectives on Arab Americans* (pp.67-88). Boston, MA: Springer.

Budman, C., Lipson, J., & Meleis, A. (1992). *The cultural consultant in mental health care: The case of an Arab adolescent. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. "N.p.".

Cohen, R. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An introduction*. Seattle: U of Washington.

Dalrymple, T. (2008). *Not with a Bang But a Whimper: The Politics and Culture of Decline*. Ivan R. Dee.

Dawud, A. Hand book: "divorce" .13:3 (h.2177,2178).

Hashem, S. (1982). *The other homeland: Sanbad journeys with Arab American immigrants in U.S.A.Beirut*. Dar Alfaq Al Jadid. (Self-translation)

Kamalipour, Y. R., & Carilli, T. (1998). *Distortion of Islam and Muslims. In mass media and education*.

Macgregor, D. G., & Godfrey, J. (2011). Arab cultural influences on intertemporal reasoning. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

Martiniel, M., & Yun, J. (2002). *Modern society and multiculturalism. Seoul*. Hanul.

Mazower, M. (2000). *The balkans: From the end of Byzantium to the present day*. London: Phoenix.

Moats-Gallagher, Charlotte. (2010). *Arab/American relations and human security, post-911 a political narrative inquiry*. Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch U.

Naber, N. (2002). *Arab San Francisco: On gender, cultural citizenship, and belonging*. Davis: University of California.

Najjar, R. (1994). A Palestinian's struggle with cultural conflicts. *Women in cross-cultural transitions* (pp.39-44).

Nobles, A. Y., & Sciarra, D. T. (2000). Cultural determinants in the treatment of Arab Americans: A primer for mainstream therapists. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70*(2),182-191.

Noman, A., & Asthana, S. (2016). Westernizing Arabian culture between adaptation and resistance: A study in Diana Abu Jaber's Arabian Jazz. *LangLit, 2*(3),181-187. Web. 3 Jan. 2018. https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1bFkBuNuRivUzdyMktxRFl0MkU/view

Nydell, M. K. (1987). *Understanding Arabs: A guide for westerners. Yarmouth, Me.: Intercultural*.

Pappeİ, I. (2006). *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Phillip Connor in his article "Conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen" http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/10/18/conflicts-in-syria-iraq-and-yemen-lead-to-millions-of-displaced-migrants-in-the-middle-east-since-2005/

Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies, 1*(1).

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf.

Salhi, Z. S., & Netton, I. R. (Eds.) (2006). *The Arab diaspora: Voices of an anguished scream*. Routledge.

Savory, R. (1976). *Introduction to Islamic civilisation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Schmidt, A. J. (1997). *The menace of multiculturalism: Trojan horse in America*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Suleiman, M. W. (1999). *Arabs in America: Building a new future*. Philadelphia: Temple UP.

Thiong, O, N. W. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. London: J. Currey.

Wang, H. S. (2013). *Arab-Americans: A 'Growing' Community*. https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/05/30/187096445/arab-americans-a-growing-community-but-by-how-much

Watts, D. (2007). *Glossary of UK government and politics*. Edinburgh University Press.

Young, W. C., & Shami, S. (1997). Anthropological approaches to the Arab family: An introduction. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 1-13.