

Female Writers and Their Contributions in the Development of Arab-American Literature.

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Abstract

The present paper is a part of an ongoing research work that is being done on the history of Arab-American literature. The study, therefore spots light on the important efforts of Arab-American female writers in sharing their brothers men to create new literary works in colonial-country. Arab-American female writers have become outstanding figures in the field of Arab-American literature and greatly indebted to Arab American feminism, which has empowered them and enabled the voicing of their concerns through literature.

Keywords: Arab-American, Women Voice, Migration, Identity, literature, feminism.

1.Introduction

A woman in the Arab-American literature is as important as man. It should be referred here that woman writing since Arab-American works which were written in the first migration phase to the U.S.A are hardly scarcity due to the social structure at that time, because the majority of the immigrants were mostly men. During the second and third phases, the number of women has been increased because of the new stable conditions that led to set up families and community. Arab-American women found it a favorable opportunity to enroll the educational institutions from the school to university and got high qualifications in varieties of specializations as well as the ingenuity in the literary genres. Therefore, the second and third-generations are consists a large percentage of sophisticated and educated women in the Arab-American community, declaring a period of vigorous and effective woman writings and going beyond the competition and progressing to get in the present time. The most productive and creative voice in the Arab-American literature particularly, the writings of the post-eighties which can be evidently colored with a female flavor. Arab-American women writers have become prominent figures in the field of Arab-American literature and greatly indebted to Arab-American feminism, which has empowered them and enabled the voicing of their concerns through literature. It should mention hearth at the last decades have been marked by an important increase of English literary works written by Arab female writers who have published more than men. Their writings try to discuss thorny issues, sensitive and important topics such as identity crisis,

the homeland, diaspora, expand their exploration of the conjunctions of race, hybridity, ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender and politics, sites of violence and oppression. They further attempt to open new channels for communication to present new alternatives that help move the community forward. Cultural Hybridity and the other in this way, Arab women's cultural identification has been effectively influenced by writers from other ethnic groups as African Americans, Asians, and Natives. Their solidarity with other people of color, namely the African-American experience, as Barbara Nimri Aziz maintains, could help Arab-American writers in their "struggle for empowerment and recognition". Through their writings, they try to humanize Arabs by concentrating their voices to overthrow the calcified terms of signification which tied them to a string of insults. However, we must remember that Arab-Americans have been classified as white for a long time by American political institutions. Putting themselves side by side with people of color, Arab-American female writers try to highlight on the intertwined relations between their culture and the others. In the essay "Global Sisterhood: Where Do We Fit In?" Michelle Sharif suggests that it will be necessary for Arab-American women to join other women of color, pointing out that: Arab-Americans belong to both cultures and therefore they occupy a unique position. Arab-American feminism has made great efforts in supporting Arab-American women to voice their concerns. In this present topic it will be focused the origins and developments of Arab-American Literature and the contributions of female writers in Arab- American Literature.

2. Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments

The Mahjar (Arabic:), romanized: al-mahjar, one of its more literal meanings being "the Arab diaspora" was a literary movement started by Arabic-speaking writers who had emigrated to America from Ottoman-ruled Lebanon, Syria and Palestine at the turn of the 20th century. Like their predecessors in the Nahda movement (or the "Arab Renaissance"), writers of the Mahjar movement were stimulated by their personal encounter with the Western world and participated in the renewal of Arabic literature, hence their proponents being sometimes referred to as writers of the "late Nahda". These writers, in South America as well as the United States, contributed indeed to the development of the Nahda in the early 20th century. Kahlil Gibran is considered to have been the most influential of the "Mahjar poets" or "Mahjari poets". Although Arab-American literature has been in existence in the U.S. for over a century, it has only recently begun to be recognized as part of the ethnic landscape of literary America.

The story of Arab-American literature started in the late 1800s, when Arab immigrants first began to arrive in North America in significant numbers from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire, primarily from what is now present-day Lebanon. The original (largely Christian) migrants came mostly as sojourners,

not immigrants. Settling in colonies in cities such as New York and Boston, and fully intending to return home one day, they voiced a mainly diaspora consciousness: a fact evident in their newspapers, which were often sectarian, political and geared toward events in the Middle East.

Although, they found themselves living in a heavily assimilationist U.S. context. The question of how to respond to such pressures while also maintaining Arab identity was a matter of great importance to the early immigrant community: newspapers and journals published debates about how to preserve Arab identity in the American-born generation, even as they discussed practical matters of integration. Complicating the process of Americanization were racial definitions of American identity which threatened to exclude Arabs. The Naturalization Act of 1790 had granted the right of citizenship to what it termed “free white persons.” But in the early 1900s what was meant by “white” became a subject of intense debate. Arab immigrants, among others, became caught up in naturalization laws basing eligibility for citizenship on non-Asiatic identity.

However, the links between western, European, Christian identity, “whiteness” and American identity, and between non-European, non-Christian identity, non-whiteness and non-American identity persisted, shaping Arab-American experience and literature both directly and indirectly. By the 1910s several literary societies and journals had come into existence, and in 1920 the literary organization Al-Rabita al-Qalamaiyya (the Pen League) was established by Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and others. These authors, who wrote in Arabic as well as in English, produced what is known as the Mahjar (émigré) school of Arab-American writing.

On the other hand, they had their greatest impact on Arabic literature, these writers were conscious of serving as bridges between East and West, and actively sought to establish philosophical meeting points between Arab and American ideologies and contexts, even as they invoked poetic forbears of both east and west—from Al-Mutanabbi, Al-Farid, and al-Maari to Homer, Virgil, Milton, Emerson and Thoreau.

3.Outstanding Female Writers and their Contributions in Arab-American Literature:

The Female writers have a vital role in the development of Arab American Literature. We praise Arab American women and their contributions in different facets of life. Arab American women are passionate about their families, careers and social environments. Their drive makes them excellent communicators and storytellers. We picked talented writers whose work reflects on their Arab past and roots, as well as on the reality of the Arab identity today. With the following list, we celebrate the imagination and the creativity that make pictures and concepts alive and reachable. We don't claim these are the only authors who deserve attention; there are plenty more Arab American female publicists, novelists, essayists, poets, screenplay writers, etc. who have proven themselves over time or are coming into the spotlight now.

Contemporary Arab-American writers grapple with these exclusionary forces even as they explore both ethnic affirmation and diaspora sensibilities. Post-1967 writers gave voice to a quest for self-identification that was particularly compelling because of its American idiom. Writing in English and publishing in American literary journals, these writers drew on U.S. literary traditions, especially free verse and the lyric poem. Authors such as Sam Hazo, Sam Hamod, Jack Marshall, Naomi Shihab Nye and others began to publish poetry that touched, sometimes glancingly, sometimes directly, on Arab identity and probed what had been lost during the generations of assimilation. For instance, in the poem “Dying with the Wrong Name,” Lebanese-American Sam Hamod describes immigrants entering through Ellis Island who were forced to “Americanize” their names. The poem makes clear that what is lost in forced assimilation is more than a name: it is an identity, a history, a self. “There is something lost in the blood,” Hamod writes, “something lost down to the bone in these small changes. A man in a dark blue suit at Ellis Island says, with tiredness and authority, “You only need two names in America” and suddenly—as cleanly as the air, you’ve lost your name” (Dying with the Wrong Name, 19). 19. In this context, it is perhaps no surprise that the next landmark literary event was the publication of the anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, edited by Joanna Kadi. This anthology, which brought many new voices into print, established the category of feminist Arab-American writing in English. Yet it should be clarified that feminism was not a new concept in Arab-American experience. Women—who constituted one out of three of early immigrants—had been challenging traditional gender roles and engaging in feminist debate from the early period of immigration. Many women emigrated alone, or took their children and left their husbands behind, and after the Armistice there were actually more female than male emigrants (Shakir, *Bint Arab*, 28). The Arab-American press in the 1910s and 1920s recounted the diverse accomplishments of Arab-American women as lawyers, doctors, college graduates, aviators and musicians, as well as giving space to debates on gender. Lebanese American Afifa Karam, for instance, wrote prolifically on gender issues between 1904 and 1924, mostly for the Arabic newspaper *Al Hoda* (see Handal, “Reflections,” 103). However, formal attempts at feminist organization did not emerge till after the 1967 war, when Arab-American life more generally was reinvigorated in the context of the U.S. social, civil, student and women’s rights movements. In the 1980s, a number of feminist organizations, academic as well as activist, were started, including the short-lived Feminist Arab-American Network, the Association for Middle Eastern Women’s Studies, The Union of Palestinian Women’s Associations in North America, and a North American chapter of the Arab Women’s Union, the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (cf. Handal, 103).

We would like to introduce some of female writers in Arab-American literature in this work as follows -

1.Randa Jarrar :(born 1978) Randa Jarrar is the brave and the provocative rebel of the modern Arab American literature. She is of Palestinian and Egyptian origins and the characters of her books are mainly Arab. Her first novel “A Map of Home” became a success in 2008 and since then it has won four significant awards. The book is about a girl, Nidali who changes homes several times with her parents, in times of war and political conflicts. The story delves into layers of cultural and social norms and their meaning to Nidali and her family. Randa has several essays where she openly talks about racial segregation. She also doesn’t conceal her sympathy for underground lifestyle, partying, and being sexually unrestricted. Randa’s latest book Him, Me, Muhammad Ali also managed to impress the critics. Los Angeles Review of Books flatters the novel saying: “These stories showcase the strength and talent of a writer of immeasurable gift and grace, who confronts the poignant and often brutal realities her characters face with sass and verve.”

Personal life

Jarrar has written about her experiences with domestic violence and reproductive coercion. She is openly queer.

Literary work

.Books

.A Map of Home

.Him, Me, Muhammad Ali

.Essays & Short Stories

.Biblioclast

.A Field Trip

.Against Domesticity

.Why I Can’t Stand White Belly-Dancers

.I Still Can’t Stand White Belly-Dancers

.Two Sentence Story

Awards

.2004 Million Writers Award for best short story online

.2007 Hopwood Award for Best Novel

.2009 Arab American Book Award

.2016 Story Prize Spotlight Award.

.2017 American Book Award

.2017 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award

.2020 Creative Capital Award

2. Diana Abu Jaber (born 1960): Diana Abu Jaber is connected to the Arab world through her father's Jordanian roots. She is a professor at Portland State University. With more than a dozen prestigious awards, Diana has become a respected author of Arab American literature. Her books have been examined as case studies on subjects like gender, ethnicity, and cultural awareness. Abu Jaber wrote two memoirs: *The Language of Baklava*, and the culinary "memoir of food and family" *Life without a Recipe*.

Fiction-

.*Arabian Jazz* (1993) - Oregon Book Award (1994)

.*Crescent* (2003) - PEN Center USA Award for Literary Fiction (1994), Twenty Noteworthy Novels of 2003 by The Christian Science Monitor

.*Origin* (2007),

.*Birds Of Paradise* (2011)

Nonfiction/ memoir

.*The Language of Baklava* (2005)

.*Life Without a Recipe* (2016)

Young Adult fiction

.*Silverworld* (2020)

Essays

.*The Other Woman: Twenty-one Wives, Lovers, and Others Talk Openly About Sex, Deception, Love, and Betrayal* includes "The Lost City of Love".

3. Etel Adnan : (born 24 February 1925,Beirut, Lebanonand Died in 14 Nov'2021) Etel Adnan is a multitalented artist with Lebanese ancestry. She is a poet, essayist, novelist, painter, and sculptor. She writes in English, Arabic, and French. Some of her writings were filmed, others were adapted for the theatre. Adnan is one of the most prominent names in the Arab American arts community. She studied philosophy which is mirrored in the spiritual essence of her work, but she is also known for her viewpoints on political issues. Etel's visual art is associated with the Lebanese landscapes.

4. Susan Abulhawa (born 3 June 1970): Susan Abulhawa is a noteworthy Palestinian-American writer who also actively advocates for Palestine. She is a founder of Playgrounds for Palestine—a fundraising program that helps for the building of more venues around Palestine for the children to play. She also supports BDS. Her bestselling work is the *Mornings in Jenin*. The novel is said to give a historical insight into the life of a Palestinian family before and after the events in 1948. It was perceived positively and got translated into 28 languages. Susan Abulhawa writes for international media like Al Jazeera and also has experience with medical publications.

5. Naomi Shihab Nye: (born 12 March 1952), Naomi Shihab Nye has a Palestinian father and an American mother. The stories in her writings combine gracefully the Arab and the American societies. Nye has three novels and multiple poems and short stories. She writes for children. Her book **Habibi** is semi-autobiographical and portrays the family of 14-year-old **Liyana** which moves from the USA to Palestine. **Habibi** is perceived as a novel both for youth and for adults, so it got awarded in both categories. Nye also edits and teaches poetry. In June 2009 she was named as one of Peace By Peace. Com's first peace heroes. In 2013, Nye won the **Robert Creeley Award**.

6. Laila Lalami (born 1968): Laila Lalami was born in Morocco and grew up in the USA. She is a novelist with many important awards for her writings. Her book, *The Moor's Account* won the American Book Award, the Arab American Book Award, and the **Hurston Wright Legacy Award**. It was on the Man Booker Prize longlist and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.

7. Mohja Kahf (born 1967): Mohja Kahf is a Syrian-American. Her family is Muslim and she even spent time studying in Saudi Arabia. She is an author of novels, poems, and essays. Her novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, was a "**One Book**" reading at Indiana University East (Richmond, Indiana) in 2017. The book was chosen as the Book Sense Reading Group Favorite for June 2007 and as the book of the year for the One Book, One Bloomington Series, by the Bloomington Arts Council in 2008. Mohja is a progressive Muslim and an activist; wrote articles discussing sex and gender issues.

8. Susan Muaddri Darraj : Susan Muaddri Darraj is a professor at Harford Community College in Bel Air, Maryland, and the author of *The Inheritance of Exile*-a collection of short stories of Arab-American women. She published several articles exploring feminism themes. Susan is a former editor at Barrelhouse Magazine and The Baltimore Review. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *New York Stories*, *The Orchid Literary Review*, *Mizna*, *Sukoon*, *Banipal*, and elsewhere. Her articles, essays, and reviews have appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Little Patuxent Review*, *The Baltimore City Paper*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Al-Jadid*, *Baltimore Magazine*, *Pages Magazine*, *Sojourner*, *Calyx*, *Urbanite*, and other forums.

9. Samia Serageldin : Samia Serageldin is a fiction and non-fiction writer with Egyptian origin. Her autobiographical first novel, *The Cairo House*, was published in 2000 and translated into 10 foreign languages. Her second novel, *The Naqib's Daughter*, about Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798, was published in February 2009 by Fourth Estate UK. Her most recent book is *Love is Like Water & Other Stories*. In addition to fiction, she has published essays on Islam, women, Arab American writing, and counter-terrorism, most recently in *Muslim Networks* (UNC Press) and *In the Name of Osama bin Laden* (Duke Press), Her another two books are *Daughters of Time* and *Mothers and Strangers*.

10. Hedy Habra : Lebanese American Hedy Habra has lived both in Lebanon and Egypt. She writes poetry, essays, and short stories. Her collection of short fiction, *Flying Carpets* (Interlink 2013), won a 2013 Arab American National Book Award's Honorable Mention and was a finalist for the 2014 Eric Hoffer Award and the USA Best Book Award. She writes poetry and fiction in French, Spanish, and English and has numerous poems and short stories in journals and anthologies.

11. Lisa Suhair Majaj: (born- 13 Oct'1960) at Hawarden is a city in Sioux Country, Iowa, United States, located on the Big Sioux River, to a Palestinian father and American mother living in Nicosia, Cyprus. She was one of the first, and remains one of the most insightful, scholars to explore Arab-American literature. The Palestinian-American poet and scholar was raised in Jordan and attended the American University of Beirut from which earned a B.A. in English literature , an M.A. in English Literature, an M.A. in American Culture and a Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan. In 2001, she moved to Nicosia, Cyprus. Her poetry and essays have been widely published. In 2008, she was awarded the Del Sol Press Annual Poetry Prize for her poetry manuscript "Geographies of Light", 2009. "In difficult times, poets and writers have always provided lifelines." Her works are *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (Garland, 2000), *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (Syracuse University Press, 2002), *These Words* (chapbook, 2003), *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab American Writer and Artist* (McFarland Publishing, 2002), Guidelines - by Lisa Suhair Majaj , Her two poetry are placed in International stage that's-1. *Asphodel* and 2. *Olive Tree* .

4.The Publication in 1994 of Joanna Kadi's edited collection, Food for Our Grandmothers:

Writing by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists, is often cited as a "landmark" moment in Arab American literary history (Majaj, "Arab-American Literature" 8). The edited work, which includes essays, short stories, poems, and reviews of writings by Arab women and feminists, grapples with questions of race, racial configuration, belonging, and naming of Arab experiences in North American societies. American women's literature to be recognized as an imperative resource for any study of Arab American literary works. In another edited collection of works by Arab and Arab-American women focused on the importance

of writing their own literature, entitled *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Women on Writing* (2004), Barbara Nimri Aziz acknowledges the fact that "many committed Arab American personalities and experts have dedicated themselves to challenging erroneous and dangerous stereotypes".

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5. Conclusion: From the above discussions we may come to a great conclusion that the Arab-American women struggle impressively to have an advanced place in the body of the Arab-American writings. They use their writings as a means to defy marginalization, racism, oppression, and exile. They positively connect themselves with fellow Arab-American writers, natives and newcomers. They try to negotiate their hyphenated identities and resist stereotypes and misconceptions about Arab communities that have been depicted by American popular culture and society. Moreover, Arab-American women challenge the sense of loss, displacement, and nostalgia. They speak loudly to express their ideas, desires, emotions, and strategies for survival through hundreds of books and different kinds of social media. Their writings essentially aiming at defining themselves, refusing all kinds of discriminations, criticizing war, supporting the oppressed people in the homeland, rejecting the domination of western culture and presenting proudly their Arabic heritage.

Modern Arab-American women writers are feminist activists who are powerfully involved in representing and redefining images and statues of women in Arab and American cultures, as well as the articulation of hybrid identities in the space between both cultures. Arab American women writers face their own particular set of problems. When they criticize the patriarchal nature of their society, they are often accused of abandoning their own culture and adopting Western modes of thought (Majaj, "New Directions" 75). This is exacerbated by the fact that feminism is associated with Western imperialism and is therefore viewed as anti-religious and anti-nationalist (Darraj 193). Finally, Arab and ethnic women writers who confirm the popular prejudices about the treatment of Arab women run the risk of pandering to the

commercial interests of the Western marketplace. In this way the Arab women were trying their efforts to established Arab-American literature and finally they are able to fulfill their desires.

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