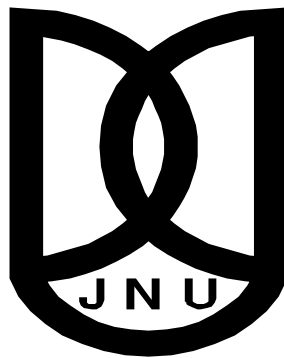


**CAUGHT BETWEEN REALITY (9/11) AND CONSTRUCT (WAR
ON TERROR): UNEARTHING THE LIFE AND POETICS OF 21st
CENTURY ARAB/MUSLIM WOMEN IN UNITED STATES**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

The Formation of “Arab-American”

The September 11th has been a manmade disaster that changed the face of United States and its people. One can say, the American history and politics tuned into fragments with the event, when two flights carrying passengers crashed the walls of the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. Many Americans felt the moment a sort of fear and trauma as their people died for no reason other than one group's enmity to *their* nation. Even after ten years, many observed that the “Terror Decade” has been ‘the worst of times’ and the ‘best of times’ for the city's Arab and Muslim communities. (Shyrock, Abraham and Howell 6) Its imprints are not restricted to the American continent alone but permeated through and through different worlds in the name of ‘anti-terror’ missions then popularly called was ‘war on terror.’ Arguably the 9/11 heralded and opened doors to many other incidents and situations carried out against terrorism and the like that remain unresolved even today.

Whatever we accumulate from media and people is that the 9/11 has made America a new. For their day-to-day lives being transformed with the incident and its offspring, the ‘war on terror’, they have had witnessed their country's renewed interests that often inscribed violence as its motto. Who were the perpetrators and victims then? Who were really the witnesses? What was the real bases of discrimination and other immediate backlashes of the attacks? This sort of queries should be cleared for which I have considered the Arab-American/ American life to trace whether the same has been decided and dictated by 9/11 and then, whether has that added layers to the very identity that is complicated already?

Evidently it is assumed that in post-9/11 the question “why do they hate us?” was posed by both Americans and Arab/Muslim Americans at each other. Meanwhile, some have particularly been targeted, detained, and arrested under presumptions alleged upon them in relation to the terrorists and include mainly Arabs, South Asians and Muslims. For an attack organized by Arab/Muslims in U.S., this created often an anti-Arab/Muslim situation. In fact the story of alienation, othering and racial/ethnic discrimination of this group had started long before

9/11. The post-9/11 has *equally* affected all Americans although the Arabs and Muslims had a “double trouble” as they were already ‘the targeted’ in the country.

America, the land of dreams seems to have become that of nightmares with this single incident alone although that it caused some people to remain restricted in their way of life in a world that was not their own. Almost overnight Arabs and Muslims have become the most visible, the most targeted, and the least understood. (el-Aswad 117) When the President and other officials were more concentrated on the new policy that othering the Arabs than uniting all, the entire Americans were not supporting it, and they have instead tried to reconstruct the peace in post-9/11 America by bringing all into a unity that made possible their nation ‘united’ again. So the question of ‘self’ and ‘other’ concerned with the Arab American ethnic identity that is very much a characteristic of the era cannot be appropriated to an American-versus-Arab.

If the happenings of 9/11 have been a milestone for America’s history it was ‘war on terror’ more or less made the former to persist. The latter has been a well set trend after September 11th. This came to be a popular discourse that helped the U.S. to justify its attacks against Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine in the name of ending terrorism worldwide. In his famous work titled *The War on Terror Narrative: Discourse and Intertextuality in the Construction and Contestation of Sociopolitical Reality*, Adam Hodges shows that how the popular Bush “War on Terror” Narrative (used here is his capitalizations) is both “constructed” and “recontextualized” across various settings through analytically studying responses from three sources namely, the presidential speeches, media discourse, and focus group interviews with politically active college students. (8) For him the function of ‘discourse’ (he framed the term after Foucault and Baxter) “regulates the way a topic can be about meaningfully in a particular culture at a particular point in history.”(6)

After reading Hodges using terms like ‘intertextuality’, ‘knowledge’, ‘power’ and the like in the above frame, what I feel that he is indirectly explaining a linear interconnectedness among the three sources he is referring in the study. For instance, how the presidential speeches on the 9/11, war on terror etc can impact over media discourse that in turn creates the notions to the public, so to the politically active students also. However, we all know this passage of inter

transmission is not always linear. But at the same time as all we know the first two parties (the President and the media) have got more power to make the third into their own rhetoric.

Apart from Hodges, there are few other critics who suggested a “construct” adjective to the ‘war on terror.’ Stephen D. Reese and Seth C. Lewis in their collaborative article (“Framing the War on Terror: The Internalization of Policy in the US Press”) define the term as a label used by the U.S government. They argue that “this was the most significant outcome of the ‘War on Terror’ *construction* (my italics) was in giving a rhetorical (if not empirical) rationale for the invasion of Iraq” (779) is suggestive of flexible and ambiguous structure of the ‘war on terror’ itself.

They traced three aspects with which the frame of ‘war on terror’ was accepted include also a “reification of that policy, dropping any sense of *its constructed* (my italics) aspect.” (784) Inferring a still existing ‘war on terror’ dominance in news discourse (792), Reese and Lewis point to the journalists’ “reification” of the President’s policy, rhetoric etc. to naturalize it into an American way. As they say, this is where Bush’s policy becomes America’s (785) To my judgement, the phrase ‘war on terror’ stands for a purpose, so it was not an impulsive event as 9/11. It is rather an ideological paradigm created by the U.S. for its so-called anti-terror project, as part of which many constructed notions of Arabs were re-formed. There were also informants and agencies to spread the new missions, likely to punish and execute even those who ‘resembled’ the terrorist. As we already proposed, it is not new to the Arabs that they have been victimized for no crimes of their own, but of some persons or real criminals who are rooted from their same community.

Without disregarding the above critical assumptions and attempts to support my thought of the ‘war on terror’ as a construct, I perceive it as such is also caused by the simple fact of its man-made entity. It has been made, so it was constructed and reconstructed is a truth to anyone who knows the current history of America. And for sure, in a same vein, one will not take September 11 not less than a reality. Before talking primarily on the incident and its effect on this and that group of America, we need to see the historical arrival of the Arabs into America, in

result figures out the very term- “Arab-American.” However my study is focused on their life after 9/11 only.

As many of the Arab American authors exemplified, the *Arab-American*, I would also like to argue, that it is the most complicated one among all other pan-ethnic identities. Citing some important definitions here will give us a more concrete sense of its ‘complicated-ness.’ difficulty of explanation. Simply sh/e is the Arab who lives in America; the one who may or may not associate his/her heritage to any of the Arab countries he/his parent(s) was born. Lisa Suheir Majaj, the well known author and cultural critic attributes the idea of, or being Arab American to “those who speak no Arabic and who speak no English; people who identify primarily with the “Arab” side of their heritage and those who identify primarily with the “American” side. This diversity complicates assessment of “Arab-American” identity.”(3) Hence the *Arab-American* is one of the most complicated identities to which some sub-identities are also part of. For instance, the term comprises a cultural multitude that of Christian Arab-Americans, Muslim-Arab-Americans, Jews and Druze. Of these, some chose to identify with Palestinians or Syrians, a trend that existed in past when the term “Arab-American” was not prevalent. It is complicated not only because of these multiple categories included in it, but because of the people’s choices regarding choice of their ethnicity.

The difficulty is also to be found in connection with one’s assimilation. Unlike in the previous case the choice of assimilation for any Arab-American immigrant is highly flexible, retaining the term’s conventional definition they have always options to choose assimilation or non-assimilation as per his/her likes in context of Diaspora. At times it becomes necessary for the above people to identify with a national or local identity, so identifying with Arab or American is part of how they have been projecting themselves, to be like whites in order to get privileges of being white.

But at the same time, it is not uneasy to find a paradox that barriers the exact definition of the term for any onlooker here. That is clearly, if the term has been unique and comprised of a huge cultural and ethnic varieties, it seems to have now become to include only one sect than any others as if the others (groups mainly who are non-Muslim Americans of the Arab-Americans)

were never a part of it. My point is toward the post-9/11 case, where the “war on terror” narratives created a ‘new’ Orientalist notion of Arab-American into the *Muslim-American*, that has been solidified with the followed new and renewed attempts of a ‘war on terror’ project, which was in my view a constructed tool by the US government to justify its so called anti-terrorist wars. And I would like to argue that this may have been one reason why only the Muslim-Americans became the ‘most visible’ or perhaps visible unlike any others of their ethnic category. They were ‘made’ visible and exposed by the U.S government and media as “enemy other.” If this has been one terrible change the U.S labelling methods done for the Arab-American complex, there were some minor misappropriations too. The post-9/11-America categorized Muslims into “good” and “bad” Muslims (Mamdani 766) as if they were nothing unlike any commodity. Although the “war on terror” put U.S at war with Afghanistan and Iraq that led a hike in racial intolerance toward Muslims within the country was true, the above judgment cannot be taken as the absolute end of the case. Also we know the Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans are not one people as we know that all Arabs are not Muslims and vice versa etc. will dismantle the previous claim.

The story of new ethnic assertions, assimilation and the like take us back to the “white” label that was given as “honorary” (Majaj 321) to the Arab-Americans. This whiteness was honorary indeed and became ambiguous at times of crisis (ibid), and in effect the community had a nominal privilege of their whiteness unlike the real whites. In other words anti-Arab racism still prevails in U.S like any other type of racism, but “unlike other forms of racism”, the critic and author Nabeel Abraham argues, it is “often tolerated by the mainstream society. (159) The act of ‘discrimination’ of some people that is the basis of ethnic racism, for a major part if not fully, stems from some available stereotypes prevailing over them. These stereotypes/ prejudices are merely constructed of some circumstances and guess works. They can never be logical so it is also illegitimate for a military gang or the like group to act upon such typologies, so to inflict violence on a particular people or group. Anyway the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudices that spaced violence and hate crimes within America, and in Gitmo, Afghanistan etc., were not the first such case by the U.S. It is rooted back to some anti-Arab prejudices of 70s and 80s in which the Arabs/ Muslims were deemed as ‘terrorists.’ And it appears in the new century that they have got renewed along with newly loomed labels. In effect or in what we see in the immediate onset

of 9/11 is that *this* and *that* anti-Arab/ anti-Muslim stereotypes worked to help the frequent violence by the US police here and there. The *Human Rights Watch* report in 2002 states the “threats against Arab and Muslim Americans were so numerous in Detroit that Mayor Coleman Young asked Michigan’s governor to assign National Guard troops to protect the city’s Arab and Muslim population” (Hampson 11).

However the acclaimed move from *Arab Americans* to *Muslim Americans* has a great relevance when being mirrored through 9/11. It is the fact that the victimization of Muslims has been worse than any others during post-9/11 years. They became the targets of the U.S government and media alike. They were seen as the “enemies within” was another phase of traumatizing of the minorities which started especially with the Gulf War (1990-91) whereby the media changed in its stereotyping attitudes. Now we see when dealing with the Arabs in United States, the pan ethnic term “Arab-American” has replaced with the “Muslim-American” along with the *otherness* attached to it appears to be less racial than religious. But this very replacement, I believe, by arguing that it has a dangerous impact in subverting/ foreshadowing the Arab-American cause as a whole. This assumption, though inviting much challenge, is ultimately relevant for my study that has not been addressed directly by many of the critics referred here and after. To clarify this, the Sikh Americans and Jews with similar head wearing and veils that of Muslim (associatively *the terrorist’s people*) were the victims of some hate crimes and 9/11 backlash can be simply taken as a reproof.

In sum, the real question regarding this transnational culture is that of identity. What in fact constitutes American-ness, or an Arab with a hyphen (hyphenated or pan-ethnic American-ness)/ Arab-American-ness? How is it to be an Arab-American woman and Arab-American-Muslim woman in post 9/11 U.S.? Does America remain land of hopes for all its marginalized groups? How are the Arab/Muslim-Americans ‘comfortable’ in an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim American settings? Are the Arab-American women caught between Arab and American identities or between their various duties or between 9/11 and ‘war on terror’ as I stated in my title? Or do they really stand as tar babies quote in the mud and violence of a war/ terror/ violence? If they are not, do they resist and utilize their ‘voice’ to make the Arabs in America

invisible, and do they indeed stand for all oppressed women worldwide than just being focused on theirs? There are lot more to ask and answer regarding the Arab-Americans.

The relevance of bringing the concerned poets' life and poetics together is to find a parallel relation between Arab-American life and literature. The latter is a real sketch of the former, clearly a conventional connection any kind of people and their writings share. So my study claims showing an interconnectedness of Arab-American literature and Arab-American life often to convey both as ciphers of resistance. Because resistance has a clearly evidenced place in their poems and in them concurrently that anyone can hardly deny. But my question further seeks how much it has been successful in doing such reversions etc, if there had any existed. In that it will also be proved how this particular literature can be worthily a tool of resistance to the voiceless people to voice about their issues. For this analogy I will be bringing some life experiences not from the writers, but from those eye-witnessed or otherwise perceivers of the 9/11 and the constructed 'war on terror' drama that held to be a tool to exclude or alienate the Arabs in United States.

As part of the consecutive efforts from the Arab Americans to become part of the American society also in solidarity with other ethnic groups of the country has helped the racial pot to melt and become water-like the very solid racial discrimination. But situations like, anywhere in this world the Muslim for instance, is confronted with questions like, "why do your women have such a restricted wearing?", "why your men oppress their wives or so?" etc from those even do not know the very basics of Islam or may be those who may have simply heard of this religion name, Islam, has become a common practice. Even I had often caught up in such situations as a Muslim/Hijab wearing woman. One colleague, a girl once had asked me about my headscarf. It was part of my usual garment and she used to see me very often. But that day it was winter when she asked me this "why..." question, she was also fully dressed up like me except the head cover. It is interesting her tone seemed to carry a phobia hidden in it when she asked, "oh..don't you feel hot inside?.." The racial stereotypes and Islamophobic narratives that created the Arabs in general and Muslims in particular to be the "enemy" of the United States might have been dismantling throughout the ages and collective efforts put for the by the Arab American writers and activists. But its seeds appear to have spread out to the other worlds wider

and wider to set roots of similar types and phobias are also implicit in my above experience. It is also a proof that mapping out how much the U.S like imperial neo-global power can make likely impacts on the whole world.

The very culture of the Arabs is largely distinct from that of Americans. It does not mean that they always feel alienated or foreign to the American/white culture, as many have argued. Rather they seem have become 'comfortable' to adopt themselves in to the new societal situations without losing their own values and traditions. This double sided task is not the only feature of Arab Americans, but common to all other similar groups too. If this is the case, the matter of discrimination, othering, detaining, marginalizing and stereotyping of various ethnic people of the United States cannot be undermined. So the Arab Americans too have their own story of vilification and victimization to reveal, and one should let them tell about and for themselves. Reading such stories would be a return that will re-evaluate the mythical power of the so-called 'American Dream.'

Perhaps the ways how the Orientalist notions that always fuelled the American racial mountain to grow that in turn made the marginalized and others (Arab/Muslim Americans and the like people) to a further alienation will be one big concern of my study. Considering the plight of this minority group's women folk, and spacing them into the Orientalists' worlds where their people are defined and redefined through a mainstream lens and by a predominant imperial anti-Arab discourse, and especially recognizing their own cultural diversities, it is easier to accumulate them to be the doers of various tasks at a time. When the term "identity" in general stands for its flexibility, for the above women it is more and more flexible. Or it would be more apt to say they are being put into that practice or adaptability is quite part of their identity's and existential conflicts. But this adaptability may not much help them from feeling estrangement just because anyone who is trapped in an often-changing-identity cannot help it.

Like African Americans, Latin and Asian Americans the Arab-Americans (both men and women) have been trying to make their voice heard in America. So their cultural and political participations, literary organizations and other getting together can be taken as cites of them proving themselves- to make themselves known to those mainstream people who might be

stuffed with typological descriptions of them. This projecting also aims to show their struggling identities. From studies on Arab Americans, many researchers and critics hold the fact of the Arab American diversity as, that this is the most diverse group in America. The diversity, in general, will show us how the mentioned people are distinct from other marginalized ones.

So there comes origin of a new literature, *Arab-American*. Interestingly this literature, like its people was not visible for long years. This literature has been “doubly invisible”, partly because “there is not a great deal of it”, and partly due to “the lack of recognized categories to make it visible”, says Lisa Suheir Majaj while addressing the thematic and other implications of this “emergent” literature as she calls it. She proves there exist Arab American literature alone and different from that of American one, whereas scholar Randa Jarrar finds them one! That the latter says, “Arab American fiction is American literature” that goes on to establish Arab-American literature is American literature. Perhaps I should not deal with this except to take these as their claims of America as theirs too, also underlines the centuries-old Arab literature and philosophy (later *Arab-American*) had to remain outside the American consciousness.

But both American and Arab themes come in this literature cannot be opposed, as it is usual to any writings in Diaspora or to that comes as part of two cultures when combined to make a new. Here comes the issue- is it possible to call literature that deals exclusively with Arab theme/matters “Arab American?” or is it “Arab literature?” what then if the writer writes on both American and Arab themes in America? What then if an American deals with Arab themes- can he be called as an Arab American writer? No, indeed! I think these overwhelmingly confused questions are special to this category of literature only. Then I also see a parallel in the complicated nature of both Arab American identity and Arab American literature’s essence. Perhaps it would be even possible to believe in this case, there will be difficulty in re-presenting (in literature here) a difficult/ complicated identity.

I think it is this literature, until now to my knowledge wherein the women have outnumbered the men in writing literature. We have many them in new writers’ row, the female poets, novelists and storytellers and so on. These women enriched the genre of Arab American literature by perfectly using their pen to real issues, to resolve both the question of Arab lives and

literature in America in relation to the mainstream ones. Beyond challenging the stereotypes, the attempts of these post-9/11 authors were to “problematize the representations of 9/11,” as popularly an “isolated event existing outside of history.”(*Al-Jadid* 25). With this I would argue, they have intended to show their relationship to this event- clearly to map who were they are to the same –with or against it along with other binaries like, others/mainstream, we/they and so forth, by bringing relation between America and its other- between inside and outside.

It is said that vulnerability is not easy to record/ re-present. But these woman authors have simply put their pains and framed their traumatic experiences in order to reclaim their relation to America and their right to be an American. And also to show what is it to be an American in margins? They give thus voice to those located at the margins of the mainstream political order of the United States.

This would be analyzed through their verses that have been written mainly after 9/11 so that their responses will show us whether they did their task well or not to ‘represent’ the true emotions felt by their people. Also, what they had done, what they would have better done to challenge the old and new threats and stereotypes in the U.S. so that they can establish themselves really for what they are against the new ‘constructed’ alleged and enforced typologies. That will, in turn, bring us, I hope, whether they are caught or trapped between the real and construct as I put in my title. The title should not be taken here for its conventional meanings. One should look deeply into the structures following this introduction in order to substantiate what I mean really when I say the post-9/11 Arab/Muslim-American writers’ task will be forever in this position- a caught in between state –between real and the construct-the crisis that creates their arts (say writings, painting, music etc). And this state, I assure will continue so far the ‘War on Terror’ will remain a construct. Nevertheless, my dissertation will also be a documentation of the thematic relevance of September 11 in selected poems of the five selected women authors.

In brief, my purpose goes with investigating the life/ poetry of Arab American women, who are positioned in a political turmoil of violence and terrorism; confused between acceptance and denial; and conflated between two or multiple cultural boundaries that might have affected

their lives in no less than adverse terms. And such a contextualization, I prefer, because it directs me to my next goal that is to observe in what degree they have been affected and caught of the same situations and turmoil they were put into. Again interestingly this leads me to another query, that to see whether they were merely spectators of their challenges or active fighters of their plights.

In this study, I will bring about five women poets of the same line so as to observe in what ways they deal with the above-posed frameworks, by highlighting the question of Arab American identity in particular. The poems selected are exclusively written/ composed on the theme, 9/11 and its aftermath. The aim of this is to explain, as I wrote somewhere above, this particular identity or existence in a particular context. In other words, my aim is to contextualize them in and after September 11. All these poets seem to have a renewed interest in old/traditional/Arab things which they recount here in their poems. For instance, most or all of them reflect more or less Edward Said in their perceptions. Why such a *looking back* is necessary will be posted in following pages.

From the writers, I am going to refer hereafter have dealt in their poems the feminist and political attitudes. As female poets, they would have to undertake the duty of a feminist (the one who acts against women exploitation) in the beginning where the West defined them with oriental stereotypes. They were then the critiques of oriental trends. What is common for the poets is their humanistic approaches. That is to respect and have faith in peoples' heart to solve any issues, and to respect each other toward the idea of peace. Hence, their between oscillations (from an 'Arabness' to an 'Americanness' and vice versa) should emphatically be discussed than anything else. So my attempt is directed towards the praxis of Arab American women poets constructing, reconstructing, and deconstructing their various beings (that "what they are/ have been and to some extent, will be, which in turn brings the ways of one's life, identity) upon different settings of cultural, geographical, political, and social realms. How they defining themselves get reflected in their verses, which may be named as "anti- Orientalism" or "self-Orientalism" or counter-Orientalism and so forth, as they have their own definitions of the orient, about themselves. This is explained in the final chapter.

They have got more than enough to imagine about their own lands so that they could not go with whatever the Occident presented to them. There was a huge gap in the immigrant Arabs' culture and the new world's which offered more conflicts. One thing is profound that the Arab American marginalization is not documented with its really deserving significance in the US official and media discourses. The narratives done as part of any racial incidents in America appeared to have somewhat highlighted only those things favouring and justifying the country's deed whether it is a misdeed or not. If the 9/11 made Arab America visible than ever before, and if that was the sole cause for them to come forward and to become responsible personalities, no doubt remain in that it influenced positively the Arab-American woman too. But we must at the same time not exclude their past, wherein their people had no voice and existence in the white society of U.S. Moreover one should see why and why their case was as such in which they could not show their faces and possess themselves for themselves in pre-9/11 in order to find what would exactly made them visible? We should also see the nature of this post-9/11 visibility especially we have still some anthologies wherein Arab-American authors are categorised into Asian-Americans or so in lieu of putting them under their own title. Such holes in American studies and more particularly, in realms of the so-called ethnic studies need to be re-examined to get the behind of the scene of Arab-American absence. In that attempt will reflect the relevance and objective of my documentation of Arab-American through this study.

Besides my interest being in the above frames of contemporary Arab-Americans, my curiosity was also driven when I saw a gap in library shelves. Surprisingly in an Indian American library, there was no term "Arab-American" carved over any books. This material absence that re-echoes the Arab American invisibility is not just due to the "librarian's dilemma" is more or less a shocking fact.

As 9/11 being the core in changing the 21st century Arab American life and marginalized condition in U.S, concerning its impact also brought forth new dimensions to their literature, we cannot help speaking about the immediate responses of various authors, the woman poets in this case who have come up with fresh styles and diction to express their challenged condition of not knowing 'who they are' to America and to their ancestral homes and the like. Taking these poets' verses written immediately after September event (so the 'First' responses), I have

accomplished the aforementioned task in my first chapter. My goal also comprises to learn about the American response to the event of 9/11. The resistance as a response is required too, for the fact that there existing many stories in US proclaiming American arrogance unacknowledged against the Arab horror.

The last analogy is required to see how much the word 'racism' still hangs in the American citizens that in effect made the marginalized more invisible. I am not juxtaposing the white against the Arabs or reverse, rather there is a narrative and counter-narrative. The purpose of the Arab American literature and writers to tackle issues of stereotypes can be justified from such cooked stories whether of arrogance or not that are set against their very people. Therefore there is a need to see the two-sided responses separately and in pretty detail to achieve the purpose of my study as mentioned above.

Among the thematically divided chapters, my second chapter brings about the hyphenated Arab-American authors who are neither with terrorists nor with U.S. Notably the term "terrorists" in my title does not include all Arabs in it as in a popular stereotype of the immediate aftermath. Similarly U.S. here is a reference to the American nationalism, or the U.S government who came up with Americanization policies that were against the ethnic immigrants and the like. So the poets take a position neither with both these extremisms. And being in hyphen they stand for both Arabs and Americans considering with whom the need to be talked about lies, that is with the oppressed and voiceless they are setting their duties of empowerment. Moreover the elements and citations of their 'resistance' are exemplified here.

And the third and final chapter remains little unique from the previous ones. It explicates about both the Arab-American male and female sexualities and in what ways the poets utilize the orientalism to reconstruct it into a new regarding the prevalent anti-Arab male female images. Mohja Kahf's Muslim woman and men images to give a threat to the existing popular prejudices and the Orientalists own notions of Arabs, Suheir Hammad's Arab women constructions in general etc will be portrayed to see how the poets would have "de-orientalized" the scene, which is new and really relevant about my dissertation. From the modes of their practicing orientalism cannot be termed strictly as did Martina Koegele or Safa'a Abdulrahim, two well known

scholars of the same field. So, taking the double sided tasks of poets like Mohja Kahf, for example I found her auto-orientalizing has two dimensions in one she has subverted the oriental typologies by essentializing the same on the other side. So keeping aside all the prefixed oriental images the critics and theorists assign to these Arab women authors, I would like to propose my own term for their practice, that is, the “de-orientalizing.” My attempt is to analyze the praxis of de-orientalization by the poets is detailed with a convenient definition toward the end of this chapter.

For a somewhat accuracy and fulfilment of this book, all the five poets will be described both individually and in analogy to one another. It will be also judged whether they have done their duty as responsible writers in crisis situations etc, if not, then I will be suggesting what they should have done better than what they have already. They will also be compared to that of some American respondents. With this mode of study, it will be easier to stress the importance of being an Arab American/Arab-American writer. I will not anyway explain every poem from each selected collections but only those (most) relevant poems, five or six by each author. I will also look at those genres other than poetry, for instance, Naomi’s letter to any would-be terrorist, that was penned immediately after the attacks is a must to include. In the end, I will pose the question: is there an Arab American literature exists exclusively written in response to 9/11 and its aftermath? In other words, is there a “9/11 literature/ writings” born as part of the above writers writing on the 9/11? The task of this will be to seek if the whole genre of Arab literature in the United States in the turn of the century be the site wherein the anti-Arab stereotypes, xenophobia racism and discrimination etc were confronted and contested.

Chapter I

Against War/ Terror/Violence and Oriental Stereotypes: Mapping the ‘First’ Poetic Responses

What the U.S government is saying to Arabs is Shut Up or Get Out of this Country. (McDonnell 7)¹

A little more needs to be said about the obscurity of Arab-American identity before exploring the ‘first’ (9/11) responses. As seen in my introduction, Majaj referring to Arab-Americans as those ‘who speak no English and no Arabic’ is not to suggest that they speak not both, instead they say implicitly that they speak a kind of mixture of both, to suggest again their unwillingness to leave their own language and culture for the sake of a new, that is American.

If Majaj makes this little more complicated, see how Nadine Naber explicates it with all its paradoxical existence by bringing ample instances to favour her arguments in her study of Arab American invisibility.² She quotes one professor named, Suad Joseph who reflects on a more negotiable interpretation of the term Arab-American as:

There are Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, Saudi Arabians, Bahrainis, Qataris, Dubains, Egyptians, Libyans, Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians, Sudanese, Eritreans, Mauritians; there are Maronites, Catholics, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Jews, Sunnis, Shi’a, Druz, Su.s, Alwaties, Newtorians, Assyrians, Copts, Chaldeans, Bahais; there are Berbers, Kurds, Armenians, bedu, gypsies and many others with different languages, religions, ethnic and national identifications and cultures who are all congealed as Arab in popular representation whether or not those people may identify as Arab. (43)

Undertaking the key ideas put forth by Majaj and Naber, and of course, visibly from the above quote one can easily understand the Arab-American as the most diverse group in the United States. I too believe in that fact because the term rather exists to include many sub-groups inside

¹ The quote is a popular say that goes back to 1980s America. Nadine Naber brings this to her ‘invisibility thesis’ to re-signify the statement’s recent applications that fingers to the inevitability of response or resistance from the part of Arab-American authors whose voice then must have been silenced. In the same way I have used it above.

² Ambiguous Insiders : an Investigation to Arab American Invisibility, article in Ethnic and Racial Studies, 23(1): 2010

itself that not only give us a variance in matters of religion, but language, colour and geographical/physical attributes of them.

Until 1950s the Arab American ethnicity was not in clash with the U.S.³ They were mostly Syrians and Palestinians, and largely Christians in number and hence have various backgrounds. At a time it was for business/ labour they emigrated whereas the new immigrants arrived for studies and settlement. Here comes the Arab Diaspora, some forced to be in exile and others chose to be in the same, to seek new existence and spaces of recognition. Notwithstanding various places and cultures they inherited and journeyed, the Arabs were common in language and some other cultural aspects. Meanwhile it is not easy to map out where precisely the point of Arab's discrimination intersects the American history.

Surely America is the land of hopes and freedoms. But it is also true it is the place where incalculable racial and ethnic discrimination to be found. Resuming the question of identity in the previous chapter, the fact of *becoming* American is not easy for any non-Americans or the coloured ones. Especially for the Arabs who were treated as yellow along with some Asian Americans, and then become 'white' in official data but not treated well with the same privileges that a *real* white could access. Thus the task of turning to American-ness remains challenging. Rather than becoming a fully American it is even hard to become a half-American, and American of another ethnic name with it. That is what exactly to be a hyphenated-American,⁴ whose *identity* is always in trouble to be here and there- even sometimes not anywhere. Experienced of her hybrid identity fused with three cultures- American, Syrian-Arab and Muslim, Lisa Suheir Majaj says; "I am tired of being afraid to speak who I am: American and Palestinian— not merely half of one thing and half, but both at once— and in that inexplicable melding that occurs when two cultures come together, not quite either, so that neither American nor Arab find themselves fully reflected in me, nor I in them" (67-8).

³ Lisa Suheir Majaj makes this historical observation in her article " "

⁴ Many theorist and ethnic critics refer to the Arab American identity as hyphenated. Majaj, Koegeler, Fadda Conrey, Safa'a Abdulrahim are some important to mention. Safa'a, for instance has pointed out the terms hyphen as a 'middle space' from where the poets articulate themselves, their very identities. She has maintained the term hyphenated throughout her thesis to show its "fluidity." p.2. (for more details, please refer chapter ii)

The question of “who I am” that is primary considering one’s identity that is never static. For the Arabs in America, it is also challenging to go with their new experiences, a change from the state of being ‘majority’ at home to a ‘minority’ in diaspora. (el-Aswad 112) In this case, the way they perceive themselves and other people should be analyzed in order to understand the dynamics of their identity reconstructions. (ibid) One such study is entailed by el-Sayed el-Aswad⁵ (‘The Dynamics of Identity Reconstruction among Arab Communities in the United States’) in which he states about the Arab American intellectual’s confrontations with a similar replaced identity positions. He says, being “confronted with diaspora, Arab intellectuals, especially Edward Said, have expressed being torn between their commitment to universal human values, their commitment to their new land, and their attachment to their homeland” (111). But as we all know for this particular community, the issue is more than merely diasporic or, in other words, the Arab-American would have been similar to other diaspora if the 9/11 had not happened. Hence this complicated being of Arab-American needs to be revisited in order to get a clear cut idea of this particular identity’s different appearance in the context of September 11.

Placing Arab American women into 9/11 will inform us the verisimilitude of gender/sexual issues of Arabs in America. Where the 21st century Arab American literature appears predominantly of fiction and many women authors talking of their sex/gender related issues, visions and realities, the terror decade was overwhelmed with poems mainly written on the same. Precisely the poets who dealt with 9/11, deliberately or otherwise have sidelined the gender-related stories, this argument is explained in chapter 3. However the *male- the exploiter* and *male-the abuser* or oppressor is the role and image of Arab men in popular American consciousness is propagated through its media and movies etc, to popularize the orient to highlight the latter’s inferior position to the so called liberal democrats of the world. Also the Arab women are nothing but exotic victims and oppressed beings in the eyes of any spectator who seldom knows about the Arab-American realities. Therefore these authors are vested with a

⁵ el-Aswad is a professor in anthropology at United Arab Emirates University. He is a well established author and critic who wrote many books on this area.

huge responsibility to report the truth- the truth about their own people, their culture along with identity affiliations and assertions.

From this crude analysis, one can guess the scope of reading Arab American literature. It is not only one should get into this torrential genre to find the truth and data, but the purpose of writing and becoming part of its enrichment dives to its existential question- that how it must influence the American literary scene by becoming an individual entity. For this influence, I borrow Williams' idea that Arab American literature needs to be read as *literature* (Williams 10).

Moving ahead, those poems and novels written on the theme of 9/11 and post-9/11 can be categorized as "9/11 literature." Interestingly some have called this category "Post-9/11 literature," and some, with a more precise emphasis, the "War on Terror literature." With the same token, naming it as "terror literature" or "war literature" cannot be entertained as it is just a misappropriation. Apart from the bypassing mentioned earlier, we must not give up other questions regarding them (Arab American women writers/poets) being stuck with the muck of their identity. In what follows my study will engage with *representation*.

Lived experiences are often getting their re-manifestation in literature. And all we know is that literature stands to also record the life as such. From this of course poetry gets its fixed and primordial place of engaging with the extreme (personal) realities. It is where in poetry the writer expresses more and more about his/ her emotional side. However this emotional ways rarely negate reason, rather it would reinforce our faculties to move with the feelings and moods the poet imparts. As the ages progress poems become more without meter and the so-called 'poetic' diction if there was any such existed. So the prosaic poems came into trend were to show *the real* in poems. Such is the best to define Arab American poetry. One thing always dominates their life and literature is story telling or stories as it is the popular attribute about the Arabs.

To recap the Arab American literature came into being in effect of a long term Arab American struggle towards recognition.⁶ Then and now its ultimate agenda might have been to dealing with identity and ethnic issues of this particular community. Poems by this group in the 21st century include stories in them. They are rather poems with stories or stories in the form of poetry. It is thus relevant to speak on this unique attribute if the 9/11 literature. I like to stress here not the form but the scope of bringing the stories again as for instance, Naomi did in her *19 Varieties of Gazelle*. It is a book of poems written ‘exclusively’ on 9/11. But when one go through and through its pages, he finds them having nothing to do with the particular incident. Hence we can pose here a question of why is it said that this collection comes under the 9/11 category. The answer Naomi herself gives which is mentioned in her introduction. That she had a muse like invoking by her dead grandmother who reminded her in dreams about her very duty as Arab American, to confront with the existing stereotypes in order to show who they or their people *are* in reality. As an inference, the idea of Arab American literature or such poems do exist for a purpose in its core- to reconstruct the *Arab American* identity. The writers’ looking back into past is not merely what Naomi had to do as above. It has its own politics that will be explained in the end of this chapter.

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, explains Safa’a.(11)⁷ It is true tha the main duties that have to be done by the poets of our study during 9/11 and regarding the issues that ensuing do not disengage with challenging stereotypes. It looks as if the challenge and counter-confrontations with the prevailing anti-Arab American archetypes have got its persistence throughout ages and ages so that it never disappears from the books and brains of the mentioned authors and activists. “While many of us write (and live) with a sense of the gap between who we are and how we are perceived- and take pains to communicate across it- our vocation is to be artists, not native informants.”(Jamal 10) As in this critical observation of Jamal, her call is toward the Arab American women taking this opportunity of crisis not to just be some native or like informants,

⁶ Majaj makes this claim in her article, “Arab-American Literature: Origin and Developments (asjournal.org).

⁷ Ibid, Safa’a. p11

or a mere respondent, but to reach beyond it by making their arts (poems) perfect in challenges. That means they are into the archived belief that the art gets perfection in crisis, and then, this occasion is, they realize to exercise their own politics towards recognition.

Besides the plurality of cultures the Arab-Americans and their literature promote and stand for, various people asserting their own ethnicities (in public and private spheres) as part of a “politics of recognition”⁸ revitalizes the Arab-American scene. Hence this sort of ‘ethnic assertion’, as Majaj argues, is central to cultural pluralism. (Majaj 320) Anyway such assertions assure a vital place in Arab American writings too. Poets like Hammed, Naomi, Majaj, Kahf, and Melhem use this often in their poems. Elmaz Abinader, Etel Adnan, Hayan Charara and Evelyn Shakir are not exceptions.

So this is from where they speak and trying to define themselves. Their stand of this in between-ness always invited confusion and confluences not only for these writers when trying to find their exact identities but for us, the reader too, when observing them. This is behind my various assumptions of them to be ‘in-between Arab and America’; between Palestine/Syria and America; or sometimes between coloured and white; sometimes with the coloured only; and sometimes between reality and construct. This last appropriation, I feel, is not the only instance of them being “caught” between 9/11 and ‘War on Terror’ as claimed in my thesis statement, but it is applicable in cases like Iraq war, Palestine-Israel conflict and the like to which the Arab/Arab-American writers must have always a response.

As we observe deeply, all of them seem to have confronted with violence and wars, terrors and anti-terror/ imperial U.S. projects, etc., critically and more interestingly they all propose a humanistic world wherein no wars and injustice will prevail over love. For this, we have their verses as evidence whereby they propagate love and peace against violence and injustice. It may be said then that have these poets done their best to be responsible activists during crisis, whereas some appeared to have taken their older responsibilities with a renewed

⁸ The term is originally Charles Taylor’s. Majaj in her essay uses this as synonym for her idea of “ethnic assertion.”

zeal. In such new interest, have they brought into light the women issue, against the so called orientalist and Islamophobic stereotypes. And they celebrate their culture even when critically responding to their new-labelled identities in the new land, where their “whiteness”⁹ give them no equal status of a real American whiteness. With my own curiosity, I will further investigate if they have truly done what they could have really, as being free to express things in the so called “free” society they are part of? Or is there a pretext that we feel when we read them that- they should have done more? The query is also about the poets in their selecting of genres especially to express the 9/11 and aftermath. For poets like Naomi Shihab for instance, chose the ‘essay’ format to show her response whereas Melhem and Hammed put it in their lengthy verse. Is there a kind of correlation in this genre based portrayal? Or is it merely the poets’ preference laid only upon her individual choice?

In addition to these, to deal with the theoretical identifications of the “otherness” that the above women poets are not to be ignored. For Suheir, she talks about it directly whereas Naomi and Melhem do it not so. And for a Muslim American woman poet the life/identity has been more challenging since the September tragedy, as found by Martina Koegeler in her thesis, “American “Sheharades-Auto-orientalism, literature and representations of Muslim women in a post-9/11 U.S. context.” Koegeler is an Arab-American scholar and specialist who particularly spoke about the Muslim women post-9/11 engagements, he says; “the specific situation of a Muslim woman writer in a post 9/11 U.S. context requires a combination of positive inversion and a more subtle approach of subversion to escape the orientalist co-optation and to be able to critique negative, patriarchal and oppressive Muslim practices as well.”(56) This is from where she perceives Mohja Kahf’s auto-orientalization by strategically subverting the existing Muslim woman trope for which she identifies herself as Sheherazade in west. How this strategy being

⁹ The word is in quotation is to suggest the white label given to them exists in name only, not in practice that does mean the holders of it seldom enjoy what the whiteness do to Europeans/ Americans. Majaj bringing David Williams, a Lebanese-American author to suggest the idea more sensibly and essentially a fact about the community. The latter in his poem, “Almost One” expresses the contemporary Arab-Americans as ‘not quite white enough’ and ‘not quite Arab enough, not quite whole’ even.

articulated and achieved by Kahf as observed by Koegeler will be a major concern of my last chapter.

Identity whether it is racial, political or social, according to Zhou and Bankston, is a “rather slippery matter that depends on how individuals feel about their own groups and other groups in society.”(Zhou& Bankston: 234). Announcing one’s identity is vital for any immigrant in incorporating and adapting to his host country or whichever place he newly is part of. The issue is ever relevant in matters of Diaspora.

To focus on the chapter title and my previous notions, it is assured that the stereotypes were constructed and reconstructed, used and reused for various imperial and ideological purposes. The West has been very much at ease with making archetypes of the Arabs or the Orient in general. So, most of the oriental documents have perfected the stereotyping to reinforce the notion of the orient as rigid, hesitant to change, conservative and barbaric, oppressed, exotic and so forth. Since then the stereotypes were used to define the orient and that created lies about the other. This oriental framework to a greater extent constituted to the otherness of the Arabs against the civilized and successful West. So there came a must to resist from the side of the marginalized, that the Arabs or Arab Americans would have known long ago but failed to respond equivocally to them until recent decades. And then words like ‘auto-orientalism’ and ‘counter-orientalism’ entered to define their ways of deconstructing the Orientalism. And their resistance became reflected with the origin of a new faces of feminism, Islamic feminism and Arab American feminism that often challenged the so called western/ mainstream feminist notions. In this chapter I will speak particularly about those Arab American woman poets who have responded to the 9/11 by de-stereotyping violence, terrorism, and the like.

Safa’a Abdulrahim¹⁰ in her thesis maintained that the poets, Etel Adnan, Kahf, Hammad, and Majaj, like all other Arab-Americans,

¹⁰ She is researcher in University of Sterling. Her thesis entitled, “Between Empire and Diaspora: Identity Poetics in Contemporary Arab-American Women’s Poetry”(2013) explores the key ideas of the concerned literature in their maximums. It seems as if Safa’a has left nothing for us to speak about the What’s and How’s of Arab-Americans.

always been struggling with a double quandary: within the larger mainstream context, they have to deal with institutionalized 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. (21)

In this section, I am looking at some important responses that immediately followed the September 11 ascribed from various areas and sources including movies and poems that have been penned down one year or a decade than the same incident. The movies presented here are not just the databanks of a post-9/11 U.S. they are rather the nearly ‘unchanged’ ways of seeing and re-seeing the other-as-other again by the orientalist, so such American intellectuals, media, public, etc comes on one side. On the other side we have a more political response embodied with a ‘resistance’ in it, which frames the core of this chapter- the Arab/Muslim American woman poets’ responses for which their most immediate poems about 9/11 will be the experiments. Arguably the term resistance is actualized and achieved through these poets’ verses are in forms and methods such as ‘anger’, ‘rejection’, ‘speaking louder’, ‘choosing a no-where-ness or that of everywhere’ and the like.

The post-9/11 response of this sort includes a multitude of discourses other than poetry. For instance, discourse by the U.S officials and government, U.S citizens (public) and from U.S media and the like. All these responsive discourses can come to strengthen the ‘war on terror’ narratives. On September 12, Bush maintained that it “will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil, Good will prevail” (Griffith 272)¹¹ He added, U.S would be opposing “a group of barbarians” and “people who hate freedom.”(ibid) Joanne Robertson, an Assistant Professor observed the 9/11 as a “senseless act.” Her close ties with students in recognizing their optimistic and other sentiments on 9/11 made her go with Charles M. Anderson’s and Marian M. MacCurdy’s famous quote from *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, they say:

¹¹ Lee Griffith(2002) document the post 9/11 Bush and other rhetoric in his “September 11” Postscript in *The War on Terror and Terror of God*.

As we manipulate the words on page, as we articulate to ourselves and to others the emotional truth of our pasts, we become agents of our own healing, and if those to whom we write receive what we have to say and respond to it as we write and rewrite we create a community that can accept, contest, gloss, inform, invent, and help us discover, deepen, and change who we have become as a consequence of the trauma we have experienced. (7)

Definitely the question of who changed or whose lives changed after 9/11 cannot easily and in accurate terms be traced. But the above quote, I believe, will be apt to describe the condition of any transformed life of U.S in the post-9/11 era, especially the Arabs.

While some explanations and responses were clear and judgmental, objective and critical some were arrogant too. Joe L. Kincheloe in his article talks about a working-class American man saying the following when he was asked why the terrorist hate them or their freedom;

“the Muslims hate us because we’re better than them and smarter than them. I’d like to kill one of them-every man, woman, child, dog, cat, horse, and mule in Afghanistan. They are primitive people- and they don’t understand anything other than raw force. I say kill’em all..” (120).

Indeed the attack was shocking but its back lash was not unexpected and, the victimization was predicted too especially by those who had a memory of previously held violence, also for those who were aware of the prejudices upon their people. They were in alarm so urged their co-fellows to be friendly to each other. Such instances are still in e-mails and phone calls; in letters and literatures of both Arabs and Americans, and even of other ethnic groups in the country. Even though the citizens were in trauma and suspicion of what had occurred, most of them helped one another in striving for peace. But sadly this did not help much the Arabs to be still targets of CIA and like American defenders. The worse thing is that the violence carried out, they made cleverly a justified act in order not to provoke the public at any rate.

With everything changed and becoming new, there was also a renewed interest in mainstream academics and politics of America. As part of this came calls to achieve a databank about Arab Americans. There the intellectuals and like persons were engaged in extensive

studies and research about the Arabs, and with a particular interest in Islam and Muslims who are viewed to be terrorists in the West. There were truth too spread on them against the vey stereotyping of them by media and some official commentators. Perhaps a major share was contributed to robust the existing prejudices on Arabs. Whatever, the negative and positive documentations made this subject to be widened with its fullest scope. Hence the Orientalism got its new meaning.

The American film and television industry remains the most powerful in shaping American public perception. It is not a surprise to see its connection with news media to continue with devaluing Arab and Muslim lives in US. In this light Ibrahim Kamal observes that “when the biases of the news networks validate the prejudices of the latest blockbuster films, the American public is bound to confuse reality with its meticulously curated fictional representations.”¹² Hollywood film industries often get facilitated by CIA and Pentagon to use the American official/military tools (Ibrahim 16), becomes clearly indicative of the US government’s role being decisive in making movie messages up to the likes and dislikes of its imperial agenda. Then those entertainments made about “war on terror” make the stereotypes, even to reinforce the existing American perception that often negate the existence of both Arabs and Muslims. They are shaped in a way to legitimize the anti-terrorist wars that changed the political maps of Guantanamo, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq into red (blood) spots more than they had before. This is the way how such fictitious representations, that will be obviously far from real, help to dehumanize the Arab/ Muslims in US. This is one method of Hollywood that makes Muslim lives “ungrievable” in the war on terror, against those whites/ Americans who are “grievable.”¹³ Naber brings Goodstein’s observation to show how movies like “Aladdin” (1992), “True Lies”(1994), “The Siege”(1998) solidified, with their themes and settings, the “Arab enemy” image into American consciousness.¹⁴ In the last film, as she observes, the “generic backward Arab- Middle Eastern Muslim” enacts violence in the US rather than in his home country. By bringing this enemy into North American setting, the film intensified the idea of

¹² “How Hollywood Makes Muslim Life “Ungrievable” in the War on Terror”, Kamal Ibrahim. Muftah.org.com, May 17, 2016.

¹³ Kamal, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Naber , *ibid*.

Arabs being a threat to US security and that Americans need to protect themselves from ‘Arab enemy.’ The American Muslims and Arab Americans who watched this movie were in threat of the siege that will feed suspicion and hatred of Arabs and Muslims in the United States. (46)

From this one can easily guess how much the situation would have been vulnerable again in post 9/11 era, where the stereotypes and prejudices had got their golden age, that got manifested in “The Kingdom,” “Babel,” “Rendition” and so forth movies. What we see in (whether immediate or otherwise responses) post-9/11 poems, the poets attempts to establish ‘what they are’ and ‘what they are not.’ These (woman) poets have to defend their identity, when their culture is under siege. They stand for their society as a whole, not always gender or relates issue specific they are. The Arab-American women got “privileges” than their male counterparts in America. Nada Elia, a comparative literature scholar and author, also the founder of RAWAN¹⁵ speaks about this apparently manifested ‘privilege’ in many instances including the West publishers’ preference to female (Arab) authors over the males. In her well written article (“Islamophobia and “Privileging” of Arab American Woman”), Elia learns this as a reflection of the mainstream American establishments seeing the selected women as harmless against their men as perennial enemies, never to be trusted. (158) This sort of preference though gives or not benefits to its agents, here the Arab/Muslim women poets, they have become more vocal with which they utilize the political and poetic spaces not for a mere feminist course alone. Their simultaneous representations of their own male compatriots are to deconstruct the ‘silenced Arab men’ due to ostracization, imprisonment, intimidation, or deportation.¹⁶ This more sophisticated and inclusive modes of feminism practiced by the Arab women in diaspora, that is not stuck into the ‘woman-only’ concerns, is more explicated in the end of this dissertation.

It is suggested, before entering the complex of ‘the poetic’ experiences (of 9/11) and responses, we need to learn the poets for their backgrounds, and positions they occupy uniquely or collectively with their community and other writers of their group or other ethnicities if any.

¹⁵ the Radical Arab Women’s Activist Network.

¹⁶ The image of ‘silenced Arab-male’, according to Elia facilitates the woman authors to become more vocal. Ibid,158.

The following portrayals serve a purpose of both showing the responses along with brief introductions of the authors that can be insightful to any core part of this project:

Suheir Hammad, the Hip-hop Artist in ‘Breaks’

Suheir Hammad, a Palestinian born American poet, performer and artist feels what she writes. After reading her lengthy verses about the September 11 and its aftermath, I feel the poet has addressed the issue with its fullest seriousness. How as a poet Hammad felt it that is to be a victim and witness of the same is expressed. For the themes and ideas described, I could see the closest connection networked across her poems, also among her collections. The poems from her *Breaking Poems* and that which she presented for the audience immediately after the 9/11, has made the mentioned connection possible at its best.

The poem “What I Will” can be seen as supplementary to the “First Writing Since.” It is to show how her cathartic feelings transformed, after analyzing the cases of the week after the 9/11 (also her responses to Bush’s War on terror project) into a metamorphosis. From the second poem being her first response to the event is not only an emotional piece. Rather it occupies her criticism, her resentment against the violence by terrorists and the State. While dealing with these, she never forget to bring about *her* people as the event’s witnesses and victims, also the white minds who suspecting the other (Arab-Americans, Muslims etc.) for the entire terror happened. She openly rejects the war on terror in both the poems, by proclaiming her own identity, culture of her people and their like to the people of America. This asserting self has been a theme in Hammad’s early poems too. The same is repeated in her *Breaking Poems*. Here she brings a new style of writing poetry- in which each verses are spaced in breaks, to show the reader what is hidden in those blanks, shown with a “{.....}”.

Hammad’s technique is always predicted and shown well. It is this way that she narrates her feelings, and stories either inside her people’s, so she as being one among them, or as an observer of whatever things are stated and staged in the verse. Her side-sitting (author-observer) often gives the narrative a third person touch, by which she describes many incidents and events,

mostly that of various women living and surviving, otherwise dying and so on. Interruptions of her appear likely include:

Can I have a half second to feel bad?
 i have not cried at all while writing this.
 i cried when i saw those buildings collapse on themselves like a broken heart. (21)

To think more on her technique, it seems she deliberately has avoided rhythm in most of her poems, even when in many lines she could have a chance to create it. All her poetry appeared to have in them nothing but Hammad's reflection of herself. More clearly, it is that kind wherein her 'self' speaks to the self and the reader. Whatever she is more aware of herself separately as a poet and a person though she has blended the two to make 'her' throughout the verses. In some she mingled English with her own language, to favor both: see she did not try to choose one over other, but preferred the mixture. It is to show her support to both *her* and *their* culture, however, the inclusion of her music, her language and culture as represented and expressed through her narrative voice in her poems indicate that she tries to assert them over her new and attributed identity (American Other). All these contribute to the political stance Suheir occupies along with her recitations of in hip hop or rap style. Her outstanding position, of course, attributed to her 'oral verses'. It is a little paradoxical that she recites those non-hip hop style poems too even when she owns a hip-hop collection that are perfectly meant to be recited. Sadiya Mansour, the popular Palestinian hip hop artist in exile who represents her people and country in her performance can be compared to that of Hammad. "there is a country in your heart where story lives and poem comes from. No one can occupy it," she says.¹⁷

Using the power of poetry as a "body of words and spaces", she believes, she has to 'reconstruct' something may be the broken pieces of the attacks. Does she really intend a reconstruction? And was it rather helpful in such deeply felt traumas and tragedies? If not, is that Hammad is trying to presume so by taking the word "break" into all her poems and breaking all

¹⁷ See preface to Hammad's *Born Palestinian Born Black*, p.10. by this she stresses the power and importance of writing, especially poems and the like in times of crisis.

her lines into pieces and spaces just to add to her poetic quality by leaving things open ended? These questions will lead us to a more political framework of her poetry. Her “First Writing Since” the 9/11 is a long lined poem, unsophisticated in style and diction but mature in theme and powerful in its protest. May be her first thought is being presented as such, perhaps as it occurred (inside her) is put as it is to the poem, for which reason one may find the above assumptions. Her poems may seem full of anger and passion towards Arabs in which she often reflect herself as a sympathizer of Americans. She has the power to represent such and such in a line or even phrase invites her brilliance to the reader.

One week after the attacks, she wrote in her poem:

then please god, let it be a nightmare, wake me now.
 please god, after the second plane, please, don't let it be anyone
 who looks like my brother
 i have never been so hungry that I willed hunger
 i have never been so angry as to want to control a gun over a pen
 not really.
 even as a woman, as a palestinian, as a broken human being
 never this broken. (23)

These lines well enough reflect all her feelings about the attacks. Interestingly in its form and structure, there is also evidence for her fragmented, fearful, angry, ferocious beings represented. The pauses she provides among words, sentences shorter, and not at all used the capitalizations etc are visible examples. So there is a narrator of all such feelings moving back and forth through and through her lines, to stress not only the emotional heaviness and anger, but also to make one feel humanity and humility alike as she does.

Hammad keeps all her ideas to be true as far as her poetry collections are concerned. But coming to identity, she does not claim about herself as an Arab American or American as such. Instead she respects both the cultures at the same time doing every task of an Arab author in America. She stands and speaks for Palestine which is also done by many of our writers. Hammad's technique is always predicted and shown well. It is this way that she narrates her

feelings, and stories either her own personal or of her people- so she as being one among them, or as an observer of whatever things are stated and staged in the verse. Her side-sitting often gives the narrative a third person touch, by which she describes many incidents and events, mostly that of various women living and surviving, otherwise dying and so on. To think more on her technique, it seems she deliberately has avoided rhythm even when in many lines she could have a chance to create it. Her internal strain and yearning to call for a universal love is manifested in her verse as “I have never felt less american and more new yorker, particularly brooklyn, than these past days.” Her poem presents all sides of this attack not only the rubble and troubles of the victims, but also events of past, future and more importantly the present. It also informs about how to love and care in face of wars or such attacks.

She seems to be very realistic in her writing. And the verses are composed in a mode that she is overtly spontaneous in her feelings, which she could often get a control of. Out of this, what is reflected in the lines are humanly feelings that can be vague and clear at the same time, that is one heart being-under surveillance of doom, distress, anger, distrust, despair, and other with negative and positive feelings. Her anxiety, fear, and outburst are in almost equal forms and highs then poured in all the verses to make her verses more into a *hip hop* style. All her poetry appeared to have in them nothing but Hammad’s reflection of herself. More clearly, it is that kind wherein her ‘self’ speaks to the self and to the reader. Whatever, she is not less aware of herself separately as a poet and a person though she has blended the two to make ‘her/ narrator’ throughout the verses. In some she mingled English with her own language, to favour both: see she did not try to choose one over other, but preferred the mixture. It is to show her support to both *her* and *their* culture, however, the inclusion of her music, her language and culture as represented and expressed through her narrative voice in her poems indicate that she tries to assert them over her new and attributed identity (American other). All these contribute to the political stance Suheir occupies. This is clearer from her recitations of her own verses in hip hop or rap singing style.

Naomi Shihab Nye: the Poet of Peace and Trees

Elnajjar reports Naomi's this interesting remark in her essay. (28) In her "letter to any would-be terrorists" that was penned immediately after the September attacks, Nye writes:

I am humble in my country's pain and I am furious...not only did your colleagues kill thousands of innocent, international people in those buildings and scar their families forever, they wounded a huge community of people in the Middle East, in the United States and all over the world. If that's what they wanted to do, please know the mission was a terrible success, and you can stop now. (28)

Among the five chosen poets, Naomi is unique for her style of articulation. For instance, the essay she wrote as a letter to any would be terrorists from which the above extract is taken, remains praiseworthy for its very appearance. Its advising and suggestive moods, its brief and palpable expression of a threat-giving to whom it is addressed. In "My Father and the Fig Tree," she symbolizes fig tree to refer the Palestinian (her father's too) displacement and longing for a home.

As in any Arab women writers, tradition becomes a key element in Naomi's poems. Going into the deep roots of her own land she tries to re-voice it along with a connection of them to her new world's ways. Her most famous work, *19 Varieties of Gazelle*¹⁸ is the one which she wrote exclusively on 9/11 and aftermath. In the book she tells, "peace is rough" to attack those who take weapons in the name of religion. She blames none but all for the responsibility is moving- "no one was right/ everyone was wrong" and "people make mistakes for decades/ everyone hurt in similar ways/ at different times." This poetic extract in itself shows how impartial Nye is. An objective spectator and at the same time a fighter is how she notably relates herself to the attacks. As I read through I am really confused whether she really entails such an

¹⁸ Naomi Shihab Nye's most famous collection that many critics name it as her response to 9/11. But at the same time, noting the subtitle itself one may suspect this notion. In addition to this, most of the poems here are not newly written but merely a revised/ modified version of her previous ones, some revised and modified, and some just republished as they were. This collection published in 2002 by Green Willow Books contains 61 poems in two sections including a postscript and introduction poem in the beginning.

attempt or else on what she has done really by this collection. For a somewhat intellectual deduction I must say she has undertaken her duty equal to that of a change maker, to correct the mistakes and re-constructing the truth regarding Arabs. This recasting fully has been part of her realization just after 9/11 that there was a need for bringing her poems again, in order to confront with the existing challenges Arabs have had to deal with the new world's new paradigms, clearly a war on terror or war on Arab/Muslims.

Naomi's "Half-and-Half" reflects her own two identities. She is a Palestinian American, the daughter of Palestinian Muslim father and American Christian mother. But there is no clear mention of the narrator being about the poet herself, rather we have a fragmented narrative in which three or four instances of such half and half condition is given. And in the end, there is a woman doing things out of nothing, which is for her identity, goes with Naomi's view. The idea of "heritage", she takes into a further step by saying, it (heritage) matters "not just for what it tells who we are, but also how it informs what we *do*, the ways in which we draw on our cultural identity for our interactions in the world." (Majaj 11) This belief in her roots, and a desire to carry it over, Naomi reveals in many of her poems. It is because of this she holds on with what her grandmother's unfulfilled wish has been-to speak for the Arab-Americans, to tell who these people are and are not, to tell they hate terrorism and violence and the like. Her pride for being always connected and rooted to her hereditary and to the related people from Arab world made her a sympathizer also, dutiful for those Middle easterners whose conflict has rarely been addressed by the U.S media.¹⁹ For her a half-ness or of being 'part' of something matters because the identity is constructed in relationship to difference.(Majaj 328)

Her fervour for peace has no end. In "How Long Peace Takes", to my sense, the most beautiful poem from the same collection explains the momentary status/ existence of peace. The poem is too short but can be a sea-like if explained further and further. She repeats her idea of a rough peace that has a rough edge when she claims it remains "as long as the question- what if I

¹⁹ Nye says the Arab-Americans' feeling sad due to a rarely balanced representation of them in the mainstream U.S. media, in her introduction to *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, p. xiv. This sadness is one among the many the community had felt long before the September 11th, so it is easy to guess Naomi's attempt is not indeed stuck to a post-9/11 framework of Arab Americans or Middle Easterner

were you?-has two heads.” It seems her inferring that peace is not merely momentary but nearly impossible to achieve.

Naomi, who is assumed to have influenced heavily by her grandmother, says; "peace is rough," in the introductory poem, "Flinn, On the Bus." This poem is the only one where she directly portrays the immediate after-happenings of the September 11 case. Her encounter with a man, Flinn (the name symbolically refers to a red-haired, so he is assumed to be an Arab in this context also, from the evidenced anxiety of Naomi regarding how he is going to be informed of the incident despite she believes, she needs to tell it to him) on the bus after three hours after the attacks made her to conclude-"peace is rough" contemplates her above thoughts. The very word "rough" can be thought here for its multiple meanings among which I prefer, 'irregular', and 'broken' to appropriate it to the previous poem "Flinn on the Bus", which serves as introductory lines to this particular collection compiled of various poems taken from Naomi's previous books that were published in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1998. There is no order among the poems according to the date of their issue. This fragmented and rhythm-less words and phrases, in my view, indicate the importance of recomposing one's past out of fragments or whatever left as debris of something. The term 'debris' here should not be seen in its conventional sense, it rather refers to the past or present experiences- so a *debris of experience*, I like to term it. This may be behind what Naomi's further thought about re-bringing her old verses into this new era. It is no less than a re-contextualization of things from past to also see whether such attempt would help to deal with the present.

Between Regret and Memory (Haunting): Remembering as Remedy in Majaj's Poems

For Majaj, as she herself mentioned in an article, "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory", memory is "a mode of knowledge" which is mediated and constructed at historicized and politicized junctures. She is my personal favorite because of her eloquence and brilliant ways of putting words into shorter frameworks. She is the one who constantly deal with the anti-Arab woman stereotypes also special for how she takes her readers into the exact environment of her verses. As I stated just before, 'memory as a means to survive' becomes the core of her major poems.

“whatever we do or don’t do may come to haunt us”-starts with this her famous poem, “Living in History.” And her idea is that being memory as the crucial thing, and one has to live in it as he does in history. They are the most important aspects of anyone’s life as s/he carries her/his past(s) throughout their lives to future and so on. The word “remember” gets a vital stress even here when in one line she says, “And we may remember the generosity/ of light: how it travels through unimaginable darkness/ age after age, to light our small human night.” But the word can only have a somewhat vague association with her idea of memory until one relate the “night” in the end to the lack of knowledge- an illiteracy rather. In fact it is used here to denote the ‘kindness’ or just to be thankful/to know to the generosity of the light on man. The poem however more perfectly fit to her acknowledged collection, *Geographies of Light* in which she gives lights and guidelines to go or live well in any challenge or the like. Every poem in the book deserves equal importance when some are extraordinary in their fabric. One such is “Guidelines”. It is a rare kind of protest she is doing hereby, very effectively to throw mud on the oppressors’ face- she offers democracy as tool to claim their (Arab) rights.

Lisa Suheir Majaj proves ‘remembering’ as a most suitable remedy to her contemporary issues. In her exposition, she traces the inevitability of ‘memory’, ‘regret’ and ‘haunting’ in one’s life. She believes “whatever we do or don’t do may come to haunt us.” In her view ‘memory’ is a mode of knowledge that is mediated and constructed at historicized and politicized junctures” (Majaj 19). It is praiseworthy that she keeps her all these philosophical and critical assumptions through and through her verses. She calls the audience, mainly the Arab Americans or Americans to remember their pasts, their cultures, their traditions, their parents, their dignities, their values and so forth. To deal with these one must read her collection, *Geographies of Light*, in which she gives ‘guidelines’ and suggestions etc along with beautiful words and worlds on Arab-American themes.

Her keeping kinship with her own old country and new is another most reflected thing in her verses. In the above poem, she states: “geography’s twisted strands, the many colours/ of struggle. No matter how far you’ve come, remember:/the starting line is always closer than you think.” The same constitutes the last two lines of her “Night Sky.” The line is: “From wherever we are, / Baghdad is not so far.” Literally it is not the geographical nearness she is talking, but

the mental closeness that has been maintained among the Arabs even after they were separated into new worlds. This kinship has further been rejuvenated with their traditional and cultural treasures that are unique from the Westerners. From the selected, “Guidelines” and “Country” are the two poems by Majaj in which she directly address the September 11 issue. The later is a long poem scribed on the related incidents and the 9/11, in little detail to show the American and non-American countries or places wherein America made the people homeless, limbless and the like. She does not blame the whole Americans, nor the country, also neither supports her people nor celebrate their victimized positions.

In the above poem, she calls the audience to take the whites who know less to library; and proposes to stay calm is a great way of protest. Her claims on the whiteness as being a recent construction and America is also the Arabs’ land (as the immigrants who stay there has a claim to stay there at least), are the cores of the poem. It seems Majaj has a passion to the word memory or ‘remember’ also she likes silence or to be a silent protestor. The first term recurs virtually in all her poems. “no matter how far you’ve come, remember/ the starting line is always nearer.” Therefore her giving hope to the Arabs’ disappointed lives in America cannot be ignored at all especially it is so much a necessity of time for this people. They are need to be guided by someone, perhaps through this poems of guidance, of light to move with confidence and courage to survive the trauma, fear and anxieties felt by them from an imperial white supremacist society. I am sure none can get out of her inspiration-giving here, her lines feel that powerful and I feel to quote here the entire poem but I should consider the relevance too:

If they ask you if you’re white, say it depends.
 Say no. Say maybe. If appropriate, inquire,
 Have you always been white, or is it recent? (51)

And the final stanza;

If they ask how long you plan to stay, say forever.
 Console them if they seem upset. Say, don’t worry,
 you’ll get used to it. Say, we live here. How about you?(51)

There is surely an anti-White or anti-racist feeling lingering in the above lines. But it is not to attack the whites as a whole but those who blindly white supremacists and deadly racists. Anyway whatever comes here to infer is again the confusion to decide whether the poet is favouring American or Arab or both. As usual it is not easy exactly where she is standing. But rather than saying she does American it is easier to suggest her favour is to the Americans if that also consider Arabs in them. But for the time being, we can position her too in the hyphen as in our title even though she has not taken any choice to be in that, as my argument claims in the title. Let us reconsider this matter a little later.

“Whatever we do or don’t do may come to haunt us.”-starts with this her famous poem, “*Living in History*.” As powerful her idea is that the memory is the crucial thing and one has to live in it as he does in history. They are the most important aspects of anyone’s life as s/he carries her/his past(s) throughout their lives to future and so on. The word “remember” gets a vital stress even here when in one line she says, “And we may remember the generosity/ of light: how it travels through unimaginable darkness, age after age, to light our small human night.” But the word can only have a somewhat vague association with her idea of memory until one relate the “night” in the end to lack of knowledge- an illiteracy, rather. In fact it is used to denote the ‘kindness’ or just to be thankful/to know to the generosity of the light on man. The poem however more perfectly fit to her acknowledged collection, *Geographies of Light* in which she gives lights and guidelines, that to go or live well in any challenge or the like is possible for the human being with his humanity, the light within. Every poem in the book deserves equal importance when some are extraordinary in their fabric. Her claims on the whiteness as being a recent construction and America is also the Arabs’ land (as the immigrants who stay there has a claim to stay there at least), are themes which needs further elaboration.

However the metaphorical explanations will give us the above image of Majaj’s poems, they carry more symbols than words and phrases. It seems she has a passion to the word memory or ‘remember’ simply as she likes to be a silent protestor. She is very calm in her presentation and representation. From her poems both “Guidelines” and “Country” are two cites of her immediate 9/11 response(s). The last one is a big verse wherein she details how America has vilified the Arab, also left the people in different geographies homeless and hopeless alike and so

forth. She does blame neither America nor the Arabs, so deals her poems in diplomacy. Her claims on the whiteness as being a recent construction and America is also the Arabs' land (as the immigrants who stay there has a claim to stay there at least), are themes which needs further elaboration. She is much more realistic in revealing these two worlds for the things as they occurred in them, to show America is othering/ attacking/ accusing/ alienating and exiling her people, the Arabs and Muslims. She makes a mockery of the "God Bless America"- lyrics, by seeing American as weapon merchant, war monger, sponsor of tortures, assassins, dictators etc along with beautiful, good, brave and quencher of democracy. There are lot more to talk about Majaj's detailing of landscape and borders. Interestingly she quotes Tim Wise in the end of her poem to state that faith is the core of union/ a harmonious life in difference- "...the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us, and the light goes out." To add, even the very title of Majaj's collection has a "geography(ies)" in it.

"No" is, in her view nothing but gives its holder the dignity and she says, "the thorns of memory can't be eliminated" whereas the houses can be bulldozed and inhabitants killed. The negating , that is, saying No can be found as a prime protest slogan in any context of life, when Majaj uses it but there is a strong negation that is offered unto the enemies or upon whomever the antagonism is thrown, as in her "Claims." In this single short piece she not only criticizes the harem stereotypes also she stands against those made labels the whole Arabs have been confronting for more than decades. "Slippage" is my most favorite, in which she realizes herself, after her mother's death, her body is carrying a 'current of memory' and it is in way to feel regret of forgetting her own name. She also recognizes that she has to hold the legacy of her mother's despair in past, indeed she is the one who carry the same legacy, of which she has been haunted till then. This poem perfectly draws on Majaj's idea of memory and my title's regarding of her verses. To substantiate, I have termed memory/remembering and regret collectively as 'haunting' according to my own theoretical understanding. In my view simply there exist both the elements in haunting, may be regret is not always there in it as a pretext. Also haunting is directed mostly to the past, if it is about the future, the anxiety and the like caused it must have a relation to the person's past whom it is associated. To conclude, it is significant to refer to the poet's enthusiastic suggestion to 'remember' as to keep on remembering to do away with the

challenges, to do with the happiness or whatever the aim may be, therefore remembering becomes a remedy, I argue.

Mohja Kahf and the “Twin-Tower” Metaphor

In her commentary on Kahf’s *Emails from Sheherzad* Majaj speaks how the latter uses her collection to show spirituality and life as supreme things to be considered. She says that the “religion and ethnicity and colour and nationality are as nothing in the face of simple humanity; that spirituality and life are beyond all of these; that no creed or ideology may be taken as justification for harm.”²⁰

Kahf’s post 9/11 “representational politics,” Koegeler states, “may be born out of desperation against a threatening homogenous majority discourse about Muslim women, but at the same time she rises from the ashes to take up her work as a cultural mediator who offers new perspectives to Muslim and other American women. (72) Kahf’s ability is beyond comments whereby she brings the effect of 9/11 for both its eventual and effectual terms as in her “We Will Continue Like Twin Towers.” The very first stanza itself is an instance;

“Maybe they had never met before they flew / Through the last air, the woman and the man / Who held hands and leapt together / from the burning tower / of the World Trade Center. (83)

This stanza could, I feel, both be imaginary and realistic alike simultaneously. When it merges Kahf’s last lines, “twin towers in my sight,/ who jumped into the last air hand in hand.” Is to refer how her people have been living as both dependent on each other and independent as the man and woman in the poem who walk over the death’s debris of Beirut. Being dependent their life, Kahf claims has been fragile whereas it had some happy moments too to make it beautiful. Whatever the case may be, it is their union to be together for future too, not only with their own people twins, but also those neighbor whites who stay near to them, and to whom they consider

²⁰ Majaj traces this as the ultimate message of Kahf’s collection is appeared in the back cover of the latter’s collection, *Emails from Sheherazad* (Florida UP: 2003)

their twin-like. The narrator's voice is full of anxiety and hope alike. s/he is filled with a mixture of feeling; there is sadness, hope, trouble, and worry in it- I think this fusion is a deliberate make up by the poet to show the unpredicted and confused positions of both the Arabs and Americans after the 9/11. This very confusion of one's own state regarding the future etc, in this case, the feeling of anxiety felt by any Arab American is shown beautifully by Kahf in her shortest verse named- The Fires Have Begun. Other important poems which narrate 9/11 and aftermath include; "The Skaff Mother Tells the Story", "The Passing There" and "Learning to Pray All Over."

Kahf's conspicuous remark seems to be that of her engaging more with the female characters in her poems; there is often a "she" or woman prominent in most of her lyrics, which also adds to her 'feminist' accomplishments. e soon regained into its routine as if no attacks or violence had occurred. So 'everything changed' image of the 9/11 aftermath by the critics should be retold into a 'something remain unchanged.'

Kahf was born in Damascus 1967. May be for this reason her poetry is overfed with dream of return, the feel of one's home in exile. The narrator of her poem, "The Cherries" asks, "what happen to a child who can no longer speak the language of your mother?" (14) So there's a homecoming-returning theme that she represents with the help of various metaphors. In many instances, she uses 'dust' as a metaphor for the *voyager- still-carrying-his/her home*. They are not reluctant to show their rage and anger, and their provocations are visibly addressed to whoever they aim them at. These two states, I argue, should cooperate to create a better poet often. Kahf's ability is beyond comments whereby she brings the effect of 9/11 effectively to show its impacts on her people in her shortest poem as:

There is a World Love Centre inside my ribcage
 There is a World Hate Centre inside me too
 The fires have begun. The fires have begun,
 And I don't know which one
 Is going to crumble first. (84)

I cannot help saying there is no poet who expressed this best about what exactly the Arab

Americans had felt in days after September 11. This is perfectly applicable to any Arabs in America like Kahf, who tries to make the new world the home but simultaneously do not want to completely abandon the old. Their condition is to love and hate America. She/ the narrator does not know which feeling is to going to “crumble” first, is to refer the Arab-Americans in the immediate aftermath of the attacks were confused to decide on this choice for which they had to wait for the counter-terrorist mission of the US, so that they would be sure of whether they may go to the ‘enemy’ position. Interesting is that their feelings have a correlation with their ‘oscillating’ identities in diaspora in such challenging situations.

Melhem and the New York Poems

D.H Melhem, one of the most noted Arab American poets, is very direct and stern. In “*September 11, 2001, World Trade Centre, Aftermath*”, she has tried her best to narrate the how’s of it. The poet/ narrator is the one in it who is walking on the subway with a loaded heart and hurt skin. As it shows her shock, wonder, struggle and fear regarding the incident happening, the poem can be easily felt as a sympathy not that melt in shock for the victims rather than a response or protest etc as the above writers did. In what she brings about the New York’s destruction, the ‘unchanged’ and ‘changed’ ways of American life. These contribute to their verses to be maturely composed unlike just beats and bits of noisily poured emotions. At the same time they are not unsuccessful to show how intense they might be in rage, provoked and the like. These two states, I argue, should cooperate to create a better poet often. As it shows her shock, wonder, struggle and fear regarding the incident happening, the poem can be easily felt as a sympathy not that melt in shock for the victims rather than a response or protest etc as the above writers did. May be it is the way Melhem wanted to put it. This gap of protest is filled in her next poem in which the earth speaks that “all life deserves respect.” This is a powerful epilogue to the first whereby she shares us great universal lessons like, “share your crusts of bread- /loaves will multiply.” Also it is where she blames none but every human being for their mutually inflicted sufferings and their creed being vengeance and greed, the guiding law, in order to claim the love as the “sternest prayer.” Melhem, perhaps different from other poets mentioned, has written a collection about the post-9/11 New York named *New York Poems*. Her way is stern and direct that effectively imparts her feelings about the 9/11, to respond to its

media broadcast. She sounds overwhelmingly in grief when expressing the ‘how’ of the event. In some poems but, she plays the role of a protester who establishes some universal claims on life, human greed etc. she is of the opinion that “all deserves respect.”

Now the 9/11 and its aftermath contextualized these writers to do respond/re-present/draw of the same case. Then they became the defender of their own tradition and culture, also critically or emotionally responded to its hostility towards the Arabs/Muslims in U.S. Whatever their contributions can be seen either as an addition to or against the neo-oriental document of the country. My study will inquire whether the Arab American women poetics/ Arab American poetics in general have to yield to the Neo-oriental practices, or do they stand for themselves (that is do the Arab American’s literature in America stands for and represent Arab American in its entirety).

Generally women are witnesses than victims of terrorism of any kind especially those external and internal violence and trauma. It is not different for the Arab Americans. Among their men becoming targets of violence, even when there are cases, may be reported or not, of women’s rights violations too, the women, most often, have to witness the war like situations. In my view, witnessing torture is more traumatic than being a victim of it. It is important to see whether the Arab American women poets have addressed their issues in war-like situations. We should also inquire whether they were like Sondos Shabayek, the Egyptian writer-cum-activist who introduced her “Vaginal Monologues” immediately after the Egyptian revolution, surprisingly taking it as time to deal with a more political issue (i.e., gender) than her contemporary political aggression. She, as an activist, then considered the gender inequality the men and women in Egypt are part and victims of as the biggest challenge be the foremost issue. Likewise, whether our mentioned poets have taken the 9/11 and it’s after era to space their poems or works in general, to re-question their cultural clash with the diaspora, or the Westerners, will be also part of my concern.

When Hamed, Naomi, and Majaj play with their diction just mixing up two languages, its purpose might be to show either their love to both or to celebrate the cultural diversity. Kahf openly shows this linguistic-othering also confronting it with her clever attitude of capturing

English to yield to her play with it/wish to do whatever she wants with it as a writer of it (English). The poem “Copulation in English” imparts a powerful voice over English’s impure existence since it is coupled, and has no existence of its own. Kahf’s lines are both reactionary and revolutionary: “we are going to make English love us...English will have to learn what to say to please us...”, and “...after this night of intense copulation, we may slaughter English in its bed and redeem our honour, even while pregnant with English’s bastard..”. these lines along with some in Arabic, and the poet’s reference of many other languages to down the acclaimed position of English although it is unavoidable adds to Kahf’s greatness.

The land-body interconnection is significant for any ethnic or non-ethnic writers despite of their nationalities. The feel for one’s self and body can moreover be a feel for one’s land, landscapes and cultural roots. Such comparison and claiming of one’s land through her body or the reverse, I argue, is a new way of self-identification. And we have all our poets done such a task so nicely and worth mentionable here is some poems: “My Body is Not Your Battleground”(Mohja Kahf), “What I Will”(Suheir Hammed), “Those Whom We Do Not Know”(Naomi Shihab), “Earth Speaks”(D.H); “Guidelines” and “Claims”(Lisa Suheir Majaj). Hence the two metaphorical bodily associations- earth’s and female/male body’s found in the above poems in their best establishes the inseparable inter relations of both land and body/landscape and ‘body-scape’ so that in a way one’s claim for her body can also be her demanding her land and vice versa.

Kahf compares her body with the land, to find a parallel between them. She ends up making them similar and synonyms to attack on the soldiers in western and eastern fronts asking them to withdraw. It is just like she asks them to take away their hands from her (the narrator) own body. The refrain occurs in every first line stresses her hatred to war/ illegal occupations and violence. She says she has not given permission to the soldiers or the attackers to be there in her body/ land, and asks, if “Has God, then given you permission.” (59)

However the above women poets are not the writers of exaggeration. They write more in real terms, or try to show, I assume the things as they are or need to be. For this reason they can be collectively called as the ‘practitioners of modesty.’ Being ‘modest’ is their way simply

because they can't just sit either silent or outrage with noise when their 'images' are in disguise, when they are 'reflecting' in others' eyes unreal/ the ways they are not. They cannot just sit and waste time admiring trees when all such happens around them.

These are then some ways they live their life, these are some modes they articulate themselves. The collective consciousness these women possess, the mutual trust they share, and their belief in unison, all helped not only to encourage the Arabs in U.S but also enriched their status quo and literature. Since when all these efforts started winning, the Arab-Americans have been visible as never before.

This literature is not a counter space against the oriental narratives alone. The *difference* of the Arab American women from that of American women, also from the Arabs must not be seen to separate them from the latter(s). In a sense, they have choices given to remain whatever and wherever they wish, but at the same time the external politics and cultural enforcements that assign them various positions cannot be underestimated. And in that they are forced to adapt themselves as per the situational variations, if not asked to assimilate. The politics of their identity, like the very ambiguity residing in the complex of their *identity* itself, also invites connotations. Anyway whatever differences make them *different* in the U.S. they utilize it as creative tool for their literary and cultural expressions.

Observing the immediate aftermath and parallel immediate women (Arab-American) responses of the 9/11, we see all they have one big aim- to propagate oneness and love, their collective sense of a togetherness, and the world to be one despite of peoples' differences etc are indicatives of their call for a universal love and peace. None of them hesitate to reveal what they exactly feel about the crisis at the same time giving a critical study of their cultural identities under siege.

Chapter II

Between Roots and Taproots: The Trope of ‘Hyphenated Arab-American Woman’ Revisited

This chapter serves to a larger extent, a supplement to the first. The post 9/11 literature and its writers, as we saw before, have helped to confront anti-Arab or anti-Arab American stereotypes. Everything changed along with their burden as authors and critics of the incident (9/11) that had sought to deflect terrorism charges targeting them. With a somewhat equal emphasis and burden, they had also to point out their fellow Arabs from the Middle East facing ‘historical injustices’ by U.S foreign policy.²¹ Hence the Arab American authors have had to go with two main duties, which include firstly deal with ‘domestic’ issues that they have to undergo in American lands, and in the second, of their homelands. And hence being dealt with a wide range of themes extending to cultural, religious, racial and political, and going beyond and beneath borders this literature has become stronger. It is then apt to say that the 9/11 offered the maturation to the contemporary Arab American literature.

In this regard, various stereotypes have been dismantled by Majaj, Kahf, Naomi, Suheir and Melhem. Nevertheless this deed remains to be any Arab American author’s primary concern, all this join finally toward the related issue of identity that means deconstructing the anti-Arab stereotypes seeks in them a re-establishment of one’s identity. It is moreover, aimed at renewing or washing the dust from their identity’s layers that had been labelled and re-labelled with misrepresentations and misunderstandings about their community. Here this assessment reinforces the fact of the identity being the most vital concern for the Arab-Americans.

Never fully assimilated: *Arab-American* as identity of Resistance

²¹ The Middle East and other Arab territorial issues always remain one of the most concerns of the Arab American authors. The term ‘historical injustice’ can better replace the case of Palestinians is an example.

As we saw, the task of assimilating to the white/ American culture was not that easy for this community except for the Christian Arabs, who found themselves negotiable that reasoned from the American concern for their religion. In order to get ‘recognized’ this community, from the beginning, has been in clash with the American requirements of naturalization. Naturalization is that process by which U.S citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after she or he fulfils the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act.²² Many of them adopted white labels for the same benefits whereas some remained with a ‘No’ to it. The fully assimilated seldom got the benefits of the ‘natural’ or so-called white people remains still an irony regarding to the question of assimilation. The unassimilated however, were willing to go with their ancestral roots as hyphenated with that of their new land, such as, a Palestinian-American, Syrian American and so forth until a time when there was no much “clash of civilization” was happening. With the increasing anti-feeling toward the ‘Arab’, ‘Middle Easterner’, and ‘Muslim’ in later years of twentieth century, these people come forth to the forefront to witness and proclaim their ‘Arab-ness’ or mainly ‘Arab-American-ness.’

The intent of their predecessors, mainly the Al-Mahjar²³ authors has been renewed by which they become agents of informing and transforming about the Arab Americans, or the Arabs in general to the US audience who have been “illiterate” about them. It is not the nationalism only helped the Arabs to challenge the “100 percent Americanization movement”²⁴ and its impacts, but there has been terrible necessity to meet against the neo-colonial trends that revitalized the stereotypes and made the Arabs marginalized again. The neo-colonial trends as suggested in Naber’s work, involves the popular culture stereotypes that often have much to do with their real entities. America, with its power of language and technology, with its supremacy in making pedagogies etc, easily finds ways to maintain the orientalisation up to its own likes and dislikes is not less than a neo-colonial trend.

²² <https://www.uscis.gov/us>.

²³ The most popular and one of the primordial Arab-American writers’ group in U.S. this establishment is said to have paved ways and opened new doors of recognition to the Arab-American literature. The word stands for “the immigrant” in Arabic.

²⁴ It is a move from American officials to make all whites, so Americanized. This trial to achieve and construct a 100% whiteness and American-ness must have frustrated the ethnic blacks and yellow people in the country, of which the Arab-Americans took Arab-nationalism as a counter deal. There were “Americanizations” done in different periods among which this was most controversial and strident. It was repudiated in 1920s.

As many critics claimed, the America made the Arabs most visible community in post-9/11 world. This being made visible is not least resolved the Arab issues in US, rather this way of dealing with the Arabs/ Islam, as they did in case of the Sikhs after the Oak Creek Massacre²⁵ in 2012, surely will complicate the ambiguous layers constructed upon Orientalism by the Westerners. And so, the community was in need for making themselves visible, and what they have had to do nothing unless they express who they are, where they come from and the like. Therefore it is plausible to say that this literature/ community's resistance proved to have changed the face of the Occidental notion about them.

Consequently it becomes the identity of Resistance. It is then plausible to think the resistance is vitally necessitated with the struggling circumstances the Arabs undergo as part of their marginalized positions. This resistance is not different from what Said proposes; he terms it as a "voyage in" which refers to looking for spaces inside or within the imperial culture or ideology, or more specific to the American example a dominant discourse or narrative, towards a counter narrative. And for Said himself the idea of identity is always based on the 'self- other' relations. But it does not mean to overestimate one's self over the other by excluding it. One should then able to become inclusive and humane in his thought so as to believe and respect difference, but not to alienate it from the multitude of culture, religion, and tradition. It not only invites one to think about one race- that is human, but also to avoid "the almost inevitable division of humanity into 'us'(Westerners) and 'them'(Oriental)." If this be his idea of human liberation, this should also get a space in the core of Arab American writers' resistance. The resistance, based on the above norms, refers to an effort of 'writing back' that Said proposes to counter the so-called oriental or colonizers' imperial discourse/ narrative in which no truth about the other become primary. It is also a historical participation that is to change the phase of history by re-shaping it with true representations.

Hence Said and his book unabatedly exist as a voice for the Palestinians and for any oppressed in general, have been appearing in the Arab American course of life and literature.

²⁵ A white supremacist shot and killed six people attending religious services at the suburban Wisconsin Sikh Gurdwara. And it is said the Sikhs were mistakenly taken by the shooter for their similar attires to that of Muslims.

That is why many of our poets mirror his notions consciously or otherwise. We should not forget to consider Fanon's quote in the beginning to reflect upon the above claims also to reflect upon the cores of this chapter.

The name 'Arab-American' adopted by many was aimed to protest the anti-Arab and similar mentalities of some Americans. Majaj in her criticism seeks to establish that employing resistance to Arab American literature will impart 'new directions' to the marginalized community. (67) No doubt this literature becomes an art of resistance in its new re-establishment in which many women authors participated than their male counterparts. Safa'a also attempts to make this point clear in her study of Arab American poetry as a tool for resistance.

As part of such participations and contributions include mainly of the female poets of our study. Suheir Hammed, for instance, has been popular for her protesting poetry, hip-hop style to further motivate her resistance, and her movie representations. She identifies herself to be an Arab/ Arab-American, an American Other like Mexicans, Asian Americans and African Americans. More specifically, her positioning herself as a Black is so political that offers her protest towards the Palestinian displacement. Naomi Shihab won fame for her not-here-not-there position, where she likes to remain to be an American than 'Arab with a hyphen' or one American with a hyphen. It is interesting to seek this sort of space to live, which I see her way of articulating her 'protest.' Kahf is calm in her ways but observing herself as a Muslim in public than Arab or American. She is very bold in her stance whereas Melhem often affirms her American-ness. Majaj is not outside the protesting poets. She is always already there to show her philosophical and universalized art of living. She suggests a somewhat clear description of where these Arab American poets go leaving their country/ old homes behind will also supplement to my own arguments in this chapter:

We need not stronger and more definitive boundaries of identity, but rather an expansion and a transformation of these boundaries. In broadening and deepening our understanding of ethnicity, we are not abandoning our Arabness, but making room for the complexity of our experiences. (5)

Abinader's finding is not just revealing these poets' unwillingness to thrust into one identity alone that may be fixed upon them as definite by the circumstance or force. What they prefer

instead is to transgress boundaries of identity and ethnicity in order to explore beyond their own ethnic origin by considering the complex of Arab and other ethnic experiences. They are never putting their Arabness aside in the above deed needs to be underlined to stress how the Arab-Americans make themselves adaptable to the new worlds simultaneously respecting theirs' own.

This chapter is not less than a formal query to show how the given authors have used their poems to cite their choice of living a different life, including their protest against violence and injustice, for which they undertake a position in between two worlds, or in the hyphen bridge that connect them to both the worlds. Now let us go ahead to read their verses and prose in order to trace out whence and where they have mentioned this choice, along with tracing elements of resistance if any exists in them.

Before proceeding further, let me be clear in my argument, that they have the privilege of choosing *none* or living *neither* when the option to be an Arab-American is always already available. In such a case they are slightly reluctant to prefer one over another, but speak for both or whoever (Arab/ American) is facing oppression or trouble, mainly whoever needs to be spoken for. This attribute becomes a necessity- an additional cloak to wear for the poets. And in my view, it also causes them to be in the hyphens.

In her research Safa'a undertakes a similar idea of hyphenated Arab-American women. She says, poets like Adnan, Nye, Kahf and Hammad have "extended themselves across both words and cultures, drawing on both, yet developing their new diasporic multi-layered perspectives; neither are these perspectives Arab, nor are they American." (20) I can agree with her definition of the hyphenated position lies in the very first sentence here, meanwhile the terms "neither" and "nor" towards its end, to proclaim the 'no-Arab-ness' and 'no-American-ness' that she attributes to the very Arab-American genre or literary or other perspectives cannot be blindly taken for its 'truth.' There is a much scope for an "either" which I would rather propose to define the case. This can be a "both" too. Meanwhile Safa'a's statement that the mentioned poets do not identify as exclusively Americans or Arabs can fit her 'neither'-'nor' frame very aptly whereby such will provide the exactness of the idea upon which it is used.

Safa's bases her arguments upon Gloria Anzaldua's idea of *nepantla* which literally means "in-between space." As per Anzaldua's explanations, the term stands metaphorically for a "forbidden knowledge, new perspectives on reality", and "alternative ways of thinking." (2) Moreover it is a liminal/ in-between space that facilitates transformations, and opens up one's identity categories to compel him/ her find new ways to define them. But this 'alternative way of thinking' or perceiving not to refer only reverting or subverting something to make it new or apparently changed in attire, so "forbidden" in a sense. What instead I propose is that the word reserves more elaborations, in that it covers what Judith Butler speaks about the poetry collection about Gitmo tortures.²⁶ The book was censored and survived it later that includes poems by the Guantanamo tortured victims, of which a major part was excluded. (Butler 55) This may be the most real pasteurizations of the torture the writers of such poems have experienced, adding a new perspective then, but not passed out in publication, so forbidden to the public. Apart from the literal 'nepantla' sense this instance negotiates, one can take its definition of "liminality" to imply the same.

Coming again to the poets, who remained "unassimilated," not favouring Arab over Americans or vice versa, I stress the 'no-where' or sometimes 'with-both' but 'never-with-the-terrorists' or the imperial US regime and white supremacists' positions in order to put them in the hyphens. In my view, these poets are not hyphenated; they are those who *prefer* hyphens to live in, instead. Further, I argue that this hyphen is not at all a symbol of how much they belong to the Arab *and* American sides, so not worthy to be stressed as it's conjunctive tag. I would call it (the hyphen) as a 'small bridge' in which the journey of the Arab American poetic *being*²⁷ can easily speak for/ against and the like about both simultaneously, by which they can have a claim on both. And thus this bridge is safe for them to choose but more challenging as if it was made of thorns. In addition to these, I would quite go with Safa's additional thesis of a hyphenated position where from the poets articulate themselves as pointed out just before.

²⁶ Mark Falkoff, ed., *Poems from Guantanamo: the Detainees Speak*, 2007. "Gitmo" is a term by the U.S. military for Guantanamo Bay

²⁷ The word is to suggest what Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time*) says, a being with small 'b' refers to the situational (positional) beings of any individual, in philosophical terms, the term is an outcome of what comes after letting the man fall to a temporal space (of time/ dotted in a linear progressive history).

I would like to mention Stuart Hall's second definition of cultural identity to associate this Arab American women's positioning towards what he defines as 'cultural identity' that it is "not an essence but a positioning. Hence there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position..."(226) Contextualizing this particular notion into the acts of them also by invoking the 9/11 in their poems definitely enjoys a vital purpose, which is a kind of identifying by themselves, in Hall's words, with the "unstable points of discourses of history and culture."(226) Thus, one's cultural identity is often in flux. Hall's idea is simple and easily comprehensible for any who thinks about his or her life, form, roles etc changing with the world's transformations. Anyway for the Arab-American women too, the case is not otherwise. In our selected poems regarding 9/11 and aftermath, the renewed theme was from most of the above poets was that of Palestine. The Palestine issue, like that of Iraq, Syria or any Arab countries, seems most vitally a responsibility for them. Safa, Koegeler and Salaita make similar arguments too. Issues like that never let the Arab-Americans to support the US and its policies ever in their life. And they are the tools by which the Palestine-supporters can question this imperial U.S. governance.

Frankly my intent is not to measure each poet's intensity of their love/ hate of this and that country. That will be foolish indeed to do so. My aim goes on to read the poets' reflections of their love/support (or even hate) to Palestine, America, Mexican, African and other ethnic-Americans etc through their poems especially written after 9/11. This will be done through observing themes like "home", "resistance", "trauma", "memory and "remembering", etc in selected poems of the above authors. There lies an inter-connection between these thematic concepts and one's political life. Clearly they would be indicating us for what these authors stand for, what their lives mean to the US, and their own community.

It is rather arguable whether the Arab Americans can easily make America their home or if yes, to what extent it is possible to be fully an American. We have already mentioned how it is impossible for them to be "whites" or "white-like" even in a racial hierarchy. It would be very difficult for any of these people, not unlike other coloured ones to match their personalities, especially physical/biological with the so-called conditions of an Americanization. But at the same time, America giving free space of expression and free life to some of the Arabs who have been in suffocation in their homelands cannot be unabated. And in such conditions people must

have found America an easy home. Meanwhile, for some who have been in clash with this predominantly racial regime, also concerning the above ambiguous appearance of Americanization, for instance which has been always set against the hyphens of the hyphenated beings, the American freedom remains a myth. For my belief, it is with such personal dilemmas, the Arab-American has become necessitated with his/ her hyphenated entity.

Between Two Homes- the Home *within*

Many immigrants and their offspring, like Naomi finds the United States as most welcoming to anyone stays there, or go for a visit or so. While travelling to Washington DC from an airport with an immigrant taxi driver, she found him wearing the same hat she had bought from Pakistan, and she was thinking herself, “This is life in this country. I love it so much.” Elnajjar reports Naomi’s this interesting remark in her essay. (28) In her “letter to any would-be terrorists” that was penned immediately after the September attacks, Nye writes:

I am humble in my country's pain and I am furious...not only did your colleagues kill thousands of innocent, international people in those buildings and scar their families forever, they wounded a huge community of people in the Middle East, in the United States and all over the world. If that's what they wanted to do, please know the mission was a terrible success, and you can stop now. (28)

Now see here Naomi’s possession- “my country” in the above extract. I think, she never claimed her as an Arab. Instead, she did it about her American-ness many times. This is appreciated that these authors do voice their claims over a great country so that they proclaim their belonging to the very banner ‘American.’ But at the same time her mind is stuck toward the troubling Palestinians from where her father and grandmother have their roots, and her idea of Islam as a peaceful religion and so forth makes her a peace lover and anti-war activist. She has a visible affinity to the language of brutality and killing, and therefore she is against the terrorists who do things in the aim of a complete destruction. Informing about the ‘would-be-terrorists’, a term she used due to her hatred to the word ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist’, she wanted to show it was not the innocent immigrants who were the terrorist, but the later is different from people of innocence, or simply the whole Arabs cannot be blamed for what has happened. Her position is disturbed by

her between-ness to both the Palestinian refugees in her neighbourhood and the Americans. So the responsibility she undertakes here is to suggest who her people or the Arabs are or who are they not against a sect of violent people. Her attack against terrorist continued in “All Things Not Considered,” where she criticized wars conducted in the name of religion, which is ‘holy’ in its usual sense. She refuses to call them holy by saying:

No one was right
 Everyone was wrong
 People make mistakes for decades
 Everyone hurt in similar ways
 At different times. (133)

“In what language is this holy?” she asks by narrating real post war incidents and scenes from the Palestinian front. Images she brings include one father burying his four month old girl weeping, “I spit in the face of this ugly world”, the Jewish boy who was shot in the cave, homeless children and refugees, silent Jewish and Arab women in fear etc. Her criticism seems sharp-edged when she asks to have a new religion if such incidents were holy as being performed in the name of religion.

Majaj seems not to be a dreamer, but consciously dreaming about the home, old memories and the like in case she felt disappointed in the new place. This living in imagination somehow gives her a solution to make this land her home, not by just feeling there ‘homely’ out of a nothing but she ‘carries’ her old home to this place, with herself and within her so that she could make that feel so real. The passion felt is enough to remove her ‘unrest of exile’ and her act is symbolically to ‘bring’ her home to her new world. Even though the feeling of ‘unrest’ pervasive throughout her poems, the ways she deconstruct the hope and despair simultaneously to enlighten- to give light to (as in her title, *Geographies of Light*) those frustrated, distracted and ruined souls of any post-war worlds.

She is in search for her own roots, her belonging and a map of her home. The intimacy one felt so to her home is represented in many of her verses nonetheless its visible tints are there

in *Night Sky* and *Guidelines*. In the latter, which is no doubt her masterpiece, the stanza below in which shown this old-home-invocation is:

geography's twisted strands, the many colors /of struggle. No matter how far you've come,
remember:/ the starting line is always closer than you think. (73)

It is important to note that by home she does not mean to establish the old home in new as the former was or seems to be. Instead she is trying to claim that America is land of Arabs too. So asking for this 'new' space, or believing to make America her and her peoples' home, like Detroit, Mission Viejo, Topeka to mention some place she 'claims' as her or Arab home is just to indicate her right to be an American too.

Hammad invoking June Jordan in her title, "Born Palestinian, Born Black" is an instance that expressing her double entity at a time. The position will confirm what Jordan speaks in her own poem about this "ever-present moment of occurring, of being both things at once" (Ali 93). Jordan's poem is being invoked by Hammad in her preface to "born palestinian, born black" has a political purpose:

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
and where are my loved ones?
It is time to make our way home. (11)

Even though her voice is gloomy in the above lines, it is not just a going back to her home she means to express. As she says in the very preface itself, she does not believe in manmade borders, and want to push and challenge herself with words, labels and definitions. For her challenging the labels and definitions is obvious from the various ascriptions she attributed to the word "Black" here. (12) Her support for the oppressed is often expressed in everywhere of her lines, and in this preface too when she says:

Why do I write? Cause I have to. Cause my voice, in all its dialects, had been silenced too long. Cause women are still abused, as naturally as breath. People are still without land. Slavery exists, hunger persists and mothers cry. My mother cries. Those are reasons enough, but there are many more. (11)

Very interesting, see the words like, ‘still’, ‘persist’ and some simple present verbs used above. They all reflect what Hammad believes, that life stays basically the same despite the changes and upheavals. She claims herself carrying her home within her along with everyone and everything. And more proudly she says “I am with me wherever I go” and more importantly “essence is one and eternal. (11) And her intent seems to establish this last statement to show that how that sameness and ‘unchanged’ essence being run by many paths of its history by also using it as a one to walk and talk about past and future. She never wants the history or labels or words to be chosen for her, she wants to trace out the history of them in order to get her freedom to choose for herself. “I decide what it means to be me, here and now. No one else can”, she adds. (12)

These ideas of her self-identification and introspection, which also gets their clear expression in her later collection, “Breaking Poems”, Suheir uses as a way to know her own inner self along with a going toward her old home not literally. Being an oral poet, who recites her hip hop poems, also a wonderful actress in her own movies, she wins popularity inside the States. And this benefit of having a large audience she uses to inform, enlighten, and transform people regarding their notions of Arabs, especially Palestinians. There will not be any other Arab American female poet who made herself a lifetime activist for Palestinians. Like Naomi and Majaj she too has got a passion to talk about her own native land. Poem she believes as family itself, when she said “there is a country in your heart where story lives and poem comes from. No one can occupy it” (Hammad 10). This blood-merged relation of poem/story and human being is the manifestation of her eco-friendly attitude. In the next page itself, she changes this home (family) metaphor into a higher level by establishing the following; “Home is within me, I carry everyone and everything I am with me wherever I go. Use my history as the road in front of me, the land beneath me. Paths are many, but essence is one and eternal” (11).

Mohja Kahf’s books are full of Syria and Syrians. She is overwhelmed with her obsession not only with Syria but Islam too. She might have felt more out-of-place than.

Hammad, Nye and Melhem for her Muslim attire in US. To be frank, this must add to her feelings of her home. One may think she never felt US less than hostile to her. But it is not the case. She appears to be the most freed woman like any white in her profession and other strands of life. Her mingling nature and sociability without ‘caring’ much about others prejudices and presumptions, makes her another famous Arab American women author.

In *Voyager Dust*, the term ‘dust’ becomes a major symbol that the refugee or the voyager carries across borders. This is to remind us the home within or one always seeking his home even he transform to other places and cultures. One’s heritage always matters no matter s/he goes whatever distance from the homeland. Likewise, the narrator’s mother has scarves that carry dust in them. It is to signify how it is impossible for the refugee/ immigrant to hold on without the help of her rooted culture, and here without the dust of such a memory, or a land’s debris. The feeling of rootedness and nostalgia is not only confined to this scarf- mother, but also held her children to fee their mother, and then of course the feel of her home as theirs too. It is how the heritage matters for generations to carry and hold on with their bodily or spiritual relations with a land:

We never knew
 It was voyager dust, It said:
We will meet again in Damascus,
In Aleppo. We will meet again.
 It was Syria in her scarves.
 We never knew it
 Now it is on our shoulders too. (1)

How much this old-new homes come together to make one happier in the new or wherever he is taken is expressed in many of Kahf’s poems. And the voyager metaphor is too common to many of her verses, as in “The Skaff Mother Tells the Story”, “Word from the Younger Skaff”, “The Roc” etc. The Arab pilgrims are happily surviving in the new world. There is a kind of adjustment they can do with everything, may be they are forced to adjust with such. But this way of life makes them adapted to any circumstances because they try to make the new world their

new home. As any human being tries to do- wherever he goes he makes it home or try to feel homely therein. But the old home never disappear. That is where many of the Arab or any in diaspora have to live between two homes, or loving both sometimes conflated in the choice. Anyway for Kahf and her family it seems they love both as in her “The Roc”:

That’s mom
 laughing at the strange loaf of bread
 There’s dad holding up the new world coffee
 In its funny stripped boxes. That’s us,
 small, weightless, wobbly with the vertigo
 of the newly landed
 voyager. (9)

For the narrator’s father this new world needs more money to live. Her parents know nothing about how to open a bank account or how to grocery shop in America. So living in this world that is ‘strange’ to them need a kind of trouble and adjustment to practice toward a satisfied life. So the term she uses is the pilgrims’ “surviving” not “living.” The parents here make their new home, but not happy can they live without knowing about Syria. And the dialogues passing through telephones over lands far from each other makes an epic, Kahf says, “The phone call to Syria was for epic/ events only. The line pulsates/with the beating of enormous wings/ they shout and shout into the receiver/ as is the other end was a thousand and one ages away. Spiny talon / digs into rock.” (10) The poem was published in 1998. But whatever is portrayed in it as the experience of Syrian immigrants stand for any new immigrants in to the United States. There is a huge desire in them to know what is new about their old homeland even they just want to hear their relative and friends still back in their old homes to be happy in the new land. It does mean that they can hardly do without both. It is like as in Kahf’s terms, a spiny talon digging into a rock. It keeps on digging as if it will approach the extreme ends. It is a very hard task, but they are not weary of digging their pasts.

Safa’a situates Etel Adnan in her assumption of homeland as writing itself. For Adnan’s case this may work well whereas for the poets of my study, a ‘between’ space of old and new

homelands, or between two countries or more, will be their fervour toward writing. However, Safa'a's going with Aftim Saba, a physician and writer who interviewed Adnan about the latter's collection, *There*, can include what Naomi, Majaj and Suheir do as being at crossroads. Saba says that writing for such poets is "a meeting point between a historical moment and the private identity."(11)

Invoking Nature-Human/ Land-Body Relations in Diaspora: an Ecocritical Approach

Another way significant and commonly applicable to the Arab American poets is a kind of invoking nature in their poems. It is just more than praising the trees and natural beauty as in some mainstream genres. For the Arabs who are so much rooted to their lands, so the very natural resources, like that of Africans or any other people who are ethnically rooted and connected in their communal feelings, the aspect of humans' physical engagements with his nature becomes a relevant matter. Interesting in this case will be how this very eco-critical analysis done in a transnational setting, where most of these writers remain displaced, exiled, and 'out of place', as Said names it.

One's homeland itself consists of his nature or physical world. But what if s/he has to travel with it? It is the case of millions of diaspora people all over the world. Then "what Arab American writing may offer is doubled places: the diasporic place in the present time of the speaker or protagonist, and that other place which throws its shadow on the present, coming from memories of displacement and experiences of immigration."(Bujupaj 2) The relation of this people with their landscape/ nature/ homeland or whatever cannot be that of same and far different at the same time from that of normal inhabitants. My claim simply is that the normal theory of ecocriticism is applicable to them too. So my attempts here will show the connections of nature-human in some Arab American poems, also to trace out the very feeling of "connectedness" they feel with such invocations.

What Ecological criticism offers according to Glotfelty and Mendelson is "a set of critical approaches to literature that examine how literary works treat the relationship of humans to the physical environment, including the relationship of humans toward the rest of nature."(81) Besides many of Arab American poetic space could be read fully as occupied with the nature that

often represented with images of trees, which are special and seen widely in the Arab homelands. What is home and nature mean to a man/ woman who carry or plant a fig tree overseas? This will be answered with how such homeland and natural relations works out in exile, or in a place in the above case, the fig too is at out of its place.

As far as the genre of Arab American literature is concerned there will be hardly a writer/ author who never spoke about olive/ fig trees. Naomi Shihab, I would call her the “poet of trees” because of her populated poems with olive/ fig trees. Majaj sees her as tree, an olive struggling to bear the history’s fruit. She says she is “many rivulets watering a tree,” and “light” that swallows the moon whole. She brings the deep connection of a farmwoman to her soil, may be to narrate how much she owns her own the self and land (the origin).

The title poem “19 Varieties of gazelle” speaks about the elegance and grace of gazelle once reflected much in Arab poems, also it was a matter of pride for them. But now being misplaced or given a new home, the Arabs are scattered, and their unity in the homeland might have such impacts too. Their disappearance and then-invisibility in the new land may be what the narrator signifies by bringing the “leaping gazelle” here:

For years Arab poets used “gazelle”
to signify grace
but when faced with a meadow of leaping gazelle
there were no words. (87)

There is a sense of gain and loss in Naomi’s above lines. The grace of gazelle that had once enriched the Arab poetry is now lost because of the Arabs’ transnational migrations that have been in part caused by the political emergencies and wars in Middle East. The term “19 varieties” may be a reference to 19 Arab countries or provinces of which people were to travel overseas either forcibly or out of their choices. In effect, what is disappeared from their lands, the people themselves in large numbers, here signified by the very “gazelle” have become Arab with a hyphen- may be Arab-American, British-Arab, or the like. so what the poem symbolizes is also about the “lost” of gazelle into not only America but also to Arab-American literature. Perhaps it is not a lost in its literal sense; it is a ‘new gazelle’ like a ‘fig’ being planted in

overseas as I mentioned elsewhere. This obvious connotation is there in the poem's end, "gentle gazelle/ dipping her head/ into a pool of silver grass. (88) In addition to the gazelle-Arab connection in the poem, other images are also brought to indicate the exile position. The term "silver grass" in above stanza can have two or three meanings. In my assumption it is to indicate either the dislocated gazelle where she cannot fit herself, that means she has to eat silver grass instead of green is a symbol of the inconvenience but she has to do with it anyway situation. Other meaning can be that it is a mere poetic metaphor in which the colour of grass could be silver or golden due to sun's hue or the like. And in the third, it could be a land where green grass seldom found. I would like to prefer the first over second and third to make my assumptions to match with the following thought of this poem.

Naomi starts the poem saying "the elegance of gazelle/ caught in her breath." It is she herself the narrator, I feel. She is the one who is sitting in US and 'feels' and 'imagine' the Arabs' laments/ longing for their own relatives or friends in abroad, that the mutually heartfelt connection from which they find hardly an escape and, in every respect, both want to feel such in order to not lose their cultural ties. It is as if one tree is planted in Arab land and its fruit or leaves are there fallen in America.

Majaj in her "Cyclones and Seeds" depicts the survivors of war and other attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine as "winged seeds upon storm." (71) The soldiers who shot the young boy upon his rectum said he was died of a heart attack. The narrator asks, if one can believe them? She positions the victims of such violence seeking their right to life in front of guns or so, like one is shouting into the storm. What if one would talk even in louder as possible to a storm? The words will be swallowed as the wind does in rain. So the silenced will be 'heard' with one voice only, that of his/ her death's pain. She says justice cannot be silenced and the silenced also lights the "wounded earth." She says: "voices planted in darkness/ still sparks the wounded earth to light. (73)

The term "planted" means buried ones. The buried voices and bodies, that calls for their repressed freedom, in narrator's words, gives inspiration for those who live. And the living ones are responsible for the dead and vice versa. In that case there is a rootedness and responsibility

the generations and people of same periods share among them. The dead however ‘inspire’ the living to achieve what they could not. And in this case, the buried children, men and women of Palestine like lands and their suppressed wish to freedom comes in a “river of voice” that lead the living people including the narrator. And they bear them forward, the “winged seeds upon the storm.” (73) The term stands for the survivors of the violence than the unaffected ones. Images like “wounded earth”, “gouged-up earth” “blood in dust” “cyclones”, “storm” and “wind” etc adds to the ‘natural’ elements of this poem. However, the serious issues mentioned in its beginning cannot be deemphasized.

Her collection *Geographies of Light* is an attempt to excavate into the natural connections of human beings, also human to human relations. Being a Palestinian-American born in Iowa and brought up in Amman, educated in Beirut and Michigan and living currently in Cyprus, she is not exactly able to locate her own exclusive belonging. She is in fact searching for her own ‘map of belonging.’ She believes nature and memory as sources of one’s strength and survival. In the second part of this collection she mentions how memory will give you a kind of rootedness that can nourish yourself to live in hope in other places than yours:

Uprooted, any stalk or vine/ would wither and die. But if the taproot / is strong, a transplant can live. (23)

She is in dire search for memories so that she can find her taproots, to locate and imagine wherever her cultural identity is rooted. Finding her taproot this way is to be helped by it in her frequent sail through different geographies, “transplantations” in her own term. She cannot help feeling for the West Bank and Palestinian people’s tragic lives. Overwhelmed with it though, she is again trying to maintain the ray of light in her poems of this most politicized section of her collection, through a yearning for peace. So Palestine also enters into the map of Majaj’s life. She is yearning for peace, for the lost Palestine to be restored, and her voice is for those silenced Palestinians. A powerful message to come into peace and stop fighting and blaming each other is represented in simple metaphors as:

you cry, give us peace!
we cry, give us our lives!

peace grows like any other plant, on the land
it needs earth and water. (87)

We should rather take this collection for its spreading humanity and light to the people all around the world towards justice and peace, in lieu of thinking it as the poet's mere seek of her political identity through memories and nostalgia. No doubt Majaj is giving insights and hopes even in such and such horrible situations or spaces of a peace-less life only because of her hope in human being's essence- the humanity.

Majaj's frequent transplantations to various geographical spaces must have made her adaptable to anywhere, also to become a human lover than favouring one over another. This universal belonging never stops her query of her own taproots. And she is rewinding transplantation as the refugee does exile. May be the answer of her 'unsettled condition' never achieved here as the unrest still lingering and hiding in her wide gaped enjambments and other poetic techniques. But it seldom reduces her brilliance in taking us, the readers to various geographies, various lights and people. It is as if we could travel all the worlds mapped out by her we feel after reading her. This taking one to the exact environment makes her always unique. Hence this taking into environment also invites the aptly possible ecological study of her poems as detailed above.

What is unique about the above poets than their diasporic/ transnational stay is that they are often between two homes, between two countries or more. One is there and one is here. They both seem real and imaginary alike, the real one will denote their physical dwelling somewhere in US. Meanwhile the imaginary one will be in their memory and also colored or discolored according to the changes the Arab world undergoes. And this imaginary home they carry in their 'self' has always already a greater place. For this emphasis being mentioned throughout this chapter through elements of memory, exile, nature etc., that is anything related to home. Ultimately for them the "interior" and "exterior" worlds remain the same. More clearly one cannot separate their personal from political.(Ali 95).

It is to refer them carrying their old homes to the end of their lives, especially how they still witness to be the carriers of their homes-their home within. This method of viewing oneself through other lens that is the way of observing self in relation/ or opposition/ or in parallel to the 'other.' Here the other can be any non-ethnic American, even any Jewish set against the Palestinian and the like. In countering back or 'voyaging- in' they may not set apart the Americans in order to see themselves only. But they are well aware of their cultural identity being moulded in and among the multi-cultural web also they are 'displaced' and 'alienated' from the mainstream.

A mere writing back to challenge the shapes of history is not sufficient for the Arab Americans, rather they would expand their minds to the wider meanings of identity and ethnicity by penetrating through and through their various prisms and faces. By using the chapter title as such, my aim has been to trace out the between-ness of the contemporary Arab American poets, of which position I argue, they prefer for their articulations. The word taproot stands for one's main root, symbolically the old/ parental homes whereas the "root" will signify their new homes (in America). So, they travel throughout the worlds they can to explore the above deed. Meanwhile this is facilitated for many of them as pan-ethnic Americans in America itself. For instance Majaj having a Palestinian born in Iowa, brought up in Amman and educated in Beirut and so forth must be having a wider spectrum of her experiences, in every of these identities. So their 'changing' beings along with facilitating the previously mentioned space, they have troubles being inside the same space to trace out their exact taproots. It is ultimately confusing to state their exact favours and oppositions that whether they enjoy being American or an Arab-American. But at any rate it is also possible to speculate the existence of a choice for them to become hyphenated, for my assumption, I would like to suggest that they have 'chosen' this hyphen between their Arab-ness and American-ness in order to balance with their new world's flexible and rigid political stratagems. Thus all their acts are flavoured in and with their own politics to oppose or favour, or an in between- that is ultimately their position to remain an 'American' without surrendering their own traditions to the mainstream imperial and neo-colonial violations. Therefore being in between two countries, they are oscillating between their Arab and American identities, without disregarding their hyphenations at the same time. I feel as

reading Hammed and Majaj more, that they are making the world their home without losing their passion to the original one.

Chapter III

Reconstructing Arab/Muslim Sexualities: Towards the Praxis of *De-Orientalising* in 9/11 Arab/ Muslim American Poetry

In the beginning of this study we saw that the Arab/Muslim Americans have been portrayed in the Western media and public sphere as other, foreigner, and more importantly the ‘enemy-other.’ This image about the *other* was very simple for the US to construct facilitated with the neo-colonial and neo-global techniques. The “war on terror” and its implications were made to flag this *making* process, and the stereotypes, which came into being as part of some popular prejudices have consciously attempted to fulfil the imperial interests by some American officials, intellectuals and media upon the already marginalized other, i.e., Arabs/ Arab/Muslim Americans. Hence this process is holding on, that in turn produces a bulk of information that added to either construct or deconstruct orientalism, which has been layered over again and again with the above process continuation. There come the “9/11” or “war on terror” narratives of the Orient that make a new story of the old.

Clearly having the power and “knowledge” in hand, the US could replace the successful Occident who, as usual, defined the who’s and why’s of the Orient in its own view, pretending ignorance or with a less interest to know the truth. There was then one document that defined in dual terms the Occident and Orient, not differently from what Said noted in his work. And in the process what is done is silencing of the other to replace their voices, or the Occident has tried to manipulate things as they liked in order to speak of and for the Orient while their fame as superior, civilized and democratic etc. lie intact on the other side. So in history so constructed was formal and it prevented the Other’s narratives; Said explains it as a “danger of narrative” by which he means “the Occidental narratives about the Orient and the Arabs had got a complex form of risk when such narratives collate white media and political theories to produce a diminutive racial picture about the Arabs just as riding camels, with mean types of behaviour, just as producing terrorists or sheikhs who have big fortunes to spend on their lust for women and temporal enjoyment.”

As we go through books and journals about Arabs and Arab-Americans, there exists a great silence about the Christian Arabs except their easy assimilation to the US. It is as if they have been never Arabs once. I felt to speak about this here as I found their (Arab Christians) position to be the real ‘invisible’ here, because I have been curious to see while searching each and every related document, a mention about their lives in America. However this community has been most in number among the earlier Arab immigrants, also nearly half of the new ones, so they deserved a mention in Arab American studies. This is what made me think on such gaps.

Meanwhile, the ‘disappearance’ of the Christian Arabs into the American culture and religion was attributed to their similar traditional and cultural tastes with the latter. So they are, in my opinion, those who ‘lost’ in assimilation, those who disappeared inside and among the Americans/ whites. Thus they became “invisibles” within the most visible Americans. And their “in” position does not provide a space for them to be marginalized, and may be for this reason of their ‘easiness’ with their new life made them somewhat absent from the Arab-American academic framework. Also it may be behind the ‘turn’ of “Arab-American” to “Muslim-American.” And one when hearing the word “Arab-American” or “Arab” in general may be having this in him to think of Muslims than Christians. Even the reality is forced to be such since the Muslims were the most targeted as part of terrorist and other attacks even organized by non-Muslims. No doubt the Muslim-American or the Muslims in particular must be represented by themselves and should get a voice of their own in this current world wherein they are treated as “others”. They are in my words the Other among others. And this chapter details the Arab (Muslim) conditions in the United States after 9/11 along with their poetic reflections in Mohja Kahf, Suheir Hmamed, and Naomi Shihab Nye also theoretically supported by Said...etc.

The plight of the “most” visible: the Muslim Arab Americans

Perhaps the most challenging life in US is that of Muslims. From the wider ethnic and cultural varieties of Muslims in this country, they are similar in culture as an *ummah*¹ besides the Arabs seem to have enjoyed often a kind of vital position. But in fact the majority of Muslims here is not that from the Arabs against the so-called notion that all Arabs are Muslims so the

enemies of US and its progress. We are not quite unaware of the politics of ‘racializing’ Muslims in this country.

It would be more appropriate to state the “Muslim-America made visible” after 9/11 in lieu of the major critics’ say, “Arab-America made visible.” Besides the strategic shift the US made behind this making Arab-Americans to that of Muslim-American to target the last in particular, which has got manifested in post-9/11 realities, now the Muslims in this country become seen or visible at its peak as never before. This most visibility, in part was constituted by the Muslims’ own appearance and their attires to symbolize the Islam in them in forms of veils, beards, head scarves, and so on. Even then they showed what they are through external appearances, as part of keeping their culture wherever they are the US citizens and soldiers were in dilemma to distinguish among the Muslims, Arabs and Sikhs in turbans or with other kinds head wearing. The latter appeared less sensible when this went to even detaining/killing the Sikhs in the cities mistaking them to be Muslims.

Ever since Islam became a widely discussed matter among intellectuals, media and people all over the world especially after the 9/11 attacks, there had been a need strongly felt from the part of the concerned authors of this group, the Muslim/Arab Americans, to create their own narratives to counter the prevailing anti-Islam discourses along with an attempt of defeating American imperialism. But ‘writing Islam’ is more dangerous, in my view, than living as a Muslim in this country. Olwa quotes Khaled Mattawa who observes this precariousness as follows:

Who would want to read an essay titled ‘Writing Christianity’? ‘Writing Judaism’ might by now sound a bit dated, given that Jewish subject matter is the domain of some of this country’s greatest novelists and poets. ‘Writing Buddhism’ still has an appealing ring to it. ‘Writing Islam’ as a topic would not sound interesting to most Muslim authors in Muslim societies. In fact, ‘writing Islam’ could sound like a fundamentalist ploy to corrupt the thoroughly secular world of literature in contemporary Muslim societies. (109)

Mattawa’s point seems dated regarding the predicament the Muslims in America undergoes. One

can guess the problems of writing religion or talking about religion (by favouring it) in a place where secularism remains the sovereign. No doubt in America, the secular literature is always preferred over other kinds. May be part of this, there exist a tendency to *secularize* all that is possible to be attuned with this country's requirements of this and that. For instance, if you are a Muslim, who speaks for or against Islam, you may be categorized as a "progressive" or "liberal" Muslim, of course only if you 'criticize' Islam in the limits of *their* notions. More evidently such categories relish a negotiable existence in the American public realm, and those who denounce Islam are privileged. (159) This labelling, Kahf never entertains and she argues it would indeed reduce the "complexity of the Muslim community." She dares to openly establish herself against American foreign policy by revealing her love to Islamic traditions.

And what if you are not a conformist to such US policies and politics like Kahf? She was discouraged in her attempt as a Muslim American writer throughout her life. In her "Why I am not a Progressive Muslim," she recounts the experience of a US soldier saying that her stories on "Sex and the *Ummah*" were doing to her tradition what his gun was doing to Iraq. (Olwan 104) What I see from this is not less than the life in America to any Muslim to be on a spider web that asks him/her frequently to be "either with us or them" or to go back to where s/he comes from.

Meanwhile the challenging position of Arab Muslim/ Muslim authors in US goes on. But the scope of their writing against the so-called imperial and anti-Islamic narratives never ends. In the post-9/11 era, the American media and those white authors who support white supremacy over anything in the world, or those who advocated Christianity or the like over Islam have been trying to create an ocean to terrorize the latter. Their mission was anti-Islamic or even anti-Arab. As part of this accomplishment, they also got a wide publicity through and through the worlds so that the Islam, as we see, in recent times become a near synonym for ISIS. So this exacerbated the necessity of a counter-literature I want to name for those collective attempts by the American Muslim authors who have been trying to remove the layers of an imperial anti-Islamic veil in US. No doubt the growth of this sort of literature has been a threat to the so-called American secular literary canon, and especially to those writers who sought to entertain the antithesis between West and Islam in order to otherwise or remove Islam and therefore Muslims from the

onset of not only US, but from all over the earth. Among the generally misrepresented tenets of this religion, let's not talk about all except the gender thing, and other most important issues that have their reconfigurations done in poems of Kahf, Majaj and Hammad.

Said's Legacy Revisited

Notwithstanding the extreme popularity Said has achieved in the realm of post colonialism, he was one among those intellectual critics who spoke for the first time against the Orientalism of the West/ Europe. As we proposed in the first chapter the Arab American poets of any genre had to reflect Said in them and their works because of some special reasons. Before going to its details, we must remember his themes and 'theories' from his trilogy of *Orientalism*. He speaks about the Arabs, Palestinians in particular, the West-East binaries along with imperial and counter imperial discourses, the stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims, the plight of Muslims in Europe, Zionism and Euro-centrism and the like.

Whatever things make common to the Arab/ Arab American authors now had been there in Said in 1980s. He has been somehow or other way foreseeing what would happen in his future as it perfects his vision in *Orientalism*. The future remain with the same issues he has had to raise, like the Palestinian one seems an everlasting trauma to all Arabs, and that is why they have to partake in the international support for the homeless Palestinians. It is hardly surprising Said's discussion of anti-Muslim oriental attitudes of the Whites and other Europeans remains ever relevant. If we analyze the case of Arab (Muslim) authors alone, they have got a double or more trouble and responsibility than any non-Muslim Arabs or non-Muslims in general. And they seem to have been supplementing to Said's works (*Orientalism* and related books) through and through ages more than other ethnic writers.

To reiterate, Said's attempt to give Palestinians a voice is set against the Zionist victor who won in establishing the modern nation of Israel who suppressed the Palestinians into refugees. And the Palestine becomes a no-land, an invisible nation that seems never going to be visible. What about the refugees? They keep on rewinding exile to exile. And what the

unfulfilled wish of them to possess the share of their land has left in the end is that a great Palestine in exile, or one in diaspora. Even the idea of Palestine is now that of “occupied territories.”

Like the Palestinian land, its people’s voices are confiscated and silenced with the successful oriental representation of them by both Europeans and Zionists. According to Said it also causes their self representation remain undone. He further suggests that it is in America where the Palestinian question is most suppressed. Even there have been some campaigns held in America to give supports to Israel against the pro-Palestinian demonstrators:

For Said, nowhere is this process more complete than in America, where the Jewish lobby is at its most effective. It is in America that Palestinian question is most vigorously suppressed and the Arab portrayed as terrorists. (Aschroft 121)

As we observed in the previous chapter, the Palestinian issue is always significant for any Arab American/ Muslim American, may be more than it is for the Arabs and Muslims worldwide. In other words, the Palestine is the question of religion than anything. The Muslim Palestinians are targeted and labelled as terrorists so as to make the Israel’s role ‘vital’ as a liberator for the primitive barbarians of the land. So the Arab/ Muslim American resistance to support or criticize this become a major part of its ‘writing back’ to the Oriental discourse set by the Occident in which stereotypes of Arabs/ Muslims reign. Said in his *Orientalism* defends Islam which is also a necessity for the Muslim writers in US today against the growing anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in forms like, fundamentalism, Islamic revivalism, and political Islam.

If the clash between ideologies has been prevalent in the twentieth century, it is that between cultures that dominate this century.²⁸ Islam is the most misconceived and misrepresented religion today. There have been western thinkers and intellectuals, researchers and academics, politicians and businessmen, who viewed this religion as unable to initiate

²⁸ Samueln Huntington prophesied this shift in the last century, which seems to have become true to the current era. See *The Clash of Civilizations*, p.4.

creativity and change. They observed everything in literal terms to establish the Muslim as backward, close minded and bloodthirsty and those who adore wars in expense of the other. The new cultural colonialism advanced in 20th century and new atheist global ideology of the West, have been much into spreading anti-Islamic sentiments globally.

Return of “Oppressed Woman” and the U.S. “Liberation” discourse

I think the word ‘oppressed’ should be archived against the necessity of speaking the ways of oppression. I am trying to suggest the Arab woman in the eyes of a mainstream white people are much oppressed, and I would term it a double oppression for the sake of mentioning how this oppression is dissimilar to that of other women. However we see most of this group’s women have proved their talents in every realms of American life is remarkable to also disprove this above stereotyping. And it is true to see some women feel more freedom in this new world whereby they have a free life necessarily without following their religion as in the homeland. This group, not surprisingly, consist mainly of the new generation Arab American women. As part of frequent attempts from Arab American writers to establish themselves among various anti-Arab notions and practices, we see the huge stereotyped-Arab-Woman-idol is melting now. Soon then, the “exotic” essence of the Arab woman may turn to a myth.

Whatever the question of this religious status has become one of the most important debate among critics everywhere. But what see when confronted with the enemies or some critics of Islam is that they would just attack it without trying to learn what it is, for instance, they do it merely asking questions like, why Islam oppresses women? Why the polygamy is allowed and polyandry not? Likewise questions however have allowed many to do with discussions of *hijab* (veil) in Islam but it has not affected the non-Muslims to change their mentality towards the women’s dress code unless most of them take it as synonymously with “oppression.” This is also the tool by which the Western/ White feminist attempt to ‘help’ the Muslim women by thinking it is *their* duty to ‘liberate’ the latter against the patriarchal and Godly oppressions. The irony about the same is that, they don’t take up the Christian women who wear similar *hijab* or so to satisfy their religious demands into consideration. May be for

this reason, the Islamic feminism has had to come forth to respond to these ‘responsible’ feminists and women liberators of the mainstream feminism. Let me not enquire more into such gaps of feminism. Before moving with the Arab American poets’ recreations of Muslim woman sexuality and Islam, we should also see why there is less such representation in the aftermath of September 11?

It is true that there is a hike in the number of women authors for this community in the current century which still happening. But the themes they include, especially in poems by the woman authors in my study, have brought in them a somewhat equal representation of both Arab/Muslim women and men alike as if there have never been gender disparities. One may ask why these women do not talk much about the so-called patriarchal oppression instead of telling stories of their men’s beards and love for them. Yes, it is the reality for them they are spaced to speak for their men more than about themselves, as their men have been more victimized before and after 9/11 to the American cruelties. This is where we also revisit Nada Elia in that we will try to see the Arab women’s vocal position being heightened with the Arab-male-victim trope. In my view, this fact makes the Arab/ Muslim American poetry unique again. By then, today’s Arab and Arab American experience are converging in novel ways as Western weapons of mass destruction devastate the Arab world, and while Islamophobia²⁹ thrives in the United States, wreaking havoc in Arab American communities. Elia’s this ending remarks are worthy to speak about the renewed responsibilities of any Arab-American women author.

There is the story of a long term stereotyping exerted upon the Arab male and female which has varied, as the critics claims, according to the power politics. For instance, the popular Arab image of the middle ages is never the same as now. There is indeed a clearly drawn historical line of this archetypal origin and development. And if those added by Said’s book were

²⁹ The first known printed usage of the word was found in a periodical in U.S. in 1991(Feb.) and it was added into OED in 1997. Lorrain P. Sheridan explains the word functionally same to that of ‘xenophobia, also reports the fact of its over emphasis in post-9/11 decades. P, 3.

of the 20th century, the recent century renewed them with a neo-orientalist and Islamophobic flavour.

Some general and renovated such typologies should be explained here before jumping into their counter-narratives. Naber, a renowned scholar of Arab American studies investigates to the concerned community's invisibility as a historical narrative. She figures out three popular media portraits of the Middle-Eastern Muslim men and women that have been originated with the neo-colonial interventions into contemporary ideological and economic strategies: in the first, the Middle-Eastern Muslim men as irrationally violent particularly towards women. In second comes the more salient "supra-oppressed" Middle-Eastern Muslim woman compared to the White American women, and finally the portrait of the same women as "Absent Arab woman." The last association is a reference to Arab woman's absence from the scene where their men are (attracted to) with the white women.

Among the new discourses evolved as part of the above and other stereotypes, the most interesting thing for me is that of the veiled women's strategy to negate the white men's desire over her "exotic"/ "erotic" by just veiling themselves, by wearing a full hijab to both resist and to satisfy her faith with God. The first resistance through veiling aimed at both the white male and white feminists who see the Arab female bodies as oppressed, exotic and the like. More surprisingly this veiled appearance provokes the imperial agents and civilizers to unveil the Arab/Muslim women has become trendy and justified despite the violence in it being unresolved. Even the white feminists and their male counterparts go to the extent to justify the act in the name of "politics of the unseen" wherein the Arab women inside the veils are seeing but not seen for the others, especially to the white males. This is one of the most debated issue of our times regarding Muslim women identity in exile. Adding to the stereotypes, an Indian Muslim woman has reported that she was called "Bin Laden without beard" in the immediate aftermath of the September attacks by some Americans.

It is high time to stop this blunders and mistakes we exert upon the woman-victim trope. In other words, there is a must I believe, to archive the very archetype of "oppressed" Arab/Harem woman. Meanwhile the characteristic conflicts of such a complicated being never

succeeds the overwhelmed desire from the white woman side, to liberate the harem girls/women. This liberation mission sought more in the aftermath of September 11 has made the Arab/Muslim (veiled) women more visible in the U.S. society. And the veil “continues to be the most over determined signifier of the U.S. liberation discourse and the old colonial trope of the ‘lifting of the veil’ as supposed liberation is alive and kicking”, argued Koegeler.(28)

Martina Koegeler in her thesis gives a clear cut analogy between various Arab American writers (feminists) in matters of the trope of Sheherazade in their works. The technique of auto-orientalism that is variously attempted and practiced by Arab or Muslim feminist writers in America like Kahf, Nafisi, Malmud etc. Both Nafisi and Mohja Kahf are discussed by Koegeler. Kahf deals with the cultural, ethnic questions not only of the Arab American women subjectivity but the Muslim women’s across the geographies. Also her works being addressed by various audiences, her refusal of fear as the base of her art in either hegemonic U.S. or Muslim nationalism/fundamentalist pressure circumstances and the like proves her distinct auto-orientalist characteristics. For instance, Kahf’s description of veil is, as Koegeler puts it her study, to represent American Muslimness not the foreignness. It is then that remark of assimilation which is symbolic of Arab/Muslim American women subjectivity. Thus Kahf does not reduce her women to the veils only, which is very much a technique of Western feminists. Referring to Kahf’s peculiar auto-orientalism, Koegeler points out that she “always places herself and her home in the U.S., while she maintains cultural and identity ties to Syria.” This double move facilitates to locate and create the above women subjectivity in the “in-between”- “a subjectivity that can be American, feminist, mother, scholar, muse, poet and much more without abandoning her Muslim/Arab heritage.” (67)

In her serialized poem, “Hijab Scene #1”, “#2”and so on, she brings situations of Muslim girls and women being confronted, questioned and ‘abused’ for their veil or head scarf in America. “you dress strange,” is the response of a tenth-grade boy to the new Muslim girl in scarf coming to the class.(41) Kahf makes fun of his American way of using “tr” in “strange.” In “Hijab Scene #2”, she brings a similar saying which many Muslim women might have experienced often. This is a woman presumably American saying, “You people have such

restrictive dress for women.”(42) Both the poems are too short, in three lines. But for Kahf it seem enough to make fun of the boy and the restaurant pink-collar woman who expresses their ‘worries’ about the *hijab*. In another poem of the same series she is more into resistance than telling a response and giving counter-response equally. In this poem named, “Hijab Scene #7”, she protests her maximum to convince the stereotypers (my neologism) about her own Muslim sexuality. She also establishes her as American and says she would not like to “defect” it. And she says she is not bald under her scarf, and she is not from a country where women cannot drive cars and the like. Her protest is very powerful in which she even threatens to blow up the Americans if they are not going to give up their presumptions on her/ her people, with the power of her words, and poems:

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. (39)

With the first line, Kahf takes herself (presumably she is the narrator herself here) into the cloak of a suicide bomber, male or female who carries explosives. It is part of the general xenophobic assumptions in US about any Arab, mostly a bearded one or one looks like a Muslim. There has been some case of arresting the ‘supposedly’ Muslim/other Arabs or anyone with the so called terrorist-attire to search for explosives and bombs in them; only out of the common stereotype of the Arab/Muslim are terrorists and then carry explosives.

Even then elements of a protest rules all over it is one place where the poet’s anti-Orientalism directly appears. This she exercise from within the oriental stereotype without affirming to the existing archetypes so to confirm her being auto-oriental, at the same time using it as a means to give a threat or verbal attack against the stereotyping mentalities and those who do live with them. She uses this with all its capability to express her protest and bold modes about how her words (denoted by ‘explosives’) are going to give counter-words to the whites or those orientalist who still loom under the mount of their stereotypes. Similar anti-oriental

techniques are seen in Majaj's verse. In "Claims", she speaks about what the Arab woman *is not* from the harem girl/ woman image along with a parallel Arab male popular portrait. The text of this poem though seems exclusive in its all inclusive manners, does not seem as effective as that of the previous in its 'protest':

I am not a shapeless peasant
trailing children like flies;
not a second wife, concubine,
kitchen drudge, house slave;
not foul-smelling, moth-eaten, primitive,
tent-dweller, grass-eater, rag-weaver,
I am neither a victim
nor an anachronism. (51)

The Arab woman image in its full archetype is represented here with a big "I am not.." preceding them. They include the Arab woman as, "victim" and old fashioned ("anachronism"), "concubine" and "second wife", "house slave" and "tent-dweller" etc. are retaken to establish a "No" to it, which is Majaj's habit of protest. The polygamous Arab male is also indirectly portrayed may be to indicate that there is a male-villain always in the woman struggles and oppression.

The audience watches curiously
as the Arab-American woman steps up
to the podium. Light hair and skin,
unaccented English...they thought
she'd be more—you know—*exotic*.

the audience waits attentively
as the Arab-American woman steps up
to the podium. She is cousin, compatriot,
fellow-traveler: Arab resonance
in a place far from home. (57)

The above poem titled as “Cadence” is another place where she subverts the Arab-woman stereotype. Of course there is an oppressed-woman-trope dismantled here, see how aptly Majaj has used her title, to show the high and low rhythms. In next poem from the same collection, she establishes the Arab woman, like the American/ white feminists simply cannot sit and admire trees. She has to do more, to defend her identity against her cultural siege:

Already she can hear the questions:
 “Do Arab women do things like that?”
 And the protests: “We have so many problems!
 -- our identity to defend, our cultures under siege.
 We can’t waste time admiring trees!” (57)

She tries to subvert the harem-woman image from within that image where in the very next stanza the same is done with the Arab male archetypes where *she* says: “I am not a camel jockey, sand nigger, terrorist,/ oil-rich, bloodthirsty, fiendish..” speaking about and for male and female sexualities and reconstructing them, Majaj’s narrator gives a challenge of identification. It is not easy to find it whether a ‘she’ or ‘he’ is the speaker here.

Hammad does a similar task by advocating egalitarianism in her most popular poem, “Exotic”(2002). Disclaiming her ‘other’ and ‘foreigner’ positions she undertakes to establish her sameness to other coloured women. She rejects her difference in such attempt by saying, “women everywhere are just like me/ some taller darker nicer than me.”(65) She has developed a new strategy to empower the Arab women that is used effectively by her where in this poem, she presents the stereotyped Arab exotic women in one end whereas the other end, the stereotyped women of various cultures, famously the coloured ones being narrated. I should quote both the ends here to see how Suheir makes it a poem of woman of colour, or a coloured feminism rather by proclaiming loudly and in hip hop protestor style, “.don’t wanna be your exotic/ some delicate fragile colorful bird/ imprisoned caged/ in a land foreign to the stretch of her wings” and the other end i.e., the final stanza appears:

nor your/ harem girl gusha doll banana picker/ pom pom girl pump um shorts coffee maker/ town
 whore belly dancer private dancer/ la malinche venus hottentot laundry girl/ your immaculate
 vessel emasculating princess. (66)

In the first part we have a counter image of Arab woman's 'vulnerable' label. The term exotic here may refer not only the Arab women where the poet speaking also about the Black /African American women. The second part is an affiliation aimed at empowering the non-white women to overcome sexism and racism and the tonal resistance is against both male dominator and a white colonizer. There is woman "submissive" as well as "provocative" simultaneously as in Kahf's "Men Kill Me" poem. Such archetypes more or less, as the critic Sierene Harb claimed help to undertake the men an economy of appropriations and possessions of the othered female body epitomizing its colonization in the name of love.(68) This theme also recurred in Kahf's "My Body is Not Your Battleground", wherein both the nationalist land ownership and one's body ownership are compared through earth-female body associations. This poem is extremely political in its framework. It is also where she questions the oppression of woman in the name of love by their own men.

To infer from the above, contemporary Arab American women/poets are not unaware of the stereotypes of their men and women. Then they, in Harb's argument, articulate a discourse of ownership of their bodies (feminine and ethnic) that constitutes a very powerful tool against their double colonization, i.e., against the sexism and racism they are subjected to.(69) In that sense, they are not far from the African Americans or Asian Americans. Countering the double colonization become their necessity, in which the male-colonizers' love as "desired possibilities" being recognized by these women authors and in effect that is what gives them an awareness of themselves, to highlight their need to love themselves first. This is where Kahf's line becomes apt, "In love she remains whole."

The love in her collection of "Sheherazad" does not have always this domain of opposing men against their women. More than this, what one visit in the book is her love to her own men and origin for which the following stanza from "I Can Scent an Arab Man a Mile Away" will be enough a witness:

They may be
 mustachio'd, macho, patriarchal,
 sexist, egoistical, parochial-
 They may, as men may,
 think themselves indomitable,
 being easily manipulable
 -but they're mine..(29)

Definitely one requires a subverted idea or image in order to counter or speak against it, or to de-emphasize it. And that is why this speaking from within something will not sound as that surprising as one expect about the Arab-American authors as it is being a very common practice and perhaps a must to do for them. For an onlooker, it is as if these poets are solving conundrums about the Arabs often by putting one image and its contra-image together to make the game and victory for themselves, simultaneously maintaining an 'invisible opponent' throughout. This invisible opponent may not always be the U.S/ Americans they can be any other Europeans or Israelis who will have a share in Arab alienation.

These in result refer to the ways of self or auto-Orientalism, as the poets revisiting orientalism through their self-essentializing³⁰ of the existing archetypes, and more importantly the orient makes the orient image. Or this is also where we see how and where the orient wearing the crown of orientalism to question or de-construct³¹ the ambiguous framework of occident's oriental notions. In this attempt what is achieved is called as "anti-orientalism." The term refers, for Jasmine Zine and Lisa K Taylor, a "political and pedagogical project that is engaged through developing counter narratives to the clichéd images of Muslim women represented through victim-centered tropes," and it also positions "new readings based on critical hermeneutic practices that dismantle these racially and religiously degenerative constructs." (13)

³⁰ Self-essentializing, I borrow from Koegeler, refers to one's entry to the oriental images or tropes, here for instance Kahf redefines the harem/ Muslim woman image/ stereotype from within the existing image or the like of the same. It is a re-perception of the orient through an oriental lens, I assume that Kahf does on one side where on the other side she strategically subvert or reconstruct the orientalised tropes.

³¹ De-construct is used here literally. It refers then a "removing" with reference to its "de" prefix. It can also mean in a higher level, what I proposed in the end of the chapter in defining my new theory, that is an "unmaking."

Combining this entering-cum-removing ways of the Arab American authors I would like to argue some their poetic attempts as spaces of auto-orientalism, and others as anti-orientalism, or in more clear terms a “counter” one, by which they exercise de-orientalisation. The term is my own invention, if there exist already a usage of it anywhere.

Kahf’s constant return to the veil is also an attribute to her auto-orientalist position, argues the critic, Koegeler. What a Muslim woman writer needs in situations like 9/11 is that:

the specific situation of a Muslim woman writer in a post 9/11 U.S. context requires a combination of positive inversion and a more subtle approach of subversion to escape the orientalist co-optation and to be able to critique negative, patriarchal and oppressive Muslim practices as well.”(56)

From this her intent is very clear that she stresses how the auto oriental strategies of contemporary Arab/Muslim women writers may function to resist and re-create Muslim womanhood as heterogeneous and self-determined.

“De-Orientalising”: Towards (my) Invention

While writing this research project, I have been also searching for something new and unique (theory or idea) of my very own as part of which, I found and invented “de-orientalisation’ or ‘de-orientalising’. I shall speak the formations of the term as came to me, after establishing its foundations from the following implications of some prefixed-orientalisms.

As we go through the above poets and their oriental deconstructions it become more and more ambiguous to trace out where they are in relation to the prefixed orientalisms (see the above subtitle). For a somewhat fitting inference of my argument, I would like to define the “orientalism” as that only which done by the occident to define, redefine and misappropriate the Orient or the Easterners. If that be the only case true, for the time being her for my convenience rejecting the Easterners’ narratives of themselves which also constitute parts of Orientalism in general, I would like to call the above women poets and activists as “anti-Orientalists” as their roles more fit to the thesis of Zin and Taylor.

As in Koegler's argument that Kahf exerting her 'own' orientalism, which he terms an auto-orientalism whereby she, unlike Nafisi, subverting the existing harem images along with a returning to the roots and present adaptations of Sheherazad. By criticizing traditional Islamic gender gaps which is also popular in Western oppressed/ veiled woman discourse, her attempt is to *re-bring* the Muslim woman figure as in the existing idea itself. I think, this retracing the *orientalised* oriental trope, whether she affirms it or not, adds to the Oriental discourse. The Orientalism, agreeing with its master, I would like to endorse here for its very undertakings by the Occident only. Even though there are intellectuals and the like who added to the versions of orientalism over times undertaking a somewhat documentation etc of the orient/ East. Disregarding that for the time being, also taking the Orientalism as it is in Said and popular definition, and more particularly for my new theoretical formulation, one needs to take the orientalism as a framework of the orient done by the occident, then the word orientalise (to orientalise) being the supreme task of an occident (also called "the orientalist" in Said's phrase). He is the one who does orientalisation). "To orientalise" as per dictionary reference, means to "make oriental in character." In the same vein, one can define occidentalism and Occidentalize too.

Considering the impossible exact definition of what sort of orientalism Kahf like poets expressed in their poetry without denying Koegeler and other critics' notion being true and inappropriate alike, also by taking Said's orientalism and the related words as explained above, I want to figure out this womanly engagements through reverting and subverting the prevalent oriental archetypes as a *de-orientalizing*. In simple terms, this is to mean what is the opposite of the word, "Orientalise." So in the new frame the term will convey an idea of "unmaking" oriental. (to unmake oriental in character) This, in my own view, stands for a deconstructing orientalism, so, a *deorientalism*. And I have consciously used not "z" but a "s" in the verb (orientalise), because of my conformity towards Said.

Searching for Coloured Feminism?

The Arab American poets like Suheir Hammad, Kahf, Majaj have portrayed love towards one's origins, towards the Arab men and towards oneself, to combat the existing racial and sexist

stereotypes. Martha Bosch Vilarrubias in her article, “In Love She Remains Whole” proves the idea to show the political potential of such poetry. As she argues, the Arab American anti-racial organizations have rarely addressed the question of their women’s suppression. The gender discrimination felt to the Arab American women hence need to be reconsidered by the concerned literature to reassert the claims of such sexism. Their poetry, as part of their feminism, revealed and represented the discrimination of race and sex as underlined above, Bosch adds. For her analysis she takes Kahf’s verses in particular and others as instances only. Her argument is also fuelled with the three forms of Arab American feminism among which she says the third-‘Arab American women-of-colour feminism’- as the most successful and fruitful. It is where the Arab American women align themselves with those of other minorities, in Hatem’s words, the “self-conscious definitions (of Arab American women) as members of an ethnic minority.”(382).

In relation to the emerging Arab American literature and its writers’ ‘recent’ visibilities that created a new voice in the marginalized ethnic genre, my attempt to associate the above poets to any kind of feminism (labelling them to feminists of coloured/ white/ Islamic/Arab etc.) met with the following three inferences that nearly approves an almost labelling impossibility: First let us see what it means to be an Arab American feminist. In one instance she is set against the mainstream white feminism which to many extend appear as opponent to her. It is to mean that so far the need to “write back” will stabilize the position the Arab/ Muslim American woman against the dangerous western anti-Arab woman narratives, this ‘enmity’ will prevail. This enmity is not to be taken in its conventional sense rather it comprises the elements of enmity through a narrative-counter narrative war, which is purely a matter of ‘convincing’ the misconceptions and oneself against both its self and others. Moreover the Arab American women’s first concern is for life/ survival when she writes and asks about and for the Palestinians and Arabs/ Muslim or any marginalized in the world. She won’t find a ‘equal pay for equal work’ or a ‘voting right’ as primary to attain like that of the western liberal feminists.

The Arab-American feminism can be compared to Islamic feminism, where the last rejects the Western feminist narratives that often consider the Muslim women subjects and subjectivities as confined and oppressed as in popular “oppressed Muslim women” genre. This impossibility is simply undone just due to the fact of the Arabs are not synonym to Muslims as in the popular

notion. It is interesting to see how Kahf brilliantly subverts this trajectory with her 'own oriental' (my term for auto-orientalism) archetypes with a modern reference to the western made cult of Sheherazad. Clearly it is to denote the duty of any such writer of the period must be to subvert existing archetypes in order to restate the reality. The challenge of questioning western

tendencies of representation also backed up strongly by the media, must have to be resolved and excavated by the Arab American writers in order to maintain themselves 'American' or a 'pan-American' in the country.

Another way Kahf presents the powerful Muslim woman is as in her "The Woman Dear to Herself." Here she calls the women to celebrate her womanhood in which she should say "I have my period" when she has it. The woman dear to herself, in the poet's opinion, loves herself and God, she "does not lose herself in the presence of man, woman, or child."(55) Kahf idealizes woman (Muslim) who loves herself or dear to herself and she is the one who is following her religion as per her God's Will. Otherwise the woman here portrayed is that of a Muslim who lives as per the rules of Islam, and that is why we have Kahf bringing some her religious principles in her verse to characterize 'the woman dear to herself. In one such instance where Islamic principle underlines her verse is, "The woman dear to herself loves/ for another what she loves for herself." (55)

One such principle becomes a criterion for the Muslims to become a complete believer- the one who is genuine in his/ her faith must practice this in order to maintain his/ her ties with the religion. It is rather obligatory to every believer. Kahf seems to have explored this idea in the centre of her poem suggests nothing less than her like to her own faith, and it is to show that the Islam in its core has nothing to do with attacking others and using violence. The similar undertaking is seen in "Fatima Migrates in October." This poem is where she is assuming herself holding in herself or in narrator, various bold women of history, most from the Islamic traditions including Prophet's wife.

Her way is in secular feministic notion is that of an Islamic feminist's. Because she undertakes to speak about the egalitarianism inside Islam and the gender equality is perceived as a truth about Islam. This type of feminism generally known as Islamic that is misconceived by

many other feminists. Then it is apt to label Kahf one that of an Islamic feminist. But the “exactness” of this label is in challenge when her speaking for the other coloured women as, she proclaims herself as “a woman in her last desperation,” and says:

I am the last survivor of the massacre of Deir Yassin
 and the last living descendent of the dead at Wounded Knee
 I am the last to crawl out from under the rubble of corpses
 I am looking for the new country
 I am flying toward the outer sea. (87)

This is a way to acquire power for her to proclaim her empowered position as a woman assigned the charge of the world. For Hammed and Majaj the case is not different as they also stand for humanity along with making the world their home than limiting themselves to their assigned borders and territories. Meanwhile such attempts had been part of their rejection of man-made borders and man-made disasters, all they agreed to the human kindness and love as things to attain salvation, and to reconcile the violence and broken bodies/ lands. This however helped them to travel across lands and lands so that to participate in the liberation of the oppressed movements and the like, also helped them to acquire more knowledge to improve their notions of race and ethnicity. The travel does not only consist of one’s physical transport, it can also include the imaginary journeying made possible with the advent of globalization. So, as being them the world’s lovers, those who empower the oppressed men and women all over the world if possible etc, one cant rather space them exactly into any of the existing feminist types, is also complicated with the inter-divisions of various feminism, as for instance, liberal and secular within Islamic feminism.

For the Arab-Americans having close ties with African-Americans and their similarly discriminated positions in U.S as narrated by many, it would be apt to check if they have a coloured feminism to practice. I strongly feel all the female poets referred before have to deal with a black feminism in their way of promoting humanity. Patricia Hill Collins’ idea of black feminism as “a process of self conscious struggle that empower women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community”(598) has proved it more effectively in the case of our poets.

Conclusion

Pointing towards the Arab male-female experiences in America it is nearly true to suggest that the Arab Muslim men's life challenges are *equivalent* to that of Arab Muslim women in America. For instance, these men were harassed and incarcerated for the 'terrorism' alleged upon them; often with no evidence and trial they were punished and detained especially for their Muslim or the like attires. For their women the case was not much different, they were a "cultural threat" to the State when their men were of "security." The women in veil, as portrayed in mainstream U.S. media and public as 'oppressed', 'exotic' and 'agency-less' are some important labels to be recounted. The threats posed were widely available to the American Orientalists to engage smoothly with their targets.

It is through and using self-assertion (or, self performance) they often represent themselves. Nevertheless many of these women were confused of their position-to say exactly of their identity-to answer questions such as, 'where they belonged' and 'who they are.' Despite the fact that America is the most comfortable place for many refugees or homeless, this story of stereotyping and marginalization remained 'traumatic' in past but manifested its 'internalized' reflections by some Americans to remind the spectators that such stories were not only of the past. In the present era, the main duty of any Arab/ Asian/ African and Latin American would be to assert their own 'self' identity and the like in order to establish them towards the popular misconceptions. Even the American public along with its government and media are greatly into this interest, of knowing who Arabs or the hijackers are, especially in post-11 age. To satisfy this need too, Arab American writings might have been a help. However the real purpose behind this very literature is not to show for namesake who this people are, nor to show what they need from the mainstream people. Rather their literary constructs are useful cites of their life itself- wherein one can see what that exactly to be an Arab American.

Arab American authors are vested with the huge responsibility to re-articulate themselves in matters of their Arab/Muslim identity along with an American one towards fulfilling their hope of that they will be represented rightly unlike in past. Such tasks and duties will not be easier when the main discourse of a national culture trying to 'exclude' them from the most

powerful country in the world. This difficulty is fuelled further with the overwhelming ambiguities among the Arab American women themselves in deciding over their own identities. The confusion is rightly comparable to that of Du Bois' notion- the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others; One ever feels his two-ness; an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (9). The plight of Arab American woman needs to be emphasized to support my thesis statement. What it is meant to be an Arab American woman is as troubling as what it is to be an Arab American man, especially at times of crisis. We can see the women of this group fighting for not mere 'feministic' cause, but for a whole cause that is assigned upon all their peoples. Their concurrent confrontations with sexist and racial stereotypes remain praiseworthy often but less than what they do as Arab-American writers or activists who act for a cause other than gender/sex. It is much relaxing to find the Arab-American women are not 'excluded' or 'invisible' from the political, economic and social establishments of recent U.S.

Hence, they are bound to carry over because they are literally under 'western eyes', and living in a 'clash of civilizations.' They have to love and hate America simultaneously. Some are in a position of being nowhere as they can't go back to their homes, and some prefer to live in dreams and memories. So memory/ the act of remembering become a means to live and survive. That is why some poets/women make the grandmothers their life companions, like Naomi Shihab; that is it she or other writers inviting Sheherazad to overseas to tell stories; that is it because some speaks by holding tree trunks and fruits, and some enlightening their people's wounded souls with incredible suggestions. All these poets are marvellous women, resembling and reflecting each other in verses and faces, telling stories through poetry.

In fact their appearance with everyone and everywhere is also assisted by the neo-global facilities that make them imaginary travellers along with their real travel to the old homelands or the lands of the oppressed and so forth. This everywhere-ness (my neologism) in effect make us sort out the issues and themes they undertake in their writings, as part of which one may find it is so confusing to categorize them into this and that themes. All in all their works besides the genre exceptions are full deconstructions and reconstructions, of the Arab archetypes in particular, as a result of which the themes and ideas are overwhelmingly recurring in and throughout their

verses. The recurrence is attributed to nothing less than their reflections about the very Arab American identity.

Most of the critical attempts reflect similar issues as if the entire Arab American literature has been nothing beyond some three or four issues. Like the Palestinian issue for instance, has been brought by all of them also by the writers themselves. Definitely I agree, as most of them argue, the Arab American writers cannot keep them away from this issue particularly it's having a serious impact on their life at home and abroad simultaneously. As we know it is a clear cut fact that the Palestinian issue is vital for all the Arabs worldwide. It also has caused some sub-themes to emerge as part of its overwhelmed influence upon the Arab American writers especially that is coupled with their diasporic positions. Such themes are mainly, homesickness, nostalgia, memory, homelessness, to-home-ness, and the like. May be they, by going through all this and that kind of themes might have tried consciously to revert the existing Arab tropes and archetypes, as many claimed. I too do not disagree with that.

The cultural and identity disambiguation of this particular community never vanishes until its complicatedness remains unchallenged. To be an Arab-American, in pre and post 9/11 United States is best to interpret in Al-Oboudi's sentence. In his play, *Portrait of a Suspect*, which explores the complexity of Arab-American-ness, Oboudi narrates, to be an Arab-American "is to be both Arab and American and, for the time being at least, to be neither." His words cannot be limited to its literariness; rather we should also see inside it another possible interpretation- that is "to be either."

Thinking beyond, one can easily say the mentioned identity is more complicated, and the people of this identity too remain in "no-where" and "anywhere" simultaneously. It is those concurrent *beings* of the contemporary Arab-Americans (men/ women and poets) intrude their lives, also interrupting our attempts to fit them into some possible frameworks. For instance, it is very difficult to fix the women poets the sort of feminism when they are from different cultures and backgrounds. Maybe even the thematic formations of my chapters seem overwhelming each other due to such reasons. Similar trouble found in my last chapter, which is apparent when assigning these women some kinds of orientalism. It is as if their faces are flashing through all

sorts. For that cause, I put them into a somewhat huge frame named, de-orientalism, which was purely my own invention. Surprisingly it seems that they are collectively conscious about their togetherness and difference alike. Nevertheless being aware of their difference, and betweenness and moreover, their positions and voyaging-ins through geographies and across borders, they appear 'under challenges' in their quest toward their 'exact' identity cloaks. They are not able to fix their issues unless they go through a double/triple positions as for their identity then being more flexible than normal ones.

To end, my work might not have brought the Arab-American women, their life and identity relates issues, their confrontations with war/ violence and terror (crises in general) and anti-Arab/Muslim stereotypes in particular in their fullest possibilities. I should have penetrated more and more so that I could achieve a mastery over this information mountain. Meanwhile that remains a dream, I feel good in my work that it could be at least an add up to the existing works of the same subject, and I feel better because I have coined a new theory to interpret the post-9/11 Arab/ Muslim women's confrontations with their ethnic experiences and oriental challenges in my dissertation.

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