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Migrant second time around

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Panel: The Migrant as Figure in Literature Today

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Amina ZAYDAN

Migrant second time around

Every day as wake up here in Iowa City, I spend two hours in my bed sifting through memories about the place I come from and about my early years. They are full of bad feelings about what it means to be a migrant in one's own country; my writing has all along been a way of exorcising them.

Let me begin by telling you a few words about myself: I am a writer only when I am writing. Otherwise I am a normal person, with a home, two kids, and a regular job: I am proud of these, and miss them all the time. I miss doing homework with my daughters, fighting with my husband, and also my daily efforts at work, at the Ministry of Culture, to push the limits of what is permitted just a bit further.

So, what the heck am I doing here in Iowa? Is this time being wasted for the sheer remembering of home I seem to be doing? My husband had said: go, this is your chance to help your people. My daughters said, go and have fun, mom—you have never had a vacation from us! My boss said, go and learn. Three sets of instructions; every day I wonder whether I am fulfilling them. My two novel manuscripts are almost finished, just waiting to be revised. But it is difficult to be working on them here, and yet it is also too early to be writing about my Iowa experience. All I am certain about is that I am collecting a lot of ideas for my work assignment.

[transition no 1: why did I displace myself from 'home' even if we have such tense political relationship? Why, in other words, did I become a temporary migrant?]

[Why do so many in the United States hate Muslims?]

From the point of view of most of my people it was wrong on my part to marry an American. As far as they are concerned, America simply hates us, putting all Muslims in the same basket as 'terrorists.' Do I look like one?