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Between Empire and Diaspora: Identity Poetics in Contemporary Arab-American Women's Poetry

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to contribute to the burgeoning field of Arab-American feminist critique through an exploration of the work of four contemporary Arab-American women poets: Etel Adnan (1925-), a poet and a visual artist and a writer, Naomi Shihab Nye (1952-), poet, a song writer, and a novelist, Mohja Kahf (1967-), a poet, an Islamic feminist critic and author, and Suheir Hammad (1973-), a hip-hop poet and political activist. The study traverses the intersections of stereotypical racial and Orientalist discourses with which these women contend, and which have been further complicated by being shaped against the backdrop of the "War on Terror" and hostility against Arabs, Muslims and Arab-Americans in the post-September 11 era. Hence, the study attempts to examine their poetry as a tool for resistance, and as a space for conciliating the complexities of their hyphenated identities.

The last two decades of the twentieth-century saw the rise of a rich body of Arab-American women writing which has elicited increasing academic and critical interest. However, extensive scholarly and critical attention was mainly drawn to novels and non-fiction prose produced by Arab-American women writers as reflected in the huge array of anthologies, journal articles, book reviews and academic studies. Although such efforts aim to research and examine the racial politics that have impacted the community and how it relates to feminist discourses in the United States, they have rarely addressed or researched how the ramifications of these racialised politics and discourses are articulated in Arab-American women's poetry per se.

Informed by a wide range of postcolonial and United States ethnic theory and criticism, feminist discourses of women of colour such Gloria Anzaldúa's borderland theory, and Lisa Lowe's discussions of ethnic cultural formations in addition to

transnational feminism, this study seeks to lay the groundwork for a complex analysis of Arab-American feminist poetics, based on both national and transnational literary approaches. The dissertation addresses the following questions: how does the genre of poetry negotiate identity politics and affiliations of belonging in the current polarized and historical moment? How do these women poets challenge the troubling oppressed/exoticised representations of Arab/Muslim women prevalent in the United States mainstream culture? How does each of these poets express their vision of social and political transformation? Emphasising the varying ethnic, religious, national, political, and cultural backgrounds and affiliations of these four poets, this dissertation attempts to defy any notion of the monolithic experience of Arab-American women, and argues for a nuanced understanding of specificity and diversity of Arab-American feminist experiences and articulations.

To achieve its aim, the study depicts the historical evolution of Arab women's poetry in the United States throughout four generations in order to examine the deriving issues and formative elements that contributed to the development of this genre, and also to pinpoint the defining characteristics marking Arab-American women poetry as a cultural production of American women of Arab descent. Through close readings and critical analyses of texts, the dissertation offers an investigation of some of the major themes and issues handled by these Arab-American women to highlight the most persistent tropes that mark this developing literary genre. Eventually, this study shows how literature, and specifically poetry becomes a conduit to investigate Arab-American cultural and sociopolitical conditions. It also offers productive explorations of identities and representations that transcend the rigid essential totalising categorisation of identity, while attempting to forge a new space for cultural translation and social transformation.

Acknowledgments and Declaration

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed:

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Introduction

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Arab-American women's writing has emerged as a method for self-representation that aims to claim agency whilst challenging mainstream public and official discourses. Through varied practices of writing, Arab-American women have fought, firstly to negate the persistent apprehension of them as outsiders that has often stigmatised their reception, and, secondly, to posit themselves as part of the ethnic tissue in the United States. Arab-American women 'are driven, as are women of color everywhere, by political motives, to speak against stereotypes, "to set the record straight"', notes Barbara Nimiri Aziz, an Arab-American anthropologist and journalist and the cofounder of RAWI (Radius of Arab-American Writers, a network of writers of Arab descent in the United States) (2004:iii).

'Write or be written', a main constituent of the mission statement of Italian-American Writers[1], have definitely inspired Arab-Americans women poets as the surge in poetry publishing in the late 1990s indicates (Aziz 2004:xii). Aziz describes the position of Arabs in America today as relatively colonised, and 'imbib[ing] so many of the biases and distortion around' them, which has rendered their heritage ambiguous to them. Therefore, she states that the mission of Arab-American writers in the twenty-first century is to seek out the overlooked minor detail of their heritage, often ignored by politics, and to help them 'rebuild a fragmented, uncertain identity' (Aziz 2004:xiii). Arab-American women have perceived literature and poetry in direct continuity with Arab-American politics, a notion made itself evident post-September 11, for coupling politics with literature enhances its capacity for reaching a broader audience.

This study aims to contribute to the growing field of Arab-American studies by highlighting the significance of the contemporary poetry of Arab-American women as a

means of pronouncing a more complex version of a diasporic belonging. Further, it aims to demonstrate that the poetry of Arab-American women has become a valuable record of a minority's multifarious and divergent identity issues, in addition to its being a conduit to explore Arab-American cultural and socio-political conditions that existed long before the urgent moment of September 11. Accordingly, this study seeks to posit the contemporary poetry of Arab-American women within the boundaries of United States ethnic literature and transnational diasporic literatures, drawing on a wide range of women of colour and postcolonial critiques in order to formulate a critical framework that is unique to Arab-American feminism and deeply rooted in the United States landscape.

Combining the postcolonial and transnational approaches with different modes of women of colour critiques, this approach corresponds to the emerging framework of 'diasporic feminist critique' developed by Nadine Naber in her most recent study *Arab America* (2012), which utilises the insights of feminisms of women of colour, queers of colour, in addition to transnational feminism to bring about 'a new way of looking, seeing, and telling' (Naber 2012:250). Therefore, by examining contemporary Arab-American women's poetry in the light of critical works by theorists such as that of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Gloria Anzaldua, AnaLouise Keating, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Lisa Lowe, Patricia Chu, Chandra Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Inderpal Grewal, amongst others, this study establishes the complexity, plurality and diversity of themes and concerns, forms and aesthetics embedded in the contemporary poetry of Arab-American women, and Arab-American women's subjectivities.

To achieve its goal, the study depicts the historical development of Arab women's poetry in the United States by exploring the work of four women poets representing four phases of Arab migration to the United States: Etel Adnan, Naomi Shiahb Nye, Mohja Kahf, and Suheir Hammad. In addition to representing different generations of Arab migration, these poets were

selected for the study because they also occupy a central position in the Arab-American literary scene, as Aziz indicates in her account of RAWI history. Acknowledging their efforts in developing this literary organisation, Aziz maintains, '[I]t also takes our leading writers like Etel Adnan, Naomi Shihab Nye, DH Melhem, Salma K. Jayyusi and Lisa Majaj, [and] Suheir Hammad who did so much for me and RAWI. It is really an honor for me but perhaps more an honor to RAWI that such eminent writers devoted their support to RAWI' (2007)[2].

A realisation of collective ethnic identity instigated the founding of RAWI (the Arabic word for a storyteller راوي) in 1996: 'Radius of Arab–American Writers, Incorporated', a name suggested by the poet Mohja Kahf (Majaj 2005:25). Then, it included fifty publishing Arab-American male and female writers. According to its mission statement, the literary organisation 'is devoted to serving the Arab American community through Arab American leadership'[3].

Each occupies a distinct place in the Arab-American literary scene. For instance, of the pioneering generation is Etel Adnan, who established the Post-Apollo Press, a publishing company that contributed to publishing and distributing works of several Arab-American writers in addition to her own (Shalal-Esa 2010:10). Naomi Shihab Nye is regarded as the most celebrated and recognised Arab-American woman poet in the United States, who was the first Arab-American woman to be invited to the White House ever, by the Clinton administration. Mohja Kahf is one of the first Arab-American women writers to identify as a Muslim-American feminist and whose work expresses an Islamic feminist standpoint. Finally, Suheir Hammad is the first Arab-American woman to perform her work on Broadway, New York. Emerging from hip-hop culture, Hammad's work has led Arab-American literature into a new direction through identifying and connecting with African-Americans. The oeuvres of these four poets demonstrate distinctive facets of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry. In the pursuit of its goal, the dissertation addresses the following questions: how does

the genre of poetry negotiate identity politics and affiliations of belonging in the current highly charged political climate? How do different generations challenge the troubling representations of Arab/Muslim women prevalent in the United States' mainstream culture? How does each of these poets aesthetically express her vision of social and political transformation?

Contemporary Arab-American women commenced their literary activity in the United States with the publication of the New York-born daughter of Lebanese immigrants, D. H. Melhem's *Notes on 94th Street* in 1972. Melhem was recognised as the first Arab-American publishing woman poet (Handal 2001:48). In 1973, Etel Adnan[4], another Arab woman immigrant from Lebanon, published "The Beirut-Hell Express"—self-translated from *Jébu: Suivi de l'Express Beyrouth enfer* (1973). A decade later appeared *Wrapping the Grape Leaves: A Sheaf of Contemporary Arab American Poets*, a small pamphlet of poetry published in 1982 by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. From this booklet, the anthology *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* emerged in 1988. The publication of this collection announced the emergence of Arab-American poetry as an ethnic production, and led, for the first time, Arab-American writers in the United States to realise their collectivity. Reflecting on the significance of this anthology, the Arab-American poet and literary critic Lisa Suhair Majaj maintains, 'The expansion of this collection in 1988 to a full-length anthology…was groundbreaking. Brought together between the covers of this book, Arab–American writers began to realize that they constituted a community' (2005:25). Since that time, a wave of Arab-American women poets began to publish and this surge intensified in the post-September 11 period. Therefore, I believe that defining the scope of the term Arab-American at the outset is pertinent to the purpose of the study.

Boundaries of the Term Arab-American

The Arab American Institute in the United States defines Arab-Americans as members of an ethnic group, who can trace their roots to twenty-two Arab countries. In 2010 Arab-American population was estimated to be around 5.1 million[5], of which nearly 3.5 million are American citizens. The majority of this population were born in the Middle East. Although Arab-Americans trace their roots to all Arab countries, the majority are from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq[6]. Since the research addresses issues of dual identity, conflicting allegiances and struggle for inclusion, the term Arab-American is used throughout the study to identify American citizens of Arab descent, who seek to posit their community within the United States' ethnic landscape.

The term Arab is a complex label of identification, for Arabs, as mentioned above, trace their roots to twenty-two countries covering large areas in the Middle East and North Africa. This reflects diverse geographical locales, complex cultural and political traditions, in addition to variances in religious identification. Inevitably, this diversity foregrounds the complexity of the experiences of Arab-Americans in the United States, and reinforces their transnational outlook. Whilst some official and public Arab-American discourses choose to use the term (Arab American) unhyphenated, to suggest fluidity and maybe some kind of integration, I would argue that the hyphen in the term Arab-American acquires some significance as positing these minority members in the in-between space and at the crossroad of the two sides of their contested identities. As the study demonstrates, none of these poets identify as exclusively Americans, or Arabs. Instead, they articulate their poetics from that middle space, the hyphen, straddling Arabic and American cultures and traditions and feeding on both as they develop their new perspectives. In "Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race", Majaj asserts that Arab-Americans are constantly seeking 'to claim a classification adequate to their experience' without minimising the complexities inherited through each side of their identity

(2000:332). In the same breath, Carol Fadda-Conrey acknowledges the hyphen as 'a manifestation of this complexity, by which American identity is intrinsically transformed to encompass a multitude that is no longer marginal, but coexists with and ultimately changes the center' (2006:14). Therefore, I believe that hyphenating the term Arab-American throughout the study will help instill the aim of the study. To begin fulfilling the goal of the study, it is necessary to review the development of Arab-American experiences in the United States. Such a review helps to highlight the significant political contexts that inform the production and reception of Arab-American women's poetry.

Arabs in the United States: 'Against the Grain of the Nation' 7

Arab-American critics and researchers have always asserted that the demonising and ostracising of the Arab-American community is seen as an inheritance of what Steven Salaita (2005:150) describes as a 'centuries-long history of ethnic-mainstream conflict' (Abraham 1994; Majaj 2000; Saliba 1994; Samhan 1999; Suleiman 1999). Therefore, at the turn of the twenty-first century, literary and ethnographic critics became reluctant to subject Arab-American studies and scholarship to the urgency of an unexpected moment such as the post-September 11 period, despite the fact that this moment became a turning point in the history of this community in the United States. They conceive the September 11 aftermath as an extension and reinforcement of post-Cold War United States expansion in the Middle East (Abdulhadi et al. 2005; Naber 2012; Salaita 2005).

As an ethnic critic, Salaita situates the experience of Arabs in the United States within 'the social trajectories' of other minorities, although the United States' interests in the Middle East area have been central to the 'construction of Arab-American community as a political and social unit' (2005:150). Salaita further argues that anti-Arab racism and hostility has neither emerged as a sole consequence of September 11, nor was it based on geopolitics related to the interaction between Arab nations and the United States (2005:158). Therefore,

he offers a new perspective of analysing the experience of Arabs in America that is rooted in the racial history of the country. He maintains that the contemporary experiences of Arab communities in the United States is governed by what he terms 'imperative patriotism', originating from settler colonialism. Hence, the resulting racism is not modern or new, but rather a reformulated one 'based on popular and political sentiment' (2005:158).

In modern America, whiteness is perceived to be central in the construction of race. Although early progressive thinkers such as Horace Kallen, John Dewey, Israel Zangwill and Louis Brandeis objected to the imperial expansion of the United States, and adopted visions of diversity and difference, this vision, however, did not include blacks or other minority groups. Instead, it sought to expand the scope of whiteness beyond the 'Anglo-Saxons' to include Jews and other Europeans 'while leaving white supremacy intact' (Obenzinger 2008: 652). Modern American racism has ultimately evolved as the offspring of 'the imagery of Indians and Africans promulgated by White settlers in addition to imperial intervention and biological determinism' (Salaita 2005:157). Salaita adds that 'the conventional messianism with which early American settlers invested their identity invents and reinvents itself based on deeply encoded notions of racial superiority' (2005:157).

According to Salaita, 'imperative patriotism' assumes that nonconformity—relating to issues of foreign affairs—to whatever is considered to be 'the national interest' is unpatriotic. Such a sentiment can be traced to the early settler societies that needed to develop 'a juridical mentality' in order to establish a sort of divine law to legitimise their colonisation of the indigenous lands. Hilton Obenzinger explains that those settlers deployed the 'cultural narrative of the Hebrew Bible to assert a covenantal relationship with God for the settlers to seize the land as a chosen people… Eventually, these American cultural narratives of providential destiny expanded to include exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, and, ultimately, the concept of the American dream' (2008:653). Such sensibilities seem to be evident in modern American politics as it emerged in Bush's administration discourse on the 'War on

Terrorism' and when promoting war in Iraq, as George W. Bush declared that 'God is on America's side', making statements such as 'either you are for us or against us' (Salaita 2005:154).

In his study "Melting Pots and Promised Lands: Zionism and the Idea of America" (2008), Obenzinger depicts the relationship between 'American ideals' and the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine as facilitated by the same colonial settlement processes. Obenzinger claims:

> Israel and Palestine have had a special role in the construction of U.S. national narratives because of overlying religious and cultural imperatives arising from an American fascination with Palestine as the Christian Holy Land, particularly the theological and ideological focus rooted in Protestant doctrines of Jewish restoration, including complex typological identification with Jews, often both philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic at the same time. Many of the earliest settlers, such as the Puritans, saw themselves as creating a new Israel in a new Holy Land, and their aspirations for Jewish restoration in the old Holy Land figured in their developing nationalist narratives as a "restored" New World, covenanted people. (2008:654)

Despite the geopolitical interests the United States and Israel share, Obenzinger further asserts that this 'religious-nationalist' association continued to influence the United States' official discourse throughout the twentieth century, and became evident as Americans increasingly identified with Israel after 1948, and particularly in the aftermath of the 1967 war, when the 'alliance between the two countries' crystallised (Ibid). Eventually, when Arabs in the United States established an ethnic community and articulated their Arab identity after the 1967 war, they acquired a 'centuries-old history of ethnic-mainstream conflict', in addition to occupying the position of the enemy to the country's first cultural and religious ally. For Arab-American scholars and critics, hence, the September 11 moment did not initiate anti-Arab racism, or produce assumptions about this minority group. Rather, it polarised attitudes that have long existed, and offered legitimacy to the official discourse of 'imperative patriotism' and its advocates (Salaita 2005:160).

In his detailed study "Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image" (1994), Ronald Stockton argues that the role of stereotypes in a culture is to 'take people out of history and deny them

the right to change across time' (1994:120). He surveyed a wide range of Arab representations in media and inferred that 'images of Arabs cannot be in isolation but are primarily derivative, rooted in a core hostile archetypes that out culture applies to those with whom it clashes' (Ibid). For example, with the stereotyped Jew, the Arab shares 'the evil eyes', 'scruffy beard', 'crooked nose' and 'vile look'. Similarly, with the Black, the Arab shares 'thick lips', 'heavy brows' and 'stupid expressions' (Stockton 1994:135). Stockton further explains that negative ethnic imagery influences public reception of minorities:

> It is important to remember that while government policies are not simple outgrowths of public opinions, governments operate within parameters defined by what the public will tolerate. If the public is willing to dehumanize a population—be it domestic or foreign—then exceptional latitude is allowed where human rights are concerned. Slavery, brutal war, mass murder, assassination, and indifference to suffering become more acceptable. (Stockton 1994:150)

By the same token, in *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001), the Arab-American media critic Jack Shaheen traces the degrading stereotypes of Arabs that persisted throughout American cinematic history from the early days of silent films until the present-day Hollywood blockbusters. Examining a thousand Hollywood productions in the 2009 edition, the author explores a plethora of demeaning portrayals of Arabs and their culture developing from the Bedouin bandits and silent, oppressed maidens to greedy sheiks and fanatic terrorists. The book urges for a counter-narrative that seeks justice for Arabs and their culture and in the process it explains how the development of these stereotypes has naturalised and reinforced racial prejudices against Arabs and their culture, which influenced the United States' domestic and foreign policies that had impacted the daily lives of Arab-American citizens. Nabil Abraham, correspondingly, warns that in the United States, 'anti-Arab racism …permeates mainstream cultural and political institutions' (1994:159). In the case of Arab-Americans, since the late 1970s and 1980s, this traditional racism has coupled with the new United States Orientalism, and initiated a discourse that constructs 'an imagined Arab-Middle

Eastern Muslim' (Naber 2012:37) as the enemy of the nation to justify its covert and overt imperial ambitions in the area.

Projected within racial and religious contexts, the Arab has been perceived as different and threatening in mainstream public culture. Shaheen traces the growth of the stereotype of the Arab throughout the twentieth century and indicates that this racial stereotyping was a 'systematic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people' (2009:7-8). In the early decades of the twentieth century and as part of promoting the civilising mission of colonialism in the region, Arabs were presented as lazy, bearded, heathen Muslims holding exotic concubines in slave markets (Shaheen 2009:14). Later emerged the image of the 'swarthy sheik', chasing Western heroines (Shaheen 2009:25). After the 1973 oil crisis appeared the image of the 'oily, militant sheik', who hoards women and natural resources at the expense of Americans. Shaheen observes that this image is derived from the stereotype of the 'Jewish moneylender' (Ibid). The political climate of the 1980s brought the image of Arab Islamic radicals who are anti-Christian and anti-Semitic, killing and terrorising Western civilians. Along with the image of Arab Muslim terrorist male emerged the image of Arab women as 'shapeless Bundles of Black' who trudge silently behind their fanatic men. After the first and second Intifada in the 1990s, Arab males and females became Palestinian terrorists who threatened and bombed Western women and children (Shaheen 2009:26-28).

The development of the United States' imperialism in the Middle East between the 1960s and 1980s brought a new era for Arabs in the United States. Naber describes this situation when:

> a general sentiment developed in which people began to consider whether other people were suspicious of them, perceived them as un-American, or wonder whether they were connected with people the U.S. government and media were portraying as enemies of the nation. (2012:37)

Before September 11, this constant and systematic racialisation of Arab culture and its population served twofold objectives. On the one hand, it rationalised the United States-led

wars in the area, and on the other hand, it offered a sound justification for violating the constitutional rights of American citizens of Arab descent. Nadine Naber mentions that from the mid-1970s, the United States government's surveillance campaigns of Arab-Americans were conducted by several government agencies such as the Immigration Department, Justice Department and the FBI, which included spying and wiretapping as a direct order from the White House 'under the guise of uncovering the activities of persons potentially involved in sabotage' (2012:38). The civil rights lawyer Abdeen Jabara reflects on the impact of these policies and practices on the daily life of Arab-Americans:

> These attitudes frequently govern how people act in employing Arab Americans, promoting Arab Americans, renting of selling homes …to Arab Americans, or in characterizing Arabs in the local media…It was the July 1967 war in the Middle East that had the effect of galvanizing what had been a dormant giant. Second- and third-generations of Arab Americans were confronted with a historic challenge to their self-identification. (quoted in Naber 2012:39)

Inevitably, these practices drastically intensified in the September 11 aftermath, and peaked after signing the Patriot Act in 2001, which 'has been used improperly again and again by law enforcement to invade Americans' privacy and violate their constitutional rights', said Laura W. Murphy, director of the ACLU Washington legislative office[8].

As Jabara described, Arab-Americans felt the impact of the United States' imperialism on their lives, which subjected them to the threat of being perceived as the 'enemy within', 'particularly if one were politically engaged in activities that countered or critiqued U.S government policies in the Middle East', Naber asserts (2012:39). These official practices embody what Salaita terms 'imperative patriotism', and in return, have ignited what Michael Suleiman referred to as an 'Arab American Awakening' (1999:13), and pan-Arab community-based organisations were, hence, formed.

The experiences Arab-Americans faced in the United States emerged from an implicit knowledge that they have been forced to engaged with the country's imperial discourse in their daily lives; a discourse that associated them not with the American nation but 'with real

or fictive places outside the boundaries of the United States, and against which the United States is at war', which reveals a distinct sense of belonging to 'a diaspora of empire' (Naber 2012:27). Naber explains that her 'theorisation of the "diasporas of empire" emerges against the highly invasive and shifting relations of power central to contemporary United States neocolonialism and imperialism,…[in which] the empire inscribes itself on the diasporic subject within the domestic (national) borders of empire' (2012:27). This theorisation, hence, reifies the conventional notion of postcolonial diaspora in which immigrant subjects move back to their former imperial centre. Instead, the subjects of 'diasporas of empire' reside 'over there', and also reside 'over here', within the empire itself (Naber 2012:26).

In addition to the acceleration of the United States' imperial ambitions and fast-paced economic expansion in the Middle East, the declaration of the Oslo Peace Accords[9] in the mid-1990s has resulted in the emergence of what David Goldberg coins 'racial Palestinianization' to describe a type of political racialisation facing Arab-Americans in which:

> Israel is taken as an outpost of European civilisation in an altogether hostile and alien environment …Israelis occupy the structural positions of whiteness in the racial hierarchy of the Middle East. Arabs, accordingly—most notably in the person of Palestinians—are the antithesis (Goldberg 2009:116)

This 'racial Palestinianization' appears to be evolving from the earlier 'religious-nationalist' outlook promoted by the founding fathers of American democracy, which viewed Palestine as the 'new frontier', and the Jewish society as the embodiment of 'American democratic values' (Obenzinger 2008:654). Built on dispossession, slavery and white supremacy, the concept of American democracy has informed the Zionist settlement enterprise in Palestine that appears 'to reaffirm the vitality of American frontier', asserts Obenzinger (2008:654). He explains:

> I do not consider the end of the colonial period to be 1776; U.S. social development persists in a colonial fashion to this day, with such living legacies as the abrogation or containment of native rights, enforcement of the color line, and selected absorption of immigrant populations. (2008:653)

Therefore, Obenzinger sees civil wars, intifadas and social movements as inevitable consequences to resist what he calls 'unintended inequities' resulting from establishing democratic values through colonial settlements such as the models adopted in the United States and Israel (2008:655).

Consequent anti-Arab racism, in addition to the demographic shifts in Arab migration[10], gave rise to a new collective solidarity and Arab identification. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always been a pivotal cause that united the Arab-American community and provided it with a political purpose, despite intra-communal schisms and disparities. This revived identification was reflected in increasing political activism, establishing new cultural and social institutions and movements such as an Arab TV station, Arab broadcasters on some public radio stations, Arab film festivals, the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, in addition to new religious institutions (Naber 2012:58).

The second Intifada broke out in 2000 with unprecedented Israeli violence against Palestinians, and later the attacks of September 11, 2001, drastically changed and transformed Arab-American community politics again. The September 11 aftermath has thrust the community into undesirable hyper-visibility that has replaced their anonymity within the United States ethnic context with derogatory representations. Also, official discourses and practices, as discussed in chapter one, contributed to igniting hatred and violence against this minority group, who found its population and culture threatened by being 'against the grain of the nation' (Joseph 1999:257), and even more seriously, by accusations of being labelled unpatriotic. Their citizenship was governed by the binary rhetoric of the 'War on Terror': either with us or against us, and American vis-à-vis non-American.

Addressing issues of contested citizenship, the Vera Institute of Justice conducted a study entitled "Law Enforcement and Arab American Community Relations After September 11, 2001" to examine the impact of September 11 on Arab-Americans' daily life. The study reported:

In every one of the sites, Arab Americans described heightened levels of public suspicion exacerbated by increased media attention and targeted government policies (such as special registration requirements, racial profiling by law enforcement, and the detention and deportation of community members). Their accounts were largely supported by local and federal law enforcement participants. While community members in most sites also reported increases in hate victimization, they expressed greater concerns about being victimized by federal policies and practices. (2006:iii)

The Patriot Act of 2001 and its stipulations of allowing surveillance without approved court orders was a major concern for the Arab-American population. This legislation has intensified the political and cultural climates and placed the whole community under scrutiny. Moreover, in 2005, President George Bush authorised the National Security Agency (NSA) to monitor phone calls and emails from citizens and others in the United States who contacted persons abroad without 'court-approved warrants ordinarily required for domestic spying, according to government officials' (Risen and Lichtblau 2005). Accordingly, several organisations filed lawsuits in 2006, 'challenging the legality of warrantless domestic spying as well as the release of thousands of customer phone records by BellSouth, ATandT, and Verizon, citing violation of privacy', states Randa Kayyali (2006).

This hostile domestic environment has terrified Arab-Americans and drove them away from politics. On the one hand, they seriously feared government harassment and unjustified detentions. On the other hand, they experienced a lack of real leadership that could stand for them in the media or protect them from FBI investigations. As an Arab-American academic and critic, Salaita maintains:

Arab Americans, and many others, are under the impression that speaking too loudly against the war on terror or American support for Israel is a viable cause for suspicion. In addition, Arab Americans cannot discuss on campus the conditions of Palestinian life in the occupied territories without harassment, complaints of anti-Americanism, or, worse, accusations of anti-Semitism. (2005:152)

Experiencing such domestic hostility, Arab-Americans had no choice but to follow the path of scholars of other ethnic groups in speaking for themselves and articulating such injustices. 'One often finds this sentiment expressed in literature, since numerous Arab-Americans find it the last haven of articulation that still belongs to them. Cultural journals such as Mizna,

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JUSOOR, and al-Jadid have therefore assumed great importance in the community during the past few years,' states Salaita (2005:153). Engaging with the 'write or be written' imperative, Arab-American women seemed to be leading this rapidly escalating writing activity a decade before September 11. Through literary activism, they embarked on extended dialogues with their mainstream public, other minority groups, and their own communities.

The Evolution of Arab-American Poetry

'Within the Arab-American literary scene, there is much more poetry than fiction' (Akash and Mattawa 1999: xiii), as many Arab-American writers (both men and women) began their literary careers by publishing poetry. Numerous reasons hypothesised such a tendency, not the least of which is the relationship of Arab-Americans to the Middle East. In the Arab world, poetry and poets are highly ranked and oral performance of poetry is prized. Kanan Makiya observes that '[n]o matter how much conflict there may actually be among Arabs, constant invocation of this tradition in modern times—whether literary or religious—has become a powerful basis for asserting identity' (1993:45). Therefore, Orfalea and Elmusa believe that '[t]he great Arab love of poetry [has] not been drained from New World veins' (1988:xii) and there is an intrinsic Arab cultural tendency towards poetry; poetry is in the blood (1988:xiii). However, there is another gloss that does not rely on Arab identity alone, and I rather agree with Lisa Suhair Majaj, the Arab-American poet and critic, who argues that publishing novels is more complex than publishing individual poems for members of a small and ostracised group such as Arab-Americans. In addition, poetry, as a literary mode, suits 'both celebration and the expression of grief' as the lyric can be 'a ready vehicle both for celebrations of family and community, and for anguished depictions of war and suffering, both of which play a large role in defining the ethnic experience of the Arab-American poet' (1999: 67).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Arabs commenced their literary career in the United States with writing and publishing poetry through Mahjar poets (émigré poets المهجر شعراء). In the Arabic language, the term Mahjar is the noun of the verb hajar (هجر), meaning to leave one's native land, and the noun Mahjar refers to the land of Arab diaspora around the world, which was only the United States in the early nineteenth century. These poets included the following established Arab male writers: Ameen Rihani (1876-1940) and the internationally famous Kahlil (Khalil) Gibran (1883-1931), who were followed by two other writers of immigrant origins, Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988) and Elia Abu Madi (1890-1957). This group was called the Mahjar (émigré) poets; most wrote in English and Arabic, except for Abu Madi (who wrote only in Arabic). These poets later formed the New York 'Pen League'—al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah—in 1920, which dissolved before 1940 following Gibran's death in 1931 and Naimy's return to Lebanon in 1932. These writers impacted Arabic poetry, introducing philosophical attitudes and abstract themes whilst providing 'the rebellion in form, content, and diction'. The Palestinian poet and critic Salma Khadra Jayyusi asserts that with this school 'Romanticism successfully entered [Arabic] poetry' (1987:67).

Correspondingly, the early Arab women immigrant writers also wrote in Arabic, and Afifa Karam (1883-1924) was an early Lebanese immigrant woman to the United States, who wrote prolifically on gender issues between 1906-1924 for *al Hoda* magazine (Davidson and Wagner-Martin 1995:60). She was the first recorded Arab woman who published books in the United States. Her first novel *Badi'a wa* (and) *Fouad* (1906)[11] 'addresses the interplay between "traditional" Syrian and "modern" Western customs and questions inherited societal norms' (Saylor 2011)[12]. Karam was also a journalist and published her own magazine *al-Mar'a a al-Suriyah* (The Syrian Woman) (1911), which later became *al-Alam al-Jadid* (The New World) in 1913[13]. In addition, there were a few Arab women writers such as May Rihani, Mariam Qasim el-Saad and the Lebanese poet Amira el-Zain who only wrote in Arabic.

Of those early émigré poets only Gibran is well known in America today. His fame rests on his book, *The Prophet* (1923), which has been translated into more than forty languages. Andrea Shalal-Esa maintains that 'for many years, it was the best-selling book in the United States after the Bible; today there are some eight million copies in print' (2010:10). Americans view Gibran as an isolated phenomenon, a quasi-religious figure who brought to America some of the wisdom of the East (Simarski 1990:50). The early generation of Arab poets in the United States sought to stress their Christian identity and their roots in the Holy Land by investing biblical rhetoric and religious analogues in order to gain the acceptance of the white mainstream, which they did by familiarising the 'exotic', whilst distancing themselves from Islam (Majaj 2000:328).

Struggling with Orientalist bias that tainted the representation of Arab culture in nineteenth-century America, this early generation adopted the strategy of presenting themselves as the bearers of Oriental wisdom. For instance, in *The Prophet*, Evelyn Shakir explains:

> [Gibran] takes on the persona of Almustafa[14] (The Chosen) as Eastern oracle…whose biblical cadence, syntax, and diction place him in the company of Jesus. At the same time a brooding photo of the author (on the back of the book jacket) encourages readers to confuse Gibran himself with Almustafa, as does the blurb below announcing that Gibran was born in Lebanon, a land that has produced many prophets. (Shakir 1996:5-6)

Majaj further observes that their strategic use of the 'exotic' relied on racial essentialism and assimilation that governed cultural interaction in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century, which enabled them to delineate themselves as both white and different. Conceiving ethnic groups and races as totally different had set the Arabs apart from white Americans, whilst allowing them to assert their difference as 'exotic emissaries' from the Holy Land. Simultaneously, the assimilation paradigm offered them chances of melting in the American pot due to their whiteness, and by stressing elements of their culture that are viewed as in accordance with American values (Majaj 2000:329).

In a different mode of religious discourse, Ibraham Mitrie Rihbany (1869-1944) sought to connect himself to mainstream context by reinforcing his Christianity. He argued that Syrians had the responsibility to import their spirituality to the West: 'The Oriental must never cease to teach his Occidental brother, nor ever allow himself to forget his own great spiritual maxims which have guided the course of his life for so many centuries' (1922:301). Whilst stressing Christian identity, those authors simultaneously engaged in distancing themselves from Islam, considered in the American context as the antithesis of all that was Christian, Western and white. In *Wise Men from the East and from the West (*1922), Rihbani referred to Muslims as 'the traditional enemy of my people' (1922:159), in order to align himself and other Christian Syrians with Christianity, Europe and the West.

From the 1940s until the late 1980s writers did not identify as Arab-American, and Majaj maintains that economic struggles, xenophobia and the immigration quota hindered the progress of Arab creative writing in the United States until the early 1970s onward (2005:25). Contemporary Arab-American literature appeared on the scene with the publication of the *Grape Leaves* anthology in 1988, which included fifteen contemporary voices, in addition to five poets from the first generation of the Arab immigrants in the United States. The collection included the works of Etel Adnan and Naomi Shihab Nye, in addition to three other women poets: D.H. Melhem, Doris Safie and Elmaz Abinader. Although works in this collection acknowledge racial politics and the issue of Palestine, they are preoccupied with themes of food and family, establishing the nostalgic undertone of the volume. Food is an important emblem of Arabic culture that links these immigrants to their homelands. Their poetry is filled with dates, oranges, lemons, figs, almonds and their trees.

Family also emerges as another strong source of Arab-American identity, as the poet Gregory Orfalea asserts that for Arab-Americans, 'the family is the self' (1988:93). Mary

Zogby indicates that the subject of the love of the family marks out Arab-American poetry from mainstream poetry in the United States (1988:91). Echoing this sentiment, the Lebanese-American poet Ben Bennani also observes: 'In America, unfortunately, poetry most often presents the individual in isolation' (1988:218). Orfalea and Elmusa note that Arab-American poetry is 'a people-filled poetry in which people are the images…not objects for exploring the psychoanalytic powers of the poet' (1988:xxvii). Therefore, many poems in this early collection reflect the poets' attempts to recreate the images of their parents often in conjunction with other images that are culturally specific: Arabic food and Arabic music (Zogby 1988:93).

It is intriguing to note that whereas Arab-American poetry was established and further brought into the spotlight by male poets in the early and mid-decades of the twentieth century, it has been predominated by women poets at the turn of the twenty-first century, whose poetry departs from the celebratory and nostalgic overtones that garnished the works from the mid-twentieth century as mentioned earlier. The poet and writer Nathalie Handal maintains that Arab-American women poets have always moved to and from their culture of origin, trying to understand it, nourish it and expand it into their lives (2001:43). Nevertheless, they remain in their American context or background by relating themselves to other American women writers of ethnic groups, mainly Native American, African-American, Asian-American and Latina/American, writers such as Joy Harjo, June Jordan, Maxine Hong Kingston and Gloria Anzaldua. Such connection helps them identify with America, and in becoming more American (2001:44). Relating themselves to other minority groups in the United States enables them to understand their experience and assure them that they are not alone, and as Handal puts, it is 'a way of stating that America is also about *this diversity'* (2001:44).

Contemporary Arab-American women writers and poets have always been pushed to choose between their multiple identities. In "Boundaries: Arab/American", Majaj maintains that Arab-Americans felt betrayed by their fellow Americans, describing a radio

commentator's pronouncement that 'in war there are no hyphenated Americans, just Americans and non-Americans' (1994:82). They have been deeply affected and sabotaged, as mentioned earlier by all the historical and political events that happened in the Arab region. Through their poetry they articulated their stances against racialisation, demonising stereotypes and misrepresentations that wreaked havoc on the community particularly during times of domestic unrest after September 11. Also, they have voiced against the injustices inflicted on their fellow Arabs in the Middle East due to the United States' imperial project in the area and its pro-Israeli support. Palestine and the search for a just peace are pressing issue in their poetry. Additionally, despite the enormous pressure and intense political racialisation, contemporary Arab-American women poets (and male poets) continue discussing and portraying the Arab-Israeli conflict, thus forging their connections and solidarity with the Arab world. These attitudes and efforts 'should not be taken for granted,' contends Handal, because 'for an Arab-American poet to criticize his country's [the United States] stance in anything but the most veiled terms is risky (2001:40). He/ [she] had 'no legs to stand on, political or literary, in the halls of power' (Orfalea 1988:xxiv).

As my study of Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad shows, Arab-American women poets explore their doubleness and this cultural schism, and demonstrate a constant negotiation of self, heritage and vision as they try to settle the two sides of their hyphen and bring cohesion to their multiple identifications. They can also affirm their religious and national aspects of identity, whilst exploring the conflicts attached to their multi-layered identities and the multiple contexts from which they emerged. Although their poetry crosses the Atlantic to portray the impact of American imperial strategies on socio-economic/cultural dynamics and turmoil in the Middle East, it simultaneously crosses the boundaries of Arab-American ethnicity to forge alliances with other minorities, rooting itself in the United States ethnic literary tradition.

Acknowledging the position of Arab-Americans as a minority group within the United States and linking its experiences to the larger ethnic social and literary spheres is a central foundation for this study. Analysing contemporary Arab-American women's poetry in the light of different tropes of women of colour critiques and ethnic cultural formations of ethnic history and politics inform the theoretical framework of this study. The study, therefore, explores the complexities of allegiances and affiliations related to Arab-American identity issues through the lenses of African-American, Asian-American and other ethnicities and places Arab-American citizenship within the larger ethnic context, and relates their experiences to the various minority groups in the United States. By highlighting the different themes and concerns addressed in contemporary Arab-American women's poetry, such as institutionalised racialisation, identity politics and essentialist representations amongst others, this thesis attempts to delineate the complex historical, cultural, religious, linguistic and national backgrounds, and show how poetry can challenge the mainstream's perception of this group as a homogenous entity.

However, the ramifications of the United States' foreign policies in the Arab region and the prevailing mainstream prejudices against Arabs, Muslims and their culture are still pressing concerns in the contemporary poetry of Arab-American women. Such issues have complicated the ethnic experience of the group members and led them to identify with their people back home in the region, which renders the approach of analysing texts in this thesis markedly transnational, as it features and emphasises the solid links between these poems and the relationships they sustain with their homelands, either imaginary or actual [15]. Therefore, the method of approaching the texts selected for this study operates on two levels; on the one hand, it attempts to relate Arab-American women's poetry to the canon of ethnic literature in the United States, whilst on the other hand, simultaneously connecting it to the homeland in the Middle East.

Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad have extended themselves across both worlds and cultures, drawing on both, yet developing their new diasporic multi-layered perspectives; neither are these perspectives Arab, nor are they American. In relation to their postcolonial mother culture, their poetry becomes a conceptual space in parallel with Bhabha's 'third space', which is conceived as 'a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (Bhabha 1990:208). However, as diasporic women writers, their literary production can be seen as emerging from Anzaldua's concept of nepantla, functioning as 'a metaphor for forbidden knowledge, new perspectives on reality, [and] alternate ways of thinking' (Anzaldua 2000:5). Nepantla is a Nahuatl word that means 'in-between space'. Anzaldua uses this term in her post-Borderland theory as evoking liminality and potential change. Ana Louise Keating explains, 'For Anzauldua, nepantla represents temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of crisis. Nepantla occurs during the many transitional stages of life and describes both identity-related issues and epistemological concerns' (2009:322).

> The nepantla, according to Gloria Anzaldua, is:
>
> the liminal space, in-between space that facilitates transformation; as the boundaries breakdown, the identity categories that before were so comfortable—so natural, as it were—no longer work; they dissolve compelling us to find new ways to define ourselves. (2000:5)

Accordingly, the nepantla becomes a pertinent term for analysing Arab-American diaspora as it allows Arab-American women to negotiate the different aspects of their experiences in diaspora, where intersecting political, social, economic and cultural realms are acknowledged and reconciled. From the Arab-American nepantla, these women retell their stories through a diasporic prism in which their diverse identities, allegiances and the experiences—they have lived and are still living—are interwoven, allowing new images and forms to emerge.

In this case, poetry becomes a cultural space of negotiation and meditation from which these women denounce the power politics that shape their lives, where cultural, racial and political tensions become evident. Hence, this study explores how these poets seek to

negotiate their identity allegiances and political affiliations through poetry as a mode of knowledge that allows them to resist the resurging Orientalism and the increasing racialisation, whilst undermining the essential and ahistorical notion of the Arab/Muslim woman's identity. More importantly, for Arab-American women, poetry has also become a viable means of practising self-criticism through maintaining their relationships with the old homeland, leading this minority group in the 'new directions' that Majaj called for (1999:67). Dwelling on the transnational aspect of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry underlines the significant role of self-criticism that made itself evident in the poetry of these women, such as Adnan's denouncements of war and violence resulting from Lebanese politics, whilst the works of Kahf and Hammad undermine the patriarchal forms of Islam and nationalism. Through their poetry these women devise a critical outlook that departs from a nostalgia that yearns for a lost homeland. Like all other Arab-Americans, these women have always been struggling with a double quandary: within the larger mainstream context, they have to deal with institutionalised racism, discrimination and misconstrued representations, highly intensified after the disaster of September 11. Within Arab-American communities, however, they have to maintain the solidarity and boundaries of their communities, which renders addressing intra-communal issues, such as patriarchy, homophobia, sexism and religious conflicts, more challenging, where their voices were always disregarded.

The rise of the rich body of Arab-American women's writing, and particularly poetry, can be seen as one of the most important consequences of the tragic events of September 11 and its aftermath. Explaining this penchant for Arab-American women's writing, Elmaz Abinader suggests that Arab men are still unsettling figures to American sensibility (qtd. in Majaj, 2005: 30), and, hence, their works are not received with much enthusiasm. I find Chandra Talpade Mohanty is very useful here as she reminds us of how the global hegemony of Western scholarship governs the discourse of Western feminisms regarding 'the production, publication, distribution, and consumption of information and ideas' of women of colour

(2003: 21). In *Feminism Without Borders*, Mohanty examines the 'ethnocentric universalism' implied in the discourse of the United States' feminism and how it influences the reception of women of colour, as it 'sets out its own authorial subjects as implied referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others' (Ibid). Ultimately, it is this 'ethnocentric universalism' implicit in United States' feminist discourses that seems to be responsible for engendering such an increasing demand for, and enthusiastic reception of, the works of Arab-American women after September 11. Embedded in this interest in the work of Arab-American women is a desire to reinforce the preconceived aspects of Arabic culture (such as women's oppression and victimisation and men's barbarity and savageness) to show that they are people who needed to be brought to light and rescued by Western feminism.

The Position of Contemporary Women's Poetry within the Field of Arab-American Studies

Despite the abundance of Arab-American women poets who have been publishing since the last decade of the twentieth century, a dearth of critical material is evident, as the field of Arab-American Studies lacks the theoretical and methodological tools necessary to develop the field. Notwithstanding the centrality of poetry in the Arab-American literary scene, critical attention is mainly drawn to novels and non-fiction prose produced by Arab-American women writers. This tendency is reflected in the few books, journal articles and even fewer academic studies that investigate the multiplicity of Arab-American identities, complicated by living in a hostile domestic environment. Arab-American poetry, and specifically, women's poetry, has been scantly acknowledged or examined despite its prominence in the Arab-American literary landscape, and despite the abundance of notable women poets publishing today. In the best cases, the poetry of Arab-American women is anthologised with Arab women's poetry from the Middle East, such as in *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology (2001),* edited by the Arab-American poet and

writer Nathalie Handal. Reviewing the corpus of Arab-American literature, and specifically, women's writing, I can lay the claim that this study is the first academic effort that acknowledges the genre of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry, bringing together four of the most significant contemporary Arab-American literary publishing figures today, particularly Etel Adnan and Naomi Shihab Nye, whose poetry has been scarcely examined despite their significant position within the context of the Arab-American literary scene. It is a pioneering work for being the first to examine the aesthetic value of Adnan's work and its relation to nineteenth-century French Symbolism, and for presenting a new perspective for examining Nye's work, departing from the celebratory outlook. This project can be viewed as establishing this growing genre and contributing to shed some light on this unexplored terrain of Arab-American literature.

As mentioned earlier, the publication of *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* (1988) announced the existence of Arab-American literature, and particularly poetry as the main conduit of voicing ethnicity. It was the first serious American anthology that acknowledged the work of the earlier Arab-American émigré poets and also the first that compiled fifteen Arab-American men and women, of Muslim, Christian and Jewish heritage. *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999), which included different works of established and upcoming writers, overlooks the importance of poetry as it includes more fiction and non-fiction prose, despite the fact that most of the Arab-American writers, and particularly women, were publishing poetry at that time. However, a decade after the appearance of the first anthology, the volume marks a distinct transformation in themes, allegiances and tones. As the title suggests, the collection demonstrates the evolution of Arab-American literature beyond the legacy of Gibran and the Pen League writers, and also beyond the sensibilities of the poets of the *Grape Leaves* anthology, who viewed their poetry, in the words of Joseph Awad, as 'the music of the melting pot of America' (Orfalea and Elmusa

1988:56). The collection, furthermore, introduced writers such as Suheir Hammad and Mohja Kahf to a broader audience.

After the publication of the first poetry collection in 1988, only two anthologies of poetry appeared to date: Nathalie Handal's *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology* (2001) and *Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry* (2008), edited by Hayan Charara. Handal's collection was the first, and to my knowledge, the only anthology of Arab women poets that included twenty Arab-Americans. This collection is the only one until this present study that acknowledges the existence of the body of Arab-American women's poetry as a distinct genre with its own characteristics. Andrea Shalal-Esa claims that the volume 'has sold more than 10,000 copies, a phenomenal achievement for a book of poetry in the difficult U.S. market' (2010:10). The anthology is distinguished by its extensive account of the evolution of the poetic tradition of Arab women and its roots in pre-Islamic history, which emphasises the diversity and heterogeneity of the backgrounds and experiences of Arab women, and by extension, that of Arab-American women as well. However, the poetry of Arab-American women is overshadowed by its inclusion within the poetry of Arab women from the Middle East, which may lead to the erroneous understanding that the poetry of Arab-American women is a continuity of the poetic tradition of Arab women.

Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry (2008), edited by Hayan Charara, an Arab-American poet, features thirty-nine contemporary Arab-American poets, seventeen of whom are women poets. The volume manifests an array of different poetic sensibilities touching on different aspects of humanity, such as cultural politics, loss, politics and art, and demonstrating a two-decade evolution. The collection is distinguished by introducing new and young Arab-American voices whose poetry expresses with originality a relentless urge not only to speak, but more importantly, to be heard. Charara asserts that the

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publication of this anthology emphasises the importance of poetry within the Arab-American literary scene, as the number of new poets has almost doubled from that in the first anthology of 1988 (2008:xx).

Contributing to instilling and reinforcing ethnic pride in the community, the *Grape Leaves* anthology led to the emergence of Arab-American scholarship in 1990s. Salaita mentions that Arab-American scholars were on the threshold of a 'critical breakthrough' a few years before September 11 (2005:149). These publications, varying in breadth and disciplines, are believed to foreground the field of Arab-American Studies, and Arab-American feminism in particular, that took shape a few years after September 11, when the demands for such scholarship have increased.

As mentioned earlier, the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed an accelerated surge in Arab-American women's writing and publication. Amongst the pioneering Arab-American feminist collections is Joanna Kadi's *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writing by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994). The collection is considered a landmark in Arab-American feminist writing for being the first collection that features a wide spectrum of women writers from diverse disciplines, experiences, backgrounds, ethnicities and sexualities, who are all from Arab descent and living in North America. However, of the forty-two contributors, only five Arab-American poets are included: Lisa Suhair Majaj, Naomi Shihab Nye, D.H. Melhem, Pauline Kaldas and Doris Safie. The essays featured in this collection explore these women's experiences with dual affiliations, cultural schism, racial politics, misrepresentation, sexual politics and homophobia within Arab-American communities, in addition to stressing the importance of connecting with other ethnic groups in the United States and Canada to defy racism, attain visibility and achieve social transformation.

Correspondingly, the anthropological study *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States* (1997) by Evelyn Shakir brought to light the history of Arab migration

and Arab women in the United States, which had received very little attention in the ethnic discourses in the period prior to the appearance of this publication. The book is a historical study of the experience of Arab women throughout the history of Arab diaspora in the United States. Documenting the experiences of Arab immigrant women since the nineteenth century to the present, the book focuses on the several generations' negotiations between Arab values and the sexual and social liberties granted in the United States. This study might be considered a prelude to Arab-American feminism in the way it challenges the monolithic representation of the voiceless victim Arab woman, for it focuses on the heterogeneity of the experiences of Arab women in the United States. In addition to these publications appeared Lisa Suhair Majaj's theoretically sophisticated articles that explore the ethnic experience of Arabs in the United States and its impact on the newly born contemporary Arab-American literature.

In addition to the aforementioned publications of Arab-American women, *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab-American Women on Writing* (2004), edited by Susan Muaddi Darraj, appears to present a brief record of the literary oeuvre of the publishing Arab-American women writers. The book assembles a set of reflections on writing by contemporary Arab-American women. It offers researchers insights across different generations and diverse backgrounds, inviting a deep immersion into the burgeoning field of Arab-American feminism. The collection includes eight notable publishing poets of the eleven featured contributors: Mohja Kahf, Lisa Suhair Majaj, Nathalie Handal, Etel Adnan, Suheir Hammad, Naomi Shihab Nye, Dima Hilal and Marian Haddad. This compilation indicates that a large number of Arab-American publishing women are poets, whose literary work has not been explored critically yet. Its generational approach has inspired my own study, and I hope that my analyses will complement the personal perspectives provided by these four generations of Arab-American women poets.

By the second half of the first decade of twenty-first century Arab-American poets have entered the American public sphere 'at a moment when the very notion of "Arab" and 'Arab

American" [were] ready to burst. We are ripe for reinvention,' asserts Charara (2008:xxix).

Echoing this sentiment, Salaita also asserts that Arab-American literature is ready for criticism

as it is 'becoming a serious force within the category of American letters' (quoted in Charara

2008:xxix). The post-September 11 period has generated a high readership for works on

Middle East, Islam and the conditions of women in that part of the world. Shalal-Esa cites

Michael Norris' analysis of Bowker's Books in Print database, which demonstrates a surge in

the publications about the Middle East beginning in 2003 and 2004. 'His data shows a steady

increase in the number of fiction and non-fiction books published about the Middle East, from

793 in 1997 to a peak of 1,304 in 2004. In 2006, the number had dropped back to 1,076,'

contends Shalal-Esa (2010:10).

Although Arab-American literature seems to reveal concerns with the acceptance of and

humanisation of Arab culture and its offspring of Arab-Americans, the emergence of Arab-

American literature offers new areas of scholarship that have been rarely explored, such as

feminist writing and the most recent emerging genre of Arab-American queer studies.

Therefore, several studies and publications appeared since then exploring the diverse

experiences of different Arab-Americans in the United States, their relations to other ethnic

groups and the impact of the United States' overseas imperialism and foreign policies on their

communities, in addition to some intra-communal issues. Although some of these works have

addressed and explored contemporary Arab-American women's writing, nevertheless, none of

these endeavours have paid critical attention to the evolution of the body of Arab-American

women's poetry as a key means of articulating these experiences. For instance, *Etel Adnan:*

Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist (2002), edited by Lisa Suhair Majaj

and Amal Amireh, compiles twelve essays that discuss and explore the critical and cultural

contexts of the work of this prominent Arab-American poet, novelist and artist. To my

knowledge, Etel Adnan is the only Arab-American woman poet who has received such critical

attention. Nevertheless, and despite the fact that she has published eleven collections of poetry

since 1966, only the first four essays in the collection address her poetry, one examines her visual art, and the rest of the book is devoted to exploring her award-winning novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1982) and other non-fiction prose works. Also, the publication of *Homage to Etel Adnan* in October 2012 provides this Arab-American poet with even more recognition and distinction. Edited by Lindsey Boldt, Steve Dickison and Samantha Giles, the book was compiled on the occasion of Adnan's receipt of the Small Press Traffic Literary Arts Centre's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011. It includes essays written in tribute by colleagues, friends and admirers of Adnan and her work.

It is noteworthy to mention that the academic studies that appeared in the last few years have acknowledged the work of some Arab-American women poets in the process of examining the impact of political racialisation, identity issues and the United States' imperialism on the emerging Arab-American literature. Carol N. Fadda-Conrey's study of Arab-American literature, *Racially White but Culturally Colored: Defining Contemporary Arab-American Literature and its Transnational Connections* (2006), examines the poetry of two American women poets, Mohja Kahf , and Suheir Hammad, in a chapter entitled "Weaving Poetic Autobiographies: Individual and Communal Identities in the Poetry of Mohja Kahf and Suheir Hammad". The chapter pursues a close analysis of the autobiographical elements in the works of these two poets. It explores how these poets foreground the paradoxical position of the Arab-American woman within the ethnic, racial and cultural spheres in the United States. My study of Kahf and Hammad builds on this interest in subjectivity, but I argue for the importance of reading their work according to their particular generational interests in Shahrazad and hip-hop.

Again, and for the second time, the autobiographic elements in Kahf's and Hammad's poetry are examined in Nawar Al-Hassan Golley's second book *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing (Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East)* (2007). The book examines the autobiographical writing of contemporary Arab and Muslim women

writers, most of whom live in diaspora. In many ways, the book is considered an extension to her first book, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (2003), in which she applies a variety of Western critical theories to the autobiographies of Arab women from the Middle East, such as Huda Shaarawi, Fadwa Tuqan, Nawal el-Saadawi and others, in order to depict the productivity of these critical frameworks in examining Arab women's writing. *Arab Women's Lives Retold*, on the other hand, explores how different women poets, novelists and writers of Arab descent utilise autobiography in their work to challenge the essential notion of Arab women's subservience in the twenty-first century. The work compares the autobiographic elements in the poetry of Kahf and Hammad and examines how that poetry shrewdly portrays the conflict between Arab and American cultures. Although the book addresses the thematic aspects in the works of these poets, it hardly acknowledges the specific aesthetic or formal value of their work as the offspring of the Arab-American literary or poetic tradition. More importantly, I believe that including these two poets with other women writers, such as the Egyptian Nawal al- Sa'adawi, the Algerian Assia Djabar and the Arab-British Ahdaf Soueif, overlooks the specific aspects of the Arab-American experience relevant to their work, not to mention presenting a sweeping understanding of their work as relating to the Middle East.

In a more focused context, the study of Amal Talat Abdelrazek, *Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossing* (2007), explores the works of three Arab-American novelists and one poet to examine how these writers uniquely address racism and marginalisation to reveal the distinct aspects of their ethnic histories. The works studied are: *A Border Passage* (1999) by Leila Ahmad, *E-mails from Scheherazade* (2003) by Mohja Kahf, *West of Jordan* (2003) by Laila Halabi, and *Crescent* (2003) by Dian Abu Jaber. The study draws on the border theory developed by Avitar Brah, Gloria Anzaldua, Gilles Deleuze and others to explore the border crossing in works mentioned above. The study investigates how Kahf attempts to deconstruct the Orientalist stereotyping of the Arab/Muslim woman and establish in the process an anti-

essentialist notion of Arab/Muslim subjectivity that defies her monolithic representation in mainstream culture and media.

In her study, Abdelrazek calls attention to psychic and geographical territories delineated, and focuses on displacement and exile experiences as relating to diaspora and border crossing. Although the study focuses on the work of four Arab-American women and their experience in exile, it fails to connect this literary work to the larger context of women of colour feminism in the United States. Furthermore, including a poetry collection with three works of fiction somehow obscures the formal concerns of genre, in favour of a post-September 11 rationale for the choice of works.

In the same vein, in her study *Racing Sheherazade: Arab-American Women's Translations of Sheherazade in Writing and Performance* (2009), Somaya Sabry explores how Kahf seeks to transform the Orientalist image of the Arab/Muslim woman by reviving the mythic figure of Shahrazad[16] in her poetry. The study examines the revival of the orality and narrative of Shahrazad, the mythic narrator of *The Thousand Nights and One Nights*, in the poetry, novel and stand-up comedy of four contemporary Arab-American women, respectively, Mohja Kahf, Diana Abu Jaber and the performers Laila Farah and Mysoon Zyiad. The study further argues that these women offer a productive interrogation of identities and representations, whilst creating a space for cultural translation through their writing and performances. They open up the rigid categories of monolithic identity so that Shahrazad can survive in the twenty-first century America. My study is a further attempt to challenge the rigid categories of Arab-American identity through a generational approach that includes the Shahrazadian narrative but is not defined by it.

The works of Arab-American poets such as Mohja Kahf, Suheir Hammad, in addition to Naomi Shihab Nye, were also examined in the significant volume *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives of Anglophone Arab Literature* (2009), edited by Layla Maleh. The work examines wide-ranging Anglophone Arab texts produced by Arab-American, Arab-British and

Arab-Australian writers of diasporas. It registers the evolution of these Anglophone literatures since they emerged at the turn of the twentieth century until post September 11. Apart from all of the other works and academic studies that highlight the historical and cultural values and contexts of this production, this work is distinguished by delineating the aesthetic value of this emerging literature, which has received very little critical attention so far amongst other Anglophone writings, such as the Indian, West African and Caribbean. Authors discussed in the study respectively include Elmaz Abinader, Diana Abu-Jaber, Leila Aboulela, Leila Ahmed, Rabih Alameddine, Edward Atiyah, Shaw Dallal, Ibrahim Fawal, Fadia Faqir, Khalil Gibran, Suheir Hammad, Loubna Haikal, Nada Awar Jarrar, Jad El Hage, Lawrence Joseph, Mohja Kahf, Jamal Mahjoub, Hisham Matar, Dunya Mikhail, Samia Serageldine, Naomi Shihab Nye, Ameen Rihani, Mona Simpson, Ahdaf Soueif and Cecile Yazbak.

Although the study can be considered pioneering in bringing together different Anglophone Arab literatures, however, examining this array of writers with postcolonial lenses may overlook other aspects of their experiences and might even be considered inaccurate, particularly in the case of Arab-Americans as compared to Arab-British, for instance. Also, in this study, the poetics of Arab-American women are examined more culturally and thematically and out of the context of poetic tradition, and crucially, without the perspective provided by the foundational voice of Etal Adnan.

The years 2011 and 2012 have witnessed the publication of two important works that can be considered the pillars for the developing field of Arab-American feminism. Edited by Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany and Nadine Naber, *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging* (2011), compiles a large spectrum of Arab-American feminist writing. This big volume encompasses most, if not all, of the contemporary publishing Arab-American women's voices today across various disciplines, including poets such as Majaj, Hilal and Hammad. Hailing from diverse geographical locations, vocations, religious faiths, class backgrounds and sexualities, contributors express their feminist

commitments to both intra-communal and national issues from an Arab-American feminist angle. The collection seeks to forge new channels for instilling grounded perspectives at the centre of gender, American, ethnic and Middle East studies. The diversity emphasised in this collection has offered this study means of achieving a more focused analysis of four Arab-American key poets.

In *Arab-America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (2012), the anthropologist and activist Nadine Naber examines the complex cultural politics facing Arabs in the present-day United States. The book introduces a new perspective to examine the Arab-American experience in the United States as 'a diaspora of empire' instead of the conventional postcolonial diaspora. Correspondingly, Naber attempts to develop a new 'diasporic Arab feminist critique' that is sought to offer 'a resolution to the difficulties of critiquing' issues specific to Arab communities without reifying Orientalism (2012:249). This work needs further research and investigation, although it can be considered as a nucleus for the emerging Arab-American feminism. Inspired by Naber's attempt to bring together the critical languages of diaspora, Arab identities and feminism, my study seeks to situate Arab-American women's poetry within Naber's formulations of this culturally diverse and politically active 'Arab-America'.

Based on the above, it can be inferred that most of these publications and studies have mainly focused on the work of two women poets, that is, of Mohja Kahf and Suheir Hammad, in isolation from the larger context of Arab-American poetry, and more specifically, of Arab-American women's poetry. Such a focus might result in overlooking the importance and oeuvre of other notable Arab-American women poets whose substantial contributions continue to enrich this genre. In the pursuit of its goal of presenting an introduction to Arab-American women's poetry, this study diverges from the urgency of focusing on the impact and consequences of the September 11 aftermath that has informed and led most of the earlier studies in the field, and examines the growth of the body of Arab-American women's poetry

through four generations of Arab diaspora in the United States as mirroring the development of the Arab-American community within the ethnic tapestry in the country.

Chapter one, entitled "In the Belly of the Beast: Toward Arab-American Diasporic Feminist Anti-Imperialist Critique", aims to foreground the study by offering a detailed account of the position of the Arab-American community within the ethnic grid in the United States in order to understand how such a position has impacted the literary production of this minority group. The chapter also demonstrates the influence of racial politics on the poetry of these women as overriding other persistent intra-communal issues.

Chapter two, "*The Arab Apocalypse*: Rewriting Home and Conflicted Allegiances in Etel Adnan's Poetry", draws on theories of transnationalism and diaspora in the work of Pnina Werber, James Clifford and Aihwa Ong to discuss the work of Etel Adnan. Through analysing the exemplary text *The Arab Apocalypse,* the chapter explores the hold of the old homeland (Lebanon) on the psyche of the poet. The chapter further demonstrates the poet's realistic and critical outlook towards the old country and how it enabled her to break down the simplistic concepts of national belonging and cultural multiplicity. In addition to discussing the influence of Adnan's complex marginalisation, the chapter highlights the centrality of Middle East politics, and particularly that of Lebanon, in her work, whilst demonstrating in the process how visual art has helped shape her poetics in a revolutionary text such as *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989). Moreover, the chapter also depicts the affinities of her aesthetics to that of nineteenth-century French Symbolism.

Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua's Borderland theory, chapter three, "From the "Nepantla": Compromising the Palestinian Cause in the Poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye", examines the work of Naomi Shihab Nye in her attempt to configure an image of the Palestinian that challenges the one preconceived in mainstream consciousness. Although she acquires the mediator position to narrow the gap between her two sides of the hyphen, her poetry seems evidently rooted in the tradition of the American poetry of the south,

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demonstrating the influence of her mentor, William Stafford. The poet has always asserted her links to other minority groups; paradoxically, though, her poetry is governed by a tendency toward assimilation that marked her generation.

Chapter four examines the work of Mohja Kahf as representing a more confrontational generation of the 1980s that constituted the second and third wave of Arab immigration to the United States. Identifying herself as a Muslim-American, Kahf belongs to a generation of Muslim feminist writers and academics who took on themselves the task of challenging and transforming the distorted images and unjust stereotypes of Islam and its women. Informed by the works of Edward Said and feminists such as Meyda Yegenoglu, Suzan Gauch and Rana Kabbani, the chapter depicts how the poet attempts to undermine the hegemonic digressive representations of Arab/Muslim woman rooted in nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse. Moreover, the chapter also illustrates how the poet resists such Orientalist translation of her culture by weaving her discussion of the hijab through reviving the translational figure of Shahrazad.

The work of poet and activist Suheir Hammad is explored in chapter five under the title "*Born Palestinian, Born Black*: Afro-Arab Poetics and Belonging in Suheir Hammad's Poetry". The chapter underlines how the work of Hammad departs from the Arab-American agenda of representation in the United States to establish a solid poetics that relates itself to African-American hip-hop poetry and music. In her work that originates from hip-hop culture and consciousness, Hammad seeks to utilise Afro/Arab-American poetics to transcend the hegemonic perceptions of belonging and citizenship. Drawing on Black and third-world feminisms, the chapter also set out to explore how the poet reconstructs identity by demonstrating the overlapping interdependent histories of dispassion, in addition to African and Arab cross-cultural politics.

It is very important to note that the texts selected for this study are meant to be representative and not comprehensive. Also, this selection aims, first of all, to situate the genre

of Arab-American women's poetry within an ethnic minority framework in order to highlight issues of belonging and transnational citizenship. Secondly, the selection of these texts reflects diverse themes, preoccupation and experiences, which undermines the monolithic representation of the Arab/Muslim woman. This approach seeks to stress the plurality and fluidity of Arab-American women's identities. This study ultimately sets out to acknowledge Arab-American women's poetry as a constructive space to examine issues of ethnicity and contested identities, which are further complicated by their status as individualised strands of experience woven into a larger ethnic United States tapestry. As Aziz puts it, 'Our literature first helps us comprehend ourselves—where we came from, what we are and where we want to go—and fully feel our self-worth. Then, through the stories that emerge, we can move others' (qtd. in Majaj, 2005:24).

Chapter One

'In the Belly of the Beast': Towards an Arab-American Diasporic Feminist Anti-Imperialist Critique[17]

For Arab-American women writers, the hyphen has become a contested space due to the resurgent Orientalist and stereotypical racial discourse on Arabs in the United States. The disaster of September 11, 2001, has complicated governance issues and impacted American society and particularly the diverse Arab-American communities. The United States discourse on the 'War on Terrorism' has reproduced the sweeping concepts of the '"good" Western civilization against an "evil" Islamic one,' maintains Mervat Hatem (2005:39). Such generalisation has treated these diverse Arab-American communities and 'their cultures, their political and social projects as homogeneously suspect' to justify racial profiling of these citizens (Ibid). As noted in the introduction, although in the post-September 11 period Arab-American communities have been subjected to civil rights violations at the hands of the FBI, such as intense investigations, surveillance, detention and deportations (Abdulhadi et al. 2005; Hatem 2005; Salaita 2005;), this group experienced systematic political racialisation in the decades before September 11. From such a context emerges Arab-American political activism in the last two decades of the twentieth century driven by the logic of assuming the Middle East as the authentic site of political resistance, i.e. 'over there'. Consequently, persisting intra-communal issues such as sexism, homophobia, civil rights and other issues, in which Arab-American women were involved, need also to be seen as legitimate politics.

It is very important to understand this logic within the context of belonging to a 'diaspora of empire'. As Naber explains, the empire 'inscribes itself on the diasporic subject within the domestic (national) borders of empire, producing a narrow nationalist movement logic that privileged the territorial homeland over the diaspora' (2012:198). Therefore, Arab-American politics develops dynamics that focuses on anti-imperialism/Orientalism whilst

averting the possibilities of addressing communal issues, and, hence, producing its own coercion. Drawing on Inderpal Grewal's concept of 'transnational connectivity' and Naber's framework of 'diasporic feminist anti-imperialist' critique, the chapter aims to demonstrate how poetry enables Arab-American women and opens up spaces for articulating feminist politics from the Arab diaspora in the United States that is beyond an essentialist and singular Arab/Muslim monolith.

As an imperial power, a multicultural nation and a site of hierarchal racial formation, the United States is believed to facilitate producing identities within what Grewal describes as the 'many connectivities in a transnational world' (Grewal 2005:196). In addition to state practices, Grewal acknowledges strategies of self-identification through belonging to ethnic communities as also responsible for producing such diasporic subjects (2005:200). She explains that concepts such as 'new mestiza' and hyphenated identities are 'based on gendered and ethnic identities', which have reinforced their connections to 'the American nation' whilst simultaneously challenging its white supremacy (Ibid). Therefore, she offers an understanding of the diasporic and hyphenated subject as resisting the nation-state whilst sometimes assimilating to it (2005:27). Grewal sees transnationalism as an empowering force that renders diverse nationalisms visible and 'provides a sense of place to those who see themselves displaced' (2005:33).

In *Transnational America,* Grewal introduces 'transnational connectivities' as a means through which diasporic and hyphenated subjects are created (2005:36). These 'transnational connectivities' are perceived as powerful in the way that they open up spaces for communication across borders and boundaries 'through articulation and translating discourses'. Encompassing diverse old and new forms of racialisation, colonialisation and globalisation, 'transnational connectivities' allow multiple identities 'to coexist as well as to shift from one to the other. They produced institutions and subjects, places and identities out of circulating discourses,' asserts Grewal (2005:36-7). Utilising such a diasporic transnational

approach enables us to explore the articulations of Arab-American women and their identity formations within national boundaries, and across international borders. Instead of being simply 'hybrid subjects' incorporating two races or nationalism, Grewal explains that these 'transnational connectivities' have made these subjects 'more flexible and dynamic in relation to multiple identities, nationalisms, [and] communities' (2005:200). They move 'from one subjectivity to another', and become 'able to coexist with contradictory and diverse subject formations' (Grewal 2005:200). In parallel with Hilton Obenzinger's and Steven Salaita's discussions of race in terms of securing governmentality, Grewal also sees race and gender operate, though in constant flux, as apparatuses for governance, which are connected to earlier forms of racialisation and colonialisation. Therefore, she urges the understanding of these 'racialised and gendered subjects not as autonomous projects of resistance but as subjects that develop in relation to modern regulative and disciplinary institutions' (2005:197).

To highlight the significance of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry as a diasporic feminist anti-imperialist articulation, this chapter probes the national and international challenges that have formed and impacted the experience of Arab-American women poets as subjects of 'diaspora of empire' before and after September 11, 2001.

The Political Climate Prior to September 11, 2001

Whilst the term American can be understood to include the citizens of the two continents of America, in the United States, this label denotes a strand of hegemonic definitions of Americanness, 'the context of which is inseparable from the destruction of [their] homelands and the [United States] violence against their people', as stated by Rabab Abdulhadi et al. (2005:14).

The Israeli occupation of Arab territories after the 1967 war, resulting in new political and national realities, had instigated a hostile climate that transformed the Arab-American experience. Adding to that is the demographic evolution of the Arab community in the United States with the arrival of more Muslim Arabs, who demonstrated more political awareness,

leaving their homelands after the 1967 war and other civil strife to join the Arab minority in American diaspora. These newcomers, igniting national pride and political awareness, along with the hostile climate, led many members of Arab-American communities to identify publicly as Arab-Americans in the late 1970s and 1980s, despite their ability to pass as White. They decided to utilise their ethnic identification as a viable strategy for the emerging political activism that aimed to resist official racism. They also took effective steps to organise politically to defend themselves against the official systematic political racism. Abdulhadi et al. describe this strategy of ethnic identification as an effective tool to undermine the hegemonic 'dominant definitions of hyphenated American identities' that denotes adherence to assimilation and the 'long-discredited melting pot theories' (2005:14).

We have seen in the introduction that Arab-American women writers formed RAWI in 1996, and that creative writers identified their group identity in the late 1980s, but there is an earlier tradition of affiliation to consider. Hatem pinpoints the civil rights struggles of the 1960s as the source that had inspired Arab-Americans to form their first important national organisation: the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG). The organisation aims to 'represent the pooling of the intellectual resources of the community for the purpose of warding off the intense criminal attacks against the [community] and against the old homeland' (Hatem 2005:42). The organisation won nationalist credentials through its commitment to produce first-rate critical literature on the Arab world in the United States to challenge the representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, Hatem maintains that the goals of the AAUG affected relationships between some rival Arab and Jewish communities to inform the mainstream public about the Arab-Israeli conflict (Ibid).

As the political racialisation heightened in the late decades of the twentieth century, the needs of Arab-American communities have expanded. In 1972, the National Association for Arab Americans (NAAA) emerged as a political lobbying group. It was followed by the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee in 1980, which aims to resist the prevalent

misrepresentation of Arab-Americans in popular culture. In 1985, the Arab-American Institute was established to increase and activate Arab-American participation in electoral politics (Suleiman 1999:6). Michael Suleiman points out that Arab-American interest in electoral politics grew faster throughout the 1980s, which resulted in establishing new alliances with African-Americans whilst intensifying political rivalries with Jewish-Americans (1999:8). It is important to mention that in the late 1980s and 1990s, the AAUG and ADC have marked a turn in defining the agendas of Arab-American politics, emphasising the national agenda of their communities, focusing on the needs of youth and women, civil rights reinforcement, in addition to denouncing their critique of how international issues are used to define their American citizenship (Ibid).

Political Provocations in the September 11 Aftermath

September 11 was a turning point in the history of Arabs in the United States. It marks the reversal of the political integration process that emphasises the national agenda of the community. The 'War on Terrorism' and international concerns resulted in defining the citizenship rights of Arab-Americans. Such a definition has produced a hostile political climate that has affected the political alliances between Arab-Americans and other racial groups, such as African-Americans, in addition to the gross and widespread violation of Arab-American civil rights. From this stance, Hatem argues that the 'global context of war on terrorism and transnational identities agendas' are deeply rooted in the United States' national agendas. She explains that the United States' reaction to the 'War on Terrorism', also known as 'a war without borders', mainly focuses on homeland security. Hence, the United States 'national interests have guided the war on terrorism and have superseded those of other partner nation-states in that military effort,' notes Hatem (2005:40). The United States' definition of its enemies has reinforced the national links between Arab-American communities in the United States and Arabs in the Middle East and, consequently, set them against the United

States and its national security (Hatem 2005:41). Therefore, criticising the 'War on Terrorism' and the violation of Arab-American rights as American citizens was immediately equated with the support of terrorism (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:15).

The collapse of the Oslo Accords in 2000 led to a deep polarisation between Arab and Jewish groups in America, and later September 11 in turn has fuelled the process as Israel succeeded in portraying the second Palestinian Intifada as a continuance of the terrorism that hit the United States on September 11, 2001. Inevitably, the result was the reinforcing of the connection between Arab-Americans and their interests and involvement in the issue of Palestine on the one hand, and terrorism on the other. Even amongst the most liberal circles, any critique of Israeli occupation and expansion was considered anti-Semitic. Also criticising the war on Iraq, the detention and deportation of Arab immigrants, the violation of Arab-American civil rights, exposing Zionism and the United States' support for the Israeli war in the Arab world were considered and marked as unpatriotic, and undemocratic acts that threaten national security (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:14-16).

As a minority group, Arab-Americans occupy an anomalous position in the United States ethnic grid; a position that is defined and affected by their country's foreign policies and imperial strategies in the Arab world, which has radically transformed the politics of the community and the way its members relate themselves to both their country, the United States, and the old homeland. Such realities and realisations have birthed Naber's 'diasporas of empire' (2012) that theorises the diasporic experiences and realities of Arab-Americans. Challenging the intrusive power relations governing the United States' neo-imperialism, this framework addresses 'a moment in which the empire and its subjects exist in a transnational frame', maintained Naber (2012:25).

Pivotal to 'diasporas of empire' theorisation is the United States' construction of Arab communities according to its changing imperial strategies and foreign policies in the region that continue defining and affecting the lives of the Arab communities in America. Naber

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further contends that the 'diasporas of empire' framework situates Arab-American experiences within the contexts of 'local and global realities of imperialism, displacement, …civil rights, and anticolonial/anti-imperial politics' (2012:60). Moreover, this proposed framework offers new perspectives to explore and analyse the experiences of Arab-American women as subjects of 'diaspora of empire'.

The Impact of Intra-Communal Politics on Arab-American Women

Arab-American women are positioned at the crossroads of racism in the United States' mainstream larger society and sexism within the bounds of their communities. Their actions, Abdulhadi et al. maintain, 'are "entangled" in the web of sexism, racism and exile, within and outside their communit[ies]' (2005:20). Alia Malek, a human rights attorney and writer, identifies two types of oppressive forces acting on Arab-American women: 'patriarchy in the private' realm, and 'racism in the public' one. In the Arab-American private spheres, women are struggling against assaulting their 'humanity as women', whereas in the larger mainstream public space, they are resisting assaults on their humanity as Arabs (2005:170).

Throughout the twentieth century, the articulation of Arabness, or Arab cultural identity, was governed by 'the triangle ideal of the good Arab family, good Arab girls, and compulsory heterosexuality', as set against licentious America, its bad women and broken homes (Naber 2012: 65). Identified as a 'politics of Arab cultural authenticity', such articulation provides Arab diasporic subjects with a framework to resist racist representations and Orientalist discourses of Arab/Islamic culture in the United States. Naber observes that her formulation of the 'politics of Arab cultural authenticity' relates to a diaspora studies theorisation that incorporates the concept of nationalism into a concept of belonging, community and affiliation within historical contexts of displacement (2012:65).

It should be noted, though, that this cultural authenticity has been reinforced and facilitated by the liberal discourse of the United States' multiculturalism that, according to

Elizabeth Povinelli, inspires 'subaltern and minority groups to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity—a domesticated nonconflictual traditional form of sociality and intersubjectivity' (2002:6). Multiculturalism drives indigenous people and immigrants to embrace concepts of culture that are depoliticised and static (Grewal 2005; Lowe 1996; Povinelli 2002; Prashad 2000). In the same breath, Vijay Prashad notes that 'whereas assimilation demands that each inhabitant of the United States be transformed into the norm, U.S. multiculturalism asks that each immigrant group preserve its own heritage. This heritage or "culture" is not treated as a living set of social relations but as a timeless trait' (2000:112). Grewal, correspondingly, identifies multiculturalism in the United States as 'a state project, produced through the census, laws, and provisions governing immigrants and "protecting" minorities to create racialized and gendered subjects who see themselves as "American" at some point and as different kinds Americans at other times and places' (2005:200). Consequently, such logic would promote the existence of an essential authentic and ahistorical Arab identity and culture in the United States.

In the Arab-American diaspora, family is the nucleus of Arabness, and the cornerstone of Arab cultural authenticity. Halim Barakat maintains that, for centuries, the concept of family has been at the heart of social organisation in Arab culture. He further argues that 'family is the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit religious, social class, and cultural identities' (1985:157). For Arabs in the United States, family becomes a distinctive marker of an authentic Arab culture, and a marker of a difference between Arab and American cultures. This distinction between good Arab culture and bad American culture is rooted in Arab nationalist dynamics deployed to challenge Orientalist and imperial discourses. Naber explains:

> Within the dominant middle-class articulation of Arabness, a patriarchal and heteronormative family is a key signifier of a pure and unchanging Arab self. Despite the distinctive shifts brought about by displacement, assimilation, and racialization, the politics of cultural authenticity arranges the domain of family as a space that this Arab diaspora can call its own. (2012:75)

As much as the structure of the Arab family is supportive, it is paradoxically oppressive. Whilst generating generosity, closeness and empathy, the Arab family is, nevertheless, controlling in ways that tend to engender schism in the lives of particularly young people who are entrapped between loyalty and resistance. Claims to 'cultural authenticity' have reinforced parental control on the lives of second- and third-generation Arab-Americans. Operating on different levels, the politics of 'cultural authenticity' has policed and regulated the lives of many Arab-Americans, mainly impacting on definitions of female identity and homosexuality.

In different Arab-American communities, conservative forces and institutions have used the issues of sexism and the control of female sexuality to preserve communal boundaries. A major preoccupation of Arab-American feminists is the way Arab families push their daughters to pursue 'higher education and career advancement while coveting their virginity'. In Arab-American communities, higher education becomes the 'modern day convent' that protects Arab-American daughters from sexual relationships (Malek 2005:172). In "Reflections On Sex, Silence, and Feminism", Nathalie Handal depicts her journey of 'sexual liberation': the shift from viewing sex as dirty, and her body as a property of a man, to allowing herself the right to pleasure and desire. Handal further states that access to education in exchange for virginity whilst expecting her to fulfil a marriage to a Palestinian or Palestinian-American man 'was the unspoken deal in her family' that the poet had realised after regaining sexual and feminist awareness (2005:98-9).

The concepts of sexuality and gender buttressing the dynamics of 'Arab cultural authenticity' originate from Arab nationalist discourses. Joseph Massad argues that for an anticolonial nationalist project, it is very crucial to define gender roles 'in relation to the nationalist project and to dissociate national identity from any colonial contamination' (1995:470). 'Arab cultural authenticity' therefore reinforces the creation of gender roles that correspond to the nationalist separation of social space into inner/outer, or in this case,

Arab/American. Naber maintains that 'Arab cultural authenticity' 'requires Arab women to uphold premarital chastity and expect them to be ideal wives, daughters, and mothers'. This articulation of Arab identity and culture foregrounds 'the symbolic presence of the idealised Arab woman to facilitate the belief that an essential, homogenous, true Arab culture can be protected, maintained and preserved in America' (2012:82).

By the mid-1980s, contemporary Arab-American women found themselves entrapped within a dilemma of nationalist and imperialist discourses. In *Impossible Desires* (2005), Gayatri Gopinath explores how conventional concepts of diaspora invest concepts of 'nation' into a notion of an absolute 'culture'. 'Fictions of purity', Gopinath argues, 'lies at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies', which explains the rigorous hetero-normative and patriarchal structures of community that govern conventional diasporic discourses (2005:4). In Arab-American communities, cultural ideals about sexuality have been intensely aggravated as they were struggling with racism and assimilation, which led their cultural leaders to promote the idea that feminism and sexual dissidence are forms of cultural erasure and even betrayal, signalling those who criticise sexism and homophobia as abettors of Orientalism. Homophobic discourses reveal such a stance that constructs the category (queer Arab) as oxymoronic. Accordingly, queer Arabs are marked as Americanised and traitors to their people, which has led Arab-American feminists to call for combining the categories 'Arab' and 'queer', instead of being obliged to choose between parts of their identities (Attiah 2005; Hyder 2005;Kadi 1994).

As mentioned earlier, the politics of cultural authenticity demands compulsory heterosexuality as the main constituent of pure Arab culture and identity that are embedded in the family institution and the idealisation of Arab women. Accordingly, and through this articulation, Arab 'homosexuality is rendered distinctly American, distinguishing good Arabs from bad Americans' (Naber 2012:84). Arab engagement with European colonialism and the counter-Arab nationalist discourses have all contributed to the conflation between

'homosexuality' and 'the West', which served the purpose of establishing a nationalist unified identity that is meant to challenge the European/American threat. This contested identity is important for the literary history of Arab-American women's poetry, because although Etel Adnan has been publishing her poetry since 1966, she did not identify as lesbian and appear in queer publications until the late 1990s.

In her article "Sexualities and the Social Order in Arab and Muslim Communities", Rabab Abdulhadi illustrates that throughout Islamic history from Caliphates (623-656) to the Ottomans (1281-1922), there has been an ambiguity in sexual attitudes. Those attitudes varied from periods in which homosexuals were burned to periods of highly liberal sexual attitudes when homosexual literary figures thrived (2009:468)[18]. Abdulhadi argues that Arab engagement with European colonialism had led them to develop rigid sexual attitudes, internalising Orientalist representations of sexuality. Hence, Arab nationalist regimes have stressed their ability for self-reign by developing a conservative heterosexual order that ensured hyper-masculinity and rendered queers as subjects of deviance and shame (Abdulhadi 2009:475).

In the diaspora, the conflation between homosexuality and the West, however, is invested as a strategy for controlling sexuality (Abdulhadi 2009; Naber 2012). Naber also maintains that the Arabs' preoccupation with hetero-normativity, family and patriarchy is part of a 'selective assimilation strategy' adopted by Arab-American immigrants. By promoting white middle-class norms and avoiding a critique of the United States' racism, imperialism and sexism, the politics of cultural authenticity facilitates access to economic, social and political privileges (2012:93). For Arab-Americans, the 'politics of cultural authenticity' effectively reinforces cultural forms that render them similar to the stereotypical middle-class Americans.

Throughout the twentieth century, Arab-American political activism was permeated by a common culture that assumes discussing matters of sexism, patriarchy and homophobia in

public would sabotage the movement's targets and goals. Arab-American feminist scholars and critics explain that these Orientalist representations were reinforced by mainstream public support of the United States military's intervention in the Arab world. From the other side of the aisle, liberals have also expressed profound empathy for Arab/Muslim women, who are perceived to be victims of their religion and culture, but very little concern over the impact of the United States' policies on Arab communities either at home or overseas (Abu-Lughod 2002; Jarmakani 2008; Naber 2012). Hence, male and female Arab-American activists worked according to an implicit agreement to mute intra-communal issues such as sexism and compulsory virginity, for instance. This unspoken agreement to mute feminism was consolidated by the fear of betraying one's own community (Naber 2012:195). As an Arab-American woman activist from the Bay Area, San Francisco, explains, 'It was so hard to talk about our gender issues. It felt like we were betraying our own kind. It was never the right time' (quoted in Naber 2012:195). Therefore, critiques of the dominant discourses in the United States, such as Orientalism, imperial racism and Zionism, have imposed pressures on the group members and kept them united.

Reflecting on the Iranian diaspora in the United States and the stifling roles of Iranian women, Haideh Moghissi argues that 'any community whose sense of identity is collectively denigrated by the structural racism of the larger society feels the need to mute dissenting voices which challenge its sense of homogeneity, common fate and common cause' (1999:216). She further notes that 'living in the territory of not-belonging can shift social and political priorities and individual aspirations in favour of maintaining communal dignity and cultural identity at the expense of gender equality', and that 'the pain and anger that racism causes encourage members of diaspora…to stick together and to suppress disharmony…no matter what form it takes' (Moghissi 1999:207-9). Inevitably, Naber observes that the experience of contemporary Arab-American women writers corresponds to what feminists of colour and third-world feminists described as the difficulties of 'airing our dirty laundry in

public' (2012:195). In addition, Naber argues that such perspectives explain the logic behind regulating feminist critiques within Arab-American political movements throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and privileging anti-imperialist feminism as the only acceptable form (2012:195-6).

Arab and Arab-American women's experience with sexism has always been 'exaggerated, sensationalized, and used against us,' asserts Abdulhadi et al. (2005:21). Cultural nationalist institutions, hence, have often considered criticising 'familial and communal oppressive practices as feeding into the reproduction of racist stereotypes of Arab men, and as an act of betrayal to community under siege' (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:15). After September 11, nevertheless, critiques of Arab-American homophobia within larger mainstream public spaces have become more difficult, and tended to evoke severe anti-Arab racism, contends Joanna Kadi (2005:34).

However, whilst addressing and challenging patriarchal practices and structures within Arab-American communities, it has become very difficult for Arab-American activists and feminists to avoid the 'Eurocentric racialization' of their mother culture that is integrated in the larger hegemonic United States discourses (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:15). Such discourses interpret all things Arab as oppressive or 'backwards'. Comparing her experience with that of her counterparts in Latin America and France, Handal argues that sexism is not exclusive to Arab culture, and patriarchy rather exists everywhere, though taking different forms in different contexts. It is a result of various socio-political and economic factors (2005:105). Handal insists that when analysing gender roles, it important 'to place issues in their political, social, and cultural contexts as well as in local, national and international contexts' (2005:103). Therefore, exploring the political context of Arab-American women's experiences in the United States becomes pertinent to understanding and assessing their literary production.

The Impact of Racial Politics on Arab-American Women

In the public sphere and larger mainstream context, Arab-American women had to face and resist the stereotypical image of 'the nameless faceless veiled woman', as Hatem summarises it (2005:44). She further asserts that in the wake of September 11, Arab/Muslim women became the first targets of anti-Arab/Muslim violence. In the same breath, Amira Jarmakani maintains that 'the mythology of the hijab is so powerful and so prolific' that it has effectively displaced and clouded the possibilities for considering or acknowledging the complex web of entangled patriarchal and imperial relations that had impacted these women's lives. In addition, September 11 has become 'the defining event for perceptions and representations of Arab women' in the United States, asserts Jarmakani (2005:130).

Therefore, for some of these women, wearing hijab became a political declaration to assert their identities in such a hostile environment. Hatem, nevertheless, states that the binaries (secular = modern, religious = backward) also exist within Arab-American communities. Adhering to earlier Orientalist conceptions of Islamic attire as symbolic of oppression, secular Arab-American feminists reject hijab as an unacceptable symbol of political solidarity, denying these women active participation in society (Hatem 2005:44-6). In "Arab Americans and Arab American Feminisms After September 11,2001", Hatem poses the question: 'when did Arab and/or Muslim women start to think that their observant counterparts were less critical or liberated? Should not Arab women…whether they are secular or religiously observant, have the right to choose their politics?' (2005:45). She further argues that the assumptions that secular women are progressive and religious women are essentialist work to reinforce the schisms between 'Western versus Oriental', and Muslims versus Christians. Hence, she regards this issue not as 'a religious division but rather a political one that should be addressed' (2005:46).

Arab-American women face the violence of silencing in official circles but also within different feminist circles. For example, mainstream United States feminist discourses have

always conceived Islam as the antithesis of feminism, developing a critique that assumes a Muslim woman cannot be a feminist. Abdulhadi et al. point out that these discourses acknowledge hijab, female circumcision and the harem as the main constituents of 'acceptable Arab feminist speech', whilst excluding other issues 'outside of this domain—such as the impact of the Israeli occupation on women, or the links between the U.S.—led economic liberalism on women's labour' (2005:21). They expound:

> The "veil", "female circumcision", and "honor" crimes are but three examples that have become the standard litmus test by which our feminism is measured and evaluated, and the basis for which we get hired and fired, granted monetary rewards for our projects, or granted native informant passes to national feminist gatherings. (2005:21)

From the same stance, Susan Muaddi Darraj, an Arab-American feminist and critic, points out that the ability of an Arab-American woman to define her subjectivity is obscured by 'The Faceless Veiled Woman'. This Orientalist representation of Arab/Muslim women has become a means of substantiating the ostensible barbarity of Arab culture and Islam rooted in the earlier colonialist discourse: 'the backward nature of the "other" becomes a confirmation of the dominance and superiority of the self' (2005:164).

In "The Dynamics of Arab American Feminism", Darraj narrates her experience with publishing her book *Scheherazade's Legacy* (2004) that included a number of Arab-American women writers. The collection addresses these women's experiences with writing and the role of writing in addressing some major preoccupations, such as the struggle over belonging and dual identities, nation-based racialisation, general misunderstanding of Islam, in addition to the essential stereotyping of women in the Arab world and in the Arab- American community. 'Although the publisher was very supportive of the project and enthusiastic about the potential contribution the book could make to the field of ethnic American literary studies', maintains Darraj, the publisher insisted on the design of the cover page, in which 'a woman's eyes gaze out at the viewer from between the narrow slits of her black face veil. Behind and above her, minarets loom in the dusky blue background'. As an Arab-American feminist, Darraj was

disturbed and disappointed by this stereotypical image. 'It was an exotic and Orientalist design, something completely anathema to the book's message,' she asserts (2005:164).

Unfortunately, more than a decade after September 11, Arab-American women are still struggling with the image of 'The Faceless Veiled Woman' on different fronts. In addition to indicating a lack of interest in understanding the Middle East and its culture, this image has a devastating impact on Arab-American feminism. One of the shining examples of how the mainstream feminism and media insist on formulating and promoting the image of the silenced veiled Arab victimised woman is Geraldine Brooks' *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*. First published in 1996, the book generated 'a substantial amount of media hype', Darraj affirms (2005:165). It was an international bestseller, translated into seventeen languages. In the book, Brooks records her experience—as a long-time journalist for *The Wall Street Journal*—with Arab men and women, describing twentieth-century Muslims as retreating rather than moving forward and thus becoming worse fundamentalists. The book was reprinted in 2007, 2008 and 2010 with the same accounts and stories, without addressing the major developments that took place in some societies, such as Saudi Arabia, for instance[19]. Although objectivity is a significant principle of journalist professionalism, it appears to be lacking in Brooks' account of Arab women and Middle Eastern culture, which justifies Darraj's exclamation: 'Why did Brooks, as a skilled journalist, not seek interviews with the activists as well as the victims?' (2005:165)

Insisting on this portrayal of Arab women confirms the persistent Orientalist logic through which the West understands Arab women. Therefore, several Arab-American feminists argue that despite the significant interest in the Middle East, following September 11, 2001, the United States did not attempt any serious progress in understanding Arab culture, not to mention women's roles in Arab communities in America (Abdulhadi et al. 2005; Hatem 2005). Instead, the image of the victimised, oppressed Arab woman has been continually employed to justify the United States' foreign policy in the Middle East (Darraj

2005:159). Within liberal multicultural discourses, on the other hand, it became acceptable to denounce single personal acts of discrimination against Arabs, but it was inadmissible to criticise the United States' 'War on Terrorism', or its support of Israeli war on the Palestinians. United States' liberal and progressive feminist circles define any critique of Israeli expansion as anti-Semitic. '[L]iberal feminist crusaders refuse to acknowledge our right to define our agendas or to name our concerns on our own terms,' Abdulhadi et al. proclaim (2005:21). Moreover, some anti-war organisations have refused to extend their opposition to the war on Iraq and to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, despite the fact that serious attempts that aimed at revealing the United States policies' in Iraq were part of its imperial project in the area, carried out with the help of Israel (Abdulhadi 2005:16).

In "The Burden of Representation", and "Gender, Nation, and Belonging: Arab and Arab- American Feminist Perspectives" respectively, the Palestinian-American feminist Nada Elia and Rabab Abdulhadi, Nadine Naber and Evelyn Alsultany narrate their experience with silencing the pro-Palestinian activism that occurs in the most progressive spaces in the United States, where they are supposedly given chances to speak for themselves, rather than be misrepresented. They share with readers their experience as some of the Arab-American women contributors to the anthology: *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating in 2002. The editors intended to mark the twentieth anniversary and honour the legacy of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1981), which challenged dominant feminist frameworks in the 1970s through the intervention of feminist and queer activists of colour (Anzaldua and Keating 2002:1). Despite the fact that the project of 2002 was no longer about, on, or by women of colour as it included men, white as well as women of colour, liberals as well as radicals, Arab-American writers were specifically thrilled to be part of this project as the earlier one did not include a single Arab-American voice (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:8; Elia 2005:46; Handal 2005:101).

According to Abdulhadi et al., Elia and Handal, the editors created a listserv to communicate with the contributors about formatting, deadlines and other technicalities, and also to get input about the title of the collection. The listserv then developed into a political forum as some contributors forwarded messages from progressive activist organisations they were affiliated with calling for action about specific causes. Elia describes the tone of the listserv as 'extremely jovial' until one of the contributors posted a message enquiring as to whether the contributors to the project wanted to issue a collective statement condemning the latest Israeli violence against the Palestinians during the Second Intifada after the Israeli massacre of Palestinian civilians. The listserv tone changed immediately, and that contributor was accused of being a hatemonger, racist and anti-Semitic 'who should not even be included in the anthology '(Elia 2005:65). Hostility escalated, and despite their articulate arguments to explain that denouncing Zionism is but a political critique that should not be conflated with anti-Semitism, Arab-American women contributors were incapable of bringing their Jewish counterparts and their allies to understand that the political denunciation of the Zionist occupation of Palestine and the racial discrimination in the United States emerges from their desire, as women of colour, to be free from all sites of oppression and not from anti-Semitism. According to Elia (2005:65), 'They refused to acknowledge that Palestinian women are more oppressed by Israel and Zionism than they are by their fellow Palestinian men.' Palestinian women's rights to an education, their freedom of movement, their rights to work, their rights to live where they choose, their rights to sufficient food, clean water and proper medical care in their homeland are but denied to them by the occupying state of Israel and not Palestinian men, Elia argues (2005:65).

Elia maintains, 'Every pro-Palestinian email on that listserv was met with a barrage of accusations from Jewish contributors.' The anti-Arab rhetoric continued 'unprovoked', accusing Arab contributors who had criticised Israel of being so racist and in parallel with Ku Klux Klan (2005:65-6). Although Arab-American writers urged the editors to intervene to end

this situation, they did not respond until some contributors indicated their wish of withdrawing their pieces. Keating shut down the listserv and suggested the creation of another one to continue political discussions without hindering the book project. Elia argues that this listserv incident has partially silenced Arab-American voices, whilst Keating's suggestion of creating another listserv has pushed to the margin the Palestinian issue, although it denotes a struggle for women of colour as 'colonised people seeking to break through hegemonic narrative that completely erases them or at best misrepresents them' (2005:66).

In the preface to *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, Anzaldua states the aim of this new volume to be a shift from 'what has been done to us (victimhood) to a more extensive level of agency, one that questions what we're doing to each other, to those in distant countries, and to the earth's environment' (2002:2). However, the listserv incident suggests a deep chasm between the projects intentions and reality. As Arab-American contributors, Abdulhadi et al. view the listserv episode as threatening to the integrity of the book 'when struggles for equality of all peoples excluded the Palestinians, (2005:9). In the same vein, Handal expresses her disappointment and dismay, noting that the participation of other women of colour in this act of silencing pushes their exclusion as Arab/Palestinian-Americans to the apex (2005:101). It is worth mentioning that no response has been recorded to counter this version.

Some communities and organisations of women of colour, such as Women of Color Resource Center, INCITE: Women of Color against Violence, activists and scholars at the Women's Studies programmes at Medgar Evers, Hunter and City Colleges, have shown solidarity with the struggles of Arab-American women by organising political education projects to the persistent stereotyping of Arab and Arab-American women, and offering them 'platforms from which to speak' for themselves (Abdulhadi et al. 2005:16). Nevertheless, racism in the United States has also seeped through to circles of feminists of colour, who failed to link the struggles Arab/Muslim-American women face to their racial struggles.

Although they identified race and sometimes class as the main elements of oppression, nevertheless, they could not accept or even take notice of other ideologies as maintaining oppression on their Arab-American sisters. Arab-American feminists identify Zionism as a very 'significant determinant' of different forms of oppression they are struggling against in the United States. In "The Forgotten-ism", Naber et al. explores the different ways in which Zionism has negatively impacted their lives as women of Arab descent in the United States, including the isolation and the silencing, in addition to the charges of anti-Semitism. Zeina Zaatari explains that statements articulated by feminists of colour about the inextricability of race and gender, and the centrality of their dual and multiple identities, is comparable with the demands of Arab-American women (2005:84). Arab-American women's awareness of the plurality of their position has made it difficult for them to take a single stance. 'As an Arab feminist,' Zaatari asserts, 'I carry all of my history in my pocket at all times' (Ibid). Therefore, there is a necessity to construct spaces from which Arab-American women can claim agency, announce plural subjectivities, highlight the heterogeneity of feminist perspectives, and assert the particularities of Arab-American feminisms.

Arab-American women have always sought to include their battles with all other feminists in the United States to create alliances and dialogues as equals, not victims who need to be liberated. Nevertheless, it has become obvious that after a whole century, these women are still struggling with and resisting the same oppressive forces. Such struggles have merely pushed these feminists and activists to take what Malek describes as 'defensive postures', which were made even more defensive, as Malek puts it, because the support from potential sources of solidarity, such as mainstream women's movements or those of women of colour, was not available to Arab-American women. Malek identifies two main reasons for this lack of support: the first is that the Arab and Muslim culture had been constructed as the ideological antithesis of America and racialised as 'foreign', leaving Arab-Americans 'either invisible or untouchable'. Secondly, the Jewish-American minority, often perceived as a rival

of the Arab-American group, had already been integrated into the larger racial-minority community, 'a community that initially seemed unable to accommodate both groups,' observes Malek (2005:170).

When effective political engagement and participation is denied to Arab-American feminists and activists, and when their humanity and autonomy are undermined by the frozen images of either 'The Faceless Veiled Woman', or the exotic sex object, words become an effective way to expose and deconstruct such misconceptions about Arab women and their culture, in addition to building bridges that reach out to all those who are barred from knowing the other by their prejudices.

Writing as a Resisting and Connecting Tool

In the dynamics of Arab-American community development, we can identify its departure from the position of an invisible minority to a 'problem minority' (Naber 2012:25) in the last decades of the twentieth century. Barbra Nimri Aziz explains that contemporary Arab-American women's obligation to the task of writing as being 'driven by the same spirit that led so many black women and Asian women and Italian women to search their lives, to dig through the hoary gravities, to imbue things with real importance' (2004:xiv).

Arab-American women writers set out to inscribe themselves and their untold stories to achieve visibility and claim agency since the literature as mentioned earlier was 'the last haven of articulation that still belongs to them' (Salaita 2005:153). For women of colour, the project of writing aims to 'retrieve in places other than official history a repertoire of forms of memory, time, or counterhistory…and to rearticulate them in culture in ways that permit the practices of subject and community that not strictly governed by official modes,' as noted by the Asian-American critic Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts* (1996:127). Although this statement has emerged from Asian-American experience of racial discrimination in the United States, it can be useful in understanding the Arab-American case in the same environment due to the

hegemonic narrative that has rendered Arabs as 'the enemy within', or at best, 'the ultimate other' (Fedda-Conery 2006:137).

Arab-Americans lack the venues that allow them to denounce official policies governing their communities in the United States. In the documentary *Selves and Others* (2004), Edward Said calls for the need of 'an empowering space of articulation distinct from token inclusions'. 'There is a battle for space,' asserts Said. After being repeatedly invited by the media to represent Palestinians, he describes his aggravation at this kind of inclusion that caused him 'to be treated as guilty until proven innocent'. Correspondingly, Mohja Kahf voices her discontent with being invited to literary panels throughout the country, an act she believes to be resulting from the state's wish to conciliate its announced interest in Arabs and Muslims (quoted in Fadda-Conrey 2006:140). This position of Arab-American women seems to follow the trajectory of other ethnic women writers, such as Asian-Americans, for instance. Describing Asian-Americans' 'battle for space', Patricia Chu identifies it as 'a struggle in which speech and authorship are symbolic of and instrumental to survival and the search of fullness of being' (2000:2). Carol Fadda-Conrey argues that the availability of more inclusive cultural and literary spaces, in which visibility or 'fullness of being' could be achieved, depends on articulation and criticism of marginalisation, with the aesthetic expression involved in literature being a necessary vehicle for such purposes (Fadda-Conrey 2006:140). However, some Arab-American women writers such as Naomi Shihab Nye were keen to embrace the privileges of such tokenism, as discussed in chapter three.

Using literature as a tool to resist ethnic oppression in the United States is viewed as an effective strategy to claim autonomy. 'It signifies not only the capacity to speak but the belief that…literary representation—is also a claiming of political and social agency,' argues Chu (2000:3). Analysing Maxine Hong Kingston's works, Chu maintains that by breaking the silence enshrouding her personal and communal histories, Kingston challenges the 'official modes' of Asian-American history in the United States. Chu further indicates that Kingston

has 'shock[ed] American readers into recognizing the Chinese Americans as complex subjects, [and] subtly chang[ed] the cultural landscape for those to follow' (2000:2). In the same vein, the poetry of Arab-American women discussed in this study reveals the complexity of Arab-American identities and the diversity of their experiences, negating the existence of a monolithic Arab-American narrative or experience that aims to shock their mainstream readers. They so do by highlighting the links of history and politics, which have been significant to the Arab-American community, and have been more often absent from the official version of the United States' history.

Arab-American poet and critic Lisa Suheir Majaj believes that employing literature as a means of resistance would effectively lead this minority into 'new directions' (1999:67). Inevitably, such a perspective can be traced as originating from an understanding of the significance of art and culture in the United States' leftist politics. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd theorise about the mobilisation of art forms for challenging 'the incessant violence of the new transnational order with its reconstituted patriarchies and racism' (1997:26). They also argue that the concept of cultural work calls for 'redefining the political', as politics is 'always braided with culture' (Ibid). As a cultural production, contemporary Arab-American women's poetry reveals an Arab-American perspective that has been eliminated from mainstream literary and political registers. It presents its readers with a more personalised and intricate history of Arab-American communities, whilst at the same time featuring and focusing on the complexity of their experiences in the United States.

As members of a beleaguered minority group, Arab- American women poets can be conceived to be in 'double jeopardy'; a term coined by Frances Beal to explain the position of the black female and to propound a theory of 'multiple and simultaneous oppressions', where racism and sexism overlap in the lives of black women (2008). This theory of multiple oppressions was facilitated by the Third World Women Alliance in the late 1960s to make sense of the nation-based racism and oppression that impacted the lives of its members.

Handal believes that feminism exists to help society evolve, and 'to build new and fairer social politics for both genders' (2005:104). Nonetheless, all Arab-American women writers, and feminists in particular, constantly face the dilemma of how to tell Arab-American stories without sustaining the degrading stereotypes of Arabs that are rooted in mainstream consciousness and culture. The persistent political oppression and abject racial stereotyping have overwhelmed Arab-American women and trapped them in 'defensive postures'. Such pressures have left them incapable of addressing their personal issues and critiquing a community that have been under siege for a century.

In this context, R. Radhakrishnan's argument on the necessity of finding alternative visions for articulating diasporic experiences seems very useful and illuminating for exploring Arab-American women's writing and poetry as a diasporic production. Radhakrishnan argues that '[o]bsessively concerned with the West…nationalism fails to speak for its people…suppresses the politics of subalternity…and it fails to historicize this inner reality in its own multifarious forms'. Alternative visions are, thus, required to allow the inner self to become an agent of its own history (1992:89-90). Accordingly, and drawing on Radhakrishnan's theorisation, I would argue that contemporary Arab-American women's poetry seeks to liberate 'those spaces foreclosed within nationalism', whilst enabling 'a non-reactive, non-paranoid mode of subjectivity and agency in touch with its own historically constituted interiority…a prey neither to the difference of the western subject nor to the mystique of its own indigenous identity' (Radhakrishnan 1992:91-2). Contemporary Arab-American women poets seek to challenge the singular unified concepts of Arabness and imperialism, whilst undermining the representation of the Arab/Muslim woman as a monolith. Highlighting the untold stories of loss and pain from different Arab positions and perspectives attests to the fluidity and plurality inherent in Arab and Islamic cultures, thus opening up new possibilities for recognition and inclusion.

The specificity of the experiences of Arab-American women as subjects of 'diasporas of

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empire' requires an adequate critical framework to examine and analyse the overlapping and intersecting power structures and relations that shape these experiences, such as the 'diasporic Arab feminist critique' proposed by Nadine Naber in her thorough ethnographic study of the Arab-American community in the Bay Area, San Francisco (2012). Drawing on the work of feminists of colour, queer of colour theorisation and the methodology of transnational feminism, Naber's approach suggests new perspectives for analysing Arab-American women's writing (2012:250). The model seeks to account for the complexities of the Arab-American communal experiences in parallel with the larger context of the empire. It proposes a political vision that moves beyond the essential anti-Orientalist externally focused feminist critique that overlooks the community's internal issues.

Naber's 'diasporic Arab feminist critique' centres on undermining the power structures of patriarchy and homophobia that are internal to Arab communities, whilst illustrating how these structures are shaped by a range of intersecting histories of power relations (Naber 2012:202). This model seriously considers the varying historical circumstances that are interwoven within Arab-American communal issues of gender and sexuality, such as reactions to the United States' Orientalism and imperialism in the Arab region, and the individuals' desires for social and political privileges and inclusion. Naber believes that combining the externally focused critique with that of the internal power relations that constrain the fluidity of the community would result in creating a 'multisided feminist' vision through which diasporic Arab-American experience can be assessed and examined.

Central to 'diasporic Arab feminism' are writing, artwork and other forms of expressions that are perceived to be spaces for resistance and transformation, through which these women articulate their identities in terms of multiple histories and internal communal challenges. 'Poetry is the language people understand. It is a mechanism…that resonates with folks here…the public can't negate cultural expression in the same way they negate interviews and lectures,' asserts a young Arab-American poet (quoted in Naber 2012: 231). Naber observes

that for women of colour, poetry and performance art have always been considered as popular strategies of political discourse and viable media for expressing overlapping forms of oppressions in the United States (2012:241). Through their poetry, Arab-American women strive to open new channels for communication with the mainstream public and other minority groups by transforming the concept of an absolutist Arab culture into a live, fluid entity travelling in a 'new direction' that is transnational, coalitional and intersectional. This approach allows Arab-American women poets to highlight an array of experiences in order to impact their readers from mainstream and other minorities as well, and moreover, it enables them to foreground the multiplicity of experiences with nation-based racism and imperialism which Arab-American political activism has failed to acknowledge.

Produced by subjects of 'diasporas of empire', the poetics of Arab-American women combines struggles for decolonisation and self-determination taking place overseas with those struggles shaping their lives inside the United States. In this sense, their poetry departs from nationalist stances of diasporic communities, and moves towards a diasporic and transnational anti-imperialistic feminist framework that transcends the rigorous nationalist boundaries, giving more room to coalition-building with other minorities. This vision emerges out of a sense of belonging to a 'diaspora of empire', and residing in the United States as a population, which is connected to a region with which the United States has a long history of intervention. Their poetry becomes a strategy for transformation by forging alliances and coalitions that disrupt the dominant logic that had fuelled Arab-American political discourse. Their vision rises above the conventional articulations of identity in terms of community boundaries as sealed-off rigid entities. Their identity articulation transcends the 'traditionally hierarchal relations between nation and diaspora, where the former is seen as merely an impoverished imitation of an originary national culture' (Gopinath 2005:7).

Strategies of Arab-American Women's Writing: Upholding Difference

Trinh T. Minh-ha argues that the Western concept of identity revolves on the perception of an authentic subliminal essence that eliminates all that is considered different (foreign). Therefore, Minh-ha suggests 'a model of identity' that enables the recognition of differences and similarities (1997:415), asserting that 'Difference should be defined neither by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture'. Analysing the hijab within this framework, Minh-ha argues that women's decision to lift the veil can be seen as resisting men's oppressive rights to their bodies. On the other hand, the decision to wear the hijab they took off once can be seen as emerging from a desire 'to "reappropriate" their space, or to claim a new difference in defiance of genderless, hegemonic standardisation' (1997:416-7).

Within this context, Amal Abdelrazek describes Arab-American women as moving at least between two positions: 'that of affirming "I am like you" while persisting in her difference, and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at' (2005:142). Neither are Arab-American women the same as Arab or American women, 'nor are they quite the other'. Difference can also exist within the single Arab-American identity, as Abdelrazek puts it '[w]ithin every "I" there is an "other" and within every "other" there is an "I"' (2005:124).

Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad strive to demonstrate through their works the '…difference between difference and dichotomy' (Geertz 1995:28). Clifford Geertz explains that the 'first is a comparison and it relates; the second is a severance and it isolates' (Ibid). For example, in their poetry, Naomi Shihab Nye and Suheir Hammad seek to endorse poetics of identity and resistance. Although adopting different strategies; that is, of storytelling in the case of Nye, and the harsh hip-hop rap poetry in Hammad's, they both aim to break down the dichotomy between the self and the static essential and monolithic representation of Arab culture and its men and women. Like the different speakers in Kahf's poems, Arab-American women strive to resist the schism between the self and the other by disputing and undermining

the representations that mark them as different from Americans or set them apart from other women of colour in the United States.They reject the static notion of identity as an essential core, refusing to be assigned to neat positions.

In "The Image of Arabs in the Sources of American Culture", Marsha Hamilton notes that:

> Many American images of other peoples have their sources in European, especially British, culture. For hundreds of years, Europeans and Americans have viewed the Arab Middle East in terms of a few unchanging stereotypical images: the wealthy sheikh, the harem beauty, the religious fanatic, or the downtrodden peasant. These images were common in Colonial America; yet despite massive social change in the Arab world, they remain virtually unchanged in American popular culture today. (1991:1271)

Hamilton further indicates that a major concern of the Arab-American community has been the negative stereotypes of Arabs that have affected not only the United States' political policy but also their lives on a daily basis. Arab women in particular have rarely been portrayed in mainstream art, literature, songs or films as humans capable of love 'or as involved in professions, public life, and politics in the Middle East' (Ibid).

The contemporary Arab-American poets discussed in this study have defied the Orientalist image of the Arab Muslim woman as a domesticated, unenlightened and subjugated other. Kahf expresses it in her poem "Descent into JFK", how these prevailing images of Arab women prevent Americans from seeing the truth:

> They'd never know Khaleda
> Has a Ph.D.
> Because she wears a veil they'll
> Never see beyond

In the same vein, and revolting against being framed within the 'gaze of the Western male', Suheir Hammad announces:

> don't wanna be your exotic
> some delicate   fragile   colorful bird
> Imprisoned   caged
> in a land foreign to the stretch of her wings
> […]
> not your

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harem girl   geisha doll   banana picker
        […]
        town whore   belly dancer   private dancer

<div align="center">(1996: 64)</div>

In the lines above, Hammad seeks to break the shell of the Oriental exotic that has marred representations and images of all Arab/Muslim women. In these lines, the poet puts her will to work against the stereotype, emphasising that she will not allow anyone to frame her within such a limited set of identities.

Through reviving the mythic literary figure Shahrazad in the twenty-first century in the poetry collection *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2003), Kahf aims to undermine the frozen image of the Arab/Muslim woman in mainstream media and public culture, and instead instil one that is of writers, poets, mothers and lovers. In Kahf's version, Shahrazad's stories are not 'bedtime stories/ that will please and soothe' (2003:44). On the contrary, they aim to challenge the role of the Arab-American woman as an exotic object and a meek storyteller, but one who entangles the king's/male's ego within the web of her creativity.

Strategies of Arab-American Women's Writing: Building Bridges and Connecting

In "Bridges to Cultural Understanding", Paula Sunanon Webster and Toni S. Walters emphasise the importance of using poetry to promote multi-ethnic awareness in classrooms in the United States. They point out that poetry provides students with opportunities to view and engage with global diversity as a reality. Poetry also enables its readers to connect with others and to their inner selves as well (2008:44). Correspondingly, in "The Therapeutic Value of Poetry for Students and Readers" (2010), Todd O. Williams explores the interface between poetry therapy and pedagogy for the purpose of aiding in positive social transformation. He argues that the therapeutic value of poetry can be useful for literary studies, both in the classroom and for scholarship (2010:78). He maintains that:

> Poetry can help us to repair our view of the social world by offering the kind of hope that can lead us to prosocial actions and attitudes… We repair [the] negative view of the world when we have positive experiences and witness positive aspects of

humanity, especially love and compassion… poetry that offers a realistic view of pain and suffering proves even more beneficial because it offers recognition of our negative experiences and emotions and links us to a common humanity. (2010:82)

Revealing the untold stories, ignored histories, pain and agonies in their writings, Arab-American writers firstly aim to strengthen reconciliation and peace relationships between their community and the larger mainstream society, in addition to other minorities whose racial prejudices have hindered them from reaching out to others, and secondly, reduce the internal conflicts within their community as well. Hence, Arab-American feminists took upon themselves the task of correcting mainstream views by producing more effective literary works that may succeed where politics have failed. It is useful here to recall Miriam Cook's account of her writing:

> You set out to express yourself, to transform your own self, your vision of your own presence in the world through your writing. And if one person reads your poem and says: "Yeah, I felt this but didn't express it this way, or I never saw it this way" - that's good enough. So, I believe that my writing has the potential that it will change one person. I don't aspire to more or less than that. (Cooke 1986:43)
> .

Teaching poetry in schools for over two decades, Shihab Nye embraces poetry as an important instrument for the healing process required to connect different races and nations. She acknowledges her poetry as the bridge that links her students and readers to her ancestry homeland, Palestine. Throughout her poetry and storytelling, Shihab Nye strives to portray the humanity of her misrepresented Palestinian fellows, whilst simultaneously celebrating the diversity of her neighbourhood in Saint Antonio, Texas. Though challenging the rigid identity boundaries, her poetry mainly aims to highlight the connections amongst people around the world by focusing on the minute details of everyday life as a means of promoting understanding and compassion for the different other.

Perceived as aliens and non-white others, Arab-Americans have been very keen to forge alliances with other minority groups to gain visibility and solidarity.

For instance, Anan Ameri, a Palestinian-American activist, calls for a perspective that emphasises 'coalition building among Arab-Americans and communities of color' to achieve social transformation (2005:73). Therese Saliba has called for coalition-building through shared histories of oppression even before September 11, arguing that 'we need to continue to make the necessary links with other folks that will pull us out of our isolation' (1999:318). Although political organising emerges as an important site for such solidarities amongst different ethnic groups (Samhan 1987; Saliba 1999), Majaj (1999), however, was unequivocal in demanding expansive exploration of possibilities for building bridges with other minority groups in literary criticism.

Informed by postcolonial discourses, different modes of feminism and black theory, Arab-American women writers and poets have consciously sought to connect. Within this context, Michelle Hartman argues that:

> black music offers a powerful and positive symbolic site for Arab Americans to invoke connections between these two groups. Often, invocations of African American music by Arab American writers are positive and celebratory, underlining a shared understanding through culture rather than establishing a bond between the two groups which is only based on shared oppression. (2006:146)

However, the early generation of Arab-American writers has shown this celebratory attitude, such as Etel Adnan in "The Beirut Hell-Express", appeared in 1973. In this politically charged twelve-page poem, Adnan expresses her disgust with corruption and hypocrisy in Lebanon and the Middle East. Born and raised in Beirut, her attitude expresses third-world solidarity with the African-American cause. This affiliation has been continued by younger generations of Arab-American poets such as Suheir Hammad. She decided to embrace blackness and its culture as an identification, as indicated in *Born Palestinian, born Black* (1996)*,* her first collection of poetry. Her bold political poetry throbs with hip-hop pulses to the words that denounce different forms of violence: in war zones, streets, families and nations. In the last decades of the twentieth century emerged the hip-hop culture that brought to the fore

'residential and educational segregation, police brutality, discrimination in employment, and cultural suppression in the lives of inner-city dwellers' (Lipstiz 2000:165). Scholars such as Paul Gilroy (1992), George Lipsitz (2000) and L. de Leon (2004) argue that the African-American hip-hop has created a new coalitional politics that transcends the idea of a natural, biological, racial family. Lipsitz examines how hip-hop offers a new historicity that overrides the influence of family and nation whilst offering new strategies for living with difference and building on the hybrid qualities of the form itself (2000:91). In "Diasporic Noise: History, Hip Hop, and the Post-colonial Politics of Sound", Lipsitz asserts the potential of the 'diasporic conversation' within hip-hop in connecting different cultures (1994:27-28). Thus, Suheir Hammad's embrace of hip-hop culture and poetry establishes a crucial mechanism of contemporary Arab-American political expression, mobilisation and coalition-building in a moment when political activism hinges on cultural pluralism and weaving diverse cultural forms together (de Leon 2004). Hammad has paved the way for a younger generation of Arab-American hip-hop artists and slam poets such as Iron Sheik, who appeared on stage in the period 2000-2006.

After a century of racial oppression and political discrimination in the United States, Arab-American women continue to struggle in a highly-charged political environment that demonises their culture and renders them oppressed helpless victims. Through the power of their creative writing, Arab-American women poets seek to replace conflicts and dominant prejudices by mutual understanding of difference. By unfolding their histories and telling their stories, Arab-American women writers and poets set off for the purpose of effective healing, connecting with other Americans and resisting persistent stereotypes.

Ensnared in the paradox of the fluctuating and multiple migration histories constituting Arab diaspora in the United States, and the articulation of a historically and territorially rooted Arab anti-imperialist politics, contemporary Arab-American women's poetry undermines the essential definition of power, identity and politics that prioritises one political site, the

homeland, to other sites of violence and oppression. Instead, it attempts to open new channels for communication to present new alternatives that help move the community forward. In the following chapters, this study explores how these poets crystallise this 'diasporic Arab feminism', by examining the most common strategies they deploy to interrogate the burden of belonging and non-belonging, and their Arab heritage, as they struggle to create more realistic and adequate representations of themselves in the United States.

Chapter Two

The Arab Apocalypse: Rewriting Home and Conflicted Allegiances in Etel Adnan's Poetry

'I feel that I haven't settled anywhere, really, that I'm rather living the world, all over, in newspapers, in railway stations, cafes, airports…The books that I'm writing are houses that I built for myself,' states Etel Adnan, a pioneering Arab-American woman artist and writer (1993:111). This statement summarises the long journey of exile, wandering, and homecoming in the life and work of this Arab-American poet. Reviewing her works *Of Cities* and *Paris*, Ammiel Alcalay wonders, yet raising the problem of identifying Adnan, that ' she now writes in English, after having composed in French for many years (She also divided her time between California and Paris). At the same time, she is unquestionably an Arab writer. How, then, can one come to an easy definition of Adnan? Is she a Lebanese, a French writer, an American writer, a woman writer?' (1993:311).

Although she lives between California and Paris, she continues to visit Beirut, her place of birth. The poet explains that the same exile she carries with her 'goes back so far …[and] lasted so long, that it became my own nature…I am both a stranger and a native to the same land, to the same tongue' (2007:13-14). Although Adnan identifies herself as an exile, I believe that she is best identified as a diasporic subject rather than an exile or an immigrant, firstly, because she moved to the United States wilfully, and secondly, unlike many exiles and refugees, she has always possessed the financial means and freedom to travel constantly between California, Paris, and Beirut. Therefore, Adnan occupies the position of what Carol Fadda-Conrey terms, in another context, 'the transnational diasporic subject' (2006:99), who straddles Lebanese, French and American cultures, but is 'displaced in [all] and belongs completely in neither' (Ibid). Though excluding her from American, Arabic and French cultures[20], diaspora has endowed Adnan with a critical apparatus that enabled her to assess her

three cultures from an objective perspective. This standpoint, in turn, led its subjects to dodge assimilation and diasporic belonging, and instead assume a cosmopolitan and transcultural life style (Fadda-Conrey 2006:100).

Expounding on Khachig Tololyan's description of diaspora as a 'transnational moment' (1996), Pnina Werber defines it as the 'transition…in the modern era…from exilic nationalism to diasporic transntionalism'' (2000:16). Identifying Adnan as a 'transnational diasporic subject' appears to be very useful in analysing her work as capturing the paradox inherited in her poetics. Adnan's diasporic experience results from her complex and multi-layered marginalisation originating from her personal circumstance, the fragmentation of the Arab world as it emerged from the ashes of colonialism, and the process of decolonialisation. In addition to the above are the subsequent political, cultural and social turbulent upheavals that ensued from the many crises this part of the world has faced and, in particular, the civil war of Lebanon (1975-1990) and the loss of Palestine that have always preoccupied the poet's psyche and work. Her work therefore reflects the complexities that permeate the relationships between the diaspora and the homeland, Lebanon. Her depiction of the transnational connections between home and diaspora transcends the model of Arab-American writers of the 1970s-1980s that sought to promulgate the 'nostalgic longing for a return to origins …[which] often results in a reification of the past, making transformation of oppressive elements singularly difficult' (Majaj 1996:274). Illuminated by the discussions of 'diasporic transnationalism', postcolonialism and third-world women feminism, this chapter, hence, proceeds to examine how Etel Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989) destabilises the fixed notion of home, and attempts to replace it with more flexible and fluid forms of identifications. By selecting *The Arab Apocalypse* as an exemplar of Adnan's work, I aim to highlight the intersections between postcoloniality and 'diasporic transnationalism' that enabled the poet to break down the idealist and essentialist concepts of belonging whilst

reconfiguring home, Lebanon, as a site of inexplicable war and repressed sexuality, and by extension, homosexuality.

Composed from a 'transnational diasporic' vantage stance, *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989) epitomises what Susan Friedman describes as 'the rupture of writing rupture' (2004:189). In a series of fifty-nine poems, numbered but without titles, Adnan blends political concerns, artistic exploration and literary experimentation, and in doing so, destabilises the fixed meanings of home and belonging. Through the prism of 'femininity', this 'transnational diasporic' text aims to search for new beginnings in order to imagine Lebanon anew. Portraying murderous destructiveness and reckless brutalities resulting from the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990), *The Arab Apocalypse* articulates what Alcalay coins a 'poetics of disaster' (1993:99).

The book began, Adnan says, as 'an abstract poem on the sun. [But]…the war—[the Lebanese civil war]—took it over' (quoted in Majaj and Amireh 2002:18). *L'Apocalypse Arabe*, a book-length poem, was first published in French in 1980, and was later published in the poet's own translation in English in 1989 by her own publishing house based in Sausalito, California, the Post-Apollo Press. This collection can be considered one of Adnan's most important works, firstly for its aesthetic quality as combining poetry with visual art, and secondly, for its being amongst the first works that articulated a harsh critique of Lebanese politics and the civil war and inspiring other writers, particularly Lebanese women writers.

However, apart from the article of Caroline Seymour-Jorn, entitled "*The Arab Apocalypse* as a Critique of Colonialism and Imperialism" (2002), the work scarcely received any critical attention. Unfortunately, Seymour-Jorn's article ignores the context of the Lebanese Civil War and Middle Eastern politics for her reading, and presents a reading of the text as a general critique of 'colonial and neo-colonial violence on a global scale' (Seymour-Jorn 2002:37). It is important to note here that Adnan's poetic style in *The Arab Apocalypse* is complex and resists analysis, to a great extent. However, my analysis draws on the poet's

interviews, biography and her prose works that address the contextual issues of the poem explicitly [21]. For the purpose of this study, this iconographic text is examined as an exemplar of Adnan's oeuvre that combines trauma poetics with visual art, in addition to highlighting the impact of transnationality on the poet's work.

Biographical Insights

Etel Adnan became a citizen of the United States in 1982, but her work articulates a severe sense of alienation and marginalisation that has shattered her consciousness as a woman writer. In his book on ethnicity in Lebanon, David Gordon uses 'marginalism' as a term that 'refers to the situation or condition of a person or a group living within a society with which the individual or group feels only partial identification, while nourished and sustained by a culture that differs from that of the majority' (1980:17). 'The group may be either an ethnic minority…or it may be a class of modernizing individuals who have rejected or transcended the conventions and traditions of their society,' notes Gordon (Ibid). Marginalisation often results in a lack of free or full participation in the cultural and political spheres of the perceived homeland, which are Lebanon, France and the United States, in Adnan's case. Growing up at the crisscross of diverse cultural, religious and linguistic worlds alienated the poet and placed her on the margins of all these worlds. However, the poet's linguistic marginalisation appears to be the most intense and turbulent. Based on the poet's biography, I argue, in this section, that the poet's linguistic estrangement and exile is a key element in the formation of her diasporic identity, and the complexity that foregrounded her literary vision and work, particularly *The Arab Apocalypse*.

Etel Adnan was born in Beirut in 1925 to a Syrian Muslim father—an Ottoman officer—and a Greek Christian mother. Adnan was educated at French convent schools in Lebanon and later studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1955, she moved to the United States where she attended Berkeley and Harvard, and later taught humanities and

philosophy at Dominican College in San Rafael, California. In 1972, she returned to Beirut and worked as a literary editor of the daily newspaper *L'Orient le Jour* until the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. She left Beirut and moved first to Paris, and lastly settled in Sausalito, California, where she decided to adopt American citizenship, because for her, the 'old Beirut [was] as remote…as the Stone Age' (Adnan 1993:82).

In the classes of the French critic and essayist Gabriel Bounoure, Adnan realised that 'poetry was the purpose of life, poetry as a counter-profession, as an expression of personal and mental freedom, as perpetual rebellion' (Adnan1990b:17).'For years I was convinced that the whole human race was created in order to sit on sidewalks and read poetry,' the poet says in an interview with Kilpatrick (1985:116). Her view of poetry as 'a revolution, and a permanent voyage' steered her career and life (Adnan 1990b:18). In November 1949, Adnan won a scholarship and left to Paris to pursue her studies in the Sorbonne. She studied philosophy as a continuation of her interest in poetry. 'I considered philosophy, after Holderlin and Heidegger, as finding its greatest expression in poetry,' says Adnan (2007:14).

The poet's anomalous position between different and sometimes conflicting linguistic, cultural and religious worlds was accentuated by her early French education in Lebanon, which can be seen as a direct consequence of the French colonial legacy in the area, and finally intensified by the influence of the Anglo-American culture of the United States, her final destination. Adnan grew up speaking Greek and Turkish, and by the age of five, she was speaking only French (Adnan 2007:14). Reflecting on the influence of the French education on a whole generation of Lebanese children, Adnan asserts:

> We were taught the same books as the French kids in Europe, the capital of the world seemed to be Paris, and we learned the names of all kinds of things we never heard or saw…Somehow we breathed an air where it seemed that being French was superior to anyone, and as we were obviously not French, the best thing was at least to speak French. Little by little, a whole generation of educated boys and girls felt superior to the poorer kids who did not go to school and spoke only Arabic. Arabic was equated with backwardness and shame. (2007:13)

From the very beginning this education alienated the poet from her familial and Arab cultural contexts, which produced in her a sense of a deep chasm and impacted her awareness and sense of self. Language is the most significant factor defining one's culture and identity. 'Among all of our recognised allegiances, language is the most influential,' according to Maalouf (2000:130). For Adnan, language is central, and a construct of self (Adnan 1993:111). The obligatory French education has separated the poet from her Arabic cultural identity, which placed her in 'an intellectually restricted world' (Ouyang 2002:72). Such a position situates Adnan with many postcolonial writers in their linguistic dilemma. By accepting the language and education of the colonising centre, colonial subjects become separated from their past, an essential component in the construction of identity (Maalouf 2000; Levy 1995). Although Adnan lived as a French-speaking person even in the United States, she remains resentful of her own colonisation, and for her inability to write in Arabic, which denied her a role and status in Arabic culture.

The Lebanese-French writer Amin Maalouf identifies language as a central constituent of identity. He maintains:

> [E]very human being needs a language with which to identify and which is related to his sense of his own identity. That language may be common to hundreds of millions of individuals or just a few thousand. Numbers are unimportant; what matters is the sense of belonging. Each one of us needs this powerful and reassuring link (2000:132).

This central 'reassuring link' seems to be absent from the experience of the Arab-American poet Etel Adnan. The constant shift between French and English languages as a writing medium indicates the lack of such maternal language or centre, which, in turn, led to a decentring of the poet's experience, placing paradox and fragmentation at the core of her work. For Adnan, the French language represents colonial imprisonment, which she sought to escape when she gave up writing in French during the Algerian War.

Between 1949 and 1955, and for the adolescent Adnan, Paris was 'the center of the world' (1990:19). However, a few years later, Paris became 'a dead center' (Adnan 1993:27).

Instead of being the 'calm center of established values', it became a place of conflict against everything that is Arabic (1993:67). After escaping Beirut during the siege of Tel Zaatar, the worst moments of the Lebanese Civil War, Adnan could not find home in Paris (Adnan 1993:63-4). The French past colonial history in Lebanon and its anti-Algerian sentiment put Paris at war with Adnan's Arab identity. Living in Paris was like a slow death; it was 'daily poison, minute drops of arsenic, distilled evil, a passionate addiction' (1993:27). When she was in Paris her 'mind furiously runs towards distant places. *Anywhere out of this world'* (Adnan 1993:43: Adnan's italics). Hence, she lost her centre again, and having 'no guts' to move back to Lebanon (Adnan 1993:10), she had to live elsewhere, in California, the United States. This deep alienation and intense feeling towards Paris as symbolising French colonialism had led her to stop using the French language and turn to English. Abandoning the French language disoriented the poet and dislocated an essential part of her identity.

Reflecting on abandoning the French language, Adnan writes, 'I was disturbed in one fundamental realm of my life: the domain of meaningful self-expression' (2007:15). This declaration is in parallel with Maalouf's comment on the centrality of the maternal language to identity formation. Maalouf observes, 'It is extremely dangerous to try to break the maternal cord connecting a man to his own language. When it is ruptured or seriously damaged his whole personality may suffer disastrous repercussions' (2000:133). Although Maalouf's comment relates to an extreme context of identity damage that produced extreme fanatics or hard-line Maronite politicians in Lebanon's case, this linguistic rupture has seriously complicated the poet's experience of marginalisation and shattered her psyche and consciousness, because it forced upon the poet other forms of marginalisation, such as familial and cultural.

On a deeper level, the poet seems to share with Maalouf his opinion of the 'disastrous repercussions' resulting from losing the connection with the mother tongue. Although poem LVI in *The Arab Apocalypse* depicts scenes of destruction where people have been killed and

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mutilated, it also suggests that violence has been directed at Lebanese Arabic culture as well, as represented by the Arabic language:

> I said that this tongue   smoking like roast-lamb   will disappear
> Make tomorrow's men speak in signs collectively
> They threw the Arabic language to the garbage toads took it up
> (Adnan 1989:75)

In the lines above, the poet resents the impact of the cultural colonisation on Lebanese generations. As she observed earlier, the Arabic language and culture were seen as backward and, hence, French became the culture and language of Lebanese elites, and the Maronite ruling class, who mainly identifies with France whilst distancing themselves and their country from the Arab world and its culture. The poet here seems to begrudge the Maronite disaffiliation with the Arabic culture and language that had led them to assume superiority and colonise their own people. This disconnection from the mother culture and language, as Maalouf observes, drove those Maronites, amongst other reasons, to wage the unprecedented brutal civil war against all other Lebanese in 1975.

Compounded with the poet's utilisation of visual art as another language, complexity and fragmentation emerge as distinct features of Adnan's multi-layered work. The rest of this chapter examines how this linguistic marginalisation, along with other forms of marginalisation, complicates the poet's life as a subject of 'transnational diaspora', whilst exploring how diaspora affects her relationship with her homeland, Lebanon, as rendered in *The Arab Apocalypse*.

The Transnational Diasporic Context

In *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, Nathalie Handal acknowledges Adnan as a bilingual Arab-American poet and writer (in French and English) and a painter and tapestry designer, whose visual artworks and writings have gained her an international reputation (2001:48). Correspondingly, in their volume *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist,* Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh

recognise Adnan as the most celebrated and accomplished Arab-American woman author (2002:2). She is a poet, a novelist, an essayist, an artist and an active feminist who has written more than thirteen books. Adnan belongs to the transitional generation of the 1970s-1980s, which was considered the 'bridge between the two highly enculturated [Arab-American] generations, [and the] direct links between Arab-American writing and the American literary canon' (Abinader 2000). Though expressing an assured political standpoint, Adnan's work is also characterised by 'an artistic maturity' (Shakir 1996:23) that has paved the way for younger generations of Arab-American women writers, whilst simultaneously leading contemporary Arab-American writing into a 'new direction'. Through self-criticism and the process of 'demythologising the homeland', Adnan introduces a 'new dimension to the depiction of the homeland, yoking it to a human drama from which many Lebanese would recoil' (Ibid). Her work constantly moves between California, Paris and Beirut, reinforcing ideological, cultural and political negotiations of Lebanese, French and American cultures that informed her 'anti-nostalgic' stance (Fadda-Conrey 2006:98).

At this point, it is worth noting that unlike the work of other Arab-American writers, Adnan's work does not address politics of racism, and representation of Arabs/Muslims and especially women in the United States, because for her, America was a virgin land that had not existed in her childhood as a colonising power such as France. Adnan explains that 'when I landed in the United States, I had a kind of fluid identity: was I Greek, Ottoman Arab, almost French?...I didn't feel like an exile, as I chose to come, and encountered an open and dynamic society, or rather a whole new world' (2004:56). For her, America was the land of liberty and freedom and not exile until the 1967 war when its politics in the Middle East crystallised through its unlimited support for Israel. From that moment, which Adnan describes as the '1967 earthquake', she came to realise the political and economic hegemony of the United States that have shaped the globalisation discourse and later brought the New World Order (Saba 1998:2).[22] Despite stressing the role of the homeland in shaping the transnational facet

of her identity, the poet has always acknowledged the significance of the host land, the United States, as a fertile space that has helped transform her identity, linking it to 'diasporic transnationalism', where cultural negotiations took place.

In the mid-1950s, in the University of Berkeley at California, Adnan met other Arab students and the first Palestinians she ever saw. Recalling this incident, Adnan describes the centrality and direct impact of this experience on both her consciousness and literary career:

> Many things happened then, simultaneously: the discovery of a historically tragic event concerning all the Arabs (as we have seen it since), a shame of not knowing it before, and an anger at the injustice inflicted upon people, who, …were demonized by the American press. They had to be demonized in order to justify the cultural and then, progressively, physical genocide to which they were submitted. Palestine then became a continuous thread in most of my poetry and writing. (2004:57)

It was in Berkeley that she 'became an Arab, and at the same time [she] was becoming an American' (Adnan 2004:56-7). Interestingly, however, the poet only felt an exile after she had seen her country Lebanon consumed by civil struggles and political unrest from which it would not grow normally after the 1970s' civil war. By that time, she felt the 'old Beirut [was] as remote…as the Stone Age' for her (Adnan 1993:82). In fact, she felt exile in Lebanon since the civil war because she was estranged on all levels: culturally, politically and socially. 'There are exiles in one's own country,' Adnan observes (Saba 1998:3).

Maalouf writes, 'If you have gone away, it is because there are things you have rejected—repression, insecurity, poverty, lack of opportunity. But this rejection is often accompanied by a sense of guilt' (2000:33). This sense of guilt, along with yearning, tied Adnan to Beirut, making it the focal point of her wandering. Her diasporic standpoint, on the other hand, drove her away from nostalgia, and offered her possibilities of negotiating and discovering two parts of her identity, instead of compelling herself only to one part. Reflecting on such conflicting allegiances, Maalouf notes that '[e]very individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbours them with difficult choices' (2000:5). As an Arab-American

women writer, Adnan was entrapped in the painful schism between an Arab-American nationalist agenda and the community's self-criticism, which she could not resolve easily, as Maalouf explains:

> A person's identity is not an assemblage of separate affiliations, nor a kind of loose patchwork; it is like a pattern drawn on a tightly stretched parchment. Touch just one part of it, just one allegiance, and the whole person will react, the whole drum will sound. (2000:22)

In *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan seeks to compromise with her diverse affiliations to rewrite home through a diasporic lenses. Reflecting on the role of diasporic exile, Edward Said maintains that '[t]he exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reasons or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience' (2000:185). In the case of Etel Adnan, the act of 'breaking the barriers of thought' involved disengagement from the ideal and essentialist nationalist agenda of the community, and moving towards more intricate issues to achieve social and political transformation.

Drawing on the work of both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Derrida, the critic Angelika Bammer identifies displacement as a process in which uncomfortable feelings and thoughts are repressed (Freud), whereas meanings are dispersed and indefinitely deferred (Derrida). In both cases, what is displaced, dispersed, repressed or deferred always remains there: 'displaced but not replaced. [It] remains as a source of trouble, the shifting ground of signification' that destabilises meaning (1994:xiii). Speaking of diasporic identities in the postmodern era, Bammer observes:

> In the present, so-called postmodern time, this sense of palpable, yet "unknown and unimaginable" has become…even more foregrounded…[where] our sense of identity is ineluctably…marked by the peculiarly postmodern geography of identity: both here *and* there and neither here *nor* here at one and the same time. It is in this sense and for this reason that marginality and otherness increasingly figure as the predominant affirmative signifiers of (postmodern) identity. Indeed, it would appear, almost by definition, that to "be" in the postmodern scene is somehow to be an Other: displaced. (1994:xii)

Traditionally, the concept of diaspora denotes the dispersal of some populations from their native lands and the suffering resulting from different forms of exile (Tololyan 1996:11-12). Due to constant revisions in diaspora studies, this notion, nevertheless, has evolved and become deeply rooted in 'global processes of de-territorialization, transnational migration and cultural hybridity' (Kokot et al. 2004:1). Accordingly, James Clifford argues that 'diasporic cultural forms can never…be exclusively nationalist…[because] they are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachment' (1994:307). Further, Aihwa Ong defines transnationality[23] as 'the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space' (1999:4). Dissecting the meaning of transnationality, Ong explain:

> *Trans*[24] denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something…[In addition], transnationality also alludes to the *trans*versal, the *trans*actional, the *trans*lational, and the *trans*gressive aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism. (1999:4: Ong's italics)

Adnan's transnational movement has consequently led her to question and problematise the stability of the concept of home and belonging. Whereas the vantage point of her diaspora allowed her to negotiate her multiple identities, transnationalism offered her, as an ethnic individual, possibilities to transcend the power hierarchies of belonging, hence, allowing the emergence of new transnational ethnic perspectives, that move towards changing the nature of Arab-American diaspora.

In this context, Win-Chin Ouyang, in her article "From Beirut to Beirut", notes that in this postmodern era, displacement is explored as a theoretical signifier, textual strategy and a lived experience (2002:68). Adnan's work can be viewed as a consequence and a manifestation of her displacement. In works such as "The Beirut-Hell Express"(1975), *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978), and *The Arab Apocalypse* (1980), the poet documents her exile from Beirut, whilst demonstrating how the civil war, the hierarchies of colonial domination, re-emergence of the colonial order and the oppressive patriarchal structure have all forced her to

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leave her homeland and wander. However, in later works such as *The Spring Flowers Own and the Manifestations of the Voyage* (1990), *Of Women and Cities* (1993) and *In The Heart of the Heart of Another Country* (2005), to mention some, she mediates her exilic experience and meanings of femininity both for her identity as a woman and as a symbol for her exile.

Although Etel Adnan writes from the position of a 'transnational diasporic' subject, her work is driven by the force of concepts from postcolonialism and feminism. Adnan has always sought to formulate a political and artistic language that enables her to articulate her particular sense of oppression, alienation and her desire for liberation and social change. Central to Adnan's feminist thesis is the reciprocal relationship between sexism and war in Lebanon and the Middle East, where women were not only domesticated, but also conquered and dominated by their men. Evelyn Accad points out that when relationships between men and women are perceived in terms of violence, conquest and domination, society and country will eventually reflect similar political anomalies (1990:68).

Wars have always impacted Adnan's fate and career. Whilst the Algerian War (1954-1962) had led her to abandon composing poetry in the French language, the Vietnam War (1955-1975) brought her back to poetry, except in another new language, English. She believes that poets 'fought against the war through poetry' (1996). It is very intriguing to note that Adnan's first poem in English was an anti-war poem entitled "The Ballad of the Lonely Knight in Present-Day America"[25]. 'The publication of that poem made me an Arab American poet,' Adnan states. The publication of this poem and other anti-war poems to follow had led her to integrate within the American literary scene, and further enabled her to create a network of poets and artists across the United States (Adnan 2004:57-8). Also, her collection *There: In the Light and the Darkness of the Self and of the Other* has its beginnings with the start of the war in Bosnia. The book, however, moves from there to meditate on the conflict in the Middle East and connects the war in Bosnia to the genocide of the Palestinians. It compares the role of

Europeans in that conflict and relating it to the British role of facilitating the creation of the state of Israel in Palestine.

The 1967 war and its consequent defeat of the Arabs, mainly due to the American support for Israel, led Adnan to suffer an intense inner conflict, as she had never conceived the United States as an enemy. Although she was living in harmony with her community in California as a philosophy professor in a friendly environment, she felt in exile because she was emotionally alone since her American friends did not share her pain or even sympathise (Saba1998:2). In 1972, she gave up her job and pension plan and decided to return to Lebanon to share what she had learned in America. However, her experiment failed due to the civil war in 1975 and she had to leave Lebanon to go to Paris and then to the United States in 1979, returning to 'point zero' to struggle with 'inner' and 'outer apocalypse' combining in her life and work as well (Saba 1998:2).

The Impact of War and Lebanese Nationalist Politics

War 'becomes the substance of one's writing…[because]… there is a combination of the outer apocalypse and the inner apocalypse and my work reflects that along with issues of exile,' declared Etel Adnan in an interview with Aftim Saba in 1998. In the same interview, the Arab-American poet resents the reality that '[e]very Arab country has experienced internal or external wars; instead of advancing we are always returning to point zero…because the balance of power works against us'. War becomes the substance of Adnan's writing because '[f]or the Arabs, the twentieth century was an apocalyptic century". 'How can we turn our back on that?' Adnan exclaimed (Saba 1998:1). Her work, thus, aims to explore the chaos and the 'apocalypse' caused by war and how it affects identity formations of diasporic subjects such as her.

According to Miriam Cooke (1988) and Evelyn Accad (1990), Etel Adnan is considered one of the most significant female voices contributing to the corpus of war literature in the Middle East. Combining the often-opposed personal and political realms, her

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work attempts to subvert the irrationality of the Middle Eastern/Lebanese situation by undermining and exposing the assumptions of patriarchal polity. Written during the siege of the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel-al-Za'atar, or shortly after the massacre, *Sitt Marie Rose* (winner of the France Pays-Arabes in Paris; translated into six languages) and *The Arab Apocalypse* subsequently can be considered amongst the pioneering war works that had opened the space for Lebanese women writers to launch a new public discourse. Whereas *Sitt Marie Rose* didactically and directly voices Adnan's pleas to the Arab reader, *The Arab Apocalypse* registers what Cooke identifies as 'a traumatic moment in the history of [Lebanon's] consciousness' (1988: 3). Pronounced from the locale of a 'transnational diaspora', Adnan's poetics passes through the prism of feminism in which the personal and the political are interwoven. Throughout her work, Adnan highlights the interrelationship between sexuality and war in the Middle East as an imperial legacy. Further, she aims to interrogate the consequences of the political systems that were instilled and propagated by colonialism and its recent version of American neo-imperialism. It is transnationality that has facilitated such a harsh critical stance as the one expressed in *The Arab Apocalypse*, diverging from nostalgia, and instead destabilising notions of citizenship and belonging.

The 1960s and early decades of the 1970s witnessed the rise of young Arab states gaining their independence from colonialism. Although nationalism was inevitably a major element in the development of these countries, they also reclaimed most of the patriarchal values of tribal traditionalism, which were perceived to be integral to Arab culture. In "Feminism—or The Eternal Masculine—in The Arab World", Mai Ghoussoub explains how colonialism was experienced not only as 'a domination or oppression but also as a usurpation of power', of which Arab women were the principal victims (1987:9) She further maintains that these postcolonial nationalist regimes have reinforced the control of Islamic and Christian patriarchal institutions on the laws governing domestic and private spheres—marriage, divorce and custody of children—are controlled by. Consequently, women's political rights,

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'nominally granted' by the emerging postcolonial state, are practically a 'dead letter' (Ghoussoub 1987:8). 'In the Middle East, nationalism and feminism have never mixed very well. Women were used in national liberation struggles in Algeria, Iran and Palestine, only to be sent back to their kitchens after independence had been gained,' explains Accad (1992:18). Hence, Adnan's award winning novel *Sitt Marie-Rose* (1977) was not marketed in East Beirut because the novel represented a fierce feminist critique of the masculine supremacy of the Lebanese politics that had dragged the country into civil war.

Raised in a cultural atmosphere that excludes women from participating in public life, Etel Adnan acknowledges the difficulty of being a female in the Arab world until the mid-decades of the twentieth century. From early childhood she was made aware that 'a little girl was a daughter, a schoolgirl, and a future wife', not 'an autonomous being' who could defy social norms (Adnan 1990b:12). Although Lebanon appeared to be modern and more westernised than any other Arab country during the 1960s and 1970s, the state practices and its social structures were governed by a 'modernised' type of traditional patriarchy, or what Hisham Sharabi coins as 'neopatriarchy' that reinforces 'a conservative, relentless male-oriented ideology, which tends to assign privilege and power to the male at the expense of the female' (1988:33). Sami Ofiesh and Sabah Ghandour contend that in the case of Lebanon, the absence of a fundamental challenge to patriarchy had led the post-colonial state to reproduce patriarchal structures that had been instilled and reinforced by colonialism (2002:124).

In her works on war, *Sitt Marie-Rose (*1982)[26] and *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), Adnan attempts to expose the destructive assumptions and values of the dominant patriarchal chauvinism, of which sexism is a core constituent. For Adnan,'[p]eace and patriarchy are antithetical by definition' (Reardon 1985:37), because patriarchy is a system in which persons are bred to violence and authoritarianism: men are encouraged to be more aggressive, whereas women are conditioned to deal with violence by avoidance and submission. Reflecting on the

Lebanese society's willingness to inhale violence as part of its social training, Mary Rose, the protagonist of Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*, observes:

> It's fear, not love that generates all action here…The citizens of this country [Lebanon] are accustomed to fear, fear, the immense fear …of not being the first at school or in the car race, of not making love as often as the other guys at the office, of not killing as many birds as their neighbour. (Adnan 1982:68)

When war erupted in 1975, the Lebanese were ready to embrace violence; it was 'absorbed like a consumer product….the whole country [was] responding without reserve to this call to violence. The pleasure of killing with all the justification one could find for it blooms' (Adnan 1982:13). *Sitt Marie Rose* is based on the true story of Marie Rose Boulos, who was kidnapped, tortured and then killed by Phalangist militiamen in the civil war. According to Adnan, the book is not about the story of this woman. Instead, it tells 'that the "reasons" for her ordeal were not morally acceptable' (Adnan 2007:15). Ofeish and Ghandour consider this novel to be Adnan's fictional and political response to the civil war crises (2002:128).

Unlike the Lebanese civil conflicts of 1860 and 1958, the civil strife of 1975 has been described by Lebanese and Western observers as the bloodiest and most brutal of all. In addition to the planned and organised extermination campaigns (massacres of Damour and Tel-al-Za'atar), unique to this war was its manifestations of bizarre and grotesque cruelties, such as the systematic rape of women by militia men, mutilation of victims and the practice of forcing members of a family to kill each other (Khalaf 1987:235; Accad 1990:34). A brief account of Lebanon's post-colonial history is presented in appendix A in order to supplement the explanations given in this chapter of Lebanon's violent politics. I offer a summary of how the discordant elements of these various internal and external dialectics have accentuated the divisions within Lebanese society, and how external pressures have compounded internal disparities on the Lebanese stage, turning the country, particularly Beirut, from a playground into a battlefield. Whilst beyond the scope of the critical purposes of this chapter, presenting

such a historical account will help the reader gain an insight into this key period in Lebanon's history and its impact on the poet's life and work.

Writing as a Homeland

From a postcolonial perspective, Adnan writes to denounce the painful experience of imperialism, and to bring cohesion, coherence and structure to her fragmented memories and experiences, but more importantly, as Ouyang puts it, 'to seek justice' (2002:82). Writing, for this poet, is 'a meeting point between a historical moment and the private identity' (Saba 1998:1). It is a process of empowerment and an act that brings to the fore the exile from the margin. After her long journey of wandering and exile and after she had lost Lebanon forever, Adnan declared that her books are her home. Abandoning Lebanon as a home allowed the poet to avoid the essentialist and stable definition of home, and by extension, identity, whilst relating herself to these multiple homes, attaining an even better understanding of herself.

In "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora", Susan Friedman maintains, 'Home may in fact be constituted upon an act of violence against the body, even as that body travels, migrates, or goes into exile. Safety might reside neither in home nor homeland, but only in flight' (2004:199-200). In parallel, Carole Boyce Davies notes, 'Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement' (1994:113). In Adnan's 'transnational diasporic' experience, the constant movement between her different homes in Paris, Beirut and California embodies Firedman's 'flight'. By shifting homes and places, the poet realises that these new places were incapable of offering her emotional safety more than Beirut did. Despite the availability of these homes to Adnan, she refuses committing herself to one location, but uses her experience of 'diasporic transnationalism' to negotiate her diverse homes and belongings. Instead, these homes offered her a space from which to articulate her analytical perspective, reaching the conclusion that writing is her home.

'For some writers, exile is a desired location of which they can create,' maintains Boyce Davies (1994:144). She identifies '[w]riting home' as a twofold process; on one level, writing is a 'means of communication with home', and on a deeper level, it is the process of 'finding ways to express the conflicted meaning of home' (Boyce Davies 1994:129). Hence, none of these cities become the poet's constant place of abode. It is this process of writing that enables the poet to retrieve her home, though imagined. Boyce Davies explains that the yearning for home is often unleashed through writing that encompasses the rewriting of that lost home.

Adnan's work has always sought to find Lebanon and reconfigure it anew. Her endeavours lead to her demonstrating complex and intricately related forms of marginalisation resulting from her personal circumstances—linguistic, literary and gendered—and the fragmentation of Lebanon and the Arab world and the social, political and cultural precariousness manifest in its many crisis, most prominently, the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990) and the issue of Palestine.

Although Adnan has always considered herself a French-speaking person, she has always objected to the fact that French 'was decided' for her as a colonised subject ruled by the French mandate. She maintains that the French 'imposed in Lebanon a system of education which was irrelevant to the history or geography of the children involved, totally conforming to their schools in France' (2007:15). Whilst other children spoke Arabic at home, Adnan could not because her mother was Greek, and consequently, French dominated at home as well. Having the French language and its psychological, literary and cultural consequences imposed upon her, Adnan was deprived of the cultural identity stemming from her Arab heritage and, hence, placed in 'an intellectually restricted world' (Ouyang 2002:72).

This linguistic exile has imposed on the poet personal and familial estrangement. Adnan states that 'a new problem faced me at home; studying in a language basically foreign to my parents created a distance between us: I was engaging myself in territories alien to them

and I was being estranged…I was becoming a foreigner in my own house' (1990). Her mother

became openly hostile and tried to prevent her from continuing her education in France.

Although Adnan completed her education, her parents were lost to her, as she laments :

> Dear parents…[n]either of you ever saw Paris or intended to…You thought of Paris as intruder into the order of things as you knew them. Paris was a place of perdition, you said. Be assured: I did not lose my soul in it. I only lost my illusions. And you. (1993:45)

> However, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) had caused her to reject the

French language as a medium of expression. Adnan writes:

> It was during the Algerian war of independence…that I realized that I couldn't write freely in a language that faced me with a deep conflict. I was disturbed in one fundamental realm of my life: the domain of meaningful self-expression. (2007:15)

Despite her decision to stop writing in French and to write in English instead, she remained

marginalised in both the Arabic- and English-speaking worlds. In the Arab world, English was

the language of the neo-coloniser, the United States, and works written in English, therefore,

were accused of complicity with imperialism and were often excluded from Arab discourses

on cultural and literary modernity of the newly 'imagined Arab nations', Ouyang observes

(2002:72). On the other hand, Alcalay remarks that being a member of the Arab-American

minority, and 'writing in a culture that is at worst hostile and at best indifferent to Arabs,

Adnan's sensibilities fall outside the concerns of the majority' (1994:311).

For Adnan, however, the linguistic marginalisation is also a gender-related issue that is

linked to the obstacles facing Arab women writing in a language shaped by men and aimed at

an audience restrained by different levels of patriarchal authority. Written after the suicide of

her friend, "Five Senses for One Death" is 'probably the first poem in Arabic

literature…where a woman poet writes a love poem about another woman,' Adnan states

(1986:118.). The poem indicated the poet's growing feminist sensibilities as she insisted on

keeping the feminine form for her friend in the Arabic translation, despite the editor's

objection. The editor saw it as a love poem and decided to use the masculine form as literary

and cultural conventions in Arabic culture. However, Adnan insists it was a young woman, and not a man and 'women have a right to their own feelings,' Adnan asserts, considering this poem per se to be her 'feminist declaration' (1986:119).

By the last decade of the twentieth century Adnan started to identify publically with the new space of lesbian and gay writing. Whilst her earlier writings hint vaguely at this subject, in "First Passion", published in *Queer 13* (1998), Adnan writes of a friendship that was 'between friendship and something else which we were too young to name' (1998:242). The article links her recollection of her friend and memories of Beirut in the 1930s with questions about selfhood and the nature of love. Adnan describes this 'first passion' as 'opening a door not only to the mysteries of relationship, but also into self-awareness' (1998:245).

Circumscribed by her language, voice and sexuality, thus, Adnan's rendering of subjectivity and agency has always been complex. In her article on the writer Judith Grossmann, Susan Canty Quinlan (1995) remarks that the woman writer 'is exiled by the language she must use in order to name "thinking" that characterises her ability to understand and interpret the world around her'. She states that 'women are exiled from symbolic language that structures law and social conventions, among which perhaps the most significant are parental and marital relationships'. For women writers, linguistic exile means 'lack of ability to restructure words in order connote [their] experience' (Quinlan 1995:118). For Adnan, language is not simply a medium of expression, but rather a construct of self. Adnan describes her attempt at abandoning words for a while:

> I was trying …to figure out how one could think without words…I tried to stop this inner language that keeps rolling like a reel, and something else stopped too. I face blank space. I stared intently at the windows across the courtyard, moved my eyes north, south, sideways. I found myself stroking walls with my glances and establishing no connections. I became a pure vision of surfaces…I stopped recognising objects as such. Started to fight somnolence…No animal ever experienced such a state, I'm sure…But when I tried to put words aside, for good, I ended in a painful state of being. (1993a:53)

Although Adnan has always considered poetry 'a revolution….[and] an expression of personal freedom' (1990:17-18), she turned to painting as a language, and a medium of expression when lingual expression failed her. Twentieth-century women artists such as M. Catherine de Zegher view art as a process that creates a subject and a social practice that is productive and constitutive and not only a production (1996:23). She maintains:

> The act of marking the blank surface may constitute a refiguring or coming-into-language from a space of uncertainty. As much as language is a vehicle to define the self, and thus a means of empowerment, it also deidentifies the self since strangeness/otherness of the self occurs as soon as it is constructed outside the self…Drawing or writing: the tracing of the sheet is the beginning act of symbolizing the self and its reality. (1996:31)

Correspondingly, Adnan considers art as a space that allowed her construct herself, in addition to its being an apparatus for contesting the dominant socio-political and economic circumstances. In an interview with Ali Alwan Ubad, Nasri Zacharia and Mohammad Jamil Dagman (1990), Adnan expresses her view that visual art is a language that enables the voiceless colonised subject to solve the problem of language. Further, she believes that the colonial legacy is responsible for pushing some people towards visual art, '[b]ecause [writers] may feel that they can surpass the borders through the visual combined with the textual'.

Emerging from the diaspora, Adnan's work is, by necessity, autobiographical. Trinh T Minh-ha notes that '[t]hird world writers of diaspora are condemned to write only autobiographical works (1994:10). In all of Adnan's writings, the subject is one and the same: her fragmented and exiled self. In "Poetry Is a Kind of Unconscious Autobiography", Robin Warren observes that 'a poem [is] but a hazardous attempt at self understanding…It is the deepest part of autobiography' (1985:10). In the same vein, Celeste Schenk suggests that poetry and autobiography 'maybe fruitfully conceived as cut from the same bolt' (1988:287).

According to Minh-ha, this process appears to be really important in the writing of third-world women who seek to transcend the self to trace links between the writer's individuality and her ties to specific communities, be it outlined by either sexuality, ethnicity

or race (1994:10). Correspondingly, Susan Friedman maintains that the 'individualistic paradigm of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women minorities' (2004:35). Therefore, '[i]n taking the power of words, of representations, into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic, nor it is merely collective,' Friedman expounds (2004:40). She further points out that this reformulation of autobiographical writing enables minority women writers to transcend the limited spaces of self-representation available to them, and thus helps them 'create an alternative self in the autobiographical act' (2004:40-41). The poetry of Etel Adnan can be viewed as seeking to create such an alternate self that is both 'unique' and 'shared', which goes in line with what Schneck names the 'multiplicity of self-representation' (1988:290). Adnan's work exhibits a relationship between language and the self, as she writes:

> There is a dialectical relation between one's life and one's work. The former obviously influences the latter, but one's work also becomes an influence on one's life. It is a two way affair, a mysterious process where what we call life and what we call creation merge and do not merge, cross feed each other. (1990:11)

Examining other exile narratives, Kerby notes that 'acts of self-narration' are to be perceived as 'fundamental to the emergence of and reality of the subject', and not merely descriptive accounts of the self, because understanding of the self is meditated through language (1991:4-5).

For a diasporic subject like Etel Adnan, '[l]anguage is the only homeland' (Milosz qtd. in Friedman 2004:206) that is reliable and remains constant for her. Not only do writing and composing poetry allow her to bring cohesion to her fragmented self, and bridge the gap between her conflicting realities, but most prominently, the act of writing allows her to create a new reality, a new home containing elements of realities and relationships that are reconfigured in new narratives, which become 'new homes in the making' (Friedman 2004:206). Combining language with visual art, works such as *The Arab Apocalypse* allows the poet to construct what Salman Rushdie calls an 'imaginary homeland' (1992:9). In the

following section, I will explore how the poet, from her diasporic position, deconstructs her old homeland and attempts to rewrite anew Lebanon.

The Arab / Lebanese Apocalypse

In the 1980s, Etel Adnan's *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989) emerged as a site of revolutionary poetics in which the political and personal realms blend to challenge existing social constructs and stand for all that might be 'other' in the dominant patriarchal system, be they women, Palestinian refugees or non-Maronite underprivileged Lebanese citizens. Historically rooted, and intensely feminist, the text reveals the unwavering poetics of anguish that people suffered during this brutal civil war. Adnan describes the poem as written 'out of the type of the tension that brought about the war, the sense of explosion, of catastrophe. An apocalyptic sense…I was so inhabited by that ominous sense of disaster…I was writing on an explosion per se, on apocalypse per se and I saw it in color' (quoted in Majaj and Amerieh 2002:18). Crossing different temporal and spatial zones, *The Arab Apocalypse* is a complex hybrid text in which Adnan's poetics functions in symbiosis with her preoccupation as a painter. It is a collage of experiences and histories assembled according to the poet's personal perceptions and articulated from her position of 'diasporic transnationalism', and through what Griselda Pollock names a 'space of the feminine' (2003:3). To unravel the complexity of this text, the analysis will focus on three distinctive aspects of this poem that are demonstrated in all of Adnan's work: firstly, the poet's investment of visual art as another language in her work; secondly, the combination of the personal and the political; and thirdly, the poet's faith in feminine values as an alternative to achieve peace.

Acknowledging the role of painting as a process of creating the subject and a medium of communication, Adnan asserts, in an interview with Kathleen Weaver in 1986, that she writes as a painter and not the contrary:

> I didn't paint as a person who comes from literature…But I am writing as a person who comes from painting. By that I mean what you do is make your composition. You

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trust your colors and your shapes, your gestures. You trust that something beyond that will come through even if you don't know exactly what. You know that you are not just decorating a surface. You know that you are saying more than meets the eye. In a way this is what we call a collage, but instead of using bits of paper you use abstract shapes or planes of color. This is the way I proceed in poetry. I have the need to say something very precise, but I don't need to say it in a precise way. And I trust that whatever I want to say will come through. That I don't need to be sequential. I don't even need to be clear. I have to be clear in my intentions, not in my words. (1986:15-16)

This statement highlights the essence of Adnan's poetic vision as emerging from an artist's consciousness. Hence, lines, shapes, punctuation and line spacing become part of the language she uses to convey her message. Such a vision is crystallised in *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), which amongst all Adnan's work, asserts the affinity of her work to Charles Baudelaire[27] in his emphasis on the prominent role of colour rather than line to articulate feeling, and his radical exploration of the dynamic and creative relationship between poetry and painting as both striving towards the same goal; that is, of the sensual and suggestive qualities of the image (Scott 1988:28-37). This work also draws on other nineteenth-century French symbolists in their emphasis on the spatial structure of the prose poem resulting from their apprehension of the poem as a quasi-pictorial totality. *The Arab Apocalypse* is a visual text that depends for its full impact on visual attention. Adnan employed images which are both textual and spatial that offer both the impact of the graphic image and yet retained the ambiguity of suggestive poetry.

For nineteenth-century French symbolist poets, the poet, like the painter, makes marks on the white page and the interpretive processes used in painting can be utilised in poetic composition. One of the most important operative processes is the notion of the page as being the formal arena of the poem's performance, which emphasises the relationship between figure (text) and background (page), in addition to the visual hierarchisation of linguistic elements (patterns of spacing and typography) within the format of the page (Lawler 1969:71-3; Scott 1988:37). Hence, 'the foregrounding of the linguistic signifier (through spacing, the use of capitals, italics, etc.) could be considered the poetic equivalents of the plastic qualities

of paint' (Scott 1988:37). Symbolist poets such as Mallarme and Rimbaud viewed the poem as an artistic arrangement of signifiers as much as a linguistic structure of logically coordinated signifiers.

Derived from Baudelaire's imagery of cosmic elements such as the sun, moon, and ocean in his *Flowers of Evil*, Adnan's text portrays an ongoing violent conflict that predominates relationships amongst these natural entities, leading to a universal catastrophe and total destruction of the Earth. In Adnan's imagery, the 'sun' is depicted as an oppressive power that circumscribes all 'other' subjects that are conceived to be either belonging to a different gender, race, status or different religious and political spectrums. Within the context of the poem of the Lebanese Civil War, the sun is employed as a symbol of the oppressive power of the Maronite ruling party and its militia that had dragged the country into the inferno of civil war in 1975. However, in different places in the poem, this sun is depicted as the colonial/imperial powers that inflict torture and sufferings on various groups of people, such as Native Americans and Palestinians, in their attempts to control the world. Also, the sun is used in this text as a symbol of patriarchal authority and institutions that oppressed Arab/Lebanese women. Ultimately, the sun is rendered as a general symbol for the violent capacity of human beings and their power of causing severe damage to each other.

The opening poem of the book epitomises Adnan's description of the poem as an apocalyptic explosion in colour[28]:

(Adnan 1989:7)

The poem begins by introducing the leading figure of the work; the sun that appears in different colours and shapes. In the first line, the rhythmic arrangement of the signifiers/noun phrases evokes a sense of order, similar to a militant order. On the one hand, the line also suggests the existence of different suns identified by their different colours and the capitalisation of the indefinite articles introducing the five noun phrases that appeared in the first line. It can be inferred that these different entities may symbolise the warring parties or the main powers playing on the Lebanese political stage. However, as the poem proceeds, order collapses and colours blur and visual signs enter the text, indicating the breakdown of language so that the poet's articulation becomes a kind of hallucination. In contrast to the order and structure suggested by the rhythmic arrangement of the noun phrases in the first line, the rest of the stanza is composed of a cluster of noun phrases with no syntactic links to suggest any hierarchical logic; a structure that, in turn, implies chaos, fragmentation and collapse of civil order that prevailed during the civil war.

The prominence of colour as noticed in the opening stanza reinforces the influence of Baudelaire's aesthetic, particularly his view of colour as a compositional element in painting and poetry (Scott 1988:39). Like brushstrokes, the juxtaposed colourful images of the sun have replaced the linear logic of argument, arousing the curiosity of readers and inviting them to collaborate in the experience of deciphering the text. Although the sun is portrayed as a cosmic entity, the nets of associations between words and visual symbols indicate that the use of the sun in this text goes beyond its significance as a cosmic entity. As the text progresses, the image of the sun is crystallised. This sun, appearing in colourful shapes, is also portrayed as 'universal', '[b]lack', 'vain', 'sorrowful', 'bellicose' and 'pernicious' and able to inflict pain and torture on people (1989:7). Hence, it can be surmised that the sun is used as a multivalent symbol of all oppressive powers that circumscribe their subjects within circles of fear and oppression.

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For Adnan, the use of the 'sun' draws on its prominence as supreme deity in ancient civilisations, as the visual symbols and verbal allusions in the first two poems indicate. These two poems include most of the visual representations of the sun used throughout the work, of which the circle and its variants are the most significant. According to James Hall, the circle (the pure form) is a symbol of the cosmos, the heavens and the supreme deity in the East and West. Renaissance humanists likened it to God from its perfect shape (1996:2). Whilst the spiral figure seems to stand for the eclipsed sun, it may be associated with fertility and birth, as the double spiral represents the bovine womb of Meskhenet, the Egyptian goddess of childbirth (Hall 1996: 2). Adnan's sun also takes the shape of the Caddo solar cross ⊕, which she describes as a '⊕Hopi a Red Indian sun' (1989:7). In ancient cultures, the 'Sun Hero' is often the world saviour, who renews the world, inaugurates a new age and sometimes renews the established cosmic order (Olcott 2008:42). On the contrary, in Adnan's text, the Sun Hero of the modern times appears a 'militant' and 'war vessel yellow sun' (1989:8) that tortures people, brings wars, eliminates life on earth and destroys the universe.

The Arab Apocalypse demonstrates the most significant devices and techniques that mark Adnan's later work: imagery and structure that draw heavily on Baudelaire's aesthetics of 'bizarre combinations' (Wing 1975:165), and the shift from lyric to prose poems, as exhibited in *Flowers of Evil*. Also, it could be argued that *The Arab Apocalypse* belongs to what Hassan Ihab names the 'symbo-metaphysical' tradition of poetry; a tradition that combines French symbolism, on the one hand, and seventeenth-century English metaphysical verse, on the other hand, and which is best embodied in Baudelaire's "Correspondences" (1954:440).

"Correspondences", the fourth poem in the collection *Flowers of Evil*, expounds '*La théorie des correspondances*', the keystone of Baudelaire's poetic theories, which implicitly proposes Baudelaire's concept of 'synesthesia'. It is the 'production, from a sense impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of a sense impression of another kind' as well as

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being 'the production of a synesthetic effect' by using symbol and metaphor. In "Correspondences", Ihab maintains, nature is 'the store house of units of experience', which acquire meaning and coherence when 'welded into a metaphor'; a metaphor in which the two principles of similarity and association 'undergo radical modification' (1954:439-42). Similarity becomes imaginative and association rises above the restraints of tradition and logical classification, resulting in what Nathaniel Wing (1975) describes as a 'bizarre combination' of discordant elements in which the concrete and abstract as well as the mundane and celestial interact to confront consciousness with objects, sensations and experiences that do not go together, requiring the reader's conscious or unconscious collaboration in the experience of deciphering these bizarre relationships .

In *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), this 'bizarre combination' is manifest in various forms of metaphors in order to valorise transgression of the dominant patriarchal norms that govern moral, political and cultural scopes. For example, in poem VII, Adnan portrays the tribal patriarchy that governs Maronite politics as 'fascism dressed in green masturbat[ing] its gun' (1989:19). Unfamiliar and extremely shocking, the image aims to expose the destructive values of this discourse. These Phalangist militiamen attain the highest level of pleasure by exhibiting severe violence against their opponents. Guns are their intimate partners because they prefer killing to kissing, according to Adnan (1982:2). Described by Anne Jamison as the 'aesthetics of transgression' (2001), these discordant images do implicitly underline the unifying transcendent potential of poetry, as Baudelaire writes in "Correspondences": 'Like long echoes which heard from afar are confused together in a shadowy and profound unity' (1998:19).

Baudelaire's 'aesthetics of transgression', Jamison indicates, results from the 'tension between Baudelaire's verse and critical writings', from which emerges the prose poem form, where verse and prose, critical and poetic modes of writing 'alternately violate, encroach upon or embody each other' (2001: 258). For Baudelaire, the prose poem, in its punning and

'discursive duplicity', underpins the dialectic between textual and contextual referents in order to challenge the established logical norms and enacts change within the system and discourse (Stephens 1999:75). Hence, Adnan adopts the prose poem form as the apparatus of her poetic project for its extensive powerful strategies, mainly the oppositional, in which the interplay of language, imagery and methodology enables her to produce her own aesthetics of transgression or 'bizarre combination'.

In *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan adopts the prose poem genre to deploy the 'sun' as a multivalent symbol and reinforce 'discursive duplicity', in order to enable the reader to reconstruct meanings by juxtaposing or superimposing networks of significances (Stephens 1999:75). Adnan's sun mostly appears to symbolise the Lebanese autocratic political system; however, the metaphor includes all forms of totalitarian and authoritarian oppressive powers (1989:20). In addition to portraying the violent potential of human beings and their powers of causing severe damage and hurting each other, the sun also stands for the religious orthodoxies and institutions that colonise the souls and the minds of their followers, leading them blindly to meaningless wars. As explained below, the 'sun' is also depicted as a metaphor for the strength and intensity of the Middle Eastern tyrannical oppressive patriarchy that objectifies women and circumscribes them within rings of different levels of subjugation—physical, psychic, sexual, social and political—which include all that might be 'other' to a monolithic phallocentrism.

Adopting the prose poem genre has helped Adnan optimise the linkage between the personal and the political realms that is considered one of the distinctive features of this work. Although *The Arab Apocalypse* appears to record the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 as a direct consequence of the failure of the political system, at a deeper level, the poem, nonetheless, exposes the moral decay of traditional patriarchy, the greatest oppressive power, which controls and supports the political enterprise in Lebanon and the whole Middle East. In *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan explores, in various ways, how male chauvinism, nourished by

patriarchy and operating in all spheres of private and public life, sowed the psychic seeds of war in Lebanon. Of all the poems in the collection, poem VII appears as an exemplar of Adnan's poetic vision and political preoccupation in which the poet relies on juxtapositions and contradictions derived from using the 'sun' metaphor as a multivalent symbol to help Adnan deliver her message in a 'precise way'. The poem attacks the supremacy of patriarchal values and assumptions, and how they govern the social and political spheres, leading the country to this catastrophe. The poem denounces the policies and strategies of the powerful and totalitarian Maronite politics, which turned the country into a war zone. The poem opens on a 'warring sun in Beirut' lingering in the sky over a scene of butchery:

> A warring sun in Beirut thunderous April cool breeze on the ships
> yellow sun on a pole an eye in the gun's hole a dead from Palestine …
> a bird on a dead Palestinian's toe a fly at the butchery
> Beirut-sulphuric-acid STOP the Quarantina is torching its inmates STOP
> Beirut (1989: 19)

The lines above chronicle the commencement of the conflict in 1975, when hatred erupted, and thunder 'mix[ed] with rhythmic sound of war', disturbing the April coolness to declare war (Adnan 1982:11,13). The principal protagonists were the Maronite militia, representing the Christian right, and the Palestinian refugee-militants that they sought to eliminate. 'Violence [rose] from every square meter' in the city that became an inferno. 'Rockets whip against buildings' and fell on Tel al-Za'atar, the Palestinian camp, and 'dynamite [exploded] like an evil eye'. Media reports, which Adnan describes elsewhere as reports of sadism: 'blinding, castration, nylon bags full of cut up bodies thrown onto public squares, death by kitchen knives, a disturbing surgery, [and] torture in the cemetery' (Adnan 1982:13-15).

No other city suffered murder and sadism as did Beirut, Adnan observed, describing how 'In the smoking bath of acid, under bullets, rockets, napalm and phosphorous bombs, with assassinations and abductions, each being met [his/her]…apocalypse' (Adnan 1982:103). In fact, the last line alludes to the Quarantina or Karantina massacre that took place on 18 January, 1976, in which about one thousand PLO fighters and civilians were killed. Shocked

and traumatised, the poet finds herself powerless and incapable of comprehending the situation. For Adnan, 'the language-circuit has burned' (1989:43), as the lack of a syntactic order indicates, which expresses the absence of logic and reason. She appears outraged and requires all this annihilation to 'STOP' at once. Palestinians were savagely executed: on 'every branch the militia hung severed heads', 'they dug out the dead   cut their organs and stuffed their mouths'(1989:64). Adnan maintains that these militias sought primitive and absolute genocide. Even after death they insisted on mutilating the corpse to diminish and erase the enemy in a monstrous act of purification (1982:66).

In poem VII, Adnan also pinpoints the cause of this war, which she describes as 'a backfired adventure' in which 'Beirut-the-fool writes with blood: Death to the moon' (1989:20). It has been acknowledged that the massacre of Ain el-Roummaneh on 13 April, 1975, marks the official beginning of the war. On Sunday 13 April, the Phalangist gunmen ambushed a bus and killed all of its twenty-seven Palestinian passengers. Palestinians avenged their dead, and Maronite militias counterattacked, and so on. On 14 April, the war began (Deeb 1980; Gilmour 1987; Gordon 1980; and Khalaf 2002). This war was meant to be the device for a 'zealous campaign' of sectarian and political cleansing initiated by the Maronite-sectarian militia that is conceived to be the State's protector. The campaign targeted Muslims and other Christian political opponents (Petran 1987). Palestinians were projected as the nation's enemy because their alliance with other Lebanese would threaten the Maronite elite's interests and project of dominating and westernising Lebanon, and also mainly to confuse the Lebanese's accurate assessment of the war as a class-based conflict (Ofiesh and Ghandour 2001:6). Hence, Adnan decries in *Sitt Marie Rose* (1982) their politics that 'stained the country with blood' and terrorised only 'the wretched and the down-trodden' (1982:12). Although Maronites portrayed this war as a Crusade, Adnan realises that it was a 'Crusade directed against the poor…,[who were] considered…to be the vermin… They [fought] to block the tide of those who [had] lost everything, or those who never had anything. They

[turned] those among them that were poor against the poor "of others"' (1982:52) so that 'a Kurd [is] killing an Armenian [and] an Armenian [is] killing a Palestinian'(1989:20). Adnan describes the Maronite political and religious cleansing mission as a 'cannibal and anthropophagus sun' that not only tortures its victims and injures every aspect of them, but also devours them totally, and eventually eats its own children (1989:19-20).

Adnan's depiction of the Maronite discourse and politics evokes Maalouf's observation of Lebanese politics that the logic behind ethnic massacres is 'indecipherable' and can only be explained as emerging from 'blood-thirsty ancestral or hereditary madness'. He identifies the 'tribal concept of identity' as responsible for facilitating such a distortion (2000:28). According to Maalouf, the notion of 'tribal identity' that reduces identity to one single affiliation encourages people to adopt domineering, sectarian and intolerant attitudes. Such attitudes frequently contribute to 'transforming people into either killers or at best supporters of killers,' writes Maalouf (2000:30). Consequently, the others are doomed, intimidated, punished and denounced as 'traitors' and 'renegades' (Ibid).

In this poem, the 'sun' also stands for the traditional patriarchy that Adnan considers the wellspring of Lebanese politics: 'a bestial sun crawls on my backbone and gnaws at my neck. Its hair… | Its hair is falling   outside fascism dressed in green masturbates its guns (1989:20). Patriarchy is depicted as a brutal, vicious and old 'sun' that tends to objectify women, and paralyse and restrain them from participating in public domains, as the first line suggests. This old patriarchy emerges in a militant fascist disguise that embraces force and war to sustain authority and maintain the social order it created: 'dressed in green', refers to the Phalangist militia green uniform. *The Arab Apocalypse* demonstrates how Lebanese politics manifests the excesses of negative male values and machismo in its attempt to achieve national unity. Adnan's war works highlight the relationship between a perverted male sexuality and the explosion of violence in the Lebanese Civil War:

When you read the papers there is always rape involved in the behavior of soldiers unleashed in a village or against their enemies. Because [sexuality] is the most powerful experience the average man is used to having. They do not all get powerful emotions out of music or painting or even sports. The common denominator is really sexual experience. With love it is a good thing, but once it is impersonalized, once they want to express power—that is what comes to their minds. There is always that in the vocabulary and in the form of tortures they use. Men identify themselves through their sexuality. So, when they want to hurt someone, it is usually through sexuality. That is why they have sexual mutilations even after the death of a person.   (Weaver 1986:15)

In the same poem, however, this 'bestial' and 'cannibal' 'warring sun' appears to be intimidated and threatened by the hidden power of women: 'Bedouins covered by sarcophagi know that a tattooed moon floods you with dynamite!' (1989:19).This line embodies Adnan's emphasis on the relationship between violence and fear of women. Given the fact that French is Adnan's mother tongue and the poem was originally written in French, it can be inferred that the 'moon' stands for a woman and the adjective 'tattooed' may symbolise all the feminine values she represents in contrast to the oppressive warring sun that represents a masculine entity, because in the Middle East tattooing is rather a feminine beauty custom. Middle Eastern men rarely tattoo themselves. The line implies that the emergence of these feminine characteristics would shake and interrupt the hierarchal order and threaten the unquestioning acceptance of authority in such a patriarchal-tribal society. It can be argued that although the 'tattooed moon' basically refers to women, the metaphor can also stand for all 'other' subjects or objects under the control of this authoritative fascist system, be they Palestinians, underprivileged Lebanese or members of other sects and parties who were demanding reforms, change and their share of power. These subjects, therefore, must be contained within circles of oppression to maintain control and domination. In the interior spaces of these circles 'lively forces are crushed, annihilated, [where] apparent confusion is maintained through a mortal order' (Adnan 1982:104).

In addition to highlighting the impact of nineteenth-century French symbolism on Adnan's poetry, *The Arab Apocalypse* also demonstrates a figurative synthesis emanating from an artist's experience that requires readers' collaboration to establish the overall network

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of meaning. This approach enables the poet to bring to the contemplation of this world a 'cosmic vision' (Sellin 2002:29) that connects the diverse elements provided in the text. Springing from such 'cosmic vision' the imagery in poem XVII connects in a complex network of relationships such diverse elements as Jupiter, Ganymedes, the Sun, Beirut, Arabs, Gilgamesh, and Middle Eastern Politics.

The poem opens with the appearance of Jupiter, the main antagonist and the major player on war stage in this text:

Jupiter moves forward followed by thirteen moons STOP Ganymedes enamored of the sun

Beirut is a poultry yard with peacocks and the stench of poultries
Jupiter swims in a metallic solution   ◉   The discharge is incoherent

Beirut is a satellized planet domesticated by its enemy profanated by EVIL
An electric current covered with hair like a mare circulates in the universe
Beirut hides in trenches   bending its neck goes to the slaughter house

(1989:36)

The imagery developed throughout this poem is a continuation of the main theme of the book that is based on an expansive cosmic metaphor of the solar system and its function in the universe on the one hand, and its function in ancient myth on the other. Alluding to Jupiter's function in the solar system and its symbolism in ancient Roman myth, the text depicts the planet as a supreme power, or maybe even the Supreme Being in this scene, which is larger, and even more powerful than the 'sun', the main character in the collection. Also using the 'sun' throughout the poem as a common noun implies a kind of power hierarchy between the two figures.

Jupiter is the largest planet in the solar system, whose gravitational influence helped shape the solar system. Moreover, it is believed that the planet may be responsible for Late Heavy Bombardment in the inner solar system's history, commonly referred to as the lunar cataclysm[29]. On a mythical level, Jupiter stands for the great-protecting deity of the race, who keeps the hero in the duty path toward gods, state, and family. It is the supreme god of the Roman pantheon, called "shining father". Romans worshiped it as Jupiter Optimus Maximus

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(all-good, all-powerful). Jupiter is also known to be the protector of the ancient league of Latin cities[30]. Ganymedes is one of Jupiter's largest moons and according to ancient myth, he is the Trojan prince, who was abducted by Jupiter and taken to Mount Olympus to serve as the cupbearer for the gods. In poetry Ganymedes has become a symbol for homosexual love and desire. The text introduces Jupiter as an ultimate oppressive power in addition to the sun, which we have met earlier. However, the relation between the three figures—Jupiter, Ganymedes, and the sun seems ambiguous or unstated in the poem. On one level, the metaphor 'Ganymedes enamored of the sun' may hint to the poet's sexual orientation and the dominance of the compulsory heterosexuality that oppressed the poet and imprisoned her during the 1970s and the 1980s. The recurring portrayal of the sun throughout the text as the oppressive Arab and Lebanese patriarchy may validate such interpretation. On another level, Ganymedes can be seen standing for all the oppressed, including women, disfranchised Lebanese populations, Palestinians, and other victims of the oppressive Lebanese patriarchal politics. Jupiter's position and function in both universe and myth seem to be correlated and intertwined, but Adnan never states the relationship between Jupiter, the all supreme ancient god and Beirut. This mission is left for the text readers.

The poem then takes the reader from Jupiter's heavenly dwelling in the skies down to the mundaneness of stenchy Beirut that became a 'poultry yard'. The 'poultry yard' metaphor reveals the poet's disgust of this war and its anti-heroes. The vanity of Lebanese war masters is compared to that of peacocks. They set the country on fire to satisfy their egos, regardless of the nation's interest. The unjustified and meaningless war is compared to the bloody sport of cockfighting or just any fowl fighting, in which fowls inflict pain on each other and even kill each other to amuse the watching elite audience. Due to this savage war, the city became a stenchy ditch for dead corpses as this war leads the country toward tragic devastation and total destruction. In the third line Beirut is rendered as a planet that is destroyed by both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons. On the one hand, the city is remotely controlled by its enemies such as

Syrians, Israelis, or Americans and other Arabs whose Lebanese allies fight for their interests on the Lebanese soil. On the other hand, the country is destroyed by the corruption of its own fellow citizens. The word 'profanated' alludes to the traditional trope of war-torn Beirut as the captivating whore. Throughout *The Arab Apocalypse* in addition to other Adnan's writing Beirut has been compared to Babylon as the 'whore of cities' for encompassing all forms of moral corruption and decay that along with such cruel war led the country to its fatal destiny.

It is very significant here to highlight the poet's strategy of the systematic alternation between Jupiter and Beirut running throughout the poem as it continues describing the impact of war on the city and its inhabitants:

> Jupiter revolves within the boundaries of its acid madness
> Beirut turns round and round it is a weathercock of disaster
> Jupiter gets away from the sun and runs back to it: it is a hunting dog
> any Arab crowd is a crowd of poets. Listen to its maledictions!
> incandescent planets darkly flutter in the heart of the war (1989:36)

The poem proceeds in portraying the oppressive power of Jupiter, however, its relation to Beirut is still unclear to the reader or deliberately unstated. The use of 'malediction' suggests the involvement of Arab countries in this war as emanating from the oppressive and patriarchal Arab/Muslim politics. 'Arab crowd' could refer to the League of Arab States, commonly known as Arab League. The word 'crowd', however suggests primitiveness, absence of order and authority that could put an end to this destructive war. On the contrary, these countries settle their savage feuds and wars on the Lebanese soil. The role of Arab countries is highlighted in the paradox 'incandescent planets darkly flutter'. The last line may suggest a collective Arab conspiracy against Lebanon that has thrown this country into this war limbo.

In Adnan's poetry metaphors and paraphrase do not convey the poet's message or moral. Her poems do not end with a condensed life experience or social and political message.

Adnan's text always urges and requires its readers to collaborate in translating the unstated envoi. Meaning is conveyed by the silent sparks originating from the indefinable contact point of two realities. Jupiter and Beirut are two distinct and polar realities, which are only linked in Adnan's text. The ineffable contact point does not exist in our palpable world, but rather, it occurs in what Eric Sellin describes as 'Adnan's interzone' (2002:29). The juxtaposed realities that Jupiter and Beirut symbolise in this text steer readers toward an implied third reality that they can acknowledge but barely explain. Adnan creates 'linked enigmas' as often as she links images (Sellin 2002:33).

By The end of the poem, the poet describes the desperate situation and deprivation the Middle East suffers as 'geomagnetic forces dry up our regions   We implore the rain/ we receive solar particles…' (1989:36).The poet appears to question the role of religion in people's life. They helplessly pray for God's help to rescue them from this moral and spiritual drought that has driven them to such catastrophic destiny. But alas, they only receive 'solar particles' of destruction. The sentence 'We implore the rain' may allude to the religious ritual of the prayer for rain that is sustained by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The line implies the spiritual poverty of the divine religions and their incapability of sustaining people's lives. The poem concludes with Jupiter, as the poet extremely suggests in the last lines that God might be responsible for causing this misery and rather merciless: 'We go in hordes to praise the Lord the solar Face is pitiless/ Jupiter and the sun fight over Gilgamesh's mortal remains' (1989:36). Gilgamesh was the fifth King of Uruk, modern day Iraq. In Mesopotamian mythology, he is a demigod of superhuman powers who built the city of Uruk to defend his people from external threats. In Arabic literature Gilgamesh has become a symbol of pre-historic Arab heroism and Arab national unity (Houssouba 2002: 137-153). In Adnan's text Gilgamesh may refer to the Palestinians in Lebanon who have been destroyed by the Phalangist Party and its allies, and hence left at the mercy of Jupiter and the sun. As mentioned earlier Adnan forges for her readers an 'interzone', in which she can collaborate

with them to decipher the invisible envoi. Providing the framework of such 'interzone', the poet leads her readers toward the presupposed verity. The text never links Jupiter to Beirut, but it leads us through Adnan's 'interzone' to establish the connection between the two and discover the poet's genuine emotion that is left unstated between these two realities. By the end of the poem we are made to realise that Jupiter may stand for the Supreme Being, who Adnan conceives to be the most oppressive, and the most powerful of all, and who mercilessly abandons his loving subject to death and destruction. Connecting these interwoven links, I believe that the poem implies that the patriarchal and oppressive Lebanese politics is the offspring of the more oppressive and manipulative religious institutions in the Middle East that has long engendered the suppression and oppression of women and other vulnerable groups or polulations.

Adnan maintains that in Lebanon, women were free within certain domains, but they did not exist in politics and war (Weaver 1986:14). Therefore, women's access to greater public and political domains has stirred up even greater antagonism: 'every feminine act, even charitable and seemingly unpolitical ones were regarded as rebellion in this world where women had always played servile roles' (Adnan 1982:101). Overwhelmed by the perils of war, and by the murder of the Lebanese feminist activist Marie Rose Boulos, who was kidnapped and tortured by her own people, the Maronite militias, for being pro-Palestinian, Adnan might have given an exaggerated account of the motive forces of her society. She believes that men oppress women because they fear their influence, whereas women exert indirect powers over men: although they might appear ineffective, these powers are 'so strong that… men cannot recognize them as such' (1982:67).

Despite the complexity and fragmentation that underline the text, and unsettle its meaning and interpretation, the perpetual struggle of the sun with other cosmic entities, such as the sea or the moon, seems to be a metaphor standing for struggle between the colonising oppressive powers and their vulnerable subjects. Be it the modern imperial powers, the

Maronite ruling class and its militia, or the patriarchal societal institutions in the Middle East, this dominant force is engaged in a struggle in which it is attracted to, repulsed by and determined to control its subject. Throughout the collection, all the poems demonstrate the ambivalent and complex relationship between the sun/coloniser and its subjects. They portray the suffering of different individuals, such as women, Palestinians, underprivileged Lebanese citizens and Native Indians, whose bodies and souls have been crushed and mortified by the force that operates to control them.

As a hyphenated American citizen, Adnan seems to identify with Native Americans as she refers to their struggle and genocide in several places in the text. We first meet Native Americans in the opening poem:

Hopi a Red Indian sun an Arab Black Sun a sun yellow and blue
A solar Hopi a solar Indian reddening a solar Arab darkening. (1989:7-8)

Connecting Arabs to Native Americans in several places in the text, such as poems II, V, VI, XII, could be an manifold technique: firstly, it could echo Salaita's and Obenzinger's arguments of the history of racism in the United States as not being modern, but rooted in the mentality of the earlier American settlers, as mentioned in the Introduction. In all these poems, Native Americans are described in contexts of genocides against Palestinians and other nations such as Kurds. Hence, it might imply that modern American imperial and military practices in the Arab region are an extension of older forms of American colonialism to which she refers as a 'trajectory on the mobile wall' (1989:9). Secondly, this connection signifies her identification with other ethnic minorities in America. In addition to Native Americans, other American ethnicities appear with the Arabs in the text, conjured up by references to the Inca civilisation, Mexico, Armenians, Amazon and Guatemala, to mention some, in poems III, V and XVIII.

The last poem of the collection envisions a total collapse of order as the ultimate end of this chaos when the warring powers will devour themselves: 'When the sun will run its

ultimate road', 'fire will devour …its perfect circle', 'the sun will extinguish the gods the angels and men', 'and it will extinguish itself….'. Systems will fall, circles of oppression will vanish and night will prevail (1989:78). Interestingly, this poem is evocative of the Qura'anic verses that describe Judgment Day, when the world will come to an end: 'When the sun shall be wound round and its light is lost and is overthrown | And when the stars shall fall | And when the mountains shall be made to pass away | And when the seas shall become as blazing Fire', then 'every person will know what he has brought of (good and evil)' (Surat At-Takwir 81:1-3, 6 and 14[31]). Whilst the Qura'an describes that day as a dawn: 'And by the night as it departs | And by the dawn as it brightens'; that is, when the message of the Prophet—peace be upon him—is verified and only those in the world who have done good will reap their rewards, Adnan describes this final moment as a night when the evil and destructive force of the sun devours gods along with angels and men, and destroys itself in the end.

Perhaps Adnan suggests that only such a cataclysm will allow humans to reach a new level of rationality that will help them stop the suffering they inflict upon each other in order to establish a better future. Adnan appears to challenge the religious discourse and refute its claim of saving souls and bodies. She believes that religious authorities, both Christian and Muslim, have colonised the souls and bodies of their followers and tuned their hearts into 'arid deserts', leading them blindly to destruction (1982:95). However, Adnan again fails to notice—due to the chaos and confusion that prevailed in the 1970s—that religious institutions did not reflect the spirits of either Christianity or Islam. Instead, they abused their powers to achieve individual interests, and tended to exercise control over their populations to use them as an effective tool in their race for power. The poem concludes with a plea for love and peace as the only road to salvation: 'in the night in the night we shall find knowledge love and peace' (1989:78).

For Adnan, love is the fundamental life-affirming value, and the only means of breaking these horrible circles of oppression. She denounces the love of the tribe, as for her,

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'the only true love is the love of the Stranger'. When men cut the umbilical cords of kinship they 'become real men, and life among [them] will have meaning' (1982:95). Further, she believes that tribal love can only be broken down by true love between men and women: 'When a man and a woman find each other in the silence of the night, it's the beginning of the end of the tribe's power, and death itself becomes a challenge to the ascendancy of the group' (1982:55). This love is the foundation for a new future, in which women are not the prizes for their tribe's men. Real love is not tribal, jealous, possessive and exclusive, but reaches out to others (Accad 1990:76). In this world, it is 'the unknown, the untried' (Adnan, 1982:100). Love is the stone pillar of peace. Adnan calls the warring parties to love each other, tolerate differences and make their peace with their country that 'can no longer sustain this hatred [that] brought … this apocalypse' (1982:86). It is significant to note here that Adnan's feminist project has anticipated Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's thesis of the 'Matrix' as a symbol of coexistence in one space of two bodies, two subjectivities whose encounter at this point seeks neither to master, nor assimilate, nor reject, nor alienate.

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, painter, psychoanalyst and feminist theorist, develops the feminist theorisation of subjectivity and representation beyond the confines of the dominant phallic hierarchies. Drawing on the image of 'the intrauterine meeting in the late stages of pregnancy as a model for human situations and processes in which the *non-I* is a partner in difference', Lichtenberg Ettinger proposes the 'matrix' as 'a slight shift from the Phallus' that neither seeks to replace it, nor aims to oppose it (1992:94). The concept of the 'matrix' does not suggest discarding the phallic, but rather to coexist with it. Lichtenberg Ettinger defines the 'matrix' as:

> an unconscious space of simultaneous emergence and fading of the *I* and the unknown *non-I* which is neither fused, nor rejected. Matrix is based on feminine/prenatal interrelations and exhibits as a shared borderspace in which [Lichtenberg Ettinger] calls differentiation-in-co-emergence and distance-in-proximity are continuously rehoned and recognized by metamorphosis created by… relations without relating on the borders of absence and presence, object and subject, me and the stranger. (1992:153)

Griselda Pollock further argues, in her article 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', that this feminist theorisation is not an alternative position to the phallus. Introducing the matrix opens up the symbolic field to extended possibilities in which a phallic logic does not need to displace the other to be. She explains that introducing another symbolic signifier into culture to stand beside the phallus will open the space for the invisible feminine to enter and shift aspects of our consciousness and unconsciousness, and signify other possible relations between the different subjects—*I* and *non-I*. The 'matrix' is, therefore, about the encounter in difference, which tries neither to master, nor assimilate. It is a symbol of coexistence in one space of two subjectivities whose encounter is not an either/or. In *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan imagines and craves for a new beginning by renouncing the patriarchal binary trap of man/woman, self/other, we/strangers and hate/ love, because displacing the reign of sexism, rooted in Arab culture, will help confront and deal with what Pollock calls 'forms of xenophobia: fears of difference, of strangers, of the other' (2009:13-15).

Shocking, confusing and perverse, *The Arab Apocalypse* marks Adnan's inscription with the feminine to destabilise monolithic phallocentric binary oppositions, and deconstruct the fixed gender roles and existing social norms in her search for a new beginning in the sense described by Edward Said:

> Beginning is basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simpler linear accomplishment…beginning and beginning-again are historical whereas origins are divine, that a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention. In short, beginning is *making or producing difference…*, difference which is the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language. (1985:xxiii)

Based on juxtapositions, discordant metaphors and associations of ideas, the work ends with this notion of 'beginning'. The end of this book-length poem envisions a new beginning and the reversal of the sun's light to the moon's darkness, which can be seen as comparable to the notion of the 'matrix'.

The form of poems in *The Arab Apocalypse* is much less fixed, but the vast majority consist of dense and concentrated blocks of prose presenting themselves as individual pages. Only thirteen of the fifty-nine pieces run over two pages. Unlike the nineteenth-century French symbolists, Adnan has scarcely recourse to punctuation as a spacing device. Instead, she adapted blanks and visual drawings to space the constituents of her poems, as noticed in the examples quoted above. The collection barely includes any colons, commas or semi colons, and only few full stops were used to end some poems. Hence, her articulation appears to be an unceasing and incomprehensible outpouring of anger that suggests the poet's anguish, desolation and devastation.

Two other features mark the typography of *The Arab Apocalypse* and can be viewed as reinforcing the plastic qualities of the poem, and which are directly linked to nineteenth-century French poetic tradition: the use of block letters, and citing a plethora of proper nouns throughout the text. In *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan presents individual words in block letters such as STOP and HOU, which are used all over the text as both spacing and punctuation devices, reflecting the poet's vision: 'sunlike urine paper STOP purple sun STOP   BLAK ANTS', 'a sun tattooed with our sins STOP sun ripped up by lightening STOP glaring neutrons' (1989:24), 'At the door of Paradise STOP a solar bath' (1989:33), 'Resurrection of the dead STOP Resurrection of the Planets STOP Resurrection of the peoples' (1989:32), 'feet in the sand HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! Wind in my feet' (1989:33). In poem XXXV the line 'STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP' separates the first stanza from the second one, whereas the line 'HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU' separates the second stanza from the last one. The use of the word STOP might suggest either the poet's begging or wish of stopping all forms of violence and injustice depicted in the text. HOU, on the other hand, could suggest the poet's painful crying or weeping[32].

Another common feature that characterises the typography of *The Arab Apocalypse* is the spacing of some poems by separating stanzas with lines of fragment phrases and sentences in block letters, or concluding poems with a single line of phrases or sentences in block letters, such as in poems X, XI, XIX and XX. Also, it can be assumed that inserting words in block letters in the middle of a line may create an effect that seems to be equivalent to that of rhyme in prosody, as in the following examples: 'Sun of BABYLON sun of GILGAMESH sun of MOHAMMAD' (p.32), and 'LAUGHTER the sun is laughing LAUGHTER the sun is LAUGHTER the sun is laughing' (1989:37).

The other plastic device that distinguishes *The Arab Apocalypse* and promotes the visual quality of the text is the myriad of proper nouns of literal, political and mythical figures, places, natural phenomena and organisations cited throughout the book. Such procedure would accentuate the pictorial effect of the poem on the level of signifiers as well as signified. Amongst the most cited literary figures are nineteenth-century French poets such Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Gerard de Nerval. The text also includes Muslim philosophers such as Imam Ali, Avicenna and the Sufi poet, Al Hallaj, as well as political leaders belonging to different historical periods, such as Mao, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Che Guevara, and Pontiac, the famous Native American leader. Middle Eastern and world cities and capitals were frequently cited, such as Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Paris, New York, Marrakech, Dubai and Mossoul. The text, moreover, refers to mythic figures such as Gilgamesh, Aphrodite, Isis and Ishtar. Countries such as Palestine, Spain, Argentina, Guatemala, Cuba and others are frequently cited. *The Arab Apocalypse* also refers to natural phenomena such as Mount Sannine, and many rivers such as Orontes, Tigris, River Meuse and Euphrates, in addition to planets such as Mars, Venus and Jupiter. Also, some Native American tribes are mentioned, along with the C.I.A. Citing this vast array of names indicates the resources of the poet and helps the reader create networks of associations between the signifiers and the signified to reach the imaginary vision behind this arrangement. On the other hand, to reinforce the visual

and plastic quality of the text, Adnan attempts to create a verbal structure in which capital letters thicken the texture of the poem, fixing the signifier against the foreground (the page), in order to establish a textual surface that strikes and fascinates the reader as much as the suggestive qualities of the images and the imaginary vision signified behind the words.

The fragmentation of the text and its non-linear structure correspond to the fragmentation of the poet's life and diasporic experience. Adnan reflects on her sense of fragmentation and hybridity:

> There is unity in some people's lives…[but] to my life there is no center. I borrowed the French language (it was decided for me), borrow their city, buy Yugoslav shoes, Scottish cashmere sweaters, Italian socks…I'm not going to carry this any further lest I discover that my cells are made of Argentine meat and Dutch milk. (1993b:33)

This sense of fragmentation haunts the consciousness and work consequently. Though pulling her westward towards her diasporic home, the United States, and eastward towards the homeland, Lebanon, this fragmentation is reproduced literally through the non-linear arrangement of the text. Fragmentation appears to be a staple technique in *The Arab Apocalypse*, manifested in the complexity and disconnectedness of the structure of the text. Adnan resists the linear mode of composition and logical order by employing methods designated to reinforce the fragmentation of discourse and phrase, because she believes that 'time is dead…[and] action is fragmented into sections so that no one has an exact image of the whole process. The imagination of those holed up at home cannot travel even as far as the nearest bombing' (1982:17-18). In addition to reflecting the state of chaos and the apocalyptic explosion of hatred and revenge in Lebanon during the civil war, the fragmentation in this text serves to supplement the fragmentation of the poet herself.

In addition to its being a feminine space, in which visual art collaborates with poetry in an imprecise manner to deliver 'something very precise', *The Arab Apocalypse* demonstrates the multifaceted 'transnational diasporic' perception of the poet and offers a dynamic and

compelling mixture of postcolonial politics and feminist critique. It became what bell hooks describes as:

> that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order…that does not demand forgetting. (1990:148)

The text illustrates the poet's ability to transcend convention due to her multiple and complex experience of marginalisation and displacement, which freed her from the constraints of tradition, be they literary or social. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said notes that the exile may be forced into restless movement, constantly unsettled and unsettling others (1994:53). However, diaspora permits its subjects to examine their conditions and the world from multiple perspectives. Writing becomes creative when it frees itself from the demands of literary conventions and cultural expectations. Language is given a new function, and accordingly, becomes a means by which the poet constructs herself. In her writing, Adnan is engaged in rewriting home to reconstruct a self that is fragmented.

The Arab Apocalypse manifests Adnan's credo of 'visual art as another language', and highlights most of the significant devices and techniques that mark her later reworking of imagery and structure. This work is a mixture portrait of textual and visual elements in which the poet attempted to maximise the pictorialist potential of language, whilst still retaining its poetic ambiguity. It is an exemplar of a vital interrelationship between poetry and painting, enhanced by investing a wide range of methods to reconstruct the elements of the poet's artistic vision in linguistic terms, whilst stressing the surface values of the text and the images it proposes. Engaging with harsh self-criticism of the homeland, Adnan sought to reconfigure her old homeland and negotiate the two parts of her identity, because she realised that only through self-criticism from within can a community achieve new social and political realm.

Chapter Three

From the 'Nepantla': Compromising the Palestinian Cause in the Poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye

A week after September 11th, Arab-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye sent an e-mail to her friends entitled: "A Letter From Naomi Shihab Nye, Arab-American Poet: To Any Would-Be Terrorist." Her message was: 'I am sorry to have to call you that, but I don't know how else to get your attention. I hate the word. Do you know how hard some of us have worked to get rid of that word, to deny its instant connection to the Middle East? And now look. Look what extra work we have' (Shihab Nye 2004:362). In fact, these words encapsulate the essence of Shihab Nye work as an Arab-American or Palestinian-American writer.

As an Arab-American poet and writer, Shihab Nye uses her poetry as a means of explaining and portraying her Palestinian ancestors and, by extension, her Arab side of the hyphen. As a Palestinian, she feels obliged to tell the stories beyond the headlines to depict her people as humans with whom her American readers can identify, not the hard faceless terrorists stereotyped by the American media. 'I think as a Palestinian American that's part of my job—to tell stories the news doesn't have the time to tell. We have to tell what we know', she asserts in an interview with Joy Castro (2002:229). Hence, Shihab Nye's work strives to encourage mainstream readers to have empathy and connect with the other, the demonised Palestinian. In the same interview, the poet confirms that her poetry has always aimed 'to make wonderful voices available to more readers, to promote poems of humanity and intelligence that extend and connect us all as human beings, to enlarge readers' horizons-in'. Shihab Nye's poetry, further, seeks to urge readers to acknowledge otherness as a glory and not a threat since 'we all sleep, eat have dreams and loves and hopes and sorrows, then we are all connected in the same way' (Castro 2002:228).

Therefore, Shihab Nye's poetry often features the links between things and people by highlighting the minute details that connect people across cultures and different geographical regions. In her article entitled "Arab-American Writers Identify with Communities of Colour", Andrea Shalal-Esa (2003:3) claims that Shihab Nye's work has always challenged the binary categories of identification, focusing on the 'multiple and often overlapping categories that constitute identity, including ethnic origins, gender, religion and geography'. Although Shihab Nye has always identified herself and poetry as a cultural bridge and linking medium between her two cultures, in parallel with Gloria Anzaldua's theorisation of the role of the Chicana artist, her work, nevertheless, reveals complexities of identity issues predominating the American cultural and literary scenes, and more importantly, deploying poetics of racial passing. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua's theories of Borderlands/La Frontera and her later work on the 'Nepantla' and the 'New Mestiza Consciousness', this chapter will proceed to analyse Naomi Shihab Nye's work, illustrating how the American side of the hyphen has coloured her poetic vision and practice, leading the poet to use her ethnic identification as a strategy for positioning herself within the world of American letters as a border-crossing poet.

Naomi Shihab Nye was born in St. Louis, Louisiana, in 1952 to a Palestinian father, Aziz Shihab—a refugee from the war of 1948[33]—and a German-American mother[34]. She was raised on a farm in St. Louis, where she learned to connect with nature and appreciate her father's longing for the land. In 1966, when the poet was at the age of fourteen, her family moved to Palestine but left in 1967 when the war broke out in Palestine. This experience had a deep impact on the poet's consciousness and sense of belonging (Gomez-Vega 2001:246), inspiring the formation of her vision and mission as an American writer of Palestinian descent. Shihab Nye explains that 'when you grow up in a house with someone who lives with a very strong sense of exile, when they are disconnected from the place they love most, that casts a certain light on how you see everything—your sense of gravity, history, and justice' (Davidson 1998:165). After that, the Shihab family lived in San Antonio, where the poet

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earned her B.A from Trinity University and resides to date. Nye knew that she wanted to be a poet even before she could use a pen. At the age of seven, she submitted her first poem, starting a prolific and award-winning career.

Naomi Shihab Nye is a highly acclaimed writer, essayist, anthologist and 'the best-known Arab-American …poet by far' (Shalal-Esa 2003:1) who has written and edited nearly thirty books. Naomi Shihab Nye has also been a Lannan Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow and a Witter Bynner Fellow (Library of Congress). She has received a Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award, the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, the Paterson Poetry Prize, four Pushcart Prizes, and numerous honours for her children's literature, including two Jane Addams Children's Book Awards. Her collection *Nineteen Varieties of Gazelle* (2002) was a finalist for the National Book Award. She is a regular columnist for *Organica* and poetry editor for *The Texas Observer*. Her work has been presented on National Public Radio on *A Prairie Home Companion* and *The Writer's Almanac*. She has been featured on two PBS poetry specials: *The Language of Life with Bill Moyers* and *The United States of Poetry* and also appeared on *NOW with Bill Moyers*. In January 2010, Shihab Nye was elected to the Board of Chancellors of the Academy of American Poets, and, recently, she was named laureate of the 2013 NSK Prize for Children's Literature[35].

The poet positively embraces her bi-cultural heritage, perceiving the dual perspectives of her parentage as a source of enrichment that drew her closer to other cultures. She feels very close to Mexican culture because of the sense of otherness that Mexicans feel in the United States; a sense of otherness that she can identify with. In an interview with Phoebe Davidson, she explains her attachment to other cultures, and particularly Latin American culture: 'It doesn't matter it isn't my culture, I've always felt that any little bit of other in our lives …gives much more than it takes away' (1998:162). Many Arab-American women have sought spaces of empowerment and visibility through alliances and coalition-building with

other minorities. For instance, in "On Rachel Corrie and the Meaning of Solidarity", Therese Saliba discusses the significance of coalition-building for Arab-American women in the post-September 11 era. She argues that Arab-American women should extend themselves beyond the borders of their communities to help pull them out of their isolation (2005:225-6). For belonging to the 'most Invisible of the Invisibles', and for the purpose of seeking identification with others, the Shihabs chose to settle in San Antonio, Texas, after they had moved back from Palestine to the United States in 1967. This border city was 'a wonderful, [and] open-armed place' for them to come, where they could 'start clean and new' (Davidson 1998:166-7). However, for the teenage poet:

> Home had grown different forever. Home had doubled. Back home again in my own country, it seemed impossible to forget the place we had just left: the piercing call of the muezzin from the mosque at prayer time, the sharp cold air that smelled as deep as old as my grandmother's white sheets flapping from the line on her roof. (Ibid)

Shihab Nye: The Arab Mestiza

Naomi Shihab Nye always claims that her experiences in Palestine and San Antonio have led to the formation of her poetic vision through the prism of what Gloria Anzaldua coins the 'radical multiculturalism'. It is a mode of multiculturalism that seeks to move beyond binary classifications of identities and rigid boundaries of identifications. Rather, it moves towards more inclusive relationships and commonalities within the context of difference to denounce and transform persistent realities by forging alliances that cross race and other tropes of classifications of different groups (Anzaldua 2007:5).

In the work of Gloria Anzaldua, the term borderlands has transcended its physical signification to become an inclusive term encompassing cultural, psychic, sexual and spiritual borderlands as well (Keating 2009:9). According to Keating, 'It becomes the one spot on earth that contains all people in it, whether they are natives or immigrants, coloured or whites, queers or heterosexuals' (2009:180). However, Anzaldua mentions in *Interviews/Entrevistas* that she found people 'were using "Borderlands" in a more limited sense than [she] had meant

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it, so [she] elaborated on the psychic and emotional' borderland and used 'nepantla' to theorise 'unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestiza[36] living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities—psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, [and] imagined" (Anzaldua andKeating 2000:167).

'Nepantla' is a Nahuatle word meaning 'in-between space'. It is a liminal space, where transformation occurs. People experiencing 'nepantla' are threshold people who live within multiple worlds and develop 'perspectives from the cracks' to re-conceive and transform the various worlds they inhabit. She describes 'nepantleras'—people who experience 'nepantla'— as 'supreme border crossers…[acting] as intermediaries between cultures', and acting "as agents of awakening [to] inspire, and challenge others to deeper awareness" (Keating 2009: 20). From this literal and metaphorical 'nepantla', Shihab Nye not only intends to spread, but also to produce knowledge about Palestinians for Americans and other people of colour. In this case, writing poetry can be viewed, in addition to communicating feeling, as a political act emerging from the urge to resist, subvert, educate and transform.

On the creativity of women of colour, comments Anzaldua,'when women of colour write poetry, or paint, or dance, or make movies, they always inscribe themselves and their histories. Hence, their creativity is political. It is both a symbol and a vehicle of communication…They build culture as they inscribe in these various forms' (in Keating 2009:135). The 'new mestiza consciousness' represents an innovative expansion of the previous biologically based definition of mestizo; and, hence, with poetry springing from her 'new mestiza consciousness', Shihab Nye attempts to cross between what appear to be conflicting cultural and geographical spaces. This consciousness of 'the borderland, that is…holistic, non binary way of thinking and acting' (Anzaldua 2007:101) has helped her to form a twofold vision, which allows transformational tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence and define her role as a mediator.

Anzaldua denfines this 'new mestiza'as a liminal subject who lives in a borderland between cultures, races, languages and genders, where she mediates, translates, negotiates and navigates these different locations. For her, multiculturalism is not only a way of interpreting the world, but rather a methodology of resistance (2007:99-101). Keating sees this definition of the 'new mestiza' as an inclusive term that acknowledges the existence of multiple facets of identity that are neither repressed nor assimilated when they are not in the foreground (Keating 2009: 211). These liminal subjects have to shift around to accomplish their mission of linking and bridging between different worlds, cultures and communities. For Shihab Nye, identity is always in a flux; it changes as she crosses her many worlds everyday—home, Arab-American community, multicultural neighbourhood, mainstream community, literary circles, feminist of colour and her poetry classes. As a 'new mestiza', she has many true faces depending on the kind of audience and the space she finds herself in.

In her article "The New Mestiza Nation", Anzaldua asserts that it is not sufficient for feminists of colour to reinscribe the tradition from which they emerged and set up a we-are-right/they-are-wrong binary opposition, because perceptions based on these representations problematise these binaries, asking how people negotiate multiple worlds everyday. A mestiza, instead, should resist assimilation and disappearance by one strategy that incorporates three skills:

> observing/knowing, understanding, and communication. Knowledge can lead to understanding through which communication is sustained. Hence people inhabiting these different worlds and spaces must know each other, and as belonging to different cultures, they must also see from multiple points of view, from the viewpoint of multiculturalists who take in and try to incorporate all the different perspectives. It means looking in, and looking from more than one direction at the same time. (quoted in Keating 2009:99-105)

Shihab Nye interprets her multiple identities as extending herself in each of these worlds, countries and cultures. In an interview with Bill Moyer, Shihab Nye remarks :

> You can't stay in your little comfortable spot…it's a challenge and-- whether it's loving another culture far away that suddenly has been represented by an act of violence-- or whether it's loving another person…that always involves—you know—all kinds of

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growing-- we're challenged. And so every time you care about something or somebody that relates to a different place in the world, then your empathy grows. (2002)

The poet's interpretation of her multiple belonging and diverse cultural heritage originates from a vision that is similar to Anzaldua's notion of 'the new mestiza'. As a multiculturalist scholar, Anzaldua insists on the necessity of action to activate communication. She contends that feminists of colour are bridge persons who connect and make links between their ethnic communities and academic ones, between their feminist groups and non-political ones, and between languages (2009:106-7). In a parallel way, Shihab Nye seeks to occupy this position of cultural bridge to link her Arab and American cultures.

The Impact of Deep Image Movement on Shihab Nye's Poetry

Paradoxically, the 'New Mestiza Consciousness' that has placed Naomi Shihab Nye in Anzaldua's 'nepantla' has been nourished by American mainstream wellsprings. Despite the fact that Arab-American critics, such as Lisa Suhair Majaj, recognise and celebrate Shihab Nye as an heiress of the Arab tradition, Naomi Shihab Nye's poetry is rooted in the American tradition of storytelling and greatly influenced by the poetry of the north western Deep Image movement of the late fifties and sixties. Nye's American parentage, early life in Missouri and her marriage to the Christian American, Michael Nye, enabled the poet to cross to the other side of the hyphen unnoticed, making her part of the mainstream tissue. Despite her identification as Arab-American to register a political stand, Shihab Nye has often been identified as American. She explains to Bill Moyer that after September 11, she did not have a hard time working to explain herself to the public like all other Arab-Americans 'because I'm more identifiable as an American', asserts Shihab Nye (2002). Furthermore, Shihab Nye has been included as American in many works published by American writers in the United States, and relating to different subjects, such as American literature, literary criticism, poetic genres, children literature, teaching poetry, American women's writing and other subcategories, none of which relates minority writing[37]. As an American, therefore, Shihab

Nye was naturally influenced by mainstream American poetry. The poet mentions the influence of poets such as Carl Sandburg, Carlos Williams, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, to mention a few. Most importantly, however, Shihab Nye acknowledges the great influence of the American northwestern poet, William Stafford (1914-1993), whose 'voice has guided [her] life since she was sixteen'. Shihab Nye describes Stafford as 'a pacifist, ethical human being, as well as a great and subtle poet' (Nye 2007:5).

William Edgar Stafford was an American poet and pacifist. His third collection, *Traveling through the Dark*, won the 1962 National Book Award[38]. Stafford was a prominent figure of the Deep Image movement[39], a school of poetry that affected a substantial change in the approach taken by North American writers' and readers' approaches to writing from the mid-1950s of the twentieth century. This poetry attempted to steer contemporary American poetry inwards, towards the unexplored psyche, through startling images. Central to the mission of the Deep Image movement was to dismiss the entire English tradition and introduce a new generation of North American poets who treated images 'as a mode of thought rather than skilfully crafted decoration' (Ulman 1991: 203). Accordingly, the poem is perceived 'as an experience rather than a statement, and the reader's experience of the poem as inseparable from the traditionally analytical act of understanding' (Ibid). In her account on the Deep Image movement, Leslie Ullman relates the popularity of this movement to its ranking 'intuition over rationalism and imagery over discourse as means of penetrating… the reader's unconscious' (1991:203-5).

William Stafford was identified as a 'regional' poet, whose writing looked westward, revealing interest in the narrative and the use of the vernacular as a means of entering the realm of communication. He found themes in small-town family life and in nature, and his poems are typically short and optimistic, focusing on the earthly details of the American West (Holden 1991:260). Stafford has always believed in the communicative power of poetry. For him, 'poetry is language at its most intense and potentially fulfilling. Poems do bring people

together' (Young 1993:4). In an interview with William Young in 1993, Stafford asserts that in order to achieve communication, poets must use 'the language ordinary people use not when they are writing but they are talking'. Further, he explains that 'it would be a mistake to try to heighten or lower my place in the language that comes to me...Bounces in language are not literary ones' (Young 1993: 5). Stafford made his poetry available for everyone who can understand his words, because he aimed to achieve communication 'straight across from the reader' (Ibid). He tended to avoid ambiguity and deep philosophical tenors because 'senses are fallible, and …our minds are fallible, and I don't have the belief in my ability or any one's ability to get very far beyond appearances' (Young 1993:3).

This sentiment and Stafford's quotidian poetic style and insights are evidently manifested in Shihab Nye's work, which have helped form her poetic vision. The poet maintains that she grew up believing in the power of linkage that poetry produces. She believes that '[l]anguage can carry us to understanding and connect us to things that matter in our lives'(2002). Shihab Nye further asserts that her faith in the power of words to renew and uplift the spirit is the fuel that feeds her soul. This view is reflected in her appreciation for the work of Stafford, whom she acknowledges in her poem "Bill's Beans" as the one who 'gave us our lives that were hiding under our feet' (Nye 1994:14). Her September 11 e-mail, addressed to any would-be terrorist, although mourning the tragedy and the subsequent devastation, also resonates with this sentiment. She advised the terrorist to 'read Rumi. Read Arabic poetry, because poetry humanizes us in a way that news, or even religion, has a harder time doing. A great Arab scholar, Dr. Salma Jayyusi, said ''if we read one another, we won't kill one another''. Read American poetry. Plant mint' (Shihab Nye 2004: 363).

Using accessible direct everyday language, Shihab Nye weaves her stories in a prosaic style that lacks the intensity of poetic ambiguity, and intertextuality. Shihab Nye has always asserted that her work aims for clarity, because she writes consciously to communicate and 'reach whoever has the time to read a good story'. Despite this, though, Shihab Nye's poetry

could not escape the Deep Imagist trap of 'narrow and dull decorum' that, according to Berslin (1978: 357), had spread over most American poetry of the late sixties and the early seventies. The subject matter of Deep Image poems have always been criticised as 'archetypal', ahistorical and 'open, literally, to everybody, regardless of intellect, caste, education, or geography' (Holden 1991:256-59). Shihab Nye's poetry evidently reinforces the Jungian epistemology of Deep Image poetry that had encouraged the cultivation of archetypal personas speaking for all humanity for all time.

"Kindness" (1980), a highly acclaimed poem that is included in many poetry syllabi in the United States, can be considered an example of Shihab Nye's utilisation of Imagism. The poem reveals an aspect of Shihab Nye's vision of the necessity of compassion and empathy amongst human beings as a means of achieving full understanding and appreciation of humanity regardless of ethnicity or race, economic status, education or any other defining characteristics that divide nations of the world, or even citizens from one nation. In Colombia, the poorest and harshest country in the northwest of South America, the poet found a world where the future would 'dissolve in a moment', the landscape 'between the regions of kindness is barren', and the kind is matched equally to the mean-spirited. Nevertheless, the poet found that this world also overwhelms the globe and is not restricted to Colombia, which had inspired this poem during her visit to Colombia in 1978. In "Kindness", Shihab Nye introduces kindness as the culmination of the deep meaning of one's life. Throughout the poem, Shihab Nye identifies three essential steps to reach deep kindness: experiencing intense loss, empathy—through recognising the universality of death, and sorrow.

The poet does not offer a direct definition of, or explanation for, kindness, but instead forces the reader to examine the opposite of kindness to attain a better understanding of it. To recognise kindness, readers must experience loss, and 'feel the future dissolve in a moment / like salt in a weakened broth'. The poet employs metaphor and personification to expound her belief in the necessity of kindness in humans' lives. For example, the metaphor of bus riders,

extending throughout two stanzas, identifies kindness as a destination towards which all people should head. Also, the metaphor 'the passengers eating maize and chicken' signifies the poet's identification with minorities such as Native Americans. The use of 'maize' implies that other passengers might be natives, presumably different from most readers, since the word 'maize' is a synonym for corn derived from an extinct Latin American language and translated by the Spanish. In the second stanza, the picture gets grimmer and more depressing when readers face the lonely death of an unknown Indian on the road. Shihab Nye explains to her readers that:

> Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
> you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
> lies dead by the side of the road.
> You must see how this could be you,
> how he too was someone
> who journeyed through the night with plans
> and the simple breath that kept him alive. (1995:25)

In the above stanza, kindness is cast as a powerfully attractive force, as the phrase 'the tender gravity' suggests. The word tender here is opposed to the inhumanity implied in abandoning the dead on the road, which shows neither remorse nor respect. Following this image of the dead Indian in a white poncho, the poet addresses her readers and urges them to imagine that this person could be them and how that unknown Indian was once a person who had dreams and plans for his life. The idea of death in this stanza is used to summon the universality of death as an experience that connects all human beings. Readers are forced to see death coming to all people and that understanding this fact should pave the way to connect with others and recognise them as fellow travellers in life, regardless of their ethnicity, race, economic status or education.

In the final stanza, the poet relies on personification to cast 'kindness' as the ultimate end of such deep experiences as loss, empathy and sorrow. Kindness is personified as raising its head 'from the crowds of the world to say / it is I you have been looking for / and then goes with you everywhere/ like a shadow or a friend'. Kindness appears to be a typical embodiment

of Imagism, in which the poet's 'state of mind, as enacted by a progression of loosely connected images, leads to a personal epiphany or emotion' that reflects a larger collective wisdom (Ullman 1991: 205) The poet brings herself and the reader into a shared exploratory state of mind and involves both in a associational journey to an open-ended sort of closure (Ibid). This final image appears to be a revelation that aims to precipitate readers' feelings. Obviously, the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye seems to celebrate Imagism, emblematised by the great influence of William Stafford, who describes Shihab Nye as the 'champion of the literature of encouragement and heart'(Shihab Nye 1995). Commenting on Shihab Nye's poetry, Stafford contends:

> In the current literary scene one of the most heartening influences is the work of Naomi Shihab Nye. Her poems combine transcendent liveliness and sparkle along with warmth and human insights…Reading her work enhances life. (Shihab Nye 1995)

To a great extent, Shihab Nye's poetry epitomises 'cosmopolitanism', a concept introduced by Kwame Anthony Appiah as 'the idea that we have obligations to others…that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith and kind or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship'. In addition to considering the value of human life, Appiah urges us to consider seriously the value of 'particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance' (2006: xv). Therefore, the other aspect of Shihab Nye's vision deploys the belief that observing the lives of others and sharing detail with them will help dissolve the boundaries between individuals and cultures. In her work, Shihab Nye employs personal relationships to collaborate in the political struggle for peace. She points out, 'Most of us are not politicians, so personal connections are all what we have…[V]oices are the best tool we have. In whatever seemingly personal venues we may find ourselves, voices matter. A voice may stir up little waves that reverberate out and out much farther than we could ever imagine' (Shihab Nye 2002: 226). Hinging on the idea that 'the personal is political', many of Shihab Nye's poems are set in domestic realms usually linked to women. In her poetry kitchen, she turns 'images of food and household tasks into

sacred objects that signify larger themes of gratitude, cooperation and connection' (Mercer and Storm 2007:34). It is very important to note here that the use of food in Shihab Nye's poetry differs from that of the earlier Arab-American poets featured in the anthology *Grape Leaves* (1988). Earlier Arab-American poets used food as an ethnic marker that distinguishes and sets them apart as different in their new home. Their nostalgic yearning for the old homeland was mainly manifested through remembering ethnic food. In contrast, in Shihab Nye's poetry, food becomes a bridge that links different populations; rather, it is a unifying force. Using food emerges from the poet's belief that food is an example of '[t]he material world that gives us a sense of gravity' (Shihab Nye 2000), and, hence, connect people.

In "Travelling Onion", Shihab Nye chronicles the history of the onion throughout different civilisations. The poem depicts the onion as a global object that first originated from India, taken to Egypt as 'an object of worship', and from there it moved to Greece and the rest of Europe (Shihab Nye 1994:131). On one level, the onion's translucence provokes the invisible effort of domestic labour: 'When I think how far the onion has travelled/just to enter my stew today, I could kneel and praise/ all small forgotten miracles' (Ibid). While her guests praise the 'texture of meat or herbal aroma', the poet identifies the onion as the real hero of the stew: 'the translucence of onion, /now limps, now divided' that 'for the sake of others, / disappear[s].' The portrayal of the onion's journey throughout history and its integral role in sustaining the flavour of the stew may imply, on a deeper level, the significant role played by marginalised populations in building the United States throughout its history, whose efforts have been totally overlooked by political racism and other issues. Moreover, the onion metaphor can also invoke the importance of comprehending the individual and cultural histories of others in order to attain better understanding and connection. Lorrain Mercer and Linda Storm note that 'Shihab Nye's focus on food and its link to histories of marginalized… people underscores the notion that our connections to each other must go beyond the boundaries of self and geographical space' (2007:34).

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Similarly, in "Arabic Coffee", the ceremony of brewing coffee connects family members and friends. Although the process of making the coffee follows a traditional Arabic recipe of letting the coffee 'boil to the top, and down again' for two times, the father, nevertheless, breaks with that tradition and serves the coffee for both men and women: 'And the place where men and women/break off from one another/was not present in that room' (Shihab Nye 1994:130). According to the poem, this tradition of serving 'Arabic coffee' helps bridge the gap and connect the hyphenated sides of the father's life and experience. It contributes to creating a new tradition and a new community. His family, friends, Arabic culture and American future 'will gather/in small white cups' (Shihab Nye 1994: 130). In this poem, Arabic coffee is rendered as the bridge that allows the father to celebrate his culture with his non-Arab friends who gathered for this tradition: 'He carried the tray into the room/high and balanced in his hands, /it was an offering to all of them.' Despite what the poet describes as his 'hundred disappointments', he still believes that 'luck lives in a spot of grounds' (Ibid). The bittersweet taste of the Arabic coffee symbolises how the poet interweaves the bitterness of displacement and exile with the optimism for a better future in the United States.

After September 11, the poet felt that her late paternal grandmother, Khadhra Shihab, was 'poking' her to write 'for the women who believe in peace, for the children who want to live together. For all of us who would never, never believe anything like that could be a good—good representation of our religion, or our culture' (Shihab Nye 2002). In this case, Shihab Nye has transformed the act of composing poetry into a political proclamation. In the introduction to her poetry collection, *Nineteen Varieties of Gazelle* (2002), Shihab Nye attempts to apprehend the devastating tragedy of September 11 by turning to poetry:

> Writers, believers in words, could not give up words where the going got rough. I found myself, as millions did, turning to poetry…Why should it be any surprise that people find solace in the most intimate literary genre? Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases those details. We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortably into experience,

holding and connecting it more successfully than any news channel we could name. (2002:xvi)

Shihab Nye acknowledges the significant role of poetry in connecting and facilitating understanding between nations and different cultures. For her, language is more effective than news channels, particularly in the case of Arabs and the Middle East. Alisa Solomon, in "Who Gets to Be Human on the Evening News", argues that news reports from the Arab world deliberately ignore the history of recent events, creating what she describes as a 'frame' that 'erases the occupation':

> The humanity of Palestinians is thrown into question, they appear as incorrigible, unaccountably violent, preternatural Jew haters. The Palestinian escalation of suicide bombing of civilian targets inside Israel…is seen through this frame, not as a desperate weapon of resistance, morally reprehensible as it may be, but as motiveless malignancy proof of innate Palestinian barbarism. (2006:1589)

Witnessing such injustice inflicted on her people, as a Palestinian, the poet made it her mission to tell the other part of the story to help bridge the gap between the two cultures.

Produced by a 'nepantla', the poet's political mission centres on her efforts to transform the mainstream conceptions of Arab-Americans and their mother culture by offering images that humanise them in order to resist an overwhelming demonisation. She takes upon herself the responsibility of telling the other side of the story as the war goes on in the Middle East. Through her poetry, therefore, Shihab Nye attempted to rhetorically mark the lives of many others, including 'the innocent citizens in the Middle East who haven't committed any crime' and 'who are living solid, considerate lives, often in difficult conditions' (Shihab Nye 2002:xvii). Approaching and understanding the 'other' can be only achieved by breaking the silence, and, concurrently, communication is carried off by articulating and speaking. For Shihab Nye, poetry is the best tool to achieve communication amongst different cultures and peoples, according to the "Would-Be Terrorist" letter quoted earlier. Although the poet intends her poetry to be a counternarrative and political text that aims to establish a new paradigm of the Arab world, I find her approach to Arab-American and Middle Eastern issues rather

epitomises the poetics of 'Arab cultural authenticity', reinforced and encouraged by the politics of the American liberal multiculturalism of the 1980s. Such poetics promotes the articulation of a pan-ethnic Arab identity that was employed as a strategy for gaining racial-ethnic recognition, rather than declaring a political statement.

As discussed in chapter one, central to the liberal multicultural discourse in the 1970s and 1980s United States is the bifurcation that separates the two domains, the cultural and the political, in order to control ethnic minorities. Lowe argues that multiculturalism became an essential tool to maintain hegemony that relies on 'a persistent distraction away from the historically established incommensurability of the economic, political, and cultural spheres' (1996: 86). In the case of Arab-Americans, multiculturalism was facilitated through promoting politics of 'cultural authenticity', which they uphold as a strategy for racial passing. It has led them, though, to proclaim particular ideals, such as markers of an authentic, essential, or what they perceived to be real, Arab culture (Naber 2012:63). This 'cultural authenticity' makes itself evident in Shihab Nye's portrayals of Palestinian males and their culture, as demonstrated later in this chapter.

The Good Arab in America

In *Crossing the Line*, Gayle Wald identifies racial passing as 'a practice that emerges from subjects' desires to control the terms of their racial definitions, rather than their being subjects to the definitions of white supremacy'. Accordingly, instead of involvement in racial transcendence, racial passing is perceived as entailing struggle to control over racial representation on a context of 'radical instability of embodied appearance' (Wald 2000:6). The authoritative power of race to define identities and assign subjects to a stable place in the racial order in the United States led racial passing to offer possibilities of racial transgression, or 'crossing the line' (Wald 2000: 5). The racially defined subjects may question, undermine or threaten the power of race through practices that aim for self-authorised ends. Conventionally, passing is known to be a volitional act that allows members of marginalised

groups to assimilate in a privileged culture to reap social, economic and legal benefits usually denied to people of colour.

Wald argues that racial identities continue to be important sites of negotiation and struggle in a society that confers enormous power on the portrayal of race. She further highlights the enterprise of 'crossing the line' as a strategic appropriation of race's power, emphasising the stakes of such appropriation for racially defined subjects (Wald 2000: ix). Notwithstanding that, Shihab Nye considers and means her literary output to be political resistance emanating from Anzaldua's 'nepantla'; moreover, the poet rather sought to defy and rewrite the scripting of her racial identity according to the socially desired image by the dominant culture. Hence, her poetry reflects the dialectics of identity through which Shihab Nye appropriates race for her own needs, wishes and interests.

The poet physically passes as non-Arab due to her American parentage; however, this passing did not endow her with the economic and literary privileges she hoped for. From a canonical perspective, the value and quality of her output is undermined, or, at best, questioned. Whilst criticising the Deep Imagist adaptation of the prose poem, Michel Delville describes Shihab Nye's work as 'emblematic of conspicuous lack of ambition' (1998:244) that predominates recent collections and anthologies. Such a view is provoked by the poet's remarks on her 1991 collection, *Mint*:

> I think of these pieces…as being simple paragraphs rather than prose poems, though a few might sneak into the prose poem category, where they [are] travelling on their own. The paragraph, standing by itself, has lovely pocket-sized quality. It garnishes the page, as mint garnishes a plate. (quoted in Murphy 1994:103)

On the contrary, her identification as a liberal Arab-American, or an assimilated Arab-American, has provided her with the aspired for social, literary and economic gains. Despite its lack of ambition, and questionable artistic value, Shihab Nye's poetry has endowed her with 'enviable… reputation' (Seale 1997: 210). Stressing the interconnection between racial passing and the complex multivalent institutional histories of American literary and cultural

studies, this view of Shihab Nye's work and reputation does affirm Wald's observation that, within American literary tradition, 'texts acquire or lose status based on needs and interests extrinsic to their existence as aesthetic objects' (Wald 2000:viii). Similarly, Shihab Nye has been recognised and celebrated in Arab-American literary society as an accomplished poet (Elmusa 2007; Majaj 1995; Shalal-Esa 2003; Wardi 2005), and on a national level, the poet has received several awards as mentioned earlier, and moreover, represented the United States in the Middle East and Asia through the Arts America programme of the United States Information Agency. Also, she was invited to the White House during Bill Clinton's presidency. It can be assumed that, unlike other Arab-American women writers, Shihab Nye has won such an overwhelming endorsement, partly because she claimed her Arab side of the hyphen without going against the grain of the politics of the mainstream culture, but most importantly, she appropriates her poetics of race according to the image desired by her mainstream culture. Hence, not only does Shihab Nye's poetry lack any explicit criticism or reference to racial politics that affects Arab-Americans, particularly women, in the United States, but also her intended political antidote has turned into a mawkish and unrealistic portrayal of Arabs to win readers and institutions over.

In Shihab Nye's poetry, the figure of the exiled Palestinian father, Aziz Shihab (1917-2007), has been employed as an exemplar of all Arab men. For the poet, '[t]here is no one like him and there are many like him—gentle Arab daddies who make everyone laugh around the dinner table, who have a hard time with headlines, [and] who stand outside in the evening with their hands in their pockets staring toward the far horizon' (Shihab Nye 2004). This father has become a recurring figure in Shihab Nye's poetry. He is presented as a figure that plants fig trees in the middle of Dallas, Texas, tells folktales to the neighbourhood children, serves tea with sprigs of mint and leans over the stove to boil Arabic coffee.

Also, despite the recurring appearance of the poet's paternal grandmother, Khadra Shihab, as a wise and influential female voice, Arab men, as symbolised by her father, are the

touchstone of her work. Most importantly, and central to the poet's political pronouncement, is her goal of persuading American readers that Arab tradition does not emerge from fundamentalism that has brought about terrorism to the United States. Hence, her work always depicts and illustrates the kindness and generosity of Arab men. For instance, in her letter to "Any Would Be-Terrorist", Nye describes 'the Palestinian grocer in [her] Mexican-American neighbourhood [who] paints pictures of the Palestinian flags on his empty cartons. He also paints trees and rivers and gives his paintings away'. He also refuses to be paid for the lemonade he offers the poet, symbolising inherent Arab generosity, 'for Arabs have always been famous for their generosity' (2004: 363). Also, in the aforementioned introduction, the poet describes 'the gentle Egyptian basket-seller', the 'elegant Arab man' who gave her twice the cloth she had paid for, and Waleed, the restaurant owner, who cooked lentil soup for free for her son (2004:xvi).

Correspondingly, most of Shihab Nye's poetry revolves round portraying generous, kind, patient, dedicated and loving Arab male figures, such as her uncle "Mohammed on the Mountain" (1980); "the Man Who Makes Brooms" (1986); "Abu Mahmoud", the gardener from the West Bank (1995); the weather man "Mr.Dajani, Calling from Jericho" (2002); and the deceased Ezzat Shihab (2005), in addition to many other characters who have been described in her poems without being named. The poet feels compelled, as an Arab-American poet, to contest the hardcore stereotype of the Arab and narrate the Arab or Palestinian side of the story. In her poetry, Shihab Nye aims to speak for the 'sweet Arab, the generous Arab', '[s]ince no one else is mentioning [that Arab] enough'((Nye 2005:57). In "The Sweet Arab, the Generous Arab", Shihab Nye introduces to her American readers an Arab that is unknown to Western media: 'The Arab who extends his hands', 'the Arab who will not let you pass/ his tiny shop without a welcoming word', the Arab 'who would not kill a mouse, a bird', the Arab who wants to live his day safely, and the Arab '[w]ho has been hurt/but never hurt in return…' (Ibid).

By narrating stories of Arab men who demonstrate acts of kindness and generosity, Shihab Nye attempts to inscribe another text of Arab masculinity that is antithetical to terrorism, hatred and savageness. "The Garden of Abu Mahmoud", set in the West Bank, Palestine, describes the daily ritual of gardening and the relationship between the elderly Palestinian Abu Mahmoud and his small domestic garden. Every morning "he came out to this garden, /dug hands into earth saying, I know you /and earth crumbled rich layers". This Arab loves his garden and calls it '*ya habibi* in Arabic, my darling tomato /and it called him governor, king' (Nye, 1995:124). In addition to highlighting the relationship between Abu Mahmoud and his garden, the poem focuses on a significant trait of this Palestinian's character: his generosity. It describes the hospitality and generosity of this fellow, who lavishes the poet with unripe vegetables and fruit from his garden when she visits him:

> He stooped to unsheath an eggplant
> From its nest of leaves,
> Purple shining globe, and pressed it on me.
> Handful of marble-sized peaches,
> Hard green *mish-mish*[40] and delicate lilt
> of beans. Each pocket swelled (Shihab Nye 1995:124)

However, the tranquility and richness of the garden is paradoxically set against the Israeli 'military settlement gleamed white' across his valley, where 'the guns live': 'He said, That's where the gun lives, / as simply as saying, it needs sun, / a plant needs sun" (Shihab Nye 1995:124). His response to the existence of this potential violence across the valley, which astonishes the poet, implies that coping with violence and enduring it has become one of life's basics for Palestinians as they struggle to survive everyday. For Abu Mahmoud, this garden is an oasis amidst a war zone. It is the in-between space that enables him to connect with his past and express his belonging to the seized land of his ancestors. In contrast to the military settlement with guns that cause destruction of all life forms, this domestic garden is set as a source of nourishment that produces rich crops of eggplants, 'enormous onions', and trees 'weighted with fruit' (Shihab Nye 1995:124). Further, the garden location signifies the

political reality of Palestinians living in an occupied territory. This poems aims to show how, in the middle of a "war zone", this elderly Palestinian creates life and peace through his cultivation of fruit and vegetables (Mercer and Storm 2007:37). In addition, the poem reinforces the image of the Palestinian as one who sustains life, as opposed to the violent Israelis inhabiting the military settlement.

In the same vain, "Mr. Dajani Calling From Jericho" tells the story of another Palestinian fellow, Mr. Dajani, 'the weatherman from Jericho', who 'wants to talk about books', and calls the poet from the ancient city to order books. In this poem, books and papers symbolise the in-between space in the life of another Palestinian. They represent the bridge and the linkage between two realities: the day-to-day violence threatening Palestinians' lives and that of the domestic life they are trying to create for themselves and maintain to survive their traumatic history:

On the day of the worst news yet, he calls again.
        Hey, they are bombing us now
        with American planes.
        But the books came! I want you to know
        We never stop holding our branch of the olive tree. (Shihab Nye 2002:131)

These lines interweave the notion of destruction and life loss with the optimism for the future suggested by the arrival of the books, on the one hand, and the Palestinians' commitment to the process of peace despite their limited chances, so that they 'will never stop holding [their] branch of olive tree /even though for some it is such a little branch' (Ibid).

Pointing to the Israeli raids on civilians and the American involvement in this operation reflects the political aspect of Nye's poem that mainly revolves around her personal connection with Mr. Dajani. This poem depicts Mr. Dajani, the Palestinian from the ancient city of Jericho who has 'Beautiful swans', 'chicken with babies', and 'many eggs'. Here, the Arab is portrayed as a kind, loving, caring and life-preserving individual, who nourishes on books and papers and who is desperately yearns for '[r]egular bits of dignity and respect', and 'the roundtable and the peace of talks'. The humanity and kindness of Mr. Dajani is implicitly

opposed to the violence perpetuated by the Israelis and their allies. Like the domestic garden of Abu Mahmoud, '[b]ooks and papers' stand for a politicised space and an oasis for Mr. Dajani because they are a 'connection between hearts' that enables him to communicate with and understand others, which he promises to keep: 'We will never cut the cord' (Shihab Nye 2002:131). The significance of books, swans, chickens with babies and "flowers, lemons, watermelons,vegetables" amidst Israeli hostility and violence evokes Homi Bhabha's concept of 'the traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history' within a 'wider disjunction of political existence'(1993:11). Although in the poems discussed above both personas attempt to create a space that helps them escape the violence and establish a Palestinian identity, this liminal space also symbolises their hope for a better future.

Shihab Nye has repeatedly confirmed that her poetry aims to inscribe a counternarrative antidote that is antithetical to the pseudo-knowledge of racial and gender stereotyping of Arabs and Palestinians. Nevertheless, her portrayals appear naïve and romanticised rendering of Arabs and Palestinians. Denouncing this depiction, Catherine Wagner comments, 'I cannot help suspecting that the simplicity of Shihab Nye's representation of the Middle East is a valiant effort to encourage us all to identify with what she sees as right' (2006:240). Moreover, Wagner also criticises the poet's vision of the Middle East in which it is always 'others' who are violent. Palestinians pick up guns because 'guns were given', and violence, thereby, is imposed on unwilling victims (Wagner 2006:143). In the same breath, Gregory Orfalea, an Arab-American poet and critic, describes Shihab Nye's oeuvre as 'political poetry, quite muted and unconfrontational' (1991:57), objecting to the poet's unjustified optimism that war will end and people will return to sharing their daily activities. However, 'the simplicity of Shihab Nye's representation of the Middle East', and her 'valiant effort' to deconstruct the Arab stereotype has turned Shihab Nye's poetry into a mawkish product to win American readers over.

Shihab Nye and the Poets-in-the-Schools Programme

Although Shihab Nye's oversentimentality can be partly viewed as an end product resulting from the Deep Image movement's influence on the poet, most significantly, it can be regarded as the offspring of what Wendell Berry labelled as the 'exploitative industry' of American poetry that started from the late sixties (1975:15). By the same token, in "American Poetry:1970-1990", Holden also acknowledges the industrial character of American poetry that has emerged since the mid-sixties as a result of the democratisation of higher education, which had led in turn to the decentralisation of poetry and the popularisation of high culture. As a reaction against the eastern-based New Criticism based in Boston and New York, carrying T.S. Eliot programmes and sustaining English tradition, the most significant symptom of this democratisation was the shift of the American poetry vortex from Boston and New York to the Midwest, from where creative writing workshops spread throughout the United States (Holden 1991:255-6).

However, the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts in the late sixties had launched the epoch of American poetry 'industrialisation'. Holden mentions that for the first time in the history of American letter, poets were paid for writing, and were provided with financial support from sources other than conservative English departments and foundations that supported conservative, elitist aesthetics. Furthermore, since the late sixties, a whole generation of young poets, using 'fanciful formulas'—laid out in Kenneth Koch's book *Wishes, Lies and Dreams*—were employed in the Poets-in-the-Schools programme, launched and funded by National Endowment for the Arts. The institution of the Poets-in-the-Schools programme can be considered another momentous symptom of the industrialisation of American poetry and popularisation of high culture, since these programmes aimed to attract young people to poetry, producing a kind of poetry that was regarded as 'oral-formulaic' (Holden 1991:256).

This inclination to popularise poetry in schools was reinforced by the emergence of poetry therapy as a field in the late sixties, highlighting the interconnection between poetry, therapy and pedagogy. To achieve its purpose, this poetry should fulfil both psychoanalytical and pedagogical requirements. Arleen Hynes and Mary Hynes-Berry lay out poetry criteria for educators and curriculum planners:

> Thematically, poems should reflect universal experience or emotion, and should not be overly personalized; …they should be comprehensible and not overly obscure so as to alienate the reader; and they should be positive, offering hope while dealing with suffering. Stylistically, poems should…use concrete imagery; they should use clear, precise language, and they should be fairly succinct in the treatment of their themes. (2012:65-76)

Apparently, the popularisation of poetry had its cost. Holden notes that whilst Poets-in-the-Schools programmes aimed to humanise and popularise poetry for their students, they had propagated instead the sentimental and inaccurate notion that poetry could be a body of knowledge that does not require research or recondite cultural initiation and is available to people who did not read much or very well (Holden 1991:256).

Based on the discussion above and the fact that Shihab Nye has mainly worked as a Poet in the Schools for more than twenty-five years through the art commissions of Texas, Wyoming, and Maine, in addition to holding visiting lectureships at Lewis and Clark College, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Texas at San Antonio, and Our Lady of the Lake University at San Antonio, it can be argued that, principally, she composes poetry as a writer-in-residence to meet the criteria of art commissions and curriculum planners of school districts who hired her for her 'enviable national reputation as a poet, and Texan' (Seale 1997:310). The poet summarises that her mission as a Poet in the Schools is meant to teach children about other cultures and help them 'appreciate one another's cultural traditions and help to be vehicles of traditions not originally our own by blood without having to feel guilty for it'. She views her experience as a Poet in the Schools 'as a fabulous pleasure, responsibility, [and] blessing' (Shihab Nye 2002). This, in turn, should explain the poet's

maudlin approach in presenting what she considers to be her political proclamation, in addition to the implausible portrayal of Palestinians and Arabs that made her poetry, what Zaatari describes, a naïve attempt 'to make the other see you as a human being, a willingness to be the token Arab or the token Muslim' (2005:76).

In the last decade of the twentieth century and just a short while before September11, Naomi Shihab Nye appeared to be more articulate about her identification as an Arab-American, repeatedly pronouncing her political and cultural positions as a bridge linking her two warring cultures, and reinforcing her output as a political resistance. The subject matter of her poems has shifted from the genteel quotidian sketching of local landscapes, lost parrots, nieces driving aunts, sweet neighbourhood and schoolgirls to centre on sketching Palestinian ordeals. In her poetry, she attempts to portray the misery and agony Palestinians experience everyday to encourage her American readers to acknowledge this suffering and connect with Palestinians in the Middle East, echoing and instilling the Imagist ethos that pain is a shared moment, universally recognised and understood. However, Shihab Nye ignores the effects of Israeli occupation and the consequences for Palestinians. For example, Julie Peteet (1994) (dealing with the first Intifada), Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttab (2001)(discussing the second Intifada), and Daniel Monterescu (2006) (analysing 'stranger masculinities') have shown that Palestinian masculinities are constantly reformed and rearticulated in relation to land and the dominant Israeli power, but Shihab Nye's poetry does not take on the ongoing construction of Palestinian identity in such settings, insisting on naïve idealisation of the Palestinians.

In "For the 500th Dead Palestinian, Ibtisam Bozieh", Shihab Nye attempts to push this process of identification and connection forward, by depicting the killing of 13-year-old Ibtisam Bozieh because she was in the wrong place:

> Little sister Ibtisam,
> our sleep flounders, our sleep tugs

the cord of your name.
Dead at 13, for staring through
the window into a gun barrel
which did not know you wanted to be
a doctor. (1994:97)

The lines above express the poet's melancholy and distress for the untimely tragic death of the 13-year old Palestinian child, whose life was cut short and dreams of being a doctor withered away. In addition to documenting the horror of what is happening to Palestinian children, the poem also highlights the theme of random killing of innocent people (Gomez-Vega 2010:123).

The poet also realises that she could have been killed if she had stayed there:

Had I stayed in your land,
I might have been dead too,
for something simple like staring
or shouting what was true
and getting kicked out of school (Shihab Nye 1994:97).

This appalling realisation, expressed in the lines above, leads the poet to ponder the question: 'How do we carry the endless surprise / of all our deaths?' The use of the word 'your land' when addressing the Palestinian child alienates the poet from that place, Palestine, and reinforces her sense of belonging to the United States, which allows her to observe and describe the misery of the wretched from that land. The last part of the poem, however, proposes sincere reconciliation to end these unabating cycles of violence. The poet suggests 'Becoming doctors/for one another, Arab, Jew, /instead of guarding tumors of pain/as if they hold us upright?' (1994:97). She urges both Arabs and Israelis to reconcile and live in peace 'instead of guarding tumors of pain', because killing another Palestinian child adds to the problem, enlarging the tumour of pain.

This optimistic urge and call for reconciliation is invested and reinforced more openly in "Parents of Murdered Palestinian Boy Donate His Organs to Israelis", the last poem in her poetry collection *Tender Spot* (2008). Although the poem addresses Ahmad Ismail Khatib, a young Palestinian boy randomly killed in West Bank, it focuses on his parents' benevolence,

humanitarianism and generosity as they donated his organs to Israelis instead of revenging his death:

> In a terrible moment,
> your parents pressed against
> spinning cycles of revenge
> to do some thing better.
> They stretch.
> What can that say to the rest of us? (2008:156)

Again, the poem illustrates the kindness, generosity and humanity of Palestinians by celebrating the brave act of Palestinian parents who donate their boy's organs to Israelis. It is a practical step that inspires change and an attitude transformation from the Palestinian side. The parents decided to overcome their anguish and sorrow, and extend their son's life after it had been cut short. Enthusiastically, Shihab Nye tells us how Ahmad has 'become a much bigger boy./…become a girl too--/ [his] kidneys, [his] liver, [his] heart./ So many people needed what [he] had' (Shihab Nye 2008:156). The poem can be read as a liberal invitation for all Arabs and all Israelis to stop the 'spinning cycles of revenge' against each other in order 'to do something better'(Shihab Nye 2008:156).

The poems "For the 500th Dead Palestinian, Ibtisam Bozieh" and "Parents of Murdered Palestinian Boy Donate His Organs to Israelis" can be regarded as examples of what Nye conceives to be political poetry, epitomising her poetics of political resistance. It is noteworthy to mention, though, that these poems focus on the untimely death of Palestinian children, not the war or the warring men. For example, in "For the 500th Dead Palestinian, Ibtisam Bozieh", the poet does not identify that an angry man from Israel pulls the trigger that sends the bullet out of the barrel. It is also noted that the use of the word 'Jew', referring to Israeli, appears imprecise and off-target because it adds a religious dimension to the historical context of the political conflict in the Middle East, which is perceived to be a direct consequence of the establishment of the State of Israel and not the existence of Jews, some of whom still live in the south part of the Arab Peninsula and different parts of the Middle East to

date. Similarly, in "Parents of Murdered Palestinian Boy Donate His Organs to Israelis",
readers meet Israelis as recipients of the organs donated by Palestinian parents. Throughout
her poetry, Naomi Shihab Nye has never mentioned Israelis or Arabs as initiating or relating to
violence in any way. Simultaneously, she has never depicted the ongoing war or the warring
parties in the Middle East, or even questioned the politics behind it. Also, Shihab Nye has
never acknowledged the armed clashes amongst disputed Palestinian parties themselves and
the intra-Palestinian struggles that complicate people's lives. Instead, her poetry presents
sketches and painful stories to portray the distress of Palestinians in the Holy Land.

After September 11, however, the work of Naomi Shihab Nye has acquired more
prominence and popularity as it became amongst the most recommended sources for teachers
and educators. It was a real challenge for teachers and educators to teach about the Middle
East in a politically and emotionally intense environment. Cyrisse Jaffee, a book editor and a
print project director in the educational department of WGBH, Boston's public broadcasting
station, indicates that they sought materials and sources that convey complexities of both
historical and current events that bring empathy without being labelled as 'unpatriotic' and
arousing unfavourable reactions from parents (Jaffee 2004:46). In this context, Barbara
Petzen, an outreach coordinator at Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies,
considers Shihab Nye's work 'excellent', because it 'helps instill empathy' by presenting
images of progressive Arabs and Muslims, as opposed to conservative and radical ones
(quoted in Jaffee 2004: 46), and, therefore, it is included in most, if not all, Middle East
syllabi.

Drawing on the examples given above, it can be inferred that amongst all Arab-
Americans, the work of Naomi Shihab Nye has won acclaim and increasing popularity due to
its tendency of claiming ethnicity whilst complying with the government's political discourse.
It is an exemplary product of official multiculturalism that promoted 'cultural authenticity' as
a strategy for integration in the mainstream culture and society. In her attempt to deconstruct

the core stereotype of the savage terrorist Arab, Shihab Nye has gone to the extreme end in her more recent work by producing images of helpless and victimised Arabs. In her poems, all Palestinians and Arabs appear vulnerable victims, lacking agency and exposed to violent attacks of unidentified others. As mentioned earlier, her poetry never describes either war or warring parties, because she could neither identify Israelis—the United States' first democratic ally in the Middle East—as violent or initiating attacks, nor could she betray her cause and portray Palestinians as subjects capable of initiating counterattacks or even fighting amongst themselves, and, hence, reinforcing mainstream demonising representations of Arabs and Palestinians. Therefore, her sentimental and mawkish representation of Arabs goes in line with the state's foreign policy and political discourse that promotes, particularly amongst young adults, the liberating wars the United States has initiated to liberate the helpless victimised Afghani women and the people of Iraq, for instance. Not only does Shihab Nye's poetry help 'to instill empathy', but it also reinforces the national and political goals of the United States government, which helps the poet to fulfil her role as a good Arab-American.

Undoubtedly, the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye exemplifies the complexities of identity issues operating in a culture that is fraught with racial and political intensity. Although the poet has repeatedly mentioned the impact of her experience in Palestine on the formation of her poetic vision and consciousness, the influence of American literary tradition and racial politics seem to be more influential on the poet's yield. Nourished by the Deep Imagist humanitarian ethos, Shihab Nye's work sustains the belief in the power of poetry to bring knowledge and empathy that enables its advocates to connect with those who are unlike them. Reflecting on the significance of poetry in American society after September 11, she contends:

> As a direct line to human feeling, emphatic experience, genuine language, and detail, poetry is everything that headlines news is not. It takes us inside situations, helps us imagine life from more than one perspective, honours imagery and metaphor - those great tools of thought - and deepens our confidence in a meaningful world. (Shihab Nye 2002:86)

However, the year she spent in the occupied territories, and later in her life in Texas,

have impacted the poet's sense of belonging and placed her in Anzaldua's 'nepantla' to assume the 'new mestiza' mission of linking her two conflicting geographical spaces, which enables her to define her role as a mediator. By offering folktale stories from her ancestral land, Palestine, the poet attempts to inscribe possibilities of peace, love and community by reinforcing the idea that sharing acts of everyday life can help us cross 'the imaginary boundaries separating individuals, cultures, and countries' (Mercer and Storm 2007:34). The poet used her Arab heritage to establish herself a literary reputation in the mainstream culture, and reap more social and economic privileges accordingly.

Whereas most Arab-Americans suffered the stigma of being Arabs in America after September 11, Shihab Nye's popularity as a poet was accelerating because she decided to use her Arab heritage as a means of passing in the United States. Introducing sentimental folktales from Palestine, the poet feeds the imaginations of mainstream readers with what they want to believe. Eventually, Shihab Nye could not fulfil the 'new mestiza' mission because she could not go against the grain of the mainstream politics. Although her work does not reflect racial ideology, it is intimately and inevitably bound up with it. Neither wholly subversive nor wholly complicit, Shihab Nye's work mediates desires that aim to 'disrupt the crude opposition of racial power' (Wald 2000:8). Nevertheless, her intended political counternarrative in its maudlin approach could not be regarded as an individualised act of racial transgression; rather, it marks the poet's strategy of assimilation, which her ethnic community tolerates.

Chapter Four

Re-inscribing Shahrazad: The Quest of Muslim/Arab-American Women in Mohja Kahf's Poetry

'We are now engaged in a worldwide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the Taliban', Laura Bush, the First Lady, declared in a radio address to the nation, two months after September 11, 2001[41]. This subject was increasingly invoked by politicians and the media as a matter of profound political significance to the United States and its democratic project in the Middle East, and featured as an issue pertinent to national sanity. For two decades prior to September 11, the subject of women's oppression in Islam emblematised by the veil and the burqa emerged as a recurring theme in the broad public conversations (Ahmed 2011:195). Addressed at the levels of state as a subject of deep political importance to the West and civilisation, and as a moral justification of war, the subject of women's oppression in Islam has become a flashpoint of conflicts. It evoked a pattern that is rooted in Orientalist discourse and has been played out by older colonialism when women, Islam and the veil have emerged into the foreground as signifiers of 'the clash of civilisations'.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, a generation of Muslim feminist writers and academics emerged who have engaged actively through various public spheres in the process of challenging the prevailing stereotypes of Islam and its women, deeply rooted in the mainstream consciousness, to redefine their Islamic identities within the American context. Dedicated Muslim-American feminists such as Saba Mahmood, Samaa Abdurraquib, Saleemah Abdul Ghafur, Leila Ahmed, G. Willow Wilson and Anisa Mehadi, to name a few, are women who identify as committed Muslims and share a commitment to Islam as a faith and identity. Ahmed indicates that the activism of this generation of American Muslim

feminists has led to the expansion of the field of the study of women in Islam from its relation to legal and scriptural texts into a field of knowledge and scholarship that extends to include a variety of other domains, such as education, journalism and the creative arts. This generation is believed to be the first true generation of American Muslim women who are breaking new grounds in the history of Islam in the West (Ahmed 2011:280; Abdul Ghafur 2005:3).

To this young generation belongs Mohja Kahf, a practising Muslim, feminist poet and writer of Syrian descent. Kahf was born in Damascus, Syria, in 1967. At the age of four, she came to the United States with her family. Her father chose exile because he was a member of the banned Muslim Brotherhood. However, for the young Kahf, this movement was an anti-colonial political movement that was incapable of comprehending all facets of Islam. Kahf grew up deeply critical of the movement's sexist interpretations of Islam, a religion she believes as being intrinsically just and non-sexist.

Like many immigrant Muslim children in diaspora, Kahf found herself struggling between two conflicting worlds, in addition to the fact that people did not know her religion and hated what they thought it represented. The Islamic centre she and her family attended was regularly the target of Ku Klux Klan vandalism[42]. Her experiences growing up in the Midwest had shaped her perception of American Islam, leading her to designate Islam as the main signifier of her identity. The poet, consequently, reinforces her Islamic identity in her work seeking to establish a space for Islamic feminism. Kahf's work exhibits an awareness of the racialisation of her Muslim identity, and therefore, seeks to resist Orientalist representations of Muslim women in mainstream culture, both as oppressed and exotic. Drawing on the work of feminists of colour such as Meyda Yegenoglu, Rana Kabbani and Lisa Lowe, this chapter aims to depict Mohja Kahf's use of the translational mythic figure of Shahrazad to undermine and contest the hegemonic Orientalist digressive stereotypes of Muslim/Arab women. The chapter, furthermore, focuses on the poet's technique of weaving

her discussion of hijab in diaspora through reviving the cultural key figure of Shahrazad in order to resist the embedded Orientalist translation of her culture and self as a woman.

Muslim women living in the United States encounter the tenacity of these stereotypical images embraced by non-Muslim-Americans. Such long-propagated images, though they have been reinforced by Western imperialism, are recently encouraged by the American entertainment industry and governmental justifications of political and military involvement in the Middle East. Given the rising levels of prejudice against Islam in the United States many years prior to September 11 (Haddad et al. 2006:15), it became urgent for Muslims to try to cast a common identity to confirm things that unite them within the framework of Islam, rather than separate them culturally and ideologically. 'We are the children of immigrants from Pakistan, Egypt, Senegal,' writes Saleemah Abdul Ghafur, the editor of the *Living Islam Out Loud* anthology. Abdul Ghafur proceeds, 'We are the distant descendants of African slaves brought to the Americas as well as the children of American men and women who accepted Islam in adulthood' (2005:3).

In *Muslim Women in America* (2006), Yvonne Haddad et al. mention that linking Islam to the violent oppression of women has been used by more than one American administration to 'engender emotional support' for American wars in the Middle East. Further, they go on to describe how this by-product had made life more difficult for Muslim women in the United States who face rising hostility against Islam and Muslims on a daily basis, and struggle with the increasingly popular belief that Islam treats women, at best, as second-class citizens. Responding to Laura Bush's address and citing her words, including her assertion that 'the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the dignity of women', feminist scholars of colour and academics have examined and exposed the fraudulence of such stratagems. Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American activist, argues that this blatant co-opting of the issue of the oppression of women in Islam is meant to serve the imperial wars and domination (2002a). Referring to Cromer as well as to Gayatri Spivak's famous phrase about white men saving

brown women from brown men, Abu- Lughod describes the 'haunting resonances' that the theme of the oppression of women in other cultures had for anyone familiar with colonial history (2002b:783-4).

Furthermore, Abu Lughod denounces the fact that the media focuses on questioning and degrading Islam whilst ignoring what is crucial to Afghan women suffering: the United States' role in creating repressive political regimes in the area throughout the twentieth century. She maintains:

> [i]nstead of questions that might lead to the exploration of global interconnections, we were offered ones that worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres—recasting an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims, cultures where First ladies give speeches versus others where women shuffle around silently in burqas. (2002b: 784)

In "The Active Social Life of Muslim Women's Rights", Abu-Lughod asks 'where is the global feminist campaign against killing such significant numbers of (mostly) Muslim women? Or maiming them, traumatizing them, and killing their children, sisters, mothers, husbands, fathers and brothers' (2010:17). In the same vein, Saba Mahmood, an American Muslim feminist, argues that 'the discourses of feminism and democracy have been hijacked to serve an imperial project'. Further, she warns that 'unless feminists rethink their complicity in his project, feminism runs the risk of becoming more of a handmaiden of empire in our age than a trenchant critic of the Euro-American will to power' (2008:82). Nevertheless, these old imperial and Orientalist ploys have been naturalised and replayed as the United States launched wars in the Middle East. As Leila Ahmed notes, this subject 'remains fraught and charged with political agendas of war and domination' (2011:231). More significantly, however, these old discourses are still pervasive among the wider public.

The veil/hijab remains the most stereotypical symbol of oppression and subordination of Muslim women. The headscarf is considered by American public culture as a signifier of cultural difference (and thereby inferiority), and a threat to secularity, which frames the female body as 'an icon of the clash of civilization' (Haddad et al. 2006: 39), which has resulted in

significant social and political ramifications. The terms hijab[43], veil or a headscarf refer to a head cover, and, moreover, represent Islamic dress—attire that covers arms, legs and hair. Although only a portion of American Muslim women wear the headscarf, Haddad et al. contend that most of the female Muslim population in the United States do agree, regardless of the attire they choose to wear, that Islamic conservative dress does not represent oppression, constriction or any other terms by which Westerners view the Muslim woman's status. For these women, Islamic dress does not entail coercion, but rather symbolises making choices and expressing identity through their mode of dress (Haddad et al. 2006: 9-10).

Feminist scholars and critics argue that the representation of Arab/Muslim woman has been rooted in nineteenth-century Orientalist discourse, which reduces Arab/Muslim women to stereotypes of either seductive sensuality or oppression. The Oriental woman has always been the space upon which preconceptions and perceptions about the East were projected (Gauch 2007; Kabbani 2008; Yegenoglu 1998). In the twenty-first century, nevertheless, the political propaganda of American neo-Orientalism has promoted and reinforced this old Orientalist discourse, producing its own Orientalist version propagated through popular media and Hollywood productions. Such Orientalist configurations have governed and continue to govern the lives and representations of Arab/Muslim women in the United States to date, leading several Arab/Muslim-American women writers to resist these representations by re-appropriating and reviving cultural figures such as Shahrazad to translate their experiences and the tensions governing their affiliations to nations and the outlines of 'race-thinking' (Sabry 2009:175) that continue to shape their lives in their new home, the United States. Pertinent to understanding the work of the Arab-American poet, Mohja Kahf, therefore, is exploring the hijab discourse at the intersections of Orientalism and race studies to understand how the poet disrupts this discourse through rewriting a Shahrazadian narrative.

The Hijab Discourse

Meyda Yegenoglu identifies hijab as 'one of the tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and its women' (1998:39). For Westerners, uncovering the Oriental woman is 'like the unveiling of an enigma, makes visible what is hidden' (Richon 1985:8). The most glaring example of the fear of the other and the associated fantasy of penetration is the obsession of French colonialism with women's hijab in Algeria, which, according to Frantz Fanon, had enabled those colonial administrators to define 'a precise political doctrine: if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide, and in the houses where their men keep them out of sight' (1967:37). Accordingly, the veiled woman is made an object for a branch of knowledge and power, and thereby, Muslim women are classified as a group of people 'who have to be trained or corrected…[and] normalized' (Foucault 1977:191). The calm, rational and civilised European subject goes awry in the fantasies of penetration, indicating that the 'precise political doctrine' is not only a military issue, but rather a defined strategic desire structured through fantasy. Accordingly, the hijab becomes part of a scene that is highly charged with sexual fantasy.

In *Colonial Fantasies* (1998), Meyda Yegenoglu explores how the hijab was manipulated by Western colonialism and nationalist ideologies. In her study, Yegenoglu shows that the desire to penetrate the veiled surface otherness is an essential constituent of the hegemonic, colonial identity. She draws on recent critical theory to undermine both traditional presumptions of Orientalist and Western feminist discourses that claimed to free the Arab/Muslim woman from hijab in the name of progress. Edward Said distinguishes two modes of Orientalism: Manifest Orientalism and its latent content. Manifest Orientalism is the 'various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology and so forth', whereas latent Orientalism embodies the site of the unconscious, where dreams, images

desires, fantasies and fears reside (Said 1979:73). Accordingly, Orientalism stands for the

production of a systematic knowledge and for the site of unconscious desires and fantasies. It

is a system in which the 'Orient is at once an object of knowledge and an object of desire'

(Ibid). Said, however, never elaborates on the nature, or the process and mechanisms involved

in the workings of latent Orientalism. Moving from this point, Yegenoglu uses Lacanian

psychoanalysis to provide convincing theoretical tools for comprehending the functioning of

latent Orientalism.

Yegenoglu identifies Orientalism as a power that is rooted in the production and

dissemination of knowledge, concepts and common sense. This knowledge, however, is driven

by 'lIbidinal economy'. Hence, she subjects Orientalist discourses to a more sexualised

reading to examine the centrality of cultural and sexual difference in formulating

representations of otherness (1998:26). Based on Lacanian fantasy framework, her work

explores the ways in which portrayals of the Orient are governed by sexual imageries and

desires, fears and fantasies. Yegenoglu, thus, organises her interrogations around the hijab by

offering the coordinates of the subject's desire for the other. Europeans offer a variety of

reasons to explain their preoccupation with the 'Oriental veil': civilising, modernising, and

liberating the backward Oriental women, making them speaking subjects. However, Joan

Copjec asserts that there has been no rational explanation to justify the West's obsession with

lifting the hijab, for it is 'an obsession nourished by fantasy' and, hence, belongs to the realm

of desire (1989:87).

Yegenoglu assumes the hijab as occupying the Lacanian '*object petit a*'[44], the object

causing desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Jacques Lacan coins the term 'objet petit a (*l'objet

petit a*), to symbolise the unattainable object of desire. The 'a' stands for 'autre' (other), and,

hence, the term is translated as 'little o-object', so that the primary significance of the 'objet

petit a' lies in being the Other's 'little object'. Lacan uses the term 'objet petit a' to refer to

what is most inaccessible in the object of desire. He describes the 'objet petit a' as something

that 'falls out' of the symbolic order, as a 'remainder'. It emerges out of a gap or lack in the symbolic order, it functions as an imaginary compensation for the symbolic castration of the subject (Lacan 1981:105). Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Yegenoglu explains that such an object 'does not exist objectively, but is constructed retroactively by the subject' (Yegenoglu 1998:46). In this respect, 'an interested look supported, permeated and distorted by desire' transforms the hijab into an 'object petit a' (Zizek1989: 34). Therefore, due to the significance of fantasy in Lacan's exploration of sexual relationships, Yegenoglu perceives fantasy as 'a scenario filling out the fundamental lack in the subject caused by a splitting in the language' (Yegenoglu 1998:46). Hence, she explains that the European obsession with the hidden Oriental life and with the woman behind it has led to an overrepresentation of Oriental women to fill in for the lack posed by a closed space (Yegenoglu 1998:73).

Analysing an ample array of nineteenth-century travel writing, Yegenoglu maintains that these Orientalist writings reveal that the presence of the veiled woman, 'fading under her sign', has disturbed the patriarchal subjectivity of Europeans, displaying an obsession that has resulted in a textual dialectic, which, in turn, gave rise to the 'tropology of the veil'. This rhetoric transforms the difference into a manipulable and enjoyable object of discourse, thereby providing the European subject with a sense of the fictive unity and command of his experience (Yegenoglu 1998:47). To reinforce its humanity, the West had to create its others as monsters and slaves. In a different register, Spivak depicts the relationship between 'the imperialist subject' and the 'subject of humanism' as both sharing 'the sovereign subject' status of authorship, authority and legitimacy (1989:10). To establish its position as 'human civilised', the Western subject, therefore, inscribes its others as primitive and backward, and thereby places native cultures out of history. In colonial conditions, the production of this modernity and universality was premised on denying freedom and autonomy to native cultures (Bhabha 1994:198). The colonial task of mastering the other was endorsed by anthropological representations. The unequal relation between the West and the Third World was articulated in

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anthropology's task to provide epistemological tools available to the observing Western gaze by 'constructing a linear time through which the relation between the West and the rest was inscribed as temporal distance' (Yegenoglu 1998:96).

Accordingly, the anthropologists' concerns in knowing and representing the Orient have become demonstrative of what it lacks. In the context of Islamic societies, Talal Asad suggests that Orientalists' concerns in comparing and contrasting the Orient with their own civilisation are to show the absence of liberty, progress and humanism in these societies, confirming that the reason for this absence resides in the religious essence of Islam: irrationality is discovered in tradition, and barbarism is evidenced in various cultural and religious practices (1995:115). Hence, the barbaric Orient has to be tamed and civilised by reorganising the 'capillaries of Oriental cultures' according to the principles of the 'modern', 'progressive' and 'civilised' West (Yegenoglu1998:97).

The issue of women has occupied a significant position in colonial and anthropological discourses. A central element in justification of the colonial project is criticism of the religious traditions and the culture of Oriental societies that are perceived to be savagely oppressing women. This Enlightenment rhetoric considers the backwardness and barbaric elements of Islamic culture, believed to cause the enslavement and imprisonment of Muslim women, as the target upon which to work. Yegenoglu explains that the association between 'the Orient and its woman' lies at the heart of Enlightenment discourse. Such association made stripping off the veil of paramount importance 'for unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the signified the transformation of the Orient itself' (Yegenoglu 1998:99). Therefore, the desire to unveil the Arab/Muslim woman is a key element in the larger progressive agenda that operates according to the premise of 'the incompatibility of Islam with Western modernity' (Ibid).

Viewed as a symbol of Islamic culture's essentialism, the hijab has always been perceived as an obstacle to modernisation. With this portrayal of Islamic cultures, the 'harem, the veil and polygamy' have become 'highly charged symbols' in the twenty-first century

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United States (Jiwani 2004:267). They function as embodiments of women's oppression, and further nourish the imperial desire with 'a most exquisite example for designating the target of change' (Ahmed 2011:230-31). In her introduction to the catalogue of the London Tate Museum's 2008 symposium "Orientalism Revisited: Art and the Politics of Representation", Rana Kabbani disputes the significance of celebrating Orientalist Art. Kabbani explains that revisiting this topic in 2008 reinforces the 'validity of reconsidering Orientalism in relation to current vital issues shaping our globalized world such as race and diaspora'. Also, she insists that neo-Orientalist bad faith 'remains in our time the essential underpinning of Western foreign policy towards the Arab and Islamic world' (Kabbani 2009:16).

In "Copulation in English" Kahf aims to deconstruct the sovereignty of the colonial narrative of her culture and self as a woman by contesting the purity and supremacy of English language:

> We are going to dip English backward
> By its Shakespearean tresses
> Arcing its spine like a crescent
> We are going to rewrite English in Arabic
> —— يـاعِين ، يـاعِين ——
> and all the languages of our blood
> We are going to give English the makeover of its lifetime,
> darkening the rims of its eyes with Hindi antimony,
> making it blush Farsi roses
> لــيلاــ لــيلــي لــيل لــيلــي لــيل لــيل لــيلــي لــيل لــيلــي لــيل ——
> (2003:71)

This introductory stanza establishes the theme and the irreverent and scornful tone of the poem. Challenging the supremacy of English language in an extended metaphor throughout the poem reinforces the poet's contempt for and attack on the colonial enterprise in the area. Opposing the personal pronoun 'We' to 'English' as a single entity suggests an unbalanced and asymmetrical power relation between the two. Although the poem focuses on the non-reciprocated relationship between Arabic and English, the pronoun 'We' may stand for all the colonised nations influenced by British imperialism and not only Arabs. In Arabic, the

expressions (يــاعين ، يــاعين —) and (— لــيل يــليل لــيل يــليل لــيل لــيل), respectively translated by the poet as (how sweet, how sweet) and (the night, the night), derived from the Andalusian poetic form muwashsha and mainly used in classic Arabic songs, function as interjection implying approval and admiration of what has been said or suggested. Ending the English lines with these Arabic expressions of admiration and approval suggests poet's unwavering belief in sustaining hybridity and difference and their significant effect on English and its culture.

Paradoxically, a patriarchal overtone dominates the poem; a tone that is reversed, however. In the lines above the 'Shakespearean tresses' is a metaphor in which English is compared to a noble girl who is malaltered and tormented by the insertion of Arabic, Hindi, and Farsi. Kahf reverses the historical hierarchy between English, the master's language, and its subjects. Verbs such as 'dip', arc', rewrite', and 'darken' suggest the subjugation of English that appeared helpless and incapable of confronting abuses initiated by a group of twenty-first 'new bullies' as the second stanza reveals. In Kahf's poem English is rendered as the object that is penetrated by the Occident. According, Homi Bhabha, hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures (1995:61). The entry of Arabic language on the English text in this poem deconstructs the series of inclusions and exclusions on whish the hegemonic culture and its language are premised. Being the master's language, English is contaminated by the difference of the native Arab in Kahf's case. Thus, hybridity becomes a counter-narrative that critiques and resists the canon for its exclusion of other narratives. The migration of the colonised to the centre underlies 'a blessing invasion that, by "Third-Worlding" the center, creates "fissures" within the very structure that sustain it.

In the second stanza the challenging and bullying tone continues as the poet proceeds in describing how the power relation between the two languages has reversed:

> We are going to make English dizzy
> until English vomits its history, Norman, Saxon, Celtic, down
> to its Druid dregs

We won't stop playing with English
We are the new bullies in the schoolyard
[…]
We will bewilder English in the Aramaic Jesus
الـهي الـهي ... الوهيم الوهيم ، لما شفـقتني

We know its biblical heart better than it knows itself
and hold the blades of these lilies-of-the-valley
against its jugular vein (Kahf 2003:71)

The poem persists in its scornful tone, which appears to be more assured as starting each line with the capitalised first person plural pronoun 'We'. The function of nosism in this text can be interpreted into two ways. Given the poet's religious and linguistic background, nosism can be interpreted as a royal we that it is used as a metaphor of greatness and has its origins in the Quran. Alluding to its function in the Quran, it is depicted as a sign of greatness as Almighty Allah uses the plural pronoun 'We' for Himself. Accordingly, the poet attempts to reverse authoritarian roles and status by portraying colonised nations as dignified and glorious as opposed to the coloniser. Simultaneously, the nosism here assumes a dominant and authoritarian role that aims to bring cultural and linguistic changes into English throughout the poem and acting as 'the new bullies'.

The line (الـهي الـهي ... الوهيم الوهيم ، لما شفـقتني) is the Arabic version of the Aramaic *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'* which is translated, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46), which is Jesus' cry from the cross. Employing biblical rhetoric reveals the poet's knowledge of Christianity and Jesus' message in the world, which has been maliciously carried out and tarnished by the colonial enterprise. Referring to English's 'biblical heart' and revealing its 'blades', the poet sarcastically questions the missionary and civilised objectives of the colonial and civilised objectives of the colonial enterprise. By comparing the aims and objectives of the colonial enterprise to 'lilies-of-the-valley' in their catching beauty and toxicant effects on the colonised, the poet aims to unmask the weapons through which colonialism was carried out. And furthermore, she indicates that

the colonised will use the same weapon to attack the master's language and tarnish its purity. Hence the use of Arabic verses without translation within the poem aims to shake the entire composition. It functions as a powerful weapon that threatens the sovereignty of English, depletes its power, and intoxicate its linguistic system.

In the penultimate stanza, however, the intense confrontation between the two languages takes a different path. It becomes a turbulent passion between two stubborn lovers:

> We are going to make English love us
> And kiss us and explore us with its tongues
> Then we will play hard-to-get
> And English will have to phone
> And leave message after message of desire on our machine
> English will have to learn what to say to please us:
> تذللـت تذللـت، حـتى رق لـي قلب حـاسـدي

<div align="right">(Kahf 2003:71)</div>

In an erotic overtone, the poem traces an irresistible attraction, though non-reciprocated, governing the relationship between coloniser and the colonised where desperate love and desire replaced earlier antagonism. Driven by such lustful passion for their coloniser, the colonised have become relentless suitors as the Arabic verse above indicates: 'I humbled myself until even my enemy wept for me'. Replacing the capitalised personal plural pronoun in the first line with 'we" in the third line indicates the retreat of the confrontational tone that has predominated the first two stanzas in favour of the suitor's humbleness. Such a techniques also indicates an obvious shift in focus and attitude. English becomes the focus of the rest of the poem as it acquires the status of a desired noble lady whose love is eagerly sought by her devoted lover as the Arabic verse indicates. It is a quote from Sabah Fakhry's song—a Syrian classic singer—that is translated as (I humbled myself until even my enemy wept for me'.

The last stanza reinforces Kahf's poetics and politics of difference. It sensually highlights the significance of cultural and linguistic hybridity and difference:

> English has never tasted anything this purple,
> seen mangos this bursting, trickling down its poems,
> pomegranates spraying the tart red seeds
> over its stories like white linen

English has never smelled cardamom this ecstatic
or breathed rhetoric this thick with love

English will come to us hoarse with the passion
we will have taught English to have
and English will never be the same and will never regret us
[…]

وإذا الفــجـــر مطل كــالحـــريق

(Kahf 2003:72)

The erotic tone continues with more sensual reinforcement to highlight the effect of the

linguistic and cultural interactions between English and its former colonies. The lines above

illustrate how the five senses collaborate to intensify the effect of such diversity and cultural

interaction. The strong colours of purple, red, and white, with their contrasting effects

dominate the scene in addition to the exotic cardamom with its strong taste and intensely

aromatic fragrance. The conceit employed in this poem seems to originate from earlier

Orientalist imagery of the exotic. The poet uses the exotic elements to contest the purity of the

master's language. Paradoxically, Kahf uses such exotic elements that once perceived as signs

of backwardness as means establishing new order, and of building new and different bridges

between the coloniser and the colonised so that beauty, serenity, and love may replace earlier

fear, contempt and antagonism.

Concluding the poem with the Arabic verse (وإذا الفــجـــر مطل كــالحـــريق), translating

as 'Here comes the down upon us like fire'—a quote from an Um Kulthoum song—the most

famous Arab singer throughout modern Arab history, reinforces the poet's aim of seeking a

new beginnings that is not based on hegemonic hierarchies, but instead a relationship that is

based on tolerating and accepting difference. In the last stanza Kahf aims to demonstrate how

intermingling and interacting with Arabic and other languages brings to English fresh colours

and scents and by extension fresh cultural perspectives. The poet seeks to erase claims for

inherent cultural purity either Arabic or English. She seeks to inhabit an in-between realm of

reality marked by shifting cultural boundaries. In this context, I find Jacque Derrida's

comment on monolingualism is illuminating here. In *Monolingualism* (1998) Derrida illustrates how monolingualism debases language to a homogenous system and is rooted in violent linguistic interdiction. He contends that 'the monolingualism imposed by the other operates by relying upon that foundation, here, through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial which, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogenous' (39-40).

In "Copulation in English" Kahf aims to trouble the normativity of English and interrupts her poem with Arabic words and verses. The strategy of inserting Arabic language without translation or explicatory notes within the text enables the poet to 'inscribe alterity' (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998:63) within English to solicit her readers' curiosity and widen their cultural background. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that introducing untraslated words within a text indicates 'a sense of cultural distinctiveness' that forces readers to overcome the limitations of their own culture (Ibid). By opening up English and mixing it with other languages such as Arabic, the poet celebrates multilingualism as a potential resides in languages, as a means of building bridges, and as a useful device that enables intercultural negotiations and transnational affiliations. Multilingualism, according to Peter Auer and Li Wei, 'offers society a bridge-building potential between different groups beyond the artificial boundaries of a nation, and bridges fro the cross-fertilization between cultures' (12). Composed in 1997, this poem introduces Kahf's politics of difference and hybridity that foregrounds her later work in the post September 11 era, particularly her call for accepting Muslim women and their cultural and religious and social life styles as different but not alien.

American Orientalism

Orientalist imagery was introduced in the United States in the nineteenth-century in the forms of paintings, photographs and fashion through descriptive accounts of merchants and

travellers. Emerging from an Orientalist mind-set, it has established 'an intellectual shorthand' for representing the Middle East popular media throughout the twentieth century (Edwards 2003: 16-17). In her introduction to *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*, Nadine Naber mentions that in *Innocent Abroad* (1889), Mark Twain sketches images of Arabs as a group that was 'by nature and training filthy, brutish, ignorant, unprogressive and superstitious' (2008:24). By the end of the nineteenth century, the sexualisation of the Middle East and elements of exoticism were introduced through images of the Orient at the Chicago World Fair in 1893, in which the Orient appeared 'different and exotic, complete with mosque, bazaar, harem, and belly dancers to titillate Victorian Americans" (Little 2008:13).

In the early twentieth century, the Orient emerges in American popular culture and Hollywood films as an exotic space where American desires could be fulfilled. In these productions, the Muslim woman appeared as symbolising 'the availability of Eastern Land for Western penetrating knowledge and possession' (Shohat and Stam 1994:148-9). Also, in *Reel Bad Arabs*, the Arab-American Jack Shaheen unfolds a problematic history from silent cinema to Hollywood blockbusters featuring Bedouin bandits, sinister sheiks and bomb-blowing evil Arabs. In this comprehensive study of more than one thousand films, Shaheen documents the consistent dehumanised and vilifying stereotyping of Arab men and women. The study concludes that throughout the history of the American cinema industry, Muslim Arabs have been portrayed as the 'First Public Enemy', brutal, heartless, and uncivilised others who are obsessed with terrorising civilised westerners. Shaheen maintains that representations of Muslim/Arab woman were cast in three categories: 'the exotic belly dancer', 'the terrorist', and 'the submissive, victimised bundle in black' (2009:7-9).

Obviously, these representations indicate the prominence of an Orientalist discourse that insists on rendering Muslims and Arabs as symbolising villainy and brutality. However, this representation has been defined and determined by the United States' imperial enterprise in the Arab world from the middle decades of the twentieth century. Naber explains that

political and economic expansions have always directly influenced how images of Arabs have been created in popular media. All the events, starting from the 1970s' United States-Arab oil wars to the Iraq War in 2003, and the United States' continual support of Israel, have galvanised an agenda of American imperialist expansion in the Middle East, which has influenced the Arabs' portrayal in popular media (Naber 2008:34). Arabs were portrayed as backward and underdeveloped people who needed to be rescued by Western civilisation (Little 2008:17). '[W]ith the waning of Britain's power, and waxing of America after 1945, something very like Said's Orientalism seems subconsciously to have shaped U.S. popular attitudes and foreign policies toward the Middle East,' suggests Little (2008:10).

However, a central critique of Said's Orientalism is its construction of hegemony as 'an all-pervasive field of knowledge' that became almost impossible to resist (Bhabha 1994; Yegenoglu 1998). Perceiving Orientalism as a 'single determining' discourse makes it very difficult to explore women's possible subject positions. Therefore, feminist critics such as Lisa Lowe attempt to identify schemes to explore the heterogeneity of the Oriental objects to develop Said's analysis of Orientalism. Yegenoglu maintains that Said identifies hegemony as 'a multi-layered grid of multiple institutions that is always governed by a dynamic process'. Driven to 'incorporate society's elements of resistance, hegemony continually makes "slippages" that lead to compromise and change accordingly' (Yegenoglu 1998:8-9). For Lowe, thereby, these 'slippages' can be designated as 'the central zones for resisting its hegemonic tendencies' (1991:5). Further, she argues that resistance can be initiated through re-articulating these 'slippages' or prohibitions since '[they] signify differently depending on social contexts and on whether they are articulated by dominant or emerging relations of representation' (Lowe 1991:91).

Situated within such a context, Shahrazadian narrative becomes a space for depicting possibilities of resistance in Mohja Kahf's and other Arab-American women's writings. Lowe also acknowledges 'the power of cultural quotation', and explains that repeating cultural

symbols results in confining the Oriental woman's image within 'a limiting nexus of various modes of representation' (Lowe 1991:2-3). In her poetry, Kahf seeks to unsettle such a 'nexus of representation' related to Shahrazad and *The One Thousand and One Nights*. Through the figure of Shahrazad, Kahf attempts to undermine both oppressive and sensual Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women in discourses of Orientalist literature and paintings, in addition to the emancipatory feminist discourse that imposes Western cultural paradigms on Third World women.

Feminist scholars have written extensively on the significance of the tale of *One Thousand and One Nights* (1885)[45] and its relation to liberation, desire and resistance. In *Liberating Shahrazad*, Suzanne Gauch discusses how Arab women writers from the Maghreb revive the figure of Shahrazad as one of resistance, foregrounding her storytelling as a liberating agency. However, the Arab-American poet and writer Mohja Kahf explores in her work what happens to Shahrazad when she lives in the Arab-American diaspora, her 'contested home in the present global, and political power dialectics', resulting from the "war on terrorism" and the American occupation of Iraq (Abu-Lughod 2002b:784). Abu-Lughod states that global capitalist politics shaping translation and interpretation are rather significant in framing the configurations and portrayal of Arab-American women. Within such contexts, translation as a cultural interchange becomes central, because the translator's gaze depicts women's lives within Western lenses**.** These contexts have always portrayed Muslim/Arab women as standing outside history and confined in static social systems. Hence, in Arab-American diaspora, the tale of Shahrazad has become a translational narrative that opens a window on another culture.

Within the context of the cultural implications of translation, Wolfgang Iser discusses the inexorability of cultures translating each other. He writes:

> [M]any different cultures have come into close contact with one another, calling for mutual understanding in terms, not only of one's own culture but also of those

encountered. The more alien the latter, the more inevitable is some form of translation. (1996:5)

Iser reinforces the importance of cultural translation as a means of communication, in addition to its significance in bridging the gap between different cultures. Accordingly, the story of Shahrazad can be viewed as a space for cultural negotiations. From this stance, Kwame Anthony Appiah explores the full import of narratives as translational and cultural linking space, particularly when they are not contained within politics. He identifies 'cultural translation' as:

> A different human capacity that grounds our sharing: namely the grasp of a narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imaginations respond, […] the basic human capacity to grasp stories, even strange stories, is also what links us powerfully to others, even strange others. (Appiah 2010:257)

This 'human capacity to grasp stories' has urged Kahf and other Arab-American women writers to explore, through the figure of Shahrazad, 'complexities of negotiating their actual lives in contrast to mainstream representations of themselves' (Sabry 2009:7). Therefore, it is pertinent to the purpose of this chapter to examine the figure of Shahrazad as a site of cultural translation whilst tracing its transmutability throughout different translations that had contributed to instilling and reinforcing the images and stereotypes of Muslim/Arab women either as seductresses or helpless victims bundled in black.

Shahrazad as a Space of Cultural Translation

In her book *Arab-American Women Writing and Performance: Orientalism, Race and the Idea of the Arabian Nights,* Somaya Sabry observes that in the original version of the tales, women were configured as 'active participants in the events around them [and] not helpless victims of their circumstances'. This active participation was epitomised in the figure of Shahrazad, the narrator who decides to marry the king, against her father's advice, to implement her plan of storytelling to save the lives of other women. Sabry, moreover, notes, 'Shahrazad's empowered intellectual abilities, in Arabic culture, were gradually diminished

through extensive footnotes in the translations of Edward Lane (1839-1940) and Sir Richard Burton (1885-1888)' (2009:13). These translations rendered Sharazad as the 'exotic/oppressed stereotype', and medieval Islamic societies as the 'unchanging historically de-contextualized "Arablands"' (Sabry 2009:12-13).

Muhsin Al-Musawi, an Arab critic, states that 'there is no trope that can accommodate the colonial desire better than the enormous taste for *The Thousand and One Nights* as signified in the title given to the tales by the anonymous Grub Street translator, *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*' (2003:72). As Al-Musawi indicates, the change of the title symbolises imperialistic ambition and desire as this text became a symbol of an Arab monolith. It is very important to note, though, that both Persian and Arabic titles do not include the word (Arabian) or even refer to it, because the text is a collection of tales and events from Persia, India and the Arab world. Therefore, attempting to confine and affix a particular culture within the frame of these tales can be viewed as an effort empowered by imperialistic motivation

Critics affirm that the most well-known and influential English translations of *The Nights* were those of Edward Lane (1839-1840), John Payne (1882-1884) and Richard Burton (1885-1888). Nevertheless, through notes, prefaces and other insertions, these translators have blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction (Sallis 1999; Sironval 2006; Yamanaka and Nishio 2006). According to Margaret Sironval, Burton's translation was distinguished by its extensive notes signifying 'the nineteenth-century craze for anthropology and ethnology', which turned the text into Burton's 'personal East' and not a 'written account of an actual East' (2006:240). In the same vein, Sabry describes Lane's translation as shaped by his *Description of Egypt* (1828), although it does not consist of extensive notes (2009:40). These insights are in parallel with Said's discussion of the significant role of these translations in creating the image of the Orient 'through a process of citation' (Ibid).

In *Imagining the Holy Land: Models, and Fantasy Travels* (2003), Burke O. Long shows how the vision of the Holy Land was shaped by American ideals of Christianity and

Judaism. Through examining a wide range of material, including educational and theme parks models, photographs, books, maps and travellers' accounts, the volume demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, these resources were responsible for firing the popular imagination with fantasies of the 'Holy Land'. Through such accounts and representations, Americans sought to bring the Holy Land to America by transforming this place from a singular religious space into multi-layered spaces charged with symbolism. Describing Chautauqua's Palestine Park, Long observes, 'Realism was the driving aim, fantasy the enabling impulse' (2003:30).

In Arab societies, *The Nights* was mainly an oral form of entertainment, which aimed to provoke the imaginative fancies of its listeners. The nineteenth-century translations have transmuted these tales into an anthropological text. This text had become the main tool for objectifying an entire culture as it highlighted the objects representing the background of the environment of the tales, such as genii, magical lamps, flying horses and carpets. Though these objects were accessories to the meaning in the original text, they have become the main focus upon which Western readers fixated, which has made their cultural assumptions inadequate (Sallis 1999:9-10). Eva Sallis explains that 'if the reader is essentially ignorant of life in Islamic society, he or she tends to read for the exotic: to make a foreground…that which, for the text is a background' (1999:10). Due to insufficient knowledge of the tales and its position in the source language, the imaginations of nineteenth-century Western writers and translators have created an image of the Middle East that is exotic.

As the colonial project was set out in its modern form, *The Nights* was introduced and perceived as a realistic account of the Middle East and all its peoples. 'The manipulation of this text for purposes beyond its role—that is of entertainment—in the original culture, creates disjunction between its function in Arabic culture and its function as designated through nineteenth-century translations,' Sabry expounds (2009:50). For Sallis, a translation is rather a window on other literatures and cultures: 'a window, not a door—we look, but do not pass to the other side' (1999:7). However, nineteenth-century translations of *The Nights* were

perceived as an anthropological text that offered knowledge of the Middle East and its diverse populations. The nineteenth-century text was considered a source of knowledge on these people and their culture, and not a literary 'window'.

Throughout history, these tales underwent substantial changes that had transformed them from an oral tale of entertainment into an anthropological text. In the tenth century, they were recombined in Iraq for the first time. Four centuries later, they were expanded in Egypt with other tales. By the end of the eighteenth century, new manuscripts were created, and since then, the text took its modern form. Sironval explains how '[m]anuscripts, translations, [and] editions of [*T*]*he Nights* bring new variants as the story passes on from one translator to another, from one edition to another, and from one illustrator to another. This transmission is linked to historical, cultural and social developments' (2006:219-220). Early translators of the tales were definitely influenced by Britain's imperial interests in the 'Arablands'. Obviously, their approach to the text was influenced by the understanding that 'an influential translation between substantially polarised cultures is a political act, sometimes, even an act of sabotage or cold war (Sallis 1999:9). This 'politically-driven' reception of *The Nights* in England strongly impacted its reception in the United States. As the text travelled across the Atlantic to the United States, it became more evident that 'malleability was the governing characteristic' that has shaped the interpretation (Sabry 2009:50-51).

Just as the background of *The One Thousand and One Nights* was fetishised and exoticised, so was Shahrazad, the heroine and narrator. Sallis maintains that Shahrzad's physical beauty is never mentioned in the original, and that she is 'a matchless beauty' is but a 'European interpolation', implying a lack of appreciation of the heroine's intellectual power (2006:102). Sketching Shahrazad as 'a matchless beauty' diminishes her intellectual and narrative powers, reducing them to sheer sexual prowess, from which the seductive belly dancer stereotype has originated. In addition, through these various translations, Shahrazad was mistakenly interpreted as a victim who strived through storytelling to save her life. Not

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only does this misreading make Shahrazad a willing victim, but also, more importantly, denies her the agency and intellect to devise an agenda of reformation. All these translations have ignored the fact that it is Shahrazad who insisted on marrying the king, despite her father's disapproval of her scheme and wishes.

As mentioned earlier, Shahrazad's story was introduced collaterally with Britain's nineteenth-century colonial endeavour and Orientalist practices relating to it. Pertinent to the Empire's goal was to interpret *The Nights* as an indication of Arab women's passivity and lack of agency to justify Britain's imperial project in the area. Arab women were imprisoned by their culture, just as Shahrazad was captured by the king, Shahrayar. Within this context, Kahf argues that the Muslim/Arab woman became 'a glamorous, shining prize to be sought for and acquired through virile competition with other members of the male world' (1999:153). Orientalist renderings of Muslim/Arab women demonstrate how this woman epitomises the effeminacy of the Islamic world that British imperialism strove to conquer. Kahf further elucidates that the Muslim/Arab woman became 'a diaphanous non-being who reveals what Islamic despotism does to effeminate "Oriental" man. She is a lesson in what Enlightened Western man congratulates himself he has been able to avoid—although he is not above deriving voyeuristic pleasure from her, both as a narrator and reader' (1999:138).

Sallis states that Edward Lane's translation intentionally disempowers Shahrazad to fit her into the model of 'Victorian Miss yearning', which led 'the text to read either [Shahrazad] will die, saving only the girl she replaces, or the women will be saved with her… either noble or a martyr, whereas the real Sheherazade is a woman determined to end an intolerable situation by persuasion, cunning or force' (1999:104-105). This disparagement of Shahrazad's agency and subjectivity has instilled the early seeds of the dominant stereotypes of either a silent willing victim or a sensual seductress that have, for long decades, beleaguered representations of Muslim/Arab women and, by extension, Muslim-American women. One of the most unique features of Shahrazdian narrative is how she 'controls the

relations between desire and the text', according to Fedwa Malti-Doughlas, an Arab-American feminist critic. Malti-Douglas argues that '[t]his manipulation of narrative desire is far more than merely a means of gaining time […] it is a key pedagogical tool [enabling] Shaharazad shifts the problem of desire from the area of sex, the realm of Shahriyar's trauma, to the superficially more distant and more malleable world of the text' (2006:22).

Gauch explains that Shahrazad's exoticisation and victimisation have become obstacles in the way of Muslim/Arab-American women writers because 'their images have been so overdetermined' and that these writers 'crossing the imaginary frontier between Orient and Occident always reverberate bidirectionally' so that 'unequal distributions of wealth and power […] create seemingly insurmountable divisions out of religious, cultural and social differences' (2007:xii). Thereby, attempting to rewrite Shahrazad in twenty-first century America, Mohja Kahf seeks to challenge the stereotyping of Sharazad as a monolith of Muslim/Arab women for two reasons: firstly, and most importantly, to foreground her voice and agency to represent herself; and, secondly, to halt the co-option of the representations of Muslim-American women in the service of the United States' imperialism. As Gauch argues of Maghrebian women writers, who have revived Shahrazad in their writings, Kahf attempts to 'elaborate complex relations to those [she] represent[s] as well as to [her] audience, [her] stories like Shahrazad's, call for boundary-crossing, multi directional, ever-evolving analysis' (2007:xiii).

Reviving Shahrazad and Contemporary Odalisques in Diaspora

In the poetry collection *E-mails From Scheherazad*, Mohja Kahf revives Shahrazad as a twenty-first century poet, divorced writer and lover to refract attempts at paralysing Shahrazad within dominant racist and Orientalist frames dating back to nineteenth-century colonial translations of *The Nights*. Paul Gilroy warns against the immobilising effects of freezing identities. He points out that if identities do not undergo a constant process of

development and social interaction, they soon become close to 'the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of particularity and its equally well fortified neighbors' (2004:103).

In "If the Odalisque" and "Thawrah de Odalisque at Matisse Retrospective", Kahf articulates the carnality problem of representation facing Muslim women, whilst pointing to the fact that the odalisque figure is central in freezing Muslim women within the passive portrayal of the odalisque in the paintings of European Orientalist artists. The word 'odalisque' is a French word derived from the Turkish word 'odalik' referring to a harem slave servant. The word consists of two syllables: (oda) means room, and odalisque means the woman in the room, or the concubine of the Sultan confined to an enclosed space, whereas (jariyah) is the Arabic equivalent of the word, meaning a female servant. Obviously, the Western rendition of the word indicates how Orientalist leaning has shaped Western representations of Middle Eastern women. Mernissi compares the connotations of the word in the two languages: 'while odalisque refers to a space, jarya refers to an activity…it comes from [Jara], to run' (2001:36). According to Jane Miller, the odalisque is the space where the Muslim/Oriental woman's body has become an exotic object, to be explored by, and exposed to, colonial gaze. Miller elaborates, 'The East also is a woman, however: a womb, female in its vulnerability and weakness and otherness and in its seductiveness, fertility and profitability' (1991:115).

In "Thawrah de Odalisque at Matisse Retrospective", these odalisques have decided to cover their bodies and heads, revolting against their fabricated images that have reduced them into fetish objects. This five-page poem limns a melodrama of 'thawrah' (a revolution), a comic and inventive revolution forced by all the odalisques in Matisse's paintings. An odalisque describes this revolution:

> *Yawm min al-ayyam* we just decided: Enough is enough
> A unique opportunity, the Retrospective brought us all together
> I looked across the gallery at Red Culottes and gave the signal
> She passed it on to Woman in Veil and we kicked
> through canvas

[…]
"She must be so uncomfortable in that position"
these two museumgoers murmured in front of Two Odalisques
Suddenly I felt my back aching
A seventy-five year kind of ache
I scattered the chessboard I had been painted with (Kahf 2003:64)

After two hijab-wearing women passed the paintings in the Matisse exhibit and uttered comments sympathising with these odalisques for their uncomfortable poses, the contingent of these painted odalisques decided to break away from their painterly and patriarchal captivity. In these paintings, the odalisques are portrayed as sitting in harem rooms, lounging idly as part of the colourful background and, consequently, epitomising available sexuality. In Western cultures and discourses, Muslim odalisques have been viewed and rendered as 'intimidating seducers, … "wanton"…completely emptied of volition, [and] ready to submit erotic conquest', Kahf expounds (1999:152). Frozen in these paintings and positions, Muslim women serve as 'bearer[s]' rather than 'maker[s]' of meaning: 'the meaning that the Muslim woman bears in the Romantic text is apparent from the unmistakable fetishizing nature of the gaze directed at her' (Kahf 1999:161). For European artists such as Matisse, Muslim women —emptied of volition and drained of subjectivity— became 'the limp shimmering object of a fetishizing male gaze', notes Kahf (1999:8).

The poem depicts a contingent of Matisse odalisques who felt tired of being nailed to the wall in positions that did not suit them. After long years of silenced torment and anguish for being left 'uncomfortable in that position', they have decided 'enough is enough' and, hence, revolted against this situation. The first phrase in the poem, '*Yaum min al-ayyam*', meaning once upon a time, indicates the narrative style that sets the poem in a web of narratives through which the narrator tells (her story) of objectification and misrepresentation. The poem depicts the physical suffering these odalisques have endured throughout history as a result of being frozen in these postures for long decades. Whilst some of them now have 'icy nipples' and are 'coughing/ the draft in the gallery had gone straight to their chests', others

feels their 'back aching/ a seventy-five year kind of ach' (Kahf 2003:64). Also, one of them

has 'a migraine…from…/ sitting and starring at her gold fish swim in circles/ around, around,

around, around/ till the fish was woman and woman was fish' (Kahf 2003:65).

These lines illustrate how the Orientalist gaze and perceptions have objectified Muslim

and Oriental women, ripped off their agency and individuality and reduced them to exotic

sexual objects. Capturing Oriental odalisques in Western paintings symbolises their position in

Western culture. Kahf mentions that the portrayal of the Muslim woman constitutes clusters of

elements in which the following are key: 'irredeemable difference and exoticism; intense

sexuality, excessive ornamentation and association with fetish objects; and finally,

powerlessness in the form of imprisonment, enslavement, seclusion, silence, or invisibility'

(1999:8). Therefore, by capitalising the words 'Woman', 'Veil', 'Two Odalisques', the poet

aims to disrupt this representation and narrative of the Muslim woman, offering her agency

that transforms her from being an object into an effective subject who is capable of change.

Asia (1946) and *Zulma* (1950) decided to lead the revolution:

> Asia and Zulma, older, led the procession
> "Everyone whose arms are numb from sleeping on them,
> raise your hands'
> Blue Nude decided she was with us
>   because of her eyes and her posture
> Pink Nude wanted in though she wasn't an odalisque
> because "that bastard, my ass is cold from these blue tiles/ and I can't love a
> man who made my head smaller than my tits
> almost an afterthought" (Kahf 2003:64-5)

Many odalisques joined, including *Pink Nude* (1935)[46], who was not an odalisque. She was

Matisse's model and studio assistant, Lydia Delectorskaya (BBC)[47]. The participation of *Pink

Nude* reflects the poet's genuine feminist preoccupation. She articulates her political resistance

through the prism of feminism. Also, it can be interpreted as a plea for Western feminism to

acknowledge the positions and struggles of Middle Eastern women, despite their difference as

part of the world's feminist cause, since all women are subjugated to the male's gaze.

Embracing their powers, these angry odalisques 'tore down museum banners' for their unrealistic and unjust labelling, and used them to dress nude odalisques who wanted clothes.

Matisse's odalisques, nevertheless, realise that their revolution passes unnoticed and that the public would always prefer to embrace mythology rather than lived experiences (Shaheen 2009:9); therefore, soon 'Pink Nude got the most movie offers/ *Playboy* tried to talk off the pants off the Culottes/ *Vintage* offered a lucrative advance to With Magnolias/ for a book deal/ with promos on *Good Morning America'* (Kahf 2003:266). Instead of acknowledging their struggle and quest for freedom, these women continue to be objectified and commodified by mainstream media in the United States.

> The odalisque narrator expresses her frustration because their voices went unheard:
>
> No one wanted to know about us
> Statements were issued on our behalf
> by Arab nationalists, Iranian dissidents, Western feminists
> The National Organization for Women got annoyed
> after some of us put on *hijab,*
> and wouldn't let us speak at their rally,
> but wanted us up on their dais as tokens of diversity
> Then someone spread conspiracy rumors about us
> among the Arabs (Kahf 2003:66)

Neither Arab nationalism, nor Western feminism or ideologies of any stripe, would be able to subjugate Kahf's self-liberated odalisques. In the lines above, the narrator highlights the predicaments facing Arab and Arab-American women, who are torn between the prejudices of Western feminism and the patriarchy of Arab nationalism. The Arab-American feminist Susan Muddi Darraj echoes a similar ethos:

> [T]he battle against sexism fought by Arab women is more layered and intricate than the one fought by Western feminists because Arab women are simultaneously fighting patriarchy in their own societies, colonialism by the West, and nationalist forces in their own societies who interpret feminism as another branch of imperialistic domination.(2003:193)

On the one hand, the narrator denounces her Western feminist comrades for dismissing the agency of Muslim/Arab women, who are deemed inadequate and unqualified to represent Western feminist values because of wearing hijab. Although Western feminism and,

particularly, the third wave, uses the existence of these women as a 'token of diversity', it refuses to acknowledge wearing hijab as an act originating from Muslim/Arab women's subjectivity and symbolising another version of liberty and freedom of choice. On the other hand, the poet or narrator critiques the socio-political contexts in the Middle East that judge these women and criticise their feminist quest as Westernised and Americanised attitudes, and view them as betraying their national struggle against imperialism and jeopardising their cause. The poem proceeds by revealing the quandaries Muslim/Arab-American women face in their homeland due to the turbulent socio-political conditions, and the prejudices in the new home, which have left them victims of: 'Cruel and unusual contortions, unhealthy and unfair/working conditions at nonexistent wages' (Kahf 2003:67). In addition to subverting Orientalist stereotypes and denouncing the politics of Arab patriarchy, Kahf also registers an assured feminist stance as she bridles at the topic of the Muslim/Arab female sexuality and declares that exposing it concerns no one but women themselves: 'Or that anyway, our sexuality,/ When we choose to put it into play,/ Is our business' (Kahf 2003:67).

The odalisques, however, refuse to give up their cause of freedom to be 'contained within narrowly-defined revolutionary frame works, whether Western or Middle Eastern' (Majaj 2012:3). They all joined to form ' a support group' to sue 'the pants off the Matisse estate and the museums…'(Kahf 2003:66) and announce a powerful comeback: 'Hi I'm Odalisque with Big Breasts/I was painted by Matisse/ but I'm in control now '(Kahf 2003:68). They decided to work together to reclaim identities on their own terms, and according to their own version of feminism:

> That when we found out With Magnolias
>   had been painted pregnant
> so we all got together for her delivery
> […]
> We held her hands, Bayadere, wiped her brow
> We were all wondering ya allah, ya Fattah but afraid
> Would the baby be smothered by the same aesthetic forms,
> would it be killed by the paint fumes from another era
> before it had a chance to breath its options?

She screamed She pushed She crowned She gushed And then!

It was like nothing any of us had ever seen. Pure life,
Pure energy.
It was a girl! She waved her fists. She let go
with a high-pitched protest to the world (Kahf 2003:68-9)

The contingent of Matisse odalisques got together for the delivery to express feminist

solidarity and receive together the newborn baby girl, who waves her tiny fists 'in protest to

the world' (Kahf 2003:69). Seeking God's help—'ya allah, ya fattah' is an Arabic expression

that denotes praying for God's help—the odalisques were hoping that the newborn baby girl

would escape their destiny. In her book *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*, Kahf

states that from the eighteenth century to the present, Western discourse portrays the Muslim

woman as 'innately oppressed'. It depicts Muslim women who substantiate this portrayal by

being either 'submissive nonentities or rebellious renegades', revolting against their Islamic

culture whilst conforming to Western gender roles (1999:177). The birth of the baby girl

symbolises the rebirth of the new Muslim/Arab-American woman, who has learned from

history not to be 'smothered by the same aesthetic forms' that had smothered her ancestors,

and fixed them in static positions.

Only towards the end of the poem we meet the narrator of the anecdote:

I, Small Odalisque, drew up my purple robe and ululated
and we all ululated
in post-odalisquesque
jub-jube-jube-jubilation (Kahf 2003:69)

This newborn girl has become the twenty-first century Mestiza, a 'Pure life' and 'pure energy'

that seeks to formulate a new feminism that helps her create a diasporic space that is neither

Arab, nor American. With the odalisques' ululation—the traditional articulation of Middle

Eastern women at moments of great joy—the poem concludes with a note of joy and hope for

a better Muslim/Arab-American feminist future.

Reviving these odalisque, eroticised figures can be regarded a form of resistant mimicry. Discussing the 'power of mimicry', Yegenoglu writes, 'The re-articulation, reworking and re-signification of the discursive characteristics of phallocentricism can open the possibility for an in-between ambivalent zone when the agency of the female subject can be construed' (1998:65). As these figures of the odalisques are reinscribed and revived as distorted imitations of Matisse's Odalisques, they displace the Oriental representation of them and, hence, disrupt dominant stereotypes of Muslim/Arab women. Accordingly, the act of mimicking them becomes an active act of resistance.

From this stance, the poem " So You Think You Know Scheherazad" emerges as a literary mimicry of the Oriental configuration of the figure of Shahrazad in Western translations. It aims to unsettle and trouble European translations of *The Nights* that portray Shahrazad as a seductress relying on her sexual prowess to manipulate the king. Addressing Western audiences of readers, Orientalists, feminists, scholars and media tycoons who think they know Scheherazad, the poem opens with the question: 'So you think you know/ Scheherazad' (Kahf 2003:44). The poem proceeds in its interrogation whilst mocking its readers: 'So you think she tells you/ bedtime stories/…invent fairy creatures/ who grant your wishes' (Kahf 2003:44). In her critique of phallocentrism, Luce Irigaray explains:

> There is…perhaps only one "path" the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it…To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible"…, in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make "visible", by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible. (1985:67)

Obviously, Kahf's mimicry of the Orientalist depiction of Shahrazad seems to emerge from the same feminist consciousness that produced Irigaray's critique of phallocentrism. In Kahf's poetry, Sharazad the victim becomes in control of her stories, Shahryar, the phallocentrism in Irigaray's term, and, more importantly, her destiny. Seeking to problematise the mainstream

perception of Shahrazad, Kahf manipulates, as a Muslim woman, 'with mimesis' to recover her agency, subjectivity and her status in history. In Kahf's poetry, Shahrazad appears in different contexts and shapes that are unnoticed or ignored in Western discourse of the Muslim woman.

Kahf's contemporary Shahrazad, nevertheless, does not tell stories to please the king, or fulfil his fantasies. Instead 'Scheherazad awakens/ the demons under your bed' and 'She locks you in with them' (Kahf 2003:44). The power of Shahrazad's tales, or writing, in Arab-American women's case, liberates the Muslim woman that drives Shahryar to:

> landing in a field where you wrestle with Iblis,
> whose form changes into your lover,
> into Death, into knowledge, into God,
> whose face changes into Scheherazad— (Kahf 2003:45).

Instead of being a fantasy vehicle, Shahrazad's stories become self-confrontations. Lisa Suhair Majaj argues that in this poem, Shahrazad assumes the role of Muslim/Arab-American women writers awakening the demons that are present within the mainstream culture (Majaj 2012:2). The poet reinforces the role of writing as an empowering tool that enables Muslim/Arab-American women to challenge different forces as the word 'Iblis' suggests. The use of the word 'Iblis'—the proper name for Satan in Arabic and Islamic traditions—and his appearing in different forms seems to allude to Islamic thought and, particularly, the idea of regarding some powerful villains worse than devils, which facilitates the collaboration between human and jinn devils to control vulnerable beings. The use of anaphora reinforces this notion of Iblis as taking different shapes of the forces that attempt to confine and control the subjectivity of the Muslim woman, such as patriarchal and religious institutions, Orientalist discourses, nationalist movements and Western feminism, to mention some. Paradoxically, Iblis can also be Shahrazad, as the last line suggests. Here, the poet problematises the perception of the figure of Shahrazad by placing her in Iblis' position; a powerful position of mimicry,

according to Irigaray, which 'convert[s] a form of subordination into an affirmation' (1985:67).

In "E-Mails From Scheherazad", Kahf reinscribes Shahrazad and brings her to the twenty-first century United States as a storyteller and a writer who pens messages in e-mail format to a world that 'is unprepared to recognize her wit, humour, lyricism, passion and intellect, and all too ready to negate her worth as a Muslim woman' (Majaj 2012:1). Referring to the poems as e-mails is significantly pertinent to achieving the poet's aim, as e-mails are perceived to be a technological, fast and pervasive means of communication. The concept of e-mails offers the poet a communication space in her diaspora, and brings Shahrazad to the third millennium, since her concise narratives travel all over the web-connected globe. The opening line announces the big return of this mythological figure into the twenty-first century:

> Hi, babe. It's Scheherazad. I'm back
> For the millenium and living in Hackensack,
> New Jersey. I tell stories for a living.
> You ask if there is a living in that.
>
> You must remember: Where I come from,
> Words are to die for. I saved the virgins
> From beheading by the king, who was killing
> Them to still the beast of doubt in him. (Kahf 2003:43)

Majaj suggests that image conjured up by the title—Shahrazad bent over her computer keyboard typing e-mails to her American readers—is quintessential of Kahf herself (2012:1). Like Shahrazad, the poet also uses words to transform her life and the lives of many other Muslim women living in diaspora by challenging racial hegemonic and nationalist patriarchal discourses. In this poem and collection, Shahrazad is not some exotic woman, or stranger; rather, she lives in the heart of the United States, New Jersey, Arkansas, amid the 'motley miscellany of the land' (Kahf 2003:40). Despite her engagement in modern life, she has not forgotten the power and the weight of words: they are 'to die for', and therefore, she cannot be easily domesticated. Alluding to Shahrazad's narrative, the poem aims to undermine Western

assumptions about Shahrazad, but in the process, it highlights aspects of the traditional

narrative that have been often ignored in Western translations of the story.

Whereas in *The Nights* Shahrazad narrates stories to save her life and the lives of other

virgins in the city, Kahf's Shahrazad uses her narration to follow through on her feminist

cause, fighting for her rights and those of her fellow sisters. Through the power of her

narrative, Shahrazad succeeded in taming the king and averting his desires for revenge, whilst

curing his complex. Her tales bewitched Shahryar: 'I told a story. He began to listen and I

found/ That story led to story. Powers unleashed, I wound/The thread around the pirn of night'

(Kahf 2003:43). In addition to reinscribing Shahrazad as an active subject capable of

engendering transformation, the poem aims to emphasise the reciprocal change and

development instigated by her storytelling: 'I taught him to heal/His violent streak through

stories, after all/ And he helped me uncover my true call' (Ibid). 'A thousand days/ Later,

[they] got divorced' because he 'wanted a wife and not so much an artist', who teaches

'creative writing at Montclaire State' (Ibid). Shahrazad has succeeded in curing her man and

helped him transform his macho pensiveness into constructive output, to ' do workshops now

in schools/ On art and conflict resolutions' (Ibid). In return, he has helped her discover her

true calling, which she identifies as 'wanting a publication'. The Muslim/Arab-American

Shahrazad refuses to be eternally captivated within the walls of orality. In the twenty-first

century, she declared her entrance into 'the public realm of the written/published word'

(Abdelrazek 2005:144) so that her art and achievements will never be subject to forces of

alteration, manipulation or erasure from history. Like Shahrazad, Arab-American women

writers, such as Mohja Kahf, use their art and storytelling as a powerful tool of resistance to

kill 'the beast of doubts' in their readers and critics and teach them how 'to heal/ [their]

violent streak' (Ibid).

Under the title "*E-mails From Scheherazad*", the poet seeks to dismantle the

monolithic Muslim woman. By assembling the "Hijab Scenes" poems in the collection, Kahf

aims at dispersing the plethora of images associated with the Muslim woman in order to resist the representations of Muslim/Arab women's lives and images in earlier framing translations. Such strategy, hence, helps to disrupt these Orientalist stereotypes and interpretations and open them to new meanings. The "Hijab Scenes" poems are seven numbered poems randomly scattered throughout the collection. Although their relation to the poems in the collection appears vague, these short pieces portray challenges that face Muslim women who wear hijab in America. It can be argued that numbering the scenes instead of giving them titles is a manifold technique. First of all, it reinforces the multiplicity of the experiences of Muslim women appearing in different contexts in the poems. Secondly, it paradoxically highlights a unanimous mainstream perception of hijab in Islamic culture as an oppressive and coercive item of clothing that hinders women's advancement.

Foregrounding the experience of wearing hijab in America, Kahf holds that fetishising and fixed portrayals of Muslim women can be resisted by Muslim writers because 'the issue is not the identity of the author but the mobilization of the core "Western narrative'' that is shaped by the literary conventions, linguistic tropes, and narrative processes within Western culture' (Kahf1999:3-4). Hence, throughout the collection, Orientalist and Arab nationalist delineations of Muslim/Arab women are introduced and interrogated.

"Hijab Scenes" Poems

In the twenty-first century United States, different discourses, be they political, feminist or liberal, have all centred on the issue of hijab as the impediment to Arab women's liberation and the only way to improve their lives in the Middle East. These discourses continue to mystify meanings and interpretations of hijab in Muslim-American diasporic context to the present day. However, this perennial topic seems to be governed by neo-imperial discourses of modernisation, on the one hand, and also by Western feminist discourse

that tends to apply Western political and historical paradigms on other societies, ignoring conceptions of privacy, political, social and historical specificities.

Katherine Bullock states that '[t]he popular media presentation of hijab as foreign is specially problematic for Muslim women in the West, who are challenged to prove that wearing hijab does not violate Western values' (2002:139). The "Hijab Scenes" series of poems, spread out randomly throughout the collection, address satirically the negative dispositions caused by stereotyping and simplistic assumptions. For Kahf, these assumptions originate from a failure to see 'behind the blind spot' (Kahf 2003:33)—persistent ignorance and prejudices that prevent people from seeing others in a wider perspective. The poems also seek to demystify the so-often misinterpreted hijab that has become an object of contempt and a marker of the parlous relationship between modes of dressing and affiliation in diaspora.

'Hijab Scene # 1" reveals a case of comparative weirdness:

"You dress strange," said a tenth-grade boy with bright blue hair
to the new Muslim girl with the headscarf in homeroom,
his tongue-rings clicking on the "tr" in "strange" (Kahf 2003:41).

This brief piece portrays the detriment of negative stereotyping and cultural ignorance that install barriers at such an early stage between children sharing the same 'home' and the same 'room'. Foregrounding strangeness, the poem implicitly asks: Who is weirder? Who is more conformist? If this teenager is tolerated as adhering to a fad, why can the Muslim girl not be equally tolerated? Ironically, the absurdity of the situation appears as the blue-hair and pierced-tongue boy, whose dressing fashion seems apposite to the traditional American norms, describes the hijab-wearing girl as strange. Instead of perceiving his classmate as different, he alienates her by using the word 'strange' because of her attire that deviates from mainstream norms which he believes to be the right ones, despite the fact that he made himself eccentric to those traditions and norms by his blue hair and piercing.

"Hijab Scene # 2" constructs another stance of compared weirdness in which a heavily made up and skimpily dressed American woman, in a superior tone, addresses the Muslim

woman: 'You people have such restrictive dress for women', while 'hobbling away in three inch heels and panty hose/ to finish out another pink-collar temp pool day' (Kahf 2003:42). Ironically, this woman has restricted herself and comfort to accommodate to Western fashion norms and taste, whereas wearing hijab can be conceived as liberating from the constraints of dictated fashions. However, the woman addressing the speaker in the poem is incapable of imagining that a Muslim woman's choice of wearing hijab entails a different form of freedom and fashion, incomprehensible to mainstream popular culture in the United States. The poem invites its readers to view hijab as a feminist act that may convey Muslim women's 'right to privacy from the intrusive gaze, and their understanding of the feminine beauty system, and most importantly, their statement that their bodies are their own' (Sabry 2009:131). Again, the poem calls attention to cultural tolerance. If the skimpily dressed woman is tolerated for acquiescing to a condescending form of male taste, the hijab-wearing woman must be equally tolerated. In these two poems, Kahf emphasises the intersection between hijab and fashion as she compares it to other modes of fashion.

"Hijab Scene # 3" depicts the issue of veiled women's invisibility in the mainstream community. This scene takes place in a school where the speaker is a veiled Muslim-American parent trying to express her wish of joining the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) to the school administrator, but 'it was no good, / she wasn't seeing me' (Kahf 2003:25). Despite the fact that '[a] regular American mother next to [her] /shrugged and shook her head', the school administrator kept ignoring the Muslim mother. The speaker, however, tried to make herself visible:

> "I would, I would," I sent up flares,
> beat on drums, waved navy flags,
> tried smoke signals, American Sign Language,
> Morse code, Western Union, telex, fax, (Ibid)

The Muslim parent tries different kinds of oral and written means of communication known to Americans to show herself as 'a regular American mother' like the one sitting next to her.

However, all the attempts of making herself visible to the school administrator have failed, and she realised that she has been deliberately silenced and ignored because: 'I could've been antimatter' (Ibid). Frustrated by this humiliation, she cries out in anger:

> "Dammit, Jim, I'm a Muslim woman, not a Klingon!"
> –but the positronic force field of *hijab*
> jammed all her cosmic coordinates (Ibid)

The parent insists that she is a 'regular American', 'a Muslim woman' though, but not an extraterrestrial alien creature or a "Klingon". The use of the word Klingon here is worth noting as significant and pertinent to the speaker's aim of explaining herself. A Klingon is a fictional warrior race in the *Star Trek* universe featured in an American television science-fiction series that ran on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) (1966-69) but later developed to eight feature films and 'became one of the most popular brands in the American entertainment industry' (Britannica Encyclopaedia online). Klingons were featured as antagonists for the crew of the USS *Enterprise*. Humanoid in appearance but with redundant organs and hair, these creatures were featured with a physical appearance suggestive of Asian peoples, possessing abilities similar to humans. They are described in the "Errand of Mercy" script as "oriental" and "hard-faced" (Geraghty 2007:51). Klingons were portrayed as inferior to the crew and closer to animals. Generally, they were depicted as 'brutish, scheming, and murderous' orientals (Roberts 2000:130-131). Because of wearing hijab, not only was this Muslim parent excluded as a stranger, but also viewed as a despicable alien. The use of 'Klingon' also alludes to the intergalactic strife, featured in the *Star Trek* series and subsequent movies, depicting hijab as a referent to the clash of civilisation concept. Also, 'the positronic force field of *hijab*' symbolises the prejudices and ignorance surrounding the long-held American preconceptions of Islam and hijab. This 'cosmic' jam, however, has blocked mutual understanding between cultures and prevented acceptance of the differences of others. This brief piece powerfully evokes the negative stereotypes that portray Arabs as *terrorists*, whilst rendering their veiled women as aliens to Western values. The Muslim speaker ends her

scene with a question pleading for mutual understanding to resolve this destructive clash: 'Can we save the ship we're both on, / can we save / the dilithium crystals[48]?' (Kahf 2003:25). The poet urges both parties to acknowledge each other's differences to move beyond their prejudices, because giving up one's difference, particularly if it constitutes a pivotal part of their identity, cannot be the ideal solution.

Samaa Abdurraquib argues that Islam has become the religion 'from which women need to be liberated'. Muslim women become responsible for cultural and religious practices. Accordingly, in the United States, hijab-wearing women are always forced into binary oppositions of belonging. Because of wearing this highly charged item, they are viewed as clashing with Western values (2006:56). However, young Muslim-Americans such as Kahf do insist on beholding their differences boldly, such as the speaker in "Hijab Scene #7". The poem develops in a monologue in which the speaker retorts: 'No, I'm not bald under the scarf/ No, I'm not from that country / where women can't drive cars / No, I would not like to defect /I'm already American' (39). In this poem, the speaker challenges the most common and persistent misperception linked to hijab-wearing women. In addition to negating all these reductionist interpretations of her attire, and by extension, her identity, she asserts herself as a Muslim-American who chooses to wear hijab as an identity-marker and not to hide any physical imperfection under it.

The poem sketches some of the stigmatising experiences that have become part of Muslim women's lives in the United States:

What else do you need to know
relevant to my buying insurance,
opening a bank account,
reserving a seat on a flight?
Yes, I speak English (Kahf 2003:39)

Ironically, the question above suggests that the act of wearing hijab interferes in all her dealings with others, whereas the given answer about hijab is irrelevant to her daily activities

of 'buying insurance', 'opening a bank account' and 'reserving a seat' on a plane. Although the speaker asserts herself as a Muslim-American who wears hijab, nevertheless, she stresses that this piece of clothing, hijab, does not restrict her independence or limit her spatial freedom. Instead, it is these degrading practices and processes that lead to confining the freedom of Muslim women in the United States.

The poet ends this degrading process by subverting the image of Muslims as terrorists:

Yes, I carry explosives
They're called words
And if you don't get up
Off your assumptions,
They're going to blow you away (Ibid)

The poet declares that her words are her weapons to resist this deeply held misperception of Muslims and to defend her position as a hijab-wearing Muslim-American. These words—poems—are the weapons she carries to explode these false assumptions. Kahf uses her published poems to resist demeaning stereotypes linked to hijab. Reflecting on hijab, Kahf believes that 'there is something deep down beautiful and dignified about [hijab]. It has brought some beautiful and joyous dimensions to my life that always amazed me' (quoted in Pervez 2004).

According to the "Hijab Scenes" poems, the way people conceive hijab in the United States reinforces Trinh Minh-ha's notion of an apartheid difference. However, Minh-ha notes that accepting differences can be an effective means of resisting homogenous and monolithic bodies. Illustrating hijab as a 'reality and metaphor', she explains:

> If the act of unveiling has a liberating potential, so does the act of veiling. It all depends on the context in which such an act is carried out or,…on how and where women see dominance. Difference should be defined neither by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture. So when women decide to lift the veil, one can say that they do so in defiance of their men's oppressive right to their bodies. But when they decide to keep or put on the veil they once took off, they might do so to reappropriate their space or claim a new difference in defiance of genderless, hegemonic, centred standardization. (1989:416)

In the same breath, Kahf believes that the social context in which hijab is framed can tarnish its beauty:

> The surrounding context can make it oppressive. For example in social contexts where observing hijab includes the practice of separating women from the resources of society including education, mosques, sources of religious and spiritual guidance…[hijab] develops oppressive qualities. Or when hijab is literally imposed through punitive sanctions rather than encouraged benignly, this deters [its] underlying beauty…and turns it into something ugly (1999:96).

Orientalists have considered the act of wearing hijab as a source of forcible suppression. Whereas Western discourses condemn hijab for its gender-oppressive characters, Kahf's "Hijab Scenes" poems assert the agency of Muslim women, within an American context, who observe wearing hijab whilst evoking its liberating potential. Aiming to deconstruct the fixed image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman, Kahf fragments and updates the Shahrazadian narrative in the "Hijab Scenes" poems. She shifts her narrators so that no singular version of a diasporic experience can be traced, which opens up the heterogeneous collective identity of female Muslim-Americans in diasporic space. This space, as identified by Avtar Brah, is where 'difference and commonality are figured in non-reductive relationality' (1996:249) so that 'identification' replaces 'identity', and the 'particular' is appreciated within the 'universal', (Brah1996:93). Identity, for Brah, 'is neither fixed nor singular, rather it is a constantly changing relational multiplicity. But during the course of this flux identities do assume patterns' (Brah 1996:123). Although a feminist conceptualisation of hijab in the diaspora demands embracing such identification, third-wave feminism has failed to situate hijab within such a context, despite its offering a space for differences within commonalities. Western feminist interpretations of hijab have failed to view the act of wearing hijab as a procedure of inscribing upon the body, which demands the female subject's active compliance.

Throughout her poetry collection *E-Mails From Scheherazad*, the Arab-American poet, Mohja Kahf brings Shahrazad to the twenty-first century to weave her narrative using 'the political language of identity [that] levels out distinctions between chosen connections and given particularities: between the person you choose to be and the things that determine your individuality be being thrust upon you (Gilroy 2004:106). As a diasporic narrative, Shahrazad has become a space of translation through mimicry, in which Arab-American women inscribe so that they become 'actively involved in the process of the political language of identity (Sabry 2009:144). Such involvement aims to distinguish between the chosen translation of themselves and the ones that have framed them. From this stance, Kahf utilises the Shahrazadian narrative as an experience through which Muslim/Arab-American women can negotiate belonging and affiliations, whilst simultaneously accomplishing in the process an agency and cultural pronouncement from which a new Muslim/Arab-American identity can emerge.

In Kahf's poetry, Shahrazad seeks to assume 'control of her narrative through the power over its production' (Sabry 2009:142), unlike the Western version, in which Sharayar dictates Shahrazad's stories. Also, the poem reveals another remarkable transformation to the original tale as it stresses the reciprocal development that both Shahrazad and Shahrayar gained from their relationship, instead of solely emphasising the role the tales played in Sharayar's healing. In her poetry, Kahf speaks for all Muslim/ Arab-American women who seek to pronounce narratives of subjugation and objectification to challenge deeply-held American misconceptions of their identities and culture. Reviving Shahrazad in the diaspora epitomises the potential of Arab-American women artists and writers to emerge as subversive figures who seek to disrupt the authoritative mainstream discourses from within.

Chapter Five

Born Palestinian, Born Black: Afro-Arab Poetics of Belonging in Suheir Hammad's Poetry

In "Moving Towards Home" (1989), the African-American feminist poet and critic, June Jordan announces:

> I was born a Black woman
> and now
> I am become a Palestinian/
> against the relentless laughter of evil
> there is less and less living room
> […]
> it is time to make our way home (2007:398).

Written after the Sabra and Shatila massacre, this poem declares Jordan's manifesto of social responsibility and pan-ethnic solidarity, whilst attempting to formulate a mutable and hybrid identity that allows ethnic people to surmount diverse social and political issues. However, encountering this poem was a turning point in the life and career of Suheir Hammad, the eighteen-year-old Palestinian-American girl from Brooklyn. Not only has this poem changed Hammad's life, but realising how Jordan, an immigrant from Brooklyn, relates herself to the victims of that massacre has altered the poet's perspective of politics and life. She realised that activism is not about accords and treaties; it is about humanity (Knopf-Newman 2006:77). In addition, this encounter brought to the Arab-American literary scene 'a new voice with an authentic blend of language that is her own' (Abinader 2000), establishing a new breadth to Arab-American political activism. Being the first Palestinian woman to be featured on Broadway, Hammad was received as 'a bold feminist, award-winning poet,…who is also a political activist and active humanitarian [that] has made a colossal contribution' to the Arab-American literary scene (Blair 2012).

Intended as a homage to June Jordan, Hammad's first poetry collection *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, more importantly, has established and declared the poet's political

stance and poetic vision and aesthetics. Utilising the aesthetics of hip-hop performance poetry and the Black Arts movement, Hammad's work attempts to register geographical linkages between Gaza and Brooklyn, and between the fate of the Palestinians and the racialisation of blackness. It could be seen as crystallising what Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick Ferguson name as the 'strange affinities' that connect Palestinians' plight to Black racialisation and incomplete freedom in the United States, animating in the process a submerged relation to hegemonic perceptions of citizenship and belonging.

Departing from the Arab-American agenda of representation in the United States, Suheir Hammad transcends the isolated authentic Arab-American subjectivity, which, according to Nawar Golley, is 'singled out as a separate entity, standing independently on its own' (2007:57). Instead, she has worked to establish a solid relational component to other minority groups, in addition to her Arab-American identity, by reinforcing substantial interrelational ties within the African-American community, whilst inscribing her own space within it. Her work, therefore, explores '(un)natural bridges' (Anzaldua 2002) that are effectively positioned in the genealogy of Black and third-world feminisms and the critique of queer of colour. Accordingly, this chapter proposes to show how the work of the Arab-American poet Suheir Hammad springs from hip-hop consciousness and music. Hammad utilises Afro/Arab-American poetics in the process of creating a transformative reconstruction of identity. The poet seeks to achieve her goal by registering overlapping characters and interdependent histories of dispossession and affiliations and cross-cultural politics.

Born on October 25, 1973, in a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, Jordan, Suheir Hammad came to the United States with her 1948-refugee parents at the age of five. She grew up in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, New York City, until her family moved to Staten Island when she was sixteen (Handal 1997:1). At the age of twenty-three Hammad published her first poetry collection *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, and a memoir entitled *Drops of this Story*. In 2005, she published a further poetry book *Zaatar Diva* (thyme), and later collection *breaking*

poems in 2008. As an activist, Hammad spoke at several university camps, prisons and anti-war sit-ins. She is also featured in movie projects such as *Lest We Forget* (2003), *The Fourth World War* (2004), and *Salt of this Sea* (2008), appearing as the leading character Soraya. In addition, she has written two plays, *Blood Trinity* (2002) and *ReOrientalism* (2003). Suheir Hammad also performs on the Def Poetry Jam show produced by HBO by Russell Simmons, the most powerful hip-hop entrepreneur in the industry. Simmons came across her piece "First Writing Since", a poem describing her reaction to the disaster of September 11, 2001, and was signed to perform for HBO's Def Poetry Jam, where she reads her original work. Her work has been published in various anthologies, including *In Defence of Mumia (1996), The Space Between Our Footsteps (1998), Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab-American Writing* (1999) and *Listen UP!: Spoken Word Poetry* (1999).

Hammad's experience in Sunset Park in Brooklyn in the early 1970s has impacted her life and intensified her sense of exile. As a Palestinian exile, her experience denotes double displacement because she experiences dislocation in the diaspora and also feels 'out of place' when back at home in Palestine 'due to the transformation of much of the once-familiar landscapes into Israeli territory,' explains Carol Fedda-Conery (2006:78). In addition, her life in this neighbourhood has distanced her and cut her off from the Arab-American community in the United States. Hammad has always asserted that her experience does not reflect 'that initial kind of Arab-American writer's reality of being in white suburbia'; and, therefore, in an interview she has contended that the work of Arab-American women such as Naomi Shihab Nye and Etel Adnan neither reflects nor addresses her urban, lower- and working-class experience (Knopf-Newman 2006:79). Instead, Hammad identifies herself as a Palestinian woman from Brooklyn. Although such identification distances her from the Arab-American community, it establishes solid connections and bridges with Afro-Americans and other coloured communities living in Brooklyn. It also reveals the various forms of violence to which the poet was subjected throughout her life, starting from the Arab-Israeli conflict to the

harsh conditions influencing urban youth culture in New York and the deprivation of peoples of colour in that neighbourhood. Most importantly, however, adopting these two markers of identity pinpoints the core of her poetic vision and political stance.

In a highly racialised society such as the United States, racial classification is relevant to political power, in relation both to majority and minority status. These racial categories, thus, tend to lead to the assumption that racial identities are fixed, although cultural and literary theorists increasingly argue against essentialist identity politics, whilst attempting to formulate mutable, hybrid identities that allow ethnic groups to negotiate diverse political and social terrains. For instance, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that the 'hybrid counter-energies' of the marginalised immigrants and exiles offer 'a genuine potential for an emergent non-coercive culture' (1994:343-35). In the same vein, Suad Joseph, though born Maronite Catholic Lebanese, expresses a distrust of identity politics that is 'often authoritarian, essentializing, fixing, and mandating what one must be in order to belong, to be a member, [and] to have a home' (1999:317). Correspondingly, Hammad describes the fixity inherited in the notion of identity: 'People often want to limit you so if you're Palestinian it's this idea that my exiled refugee status meant that I did not contribute or was not influenced by anything around me. That I'm a static person… It goes back to fundamental racism' (Knopf-Newman 2006:86).

From this stance, Therese Saliba believes that Arab-Americans need to interrogate and mobilise differences within their communities as well as other communities of colour, in order to facilitate the process of connecting to other minorities and establishing productive affinities and political coalitions (1999:306-307). Shohat and Stam introduce a concept of identities not as fixed essences that express 'natural difference', but rather as emerging 'from a fluid set of historically diverse experiences, within overlapping, polycentric circles of identities'. Therefore, they assert that it is less important to consider identity as something one has, than something that one performs (1994:346). Deniz Kandiyoti argues that the emphasis within

poststructuralist and feminist discourses on difference and multiplicity may 'lead to more refined conceptions of political alliances and coalition-building' (1996:14). As an Arab-American, Hammad troubles the notion of Arabic identity by identifying as Black. Drawing on Audre Lorde's discussion of Black identity, Hammad argues that she embraces Blackness as a cultural and political form of identification (Handal 1997:1). Identifying as Black also problematises the notion of identity in Palestinian culture. In an interview with Nathalie Handal, the poet rationalises her decision of declaring her new identity as Black in her first book. She explains:

> Within the Palestinian culture we have the concept of black being a negative force…What that book (*Born Palestinian, Born Black*) tries to do is take back the negative energy that is associated with black, reclaim it, and say that this is something that is about survival, something that is positive. (Ibid)

Identifying as Black and embracing hip-hop culture, Hammad aims to place Blackness at the centre of Arab activism, whilst unsettling the essentialist perspective of Arab identity, which has acquired fluency and new meanings in American diaspora.

As a product of a contemporary New York public school, Hammad finds herself at home in Brooklyn neighbourhoods and inevitably embracing the hip-hop culture as her own (Knopf-Newman 2006:76). Tricia Rose mentions in her study of rap that the significant post-industrial 'shifts in economic conditions, access to housing, demographics and communication networks' were responsible for nurturing the socio-political drift of hip-hop poetry and music (1994:27). Therefore, the examination of the social and political conditions in the 1970s would be necessary to clarify the logic of rap's development, linking the intertextual and dialogic qualities in rap to the diverse and social context from which it has emerged.

The Hip-hop Urban Context[49]

In an interview with Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman in 2006, Hammad maintains that being raised at the time of the birth of hip-hop in the 1970s and 1980s has enabled her to understand the nature of 'liberation struggles throughout the entire nation' (2006:65-7), and

helped her make the connection between different struggles that happened within the continental United States with that in Palestine. By the late 1970s, across the United States, federal support for social services declined, and only limited options of affordable houses were available for the working class, in addition to a 'shrinking job market and declining social services'. The poorest neighbourhoods and the least powerful groups were the least protected and had the smallest safety nets (Rose 1994:27). John Mollenkopf notes that 'during the 1970s,…New York led other older, industrial metropolitan areas into population and employment decline'(1983:213). Between 1978 and 1986, the people in the bottom twenty per cent of the income scale faced a total decline in income, whereas the top twenty per cent enjoyed most of the economic growth, which had widened the gap between classes and races. During this period, thirty per cent of New York's Hispanic households and twenty five per cent of Black households lived at or below the poverty line. Since then, 'low-income housing has continued to disappear', whilst Blacks and Hispanics continued to live in dilapidated, overcrowded and unmaintained spaces, a situation that has contributed to New York's large and chronically homeless population (Rose 1994:28).

Daniel Walkowits observes that New York has become 'sharply divided between an affluent, technocratic, professional white-collar group managing the financial and commercial life of an international city, and an unemployed and underemployed service sector which is substantially black and Hispanic' (1990:190). Within this context, Mellenkopf maintains that New York 'has been transformed from a relatively well-off white blue-collar city into a more economically divided, multiracial white-collar city' and this 'disorganised periphery' of civil service and manufacturing workers consolidates power amongst white-collar professional corporate managers, creating the massive inequalities that appeared in New York (1990:90).

South Bronx, identified as the home of hip-hop culture, experienced another severe condition imposed by the politically motivated policies of the 'urban renewal project', which started in the early 1970s and involved massive relocations of economically underprivileged

coloured populations from different areas in New York City into parts of the South Bronx. In her study of rap and hip-hop culture, Tricia Rose describes it as 'a brutal process of community destruction [carried out] by municipal authorities', which was known as 'Moses's project'[50] (1994:30). 'Moses's project' was establishing the Cross-Bronx Expressway that cut directly through the centre of the most heavily populated working-class areas in the Bronx. The Expressway was designed to link New Jersey and Long Island, New York, communities, in addition to facilitating suburban commutation into New York.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the Cross-Bronx Expressway project, known as 'Moses's project', forced the relocation of one hundred and seventy thousand people and razed some sixty thousand Bronx homes. The resultant conditions had intensified the economic and social polarities that characterised twentieth-century New York City, affecting specifically Black and Hispanic communities. These newly relocated ethnic and working-class communities were left with few city resources, fragmented leadership and limited political power. Lack of affordable houses and shrinking federal funds, and shifts in occupational structure towards corporate and information services, had all led the city's poorest residents to pay the highest price for deindustrialisation and economic restructuring. Hence, these communities were more vulnerable to slumlords, toxic waste dumps, drug rehabilitation centres, violent criminals and inadequate city services and transportation (Rose 1994:30-33).

These disastrous conditions resulting from city policies went unnoticed in the media until 1977, when an extreme power outage blacked out New York when hundreds of stores were looted and vandalised. The poorest neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, Queen and Harlem were depicted by the city's media as lawless zones, in which 'crime is sanctioned and chaos bubbles under the surface' (Rose 1994:33). In the national imagination, South Bronx became the primary 'symbol of America's woes,' Richard Severo observed (quoted in Rose 1994:33). Popular media and news coverage have exploited the devastation that faced South Bronx coloured communities, using them as a backdrop for social ruin and barbarism. Hispanic and

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Black neighbourhoods were portrayed as a symbol of ruin, drained of life and energy, whilst rendering silent their inhabitants, who were struggling under severe life conditions.

As 'a product of the New York City public school system', she was one of the coloured kids who were being taught by white teachers. Although Hammad felt some 'specific animosity towards [her] from some certain teachers' for being Palestinian, but 'in general we were all in the same boat', and part of such a 'dominant narrative being projected onto a multi-ethnic, religious, [and] gendered group of people' (Knopf-Newman 2006:77). She constantly asserts that she did not grow up as an Arab-American, and, hence, does not relate to the problems that were being written about (Knopf-Newman 2006:86). Hammad views her experience in Brooklyn as a privilege that has allowed her to understand herself through connecting with and relating to other ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. Reflecting on the unjust popular media portrayal of these communities, Hammad notes, 'I think I was blessed to have been raised in a working-class, multicultural, or color community and to see all these stories get excluded' (Knopf-Newman 2006:75).

Despite experiencing economic insecurity, diminishing social services and social isolation, the ethnic groups who inhabited South Bronx in the 1970s were fighting back, building cultural networks and 'establishing creative and aggressive outlets for expression and identification' and as Rose reflects:

> North American blacks, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, and other Caribbean people with roots in other postcolonial contexts reshaped their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain. Although city leaders and popular press had literally and figuratively condemned the South Bronx neighbourhoods and their inhabitants, its youngest black and Hispanic residents answered back. (1994:34)

Deprived of tools through literature that specifically related and spoke to them, South Bronx generations of the 1980s had to create their own. 'Writing rap…[was] what we all did,' states Hammad (Knopf-Newman 2006:86). Describing her experience, Hammad recalls, 'We all

wrote rhymes, in our books—everyone had a tag, you know, you just—the way you dressed—

it was amazing time to grow up' (Knopf-Newman 2006:85).

Hip-hop Culture

Hip-hop is a cultural form that emerges as a counter response that aims 'to negotiate

the experiences of marginalisation', 'brutally truncated opportunities' and 'oppression within

the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean histories, identities and

communities' (Rose 1994:21). For the Bronx youths, 'the hip-hop culture emerged as a

source…of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local

support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built

environment,' explained Rose (1994:35). Although some Black critics, such as Bakari

Kitwana, define the hip-hop generation as African-Americans born between 1965-1984, most

African-Americans, including hip-hop artists themselves, extend their definition of the hip-hop

generation to include 'any who is down', connecting time, race, place and poly-culturalism

and hybridity (Chang 2007:2). The rise of hip-hop marks the shift from politics to culture and

the process of reconstruction. Jeff Chang extends the definition of hip-hop to capture 'the

collective hopes and nightmares, ambitions, and failures of [all] those who would otherwise be

described as "post-this" or "post-that"' (2007:2). In the same vein, DJ Kool Herc, a pioneering

rapper, considers hip-hop as 'the voice of this generation', and the bridge that links different

races and communities. Kool Herc refers the universality of hip-hop to its ability to connect

'one to one', in addition to giving 'young people a way to understand their world, whether

they are from the suburbs or the city or wherever' (Chang 2007:xi).

Consisting of three central forms—graffiti, breakdance and rap music—hip-hop grew

as a source of an alternative identity for coloured youth. These alternative identities were

forged in fashions, language, and most importantly, establishing neighbourhood crews or

posses. Identity in hip-hop is deeply rooted in the local experience, and one's attachment to

and status in a local group or alternative family. Thus, Brooklyn communities and neighbourhoods of colour became the family and the 'continuum' to which the Palestinian exile and refugee Suhair Hammad belongs (Knopf-Newman 2006:85). These crews have grown as new kind of families that meant to offer support in a complex and rigid harsh environment. They are expected to establish the basis for a new social order (Rose 1994:34-5).

An important tool of articulating identity is hip-hop's prolific self-naming, which is seen as a form of reinvention and self-definition. Henry Gates suggests that naming 'be drawn upon as a metaphor for black intertextuality', which is very useful in hip-hop culture in which naming and intertextuality are critical strategies for creative output. Rappers, graffiti artists and breakdancers usually take on hip-hop names and identities that speak to their roles, personal traits and expertise. For example, DJ names often mix technology with mastery and style: DJ Cut Creator, Spindarella, Jazzy Jeff and Grandmaster Flash. Many rappers have nicknames that suggest street smarts, coolness, power and supremacy: L.L. Cool J. (Ladies Love Cool James), Queen Latifah, D-Nice, Hurricane Gloria, EPMD (Eric and Parrish Making Dollars), Ice-T, Ice Cube, King Sun, and Sir Mix-a-Lot. Some names serve as self-mocking tags; others critique society, such as Too Short, Sɪ Ws (Security of the First World), Special Ed, and NWA (Niggas with Attitude). Taking on new names and identities offers 'prestige from below' to face limited access to legitimate forms of status attainment (Rose 1994:55-87). In addition to the significance of identity, naming and group affiliation, hip-hop artists claim local status by developing new styles. In his study on British punk, Dick Hebdige states that style is 'used as a gesture of refusal and as form of oblique challenge to structures of dominations'. Hip-hop artists adopt unique styles as a means of 'identity formation to play on class distinctions and hierarchies by using commodities to claim cultural space' (Hebdige 2002:17-19). As an alternative means of status formation, creating a unique style of fashion or consumption rituals that 'nobody can deal with' enables hip-hop teenagers to establish local identities to overcome lack of access to traditional avenues of social terrain (Rose 1994:38).

Emerging from complex cultural exchanges and larger political and social alienation, hip-hop arts, especially rap and graffiti, are considered to be aggressive public displays of voice and counter-presence which allowed hip-hop artists and poets to assert their rights to inscribe their own identities in an environment that offered limited social space for younger Hispanics, Caribbean, African-American and other youths of colour. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, hip-hop has developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network. Trains carried graffiti tags through New York's five boroughs; flyers posted in Black and Hispanic neighbourhoods attracted teenagers from all over New York to Bronx parks and clubs and, inevitably, to events throughout the area. In "Hip-Hop Map of America", Bob Mack describes how in the age of high-tech telecommunication, stories spread at a rapid pace, and soon marginalised Black, Hispanic and other communities of colour in other cities picked up on the tenor and energy of New York Hip-hop:

> Within a decade, Los Angeles County…, Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, Huston, Atlanta, Miami, Newark and Trenton, Roxbury and Philadelphia, have developed local hip-hop scenes that link… different urban experiences of alienation, unemployment, police harassment, social and economic isolation to their specific experience via hip-hop's language style and attitude. (quoted in Chang 2007:417-421)

In his extensive cross-cultural study, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), James Scott explores the dynamics of cultural and political hegemonies and resistance by investigating how these hierarchies are contested through social transcripts, which he identifies as either 'public' or 'hidden'. Scott argues that public dominant transcript supports the established social order, whereas hidden transcripts often critique and resist various aspects of social domination. They are often expressed openly, though in disguise. Scott further suggests that 'we might interpret the rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes and theatre of the powerless as vehicles by which among other things, they insinuate a critique of power'. Moreover, he contends that examining the divergence between the 'hidden transcript' and the 'public transcript' indicates 'the impact of domination on public discourse' (1990:xiii). His analysis of power relations, as they are reinforced through social transcript,

reveals the critical role that language and other modes of communication play in destabilising power.

Accordingly, rap music can be considered a form of hidden transcript, which invents 'cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes' to resist different forms of social and political oppression. Although not all rap transcripts directly criticise forms of domination, a significant part of rap discourse is engaged in symbolic and ideological warfare with institutions that oppress African-Americans. Rose describes rap music as 'a contemporary stage for the theatre of the powerless', where 'rappers act out inversions of status hierarchies, tell alternative stories of contact with police and the education process' (1994:105).

In most cases, rap's resistant discourse aims to face the powerful, nation-based stereotyping of Black America as the spring of social ills that cause social disorder. Therefore, the social message of rap aims to undermine the official and institutional legitimate narrative that erases from the public record centuries of domination of those people of colour, women and the working classes. The primary terrains of rap criticism are the police, the government and the dominant media apparatuses. Female rappers, though they level some of these issues in their lyrics, are instead more likely to focus on 'social and political critiques against limitations of female independence, identities, community', but most critically, is the nature of Black heterosexual relations (Rose 1994:107-110).

A Palestinian Rapper from Brooklyn

Due to her history as a Palestinian refugee and a woman of colour living in Brooklyn, Suheir Hammad shares with African-American and Puerto Rican neighbours experiences of dislocation, exile, alienation and political, social and economic isolation. Such confinement and harsh conditions have led the poet to embrace the hip-hop culture, whilst setting her apart from the experience and community of Arabs in the United States. More importantly, hip-hop culture and style have enabled her develop her unique hip-hop style to articulate a counter

dominant narrative against what Rose describes as 'a mobile and shifting enemy' (1994:61). In the urban context of deteriorating low-income housing, lack of employment, accelerating police brutality and increasingly savage depictions of urban young residents, hip-hop style becomes an effective tool to fortify these communities of resistance.

In addition to Suheir Hammad, several young Arab-American writers and activists have celebrated African-American arts and literature and attempted to identify with them. Such orientation is evident in the poetry and writings of Saladin Ahmad, Diana Abu Jaber, Cherien Dabis, Betty Shamieh, Corey Wade and Stan West, to mention some (Hartman 2006). Ethnic scholars argue that it is typical for ethnic communities such as Arab-Americans, who have been stripped of their white status, to seek identification in parallel with African-Americans (Delgado and Stefancic 2011:45). Although many Arab-Americans expressed solidarity with African-Americans, 'their role within the racial hierarchies of the United States has been always ambiguous, since they are considered white by official racial system' (Delgado and Stefancic 2011:48). Whilst some of them decided to affiliate with other racial groups, a considerable number preferred to embrace this 'honorary' whiteness wholeheartedly, because being designated as white offered them some social and economic privileges that are denied to African-Americans (Gualtieri 2001:31). Such status tends to complicate the idea of solidarity with African-Americans 'as based on shared experiences of alienation and oppression' (Hartman 2006:2).

Whilst Arab-Americans were struggling on different stages and at different levels to attain visibility and recognition, attempting to forge a viable identity within the racial system in the United States, Hammad has successfully established connections between Gaza and Brooklyn due to conditions that both Palestinians in Israel and African-Americans in the United States share, such as oppression, unemployment, dislocation, limited or lack of access to social and political terrains, and shrinking economic opportunities. Therefore, Hammad convincingly and firmly identified herself as a Black Palestinian from Brooklyn, thus

embracing 'black America's most dynamic contemporary popular culture, intellectual, and spiritual vessel' (Rose 1994: 19). She asserts that 'hip-hop vernacular and aesthetics are at the core of my Americanness' (Knopf-Newman 2006:76). Rooted in hip-hop rap music, Hammad's poetry expresses bleak harshness mixed with pain and anger that departs from equally confrontational Arab-American poetry.

Rap music, like other black artistic forms before it, attracted people from different backgrounds. Its globally acknowledged industry illustrates the power of its language and the prominence of stories of injustice and cruelty and innovative forms of resistance rap music and lyrics unfold. As a cultural and political form of hip-hop, rap's ability to draw the attention of the nation, and the ability to attract crowds around the world, has offered Hammad cultural, sonic and linguistic opportunities to reach the world and spread her word. Most importantly, her unwavering faith in hip-hop aesthetics and politics has enabled her to establish her reputation at a very young age, ahead of most contemporary Arab-American women writers and activists. The drawing power of rap lies in its music, in addition to its narrative commitment to black and other disenfranchised youths and cultural resistance. 'Def Jam is the ultimate suburban record label,' states music critic Frank Owen. He also affirms that [Russell] Simmons was creating 'the first black music that hasn't had to dress itself up in showbiz glamour and upwardly moves in order to succeed' (quoted in Chang 2007:231). The contract to perform on Simmons' Def Jam has empowered this Palestinian-American poet and offered her the opportunity to be the first Arab-American woman performing on Broadway.

Rap's commercial position and global appeal did not negate its commitment to cultural resistance. Hip-hop leaders continue taking activist stands as they were trying to create a sense of community and to define a new praxis of politics and culture. As Maxine Waters puts it, the aim is 'to embrace and transform rather than to confront, isolate, and marginalise' (in Chang 2007:454). For the hip-hop generation, activism was their means of defining their

generational identity and effect social transformation; a target which Suheir Hammad could not have reached had she taken the Arab-American path of activism.

In her work, Hammad aims to introduce for Arab-Americans a model of relational poetics that enables them to depart from the United States' liberal multiculturalism and instead produce what Keith Feldman coins as 'an opaque subject of human relation' (2011:160). Unlike the work of other Arab-Americans which has been seeking to operate along the terrain of equivalence or parity—based on their granted 'honorary whiteness'—Hammad's work, springing from a 'contrapuntal vision', proposes poetics of 'strange affinities' or linked relations that mark heterogeneous and multiple sets of localised cultures, forces, languages and forms emerging in a global history of diaspora. More importantly, Hammad's work attempts to unify and link these localised experiences.

In his article "Contrapuntalism and Rupture: Suheir Hammad's *breaking poems* and the Refugee as Relational Figure", Keith Feldman acknowledges the figure of the 'refugee' as a productive space for relational identities. In "Reflections on Exile", Said writes:

> Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimension, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*…For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environments. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, occurring together contrapuntally. (2001:186)

This notion of counterpoint appears in the context of immense coalitional struggle to resist racism and imperialism in Palestine and the United States. Said elaborated the concept of counterpoint from the baroque form of fugue, developed in the works of the eighteenth-century German composer Johann Sebastian Bach[51]. 'The fugue is a musical form, produced in constitutive relation to the solidification of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and racialisation of Europe's Jews and Muslims,' notes Feldman (2011:162).

Later, in "Between Worlds" (2001), Said describes how he decided to 'think and write contrapuntally' in the aftermath of the 1967 war, departing from his assumed position of

assimilation. Marking the defeat of Arab armies and the creation of the state of Israel, the 1967 war was portrayed in the United States' popular media as the battle of enlightened Western civilisation besting the savage, inscrutable East, Said maintained. As an intellectual, he was aware of the injustice such a story produced, and, thus, took upon himself the task of presenting Palestinians as people who 'had a history, a society, [and] a right to self-determination' (2001:562). In this article, Said asserts that this shift in political and historical consciousness is manifested as 'contrapuntal practice' of '[u]sing the disparate halves of my experience as an Arab and as An American, to work with, and also against each other' (2001:562).

Within this framework and drawing on the work of Asian-American Studies scholar Shu-mie Shih, Feldman identifies what Shih calls the 'submerged and displaced relations' as 'the starting point for a fuller understanding of racialisation as a comparative process' (2011:163). He argues that describing the relations of racialisation as 'submerged' conjures up 'the aquatic, the oceanic, [and] exteraterritorial' aspects of coloniality, the black Atlantic cultures that resurface and circulate transnationality. Extending Shih's concept of displacement, Feldman indicates that 'a condition that registers rupture from one's place of dwelling and a dispersed to an elsewhere' produces figures of exile (2011:163). Therefore, he urges the reader to understand the condition of Black diaspora practices as being rooted in the dialectical tension between continuity and rupture, 'between a shared sense of cultural affiliation among a dispersed community and an often-traumatic historical as much as geographical break with either shared or perceived point of origin' (2011:160).

According to Stuart Hall, diasporic identities are 'never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, …representation' (1990:234). Hall, moreover, indicates that these cultural identities depend on the necessary and temporary 'break' in the semiosis of language (Hall 1990:240). This break occurs in a particular 'socio-historical conjunction', and 'positioning which makes meaning possible' is embedded in the heterogeneous contingencies

that make up specific articulations of 'societies structural in dominance'. Diasporic identities, thus, 'are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (Hall 1990:244).

Refugees for Refugees

A week after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans (2005), Hammad hosted a programme at Alwan for the Arts centre called "Refugees for Refugees". Amongst its participants were scholars, academics, poets, activists, comedians and others from different ethnic backgrounds such as Puerto Rico, Brazil, South Asia, Iran and Palestine. In the event poster was Merriam-Webster's Dictionary definition of 'refugee' alongside Hammad's own defnition:

'Merriam-Webster's Dictionary   Refugee: Noun one that flees; especially: a person who flees to a foreign country   or power to escape danger or persecution   Suheir Hammad's Dictionary Refugee: Noun, Verb, Ism   ONE LIKE ME'[52]

This kind of definition, obviously, relates Palestinian refugees to Black and poor Americans devastated by the hurricane and abandoned by the state, evoking a 'submerged relation' to hegemonic conceptions of citizenship and belonging—as suggested by Shih. Citing the political and German Jewish exile Hannah Arendt, Feldman compares Palestinian refugees of 1948 to the racialised Black Americans who were abandoned by the government of the United States after the hurricane. The existence of the 1948 Palestinian refugees marks the humanity echo of the Nazi genocide, which reinforces the lasting relations between European racial projects 'internal' to the continent and colonial modernity. In the same vein, Hammad's title of the event underlies the incomplete project of Black freedom in the United States, revealing in the discourse around Katrina refugees the lasting rupture of the United States' racial nationalism (Feldman 2011:165).

The political and poetic connections suggested by the motto "Refugees for Refugees" is extensively explored throughout all the poet's work, which emerges as a form of transnational cultural work whose fissures and dissonances intensify this mode of relation.

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Hammad's suggested supplement of the official definition of the term refugee can be seen as illustrating the imaginative and rhetorical power of the poetic language to accentuate political and cultural links and establishe modes of identification. Fred Moten indicates that the Black radical tradition has always operated in the 'break of history' of the Enlightenment, revealing the ways in which the categories of Enlightenment thought dictated transformation when placed under sustained scrutiny (2003:1-24). Rooted in Black radical tradition and the African diaspora from which it has sprung, Hammad's work manifests productive dissonances of modernity. Within this context, Feldman observes that Black cultural workers such as Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, June Jordan, Public Enemy and other figures who appear in Hammad's work have produced multi-form modes of cultural work that reveal constitutive breaks of modernity (2011:166). Such dissonances and breaks lie at the heart of Hammad's poetry, which, as Sirene Harb notes, speaks of the discontinuities in post-modern life in the United States and its consequences, such as 'the process of fragmentation of language, identity and belonging from within' (2011:2).

Hammad's first poetry book, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996), articulates a harsh critique of the oppressive power operating on the lives of different populations and groups within and across the borders of the United States. The book sought to reconstruct imaginary spaces through rearranging traditional geographies. The poem "Taxi" from Hammad's first poetry collection illustrates how the disparate elements of the poet's personal identity are united as the poem moves skilfully between Gaza and New York. The constant shift of locations and frames of references enables the reader to explore how these communities and spaces can relate to each other and influence one another. The poem opens in a Black American urban battleground and addresses Black American youths, 'urban warrior' and 'street soldier', to describe the familiar problem facing Black Americans in New York City— as the title indicates—of 'not gettin taxis and little white ladies/claspin purses' (1996:26).

The second part of the poem takes the reader to her 'father's city', Gaza in which '140 miles of 850,000 souls/…/stripped of humanity' (1996:26). In this part, Hammad portrays for her Black American comrades how these 'refugee camps' in Gaza turn their children into 'bad angry murderous'. Palestinian refugee camps are 'burstin with pictures of /murdered children of fire swimming/in the tears of a nation'. The poem proceeds to describe the despair of Palestinian youths 'who get arrested for thinking' and 'get their tender flesh signed with burn cigarettes'. In addition to sketching an aspect of the Palestinians' lives in refugee camps under Israeli occupation, the poem also focuses on the details of Palestinians' lives that resonate with daily concerns in a Black American urban context, such as 'closed universities and open prisons/curfews and home demolitions', in addition to 'mourning mothers/losing more sons to American tax dollars' (1996:27).

Although many ethnic groups tried to gain recognition by suggesting similarities between their communities' experiences and those of African Americans, younger Palestinian generations perceive Africans and African-Americans as their 'natural allies' (Abulhaw 2013). Critics have related the solidarity and coalition between Palestinians and African-Americans to shared struggles for freedom and experiences of racism (Motyl 2011; Feldman 2011). Young Palestinians, on the other hand, have realised that their freedom and rights 'cannot come from the same nations that facilitated and cheered on the destruction of [their] society', naming Europe and the United States (Abulhawa 2013). Instead of trying to prove their humanity to the United States and its allies and beg for their sympathy and help, this generation decided to move up their activism forward through forging multi-racial fronts to resist injustice. In the Palestine Literature Festival, June 2013, Susan Abulhaw, a Palestinian-American political commentator, and the author of the international bestseller novel *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), calls for reorienting the Palestinian struggle to 'align with indigenous struggles — struggles of the marginalized and voiceless — [that she considers to be] spiritually and politically black because there is no equivalent to the savagery inflicted on the

black body over centuries by white supremacy' (2013). Palestinians like Abulhawa consider African-Americans their 'natural allies' because '[t]hey are people who know, viscerally, what it means to be regarded as vermin by most of the world. Those who know what it is to be the "wretched of the earth"'(2013). In Brooklyn, African-Americans were family and the neighbours who have helped Suheir Hammad to come to terms with her Palestinian identity and provided her with the tools to articulate it loudly.

Connections and links between Palestinian and African-American communities are further highlighted and reinforced by entwining poetics and politics in the third stanza, in which Palestinian dabkeh beat is compared to hip-hop Public Enemy's riff. In this stanza, the poet draws the attention of her Black American 'conscious comrade' and 'struggling sister' to the refugee camp as 'a place uglier than uptown slum/ where people as just as beautiful', (1996:27) and where is:

> …a debke beat funky as p.e.'s riff
> signalling revolution liberation and freedom
> so when we're vibin on the pale
> evil of welfare and crack   know i'm
> across the street and across the sea   so when
> we're combatin cops and prisons   know there are prisons
> like ansar iii   nazis wouldn't touch   pigs wouldn't visit (Ibid).

Dabkeh, an Arab folk dance originating in the Levant, is a line beat dance that is widely performed at weddings and joyous occasions. Public Enemy, on the other hand, is an African-American hip-hop rap group known for their politically charged lyrics and criticism of the American media, with an activist's interest in the frustration and concerns of the African-American community. The poem acknowledges Palestinian Dabkeh and Public Enemy hip-hop music as sites of identification for these two communities. Moreover, she links the suffering of the two peoples through the persona who becomes the bridge between these two remote places. The connection is established through her awareness of the evils of the imperial materialism operating in the United States and its consequences, such as the drug abuse that plagued youth urban contexts. Simultaneously, she is also aware of the suffering of the

Palestinians in Gaza. The persona identifies and affiliates with both communities 'across the street and across the sea' as they share some experiences, such as struggling against police forces and unjust imprisonment conditions.

The passage proceeds to extend this relation between the two peoples through explicit political connections:

> so when we read Baraka and listen to Malcolm
> let's read darwish and keep on
> listenin to malcolm (1996:28)

The lines allude to iconographic Black American figures such as Amiri Baraka and Malcolm X and explicitly links them to Mahmoud Darwish, an equally significant revolutionary poet who is globally and nationally recognised as the national poet of Palestine. Michelle Hartman observes that instead of valorising these figures as icons, Hammad rather aims to summon up the messages they stood for: 'the liberation of the oppressed' (2006:6). Connecting these figures strongly implies that local and provincial interests of one community cannot inflect change. It could be argued here that the poet's message is directed to both communities: the African-Americans and Palestinians. This sensibility is seen to have facilitated the emergence of new approaches of Palestinian activism, as discussed above. From this stance Abulhawa argues that Palestinian liberation 'can only come from being a part of the liberation of others. And because fostering reciprocal human solidarity, is how we break an oppressor's imposed isolation' (2013).

This message of expanding the interests of one community is enacted in the lines: 'so when you call me sista/ ask about our family' (1996:28), in which the poet reminds her Black American brothers and sisters that developing an extended community must go beyond calling people brothers or sisters. Instead, it can be achieved by showing more respect by asking about the larger community to which these persons belong. The poet suggests that in addition to fighting their own battles, African-Americans must also become involved with fighting with Palestinians, since their battles are the same, though under different guises. Like all Hammad's

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work, "Taxi" also speaks to the Arab-American community as well. It urges Arab-Americans to transcend their experiences of 'honorary whiteness' and seek different modes of identification. Although the poem focuses on portraying Gaza and its people as oppressed by Israeli occupation, it also revolves around how African-Americans should turn their attention outwards, whereas Arab-Americans should transcend their concept of identity. The concluding line, thus, summarises the poet's message: 'it ain't all about/taxis/and little white women' (1996:28).

Hartman argues that the poem pleads for its readers to realise how forces of nation-based oppression operate on different levels of people's lives (2006:7). The poet pronounces her message by interweaving her experiences of being Black American and a Palestinian refugee in exile in order to articulate a larger statement about exploitation and racism, and, hence, urge these communities to transcend their local experiences. By explicitly acknowledging Black American political, literary and creative figures as her sources of inspiration, the poet aims to introduce an alternative model for Arab-Americans to help them define themselves politically and artistically. The poem urges African-Americans and Arab-Americans to break out of the patterns of thought that has long limited their horizons in order to achieve the sought-after social transformation.

Style and Hip-Hop Aesthetics

As the poetry collection *Born Palestinian, Born Black* declares, Suheir Hammad is an Arab-American Black woman rapper; as such, it is illuminating, then, to examine her work within the corpus and aesthetics of Black women rappers, whose resistant voices are integral in rap music and popular music. These women are seen to sustain an ongoing dialogue with their audiences, with male rappers and with the larger community about issues of sexual promiscuity, 'infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics and Black cultural history' (Rose 1994:146). Although they are mainly a resistant voice, they differ from their male counterparts

in their thematic focus. Generally, male rappers' social criticism often addresses police harassment and other means of policing Black men. Black women rappers, on the other hand, focus on the realm of sexual politics (Chang 445-8; Rose 1994:147). Their discourse is marked by what George Lipsitz describes for popular music as 'dialogic process' as it responds to different related issues, such as dominant notions of femininity, feminism and sexism. Their work thus reflects a constant dialogue with one another, black men and women, and mainstream culture, whilst they struggle to claim subjectivity and transcend the imprisonment within a hypocritical social environment (147-8).

Examining the work of Black women rappers in the light of dialogism can offer insights into how these women construct their own space and creatively 'address questions of sexual power, the reality of truncated economic opportunity, and the pain of racism and sexism' (Rose 1994: 149). Struggling with multiple oppressive forces, Black women rappers are engaged in constant dialogues with one another, with male rappers and with hip-hop fans. Rose writes, 'Dialogism resists the one-dimensional opposition between male and female rappers respectively sexist and feminist' (1994:149). Cornel West describes this situation as 'the pressure on African-American people has forced the black men closer to the black women: they are in the same boat. But they are also at each other's throat. The relation is internally hierarchal and often mediated by violence: black men over black women' (quoted in Rose 1994:149). In "Hip-Hop's Betrayal of Black Women", Jennifer Mclune observes that hip-hop owes its success to its patriarchal ideology that 'creates, perpetuates, and reaps the rewards of [women's] objectification' (2006), which, in turn, has driven female rappers to challenge sexism and reject the misogynistic order of the industry (Mclune 2006). In 'The Evil That Men Do', Queen Latifah's describes similar situations:

> Someone's living the good life, tax-free
> Except for a girl, can't find a way to be crack free
> And that's just part of the message
> I thought I had to send you about the evil that men do[53]

In the case of Suheir Hammad, the elements of the Palestinian exile and the stronghold of Arab patriarchy in diaspora complicate this dialogic process even further, leading to the formation of more complex intertwined issues that operate in many contexts.

Whereas "Taxi" manifests Hammad's poetics of 'submerged relations', "Suicide Watch" advances a critique of Black urban youth culture, demonstrating in the process the influence of hip-hop rhymes and rhythms, setting, language and imagery. The poem is discussed as an exemplar of Hammad's utilising hip-hop aesthetics from a female black rapper's stance, to pronounce a message of liberation. The poem opens with a warning to alert Black American girls: 'ain't no time for thoughts of suicide/ we gotsta entertain homicide' (1996:31). The dialogue between the poet and her audience of black and coloured women continues to explain the hazards of capitalism on their community:

but billboards bombard us
with calvin klein crotches and butt cracks
bag of crack   cracked bodies   and body bags (1996:31)

The poet sketches how capitalism in the United States destroys lives in underprivileged communities. She moves from the Calvin Klein billboards, evoking American capitalism and its vanity, to drug abuse. The image of crack employed in the lines above conjures up the drug epidemic plaguing American urban centres and taking the lives of their youths. The internal rhyme evoked by the structure of the last line creates a rhythmic beat that suggests the fast pace of post-modern life in the United States. The use of the homonyms of 'crack' is key in highlighting hip-hop's aesthetics and the poem's mocking tone. Also, the lack of syntactic relations implies that broken communication, discontinuity and dissonances are prevailing aspects of life in Black and coloured communities in the United States.

The poet proceeds in this poem whilst employing rhyme and rhythm to carry out her political message:

colored girls commit suicide
buying ugly lies and no lye straight and
no straight nose lies

thinkin the rainbow aint enuf
anyway the rainbow was a slave ship (Ibid).

Obviously, Hammad refers to how Black women and other coloured women suffer from the myth of white beauty that involves hair straightened by lye and straight noses. The poet warns these women that embracing the white beauty standards will conceal them and, consequently, smother their cultural identity. These lines illustrate the musicality of Hammad's verses as she uses rhyme as in (suicide, lies), in addition to more word play with the homonymic 'lies' and 'lye' and its symbolism in an urban cultural context. Moreover, the use of 'suicide' and the rainbow being 'enuf' ironically and mockingly alludes to Ntozake Shange's chore poem "For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf", and extends her political critique further by indicating that Rainbow was also a slave ship, enslaving black women's souls and bodies.

The poem encourages Black and coloured women to shed white beauty ideals and 'clean [their] eyes from blonde and and blue', and instead 'purify [their] spirit from red white and blue' to preserve their identities. In addition, the poem also articulates a harsh criticism of materialism, television culture, commercialisation and the corporatisation of society. She cries forcefully: 'enough of this/colonial commercialization of ancient civilizations/right when we need to rebuild nations' (1996:31). As Hammad strongly denounces the exploitation the United States' mainstream culture, she appeals to Black Americans to fight back against these forces and 'smell out the real enemy' (1996:32).

In the third part of the poem, the rhythms become more explicit and the pace escalates:

```
        name plate                           jail bait
slathered in vaseline            bottle pumpin curl sheen
drinkin coolers of wine            lips don't touch swine
gloc cleaned and shined           herbal buzz on the mind
sippin warm black cheery      bullet wounds honor you carry
        wallet by coach                   pimp style approach
                        yo baby yo
                        yo brotha yo
                    them gold chains
            are tighter than you think (1996:45).
```

In these lines, the poet mimics the symbols which have been embraced by Black young men as indicators of status and masculinity in African-American culture. She identifies the hypocrisy of many actions, such as not eating pork, thereby supposedly showing respect to Islam, and yet violating another taboo by drinking wine openly. The poem ends with warning these young men that materialism, displayed by embracing the symbols of wealth, will cause the downfall of all those embracing it. The gendered critique articulated in this poem, calling for respect as a sister, lies at the heart of the poet's political mission to challenge patriarchy in her society. In her poetry, Hammad attempts to illustrate how a lack of respect for women and male indifference could damage society in general more than women themselves. Hartman notes that in all of Hammad's poetry, the political message, advancing for 'social justice, anti-racism and Palestinian liberation, go hand and hand with women's role in society as equal participants and with the full respect of men' (2006:7). These political issues are rooted in her poetry, forming a fundamental part of her poetic vision.

In addition to thematic focus, Hammad's style and aesthetics evidently help articulate her political message louder, as the lines above illustrate. As a hip-hop product, her style demonstrates three basic concepts: flow, layering and rupture in line, which Rose identifies as marking all forms of hip-hop arts: 'Visual, physical, musical, and lyrical lines are set in motion, broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks, yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow' (Rose 1994:38). These concepts are utilised through several techniques, of which sampling and loop are the most commonly used. Sampling denotes isolating an excerpt, or sample, of one sound recording and reproducing it, such as the reproduction of a guitar riff from another song or of a quote from a movie in a rap song. Loop, on the other hand, is the multiple repetition of a sound sample. The loop, hence, produces the break or break beat, which Rose calls 'repetition in rupture'. This break creates the balance between past and present, which, in turn, expresses African-American culture's conception of

time, differing from the European culture's conception of time that is fixated on progress and sees repetition as stagnation (Rose 1994:73).

In the poems discussed earlier, Hammad, as a vocal rapper, employs flow in her poems to move powerfully through the poem. She stutters and alternatively races through passages, always creating beat through rhythm. These verbal beats feature 'lyrical flow' and 'points of rupture'. Rappers propagate meaning 'by using the same word to signify a variety of actions and objects' (Rose 1994:38), such as the use of the words 'crack', 'straight', 'lie and lye' in "Suicide Watch", and the repetition of 'yo baby yo'/ 'yo brotha yo' and 'rainbow' in "yo baby yo'". Layering sounds or words literally one on top of the other evokes intensity and, hence, creating a dialogue between sampled sounds and words (Hebdige 2002; Rose 1994).

An important feature of Hammad's style that suggests flow is casting aside capitalisation and syntax. Hammad's deliberate process of breaking the rules of syntax and orthography can be interpreted as mirroring the level of content on the level of form. Katharina Motyle also suggests that lack of capitalisation may express a desire for 'de-hierarchisation and democratisation, disrupting the pattern which we automatically imbue the signified of capitalised signifiers (God, President, etc.)' (2011:5). Also, lack of punctuation appears as another distinctive feature of Hammad's poetry. In all of Hammad's works there are no commas, periods, exclamation marks, etc. However, double spaces are sometimes found where one would expect a comma or a period. Motyle argues that the use of double spaces in lieu of commas and periods reproduces the effect of the beat (Ibid). Based on the premise that a comma or a period indicates the completion of an act before another action begins, the use of the double spaces may suggest that a new action may begin whilst the effect of the previous one still lingers. Like the break (beat), in the absence of commas and periods, double spaces enable a simultaneity of past and present. Hammad's gaze, therefore, locates the persisting effects of the past in the present. For her, the present conditions which African-

American and Palestinians find themselves in echoes the long history of oppression of these two peoples (Motyl 2011:3).

Tricia Rose argues that these concepts—flow, layering and rupture—reinforce continuity through flow. She explains that one must 'accumulate, reinforce, and embellish this continuity through layering; and manage threats to these narratives by building in ruptures that highlight the continuity as it momentarily challenges it' (1994:39). In this sense, hip-hop aesthetics illustrate creative ways to contest social alienation and mainstream racialisation. Therefore, Rose believes that these principles can be 'a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation: create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them' (Ibid).

Breaks and ruptures have been further crystallised in Hammad's *breaking poems* (2008). In this collection, the process of fragmentation of identity and belonging from within is paralleled with the breaking down of the language system of signification, in addition to reinforcing Hammad's relational poetics. This project, which the poet calls 'deconstruction/of language and words' (2008:18), doubts the potency of words and language, suggesting the poet's exertion with language as a means of writing back to the centre. In this experimental work appears the Palestinian/Arab-American self side by side with the Brooklyn girl whose voice pervaded earlier works. Such an approach adds another poetic strategy of confrontation with language, occupation, silencing and grief. It also expresses the quest of the poetic self for ways of narrating war, apartheid and uprooting.

The collection includes thirty-eight poems, each of which is entitled "break". Paradoxically, the title *breaking poems* can be seen as forging connections that bridge the gaps between different cultures and geographical locales:

> moon
> same in ramallah wa new orleans wa jerusalem wa johanesburg wa
> beirut same moon (2008:34)

It is the struggle against different forms of racism and apartheid that connectsF these distance

cultures and geographies both in the poet's consciousness and poetry. Hammad breaks through borders' barriers and links a Palestine under siege with diaspora and beyond. In addition to these places, the collection includes names of different places in Palestine, the Middle East and the rest of the world. The *breaking poems* collection is distinguished by introducing English to an Arabic vernacular that aims to disrupt the hierarchy of the imperial language of the centre, whilst startling into being a new language. By adopting such a technique, the poet seeks to break through cultural and linguistic conventions that were incapable of accommodating her experiences of trauma.

The poet justifies her use of hip-hop as an Arabic vernacular as a means that helps her to 'humanize and illuminate the Palestinian experience' (Knopf-Newman 2006:76), in addition to helping her getting around her feelings of brokenness. The poet also asserts that she found that no one language can accommodate and express the horror in people's lives. She describes her struggle for finding words for her poems:

> there's this transparent struggle that I have with the poem about finding appropriate language. I don't think it's an inherent deficiency in the English language as much as I think it's the horrific abundance of true fear, authentic fear that we're living with [something] that no language has words for. (Knopf-Newman 2006:75)

This strategy has allowed the poet to create what Harb calls a 'migratory agency' that travels between histories, ethnicities and languages and 'refuses to privilege the forces of monolingualism and monoculturalism as she weaves English with vernacular Arabic' (2011:3). The strategy of code-switching is a threefold process: it resists monolingual and monocultural forces threatening bilingual writers (Kraver 1997:193); and 'it creates tensions [that] challenge the binary oppositions upon which Anglo society depends,… and disrupts [the] authoritarian discourse of English as the mainstream language' (Kraver 1997:196-7). Within this context, the argument of Michael Dowdy can be useful as he notes that poems implementing this strategy can be seen as a 'conscious borrowing and mixing…of a variety of languages [and] discourses' (2007:5). As a 'migratory agency', Hammad's poetry expresses

the 'agency of the linguistic and cultural migrant', vacillating between conflicting cultures and

their linguistic traditions, such as Arabic and English in the case of Suheir Hammad.

Correspondingly, it is argued that the poet's meditation on power and language can be

explored in the light of postcolonial critique by situating it at the convergences of power and

resistance dynamics that inform postcolonial and ethnic discourses. Both discourses constitute

multi-layered shared cultural and political issues that govern their relation to the empire.

Events like the 2006 Israeli bombing of Lebanon have driven the poet to produce this

collection. In the following, Hammad reflects on the calamities of this event:

> I remember the first poem, the first one that came to me …in New York City, on 23rd
> Street. I was walking down the street, the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon has started,
> and I just couldn't get words around what I felt, and I felt broken, I felt let down, I felt
> disillusioned, I felt hopeful, and I kept trying to use English language to fit all these
> different—like fishers almost—and …after years of living here and travelling, the
> languages stopped…respecting the borders. The languages started travel freely. For
> me, this book is the first book I have ever written that came as a series and it is as
> transparent an entry into my mind as a poet's heart, as anything I have done before.
> (Flanders 2008)

Languages coalescence, therefore, stem from the poet's awareness of her diverse experiences

within socio-historical and political contexts. The the code-switching strategy depicted in

Hammad's *breaking poems* works to rationalise certain facets of her experience of

hyphenation and fragmentation. Harb observes that utilising such a strategy 'is necessitated by

the poet's awareness of the importance of language as a tool of hegemonic power' (2011:5).

Hence, drawing on the postcolonial model, Hammad's strategy can be explained as:

> seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the
> colonised place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the
> abrogation or denial of the privilege of "English" involves a rejection of the
> metropolitan power over means of communication. The second, the appropriation and
> reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding
> the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege.
> (Ashcroft et al.1989:37)

Evidently, both 'abrogation and appropriation' emanate from a drive of resistance to the

hegemony of proper English as the language of the empire. Therefore, the breakdown of

English as a tool sustaining imperial control, manifested in Hammad's work as the result of

such acts of abrogation, is derived from resisting the 'categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or "correct! usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed" in the words' (Ashcroft et al. 1989:37-8). In their seminal book, *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft et al. stress the importance of abrogation as 'a vital moment in the de-colonizing of the language and the writing of "English"' 1989:38). In Hammad's work, acts of abrogation are adapted through her full embrace of hip-hop culture and poetry; however, in *breaking poems*, she pushes this approach further by blending it with Arabic to establish and articulate difference. In "break (wave)", Hammad states:

here is the thing
the poem is the body
....
here is the thing
the body is the poem
placed in habibi's mouth
placed in men's hands
placed on maps wa within lines wa between covers
ana all this time
translating waves into language bass missing
what i had wanted to say was (20081–2, 12–19)

Adopting lower case and lack of punctuation in the stanzas above manifests the abrogation of a standardised linguistic structure. They demonstrate the defiance of the poem and the subjects or person's body, whilst casting the 'migratory agency's' challenge of incarceration by 'men's hands', 'maps' and 'lines'. However, as this resistance aims to move beyond the borders of the imperial centre, it seeks to appropriate its hegemonic language to evoke the inadequacy of translation, and, consequently, bring transformation. The poet equates her poetry with her body as she hopes to transform words into flesh and vice versa to help her attain impeccable forms of articulation. The empty space that follows the phrase 'what i had wanted to say was', nevertheless, indicates that the poet realises her incapability of expressing her 'ana', (the self/I). Another significant act of abrogation is the lack of rhyme scheme, which signifies the absence of ordering devices that help create meaning. Harab explains:

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Such alternative forms of representation illustrate how the language of the imperial centre goes through forms of abrogation and remains, despite its complexity, ''bass [however] missing'' when it is asked to account for alternative mappings of marginalized selves and origins. (2011:6)

To acknowledge these chasms or breaks in representation, the poet experiments with blending cultural markers and languages under the umbrella of hybridity and interlingualism, which Juan-Novoa explores in his account on Chicano literature:

Chicanos blend Spanish and English, at times in obvious ways, such as juxtaposing words from both languages, but more often in such subtle fusions of grammar, syntax or cross-cultural allusions that monolingual readers will hardly notice. . . . This practice rejects the supposed need to maintain English and Spanish separate in exclusive codes, but rather sees them as reservoirs of primary material to be moulded together as needed (quoted in Harb 2011:4).

In the context of Hammad's collection *breaking poems*, this practice includes moulding two different cultures and simultaneously weaving African-American with Arabic vernacular.

Such hybridisation and interlingualism are manifested in the poem ''(wind) break (her)'':

fairuz turquoise dawn ears ring
voice diwan detroit divine
smoke full lips fall on back baalbek
museum mezze sabra jordan black
june in jerusalem
bi albek
almonds coffee darwish
the eighties the ground the zeroes
tabla in brooklyn air so thick beat hung there
hips reflected the breath someone was drumming
to accompany the dying and the living
somewhere far and somewhere close (2008:1–12)

The lines above demonstrate Hammad's strategic use of cultural and linguistic hybridisation. Such strategy, in turn, has rendered meaning rather ambiguous due to the lack of textual keys and clues between words and verses that help decode meaning, and, thus, readers demand explanation relating to the links between these very different words such as 'Fairuz', 'Detroit', 'Baalbek', 'museum', 'sabra', 'jordan', and 'june'. Looking up these words in a dictionary, one may learn that 'fairuz' stands for the precious stone turquoise in Arabic; Baalbek is a

Lebanese town; 'mezze' or meze is 'an appetizer in Greek or Middle Eastern cuisine often served with an aperitif'; and 'sabra' refers to a 'a native born Israeli'[54]. Therefore, an interlingual perspective becomes inevitably crucial to decipher the type of relationships that connect these words. Such an approach offers the reader a useful tool to interpret relationships and establish connections between the singer Fairuz, perceived as a Lebanese national icon, and the city of Detroit, populated by a large community of Lebanese-Americans who left a war-torn country. The word 'museum' refers to the green line, known as (the museum crossing) that divided the capital of Lebanon, Beirut, into a Christian east and a Muslim west during the civil war (1975-1990). "[S]abra", in addition, hints at the 1982 massacre of Sabra and Shatila, the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, which was commemorated in June Jordan's poem ''Moving Towards Home''. Evoking the historical and political context of the poem, such an interpretation delineates the complex experience of the poet as a refugee immigrant and a woman of colour.

Interpreting the lines within this framework helps establish viable relationships between elements and verses and, hence, connect to them to the rest of the poem. For instance, 'bi albek' (bi:in, albek your heart); a heart of a female immigrant that yearns for homeland, and for Mahmoud Darwish's poetry as being the icon of contemporary Palestinian resistance. Referring to the 'coffee' alludes to Darwish's poem "To My Mother", (''Ila Ummi''), which addresses Palestine, his symbolic mother. In "tabla in Brooklyn" (drum), the drum operates as a cultural signifier that links the past to present, through which the female immigrant desperately seeks to apprehend memories of 'the dying and the living', to settle the paradox in 'somewhere far and somewhere close', blending and merging the two spaces in her heart and consciousness. In cases like Hammad's, the interlingual reading seems to be useful in helping readers understand the complexity of the poet's experience with all its historical, cultural and political constituents. 'It also constitutes a bridge between the past and the present of the Arab

immigrants in the United States and their descendants, offering signposts for a multilayered reading of the Arab-American heritage,' maintained Harb (2011:10)

Blending her two languages and using ambiguous juxtapositions, the poet seeks to transform Arabic and English, and unsettle the power hierarchies between the two languages, and, consequently, cultures. She attempts to resist the hegemony of the English language, in addition to the monocultural and essentialist presumptions of the mainstream audience. The poet unsettles this power relationship by defamiliarising the effect of interlingualism on her audience, which is achieved through the poet's refusal to insert English renditions of the Arabic words in the text, or even as footnotes. Instead, the poet included a non-comprehensive glossary at the end of the collection so that readers discover it after they finish reading the entire collection. Weaving Arabic with English aims to undermine the authority of the English language and reject categories imposed by mainstream American culture. Harb illustrates how this delayed effect of translation resists the hegemony of English:

> [I]t talks back to illusions of sameness and fixity underlying the notion of imperialist centralism, privileging a set of cultural signifiers and symbols and advocating the necessity to translate the culture of subaltern minorities to mainstream audiences. (2011:8)

Introducing this abundance of references and allusions, Hammad aims to encourage the American reader to tread into the world of the marginalised through their engagement with icons, words, symbols and historical and political references. This process of hybridisation is in parallel with the description of Ashcroft et al. of 'appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre' as 'the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages' (1989:37). It is a process through which the poet subverts the essentialist assumptions and notions of 'Americanness' that excludes ethnic groups such as African-Americans and Arab-Americans. Moreover, through this process, the poet also seeks to subvert the presupposition of the English language 'as a fixed, imperial language' 'whose purity delimits the borders of the American nation' (Harb 2011:9-10).

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Hammad's poetry also contains terms and cultural references from other ethnic cultures, such as African-American and Latino/a-American. In juxtaposing these symbols and words that have been integrated as a mainstream language with Arabic ones, Hammad aims to facilitate the inclusion of Arabic into mainstream culture (Harb 11-12). In *breaking poems*, not only is the appropriation of English achieved by fusing it with words, symbols and cultural references emerging from non-American/European linguistic traditions, but it is also achieved by resisting the rules of the hegemonic authoritative language. This resistance aims to help the poet accomplish her political mission of 'deconstructing American English and unmasking its colonial and imperial power as well as the cultural stereotypes it has helped to transmit'. Thus, Hammad situates her poetry within the crossroads of resistance and reclamation, where 'words originally used to silence the ethnic other are made to defy boundaries of oppression and transgress their original imperial function' (Harb 2011:11-12).

Suheir Hammad braids her poems with shrewd awareness resulting from the intersection of her experiences of war, exile, racism and colonialism. Though solidly rooted in African-American cultural, political and literary traditions, Hammad's poetry remains attached to Arab/Palestinian literature, music and culture. Her poems juxtapose Baalbak and Detroit, Jordan and Darwish, Old and New Worlds, New Orleans' flooding catastrophe and evacuations from Beirut in 2006 in "break (word)". She celebrates Palestinian Dabkah music whilst critiquing sexism and patriarchy sustained by Arab nationalism. Though celebrating Amiri Baraka and the music of Public Enemy, she fiercely condemns the misogyny and greed of some young Black-American men. Evidently, it is hip-hop that permeates Hammad's poetics in its content, aesthetics and broader messages. Through her relational Afro-Arab poetics, she offers potential for transformation in diverse settings and environments by articulating her message of social and political justices and equality. She utilises the concerns and woes of her two communities to pronounce her much broader statement about equality, women's liberation and social justice that transcend these communities. Most importantly,

Hammad's poetry calls for expanding communities through understanding labels and re-articulations of identities. It is at the intersections of politics and poetry, postcolonialism and racism, African-American and Palestinian communities, Amiri Baraka and Mahmoud Darwish, and hip-hop consciousness and music, wherein lies the transformative potential of Suheir Hammad's poetry.

Conclusion

This project has sought to advance the field of Arab-American studies. In exploring Arab-American women's poetry as a viable space for articulating self-representation and criticism, we understand how these poets attempt to claim agency and collective visibility. Whilst my introductory chapters have shown the complicated cultural context for this poetry and wide-ranging ways that critics have approached Arab-American literature, this project is the first endeavour that depicts the growth of the body of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry through four generations of Arab diaspora in the United States. To my knowledge, this is the first study that demonstrates the significance of the poetry of Arab-American women as a valuable record of a minority's multiple and divergent identity issues, in addition to its being a conduit to explore Arab-American cultural and socio-political conditions that existed long before the urgent moment of September 11.

Arabs have always found themselves as members of an ostracised population, which explains the reason that 'Arab-American writers in the United States have, of necessity, tended to address communal concerns more than individual ones' (Mattawa and Akash 1999:xii). Thrusting this beleaguered community into the limelight, the repercussions of September 11 have significantly subjected this ethnic group to religious and cultural discrimination and intense racialisation, in addition to reinforcing the ahistorical representations of Arab culture, and by extension, Arab-Americans. Arab-Americans were obliged to ward off charges of fanaticism and terrorism that had targeted them. In order to contextualise the attacks of September 11, they were also led to engage in political and cultural discussions to explain the historical injustices and implications to which the Middle East was subjected to due to the United States' ventures and foreign policies in the area. Throughout my thesis, I have attempted to show that the inheritance of a long history of racial conflict in the United States

needs to be understood alongside the sensibilities that had informed other ethnic American writers before them. Arab-Americans felt obliged to rewrite their stories to define themselves, or mainstream culture will continue defining them in its own terms. Hence, my study has explored how four Arab-Americans turned to literature to seek visibility and justice when decades of politics have failed them, for literature enables them to connect and forge alliances with other ethnic groups in the United States. For Arab-American women poets, poetry has become a register of counter-history and a space that permits articulations of subjects that are not governed by official discourses.

Throughout the study, I have argued that Arab-American women poets have recognised the significance of using literature as an effective strategy to acquire autonomy in Arab-American diaspora. Literary representations, as Patricia Chu describes them, have also become a means of claiming political and social agency (2003:3). I have demonstrated that contemporary Arab-American women's poetry reflects an Arab-American viewpoint that has been obliterated from mainstream literary and political registers. For instance, Mohja Kahf has attempted to break the shell of the Oriental exotic that has tainted representations of Arab/Muslim women in diaspora. Through her poetry, she sought to transform this deformed image, whilst simultaneously establishing her difference as a Muslim American citizen of Arab descent. Suheir Hammad, on the other hand, sought to articulate her difference through connecting with African-Americans.

Perceived as the 'ultimate other' (Fedda-Conrey 2006:137), Arab-American women poets such as Suheir Hammad and Naomi Shihab Nye have been keen, in different ways, to forge alliances with other minorities. Whereas Nye attempts to connect with Latin-Americans through her poems on Latin America, Hammad embraces blackness and its hip-hop culture to denounce different forms of violence: in streets, families and nations. Articulating poetics through a hip-hop lens has enabled Hammad to establish a 'diasporic conversation' (Lipsitz 1994:27) that transcends the boundaries of the essentialist Arab-American identification.

Within the contemporary Arab-American literary scene, poetry occupies a central position, for the publication of *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* in 1988 announced the existence of Arab-American literature. As indicated in the introduction to this study and chapter one, September 11 did not mark the emergence of the re-emergence of Arab-American literature. The works included in this early anthology demonstrate the early generations' attempts to negotiate the schism between the Arab and the American parts of the self, in addition to articulating a struggle for not quite belonging. Those negotiations and struggles, nevertheless, were devised through nostalgic yearning for an idealised old way of life and familial relationships in an old homeland that reflects the community politics of 'cultural authenticity' of the 1970s and 1980s. Reinforced and enabled by the official discourse of liberal multiculturalism of the mid decades of the twentieth century, this 'cultural authenticity' allowed ethnic groups to celebrate an idealised old homeland that is different, but ahistorical, as a strategy to police their engagement with state politics.

The poetry of Etel Adnan, as discussed in chapter two, problematises this nostalgic undertone that prevailed Arab-American poetry in the 1970s and 1980s.

In her poetry, Adnan articulates a harsh critique of Lebanese politics that negates the image of Lebanon as a spiritual fountain, as depicted in earlier Arab-American poetry.

Nostalgia and celebrating cultural symbols and an ethnic lifestyle could not accommodate the realities that increasingly pressed themselves on the lives of Americans of Arab descent in the 1990s. The expansion of the United States' imperial project in the Middle East, coupled with the United States-Israeli alliance, have subjected Arab-Americans to intensified forms of political and cultural racialisation, leading them to seek activism in literature. Ultimately, the vehement socio-political turbulences that wrecked the Middle East in the past century due to the United States' military interventions in the area have impacted and sabotaged the position of the Arab community living in the United States. Consequently, literary production such as poetry could not escape the entrapment within these persisting

harsh realities that moulded the lives and experiences of these women. Instead of negotiating their conflicting dualism through celebratory nostalgia, Arab-Americans wrote to achieve balance between the two sides of the hyphen. They deploy their difference to denounce long decades of injustice and ambiguity that shrouded their experience in the country, and more importantly, to connect with other minorities in order to fortify their ethnic position in the United States.

In the Arab-American community, women bear the brunt of political and cultural racialisation and demonisation as experiencing the 'double jeopardy' of 'multiple and simultaneous oppressions', in which layers of sexism and racism work together shaping the lives of Arab women in the United States. Arab-American feminists maintain that sexism pervades anti-Arab racism of the racial discourses throughout the 1990s that has ultimately intensified after September 11. Within this context, contemporary Arab-American women poets have acknowledged their task of writing poetry as an important medium of self-representation that reveals what Barbra Nimri Aziz describes as 'the little things' recovered from their heritage (2004:xi). Aziz urges Arab-American writers to 'seek out [the] overlooked minor details of our heritage, and with them, help us rebuild a fragmented, uncertain identity' (2004: xiii). Although Arab-American women poets and writers realise that their writings will not 'overturn centuries of injustice,…or propel [them] into position of dominance', but at least to help them 'locate [themselves] at that archaeological site, and build new stories from the little things [they] reclaim' (Aziz 2004: xiv). These poets attempt to negotiate identity allegiances and affiliations through poetry as a mode of knowledge. By teaching poetry in Texas schools, Nye sought to offer another version of the Palestinian narrative. She uses her poetry as a source for providing what she perceives as the alternative image of her fellow Palestinians. Correspondingly, Kahf's poetry sketches images of the contemporary Muslim woman that aim to trouble the mainstream narrative of Arab/Muslim-American woman.

The Arab-American activist Lila Abu-Lughod maintains that the essential and

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monolithic identity categories of the Muslim/Arab woman have been manipulated for political purposes (2002). Such manoeuvrings became evident in the United States' official discourses that aimed to justify the invasion of Afghanistan. Throughout the twentieth century, the representations of Arab culture and Arab women have been subjected to institutionalised racism through which diverse and multiple identity forms were reduced to few simple, passive and negative stereotypes. Along with other contemporary Arab-American women writers, Arab-American women poets such as Kahf, whose poetry contests mainstream narratives of hijab, took upon themselves the task of analysing and exploring these racist processes in order to challenge and undermine such discursive constructions of themselves and their culture.

The term Arab is fraught with a complex cluster of religions, ethnicities, linguistic traditions and political leanings and affiliations, which foregrounds the heterogeneity of the term Arab-American. The selection of poets for this study, in parallel, reflects some of the multiple and diverse positions of Arab-American women writers. These women are only united in their literary and political missions of resisting the processes of racialisation, whilst simultaneously seeking to reach out for a wider mainstream and ethnic readership. Their main task appears to be the transformation of mainstream concepts of Arab culture and its women. In this case, poetry becomes a space for mediation and negotiation, and as I have argued, contemporary Arab-American women poets inscribe their poetics from the position of the New Mestiza, where the racial oppressions they experience surpasses the intra-communal gender oppression. Articulating their poetry from the position of the 'nepantla', Arab-American women poets assume the role of mediators who strive to link contested geographical and cultural spaces.

Situating contemporary Arab-American women's poetry within the contexts of diaspora and race helps to construct a 'diasporic Arab feminist critique' (Naber 2012: 249), which offers new opportunities for the understanding of themes such as those of gender, sexuality and religion, long perceived to be static in the domain of Arab/Islamic culture. Such critique

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leads us to acknowledge contemporary Arab-American women's identities within fluid contexts of identification that undermine the consistent public and institutionalised racialisations. Assuming the role of cultural mediators, these contemporary Arab-American poets explore the boundaries of their diasporic identities through the medium of poetry. However, their poetic inscriptions reflect a mélange of forms and aesthetics that stress the multiplicity and diversity of their backgrounds, lifestyles and experiences. The depiction of contemporary Arab-American women's poetry throughout four generations helps us to assess the constant reformulation of racial politics in the United States that have been long operating in the Arab-American community until the present moment. Hence, an important goal of this study has been presenting contemporary Arab-American women's poetry as a fertile space for the study of intersections and discrepancies of race and feminisms. I have argued that this poetry has become a constructive domain through which these women sought to establish difference within diasporic feminism and cultural representations. As a diasporic literary field, contemporary Arab-American women's poetry opens up new channels for dialogue between different modes of feminisms without fixing third-world women's expressions within the hierarchies of the discourses of liberating Western feminisms.

Etel Adnan articulates poetics of assertive political consciousness that is complicated by her artistic allegiances to nineteenth-century French Symbolism. Demythologising her home, Lebanon, in her poetry, Adnan manifests a complex diasporic connection with that homeland. In this sense, Adnan epitomises the figure of transnational disaporic subject that dwells in both American and Lebanese culture, but belongs to neither. Adnan's poetry interweaves textual and visual elements in order to maximise the pictorialist potential of language, whilst still retaining its poetic ambiguity. It is an exemplar of a vital interrelationship between visual art and poetry. To reflect the state of chaos and apocalyptic explosion of hatred and revenge in Lebanon and the Middle East during the civil war, Adnan attempts to resist the linear mode of composition and logical order by employing methods

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designated to reinforce the fragmentation of discourse and phrase, because she believes that 'time is dead…[and] action is fragmented into sections so that no one has an exact image of the whole process. The imagination of those holed up at home cannot travel even as far as the nearest bombing' (Adnan1982: 17-18). Through her poetry, Adnan carves a feminine space in which visual art collaborates with poetry in an imprecise manner to deliver 'something very precise' (Weaver 1986:16), whilst demonstrating the multifarious perception of the poet and offering a dynamic and compelling mixture of postcolonial politics and feminist critique. The poetry of Etel Adnan reflects the first generation's links to the Middle East and its preoccupation with the politics of the region. However, the poet's position as a 'transnational diasporic' subject provides her with the tools to formulate a critical outlook that departs from the nostalgic yearning of her contemporaries.

On the other hand, the work of Naomi Shihab Nye, a second-generation Arab-American poet, rooted in the American Southern poetic tradition, originates from an American liberal multiculturalism of the late 1970s and 1980s. She pursues in poetry what we see occurring in other cultural realms in the United States: a 'pan-ethnic Arab identity' claimed as part of a 'strategy for gaining racial-ethnic recognition' (Naber 2012:46). Nye's poetry portrays an idealised Arab culture, and a romanticised far homeland, the Holy Land, or spiritual Palestine, and its people. Such poetics can seem retrograde in the knowledge of Adnan's revolutionary poetics, for Nye's poetry celebrates Arab cultural authenticity, but does not engage as closely or as fiercely as Adnan with the specificities of the region's and America's politics. The year Nye spent in the occupied territories, and later in Texas, have impacted the poet's sense of belonging and placed her in Anzaldua's 'nepantla' to assume the 'new mestiza' mission of linking her two conflicting geographical spaces, which enables her to define her role as a mediator. However, Nye cannot wholly fulfill the 'new mestiza' mission because she does not go against the grain of the mainstream politics. Although her work does not reflect American racist ideology, it is intimately and inevitably bound up with it. Neither

wholly subversive nor wholly complicit, Nye's work mediates desires that aim to 'disrupt the crude opposition of racial power' (Wald 2000:8). Her intended political counternarrative inscription, in its sentimental approach, marks the poet's strategy of controlling white supremacy. By offering folktale stories from her ancestral land, Palestine, the poet attempts to inscribe possibilites of peace, love and community by reinforcing the idea that sharing acts of everyday life can help us cross 'the imaginary bounderies separating individuals, cultures, and countries' (Mercer and Storm2007:34).

Mohja Kahf, however, is more dissident than Nye. From an Islamic feminist stance, Kahf weaves her poetics of resistance and transformation, whilst seeking to create a space for a Muslim woman in America. In *E-Mails From Scheherazad*, Kahf reinscribes Shahrazad and brings her to the twenty-first century United States as a storyteller, and a writer who pens messages in e-mail format to a world that 'is unprepared to recognize her wit, humour, lyricism, passion and intellect, and all too ready to negate her worth as a Muslim woman' (Majaj 2012:1). The poet revives Shahrazad to weave her narrative within 'the political language of identity [that] levels out distinctions between chosen connections and given particularities: between the person you choose to be and the things that determine your individuality be being thrust upon you' (Gilroy 2004:106). Through translating back the protofeminist figure of Shahrazad, the poet seeks to undermine the fetishised Orientalist representations of Islamic/Arab culture and the demeaning stereotypes of Muslim /Arab women. In Kahf's poetry, Muslim women gain agency, and become cultural agents who disrupt the exotic/oppressive constructions of their representations in mainstream culture and media. In addition, Kahf's poetry also evinces harsh criticism of intra-communal gender politics. However, the poet never departs the American context as she strives to reinforce her difference as an American embracing her version of 'the American way of life' (Salaita 2005).

From a different angle emerges the energetic combative voice of the young hip-hop poet Suheir Hammad, who reveals her experience as a working-class woman of colour from

Brooklyn through the lens of African-American feminism. Hammad extracted herself from the Arab-American literary landscape and joined her African-American comrades to embark on her political activism of denouncing a long history of injustices inflicted on African-American people in the United States, and Palestinian people overseas. Her poetry, hence, is the offspring of American ethnic experiences. The poet braids her poems with shrewd awareness originating from the intersection of her experiences of war, exile, racism and colonialism. Though solidly rooted in African-American cultural, political and literary traditions, Hammad's poetry remains attached to Arab/Palestinian literature, music and culture. African-American hip-hop permeates Hammad's poetics in its content, aesthetics and broader messages. Through her Afro-Arab poetics, she offers a potential for transformation in diverse settings and environments by articulating her message of social and political justices and equality. She voices the concerns and woes of her two communities to pronounce her much broader statement about equality, women's liberation and social justice that transcend these communities. In her work, Hammad attempts to carve an alternate self that is both unique and shared, whilst transcending the racialisation that has long shaped her life and representations women of colour in the United States. Her identification with African-Americans attests to the fact that the Arab-American community is an important constituent of the American ethnic mosaic. Inevitably, Hammad's Afro/Arab-American poetics registers the 'new directions' taken by the younger generations of Arab-American writers and activists; directions that allow self-criticism whilst building bridges and forging alliances with other beleaguered minorities inhabiting the United States.

In depicting identity poetics in contemporary Arab-American women's poetry, this study aims to contribute to the previous studies that have explored Arab-American identity politics and negotiations across different genres and disciplines. I believe that the study calls attention to the prominence of the contemporary poetry of Arab-American women as mirroring the patterns of the development of the Arab-American community and its politics in the United

States and how it is affected by government policies at home and overseas. The significance of this study lies in introducing contemporary Arab-American women's poetry as a diasporic space for articulating difference and bringing about transformation, in addition to highlighting the diversity of Arab-American women's experiences. In this respect, the thesis aims to disrupt any monolithic and essential representation of the Arab woman. Works of these poets represent distinct phases of the history of Arab diaspora in the United States, reflecting political and literary developments in the field of Arab-American studies.

Although the study does not recognise a continuity of poetic tradition, a shared, if complicated, poetics has emerged in this study. The diversity of the cultural, religious, political, linguistic and social backgrounds reflects the diversity of the larger Arab-American community. Arab-American poets in this study share historical and socio-political experiences that have facilitated the emergence of a collective memory. Such a memory united them and bound their past, present and hopes for a better future. Nathalie Handal maintains that the space of American literature has become the platform these poets share (2001:44), and the philosopher George Santayana observes that even 'if there are immense differences between individual Americans …there is a great uniformity in their environment, customs, temper, and thought. They have all been uprooted from their several soils and ancestries and plunged together into one vortex…To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education, and a career' (quoted in Handal, 2001:44).

Despite utilising different formal techniques, the poetics of Arab-American women in this study revolves around two major issues: the impact of all of the major political and historical events in the Middle East, and the affirmation of their ethnic identity. Through various techniques, these poets have sought appropriate poetic forms for their poetic and political interests. For instance, through the prose poem, Adnan's work pronounces a harsh critique of Middle Eastern and Lebanese politics, whilst mirroring influences of visual art and nineteenth-century French Symbolism. On the other hand, Nye's poetics, informed and shaped

by the values and forms of the Deep Image school of poetry of the South, aims to offer the American mainstream the real version of the Palestinians' story, the version that has been eliminated from the news headlines. Informed by Arabic literary tradition, Kahf's poetry seeks to resist the ahistorical stereotyping of the Arab/Muslim woman, and disrupt Western discourses of the hijab. Finally, through her hip-hop poetics, Hammad denounces forms of institutionalised racism and violence of belonging in the United States. Voicing themselves through poetry and from their different positions, Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad also speak on the behalf of their community to open up channels of communication with Americans and other ethnic groups.

As an introduction to this growing genre, this study is far from being exhaustive, but in the light of the development of Arab-American studies and the emerging Arab-American feminist critique, I hope that this project will act as a foundation for researching some unexplored areas, such as the emerging trope of Arab-American queer poetry of young voices such as Micheala Rae and Ahmis Timoteo Bodhran. Also, a comparative study of different genres of Arab-American queer writing can be useful in illuminating the challenges this group face. Further research may focus on a comparative analysis of the approach to the Palestine issue in Palestinian-American poets and Palestinians from the Middle East. In addition to all that, it will be useful to research the history and future of the particular relationship between African-Americans and Arab-Americans and how that relationship has been invested in literature, particularly since many Arab-Americans have expressed their affiliations with African-Americans. Similarly, a comparative analysis of literary production of different forms of Arab diaspora would be of significant use, such as researching exile and marginalisation in both Arab-British, Arab-American and Arab-Australian literatures.

Throughout the courses of their literary careers Arab-American women struggle with both racialised stereotypes within the larger mainstream context, and the oppressive gender roles within the narrower communal boundaries. They strive to precipitate transformation and

social change through their poetry. The mission of Arab-American women poets, as Handal fittingly describes it, is to help 'eradicate stereotypes of Arabs, of Arab women, and …[partake] in the transformation, expansion, and evolution of their literature, identities, and selves. They are creating new spaces, new breaths' (2001:48). Having explored the work of Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad, along with the necessary critical frameworks for readings of their work, I hope to have shown some of the 'new spaces, new breaths' created in Arab-American women's poetry – from an Arab apocalypse to 'a debke beat funky as p.e.'s riff' (Hammad 1996:27).

Notes

[1] Italian American Writers' Association (IAWA). "The Three Rules of IAWA". Retrieved December 12, 2012, from <http://www.iawa.net/get.php?q=rules>.

[1] http://www.rawi.org/rawi-history.aspx

[3] http://www.rawi.org/member-information.aspx

[4] Adnan published her first poetry collection *Moonshots* (1966), but then she was not an American citizen yet.

[5] http://aai.3cdn.net/afbc33810b07728c5a_oim6bx98f.pdf

[6] http://www.aaiusa.org/pages/arab-americans/

[7] Suad Joseph. "Against the Grain of the Nation—The Arab-", In *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Edited by Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999) pp. 257-271.

[8] http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/05/27/senate-clearing-way-extend-patriot-act/%7Cdate#ixzz2PT5FQCEc

[9] The Oslo Accords, officially known as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, were signed by the Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington, DC, on September 13, 1993, after months of secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway. This declaration was the first phase in the Middle East peace process; it set out goals to be achieved: the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the Palestinians' right to self-rule in those territories. The agreement was accompanied with signing the "Letters of Mutual Recognition", which declared for the first time the official Israeli recognition of Palestine Liberation Organization as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. On the other hand, also for the first time, the PLO recognised Israel's right to exist, revoked its call for Israel's destruction and accepted the principle of land for peace (CNN.com. http://www.cnn.co.uk/WORLD/struggle_for_peace/oslo.agreement.html).

[10] The pattern of Arab migration to the United States culminated and rapidly diversified in the 1990s. It included Arabs from Yemen, North Africa, Iraq and the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman), who were largely Muslims, unlike earlier waves of Arab migration that mostly included Christians from the Levant (Sulieman 1999:10-11).

[11] This novel could be the first Arabic novel as its publication predated *Zainb* (1914) by the Egyptian Hussain Haykal, which is conceived to be the first Arabic novel.

[12] http://www.academia.edu/1713089/A_Woman_Writer_on_the_Margins_Afifa_Karams_Badia_wa_Fuad

[13] http://www.arabwomenwriters.com/index.php?option=com_contentandview=articleandid=119andItemid=109

[14] In Islam and Arab culture, Almustafa is known to be a name used only to refer to the prophet Mohammad.

[15] Based on Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands", in which he discussed the concept of home and nation, Rushdie maintains that nostalgia alters or misconstrues the image of a lost homeland so that the immigrant keeps seeking after an "imaginary homeland."

[16] It is my spelling for which I believe to be the nearest form to the original inscription of the name in Arabic language.

[17] Zeina Zaatari. "In The Belly Of The Beast: Struggling For Non-Violent Belonging." (2005): 75.

[18] Abdulahdi mentions that the Caliphates ordered the burning of homosexuals; Omar Ibn Al-Khattab had a lax attitude regarding sexuality; and Ali Ibn Abi Taleb was not fond of homosexuals. The Umayyad rulers did not exercise state control over sexual practice (2009:468).

[19] In 2007, very important developments concerning enabling women took place in Saudi Arabia. For the first time, a woman was appointed in the Saudi Consultative Council, in addition to sponsoring an increasing number of female students to persue their higher studies abroad.

[20] For the purpose of the study, my discussion will only refer American and Arabic/Lebanese cultures, excluding the French.

[21] For a summary of the complicated political history of Lebanon, please refer to Appendix A. This brief account on the entangled reasons that had led to the Lebanese civil war seems significant in highlighting the centrality of identity issue within the Lebanese context.

[22] In the same interview, Adnan asserts that she did not experience racism on a personal level, and she has always lived in a friendly environment.

[23] Ong distinguishes between transnationality and transnationalism, perceiving the latter as referring to 'the cultural specificities of global processes, tracing the multiplicity of the uses and conceptions of culture' (1999:4).

24 The writer's italics.

[25] The poem was published in *S.B. Gazette*, a local anti-war literary magazine (Adnan 2004:57).

[26] The English Translation was published in 1982.

[27] Baudelaire was amongst the nineteenth-century poets that Adnan studied intensively as a young student of French literature in Beirut.

[28] Please refer to Appendix B (1) for the poem.

[29] http://solarsystem.nasa.gov/planets/profile.cfm?Object=Jupiter

[30] http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/308395/Jupiter

[31] *The Noble Qur'an: Translations of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an* (1997). Madinah: King Fahad Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, pp 821-22.

[32] Please refer to Appendix B (2) for illustration.

[33] Her father lost his family home in Jerusalem after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

[34] Her father, Aziz Shihab, was an importer and a journalist for the Jerusalem Times, The San Antonio Express-News, The Dallas Morning New, and various Middle Eastern news agencies. His wife, Miriam Allwardt Shihab, graduated from art school, where she had studied painting. She became a Montessori teacher. Like her husband, she also worked in various importing venues (Davidson 151, 1998)

[35] http://barclayagency.com/nye.html

[36] The Spanish word mestiza is the feminine of mestizo, plural mestizos, any person of mixed blood. In Central and South America. It denotes a person of combined Indian and European extraction. In some countries—*e.g.,* Ecuador—it has acquired social and cultural connotations; a pure-blooded Indian who has adopted European dress and customs is called a mestizo (or cholo). In Mexico the description has been found so variable in meaning that it has been abandoned in census reports. In the Philippines "mestizo" denotes a person of mixed foreign (*e.g.,* Chinese) and native ancestry (Encyclopedia Britannica).

[37] John Jorgensen. *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series: v. 70*. 1998. Gale Group; Pamela L Shelton. *Contemporary Women Poets,* St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1997; *Dictionary of Literary Biography 120*. 1992. Detroit: Gale Group.; Michel Delville. *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre*. 1998. Gainesville: University Press of Florida; Ann Grider, Slyvia and Lou Halsell Rodenberger. Ed. 1997. *Texas Women Writers: A Tradition of Their Own.*College Station : Texas AandM University Press.

[38] "Stafford wrote over fifteen books in his thirty-three-year publishing career, which made one of the most American prolific poets. His books include the poetry collections *Stories That Could Be True: New and Collected Poems* (1977), *An Oregon Message (*1987), and *Passwords* (1991), and two widely read books on the writer's vocation, *Writing the Australian Crawl* (1978) and *You Must Revise Your Life* (1986). He received many literary prizes and honors, including the Shelley Memorial Award, the Award in Literature of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He was appointed the twentieth Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to library of congress in 1970" (Poetry Foundation: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/william-e-stafford).

[39] The term, Deep Image Poetry, was first used by Robert Kelly in his essay "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image", Trobar 2 (1961).

40 *Mish-mish* is the Arabic word for apricot.

[41] eMediaMillWorks. Text: Laura Bush on Taliban Oppression of Women. 17 November 2002. 20 May 2012<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/laurabushtext_111701.html>.

[42] RoseMary Pennington. "Mohja Kahf: Footwashing". Voices and Visions: Islam and Muslims from a Global Perspective: Indiana University. April 13,2009. http://muslimvoices.org/mohja-kahf-footwashing/

[43] For the purpose of the study, I will use the term hijab from this point forward.

[44] The writer's italics

[45] Throughout this chapter the short title *The Nights* will be used from this point on.

[46] http://www.henri-matisse.net/paintingssectionthree.html

[47] http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcone/modernmasters/virtual-exhibition/matisse/8-pink-nude.shtml

[48] In the Star Trek universe, dilithium is a fictional chemical element and substance that can safely combine matter and anti-matter into a stable stream. However, dilithium is also the scientific name for a molecule

composed of two lithium atoms (*"Rascals"*. Star Trek: The Next Generation)*. Made familiar by the television series, the term has since appeared in other contexts, such as dilithium crystals, the most valuable gemstone in the computer game NetHack, the fuel that powers the *Jupiter 42* in the science-fiction comedy satire *Tripping the Rift*, and unleaded dilithium crystals are used as fuel in the *Duck Takes* episode "Duck of the Future"

[49] Unless stated otherwise, the brief history of the emergence and development of hip-hop culture is mainly based on Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (pp. 21-61).

[50] Robert Moses was a powerful city planner who executed, between the late 1930s and the late 1960s, a number of public works projects, highways, parks and housing projects that had significantly reshaped the profile of New York City (Rose 30).

[51] See Edward Said's "Glenn Goulds Contrapuntal Vision" 1983.

[52] Refugees for Refugees: Benefit for Katrina survivors.< http://insaf.net/pipermail/nyfoil-l_insaf.net/2005q3/000569.html>

[53] http://www.metrolyrics.com/evil-that-men-do-lyrics-queen-latifah.html

 http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/

Appendix A

The Political History of Modern Lebanon and the Civil War (1975-1990)

Lebanon came into being in its present political form in 1943. After independence, the National Pact of 1943[54], the second fundamental foundation of the Lebanese state, appear to implement political sectarianism, which was justified by the 1932 census that had placed the Maronites ahead of all other communities in order to vindicate allocating the presidency with its executive and legislative powers and its role as a supreme authority to a Maronite. The National Pact distributed the chief political and administrative responsibilities, according to the 1932 census[54], among the six largest religious communities in the country: Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Sunnis, Shiites and Druze (Picard 1996: 60-64). The arrangement determined the proportion of parliamentary seats assigned to each sectarian group: for each six Christian deputies, the parliament must include five Muslims (Sunni, Shiite and Druze). This proportion is also applied to parliamentary representation and government offices. As a consequence, the Maronites emerged as the most powerful of all: they hold the presidency and command of the army, whereas the office of prime minster goes to a Sunni, the presidency of the parliament to a Shiite, and the vice-presidency to a Greek Orthodox member. The post of the Minister of Defence is assigned to a Druze, and that of the minister of foreign affairs to a Christian. By 1975 the population was over two million and the Lebanese mosaic included six large distinct religious communities and about a dozen smaller ones.

According to the last estimate of population figures published before the war in 1956, the Maronites constituted 29 percent of Christian populations, the Greek Orthodox 9 percent, and the Greek Catholic 6 percent. Smaller Christian groups included Roman Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Assyrian Catholics (Nestorian),

Chaldean Catholics, Evangelists, Baptists, Anglicans, Monophysites, and there were a small number of Jews. Among the Muslims, Sunnis constituted the largest group in the early 1970s, however, they have been outnumbered by Shiite, the second large community in Lebanon. The third influential Muslim sect in Lebanon is the Druze community, which is also spread across Lebanon Syria and Israel. There were also smaller Muslim sects such as Alawis, Yazidis and Baha'is (Gilmour ;Gordon; Deeb ; and Picard).

The Maronites are a Syrian group of Aramaic origins, which had embraced monotheism[54]. They inhabited the northern mountains of Lebanon and gradually spread southwards and occupied much of the territory that formerly belonged to Shiites and Druze communities. For them, Lebanon is 'the eastern frontier of the Christian west', and many of them have denied their Arab ancestry. Subsequently, they have chosen Europe to be their ally and particularly France their historic patron.[54] According to a Phalangist Party manifesto, 'Lebanon is a soul, a spiritual principle' with a mission 'incompatible with that which the Arabs aspire generally to realize'[54]. According to David Gilmour, three elements helped shape the Maronite outlook, and produced the Maronite creed of 'Lebanism': their turbulent history, the French patronage, and their attitudes toward the Arab world. The resulting 'Lebanism' thus often displays an emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency, a rejection of Islam and the Arab world, an identification with the West and western values, and most significantly, an insistence on the survival of Lebanon as a Christian and democratic heartland in the Middle East (1979:80). In 1975 the Phalangist Party, the primary Maronite political institution, was the largest in Lebanon with nine deputies and 50,000 members. Its militia was the backbone of the Christian force and a major player in the civil war of 1975 (Gilmour 1979:80-82).

Next to the Maronites in size are the Greek orthodox and the Greek Catholic, the largest of Christian sects. Unlike the Maronites, they are more at ease with Muslims and do acknowledge their Arab roots. Many of them have greatly contributed to national Arab

movements in the twentieth century, for example, Kustantin Zurayg was one of the most eminent leaders of pan-Arabism in Lebanon, Antwan Sa'ada was the father of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and Michel Aflaq was the founder and the leading ideologist of the Ba'ath Party (Gordon 1980:39).

On the other side of the divide, the Muslim population consists of three main communities: the Sunni or the Orthodox Muslims, the Shiite, and the Druze. The Sunni Muslims were the majority sect in the Ottoman Empire and that part of Syria that subsequently became Lebanon. In Lebanon, they have worked mainly as traders and merchants in Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon since the Mameluke period, and there is a large rural community inhabiting the Akkar region in the north. Sunni leaders were the most prominent supporters of Arab nationalism and most of their leaders had acquired a pan-Arab, or pan-Islamic outlook, and they have always refused the Maronites' attempts to align their country with the West. Sunni leadership is inherited and passed from father to son or to next kin[54].

The Shiite community was the most dispersed community in Lebanon[54]. They are peasants from Mount Lebanon, the south and the Biqa'a valley. By 1970s they were the majority population in the 'belt of poverty' around Beirut. The Shiites were the poorest of the Lebanese sects, and became the largest due to their high birth rate. As with other communities in Lebanon, the traditional leadership of the Shiites was based on the feudal system of the traditional mountain communities, taking the form of feudal patronage. The Shiite inhabitants of the south had severely and constantly suffered from the Israeli policy of reprisals against the Palestinian guerrillas. Every time the Israelis crossed the borders, they bulldozed houses and bridges, which were never been used by Palestinians, but the state never attempted to protect them or even help them when they fled to Beirut. As a consequence, the resentful and embittered Shiite population increased their identification with the Palestinians, though they

tended to be less enthusiastic about pan-Arabism because they would still represent a minority in the Arab mainstream.

Neglected and always despised by the government, observers maintain that Shiite quarters became potential revolutionary centres providing recruitments for the two communist parties in the country: the Lebanese Communist Party and the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (Gilmour 1978:11; Khalaf 2002: 214). Toward the late 1960s and early 1970s, the traditional Shiites leadership of the feudal lords was challenged by the religious Iranian-born Lebanese, Musa al Sadr, who helped establish a Shiite Supreme Council Command, separate from the Sunni dominated General Muslim High Command. Sadr also attacked the greedy ineffective establishment and accused the traditional Shiite leaders of being indifferent to social problems of their Shiite population. He promised to train Shiite militias to defend the South if the government refused to do the job (Gordon 1980:11). Sadr also founded the Movement of Deprived and its armed wing, known as the Amal Movement in the early 1970s[54]. He also established a number of schools and medical clinics that are still running in the south to date. The Amal Movement was later split between a moderate faction led by Nabih Berri, and smaller extremist groups Hussien Mussawi's Islamic Amal, and Hizbollah (The Party of God), spiritually guided by Muhammad Fadlallah and politically led by Hassan Nassrallah to date. Whereas the Sunnis turned toward the Arab countries for identification, the Shiite Lebanese sought aid and inspiration from Iran, their historical ally. Within the last two decades Hizbollah has evolved to be the most influential religiously-inspired political party and militia in Lebanon, acquiring prominence due to its role in resisting Israel and defending the territory of South Lebanon.

The third Muslim community in Lebanon is the Druze community, whose despite its small number (150-170,000) had played and continues to play a crucial role in Lebanon's political life since independence[54]. Among the Druze, Kamal Jumblatt (1917-1977)[54] was the

most eminent figure since Lebanon's independence until his assassination in 1977. For thirty years Jumblatt was Lebanon's leading politician, and the only sectarian chief that had advocated abolition of Confessionalism and the chief-client system. He was immediately succeeded by his son Walid (1949-) in both party and community leadership to the present. His death shook the Druze community and Ostrvovitz notes the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt prompted the transformation of the Druze from a defensive community into terrorist guerrillas, and the succession of his son, Walid, to the leadership of the clan commenced a new era in the Druze's history (1983:273).

Although Lebanon has been always regarded as the only democracy in the Arab Middle East, its model of 'democracy by census' is unique to Lebanon and barely democratic. In the Lebanese political system, the *za'im* [54](the chief) is the main figure; he is usually a holder of a fief or a feudal office, who occupies an undefined but immensely powerful position. In Lebanese politics, and due to the provisional and confessional nature of the political establishment, religion, ancestry and wealth usually outweigh coherent political programmes and the competence of elected individuals. The resultant system depended on bargains, alliances and coalitions between blocs in the parliament that mainly aimed to secure the community and individual interests of the controlling *za'ims*, who act as clan chieftains and not as modern politicians. Even the president himself would be a *za'im* such as Camille Chamoun (1952-1958) and Suleiman Franjieh (1970-1976). Lebanon was run by its *za'im*'s interests and business lobbies—usually the same people—which have always demanded weak government and blocked legislations that might threaten their interests.

Most developments took place in Beirut with little in the rest of the country, which was depressingly neglected. In the countryside, for instance, the government's lack of interest and negligence had fostered considerable problems: in the 1960s over two hundred villages in the south had no running water, and none of the 445 villages had electricity. Correspondingly, the

manufacturing industry had also suffered from the government's lack of interest: over two thirds of local industry was in or around Beirut, whereas most of the rest was divided between Tripoli and Mount Lebanon. There was almost no industry in the south or in the Akkar region in the north (Gilmour 1980: 15-17). This underdevelopment, aggravated by the Israeli reprisal raids in the south, was the main reason behind the rural exodus to Beirut, which the authorities could not handle and then ignored. These embittered immigrants, badly housed and often unemployed, found refuge with other frustrated populations such as the Palestinian refugees, in the area around Beirut. Due to the escalating resentment and bitterness of its dwellers, these shanty-towns became potential revolutionary centres.

These social disparities and economic upheavals peaked during the administration of Suleiman Franjieh (1970-1974)[54], who was largely accused of abusing his office, and held responsible for dividing the country. His administration was described as incompetent and ineffective: not only it did not undertake any social or economic reform, but it also halted the economic plan proposed by the former administration which had aimed to reduce income inequality (Gilmour1978:83). Also Khalaf contends that Franjieh's 'feudal and clientistic' political inclination made him unreceptive to some of the progressive and liberal reforms of his cabinet. Subsequently, and due to soaring inflation and the growing of economic inequalities, the aggrieved masses were ravaged by profound feelings of deliberate neglect and dispossession, which had driven them away from support for the State and toward the emancipatory and revolutionary spirit evoked by Palestinian resistance movements in Lebanon (2002:214).

By 1975 there were nearly 350,000 Palestinians in Lebanon living in refugee camps distributed around the country. Since (1948-9) seventeen refugee camps were established in Lebanon with the help of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), where refugees were herded into old French and British military barracks or housed in tents,

surviving on basic rations of flour, sugar, rice and fat. Palestinians in Lebanon were prevented from working in both civil and military sectors and their children were not accepted in public schools, but were confined to UNRWA schools at the primary and preparatory levels only[54]. In brief, Palestinian refugees' life in Lebanon, the dreadful experience of living on the edge of the 'jewel of the Mediterranean', was the most miserable, and the discrimination against them was worse, than in any other Arab country (Deeb1980: 67; Gilmour 1978:92).
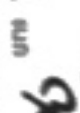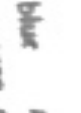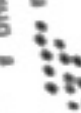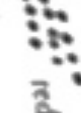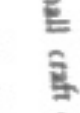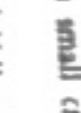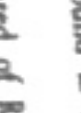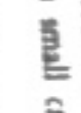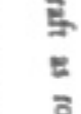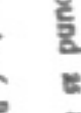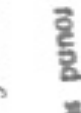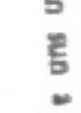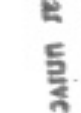
Since the elimination of the bulk of Palestinian guerrillas in Jordan by King Hussein in 1970, the PLO[54] had to shift its base of operation to south Lebanon. Palestinian activities against Israeli territories from Lebanese territory increased and the situation became difficult. The Lebanese were anxious not to give Israel an excuse to invade them. On the other hand, they worried that the emancipatory ethos evoked by the activity of the Resistance would intensify the heat between the Maronites and the Arab nationalists and other radical Lebanese groups who called for the removal of the restrictions on commando activity in Lebanon (Gilmour 1978:95).

Although Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978, two years after the civil war, its devastating reprisal operations on Lebanon started a decade earlier. These operations included regular bombing raids on Lebanese villages and Palestinian refugee camps in which roads and bridges were dynamited, houses, never used by guerrillas, blown up, turning the south into an inferno and driving tens of thousands of Shiite villagers out of their homes to inhabit 'the belt of poverty' around Beirut. These operations also included unexpected expeditions to Beirut to blow up civilian airplanes at the international airport in 1968, in addition to sea and land expedition to assassinate and abduct Palestinian leaders, to harass the local population, and to destroy its infrastructures (Glimour 1978: 99,174; Khalaf 2002:217).

On their side, the Palestinian guerrillas also intimidated the Maronites and provoked their anti-Arab and anti-PLO prejudices by showing off arrogantly as they wandered around

Beirut armed and in uniform. Nevertheless, their assumed heroism and idealism have attracted different strata of Lebanese society such as the displaced and unemployed Shiites and other Muslims, university students and other intellectual who were driven by public and social conscience, but deprived from political participation in their country. Nevertheless, it is believed that this war was never between Lebanese and Palestinian, or 'a plot of the international Left'; it was another round of the traditional Lebanese struggle between the Maronites and other Lebanese (Gilmour 1978; Gordon1980; Accad 1990; and Picard 1980).

A yellow sun

A sun A green sun a yellow sun A red sun a blue sun

blue yellow sun a yellow red sun a blue green sun a red blue and yellow a blue sun but

yellow boat a yellow sun a red a red blue blue but blue

yellow morning on a green sun a flower flower on a blue sun red

yellow sun A green sun a yellow sun A red sun a blue sun

yellow A sun a small craft a boat red blue

a quer blue sun on a card table a red which is blue and a wheel

A solar sun a lunar sun a starry sun a nebular sun

A yellow sun A green sun a yellow sun Qorrach runner ran running

A blue sun before a red sun a green sun before a lunar sun A solar moon

A floral sun a small craft as round as a round sun

Another sun jealous of Yellow enamoured of Red terrified by Blue horizontal

A sun romantic as Yellow jealous as Blue amorous as a cloud

A frail sun a timid sun vain sorrowful and bellicose sun

A Pharaonic boat an Egyptian sun a solar universe and a universal sun

A solar arrow crosses the sky An eye dreads the sun the sun is an eye

A rubular sun haunted by the tubes of the sea a sun pernicious and vain

A Hopi a Red Indian sun an Arab Black Sun a sun yellow and blue

ONE yellow plane transformed into a sun goes faster than the sun
ONE yellow mercenary crawls under the stones all the way to the Hill
ONE wounded man a hole in his forehead walks under the sun
yellow worms crawl out of the hole the air is warm

STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP

a sun airborn a sun　　　　　airplane circles up there . . .
there is no water　　　no plasma　　no air　there is the radio
there are star fish streaking in the night
the Tuaregs arrive motorized empty-handed

HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU . HOU . HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU ! HOU !

Libya disappears under tornadoes of sand
Egypt buries the solar Pharaoh under spit
only the Yakima Indian washes our forehead
the besieged Palestinians walk on all four
the Great solar Circle has encircled them in its iron ring
And tired of words they begin to bark

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