

**THE COSTS AND CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL SETTLEMENT IN USA:
A CRITICAL STUDY ON ARAB-AMERICAN WRITINGS****OLFAT SAGHEER**

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ABSTRACT

Between the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries Arabs started immigrated to North America from Lebanon and many other Arabic countries like Yemen, Palestine and Tunisia. In fact they came as temporary residents and workers not as immigrants. They settled down in cities such as Boston, New York and Michigan but have full intention to come back to their own countries one day. Due to Arab-American literature launched under many circumstances most of it economic and political.

By the time, Arab-Americans became more concern to the process of Americanization that has probably racial definitions for the American identity, and this offered more social exclusion for Arabs. On the other hand, there was what was called Naturalization Act of 1790 which had granted the right of citizenship to the pure white person as it was termed 'free white persons'. Thus Arab-Americans found themselves living under enormous pressures to assimilate the U.S. context. At the same time Arab identity was a matter of great importance to Arab immigrants. How to maintain Arab identity in the American-born generation was the major task of those people in American society.

However, the laws of naturalization were challenged and sometimes refused as it was based on whether citizens qualified as white or not. Such laws not only determined the destiny of immigrants but also set the precedents for the exclusion of entire ethnical group. However, those cases, links and clashes between whiteness, non-whiteness, Christian, non-Christian, American identity, non-American identity, European, non-European shaped Arab-American experience and literature directly and indirectly.

In the matter of fact, Arab has taken English as a medium of literary device to express their thought and attitudes since the beginning of 20th century. Gradually, this literary expression has gained full recognition. The hyphenated Arab-American, Arab-British, Arab-Australian authors have been making their voices heard with confident and power to convey their message to the world. Ironically, Arab-American literature has got his renown and only after 9/11, when the world woke up on the horror of the terrorist events of that day, then people specifically Americans went and searched about Arab people, their attentions, thoughts, attitudes, and literature. At the same time Arabs found themselves a necessity to define themselves to express their point of views towards what is going on around them and to defend themselves against the common accusation that they are the source of the terrorist in the world. Thus literature of their own footprint was urgently acquired.

In searching of a place in mainstream of American literary circles, Arab artists tried to increase sales and acceptance by creating for themselves the image of charismatic genius and to make themselves and their writings as a compromise between the spiritual East and the rational West, in other words, between mystical and dynamic. The Arab-American writers of the early 20th century, such as, Ameen Rihani (1876-1940); Khalil Gibran (1883-1931); Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988), were seen as the pioneers of cultural meditations between the East and the West, and the examples of the transnationalism. Those writers were the first real mediators between the two extreme different cultures of East and West. They found themselves in flexible position to be able through the English medium to drive away the wrong anticipations about each culture, and intellectual



reconciliation between the two cultures. Thus this mediatory function reconciles the relations between Islam and Christianity as Gibran and Rihani did in their writings in a manner that synthesized Muslim and Christian registers in a unified idiom.

Keywords: *challenges; social settlement; Arab-American writers; three writers'generations; Majhar school; costs; social exclusion; national ethnicity.*

Introduction

The first generation of Arab-American writers had reflected in their works a sense of collective optimism and celebration. They had been discussing issues beyond the boundaries of their birth-place. But there is a kind of hybridism that undoubtedly helped them negotiate the identity politics of their place of origin with less tension than their successors did. However such technique was not a literature of displacement but those writers seem to have maintained their balance among the disjunctions of temporal and spatial distance of their dual identity and to have preserved their dual allegiance to create parallels among the features of both cultures. Moreover, people in Arab World think about those artists and poets as a literary, intellectual and logical bridge connecting the two worlds along with all differences of both.

Into three trends, Arab-American writers are divided. The first can be identified as the Mahjar School (the early-twentieth-century émigrés in the USA). The early Arab immigrants came from backgrounds of poverty and even illiteracy and worked their ways up to elitist literary circles; furthermore, they were able to preserve a happy balance between East and West, home and host country. Those authors, Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and others, who wrote in Arabic as well as in English, established what is known as the Mahjar (émigré) school of Arab-American writing. Although they had their greatest impact on Arabic literature, these writers were serving as bridges between East and West, and actively sought to establish philosophical meeting points between Arab and American ideologies and contexts, even as they invoked poetic forbears of both east and west. After the flourishing of the Mahjar literature, Arab-American literature entered a period of quiescence. Due to the absence of ongoing contact with the home culture, Arab-Americans went so far in the assimilation process that some historians have described them as being in danger of assimilating themselves out of existence. Although there was not a complete dearth of literary production, Arab-American writers wrote about their Arab background with hesitation and through self-distancing narrative strategies.

Secondly, the Europeanized writers of the mid-1950s; and the more recent hyphenated, transcultural, and diasporic writers of the past four decades to the present who have been scattered all over the world. The subsequent generation of the 1950s came from elite backgrounds and worked seriously to embrace the identity of the European , and typifying the traumas and excruciating experiences of the culturally 'colonized' aptly



delineated by Frantz Fanon. Doomed to face rejection by metropolitan power but having cut their moorings to their country of origin, they had no choice but to embrace their own alienation and estrangement.

The second generation authors differed greatly from that of their predecessors (Rihani, Gibran, Naimy), in their writings they seemed to grow more out of the European tradition than the American literary scene of the time. Their works mostly reflected their British educational and intellectual formation, a phenomenon that inhibited the rise of a distinctly Arab-English style. The language they used is very English; conservative and pure, unlike American style, free and irreverent. The reason of this that Arab English, existed during this period, developed from the very language of Britain and British discourse, not from the margins or the local languages.

The third group is those who began writing after the 1970s. They were born and raised on the no longer foreign soil of their immigrant forebears; they were those who were working out of an experience of trans-culture. Those writers came from diverse intellectual and social backgrounds, faiths, vocations, and political inclinations, and, settling in Canada, USA, Britain, and Australia, had a diverse or divergent connection to the homeland.

The Costs and Challenges of Social Settlement in U.S.

Arab people due to wars and unstable conditions in their countries they became forced to leave their homelands for better future, life expenses and self-recognitions. In the host countries many ethnic groups and minorities of Arab were constituted, by the time they became looking for self-recognition, socio-equality, and other rights. They have tried to establish for themselves literary identity in world literature and ARTs. So many have started to analyze variety of literary works to classify their works, due to the exposed of many features for Arab-American writings and exhibit the problems which those foreigners are faced in this host country.

Arab-American authors concerned themselves with the themes of psychological and social exclusion that they experienced greatly in their host community. The double-consciousness and ethnicity were reflected obviously in their writings, and the quest for self-representation clearly anticipates the postmodern and postcolonial elements in their texts. Moreover, politics was major theme that featured in their writings. The political events in the Middle East were the prominent concern for Arab-Americans though they were spatial separated from their countries of origins. They wished to communicate their ideas on the serious political issues that were troubling their countries in the Middle East to help in enlightening people there with ideas for better future. The worry of self-recognition through pursuing better education and high position job and the eagerness to seize opportunities to improve their life became the major concerns for Arab-Americans.



The previous two decades have witnessed a remarkable growing of Arab-American literature, as evidence of the rapid increase in the number of literary texts published in a raiment of genres, including fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and drama. The Al-Rabitaal-Qalamiyya, or the Pen League has helped contemporary Arab-American literature to become an important juncture in its development as a field. Due to that more courses are being taught on Arab-American literature and culture across the US, more critical texts are focusing on Arab-American studies, and more Arab-American writers are being published by mainstream presses to national and international acclaim. Yet this sudden interest in the production and circulation of Arab-American literary texts is ironically paralleled with post 9/11 events and the prominent bias against Arabs and Muslims which reflects the eagerness for Americans to know more about this minority of Arabs who located in their society. On the same time, many Americans have considered this interest as a threat for their national ethnicity.

This bias that occurred against Arabs and Muslims has a long history and has been reflected clearly and became visible in US public and political scenes since the turn of the twenty-first century. With the events of 9/11, and the US-leadership of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the claimed War on Terror, Arab-Americans have found themselves marginalized to an unstable position within the US community. This infirmity leads Arab-Americans to be categorized as the religious, racial and political Other of a hegemonic US definition of nationality which has been more undirected and shapeless in nature.

Arab-Americans have covered these unstable positions well before 2001, since the Arab immigration to the US in the nineteenth century to the second part of the twentieth century onward. Yet the direct and indirect role of the US in major Middle Eastern crises and the consequence wars and conflicts has had particular impact on immigration patterns, pushing millions of Arabs and Muslims into various conditions of exile, and dispossession. These crises include the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the 1970s Arab oil embargo, the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990 and its aftermath, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the First Gulf War in the early 1990s, as well as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, and recently the agency wars that located in Syria and Yemen respectively.

Arab-American writers' works between 1950s and 1960s were clearly showing some progress and seemed to have had a very encouraging start. The authors were praised for the simplicity and directness of their writings which were characterized by high spirit and fearless daring. They were engaging culturally to the authentic political information that yielded much of the acclaim which led to the feeling of surprise English critics had at the time when they discovered that Arabs, too, were writing creatively in English language of the British Isles. Arab American authors were often praised for their master of the English language and how they could handle it craftily.



Regarding to linguistic and culture aspects, American-Arab writers have much to share. They are descendants of a rich heritage, with a great history, wealth literature and a respected language. They are very proud of their Arabic language, yet they may have differences related to religious beliefs, social practices and political preferences, yet they all are unifying to a strong belief in Arab culture. In their diasporic residences, Arab-American artists were still reflecting a warm relationship to the homeland despite the authors' geographical distance from it.

Conclusion

Literature has a vital role in constructing and expressing nations' and group's identities in the world around. Identities might be built either by people's endeavors or are acquired by inheritance. Individuals feel the necessity to confirm, and re-confirm their identity over time. The authentication of identity becomes required to prove their familial, social, ethnic and cultural legacy, on which people not only have their birthright but they are also proud of.

Today, Arab-American literature has emerged as a literature in its own right, with younger writers able to take for granted the existence of ethnic as well as literary community. Arab-Americans today confront a cultural, political, and social context that is fraught with tension. Instead of excluding Arabs on the basis of race, popular racism now targets Arabs on the basis of skin color, dress, name, religion, accent and other characteristics. As well as nowadays there is what is called as political racism practiced by politicians upon Arabs in USA under the name of 'Global War on Terror' to create safer country as they claim which what President Trump is doing these days against Arabs and refugees.

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