

# Crossing the Border: Arab-American Literature and the Politics of Exclusion

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## Abstract

*This paper attempts to trace the development of Arab-American literary tradition through three distinct generations—each of which responds quite differently to the identity politics, cultural hybridity, subversion of orientalist gaze, and the crisis of belonging amidst the inevitable multifacetedness of the Arab-American community. The literary works of the contemporary Arab-American writers are engaged with the idea of the American landscape as a long-term rather than a provisional home. In other words, this new generation of writers manages to hover over the divide between the two cultures and view the Arab world from the American soil. The paper finally approaches the Post-9/11 Arab-American novel in terms of receptiveness, characteristics, challenges, and future outlook. I argue that for the contemporary Arab-American novel to flourish, the integration of Arab experience into the American fabric, in the sense that themes and subject matters related to both sides of the hyphen, should be acknowledged as a cultural necessity. Ironically, this is the best way for Arab-American novelists to bring their distinct voices to the multi-vocal mainstream culture, to carve a niche for themselves. The useful analogy is the literary cultural expressions and experiences of the Asian, African or Canadian communities on the American soil; they are distinct, but not different from the cultural traditions of other diaspora communities.*

**Keywords:** Arab-American, Cultural Hybridity, Identity Politics, Post-/911 Novel, Neo-Orientalism.

## Introduction

With the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Arab-American literary writings have witnessed unprecedented flourishing and visibility. Diverse collections of Arab-American literary productions have emerged over the last century which gained Arab-American literature international acclaim. This dramatic boost in publications by Arab-American writers turned the spotlight on this ethnic minority. Like their hybrid identities, the literary works of Arab-American writers are indeed a combination of both Arab and American cultures, and more importantly, a mix that is as yet not a finished product. The cultural hybridity of both Arab and American literary traditions has allowed new voices to emerge.

It seems important to raise some challenging questions about the cultural importance of this new genre before I begin to trace the evolution of Arab-American writing. This paper aims to answer the following questions: What is Arab-American literature? What is its purpose? How does Arab-American literature gradually emerge? How do Arab-American writers negotiate their double identities, particularly in the post-9/11 America? What makes this literature distinct from other American ethnic writings? How do Arab-American writers manage to live on the hyphen? How does gazing at the East from the American landscape influence their writings? How do Arab-Americans straddle the boundary that is constantly shifting? Most importantly, is Arab-American literature a part of American literature? If not, how does it differ from Arab writing in English? Finally, how accessible will a non-Arab audience be to Arab-American writers, and what criterion will guarantee the universal appreciation of their works? These questions will help in theorizing about Arab-American literature since defining this kind of

growing genre is more problematic than a facile, narrow definition of ethnic literature.

### 1. What is Arab-American Literature?

Given the rich and varied history of Arab-American literary tradition and invisibility, the attempt to define Arab-American literature through a particular theme element is undoubtedly difficult. The Arab-American experience is shaped by a very long history of migration. As it has been mentioned earlier, the heterogeneity of this ethnic group is very rich in the sense that it includes people from different backgrounds—Arabs, Muslims, Jews, and Christians. It also includes people who identify with the Arab roots of their culture and those who identify with the American cultural traditions. This kind of diversity complicates the idea of reaching at a proper understanding or consensus of what constitutes Arab-American identity. Salaita (2017) posed a few important questions regarding the need for an open-ended definition of Arab-American literature:

What is an Arab American? This is our most important question, yet perhaps the most difficult to answer. Must one speak Arabic? Be fully Semite? Must an Arab American be Muslim? Can he/she be Jewish? Are non-American citizens Arabs or Arab Americans? These questions will constantly be rewritten and re-answered in such a diverse and dynamic culture. (1)

The in-between space where Arab-Americans reside has continued to unsettle assumptions about what it means to be Arab, American, or Arab-American at the same time. The experience of living on the hyphen enables Arab-American writers to inhabit multiple cultures and address multiple audiences. It also helps them move beyond both the dehumanized American present and the nostalgic celebration of Arab past to a more transitional space where

the pull between the two homes can be successfully negotiated.

The rubric of Arab-American literature should not be limited to writers of Arab origins. It should include non-Arab writers whose writings tackle the issues of Arab-American community. A study that is interested in tracing the connection between socio-political relations and artistic re-presentation of them, affiliation to this minority with Arab and American roots is the criterion for inclusion under the category Arab-American.

Arab writings in English alone are not material enough to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of Arab-American literature, since that literature and the experience that underpins the literature, is much more complex to the point of being nebulous. Arab readers will be the sole audience of these narratives and that will undoubtedly confine the identity of Arab-Americans to only one part of the hyphen, Arabic. According to Salaita (2017), one of the big mistakes Arab-American writers often make "[...] is trying to write back towards a pure Arab heritage. In this, they will never succeed, for such a thing exists only in the imagination. Their task is to build a heritage identifiably linked to the Arab world but that is nonetheless their own" (1). If we consider Arab-American literature as purely Arabic literature written in English that will diminish the Arab-American identity to the Arab world, notwithstanding the fact that the use of English might potentially bring into play non-Arab elements, besides attracting non-Arab readership.

Majaj (1999) insisted on the need to take a closer look at what constitutes Arab-American literature, "Arab American authors do not simply write Arab literature in English (as was once suggested to me): they do not simply translate from culture to culture. Arab American literary works need to explore

ethnicity as something altogether new: something that is in the process of creation" (132-133). In other words, Arab-American literature is a kind of multi-ethnic literature wherein Arab and American experiences complement each other.

The cultural legacy of Arab-American literary tradition revealed the underlying miseries, racial profiling, and the neo-orientalist discourse of Arabs in America and embodies their struggle to be an active entity in the mainstream American culture. As a growing genre, modern Arab-American literature has no stable trajectory of events and "[...] what happens "there" always influences the "here," usually before "there" even arrives, as it usually does, in the United States" (Salaita, 2007.59). The incidents that take place in Arab countries, like the invasion of Iraq, get represented in the Arab-American writings in a variety of ways. The fluctuation and double-consciousness of contemporary Arab-American writers between "here" and "there" lead to a difficult and challenging process of identity construction.

Salaita (2011) defined Arab-American literature as a remarkably new genre that "[...] consists of creative work produced by American authors of Arab origin and that participates, in a conscious way or through its critical reception, in a category that has come to be known as "Arab American literature" (4). However, the process of defining Arab-American literature is not an easy task in light of its cultural diversity and heterogeneity. The complexity raises the question of authority and assignation of collective identity. Salaita aspired for a definition that could include, but is not limited to Arab writers, in order to move beyond the homogenous pseudo-literary tradition, to more diverse and transnational paradigms. Remarkably, Arab-American literature is a hybrid mixture of Arab and

American cultures produced by American writers of Arab origin who were either born or lived in America and whose literary works represent Arab-American issues with one eye fixed on the American culture, while the other eye turned towards the Arab world. I find it useful to site this literature on what Bhabha calls the “space in-between” (79).

After defining Arab-American literature, it is important to trace the origin of Arab-Americans and how their heterogeneity and diversity complicate the construction of Arab-American identity. Blood relationships and nationality also tend to complicate the crisis of identity. Salaita (2007) describes the diverse roots of Arab-Americans as follows:

Arab Americans are Muslim (Shia and Sunni and Alawi and Isma’ili), Christian (Catholic and Orthodox, Anglican and Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant), Jewish (Orthodox and Conservative and Haredi and Reform), Druze, Bahai, dual citizens of Israel and twenty-two Arab nations, multi- and monolingual, progressives and conservatives, assimilationists and nationalists, cosmopolitanists and pluralists, immigrants and fifth-generation Americans, wealthy and working-class, rural and urban, modern and traditional, religious and secular, White and Black, Latin American and Canadian. We also occupy the many spaces between these binaries. (1)

What Salaita has suggested challenges any simplistic representation of Arab-American identity as a homogeneous ethnic group in the United States. This definition also opened the door wide to embrace a kind of cultural diversity and facilitates more possibilities for transnational affiliations. Arab-Americans should never compromise on the elements of their culture in favor of one-sided identity. It would be better for them to express themselves

on their own terms and voices that evoke freedom and protect their rights to live as American citizens. In the face of the reckless reduction of Arab-Americans into merely weaponized bodies and hardcore Islamic mindset, whatever that is, Arab-American often embrace a feckless honorary whiteness. This is a gross oversimplification of the complexity of their existence and experience.

Contemporary Arab-American literature tries to explore the intricacy of the hyphen separating the two elements of identity—Arab and American—in hope of booking a seat of their own in the main stream culture and go beyond the rigid labels of a single identity. The tendency of going from the nostalgic past to the post-nostalgic stage situates Arab-Americans in the in-between space. In other words, the post-nostalgic writers embrace a more fluid understanding of home and deconstruct any stable binary opposition in the process of identity formation. The post-nostalgic space constitutes a place where categories are uncategorized, and the space defining one’s subjectivity or identity is always in a state of flux. To return to Homi Bhabha, the process of defining diasporic identities necessitates a kind of “[...] in-between” spaces [which] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal– that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration” (2). From a Bhabhian perspective, the in-between space is a way of constituting the liminality, which somewhat allows hybrid individuals to create a space where they can better express their cultural difference. The third space thus enables Arab-American writers to compromise their American present with their Arab past. This positioning reflects a deep understanding of their hyphenated identity, and smoothes the formation of spaces situated on each side of the hyphen.

Arab-American writings are not characterized by the mere use of creativity to translate feelings into words. They have much to do with the struggle of a community, for whom their religion is a castle in which they are often confined, to live peacefully in their new home in the United States. Ludescher spoke about how Arab-American writers transcend the traditional tradition of writing and creativity to unmask their dilemma of belonging as an ethnic minority in the United States. Ludescher asked "Should they [Arab-American writers] be considered Arab American writers? Furthermore, should Arab American writers focus on the Arab side of experience, emphasizing the traditions and values of the Arab world, or should they focus on the American side of experience, emphasizing American immigrant experience in the context of multiculturalism" (106). Arab-American writings include a plethora of interior monologues wherein incidents evolve the simplistic nostalgia of their countries of origin into the need to embrace a diasporic identity in the new home. Hence, the kind of split in the Arab-American identity heavily influences Arab-American writers as they unconsciously shift to use the stream of consciousness narrative techniques without even realizing it. The unfinished/unsettled thought takes the form of a literary technique, which is the hallmark of the fiction of high modernism. For Arab-American writers to survive, they should dance on the hyphen and embrace cultural diversity in their literary works.

Nowadays, Arab-American literature is multi-diverse in the sense that it belongs to numerous cultures and engages in a variety of politics. The very act of celebrating cultural diversities will contribute to the cultural and political tenor of the Arab-American community. It would also produce a burgeoning literature that can offer an alternative discourse to the one

dominant in mainstream American culture. Through their diverse and inclusive culture, Arab-American writers can better celebrate their otherness by voicing both their cultural difference and similarities, as demonstrated by some of the leading Arab-American creators.

There are two different views regarding the classification of Arab-American writings. Some see Arab-American writings as Arab writings in English, while others view them as American literature that has emerged from the American soil, and developed within the ethos of multiculturalism. Majaj (1999) summed up this debate:

The first view that Arab-American identity is in essence a transplanted Arab identity, turning upon a preservation of Arab culture, maintenance of the Arab language, involvement in Middle Eastern politics, and a primary relationship to the Arab world. From this perspective, attenuation of "Arab" characteristics and involvement may be taken as representing a betrayal of Arab heritage and hence of Arab-American identity. The second view, however, is that Arab-American identity is intrinsically American and should be understood in relation to the American context and American frameworks of assimilation and multiculturalism. (3)

These perspectives are often seen as distinct, but not different. While the competing perspectives described above obviously influence those who identify themselves as Arab-American, this hyphenated status is only one of many in the diverse cultural amalgamation of mainstream American culture. There are many contemporary Arab-American writers, like the three selected for this study—Diana Abu-Jaber, Rabih Alameddine, and Alia Yunis, who celebrate the two sides of the hyphen, tackle Arab issues, and at the same time seek integration and assimilation into the

American culture. However, Arab-American writers cannot celebrate the hyphen quite equally. El-Said (2017) noted that “[...] it would be rather simplistic to regard their [Arab-American writers] work as belonging to one genre. The degree of Arabness varies from one generation to another and from one writer to the other” (163). Hence, there is still a slight affiliation in favor of one of the markers of the hyphen depending on which generation the Arab-American writer belongs to and on the fact that Arab-American identity is transnational and is always in a state of fluidity.

One of the issues facing Arab-American literature today is the lack of a literary critical tradition and critical discourse on the subject. There is also a kind of ambiguity surrounding the positioning of the Arab-American literary productions: should they push for better representations within the Arab World in particular and the Middle East at large or should they locate themselves within the American cultural traditions. The lack of proper critiques for Arab-American literature makes its literary tradition almost absent from any discussions/ critical engagement of ethnic and American studies. The growth of critical writing is a prerequisite for the circulation of Arab-American literature globally. In other words, the availability of nuanced readings of these texts would play a vital role in exploring and widening the cultural and sociological scopes of Arab-American literature, and in situating this new genre within the context of world literature.

For a better understanding of Arab-American critical approaches, this new literature should have the space on the discursive terrain, academic discussions and conferences in universities and within Arab-American cultural network. These critical studies should focus on the dimensions of Arab-American cultural,

social and political life that has much to do with the creative productions and receptions of this literature and address the global reader. Arab-American writers and critics should articulate what Fadda-Conrey (2014) called “[...] a rising need among Arab-Americans for a transformative project of communal and individual self-representation, one that captures the complexity and heterogeneity of their communities” (2). The necessity of having scholarly criticism on the subject would facilitate the possibility of highlighting the Arab and American parts of this hybrid literature.

According to Majaj, the history of Arab-American literary criticism began with the publication of two anthologies of Arab American literature: *Wrapping the Grape Leaves: A Sheaf of Contemporary Arab-American Poets* (1982), edited by Gregory Orfalea, and *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* (1988), edited by Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa. The emergence of these two works established “[...] Arab-American Literature as a category on computer data-bases and in card catalogues” (Majaj, 1996, 71-72). Moreover, the first and second decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had witnessed significant and notable literary criticism by Arab-American critics like Steven Salaita’s *Arab American Literary Fictions...* (2007) and *Modern Arab American Literature* (2011), Carol Fadda-Conrey’s *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging* (2014) and Wail Hassan’s *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (2011). However, the works of Salaita, Fadda-Conrey, and Hassan mark the beginning of a long journey towards reshaping the critical understanding of contemporary Arab-American literature as an emerging field of critical enquiry.

## 2. The Development of Arab-American Literary Tradition Then and Now

The trajectory of Arab-American literature has gone through three distinct phases—each of which responds quite differently to the politics of racial categorization, subversion of orientalist gaze, and the crisis of belonging amidst the multifacetedness of Arab-American community. These three distinct phases of Arab-American literature contribute to the establishment of Arab-American literary tradition as an emergent field of study. Arab-American writers live at the in-between space that is constantly shifting. They were shaped by a very long history of migration which is remarkably diverse and heterogeneous. The development of images of homeland, exile, identity crisis, and oriental representations differ from generation to generation, depending on the cultural and political milieu they were written in.

The most prominent figures of the early Arab-American writers are Gibran Kahlil Gibran—known as the founding father of Arab-American literature (1883–1931), and Ameen Rihani (1876–1940). The two writers wrote as the citizen of a borderless world and negotiated the cultural divides between their countries of origin on the one hand and the American side on the other. With the publication of Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* (1911) and Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923), Arab-American literature added to its stock significant additions that made the first step in the formation of Arab-American literature as a grand success. Being the pioneers of Arab-American literature, Rihani and Gibran are considered prolific writers in the Arab world and at the diasporic level as well. They contributed largely to the development of Arab-American literature in particular and Arab literature in general. For example, Gibran's masterpiece *The Prophet* was written in English and translated into more

than fifty languages. Similarly, Rihani's epoch-making literary output including *The Book of Khalid* is also written in English and referred to as the first Arab-American novel.

Both Gibran and Rihani's literary oeuvres, which draw on both Western and traditional Arabic literary traditions, play a crucial role in introducing Arab-American literature to global readers. According to Rebecca Layton, "The first generation of Arab American writers had newly arrived from their home countries enabled them to cross the bridge from traditional Arabic literary practices [...] and verse forms to embrace a more expanded definition of Arabic literature" (9). The ultimate goal of the literary endeavors of the early Arab-American writers was to transcend diasporic self-representations and embrace the affiliations of cultural belonging. They were acutely conscious of the stagnated status of Arabic literature authored by their contemporaries, so they had the freedom of creation in the United States as far as the development and change of literary movement of their literature back home is concerned.

Gibran, Rihani, Mikhail Naimy and Nasib Arida, to name a few, established what was known as "The Pen League".<sup>i</sup> Gibran and his contemporaries, according to Al Maleh (2009) "[...] did not write about the Arab/Syrian/Lebanese component in them so much as about the global citizen who refused national labeling [...] they represented paradigms of Transnationalism and cultural border-crossing" (426). According to Mikhail Naimy, the primary reason behind establishing such literary league was "[...] to lift Arabic literature from the quagmire of stagnation and imitation, and to infuse a new life into its veins so as to make of it an active force in the building up of the Arab nations, and to promote a new generation of Arab writers" (cited. in Ludescher, 2006, 95-96). The attitude of the

early Arab-American writers towards their own literature reveals their sense of belonging and the hyphenated identity that they have in exile. The American soil was a better environment for them than their countries of origin, yet, their works are permeated by the sense of belonging.

The familiarity with the Arab cultural and literary tradition is a prerequisite for the understanding of early Arab-American literature. The need for global circulation is also important in order to be part of an established literary tradition and discourse. The early Arab-American writers made great contributions to the process of interpretation of the Arab culture for a non-Arab audience, and their literary works formed the cultural bridge between the Arab world and Western culture. Shakir (1996) spoke about how the first generation of Arab-American writers endeavored to negotiate with Americanness as a racial construct:

[...] (they) dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters. They could not hide their foreignness, but they could make it respectable. Their American born children [...] costumed themselves as “regular Americans” and hoped to pass, which may be why they produced so little literature.(6)

The scarcity of the first generation writers' works is attributed to their struggles of assimilation into the American culture in order to pass as normal American citizens. Though the literary outcomes of the first-generation writers were poetic and entertaining, they are somewhat dated and they did not truly speak the Arab-American experience. They also represent a failure in the way of dealing with American orientalism.

The desire of the first generation of Arab-American writers to leave their native country

and embrace a new culture is replaced by a more powerful need to assimilate into American culture with the second generation of writers. There was a period of transition during which the second-generation writers wrote with a skeptical eye on both the Arab world and the American culture. This attitude, according to Shakir, “[...] helped to rekindle a sense of ethnicity in the established community and promoted a sense of kinship with the Arab world in general not just one corner of it, thus raising an old question: What should people in the Arabic speaking community call themselves” (9). Moving forward, the second generation writers manifest the need to be part of the American mainstream. Al Maleh argued that the second-generation writers “[...] were less able or less desirous to maintain the cultural balance which their predecessors sustained. The ‘universal’ voice was slowly to dissolve into a more pronounced American one in the 1950s and 1960s, giving way to writing that gradually drew away from Arab concerns”( 432). Among the celebrated Arab American writers of this period are Joseph Geta, Vance Bourjaily, William Peter Blatty, and Eugene Paul Nassar, among others.

The second-generation writers were not shy to present themselves as mainstream writers and did not prefer to be identified as Arab-American writers. These writers began writing at a time when the Arab-American experience had been going through decades of assimilation. For instance, in *Through and Through* (1990), a collection of short fiction, Geta depicts the culmination of the assimilative process, establishing a distance from their Arab identity and heritage. More importantly, the second-generation writings coincided with the rupture of communication with the homeland due to the American government's policy restricting the number of immigrants, which continued until 1965. As the children of the

first-generation Syrian immigrants, this being the group that constituted the second generation Arab-American writers, had English as their mother tongue and their lack of Arabic language had affected their understanding of their Arab heritage. Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993), the first Arab-American novel to reach the larger American audience, is a representative novel of the second-generation writings. In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber celebrates cultural diversity and produces what Ludescher (2006) described as "[...] a flurry of controversy because it broke an unwritten rule in the Arab American community that members should not criticize Arabs and Arab Americans in public" (104). *Arabian Jazz* also presents a notable growth in the Arab-American literary tradition regarding the post-nostalgic understanding of immigrants' ethnic past in sharp contrast to Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*.

The third phase of the Arab-American literature witnessed a significant shift towards fiction writings. What matters most in this phase is the writers' preoccupied engagement with ethnicity, identity construction, and the racialization of the Arab-American citizenship. This phase witnessed the act of embracing Arab-American ethnicity. Ludescher has called the contemporary Arab-American writers "The Newest Generation of Arab American Writers" (105). The new generation of writers such as Diana Abu-Jaber, Rabih Alameddine, Layla Halaby, and Alia Yunis have been publishing a large number of literary works, more sophisticated in treatment and presentation and wider in content to suggest the arrival of a community, both ethnic and literary, that is different from the first and second generations of Arab-Americans.

The contemporary writers are engaged with the idea of the United States as an abode, rather than a provisional home. Even though these

writers are internally connected to an Arab homeland, their transnational mindset is distinguished by the claim that the United States is a permanent home for Arab immigrants and their descendants. The desire to transcend the simplistic representations of home alters the fixed and exclusive landscape of the United States citizenship and belonging. Rather than framing their works primarily in terms of their contributions to an ongoing tradition of Arabic literature, the contemporary Arab-American writings have to be read as an Arab-American literature, which involves recognizing their stimulating role in shaping alternative and anti-hegemonic of one-sided cultural production. In other words, the works produced by contemporary Arab-American writers are to be considered multicultural rather than mono-cultural works. They belong to the class of writings that conceive cultural identities and the experiences thereof in non-essential and processual ways.

The contemporary generation of Arab-American writers destabilize the idea of nostalgia by using emotive representations of their native lands that go beyond a celebratory focus on ethnic and cultural traditions to include accounts of the harsh realities of war, displacement, alienation, politics, and exile. This is in contrast to how the *Mahjar* writers embraced nostalgic memories of the homeland. Through such portrayals, the contemporary Arab-American writers carry out the important task of what Shakir (1996) called "[...] demythologizing the homeland" (23). The generational shift in perspective becomes noticeable in the works of writers who either were born or came of age in the 1950s and 1960s onward. This watershed period witnessed the development of a critical and interrogative outlook among Arab-Americans primarily due to major political and military upheavals as well as social change occurring in

the United States and in the Arab world. Having produced anti-nostalgic literary depictions of original homelands, the contemporary-generation of writers exploit transnational frameworks of knowledge production to reflect in their works a revisionary approach to the Arab-American citizenship and identity. The approach in this instance is to offer a corrective the received view about the United States national membership by inserting the complex political, religious, and national complexes called Arab homelands into discursive constructions of American culture.

### **3. Double-Consciousness: Gazing at the Arab World from the American Soil<sup>ii</sup>**

The notion of double-consciousness, formerly applied to the internal conflict experienced by African-Americans, is also applicable to the situation of Arab-Americans in the post-9/11 America. The term “double-consciousness” is coined by DuBois who defines it as the state wherein “[...] blacks [are] being forced to view themselves through white perspectives while maintaining their own self definitions” (cited. in Marc Black, 393; my parenthesis). The cultural identity that Arab-Americans claimed remains one of the most controversial questions about this ethnic minority. The way Arab-Americans respond to their contested identities is quite different from the response of African Americans. While the African Americans, forming the largest ethnic minority in the United States, try to drop the hyphen and combine both the identities, Arab-Americans celebrate the hyphen separating the two identities and thus embrace the American identity while showing pride to their identity of origin.

By situating themselves within the American framework while maintaining affiliations to their homelands, Arab-American writers manage to challenge the blanket

representations propagated by the neo-imperial, neo-orientalist gaze. The American neo-orientalism as a new form of Orientalism became more prominent in the aftermath of 9/11. Although it operates within the framework that Said’s laid out, American neo-orientalist stance offers new insights to the representations of Arabs in America that have a different trajectory from that of classical Orientalism. Neo-orientalism rationalizes the military campaign of war on terror and portrays the Arab world as in need of American democracy to survive this political moment. Contemporary Arab-American writers produce narratives that counter the dominance of neo-orientalist stereotyping that, while rooted to classical Orientalism, prompts new agendas of othering. The abundant writings of Arab-American writers in the post-9/11 era serve to shed light on the different paradigms of the neo-orientalist discourse that feed Islamophobia, racial discrimination, and other ethnic and cultural prejudices.

Over the past century, Arab-Americans had exerted great efforts to embrace white ethnicity. However, time has shown that this white status is merely honorary and is quickly revoked in the aftermath of an event like 9/11. The essence of such ‘honorary whiteness’ receives no legal status within the scope of minority cultures, even as it deprives Arab-Americans of their rights as people of color. In other words, the honorary whiteness of Arab-Americans in fact means that the issues of racism, racial profiling, potential for terror, and discrimination often remain unconsidered under the pretext that white people can never suffer from these issues.

The feeling of ‘doubleness’ has arisen recently in relation to minority literature whereby diasporic writers cross the borders of two different worlds: the country of their origin and the host country. In the case of Arab-American

writers, they seek to leap the gulf between the two cultures and claim a classification adequate to their experience. However, they are challenged by what DuBois called double-consciousness, a process of internalization wherein Arab-American writers are caught between two places—with one foot in the American part of their identity, while the other foot in the Arab world. The ebb and flow between the Arab and American parts of the hyphen reveals the difficulties of trying to draw neat identity boundaries.

In the post-9/11 world, Arab-American writers have been doubly invisible, partly because they were torn between their parents' culture and their new culture. The core of their plight, according to El-Said (2003), is that "Arab-Americans, who are a *mélange* of Arab and American, become trapped in an attempt to redefine their identity, and reconstruct a hybridity that seems impossible in a world that is divided into "we" and "them" (3). This feeling of doubleness has political, cultural, and even ethnic implications that go beyond any naive celebrations of nostalgia and unsettled homes. Shehabat (2015) described how the aftermath of 9/11 worsens the Arab-Americans' ability to maintain balance between the two cultures:

The post of September 11 attacks has witnessed tremendous change regarding the representation of Arab Americans. For *émigrés* and expatriates, the increased feelings of in-betweenness and double-consciousness have been their greatest concerns. They have experienced two different worlds that pertain to contradictory cultures. For the citizens of the host home, the US, those immigrants are only 'second class' citizens. On the other hand, *émigrés*' native people hold the view that these people are no more than foreigners, predators, and aliens. (42)

The post-9/11 picture has viewed Arab-Americans as potential terrorists and the enemy residing within. Novels like Lila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2008), Alia Yunis' *The Night Counter* (2009), and Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2009), are clear examples of the American policy of demonizing Arabs in the post-9/11 era. These unfair allegations have complicated the Arab-Americans' crisis of identity as they get entrapped between two different cultures which consequently weaken their claim for citizenships. The kind of racial discrimination experienced by Arab-Americans after 9/11 attacks intensifies the internalization of their foreignness as enforced by the American hegemonic gaze. Shehabat acknowledges this doubleness. Just like other ethnic minorities in the United States "Arab-American authors were contended by matters of double-consciousness, duality, and twoness when they attempted to construct a true identity for themselves" (43). The perception of dual identities influences the Arab-American crisis of belonging in the sense that they are seen as alien wherever they go because they fail to fully belong to any one culture. In other words, they are considered too Arab by America and too American by the Arabs. With this feeling of duality, the fluid identities that Arab-Americans have embraced are challenged nowadays like never before, and are turning into a source of conflict. The hyphen in "Arab-American" shows that these two identities are overlapping, and not distinct, entities. The outcome of this feeling of dual-consciousness is that it has provided Arab-American writers a ghetto of sorts. Theirs is neither a cosmopolitan/multicultural existence, nor is a life characterized by the unbearable burden of Arab ethnicity.

#### 4. Contemporary Arab-American Novel: Characteristics, Challenges, and Future Prospects

The rise of the contemporary Arab-American novel coincides with the war on terror and the advent of the American neo-orientalism. Over the past two decades, the contemporary Arab-American novel has witnessed unprecedented global circulation against a long history of censorship and ban on sales. Soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Arab-American writers became more visible like never before. They spoke volumes about the repercussions of the terrorist attacks in complex and clarifying ways both individually and collectively. Thus, the Arab-American literary responses to 9/11 took different forms of cultural interventions and have been remarkable counter-narratives, reactive, and corrective in their overall propensity. The subject matters of these literary works concerns various racial issues in which the limits of Arab-American self-representations in the aftermath of 9/11 can be better reconfigured and renegotiated. What matters the most for contemporary Arab-American novelists is their relentless struggles to defend their rights as American citizens. Moreover, they do not prefer nostalgic celebrations of the Arab world as a form of compensation for home. The readiness to claim America as their home helps Arab-American writers to tackle various forms of displacement, exile, and dispossession, and this is markedly different from the Arab-American on the street, struggling with their double invisibility and double alienation.

Given the Arab-American history of invisibility and exclusion, these contemporary writers bear the responsibility of challenging the diasporic, racial, ethnic and political frameworks of the dominant culture. They also critique their own contested identities and relationships with other minority groups in the

United States. Fadda-Conrey's comment is pertinent here. The claim of having the United States as home in contemporary Arab-American narratives, Fadda-Conrey (2014) observes, is triggered by Arab cultural-political traces that complicates the process of their transnational citizenship and belonging:

The claim that asserts a US landscape in their works, claims informed by an Arab cultural and political lens, produce a complex type of transnational citizenship and belonging that flies in the face of the assimilation-versus-ethnic-insularity model. This type of transnational citizenship and belonging privileges complex understandings of history, geography, religion, politics, diaspora, race, and ethnicity as they are shaped by an Arab-American presence within the US as well as across the US and the Arab world.(50-51)

There is a noticeable shift in the scope of the contemporary Arab-American novelists when they transcend the early generation-writers' nostalgic celebrations of Arab homelands and lean towards the portrayals of America as their new home. Celebrating the hyphen as the backbone of their identity, they set out to deal with the harsh realities of exile, racial profiling, and displacement.

The number of contemporary Arab-American novelists is growing day after day, which undoubtedly makes them more visible than before. The "new writers," as Ludescher called them, increasingly produce more daring and counter-narratives that better describe the condition of Arab-Americans and their need to continuously negotiate with the negative stereotypical portrayals of them by the gaze of American neo-orientalism. The maturity of Arab-American novel, as a new mode of representation, depends on producing more diverse and heterogeneous narratives. It is also important to have a vibrant alternative and

interpretive tradition to explicate Arab-American fiction because the same problems of categorizations that surround Arab-American fiction also plague Arab-American literary criticism.

Cultural hybridity is one of the distinguishing features of contemporary Arab-American novel. Like their hybrid identities, contemporary Arab-American novelists write hybrid narratives that reject the idea of cultural purity, choosing to combine multiple cultural categories. There is a genuine mix of Arab and American traditions and cultures and the result is a dual perception that constitutes a hybrid Arab-American narrative. As such, cultural hybridity according to Al-Joulani (2010), suggested "[...] acts of marking difference within protective and oppositional stances or tolerant attitudes that seek meeting points of cultural intersection. These stances are central to the study of Arab-American literature" (70-71). A fine example of such cultural hybridity would be Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* and *The Language of Baklava* as both of these interesting hybrid works scrutinize the multifaceted stance of Arab-Americans living in America and the process of their identity constructions. Similarly, Alameddine's *I, the Divine* and *The Hakawati* are hybrid narratives par excellence as they highlight cultural hybridity in comparison with authenticity and cultural purity.

Like Abu-Jaber, Alameddine is one of the prominent Arab-American voices whose literary works have notably contributed to the development of Arab American fiction. Hence, Alameddine explores the notion of cultural hybridity and acknowledges that his narratives were born from diverse Eastern and Western sources. Both Abu-Jaber and Alameddine employ hybrid Arab-American narratives that receive international acclaims since they offer the readers a work of fiction that is thoroughly

innovative and experimental in its form and content. My analysis of their literary works intends to show the way they deconstruct fixed formations of identity through the establishment of an anti-essentialist framework rooted in the Arab- American subjectivity and experience. This unfixed subjectivity is definitely more complex and multifaceted, which makes the act of analyzing these works an exquisite critical exercise.

The modern Arab-American novelists write from the point of view of an inside-outsider position. This stance has raised the Arab-American novel to a new level towards cosmopolitanism. Orfalea (2006) argued that "[...] as long as the Arab-American novel addresses timeless, ethnicity themes-love, war, want and does so boldly, it will continue to strengthen [...]. That is its potential richness, I think, and in many ways that democracy of the self is very American and very Middle Eastern all at once" (127). Thus, the creative novelist is the one who goes beyond the limitations of ethnic tensions and sectarian divides and directs his/her talent, if not for love and peace, towards cultural understanding. Once an Arab-American writer writes on social and humanitarian issues, he/she is on the way to fulfilling their potential of being a cosmopolitan writer.

Another important feature of contemporary Arab-American novel is the celebration of humanness to counter stereotypical portrayals of contempt, hatred, and the politics of exclusion. The contemporary Arab-American novelist, to quote Orfalea, "[...] is giving birth to images of humanness or to "figures of the human [...]. The gifted novelist aims if not for love, for understanding, at least" (117). For her part, Majaj (1999) stresses the importance of blending given facts with passion. Majaj believes that most of the post-9/11 writers are

busy with political realities while leaving the human side unaddressed:

We need to write texts - especially novels - that will translate political realities into human terms, and that will create a space for empathy of the part of readers who might otherwise remain indifferent. Given the depth of ignorance and misinformation about the Arab world, we are particularly in need of prose - of writing that is capacious enough in form to convey fact as well as emotion [...] we need to make sure that we're not writing tracts, but are writing literature. (76)

Abu-Jaber follows the human trajectory of events which enables her to counteract the hatred stereotypes following the 9/11 attacks with the language of food, love, peace, harmony, and cultural negotiations between different ethnic groups. Also, the metaphor of food as a marker of Arab-American identity appears in many Arab-American writings. Thus, the motif of food functions as a contact language wherein people of different ethnicities meet during special occasions like Thanksgiving, Easter, Ramadan, etc. These celebrating motifs form a strong human connector for diasporas to eat up their cultural differences and share their diasporic stories and experiences.

One of the main traits of the contemporary Arab-American novel is the use of the traditional Arabic narrative technique used by Scheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Laila Halaby's *Once in a Promised Land* (2007), Alameddine's *Hakawati* (2008), Abu-Jaber's *Crescent* (2003), Yunis' *The Night Counter* (2009), Kaldas and Mattawa's *Dinarzad's Children* (2009), Darraj's *Scherahazad's Legacy* (2010), and Kahf's *Emails from Schererazad* (2012) are all examples of such works where this narrative mode is employed. The reliance on *The*

*Arabian Nights* as a narrative technique in the case of most of the recent Arab-American writings is still a point of debate for many. While the use of Scheherazadian narratives suggests in part a penchant for engaging more directly with Arab literary traditions and bringing those sources into the American literary context, it also opens up new vistas to negotiate between Arab and American literary contexts.

The emergence of Scheherazade's figure in the literary works of contemporary Arab-American writers coincided with the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The admiration for Scheherazade in the contemporary Arab-American novels reflects an aspiration for living peacefully without any geopolitical barriers. According to Somaya Sabry (2011), the current Sheherazadian narrative in Arab-American fiction serves to unfix "[...] the traces of Orientalist and racist discourses which still shape their representations" (171). The revival of *The Arabian Nights* in the literary productions of contemporary Arab-American writers represent a daring step in the way of translating Arabic culture as well as demystifying the misrepresentations embedded in the minds of many Americans about Arab-American minority. Cultural translation thus plays a vital role to uncover the politics of defining one's identity to an outsider audience—a process which becomes of paramount importance in the post- 9/11 USA. The art of storytelling is used by many contemporary Arab-American writers particularly Alameddine, Abu-Jaber, and Yunis, as an act of survival to resist the post-9/11 neo-orientalist misrepresentations of Arab-Americans. As counter-narratives, these literary works carefully question the post-9/11 American hegemonic discourse as well as any fixed formations of Arab-American identities—a theme that pervades today's world politics.

The great challenge for today's Arab-American writers is that of constructing identities and positioning themselves amongst many possibilities. Another issue that contemporary Arab-American writers mostly encounter has much to do with the contradictory positioning of Arab-Americans between white and non-white. While they are recognized as whites in the American official documents, their honorary whiteness does not secure them against prejudice and racial profiling. The struggle of living on the hyphen is expressed both domestically and transnationally especially in the case of Arab Americans for whom the notion of 'return' is more imaginative than real. Correspondingly, the contemporary Arab-American writers feel the need to write beyond the century-long vacillation between here and there, proclaimed a critical insight into the positioning of Arab Americans at the intersections of class, race, sexuality, religion, politics and other aspects of identification.

In the aftermath of 9/11, it was harder for Arab-American writers to write directly or find relevance in their literary writings to the themes of race, racial profiling, the traumatic experience of 9/11, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Serageldin (2003) talked about what forces are at play for Arab-American writings in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks:

No doubt marketing forces play a role, but also the self-consciousness that is the inescapable legacy of 9/11 for the Arab American writer. Problematic issues of who has the right to speak of 9/11, terrorism and war can have an inhibiting effect on writers and on the publishing industry. Paradoxically, a moment at which a spotlight is trained on a particular ethnic or religious demographic is also a moment in which giving expression to that voice is

fraught with conflicting expectations that can reduce the writer to muteness. (439)

Though Arab-American writers remain outsiders to the post-9/11 American publishing industry, the ball is still in their court either to define themselves or be defined by others. The problematic of points of view is also one of the issues facing Arab-American writers today as they are subjected to restrictive rules. Once the novelist tries to open a window on the orientalist gaze, this shift is likely to be met with resistance. Mara Naaman problematizes the notion of invisible ethnicity in the literary works of contemporary Arab-American novelists. Naaman (2003) argued:

It is the need for Arab Americans to 'out' themselves as American citizens; that is, to continue to assert voices of grief and rage, of humility and stridency, of fear and optimism, as a way to counter the cacophony of distorted voices and images of Arabs that bombard Americans daily. To be bold enough to speak and in so doing to write against the market—against nostalgia for a static homeland (that familiar refrain of the immigrant), and against the fetishizing of the romance of ethnic difference—is not easy, but it is a task and a challenge to which Arab American writers must rise.(380)

The task is cut out for the new generation of Arab-American writers: claiming America as their home and defending the rights of their community as American citizens. They are also called upon to take daring steps to produce more literary works and counter the hegemony of the market which is indeed an extension of the neo-orientalist ideology, which consists in making the new diasporic voices go unheard. Once these new voices rise and resist the post-9/11 American neo-orientalism, the challenges and the opportunities will be set in fine balance.

It is difficult to predict what trajectory of events the Arab-American novel will assume in the upcoming decades. However, if we take a look at the number of novels written by Arab-American novelists since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and compare them with the pre-9/11 era, we can see that the future of this fresh genre is quite promising. To fulfill their role as value-givers of their community, Arab-American authors ought to move beyond the ethnic limits when they write and publish for the sake of a better representation of both Arab and American experiences. It would serve their interest if they keep the audiences of other communities at the national, political, cultural and even literary levels firmly in mind while writing. Following this diverse path of writing would certainly enhance the Arab-American literary tradition and make the global reader aware of what kind of topics Arab-American writers write and publish about.

Remarkably, Arab-American fiction is neither simply Arabic writings in English nor a translational proposal from culture to culture.<sup>iii</sup> Arab-American literature occupies an in-between space between two different cultures, and borrows its cultural diversity from both Arab and American literary traditions in order to mould its own perspective. Despite all the fascinating strides done by Arab-American novelists, the future of Arab-American novel, according to Serageldin, “[...] will certainly be decided by market forces in the long run, but the writing community can choose to influence that publishing climate”( 443). For the Arab-American novel to materialize, there should be integration into the American fabric in the sense that themes related to both sides of the ethnic divide should be of prior importance. The time Arab-American novelists bring their unedited voices to the cacophony of the mainstream American culture, they will help defining their community and book a seat of

their own like other Asian, African or Canadian communities do.

It is important to note here that there are few Arab-American studies departments at the universities, which poses a challenge to the development of Arab-American literature in general and the Arab-American fiction in particular as opposed to other Asian and African American studies. However, this lack does not mean Arab-American studies are completely marginalized. According to Salaita (2011), the lack of enough institutes and programs does not mean that Arab-American studies are merely an invention “The University of Michigan–Ann Arbor has a small but remarkably productive program in Arab-American studies housed in its prestigious Program in American Culture. Because of this program and the presence of faculty in other departments who specialize in Arab America, the university is a center of Arab American scholarship” (5). The post-9/11 atmosphere, which allowed the publishing industry to decide what should be included as Arab-American writings and what should be excluded as being somehow more American in its contents, themes, and perspectives, is largely to blame for the difficult challenges contemporary Arab-American writers face.

Salaita (2006) anticipated the promising future of Arab-American novel and the possibility of teaching it at the university level. He also suggests the use of thematic diversity to examine different issues of immigration, exile, identity construction, sexual politics, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and Neo-Orientalist discourse:

What might strike a critic most immediately about Arab American fiction, for instance, is its thematic diversity and the way this diversity has fallen into certain patterns that lend themselves to sub-categorization. While it may have been difficult twenty or

even ten years ago to teach an entire course on Arab-American fiction, it is not only to possible to teach one now, but possible to teach many based on various overarching themes”( 134)

Accordingly, one could construct a course focused on the relationship between food, memory, and the politics of identity reconstruction in Diana Abu-Jaber's fiction. Designing a course of such kind would be significant and informative as Abu-Jaber's narrative presents a complex tableau of Arab American fiction and its commitment to the issues of race, identity, and belonging. One could also develop a syllabus based on war, Orientalism, the traumatic experience of exile, and sexual politics using Rabih Alameddine's narratives. As a postmodernist novelist, Alameddine's themes and settings place him in the lead of any study of the contemporary Arab American novel. There is a possibility of designing a course questioning the post-9/11 Neo-Orientalist gaze using of works by Alia Yunis or Lila Halaby. One could, of course, cover all these subcategories mentioned above as different units in the same course. The availability of these programs is prerequisite for making contemporary Arab-American fiction more appreciated and visible. They would also play a crucial role in enhancing a perceptible cultural significance of this new genre under the rubric of world literature.

The contemporary Arab-American fiction can be read and analyzed according to three different categories. The first category entails exile, race, identity reconstruction, and the problematic perception of home. Diana Abu-Jaber belongs to this category and her works *Crescent* and *The Language of Baklava* are a case in point. The second topic area concerns issues like neo-orientalism, sexual politics, violence, and imagined belonging and the most prominent voice of this group is, of course,

Rabih Alameddine. Alameddine's novels, *I, the Divine* and *The Hakawati*, would be appropriate reading texts for this category. The third category of contemporary Arab-American fiction copes directly with the post-9/11 political issues, challenging the status quo of Arab Americans' honorary whiteness, and forging transnational spaces that withstand and redefine any exclusionary conceptualizations of American citizenship in the post-9/11 landscape. The use of the term 'citizenship' here denotes both its legal as well as cultural aspects, with the latter being very much close to the everyday interactions and experiences of immigrants and transnational subjects, moving beyond the legal rights and obligations. Alia Yunis' novel *The Night Counter* is a typical example of this category.

Literary critics like Steven Salaita, Lisa Majaj, Wail Hassan, Fadda-Conrey, and Gregory Orfalea have written outstanding and insightful critiques that allow the readers to think critically and know more about the trajectory of contemporary Arab-American novel. Recently, Mazen Naous published his book titled *Poetics of Visibility in the Contemporary Arab American Novel* (2020), which focuses on the importance of fiction as a way of dismantling and rectifying dominant narratives pertaining to misrepresentations of Arab-Americans and their lived experiences. I consider Naous' book as a significant contribution to our understanding of the aesthetics and politics of contemporary Arab-American fiction. Literary interpretation and evaluation of this new literature, together with the establishment of literary and quasi-literary institutions that promote the study of this literature, recognition of these literary productions through representation in the mass and new media, will ensure that these literary efforts crystalize into a literary tradition.

## Conclusion

This paper has approached the Arab-American literary tradition in light of the postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha's theory of Third Space and Anzaldúa's theory of Borderland. These theories are consciously used to help deconstruct the essentialized representations of identity by employing a non/anti-essential Arab-American subjectivity and by emphasizing its complexity and heterogeneity among different ethnic minorities in the United States. The paper opened with questions clarifying the misunderstanding among many readers about whether Arab-American literature belongs to Arabic writings written in English or American ethnic studies and thus speak the essence of American literature, its traits, and evolution over the course of the past two centuries.

The paper also defined Arab-American literature as a hybrid outcome of Arab and American culture, one that deals with the issues and interests of Arab-Americans, defends their citizenship rights, and embraces cultural diversity as an inclusive language for all ethnic minorities in the United States. This hybrid genre is written by American writers of Arab origin who were either born or lived in America and whose literary works represent Arab-American issues with one eye on the American culture, and the other focused on the Arab world. The contemporary Arab-American fiction is neither Arabic writing in English nor a transnational proposal. To be specific, it is a multi-ethnic genre wherein Arab and American traditions intertwine with each other and the commonalities between the two cultures are allowed to flourish. The study discussed in detail the trajectory of Arab-American literature, beginning with the Kahlil Gibran phenomenon to the second-generation writers and finally the contemporary writers, exploring how each generation responds quite differently to the transnational issues of identity politics,

subversion of Orientalist gaze, and the citizenship crisis. The early Arab-American writers, known as *al-Mahjar* writers, negotiated the cultural divide between their homelands and the American landscape. Their literary productions were mostly poetic, but they came up short in their treatment of American Orientalism. The second generation of Arab-American writers wrote with a skeptical eye on both the Arab world and the American culture. These writers preferred to pass as mainstream writers, establishing a distance from their Arab identity and heritage. The contemporary writers attempt to achieve a compromise of the multiplicity of their identities and celebrate the cultural differences between the two cultures. However, they are challenged by what DuBois called "double consciousness", a process of internalization in which Arab-American writers are caught between two worlds—with one foot walking on the American part of their identity, while the other on the Arab world. The flow across the Arab and American sides of the hyphen reveals the difficulties of belonging to any fixed identity formation.

The paper has tried to telescope the socio-political condition of a group, with the creative writers as its spokespersons, the cultural productions of the beleaguered group with all the issues and concern they seek to articulate and find a way out of, and the critical discourse that seeks to map together the existential angst surrounding identity politics and creative response to them. It sought to do this with view to acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the experience of a people displaced from the culture or civilization they are closely associated with, in a socio-cultural context that is conducive to a plurality of cultures, due to certain socio-economic trends, but one that stubbornly clings to a self-image that is narrow and exclusionary. The effort in this study was

to navigate through the theoretical discourse on exilic and diasporic existence to understand the existential issues of the diasporas and exiled communities, and augment this understanding by analyzing fictional narratives that deal with these issues on an imaginary plane. This study would go a long way in helping the student of culture arrive at coherent view of the life of displaced groups in a world that is at once borderless, and virulently territorial. I would recommend researchers who are interested in the area of Arab-American studies to start working on sub-divisions of the Arab-American tradition like Iraqi-American, Yemeni-American, Syrian-American, Egyptian-American and so on.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> The Pen League (some called it *al-Mahjar*) is a literary organization which was formed in New York in 19920 and sponsored the creative works of Arab writers in diaspora. It aims at breathing new life to the Arabic literary traditions in America. The founders of such literary society aspired to synthesize worthy elements from their hybrid cultures and wrote extensively on topics such as migration, war, borders and exile.

<sup>ii</sup> The subheading is developed out of Salaita's essay "Gazing East from Americas: Assessing the Cultural Significance of Modern Arab American Literature" (2006).

<sup>iii</sup> It is of paramount importance to point out that there is a qualitative difference between Arabic writings translated into English, Anglophone Arab writings, and Arab-American literature. Given the fact that the Arabic translation movement began in Egypt at the beginning of the 18th century, the prominence of Arabic writings to English readers coincided with Naguib Mahfouz's awarding the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. The Arabic writings translated into English reflect the richness and heterogeneity of the Arabic ethnicity, language and culture. Through translational projects, the reception of Arabic literature has increased, achieving growing success. In *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*, Geoffrey Nash notices that "Anglo-Arab writing might be looked at as a form of translation, and that Arab writers who write in English are faced with similar issues as translators"(189). Nash also proposes that the contemporary Arab Anglophone writers like Ahdaf Soueif, Jamal Mahjob, Leila Aboulela, Tony Hanania, among others, write in English rather than Arabic in order to avoid wittings cultural restriction and censorship, and to optimize exposure (2). Serageldin distinguishes between the Arab writings in English and those texts translated from Arabic to English in terms of receptiveness and success that while the former's target audience is limited to the Western reader, the latter's audience includes both the Eastern and the Western reader (435). On the other hand, Arab-American writings are a hybrid

outcome of both Arab and American cultures and their multiple cultural categories. More importantly, Arab-American literature is a multi-ethnic literature wherein Arab and American experiences complement each other. It deals with the issues and interests of Arab-Americans, defends their rights as American citizens, and embraces different cultures.

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