

The Representation of the Car as a Social Space in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*

Hanan Qaoud¹ & Yousef Abu Amrieh¹

¹The University of Jordan, Jordan

Correspondence: Hanan Qaoud, The University of Jordan, Jordan.

Received: April 30, 2022

Accepted: May 29, 2022

Online Published: May 31, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v12n5p250

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n5p250>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the representation of the car as a social space in Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) and explore its interrelationship with issues of literary chronotope, counter discourse, and identity formation. The analysis of this study is interdisciplinary in nature; it tackles the car across social, psychological, and literary domains. Though the article takes Bakhtin's theory of chronotope as a point of departure; it puts forth Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of social space to explicate how Halaby's characters utilize their cars to incessantly produce social relationships with people from underclasses. In view of these two theories, it is found that Halaby transposes the semiotic function of the car, propelling it from the realm of conformity and nationalism to the realm of resistance and socialism. Halaby's characters are depicted struggling to unshackle themselves from the stereotyping images imposed on them. By presenting the car as a medium and means for socializing with people from distinct social and ethnic backgrounds, Halaby generates a holistic humanistic narrative that deconstructs the racist and binaries thinking that pervaded the official discourse in post 9/11 America.

Keywords: car, chronotope, diaspora, Halaby, immigrants, social space theory

1. Introduction

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space. Because space, which seems homogeneous, which appears as a whole in its objectivity, in its pure form, such as we determine it, is a social product. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73)

Space has been a topic that generates lots of scientific studies and research. However, in social and cultural studies, it used to be a gap until the emergence of "spatial turn" concept in 1970s. "Spatial turn" theory is considered a turn in spatial and geographical studies; hence, it extends the scope of space implications to involve various disciplines of humanities. Ever since, the space-time relation has become a centre of debate in postmodern academia that lays more weight on the space and its consequence to a number of theories, since it "indicates a sense of movement, of history, of becoming" (Thacker, 2003, p. 13). As such, the research on space and its application to cultural studies started with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's article "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951), which discussed the differences between space and place. Then, in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard *commingled* psychoanalysis with phenomenology to uncover the importance of occupying a given space. David Harvey, however, introduced time-space compression, whereas Edward Soja coined the term "third space" to outline the real and imaginary space (Soja, 1996, p. 6). Foucault, in his turn, devised the concept of "heterotopia" to refer to certain institution and discursive spaces that generate world within world, thus mirroring and upsetting what lies outside. He described *heterotopia* as "the possibility of seeing in the depths of a mirror the unforeseen double of what they are observing" (Foucault, 2001, p. 14). Ships, prisons, brothels, bars, cemeteries, and gardens of antiquity are some examples that he provided to clarify this concept.

The discussion is carried on by French Marxist Henri Lefebvre and Russian scholar Michel Bakhtin. Lefebvre, on one hand, reviews space from a humanistic perspective. In his theory about social production, he approaches space as a product of continuous social interaction and communication in the real world. On the other hand, Bakhtin reasserts the significance of space in relation to time in literature, introducing his theory of "chronotope," or what he describes as "artistic chronotope". He postulates that "[i]n the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 88). In his enterprise theory, Bakhtin explicates how the configurations of time and space are represented in language and literature, creating a "spacetime

frame” that organizes “centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250).

Within this theoretical framework, the current study proposes that the space of the car in diasporic literature is presented as both artistic chronotope, and a further social product. Whereas the former concept deals with the space of the car in relation to the literary time and work’s setting in general, the latter discusses the car’s space as amalgamated with social interactions that take place through it. Yet, before proceeding to the analytical part of this article, it is important to highlight how each foregoing theory does precisely work within the car, and how the space provided by the car is transposed into a space for resisting marginalization and social exclusion in diaspora, in addition to capitalism and classism in modern societies. This article suggests that morphing the car’s interior and exterior into a lived (representational) space allows its driver to create their own social space, which enables multicultural connectedness to exist. By so doing, both the car and Halaby’s produced text become figurative space of resistance that, while deconstructing the monolithic and dogmatic narratives of post 9/11 America, it increasingly propagates social and political awareness.

2. The Car as an Artistic Chronotope

The Chronotope is genuinely a term used in literary theory and philosophy of language to delineate different configurations of time and space that are represented in language and discourse. The term is derived from the Greek words χρόνος (“time”) and τόπος (“space”) so, it literally means “time-space.” However, in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin developed the concept of the chronotope in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” in a way to make it applicable to literary criticism. He clarifies that “[w]e will give the name chronotope (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). For Bakhtin, the chronotope “expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)”. Further, Bakhtin foregrounds the importance of the chronotope in literature, as a “constitutive category” that gives each genre its frame; for him, the image of the man in each genre is “intrinsically chronotopic” (*ibid.*). To put it mildly, the chronotope, alongside key themes, contributes to the construction of the identity of the protagonist in a literary work. This Bakhtinian observation initiates further investigation on countless types of social behaviour that take place within different space-time frames. Viewed from this angle, the car on the move is regarded a prospective space where major events and themes can be effectively scouted and underscored in literary works.

3. The Car as a Social Space

Henri Lefebvre draws on Karl Marx’s poetics pertaining to the modes of social and labor’s production in modern societies, as he brings forth the space produced by human and social relations. Nonetheless, Tim Unwin describes how Lefebvre’s new trajectory within geography “challenge[s] the past conceptions of space” (2004, p. 13). Thus, it is understood that Lefebvre’s neo Marxist work on space gives rise to a distinctive humanistic tradition in a number of academic disciplines. Seen from this perspective, Lefebvre sheds light on the importance of socialization and communication, enacted in spaces, in engendering forms of individual and collective resistance to the capitalists. Edward Soja is one of the ardent advocates of the need to investigate the space from postmodern alternative perspectives. He comments on such a humanistic approach, recognizing Lefebvre’s prominence over his contemporaries in “opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality” (1996, p. 6). Overall, Lefebvre’s theories on space are still a subject for ample discussion in academia so far. However, his theory of social production is considered one of his most outstanding contributions.

Certainly, Lefebvre’s book *The Production of Space*, first published in 1974, is considered a milestone when discussing his theory of social production of space. The relationship between people and space, in general, is dialectical. Lefebvre elucidates: “(Social) space is a (social) product: [...] the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (1991, p. 26). This proposition designates the premise of Lefebvre’s book. In his theory, Lefebvre explicates that the human beings are capable of producing worlds of their own by creating and producing environment which, in turn, remodels, reproduces and recreates them in a dialectical relationship. He, further, contends that, in modern economic capitalist societies, the space acts as a hegemonic tool. Therefore, the people who have spaces; i.e., the capitalists, dominate the people who do not have that much of lands and spaces.

To illustrate his theory, Lefebvre distinguishes three levels of “spatial triad”: the perceived or “the practised”, the conceived spaces or “representation of space,” and the lived spaces “the representational spaces”. He points out that a “dialectical relationship ... exists within the [spatial] triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). To identify the kind of space that the car offers, it is important to recognize the peculiarities of each level of space. The perceived space, which is also commonly known as the “cognitive space,” is the outer world, and

the spatial set, such as, the transport routes and places which relate “the specific and the local” (Lefebvre, p. 88). The conceived space goes beyond the perceived, by which experts and planners work to develop it in some ways in order to accomplish certain economic and political goals. The representational space, however, is a combination of the perceived and the conceived spaces. It is a space where social life, art, culture memories, and images are produced through living it.

Moreover, Lefebvre accentuates the role of verbal and nonverbal forms of communication in his theory, as a “process” by which humans live and produce social relations that constitute create social spaces. Lefebvre delineates the function of communication in “the realm of the perceived space” as it is “carried out, ... and corresponds to the directly experienced in a representational space” (1991, p. 369). Thus, communication represents a process in which social systems, structures, institutions and social spaces are lived, and thereby reproduced by humans in a concrete manner of everyday life. As such, communication becomes a medium between individuals and society as a whole. Lefebvre writes,

A revolutionary social transformation could be brought about by means of communication alone. Everything must be said! No time limit on speech! Everything must be written! Writing transforms language, therefore writing transforms society! (1991, p. 29)

Thus, through using it individually and collectively as “a lived and representational space”, the car is rendered highly potential for its ability to prioritize “quality of life over quantity” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 381) and “the use value over exchange-value” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 410). However, the car is basically an object. It is an auto machine that was invented in the 19th century and further developed in the 20th century. Few years later to its establishment, the automobile industry instantly became the wheel of the American capitalist economy.

In *Americanism and Fordism* (1971), Antonio Gramsci speaks of the paramount role, which the automobile played evolving the World and demonstrated the “mechanical attitudes” of the American society (p. 302). As such, Gramsci realizes the supremacy of the automobile, and, needless to say, its principal mass distributor, in changing World economy of the early 1930s. However, by the middle of the past century, the car industry fell completely under the grip of capitalist policies. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1982), Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer criticize the familiarization and repetition of the cars that was an inevitable corollary of the mass production of automobiles (p. 119). As a result, originality “had given way to consumerism” (Pearce, 2016, p. 58). Similar to other objects and products, the car has become a hegemonic tool in the modern capitalist societies. Lefebvre explains how capitalism takes advantage of such products in his theory about the circuit of capital.

Lefebvre’s “circuit of capital” discusses the process of investing in objects or lands in order to bring profits (1991, p. 340). For him, the circuit of capital is divided into two types: primary and secondary circuits. Whereas the secondary circuit concerns with investment in lands and real estates, the primary circuit demonstrates how the capitalist investment is directed to materials and machines, like cars, and how it produces a product, which later brings money that the capitalist uses to increase their profits yet again (p. 345). This explains, to some degree, the battles between different companies to produce similar cars with different trademarks. At this point, the gloomy image of the car as a tool that sustains the hegemonic domination of capitalism over people and space pervades. Still, when it is approached from literary and spatial theories, the car seems to be assigned to a more promising and influential role not only in literature but also in real world.

In light of the foregoing discussions, this article draws on Lefebvre’s theory of social space to suggest that the car in Laila Halaby’s novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007) is represented as a social space that produces social relationship, which, intrinsically, reproduces, recreates, and remoulds the car as a social space. In doing so, the conceived space of the car is transposed into a representational space, through actively experiencing its dualistic sides: the exterior and interior. Lefebvre emphasizes the social productive force in his theory and its effective capacity for transferring space from the realm of the conceived space to that of the lived space. As such, the car reflected in Halaby’s narrative is transposed into a space that challenges the capitalism and classism in modern capitalist societies, and defies all unjust practises of social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination against Arab American immigrants particularly in post 9/11 America.

4. Arab American Literature Post 9/11

Arab American literature has been developed “as a formidable art form in the Arab American community,” that is undergoing “something of a qualitative and quantitative maturation” (Salaita, 2011, p. 2). Nevertheless, it is still difficult to define. In his book, *Modern Arab American Fiction* (2011), Steven Salaita demonstrates how the diversity of the backgrounds of Arab American authors makes Arab American literature look “diverse and heterogeneous” (p.

4). This diversity, further, complicates Arab American political predispositions, while playing a crucial role in determining their relationship with other dominant minorities (*ibid.*). However, the relationship of Arab Americans with distinct American social categories, according to Fadda-Conrey, features “common experience of struggle against marginalization and discrimination, as well as their continuous negotiation of issues related to identity politics, in-betweenness, multiple home fronts, and uneasy belongings” (2011, p. 8), which are actually the issues that have constituted the thematic core of nearly all literary works, produced by Arab Americans in the post-9/11 era. In this context, Laila Halaby is considered one of the most prolific Arab American authors, whose writings touch upon such pivotal issues.

Although 9/11 events created a hostile atmosphere towards Arabs and Muslims, it amplified their existence, dragging them out of the invisibility to a “highly visible community that either directly or indirectly affects America’s so-called culture wars, foreign policy, presidential elections, and legislative tradition” (Salaita, 2011, p. 110). Since the events of 9/11, Arab American authors have responded diversely by publishing novels and poetics that depict Arab American characters in between two cultures. For example, Arab American characters in Laila Halaby’s novel, *Once in a Promised Land*, are portrayed while they are struggling to preserve their hybrid identity in a society flooded with anti-Arab sentiments. What aggravated their situation in the months that followed the attack was the discourse adopted by both the American administration and the mainstream media that, intentionally or unintentionally, relied on George Bush’s mantra, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (Bush, 2001). As a matter of fact, while this speech was used politically to justify violent acts against the Arab world (Iraq) in the onset of their “war on terror,” it has divided the American society into two groups, therefore preventing other social spectra from taking a stand.

Laila Halaby is an eloquent writer and journalist. She was born in Beirut to a Jordanian father and an American mother. Besides her collection of poetry, *My Name on his Tongue* (2012), Halaby authored two novels: *West of the Jordan* (2003) and *Once in a Promised Land* (2007). Commenting on the idea of “hyphenated identity,” Halaby says, “I feel like I’m Arab and I feel like I’m American, but the hyphen is lost on me. Even though I feel like the hyphen is also where I live, you know? It’s funny” (Berrebbah, 2021, p. 11). She sees that being a daughter of Jordanian immigrant and American mother “was not cohesive blending.” This is why she writes her stories in the first place, so that she can develop better understanding to her ‘hyphenated’ identity (*ibid.*).

Often regarded as her most well-known work and one of the most “highly sensitive” Arab diasporic fiction (*Valassopoulos, 2013, p. 1*), Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land* has rightly received ample critical attention. Yet, critics tend to overlook the prominence of the automobile in this migration work, and instead, focus upon other aspects of its narrative. Notwithstanding this, analysts acknowledge the centrality of the car to the novel, noticing that the car accident lies at the heart of the couple’s crisis. By all means, this study deeply contemplates the portrayal of the car in *Once in a Promised Land* and explores its function in-depth in an effort to open up new horizons for the car in the intellectual and literary academia of diaspora.

Halaby recognizes her humanistic responsibility to construct counter narratives that speak to all racist practices and discriminating views that have permeated the national speech since the 9/11 attacks. In her study on Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*, Amanda Llyod confirms that Halaby’s novel, “functions as a cautionary tale, instructing Americans to transcend binary discourse in order to avoid further crisis from escalating either within or beyond American borderlines” (2012, p. 30). In her novel, Halaby uses the spaces, occupied by Arab American immigrants to increase their visibility, such as, workplaces, houses, markets, and cars. Using these spaces to maintain the diversity of the American society as a whole is recognized for its ability to unravel the monolithic and binary discourse of post 9/11 *presidency* that aligns Arab Americans with terrorist groups, or presents them, at best, as isolated, passive, and unresponsive community.

Halaby, actually, acknowledges the prominence of the car in her novel. In particular, she uses the car accident textually and thematically to test the position of the “foreigners,” i.e., the Arab and Muslim immigrants in American dogmas. In an interview with Ishak Berrebbah, published in 2021, Halaby explains how the car accident becomes “the corner” from which she started writing her novel (p. 2). So, by presenting this crash, Halaby does not only propose cohesion with other minorities in a receiving society, but also explores the “implicit bias, and inherent racism with white privilege” (*ibid.*). In doing so, she confronts the “racist treatment, and mostly, onerous stereotypes” in dealing with Arab Americans, which become among the negative repercussions of the 9/11 event that blight “the lives of Arabs in the USA” (p. 7).

Once in a Promised Land demonstrates how the life of Jordanian couple, Jassim and Salwa Hadad, have been turned upside down after Jassim accidentally hits and kills a white American skateboarder, Evan. What exacerbates things is

that the car accident took place in the aftermath of 9/11, while the couple were still learning how to cope with the social and political ramifications of this historic event. The couple who left their native home to live in Arizona years ago are now seen as a latent threat to the US society, in a time when the heat of zealous patriotism has pervaded every national address, and almost every media talk show. Following racist incidents in common places, like malls and workplaces, the couple come to realize that despite being acclimated to American life for years, they are still counted as “foreigners”. However, it is not until after Jassim’s car crash and Salwa’s secret miscarriage, that the couple’s social vulnerability is exposed, and their relationship starts to decline. Towards the end of the novel, their marriage falls apart, and each one starts looking elsewhere for comfort, company, and understanding. Salwa befriends Jack, her colleague in the bank and a covert drug dealer, and Jassim gets closer to Penny, the white waitress in the near door café. The last scene of the novel finds Salwa being insulted and physically attacked by her American boyfriend, while she is heading to her car; and Jassim is talking to Penny inside his Mercedes, the moment the police calls to inform him about the brutal attack launched against his wife.

In her article “Negotiating un-belonging in Arab-American writing: Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*” (2013), Anastasia Valassopoulos discusses the themes of belonging and non-belonging. For her, Halaby’s novel complicates the representation of Arab American characters in post 9/11 diasporic literature. By exploring “the unusual and unexpected allegiances forged in crises” (p. 1), Halaby sheds light on how these allegiances show the couple, Jassim and Salwa “to be malleable and flexible in the context of radical political change” (*ibid.*). In doing this, Halaby dissolves and recreates Arab-American identities, “showing them to be malleable and [...] resilient” (p. 2).

From a different perspective, Elena Ortells Montón rereads Halaby’s novel within a postcolonial approach. In her article, “The Forgotten Victims of 9/11: Cultural Othering in Laila Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*, and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*” (2017), Montón showcases how these literary works urge readers to empathize with “Others” despite their differences (p. 4). She highlights the way these two works counter the traditional narratives of 9/11, which feature the “Other” as “Muslim terrorists.” By introducing the protagonist in Halaby’s novel as an innocent victim to a “powerful imperialistic system” (p. 5), Montón renounces “Western supremacy and imperialism” (*ibid.*). In her reading to Halaby’s and Hamid’s works, Montón relies heavily on binary oppositions “us versus others,” which is a very popular tactic in postcolonial criticism.

The current paper argues that Halaby utilizes her protagonists’ cars as vehicles to convey cultural and political urgent messages to the post 9/11 Americans. In the first part of this analysis, the space of the car is discussed as a chronotopic motif to which the characters of the protagonists - and the plotline events - are strongly attached. Using Bakhtin’s theory of chronotope, the article displays how the space proffered by the car becomes central to the most key themes and events. Besides reflecting the character of its owner, the car also witnesses defining moments that alter his or her perception and reform their identities as such. The car in Halaby’s text becomes the carrier of the most important themes such as, displacement, lack of protection, alienation, racism and exclusion. Such themes are, indeed, introduced through Jassim’s car accident, and Salwa’s car break-in. The second part of the analysis focuses on the protagonists’ cars as social spaces, through which, the couple are capable of socializing with people from other distinct communities and social classes. This part of the study primarily makes use of Henri Lefebvre’s theory of space production to illustrate how the protagonists use the spaces of their vehicles to go beyond their social and spatial boundaries. Through experiencing it actively, the space of the car gets morphed into a representational space, where social relationships are naturally produced. In addition, this study makes use of some psychological and philosophical concepts, mainly, Baudrillard’s hyperreality and second self, Edward Soja’s third space, and Homi Bhabha’s hybridity. By extension, the semiotic use of the car will be spotted throughout the discussion. Eventually, It is worth noticing that in some textual instances, these concepts and theories may conflate and converge.

5. The Car in Halaby’s *Once in a Promised Land*

The car is first encountered in Halaby’s novel in its conventional semiotic sense, where it is used as a sign and consumed on its image-value aspect. Jassim, the Arab hydrologist, lives with his wife in the hills of Tucson in Arizona. The wealthy couple lead an extravagant American lifestyle with lots of expensive brands around them. Their ‘American’ lifestyle is mainly reflected in their well-paid jobs, a luxurious house, and fancy cars. Driving in big Mercedes, Jassim’s affluence is publically revealed. Halaby narrates that “Jassim went through in his days in America bulldozer style, an Arab in a Mercedes, oblivious of the sizzling around him” (Halaby, 2007, p. 165). Halaby deliberately mentions the brand of Jassim’s car “Mercedes,” the brand that fits in American “bulldozer” lifestyle, to signify his socio-economic status. For Salwa’s car, the readers are told that she drives in a white Nissan 4x4. At this stage in the narrative, Jassim and Salwa are unaware that such a life style is inaccessible to many Americans who belong to invisible classes, or underclasses.

Prior to 9/11, owning a non-American car did not necessarily used to carry any political connotations. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, the American culture, seems to have been deeply infected with a pseudo-patriotism that has preoccupied the public opinion inasmuch as it blotches the speeches on mainstream TV and broadcasting channels. Since then, everything can be a subject for classification and judgment, depending on signs. Accordingly, preferring a non-American car may give a serious statement about its owner's political affiliations and loyalties. Halaby, astutely alludes to this meaning by presenting Evan, who turns out to be, in his mother's words, a fanatic "foolish hateful for Arabs" (2007, p. 201). When Evan is asked by the salesman about the kind of car he is planning on purchasing, the teenager replies: "Something big. Chevy Tahoe, maybe" (2007, p. 74). However, once the salesman suggests him other luxury cars, that are cheaper and stronger, like, "a Lexus or Infiniti," the boy, immediately clings to thoughts like how "odd that Lexus and Infiniti were Japanese" (*ibid.*). Evan, resembles many other young people who have been brainwashed by American national extremist discourse that assumes superiority of the white race over other races. Through insisting on owning an American car brand, Evan strives to prove his steadfast loyalty, while bragging about his ultimate American patriotism. Halaby uses Evan as an epitome of the extremist American youth, whose devotion to the American nation blinds them to the fact that their nation is, in fact, part of a bigger worldwide nation, and that there is no purity, neither in the race, nor in the nation he exalts. Thus, Halaby, so far, portrays the car as a "conceived space" that is replete with signs, symbols, and images, that are capable of conveying multiple deeper ideological and cultural messages.

Moreover, in one occasion, Joan, Salwa's co-worker, offers her two American flag decals, one for Salwa's car and the other for Jassim's. Joan advises Salwa to put them on the back windows of their cars, for "[y]ou never know what people are thinking, and having this will let them know where you stand" (Halaby, 2007, p. 55). Salwa, instantly, feels the ridicule of the situation with five-cent decals on Jassim's \$50,000 car (*ibid.*). However, those American decals become the Arab immigrants' way to evade anti-Arab racism on the road. Over a night, Jassim and Salwa, as Arab American immigrants, become in charge of publically defending themselves against unwarranted terrorist accusations, based on their physical appearance, religion, and origins. During such a contentious atmosphere, it is plainly understood that the land, where flying flags on cars become a national ritual to show American nationalism, is no longer "promised" or "beloved" (2007, p. 56), especially when such actions become mandatory as media outlets grow hostile towards those who do not comply. Apparently, the car in such instances acts as a sign or a symbol. It becomes like a parameter of someone's social structure, and political affiliation. By all means, it connotes a sort of hierarchy that makes it fathomed as a conceived space in Lefebvre's sense.

In other words, though the car, on its image-value, can be employed to send social and political messages, the car for Jassim is valued for its use-value as well. In the onset of the novel, the narrator explains that driving for Jassim is a "secret pleasure" (Halaby, 2007, p. 3), since it is, alongside swimming, the daily activity that keeps him balanced. In fact, Jassim is not a devout Muslim, he is rather an atheist whose devotion is directed to his car, driving practice, and materialistic life. Driving, for Jassim, is "his secret god" (*ibid.*). This echoes Barthes' description of Citroën DC as "goddess" (Barthes, 1957, p. 88), yet for a displaced figure in diaspora, like Jassim, driving *per se* becomes a surreptitious "god." This may be due to the mobility it bestows on him. However, Jean Baudrillard in his book, *System of Objects* (1996), states,

Every object claims to be functional, just as every regime claims to be democratic. ... With its reference to 'function' it suggests that the object fulfils itself in the precision of its relationship to the real world and to human needs. (p. 63)

In the light of this, Jassim's car is a salient example of an object whose functionality enables it to "become integrated into an overall scheme" (*ibid.*), using both its image and use values. The word "god" can imply different meanings, but for Jassim, under these circumstances, it expresses a strong and unmatched relationship with his car for the psychological and pragmatic function it serves. This agrees with the viewpoint of Baudrillard who maintains that the car transcends its fundamental function to assume "a secondary one," that is, to act as a combining element "within a universal system of signs" (*ibid.*). For Jassim, not only does Mercedes Sedan preserve his social structure, but also it helps him in creating a disciplined "bulldozer's" lifestyle (Halaby, 2007, p. 165), that, in turn, keeps him in balance with his own milieu.

In addition, though the brand of Salwa's car is not clearly revealed in the novel, we can rely on the information sneaked to Hassan, her friend in the homeland, who imagine her driving "white SUV—a Nissan" (Halaby, 2007, p. 85), which is another a non-American 4×4 luxury car. Apparently, Jassim and his wife Salwa are portrayed as avid consumers in a consumerist culture. Halaby writes,

Driving up recently repaved asphalt to his nestled-in-the hills home, Jassim pulled up his glinty Mercedes next to one of many identical expectant mailboxes, each painted a muted rusty brown ... in the coolness of his house, Jassim removed a gleaming glass from a glossy maple cabinet and filled it with the purest spring water money could buy ... [h]e pulled the trashcan out from under the right side of the sink [...] so that he could reach the recycling basket, into which he deposited a handful of direct mail and ads (except for Salwa's overpriced-underwear-catalogue ...). (2007, pp. 23-24)

This quote demonstrates the profligate American style, which this couple embrace away from any religious or ethnic manifestations. Moreover, as dedicated participants of American consumerism, the couple are ostensibly keen to surround themselves with luxuries; showy cars, hills house, and expensive silky pyjamas. Distancing themselves from any ethnic or underclass affiliations, the wealthy couple have thrived to maintain an accepted place in a social class. This kind of social isolation comes as a "a biproduct of their basically chasing the American Dream" (Berrebbah, 2021, p. 8). As a result, it renders them "unprepared, defenceless and unprotected by a supportive network" upon encountering the moment of 9/11 (*Valassopoulos, 2013, p. 2*).

The following sections rigorously scrutinize the representation of the car in relation to the socio-political changes, surrounding 9/11, through focusing on two points: the time-space intersections materialized by the car, on one hand, and the social space produced in it, on the other. Providing textual evidence, the upcoming analysis demonstrates how conflating between these two aspects creates a ground that is essential for the major events in the plot to take place.

In reality, Halaby sends the car beyond the realm of signs, allocating it a more vital role throughout her story. Time and space, configured and represented in the moving car, create an atmosphere that fairly corresponds with Bakhtinian perception of chronotope. For instance, the moments Salwa spends while driving back to her house are quite decisive in determining her attitudes and the decisions she makes later. On her way and at a red light, she stops and presses the scan button of the radio. Suddenly, a man's voice "blur[s] out: Is anyone fed up yet? Is anyone sick of nothing being done about all those Arab terrorists? In the name of Jesus Christ! They live with us. Among us! Mahzlims who are just waiting to attack us. They just want" (Halaby, 2007, p. 56). Upon hearing his aggressive tone, her "heart sped" and, for a moment, she could not discern,

where the voice was coming from and stared at the dashboard. A car's honking startled her, and a glance in the mirror gave her the driver of the car behind her with his hands in the air. Looking up, she saw that the light had turned green and lurched forward, not able to wave an apology. [...]She turned the radio off and looked up. Her eyes counted four American flags, three in stores and one flying from a car. (*ibid.*, p. 56).

As the above quote shows, Salwa first hears the threatening voice on radio, then her eyes capture American flag decals almost in every space. This situation leaves her perplexed, shaken deep within as her trust in the American dream starts collapsing. In this regard, Bakhtin, in his analysis of the chronotope in Eschenbach's *Paxziva*, stresses that the chronotope collaborates with instant themes on constructing the identity of the protagonist in a literary work. Hence, the feeling of insecurity that grips Salwa while driving makes her aware of the fragility of her position in this society, despite "years of schizophrenic reaction to American culture" (Halaby, 2007, p. 54).

Moreover, in a section, entitled, "Concluding Remarks" added to the original book in 1973, Bakhtin outlines six chronotopes that are crucial to the thematic scheme of a literary work. They are: the chronotopes of castle, parlous and salons (room), the provincial town (village), the public square, the threshold, and most importantly the chronotope of the road, where "the narrow, the confined, the private [meet] with the extensive, the public, the city" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 244). In Salwa's car, the broadcast channel, the road, the drivers and their vehicles represent the public space that invades and impinge on her own private space inside her car. This intersection, besides the transit space and elements of time on the move, form what Bakhtin calls organizing centres of "narrative events of the novel" (1981, p. 250). Thus, it is no surprise that in the moments following this, Salwa gets mentally paralyzed and unable to distinguish between the real and the virtual worlds. This is, also, translated in her inability to wave with apology to the driver in the other car, and, even later on, "she could not talk about the radio broadcast. Or the honking. Or the flags. Or work. Or anything," as Halaby recounts. She, instead, replies obscurely to her husband's question whether she is, or is not, fine (207, p. 57). Salwa grows quite frustrated upon the fact that she and her husband are perceived as untrusted and, to some extent, dangerous citizens, and thus, they should be socially distanced and excluded.

It is worth observing that the significance of the chronotope is not confined only to the themes it foregrounds or the events it generates, but also to the momentum it maintains till the end of the narrative. This is exemplified in the car accident that enwraps the climax of the story as the coming part discloses.

Once confronted with his wife's secret miscarriage, Jassim grows doubtful about the constancy of their relationship. As usual, he resorts to swimming and driving when baffled, but that day the swimming pool happens to be closed. So, he takes his car and drives back home. On the road, he accidentally strikes a skateboarder boy, Evan. Actually, Halaby amply describes the moments of the crash, depicting the interior space of Jassim's car as muddling with thoughts swinging back and forth in his mind. His thoughts mainly hover around his wife's recent miscarriage. In the meantime, the distance between his car and the figure of the boy ahead "closed in short seconds" (2007, p. 117). Under the intensity of the moment, Jassim seems to be almost incompletely aware of the danger of the situation. He slows down his speed. Nevertheless, this would not prevent the crash from happening. Rigorous police investigations find out that Evan's reckless and unexplained behaviour is the main reason behind the tragic accident. Halaby meticulously recounts the accident details, suggesting that the boy has intentionally turned his skateboard into Jassim's car. She narrates that Evan "pushed off and jumped, propelling himself straight into the front of Jassim's car. Jassim swerved left, felt a sickening *thunk*, and watched as the boy flipped over the hood" (*Ibid.*, italics in original).

When the police ask Jassim to recall exactly what happened, he says: "the one boy just came out, but he looked at me first, like he planned to do it, or like he thought he would do something else, like jump over the car, only he ended up going right into it" (Halaby, 2007, p. 121). So, it is the boy's gaze, followed by erratic riding before Jassim's car, that forces Jassim to swerve left. Jassim continues describing what he believes to be a suicidal movement of the boy towards his car. Once the boy flipped over the car's hood, "an oncoming car in the other lane was suddenly in front of [Jassim] and he had to swerve to avoid it" (*ibid.*). Despite the fact that officer Barkley eventually clears Jassim of any wrong-doing, the boy's "blue lenses" still get "larger and larger in [Jassem's] memory" and an instant shock knocks for a loop, inscribing him with endless feeling of guilt.

The car forms "the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 88). Without the car, there would not be a road accident, nor a narrative climax. In addition, in the moments of the crash, the car does not only thicken the time, but also fuses it with the space in transit, giving them altogether a "concrete whole" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 61). At this point, the chronotope of the car is intensified, giving the entire narrative momentum, that forms a leap in the plotline of the story. This is further evidenced in the alternative perception which Jassim exhibits following the accident.

Additionally, Halaby uses the car as chronotope to contour the crisis in the life of the couple; however, she touches upon some psychological phenomena pertaining to the drivers' inner attachment to their vehicles in the moment of crash. Halaby suggests this emotional bond; she pinpoints that, prior to the accident, Jassim feels that he and his car are "[o]ne, a complex, powerful machine capable of racing on the autobahn, of speeding ... of escaping the mundane" (Halaby, 2007, p. 116). This state of "oneness" with the car bestows human attributes upon it, lifting one's vehicle to a human level, leading to what is recognized by Baudrillard as "anthropomorphism" (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 16). Anthropomorphism occurs as a result of the emotional and psychological coalescence between humans and their possessions. Baudrillard articulates that the "[h]uman beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value - what might be called a 'presence'" (*ibid.*). However, at the moment of the crash, this intimate coalescence between machines and humans is getting dissolved. Actually, the car as a leading object in the life of the human being, becomes part of the self-image, which, in effect, permits the owners' "ego" to get "projected onto structural details of [their] cars," thus inciting what Baudrillard calls "second self" and "hyper reality" which enhance what Baudrillard describes as 'Narcissus' pool which, albeit at a cost, is liable to get crashed at any moment (1996, p. 101).

Respectively, the strong bonds that Jassim and Salwa have with their possessions, primarily, Slawa's silky pyjamas and Jassim's Mercedes, result in their alienation from others because of the "Narcissus pool" which their objects enable. In addition, though their "second self" and "hyperreality" empower their social affluences, they hinder them from dealing with the World in a realistic manner. In this respect, one can postulate that perhaps Jassim dealt with the situation as a "hyper" real; i.e., as if the crash was unlikely to happen since hence he was driving under 30 miles per hour. This might prevent him from acting cautiously and weighing the perilousness of the situation, and stopping the car, especially that the boy was skating too closely.

By all means, the car accident begins a series of devastating events that end in Jassim's dismissal from his job and becoming officially a threat to the community according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). His psyche, as elaborated hitherto, has been deeply affected. Moreover, his inability to tell his wife about the death of the boy makes him face the negative consequences of the car accident alone. The killing of Evan, though inadvertent, sends him off balance with a shaky character. And his beloved Mercedes, which used to be a source of discipline and pleasure, now has turned into the "murderous vehicle" in his eye (Halaby, 2007, p. 149).

Up to this point, one can infer that by addressing the notion of “oneness” in her text, Halaby subverts the myopic view which the American culture has about consumerism, which sees only the positive functional side of the car, while overlooking the possibility of being a “murderous vehicle” or a “hegemonic tool” in modern societies. Before, his death, Evan desperately wants to purchase an American car with which his identity can be better recognized on the road. As he catches the image of Jassim, the Arab immigrant in his bulldozer Mercedes, Evan probably decides to attack him. This irrational attack is wittily captured by Lloyd, as she postulates that the author wants to equate the mentality of terrorist bombers with the suicidal road attackers, hinting that those young suicides, Arabs and Americans, are victims of extremism and poverty (2012, p. 18). As such terrorism, certainly has no specific religion or race. The accident, as a matter of fact, urges Jassim to contemplate the reasons behind Evan’s suicidal attack, and makes him, later, take one step forward, leaving his cocoon, and driving to the boy’s family neighbourhood in order to offer consolation and know more about Evan’s world.

Thus, driven by “greedy” need to learn about Evan’s world, Jassim takes his Mercedes to the American working-class localities in order to explore this invisible world. To this end, he, also, befriends Evan’s mother and Penny, the white waitress who works in Denny’s. Yousef Awad, in his interpretation of Jassim’s reaction, clarifies that “[b]urdened by the fact that he has killed a boy in a road accident, Jassim begins to break his social isolation” (2012, p. 254). Awad, also explicates that although the catastrophe of the fatal car accident shatters Jassim’s identity, it helps in reforming it, pushing him out of his narrow cocoon. Further, Awad expounds that “[i]t is a white working class woman that attracts him. Indeed, it is a white working class world [that] fascinates him” (2021, p. 257). Penny, the waitress, is introduced in the third phase (the post-trauma phase) to mark the shift in Jassim’s mentality and thoughts and the transformation of his identity (*ibid.*). Taking this into account, the car, as a dynamic space, is considered Jassim’s only tool to make difference in his post trauma life. Halaby writes,

Daily he traveled ... greedy to see into lives he knew nothing about. Somehow this aspect of American culture had escaped him. The more he drove ... the more fascinated he became, amazed at the years he had spent without ever really seeing. (2007, p. 275)

Jassim has been shocked by the fact that “a country with so much wealth, the kind of wealth to which he is accustomed, could allow such conditions to exist” (Lloyd, 2012, p. 18). Jassim realizes how these hard conditions are, in fact, part of underclass people’s daily life.

The dynamic nature of the car, in general enables Jassim and Salwa to reconnect with the people from other classes. Jassim, initially, takes his car and “[drives] slowly, watching” (Halaby, 151) the domestic community around him. For the first time, he sees “pickup trucks and pink fences, shaved heads and snotty-nosed children, food stamps, tattered smiles, ill-fitting false teeth, tobacco-stained fingers, and fourteen-hour-shift bloodshot eyes”. He wonders how he did not notice all these people years ago, especially when his work times had not been so regular. Halaby maintains that,

Jassim’s awareness didn’t happen in one lightning change; no one event occurred to peel all those layers from his eyeballs, to remove the bubble-wrap around his consciousness. The movement of his thoughts was gradual, a smooth inclined ride. ... Now, early on Monday afternoon, when he normally would be working, should be working, Jassim drove up and down streets, absorbing all that he saw and trying to calm the panic that had been creeping into him since the FBI had walked into his life. It was so preposterous and so huge that Jassim didn’t know what to do with it; swimming was no cure for this kind of pressure. (2007, p. 275)

Conceivably, through his vehicle’s windows, such realistic images converge and become part of his floating space. The car, in this sense, is conceived as an epitome of Lefebvre’s representational space which stimulates incessant social relationship about the world around. The produced social knowledge, respectively, reproduces the car, with its interior and exterior, as a social space.

Moreover, Jassim’s innate need to meet with Penny in a private space leads him to the interior of his car, the place where he can feel safe and protected against the hostile atmosphere of post 9/11. Penny, in this context, poses a kind of challenge for Jassim; her friendship looks like an “impossible scenario” (Halaby, 2007, p. 158). However, Penny essentially represents a stereotypical image of American woman, who has been brainwashed by the divisive mainstream discourse that emerged shortly after the event and by the Islamophobic notions that cut across the whole nation. Penny is one among other women who wish they were younger to enrol in the American army and “show all those terrorists what Americans were made of, how they were continuing the great history of this country, getting out there and saving poor people from the oppression of living in their backward countries” (2007, p. 280). Halaby elaborates that “Each time the president spoke about the War on Terror [Penny] was outraged, sickened that there were people so sinister that they would want to harm innocent Americans” (*ibid.*). Georgiana Banita, as such, points

out that the protagonists in Halaby's novel are effectively confronted by "citizens galvanized by Bush's call to act as the eyes and ears of the government" (2010, p. 246). In this sense, having a space, a private space, where you can meet others becomes a first step for Jassim and other Arab immigrants to express themselves, in a bid to erase the heaps of misconceptions, assembled systematically by media in order to demonize them. Therefore, Halaby's characters, indeed, show the ability to demonstrate the possibility of using the car as a lived space, rather than merely a conceived or perceived space.

After several meetings with Jassim in his car, Penny's mind has been effectively changed. This is evinced in a conversation she holds with her roommate. As she is still unable to sympathize and identify with Arabs' position in post 9/11 America, she contends that Jassim is "a good guy—he's not like them, shouldn't be judged like them. But those people over there, they oppress women and kill each other. They're the ones who should be bombed" (Halaby, 2007, p. 281). Penny's main interest is in the lifestyle, which Jassim's income can afford (Salaita, 2011, p. 91) as it is, specifically, reflected in her astonishment, upon riding his Mercedes for the first time (Halaby, 2007, p. 276). Jassim's well-behaved manners during their frequent communications in / and around his car play the essential role in subverting the stereotypical images of Arabs as dangerous terrorists as it subtly problematizes the bases of binaries thinking that is embedded in the official discourse in the meantime.

Undoubtedly, Penny with her "soothing easy smile" becomes Jassim's entrance to the invisible world of the "promised land". However, Salaita notes that Jassim's attraction to Penny ascends "from a certain feeling of alienation that he imagines Penny can satisfy" (Halaby, 2007, p. 91). Therefore, Jassim tries to break this alienation by making trips with Penny in his car to Wal-Mart and other poor places. Halaby showcases how Wal-Mart allows Jassim to come in touch not only with American people from underclasses, but also with people from his homeland. He encounters a woman speaking Arabic, asking the salesman about a frying pan (Halaby, 2007, p. 278). The invisibility of such classes in media and official speeches of American presidents in post 9/11 America has worsened the situation of the minorities over there, giving misleading information about the inability of Arab and Muslim people to co-exist with other American inhabitants in one society.

In fact, Wal-Mart is viewed as an experienced space and a vivid chronotope by which the public and private spaces meet and converge. Similarly, the car is understood to be a Bakhtinian "threshold" and a Lefebvre's representational space. Yet, due to its dynamic nature, the car on the move acts as a coordinator between numerous chronotopes in a literary text. As the quotes above demonstrate, the car connects markets to the city's roads and neighbourhoods. Therefore, the road for Bakhtin is a metaphor. The "fundamental pivot [of which] is the flow of time" (1981, p. 243). Thus, the car is considered a chronotopic linker that connects various chronotopes together, and becomes, as a consequence, more "appropriate for portraying events governed by chance" than the road or any other chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 244). Moreover, as a lived space, the car is commonly experienced by people from all social classes by bringing them together into the realm of communication. A set of implicit codes between pedestrians and roads, on the one hand, and drivers and cars, on the other, governs these relationships. There is also a language that is being used between drivers and pedestrians on the road, and between drivers themselves. Evan's attempt to communicate with Jassim using gaze and zigzag movement in front of Jassim's car is a case in point. Evan, ostensibly wants to send racist and anti-Arab messages. As Lefebvre puts, there is always a code or a language ensued from spaces produced (1991, p. 16). Communication and culture, in opposite, are conceived as secondary superstructures that "can be simultaneously consumed by an endless number of humans" (Fuchs, 2019, pp. 14, 19). The car, in the light of Lefebvre's theory, is a (social) space that produces language that creates social connections which, over the time, recreates environment that reconfirms the its space as a social space. Indeed, this dialectal relationship between the (social) space and social product sets up structures, institutions, systems, discourse, cultures and spaces. Further, the way people experience the vehicles' spaces spontaneously generates ideas and discourse that cannot be fully restricted or sponsored by capitalists or politicians who try to crush "the lived experience" of common people (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 51). By extension, the interior and the exterior of the car, indeed become a paragon of Edward Soja's third space, where aspects of the real and the imaginary converge, especially for immigrants, as evidenced in Jassim's case. The car can be additionally seen as an inbetween space in a multicultural society. Thus, two points can be drawn from the foregoing discussion. First, the car that transports people to new places becomes part of their social textures. Second, once someone shares the interior of their car with others, the car is immediately transmuted into a social realm because of the social relationships being produced.

Valassopoulos calls such produced relationships "allegiances." Nevertheless, she poses a question about the nature of these allegiances that the couple tend to forge in the crises. Jassim hangs out with Penny, the white waitress, while Salwa has been attracted by her fellow worker, Jake. Through juxtaposing these "odd" allegiances with their "rejection" to their Arab-American communities (2013, p. 2), Valassopoulos underscores the anti-essentialist tendencies,

reflected in new identity of the Arab Americans post 9/11. In particular, Salwa's identity begins to take a new shape as she feels more and more alienated from her husband and her co-workers at the bank. Following an incident at the bank in which Salwa feels that she has been racially abused by a white American woman, Salwa finds Jake's attention amusing and comforting. Jake, as explained before, is Salwa's co-worker, who is younger than her, and unknown to her a drug addict and dealer. Triggered by her psychological need to be recognized and accepted among white people, Salwa befriends him. She drives many times to meet him in secret. Salaita comments on Salwa's attraction to this American young man, contending that "[Salwa's] ethnicity is built into Americans' perception of her, and any negative associations with that ethnicity come forward in unguarded moments" (2011, p. 291). Similarly, Llyod notes that it is only after Salwa has been treated badly by American customers at the bank where she works, that she decides to accept Jake's attention (2012, p. 21). In fact, Jake's company has been satisfying for Salwa, as she starts identifying herself again with the white "American" race. Her intimate relationship with him can be construed as an attempt to achieve the social inclusion and protection, which she, much like other Arab Americans, has lost after 9/11.

Throughout the novel, Salwa uses her car to keep close to Jake; she drives to visit him in his apartment several times. Once, while Salwa is parking her car near Jake's apartment, Mexican worker Esteban warns her that this place is not safe for cars. When she goes back to her car later, she finds one of its windows smashed. Initially, Salwa avoids communicating with the Mexican gardeners, thinking they may form a threat to her and her car. And when she has been warned about the danger of this neighbourhood, she does not take their advice seriously. She rather thinks that they might be responsible of her car's break in. Once more, Halaby uses the broken window of Salwa's car to foreshadow the imminent brutal violence that befalls Salwa at the end.

When Salwa visits Jake to say goodbye at the end of the novel, she sees the Mexicans working as usual. As she passes by, they smile to her. Salwa "imagines the miles of desert [these Mexican men] must have crossed for the opportunity to trim and mow and prune, the perils they must have endured to have their clear shot at the American Dream" (Halaby, 2007, p. 318). To her surprise, they are still capable of smiling, caring, and behaving with gentleness. At the door of Jake's apartment, Salwa's "heart pounding, and she glanced towards her faraway car, saw that all three workers were watching her" (Halaby, 2007, p. 316). Her fears get intense, feeling that what she does is not righteous. She thinks of her car, her shelter, measuring the distance between them. This time, she does not want to see Jake, she wishes he "would be gone", for she fears his reaction. She, instead, wants to go back to her car hastily, so she can socialize with those three Mexican workers from her own 'safe' space.

Once Jake knows about her decision to move back home to Jordan, he shouts at her, "you're running back to the pigsty you came from" (Halaby, 2007, p. 320). While she is heading out of his apartment to her car, he attacks her with a Japanese painting that cuts off her face. Seconds later, Esteban and his Mexican fellows rush into the scene and rescue her. The kindness and sympathy which Esteban shows impresses Salwa. Halaby narrates, that

In spite of the staccato way his words came at her and the thickness of his fingers, his gentleness overpowered her. All the years that she had been in America came to this: being saved from her own stupidity by a man who perhaps had risked his life so that he could prune trees and fix sprinkler heads. (2007, p. 323)

Upon this realization, her perception of Mexicans and other minorities completely changes, as she grows more compassionate. When the police come, the first question they ask "Does she speak English?" (*ibid.*). This sort of question implies that the immigrant's physical appearance will always reveal his or her original identity, no matter what she/he does to look exactly like white people. The exterior space of the car enables Salwa to come into contact with Mexican gardeners, inasmuch as it permits Jassim to socialize with Penny and invert her perception of Arab Americans. Salwa's and Jassim's aspiration to extend their social knowledge in the aftermath of 9/11 and the car crash thoroughly reflects how their characters are immensely transformed in consequence. With the raised awareness of their vulnerability in the American society, the space of their private vehicles turns out to be their tools not only for defying exclusion, but also for integrating and expanding societal connectedness. The couple's cars become their (social) space, through which incessant social relationships are casually reproduced. The cars, mirrored in final occurrences, are likely to encompass meanings of an alternative home, which, in its core, exudes radiant competence, safety, empathy, inasmuch as it incorporates social acceptance.

6. Conclusion

Notwithstanding its omnipresence in people's life, the car had been increasingly excluded from the academic debate. However, with the advent of postmodernist theories, various disciplines have engaged in cultural studies, and the study of the automobile started to transcend its semiotic representation to take a more vital position in spatiality,

sociology, literature and other humanities. Spatial turn theory has opened up the door to both humanistic and scientific disciplines to take advantage of the spatial implications. Micheal Bakhtin and Henri Lefebvre are among the most influential theorists who transcended the scope of conceptualization of space. Bakhtin introduces his theory of chronotope, to scrutinize the space in relation to time in fictive world, while Lefebvre develops his theory of the production of social space to discuss the impact of space on human relationships in the real world.

This study, accordingly, has proposed the efficient use of these two theories in literature to investigate the function of the car in Arab diasporic literature. The car embodies Bakhtin's artistic chronotope for being a focal place where "knots of narrative are tied and untied. *It* can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 250). Thus, through examining the representation of the car as a chronotopic social space in Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*, issues of displacement, exclusion, and social alienation have been brought to the fore. Halaby's characters are depicted struggling to maintain their social acceptance in post 9/11 America. In this regard, Jassim and Salwa effectively utilize their cars to create connections with people from underclasses. Jassim befriends Penny and Evan's mother who belong to the working class, while Salwa establishes a relationship with Jake, her American co-worker who happens to be drug dealer and addict. This article has demonstrated how the lived spaces of their cars propel them to come in contact with people from other ethnic backgrounds, and thereby, increase their knowledge of the American multicultural society. Through roaming around the poor neighbourhoods of Penny and Evan's family in his Mercedes, Jassim gets in touch with people from different social, national and ethnic backgrounds. Salwa's car, on the other hand, becomes the sole topic of several talks she has with Mexican worker Esteban. Overall, Jassim's Mercedes and Salwa's Nissan SUV have been spaces that remould the couple's social experience. However, the representational space they thoroughly embrace inside their cars enables them to challenge racism, classism, and social exclusion in the outer society. Accordingly, the experience the couple live through their cars helps transform their characters inasmuch as it enhances their understanding of their surroundings and their hyphen-identities.

References

- Awad, Y. (2012). *The Arab Atlantic: Resistance, diaspora, and trans-cultural Dialogue in the works of Arab British and Arab American women writers*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Banita, G. (2010). Race, Risk, and Fiction in the War on Terror: Laila Halaby, Gayle Brandeis, and Michael Cunningham. *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 21(4), 242-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2010.523612>
- Barthes, R. (1957). *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The System of Objects*. London: Verso. Print.
- Berrebah, I. (2021). Women in Cultural Insularity and Anxious Spaces in the Arab and Arab American Contexts in Laila Halaby's *West of the Jordan*. *Anglo Saxonica*, 19(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.5334/as.58>
- Bush, G. W. (2001, Sep.20). *Address to a Joint Session of Congress* [Speech transcript]. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>
- Fadda-Conrey, C. (2011). Arab American Citizenship in Crisis: Destabilizing Representations of Arabs and Muslims in the US after 9/11. *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 57(3), 532-555. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2011.0068>
- Foucault, M. (2001). *The Order of Things*. 2nd ed., Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2019). Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space and the Critical Theory of Communication. *Communication Theory*, 29(2), 129-150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qty025>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Americanism and Fordism*. Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. Trans. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. Eds. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International.
- Halaby, L. (2007). *Once in a Promised Land*. Boston. Beacon Press.
- Horkheimer, M., & Theodor W. A. (1982). *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Llyod, A. (2012). Reverse Orientalism: Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. (Master degree). Cleveland State University. ETD Archive. 529. <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/529>

- Montón, E. O. (2017). The Forgotten Victims of 9/11: Cultural Othering in Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 50(2), 17-34. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sli.2017.0010>
- Morson, G. S. (1984). *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pearce, B. (2016). Gatsby's Rolls-Royce: Reflections on the Automobile and Literature. *English Academy Review*, 33(2), 52-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10131752.2016.1249686>
- Salaita, S. (2011). *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Soja E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and-imagined places*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell.
- Thacker, A. (2003). *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Unwin, T. (2004). A Waste of Space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 25, 11-29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0020-2754.2000.00011.x>
- Valassopoulos, A. (2013). Negotiating Un-belonging in Arab-American Writing: Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land*. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50(5), 596-608. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.862443>

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).