Collision or Coalition: Cultural In/Determinacy in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003)

"In the book of life, every page has two sides."
- Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz* (6)

"Not black. Not white. Never quite fitting in. Always on the Edge."
- Joanna Kadi, *Food for Our Grandmothers* (xvi)

Osama Madany
(Prof. of English, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, Egypt)

I

Dubbed by Joanna Kadi as "the Most Invisible of the Invisibles" (xix) due to their relative absence from the ethnic canon, the Arab-American community is situated as an isolated enclave that is viewed to separate itself from other ethnic groups and from the dominant, white mainstream center. With this group's identity being transformed throughout history "from nonwhite, to white, to somewhere outside the limits of racial categories" (Saliba 311), Arab-Americans have been vexed and perplexed by notions of "blackness," "whiteness," and "in-betweeness" that have often seen them both collide and coalesce with the American hegemonic society. How this community engages with this "borderless Arabness" both negotiates and recreates the Arab-American experience within the privileges and inequalities of the American cultural and racial hierarchy.

Arab-American novelist, Diana Abu-Jaber (b.1960) explores in her novels, *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* the vortex of "not belonging" which makes her characters (second and third generation Arab-Americans) repeatedly clash head on with white hegemony while assuming, at the same time, a semblance of "whiteness." Equally, they tend to employ a strategy of identity building that aligns them with other ethnic minorities as a substitute to the failure to carve out a space within the dominant white community. Hence, the construction of what Carol Fadda-Conrey calls: "*ethnic borderland*; a constructive space in which interethnicities between and

within different communities of color could be established and maintained"[1] (187). In *Arabian Jazz*, the characters' actions to blend in mainstream "whiteness" point to an awkward relationship with American society; a sense of displacement articulated in a daughter's raging at her father: "There's only so much you can do to become American"(106). Yet the daughter, herself, is a trapped animal; bound by contradictory cultural perceptions; at times viewed as "a wild-American girl, painted and cunning"(10) and at other times as "a boring Arab"(10). Plagued by whiteness, characters attempt to find a way out by affiliating themselves, consciously or unconsciously, with other ethnic minorities like African-Americans and Latinos. In *Crescent*, Abu Jaber concocts a medley of characters, members from a wide selection of Arab (and other Middle Eastern) backgrounds that negate simplistic representations of Arab identity. Yet, in defiance of American racial injustice, they manage to negotiate their cultural barriers by partaking in an Arab communion provided by the protagonist's café-shop; thus constructing boundaries among the various ethnicities.

This paper, as such, explores the doubleness of signification which highlights the spaces between Arab and American, propelling Diana Abu-Jaber towards a strategy of negotiation. Collisions with mainstream American culture engenders coalitions across ethnic boundaries which calls for the cultural indeterminacy of both *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*. This need, if not compulsion, to forge connections beyond the insular boundaries of group identity; to articulate identity within and across cultural lines, lies at the heart of the ongoing discourse on the ethnic/cultural status of Arab-Americans in the United States.

II

In the current American atmosphere of enjoying and celebrating literature of culture and immigration, many feel to have "discovered" the Arab-American voice.[2] But this is not the whole case. Arab-American

---

[1]. The term “ethnic borderland” draws upon Gloria Anzaldúa’s definition of “borderlands [as being] physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different cultures occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” (*Borderlands* 19).

[2]. The designation "Arab-American," like any classificatory phrase in ethnic studies,

literature spans virtually an entire century; going back to the early years of the 20th century, and continues to thrive today. This strong presence of Arab-American literature is believed to be part of the upsurge of "ethnic literature" in the United States of the 1970s. Writers from Hispanic, Native, Asian, and African backgrounds emerged, accompanied to a lesser degree by Arab-American writers. What seems to have gone unrecognized in the 1970s was that Arab-Americans were among the first immigrant writers to be recognized as a literary force by the broad American literary community.[3] As such, Arab-American literature today[4] is growing

---

is immediately problematic. It does not adequately represent the large contingent of Arab- Canadian authors who are often joined with their peers to the south as "American." More important, a good amount of work written and received as Arab-American is produced by authors with no Arab background. For instance, in the anthology: *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, edited by Joanna Kadi, includes selections from the Armenian writers, Zabelle and Martha Ani Boudakian, the Iranian writer Bookda Gheisar, and the Jewish writer Lilith Finkler. Poet Jack Marshall is a Mizrahi Jew, and author and activist Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhran is a member of both Radius and Arab-American Writers, Inc. [*RAWI*] and The New Association of Sephardi/Mizrahi Artists and Writers International [*NASAWI*]. Natalie Yatsukhina, a visual artist for *Mizna* (Arab-American Journal), is Kazakhstani. Many non-Arab authors—including American Lisa Gizzi, editor of *Mizna*, and British poet Anna Reckin—produce works with Arab themes received in an Arab-American context. The matter of nationality also serves to complicate any simple conception of Arab-American letters. Some writers who have been counted as Arab- Americans have one Arab grandparent, while others who publish in Arab-American forums were born and live in the Middle East. Most write in English (in many cases from necessity) but some in Arabic, publishing in Middle Eastern journals or in the various Arabic-language newspapers in the United States. Some are immigrants from the Middle East to America, while others emigrate from America to the Middle East. For example, poet and scholar Fawaz Turki is a Palestinian immigrant who grew up in the Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Lebanon and has been anthologized in both Palestinian and Arab-American collections. Another example is American-born Kathryn K. Abdul-Baki, whose novel *Tower of Dreams* takes place in Kuwait and could be classified as Kuwaiti just as easily as American.

[3]. One of these early contingents, created in the 1920s, was known as *Al Rabitah al Qalamiyah*, or the *New York Pen League*. This organization, familiarly known as *Al-Mahjar*, or “Immigrant Poets," was comprised of writers from Lebanon and Syria who often wrote in Arabic and collaborated with translators of their works. Ameen Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy and Elia Abu Madi served as the major figures in this period, and are frequently credited with developing an interest in immigrant writing in general.

sophisticated in scope and ample in content[5]. It represents the voices of its community and exhibits an impressive range. Yet, the demand for more extensive representation is frequently voiced: "What we need is not less but more representation – for only when there is a wide array of depictions of Arab-American experience and culture will writing that is self-critical be understood for what it is: not a betrayal, but an attempt at self-transformation (Majaj, "New Directions" 74).

Arab-American literature, in this respect, can be described as a multi-cultural mosaic; expressive of multiple voices that are not limited to issues of culture and identity, but are extensive and far-reaching. Arab-American writers are presently going beyond stories and poems that are linked to the homeland and heritage, and are exploring new territories that are related to years spent in the United States, and socio-political issues that affect their everyday lives. In consequence, the traditional view that the Arab-American identity is transplanted; turning upon a preservative of Arab culture, maintenance of the Arab language, involvement in Middle-Eastern politics, and a key relationship to the Arab world, has been modified to "a view that the Arab-American identity is essentially American and should be understood in relation to the American context and American frameworks of assimilation and multiculturalism" (Majaj, "The Hyphenated Author" 337). However, like Arab-Americans themselves, Arab-American literature is part of the Arab culture and part of the American culture and, most importantly, is part of what the postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha calls the "space in-between" (11). Thus, Arab-Americans are often challenged by what Majaj calls, "split-vision" ("New Directions" 72) or what W. E. B. DuBois calls "double consciousness" (21); meaning that, as Arab-American writers turn one eye to the American context, the other eye is always turned towards the

---

[4]. Prominent contemporary Arab-American authors include Elmaz Abinader, Joseph Geha, Diana Abu-Jaber, Mohja Kahf, David Williams, Joanna Kadi, Kathryn Haddad, Etel Adnan, Lawrence Joseph, Khaled Mattawa, Adele NeJame, Munir Akash, Sharif S. Elmusa, Kathryn K. Abdul-Baki, Evelyn Shakir, Gregory Orfalea, Paula Haydar, Adnan Haydar, Sarah Rogers, Barbara Nimri Aziz, Eileen Kaady, Pauline Kafdas, Therese Salibe, Elie Chalala, Naomi Shihab Nye, Suheir Hammad, Mona Fayad, Miriam Cooke, Samuel Hazo, Ray Hanania, Frances Khirallah Noble, and D. H. Melhem.

[5]. In the last three issues of *MIZNA* (Journal of Arab-American Literature) 2007, Vol. 8, Issues 1, 2, 3, for example, thirteen national backgrounds are represented, forming a total of thirty one contributors.

Middle East, which reveals the intricacy of trying to set neat identity boundaries. From this perspective, the creation of something new and different out of the combination of Arab and American cultures, is central to Arab-American identity especially when acknowledging that current Arab-American texts are those that portray the experiences and conflicts of second and third generations of Arab-Americans. Such texts are part of Arab culture, part of American culture, and also part of something still in the process of being created. In consequence, Arab-American writers carve their experiences out of their Arab identity, out of their American identity, and out of the identity shaped when these two cultures convene. It would, thus, be a stretch to try to rationalize Arab-American letters as directly connected to Arabic literature alone. Arab-American authors borrow frequently from both the aesthetics and intentions of Arabs outside the United States, but the two traditions have taken noticeably different routes. A more functional methodology will place Arab-American writing in its American context but locate Arab themes that distinguish it from other ethnic American literary movements. Such an approach allows critics to identify prominent Arab cultural and aesthetic textual elements while simultaneously analyzing Arab-American writing as a distinct phenomenon, and in terms of how it interacts with all aspects of American artistic production.[6]

As a principal means of resisting essentialized identity politics, Arab-American writers tend to emphasize hybridity and diaspora, rather than roots. Their works shift away from narrow identity politics, determined by static notions of race and gender towards a rearticulated politics of difference which is affixed to the Arab – who is designated not only as alien but also as neither an autonomous nor an individual person. Arab-American writers seek to challenge the dualism or opposition between self and other by questioning the stereotypes that constitute Arabs as "different" from Americans. They promote a dynamic identity of negotiation and resistance,

---

[6]. The emergence of magazines and newspapers that highlight Arab-American culture, the abundance of organizations which address issues of Arab-American identity, the access to web sites and specialized search capabilities in the writings of Arab-Americans, the anthologies and presses that collect Arab-American voices, the conferences that have as central themes Arab-American writers, and the convocations which emphasize the works of Arab-American authors and performers, all create the sense that Arab-American literature is something that has just now emerged - that it has discovered America and America, in turn, has discovered Arab- American writers.

celebrating rather than denying difference; a type of difference that is not determined by a dominant culture and that breaks down the dichotomy between self and other.

Another way in which Arab-American writers resist essentialized identity politics is through the concept of hybridity, refusing to be restricted to only one position, breaking down the centre/margin dichotomy, and opening up spaces between the centre and the margins. Arab-American writers tell their tales in an attempt to replace the Orientalist notion of the Arab Muslim as synonymous with passivity by notions of Arabs as active agents in the third space where hybridized individuals, erasing any claims for inherent cultural purity, inhabit the realm of an "in-between" reality marked by shifting psychic and cultural boundaries.

It is, also, important to note that these writers use their words as a means of building bridges to the "other." By telling their untold stories of struggle and pain, Arab-Americans hope to reach out to others who either ignore or demonize them. Hence, the recounting of their personal stories in their literature aims to reduce inter-group conflicts and enhance peace building and reconciliation between different groups who are otherwise barred from reaching out to each other by their racial and religious prejudices. Contemporary Arab-American writers, using the healing power of words to tell their stories, seek to open doors to an understanding of their differences and resist their own image that has been distorted and demonized by detrimental prejudice.

To position the literature of Arab-Americans within an ethnic/cultural borderland necessitates the delineation of the Arab-American community's current racial categorization in the United States; thus determining the cultural and ethnic markers that draw the dividing lines between Arab-Americans and other ethnic communities.[7] Currently situated within the "white" category by the *United States Census Bureau*, the Arab-American community seems to have no legal position within the spectrum of minority

---

[7]. Observe Majaj's argument that "memory grounds both identity and interest: invocation of a communal past and projected communal future provides the basis for an emotionally resonant politically coherent 'imagined community.' " See "Arab-American Literature and the Politics of Memory," *Memory and Cultural Politics*, ed. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, and Robert E. Hogan (Boston. Northeastern University Press, 1996): 266- 90.

cultures to voice its concerns about discrimination. This ambiguous racial position - "white" - has stimulated comments like that of the Executive Director of the Arab-American Institute, Helen Samhan, that the current federal "white" categorization of Arab-Americans from the Middle East and North Africa within the "white 'majority' context" does not resolve confusions regarding their racial status (219). The debate revolving around Arab-American racial classification, starting with the first wave of immigrants and persisting to this day,[8] demarcate the shifting landscape occupied by Arab-Americans; with this group's identity being transformed throughout history from non-white, to white, to a marginalized category.

Present debate in the Arab-American community revolves around two opposing demands: complete integration and the preservation of the "white" classification, or the right to be granted minority status and be linked to other "people of color" (Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White'" 52; Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity" 322). This unstable identity of Arab- Americans burdens this group with what Majaj describes as an indefinite state of "honorary whiteness,"[9] allowing this group a cautious entry into mainstream white American society, only to find this status "readily stripped away at

---

[8]. Arab immigration to the United States is characteristically divided into three phases: the first one extending from 1885 to 1945; the second from 1945 to 1967; and the third from 1967 to the present (Naber 1). The first wave of Arab immigrants consisted mainly of Lebanese Christians who, although invariably classified as Syrians or even Turks, rejected for the most part any Arab national commitments or identifications, maintaining their cultural and social links to their home country while seeking assimilation in the United States by claiming their rights to be categorized as white citizens (Naber 2; Saliba 311). The second and third waves of Arab immigrants, however, proved to be less prone to assimilation since they were largely comprised of Muslims and Arabs who maintained strong Arab national identities (Saliba 311-12). The increasing political tensions between the United States and the Arab world in the second half of the twentieth century, especially following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and currently post 9/11, 2001, galvanized a "rising ethno-political consciousness" among the Arab-American community, while simultaneously instigating "the beginning of [this community's] social, political and cultural marginalization" (Naber 3).

[9]. Majaj borrows this concept of “honorary whiteness” from Joseph Massad (101) and Soheir Morsey (177).

moments of crisis" ("Arab-American Ethnicity" 321).[10] Majaj's "honorary whiteness" serves to isolate Arab-Americans from both the white category as well as from an ethnic minority status, situating them in an ambiguous, unstable racial space. "Some Arab-Americans," Majaj notes, "have turned to pan-ethnic forms of racial identification, which, although blurring differences among members of this community, helps them confront the increasing politicization of their racial categorization ("Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race" 327). Moments of American national crisis, like September 11, 2001 serve to position Arab-Americans under a suspicious light which further conceals the complex structure of this composite group by reducing it to a set of negative stereotypes. This could, undoubtedly, reassert the invisibility of Arab-Americans by obliterating the distinguishing indicators separating members of this group from other ethnicities.

The borderland between Arab-Americans and other ethnicities in the United States has been an ongoing debate, with the ubiquitous issue being whether this area ultimately engenders inclusion or exclusion. Debra Castillo corroborates David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelson, who in their introduction to *Border Theory*, voiced their scepticism toward borderlands as "the privileged locus of hope for another world" (Johnson and Michaelson 3). Castillo focuses on the border as a reflection of "those stereotypes about itself that each society has refused, while readmitting the stereotypes about the refused other" (Castillo 187). Carol Fadda-Conrey is more articulate:

> In establishing links between Arab-Americans and other communities of color, the ready acceptance of ethnic stereotypes should be replaced by a constructive understanding of commonality and difference among the groups involved. The search for ties between communities within the ethnic borderland should always be accompanied by the unfixing of ethnic stereotypes; in this way, the ethnic borderland takes on a fluid

---

[10]. In reference to these "moments of crisis," Majaj cites the case of the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in which Arabs were the prime suspects. Another instance that highlights the volatile position of Arab-Americans in American society is the post-September 11, 2001 racist treatment to which individuals and groups of Middle Eastern, North African, and even South Asian backgrounds were subjected. More interestingly, acts of vandalism perpetrated in retaliation for the September 11 attacks also targeted Muslim individuals, families, properties, and Islamic sites and symbols in America, such as mosques and the burning of the flags of Arab and Muslim countries; a point that denotes the conflation of Arab and Muslim identities in the American mind.

> quality, transgressing the limitations of tightly enclosed enclaves, not only easing border-crossings, but rendering limiting borders hazy in the process. (191)

In consequence, to scrutinize the ethnic borderland in which Arab-Americans and other minority groups can co-exist calls for an analysis of these groups' individual makeup, thus negotiating the limits that keep them apart and even relegate them to invisibility.[11] Focus on issues of multi-ethnicity, cultural multiplicity, exilic identities, and invisibility is bound to forge in the process a constructive and inclusive dialogue among communities of colour. In reference to *This Bridge Called My Back* (ed. Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981), Anzaldua writes in her preface to *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002): "Twenty-one years ago we (women of color) struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference" ("(Un)natural Bridges"2). This critical approach would ultimately help alleviate the invisibility plaguing Arab-Americans by enabling them to explore their multiplicity within a multi-ethnic American society. *This Bridge Called My Back* affirms the importance of this multiplicity, stating: "We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words" (Moraga and Anzaldua 23).

Recognizably, in a race-conscious American culture, Arabs are often identified and treated as "people of color," and some of their struggle with the hegemonic culture that has devalued them are similar to the experiences

---

[11]. Works like *This Bridge Called My Back* (ed. Moraga and Anzaldua, 1981) are ground- breaking efforts to widen and transform the various borderlands linking various communities of colour. This has been developed in the more recent *This Bridge We Call Home* (ed. Anzaldua and AnaLouise Keating). This latter work features, most notably, Arab-American voices (e.g. Evelyn Alsultany, Nathalie Handal, Reem Abdelhadi and Rabab Abdulhady and Nada Elia) plus previously omitted white and male voices. As Anzaldua notes in this book's preface: "Diversity of perspectives expands and alters the dialogue, not in an add-on fashion but through a multiplicity that's transformational…. These inclusions challenge conventional identities and promote more expansive configurations of identities" (" (Un) natural Bridges" 4). It is such configurations that imbue the borderlands with inclusive rather than exclusive characteristics.

of other minorities.[12] This self-conscious definition of Arab-Americans as members of an ethnic minority represents a break with older attitudes and strategies. It embodies a new emphasis on their hybrid cultural character as at once Arab and American. The Arab component is not only shaped by the past and present history of their countries of origin, their diverse cultural/ethnic traditions, but also by the history of the Arabs' immigration to the United states and the position they occupy in this country. The American component is largely shaped by widespread intercultural marriage, the experience of being a cultural minority, and the treatment of Arabs and/or Arab-Americans by the hegemonic culture as a cultural "other." This new discourse on what it is to be Arab-American highlights the rewarding potential of forming alliances between Arab-Americans and other minority groups.

In a series of articles dealing with the development and tenor of Arab-American writing, Majaj has developed arguments relevant to this point. In "Arab-American Ethnicity," she notes:

> The question of how to establish connections and coalitions across ethnic boundaries is of increasing importance within Arab-American discourse. Given the marginalization of Arab-Americans within American culture and the on-going reality of Anti-Arab discrimination and violence, the need to focus on protecting and strengthening Arab-Americans as a group remains strong. However, it is also increasingly clear that ethnic identity cannot be constructed in isolation. (332)

She goes on to remark: "Contemporary Arab-American literature increasingly reflects the awareness of the need to forge connections beyond the insular boundaries of group identity. In contrast to earlier Arab-American writers, contemporary writers increasingly seek to articulate identity not only within but also across ethnic lines, from a stance of 'reciprocal inter-communalism' " ("Arab-American Ethnicity" 333).

This sense of shared oppression with other "people of color," has prompted shared action around many of the issues considered important by

---

[12]. See Joanna Kadi, “Introduction,” xvi; Therese Saliba, “Sittee,” 8; Majaj, “Boundaries,” 66 in Joanna Kadi (ed.), *Food for Our Grandmothers* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

racialized groups in the United States. Long before September 11, 2001 issues on which Arab-Americans expressed common ground with other minority groups, like African-Americans, have included: racial profiling; detention and murder for political organizing; and the lynching of Arab-Americans in the American south.[13] But it is not merely in political terms that such solidarities have been articulated. Like other racialized groups in the United States, Arab-Americans have attempted to express their identification with various minorities' arts, literature, and creative production in general (Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity" 323).[14]

The ways in which racially-marked groups in the United States identify and affiliate with or dissociate and distance themselves from other minority groups is central to pledging their claims to a position in the American society. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have argued that it is common for groups in the United States that have been excluded from white status and the mainstream to build their legal claims for recognition on parallels with African-Americans; the most oppressed and, consequently, the most forceful American minority group in its demands (71-93). Arab-Americans are by no means an exception within this context. Their situation is often paralleled to those of groups like Latinos, Jews, Armenians, and South-Asians, but especially to African-Americans. While many Arab-Americans have expressed bonds of solidarity as individuals and communities with other minorities, their role within the racial hierarchies of the United States is not necessarily so straightforward. The racial-identification of Arab-Americans has frequently been unstable and a source of questioning. The very label, "Arab-American" is contested as a way to describe this less than homogeneous group of people (Kadi xix).[15] Within

---

[13]. For some of the works dealing with these issues see: “Gualtieri (“strange Fruit?”); Hassan; Majaj (“Arab-American Ethnicity”); Morsy; Naber; Saliba; and Samhan.

[14]. This is evident in the poetry and writings of Saladin Ahmad, Cherien Dabis, Suheir Hammad, Betty Shamieh, Corey Wade, Stan West, and others.

[15]. It is often contested that producing an appropriate terminology with which to discuss and group such a diverse community of people-ethnically, linguistically, nationally, religiously, and so on - itself is problematic. As Steven Salaita observes:

> The term describing Americans of Arab origin is Arab-American. However many immigrants from Lebanon and their descendants, although Arabic speakers, choose to identify themselves not as Arab, but as Lebanese, Christian or even Phoenician. Some Muslim Arab-Americans are more comfortable associating with Muslims of various ethnicities than with Christian Arabs, while a disproportionate number of Arabs in the United States are Levantine Christians.

this contested Arab-American community, some have decided to work towards and in alliance with other racialized groups, whereas others have strongly identified with whiteness and embraced this identity wholeheartedly (Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity" 322; see also Naff, Dabis, Wade, and West).[16]

The contested racial identity of Arab-Americans is ambiguous even when compared to other "in-between" groups in the United States, who are also accorded what Mathew Frye Jacobson has labeled: "probationary whiteness" because of the precarious nature of their legal status (57, 174). The experience of Arab-Americans has revealed that this "white" status can be, and often is withdrawn at given moments (Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity" 324), favouring and yet complicating their identification with other minority groups. The word "probationary" is also a reminder of the way in which Arab-Americans historically "became white" through litigating their right to claim this status (Haney-Lopez 49-77); thus endowing them the right to naturalize as American citizens on this racial basis. Evidently, this white status did offer opportunities to many Arab-Americans. Being designated "white," for example, allowed Arab-Americans to own property and businesses in the United States when African-Americans and other minorities, designated "black," could not (Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White'" 31, 54; Haney Lopez 141). White status can, thus, complicate a notion of simple solidarity with "people of color" based on shared experiences of oppression. The discourse that defines Arab-Americans as "people of color" gives a new impetus for the discussion of racism as a problem facing this community, reinforcing its ability to mobilize against the racism of the hegemonic culture. The struggle against these dilemmas provides important levers for overcoming the "partitioned" (Ghosh 340) and "ghettoized" (Shohat 98) existence that have dissipated the collective and intellectual energies of Arab-Americans as "people of color" in the United States. The attempt to establish historical and representational connections without ignoring the differences that make Arab-Americans

---

> Nonetheless, Americans of Arab origin display a cohesion across such lines that is much stronger, in many regards, than the Arabs in the Maghrib and Mashriq. We must seek to understand how divisions in the Arab world affect the Arab society in America. Criticism must take into account the fact that the Arab world, and, in turn, Arab America, are hardly homogenous. (16-17)

[16]. Lisa Suhair Majaj ("New Directions") and Steven Salaita have both explicitly called for greater exploration of alliances with other groups of colour in literature and literary criticism.

singular, promises to enhance the ability of the group to effectively develop new discourses and alliances with other minority groups capable of challenging the forces of the hegemonic culture which they encounter in the United States.

Accordingly, although ethnicity has often been associated with an exotic "otherness" or to minority groups, contemporary Arab-American writers seek to emphasize hybridity and diaspora, rather than roots and tradition as a means of resisting essentialized identity politics.[17] Their work is constantly shifting away from narrow identity politics towards a rearticulated politics of difference. Amal Abdelrazek is aptly expressive in this context:

> Although difference is often constructed and understood in racial or color terms, I argue that a more subtle, and in some ways more damning, designation of difference is affixed to the Arab – who is designated not only as alien but also as neither an autonomous nor an individual person. Arab-American writers … seek to challenge the dualism or opposition between self and other by questioning the stereotypes that constitute Arab(s) as "different" from Americans. They promote a dynamic identity of negotiation and resistance, celebrating rather than denying difference, a kind of difference that is not determined by a dominant culture and that breaks down the dichotomy between self and other – for in every self there is an other and in every other there is a self. (142)

Arab-American writers seem to resist essentialized identity politics through the concept of hybridity, refusing to be restricted to only one position, breaking down the center; the margin dichotomy, and the opening up of spaces in-between. The literature of Arab-Americans is an attempt, in one respect, to replace the Orientalist notion of Arabs as synonymous with passivity and reticence by active notions of Arab-Americans as "active agents in the third space where hybridized individuals, erasing any claims for inherent cultural purity, inhabit the realm of an in-between reality marked by shifting psychic and cultural boundaries" (Abdelrazik 142).

Finally, it is important to note that these writers use their literature as means of building bridges to the "othering" American mainstream culture

---

[17]. Diaspora and hybridity theories are well developed in the work of cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York , Routledge, 1994); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Reprinted in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Black Popular Culture*, Gina Dent, (ed.), (Bay ness, 1992): 21- 33.

through forming cultural alliances with other minority groups. By telling their untold stories of marginalized, "hyphenated" selves, Arab-American writers hope to reach out to others who either ignore or demonize them. Hence, the recounting of their personal tales, in both prose and poetry, aims to reduce inter-group conflicts and enhance reconciliation among the various ethnicities that are otherwise barred from reaching out to each other by their racial and cultural prejudices. The literature of Arab-Americans, in this respect, plays a key role in resolving ethnic conflicts by engaging both the self and the other. Contemporary Arab-American writers, using the healing power of words, seek to open doors to an understanding of their own differences, form cultural and literary alliances with other "people of color," and resist the making of their own image that has been largely tarnished by American hegemonic culture.

III

Published in 1993, Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* [18] appeared shortly after the gulf war, which heightened negative portrayals of Arab-Americans. Abu-Jaber, as Evelyn Shakir remarks, was then writing "in an age of rampant xenophobia" (64). Ultimately, Abu-Jaber voiced her dilemma unequivocally: "How, then, to introduce oneself to an audience with its own ideas about the culture in which one is rooted, ideas usually unflattering, sometimes patronizing, and occasionally wildly romantic" (Shalal-Esa 19). Generally "thought to be the first novel published about the Arab-American experience" (Evans 42)[19], Diana Abu-Jaber navigates in

---

[18]. The first Arab-American novel to reach a large mainstream audience in the United States, *Arabian Jazz* won the Oregon Book award and was a finalist for the national PEN/Hemingway award.

[19]. Although the first novel about the Arab-American experience might be difficult to identify -especially given the myriad criteria for a novel's composition - it is inaccurate to bestow this precedence on *Arabian Jazz*. The ethnic continuity between the Arab world and Arab America clouds attempts at compartmentalizing this literature into specific periods. Even more to the point, Gibran and Rihani wrote novels while in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Gibran's most notable novel is *The Broken Wings*. Rihani's long published novel was *The Book of Khalid* (1911), about the Syrian immigrant experience. It is currently out of print. Etel Adnan published *Sitt Marie Rose* in 1977, and Elmaz Abinader's *Children of the Roojme*, defined at times as a novel and at others as autobiography, appeared in 1991. Nonetheless, Abu-Jaber is a seminal figure in the Arab-American literary tradition. The publication of *Arabian Jazz* signaled a much

Arabian Jazz a landscape laden with overlapping cultural mores; confronting us with issues of racism, abject poverty, female infanticide and incest, all set against the backdrop of one immigrant family's struggle to carve out an identity in upstate New York. Using multiple narrators and continually blurring the lines between past and present, the book provides a potent materialistic critique of America, casting an equally sceptical eye on the patriarchal vestiges of the Arab world; while simultaneously offering multiple instances of cultural and ethnic border-crossings. The novel is, thus, wider in scope and less autobiographical than generally thought. Abu-Jaber elaborates:

> While I do start with a kernel of "real life" (i.e. characters who initially have similarities to people I've known) the stories always take on a life apart as I write. I knew I wanted to write about growing up in a very Arab-centric household in New York and I wanted to deal with the inevitable cultural collisions that will take place with that sort of displacement. Issues around politics, gender roles, and more domestic or artistic concerns like food and music, all become the sort of signifiers or nexus points that then flag the internal struggles. (Salaita, "Sand Niggers" 434).

The novel, in consequence, reaches beyond Arab contexts to dramatize socio-ethnic undercurrents in America today.

The novel, set in 1990, relates the experiences of two first-generation young Arab-American women, Jemorah (Jem) and Melvina (Melvie). The American part of their selves is not only bestowed upon them by their residence, with their Palestinian-Jordanian immigrant father, Matussem Ramoud, among the hopelessly degenerate inhabitants of the peripheral town of Euclid, in upstate New York, but primarily through their Irish-American mother, who died of typhus when the girls were young during a fatal visit to the father's family in Amman, Jordan. Caught between two different cultures, Jemorah and Melvina uncomfortably search for their identity under the unrelenting supervision of their father's childless sister, Fatima. Since their early childhood, they have been simultaneously claimed by both cultures, proving through their dual belonging the truthfulness of the Bedouin saying Abu-Jaber quotes at the beginning of the novel: "In the book of life, every page has two sides" (6). Jemorah and Melvina recall the

---

broader way of approaching and constructing fictional accounts of the Arab-American world and, as a result, set much higher stakes for those who would write after it.

pull and tug of the contradictory messages about where "home" is from aunt Fatima, on the one hand, who would murmur in their ears in her clumsy English: "You come back to home soon, come back to Old Country, marry the handsome Arab boys and make for us grandsons" (77), and their mother, on the other hand, who would privately murmur in their ears: "Your home is here. Oh, you will travel, I want you to. But you always know where your home is" (78).[20]

Such articulated statements are ironic considering the family's Palestinian origin on the father's side and their loss of any geographic homeland. The immigrant generation of Abu-Jaber's novel recalls with bitterness the experience of dispossession, the hardships in border occupations, followed by the illusion of making a home in the United States, echoing their illusion of making a home in Jordon:

> Lost to the world was Matussem's private land, like the country his parents tried to leave as they made lives in Jordan, as they let go of their children's memories and let them grow up as Jordanians. Matussem was only two when he left Nazareth. Still, he knew there had been a Palestine for his parents; its sky formed a ceiling in his sleep. He dreamed of the country that had been, that he was always returning to in his mind. (260)

To Palestinian-Americans, the offspring of the exiles and refugees who have surrendered their land, and have seen it "washed away under the wheels of tanks and trucks as if under the force of the ocean" (340), "home" becomes a deceptively elusive phenomenon, constantly beyond reach. The resulting ambivalence is reinforced by the politicization of Jemorah and Melvina's American and Palestinian identities and the discriminatory attitudes they may either confront or evade.[21]

---

[20]. The autobiographical background, here, is quite obvious. Diana Abu-Jaber, herself, has a Palestinian-Jordanian father and an Irish-American mother. She inherited her Irish-American mother's coloring, which she describes as "an acceptable Anglo-pale," but she is all too well aware of this country's "real issue" with colour and the mixed messages that children of colour receive. Growing up, she and her two sisters were encouraged, even forced, to identify with their Arab heritage, but their relatives were also constantly exhorting them to stay out of the sun to protect their milky white complexions so they could pass as white Americans. Yet Abu-Jaber firmly identifies herself as a woman of colour, even choosing to keep the Arabic family name that caused her so much grief and misery as a child, and still requires tedious explanations, especially since the post-September 11 backlash.

[21]. Mojahid Daoud emphasizes the political context that has determined in the last

In the novel, Jemorah and Melvina's childhood memories are constant collisions with mainstream whites; memories which contain unhappy incidents of hostility expressed in jeers and taunts, physical aggression, or racist labels. Jemorah recalls with pain her daily bus rides to and from school when she "learned how to close her mind, how to disappear in her seat"(92) in order to shut off the other children's comments on her name and her skin. But there was no way she could prevent her hair from being pulled and her face from being scratched; no way to prevent being pushed from the bus to face her "shameful" (92) family name painted, in what seemed to her too big and too bright letters, on her home mailbox. To her also, "home," where the jeering voices would haunt her sleepless nights, is of little comfort. But the painful irony of these episodes lies in the fact that the whole neighbourhood is a socially peripheral world, and that her fellow bus riders, her "tormentors … turned up poverty-stricken, welfare-broken, sick, crazy or drunk" (93). Jemorah makes her way to college with the memory of the early pain and the distressing knowledge that "she didn't fit in even with them, those children that nobody wanted"(94).

Further hegemonic racist hostility confronts Jemorah at her workplace with her supervisor, Portia Porshman; a woman who went to college with her mother and who now "generously" offers to help her up from the lower ranks of the ethnic hierarchy, to "scrub all the scum" (295) off her. It is interesting that throughout the novel, the hospital, where Jemorah and Melvina work, acts metaphorically as an imprisoning white social environment for Jemorah. She has tried numerous times to leave, but has hopelessly bent to the intimidation of Portia. Yet in the end, it is Portia who drives Jemorah from the hospital. In the novel's gravest and bleakest scene, Portia calls Jemorah into her office and embarks on a diatribe naively intended to keep Jemorah under her command. It is worth quoting in full:

> Your mother used to be such a good, good gift. She was so beautifully white, pale as a flower. And then, I don't know, what happened. The silly

---

decades the conditions of Arab-Americans as a specific ethnic group:

> Unlike other ethnic groups ... Arab-Americans have had to suffer directly as well as indirectly the effects of an ideology, namely Zionism, intended to defame the character of all Arabs. This powerful political ideology has permeated many aspects of American popular culture stigmatizing Arab-Americans and leaving them with the sense that they are outcasts in America's celebrated immigrant history. (173)

> girl wanted attention. She met your father in her second year [of college] and she just wanted attention. We just weren't enough for her. I'll tell you, we couldn't believe it. This man, he couldn't speak a word of our language, didn't have a real job. And Nora was so—like a flower, a real flower, I'm telling you. It seemed like three days after she met that man they were getting married. A split second later she was pregnant. I know for a fact her poor mother—your grandmother—had to ask for a picture of the man for the parish priest to show around to prove he wasn't a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really, who could tell the difference, the one lives about the same as the other…. (293)

The scene culminates with the hospital office transformed from a metaphor of totalitarian control into a white mold that reflects the traditional American metanarrative of forced, but false assimilation. Portia continues:

> She never did finish college after that, never got to be the woman she could've been. A husband and baby at twenty. Look at what I've done with my life. You know, it's not too late for you. Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that color. A damn shame. But I've noticed that in certain lights it's worse than in others. Your mother could have made such beautiful children—they could have been so lovely, like she was, like a white rose. Still, it could definitely have been worse for you, what with his skin. Now, if you were to change your name, make it Italian maybe, or even Greek, that might help some. I'm telling you this for love of your mother. I'll feel forever I might have saved her when that Arab man took her and you kids back to that horrible country of his there [Jordan]. It's a wonder any of you survived that place, so evil, primitive, filled with disease! I should've spoken up twenty years ago, but I didn't. I thought, the Lord will provide, blah, blah…. I'm telling you Jemorah Ramoud, your father and all his kind aren't any better than Negroes, that's why he hasn't got any ambition and why he'll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life…. We'll try putting some pink lipstick on you, maybe lightening your hair, make you American. (294)

When contemplating this aspect of hegemonic America, it seems that Abu-Jaber has no use for subtlety. The statements are direct and blunt. It is a situation that has precedents in her own childhood: "Abu-Jaber explains, even though Syracuse had a large Arab-American community, even though she and her two sisters were surrounded by uncles, aunts, and cousins, who lived in or visited the community, even though they were encouraged to identify with their Arab heritage, they were told by their Jordanian-American relatives to stay out of the sun to protect their milky white complexions so they could pass as white Americans" (Evans 41). Portia Porshman is, thus, convinced that true Americans – and by implication – dominant American culture – must be white, and uses the "Negro" as a

symbol against which she can posit the superiority of whites. In her mind, the diatribe is an endeavour to help Jemorah integrate. This is evident in the familiar comparison of white women with flowers; symbols of purity and delicacy .

Abu-Jaber describes the feeling of fear which is produced by this overt expression of hostility and which seizes Jemorah following the conversation with Portia:

> It struck her … that the thin breath in her lungs and the tightening sensation in her stomach were fear. Not merely the fear of being caught, but of everything around her … of the world of these people, who didn't know her or want to know her. (298)

In retaliation, Abu-Jaber crosses cultural boundaries in *Arabian Jazz* in order to situate the concerns of Arab-Americans into a more comprehensible framework. "I was searching for a long time for a metaphor for Palestinians that Americans could grasp in visceral way," she explains to Evans. "This country can tend to be so isolated and so muffled from what's happening outside of its borders" (Evans 47-48). She gradually realizes that "the experiences of Native-Americans were so similar to what was happening to Palestinians, the way they were slowly phased out or pushed back, how there were moments of violence, but that native peoples were always constituted as savages or barbarians" (Evans 48). This recognition is integral to *Arabian Jazz* especially when Jemorah and Ricky Ellis, a destitute, half-Onondagan (Indian) gas station attendant, become lovers. Both have become marginal by their community and first found solace in one another as children, without uttering a single word to each other. Although they never solidify a relationship in adulthood, yet their impromptu sexual intercourse aptly symbolizes the entrance of one ethnic culture into the folder of another. This physical intercommunication provides comfort amid surroundings where Arabs and Indians are often represented as being subhuman; their relationship, thus, provides a sentimental counterpoint to the prejudiced confrontation of the white, mainstream community.[22]

---

[22]. Abu-Jaber's strategy, here, is not unlike those often used in the literature and criticism of other ethnic groups. Robert Warrior, for instance, stresses a similar desire in looking at the discourse of Native America: "[Natives] can further humanize ourselves and our works by engaging our particular question in the context of other Others around the world who face similar situations. Whether such engagement is fruitful is not so important as is opening ourselves from the stand

When Jemorah begins her relationship with Ricky Ellis, she opens up new possibilities for cultural identity and cross-cultural connections. Ricky's life mirrors hers in several ways. His Native-American mother leaves the family when he is a child. Like Jemorah, he is haunted by a loss that is both personal and cultural. He searches for something inside of himself that can connect him to his mother and to her culture:

> Ricky would check himself from time to time for signs of her, the edge of bronze his skin took on in the light, the way his clear eyes would seem to change suddenly and blacken, and something else – there was always something else – shifting inside him, the slant of the bones and muscles in his face, the river-quickness of his limbs, his body running with the currents that forked through upstate. (273)

Abu-Jaber has endeavoured to explain the similarities she detects between Native-Americans and Palestinians. She remarks to Evans: "The experiences of Native-Americans were so similar to what was happening to Palestinians, the way they were phased out or pushed back, how there were moments of violence, but that native peoples were always constituted as savages or barbarians" (48). As Kaldas remarks: "Through Ricky and Jemorah's relationship, Abu Jaber again pushes the reader to see beyond the surface, revealing the connection between the Native-American and Palestinian loss of land and culture." (179). Ultimately, Jemorah's relationship with Ricky reveals itself as a more complex struggle to formulate a cultural identity that can allow her to function positively in a race-conscious culture.

Minority negotiations between Arabs and other ethnic groups can decentralize and restructure the norms of the hegemonic culture. Steven Salaita notes:

> In *Arabian Jazz*, contextualizing the Arab within a broader rubric of minority discourse produces a textual paradox worth our attention: Abu-Jaber creates an essentialist other – the Arab-American – who interacts with other marginalized characters so that the essentialist tendencies of the dominant society can be mitigated and ultimately restructured. This is more than simple strategic essentialism, however. Rather, it expands on strategic essentialism to underscore a doubling of identity – through aesthetic markers such as … dialogue with non-Arab double others. ("Split Vision" 15)

---

point of intellectual sovereignty, to a wide range of perspectives." (Warrior xvi).

The commonalities among Arabs and other minorities are powerfully represented here, and serve to counter the commonplaces of tolerance in the dominant culture. Abu-Jaber portrays this culture from the perspective of its subjugated citizens. In Abu-Jaber's analysis, its underpinnings contradict the descriptions offered by the popular American media. She employs an explicit language that exposes and ultimately spells out the layered identities of the Arab characters. It is likely that "the interpersonal resolution revealed in the novel can be largely attributed to Abu-Jaber's emphasis on the inevitable doubleness of Arab identity and social behavior in the United States" (Salaita 17).

Abu-Jaber adds another twist to the already complex identity plot when she has Jemorah pushing Portia away and storming out of the building after revealing sarcastically that her father's mother was, "in fact," black. Yet, her rushing out of the office, an emblem of America, later draws her back. This time, however, the forceful Melvina confronts Portia and silences her. This affirmation is a complicated instance of negotiation. Rather than try to escape the office permanently, Jemorah, with the aid of her sister Melvina, is adamant in her resistance. But pressure eventually takes its toll on Jemorah. Unresolved ambivalence is displayed at the end of the novel through her contradictory final decisions regarding the whole orientation of her future. She initially states, quite unexpectedly, her decision to marry her cousin, Nassir and "come back with him to live in Jordan" (307), fulfilling her aunt Fatima's plans to dispatch her in marriage. To account for her decision, which generates considerable surprise among her family including the very cousin she is willing to marry, Jemorah invokes her alienation in the United States and the racist hostility she can no longer bear to face:

> I don't fit in. I haven't put together a life. I'm still living at home, I've been working at a job I hate. I'm so tired of being a child, being good, wanting people to like me. They don't like me. They don't like Arabs. (328)

It seems the door that Portia opens into American culture is so repulsive that Jemorah turns in the opposite direction, ready to embrace her Arab identity and relinquish her Americanism. Yet Nassir arrives, not as a representative of the Old World, but rather with a sense of detachment from all nations. Initially, he seems to be the voice of the West, with his Oxford and Cambridge education; now on his way to Harvard, he seems to give to Jemorah the answer to her predicament. But as Pauline Kaldas notes: "Despite or perhaps because of the combination of his Arab identity and his Western education, Nassir stands on the outskirts of national identity" (180).

He mocks the West's cultural materialism, making fun of the recliner that recedes further back than chairs in Jordan. At the same time, he ridicules Arab culture, describing the family in Jordan as a "cult organization" (324). When Jemorah explains her desire to return to Jordan in order to be among family and have a sense of belonging, Nassir breaks down her idealistic image, remarking: "There is nothing unique or magical about the Middle East; it shares xenophobias and violences with all the rest of the world" (329). As Evelyn Shakir Explains: "His assertion flies in the face of Arab-American romanticism" (74). Nassir's wisdom allows Jemorah to embrace both her Arab and American identities. He tells her: "To be the first generation in this country, with another culture always looming over you, you are the one who are born homeless, bedouins, not your immigrant parents…. You get two looks at a world. You may never get a perfect fit, but you see far more than most ever do. Why not accept it?" (330). As Salaita puts it: "Neither Arabism nor Americanness is ultimately relinquished, and the text becomes particularly slippery. Rather than imposing a simple binaristic solution for Jemorah's quandary, Abu-Jaber complicates expected definitions of ethnic and national affinity" ("Sand Niggers" 438-39). Nassir's ability to travel between east and west "as if he carried the distance of his journey in the slant of his shoulders (331)", gives him the experience and insight to help Jemorah.

So, unexpectedly, and urged by the same motives that prompted her to return to her country of origin, Jemorah states her decision to stay in her adopted homeland and go back to school in order to "crack" the mystery of racist hate (362). Jemorah's metaphoric journey at the end of the novel, reflecting sudden shifts between the two opposite poles of surrender and struggle, demonstrates her unresolved ambivalence; an inability to neither coalesce nor collide with mainstream American culture. Her cultural indeterminacy is eventually revealed in her inability to relinquish neither her Arabism nor her Americanness. "Rather than imposing a simple binaristic solution for Jemorah's quandary," Salaita notes, "Abu-Jaber complicates expected definitions of ethnic and national affinity. With layered language, she creates a setting in which Arab and American social mores form coherent, yet non-linear patterns of interplay" (17).

Worthy of discussion in this context of ethnic/cultural indeterminacy is the affiliation of Arab-Americans to African-Americans through music; specifically Jazz music. Within the complex situation of racial, cultural, social, and economic politics involving Arab-Americans and African-

Americans, black music offers a powerful and positive symbolic site for Arab-Americans to invoke connections between these two groups. As Michelle Hartman observes: "Often, invocations of African-American music by Arab-American writers are positive and celebratory, underlining a shared understanding through culture rather than establishing a bond between the two groups which is only based on shared oppression" (148). It is, therefore, productive to explore how *Arabian Jazz* draws upon the symbolism of African-American music and the celebration of black music to culture by invoking jazz and defining it as African-American music.[23]

Abu-Jaber, undoubtedly, shows jazz to be a creative enterprise, manifesting due respect for African-American musical tradition.[24] "Blackness" itself has been located as a space for oppositional creativity in the United States. Performers from different groups, including those who identify themselves in opposition to blacks, seek to imitate and respect African-American Jazz musicians (Roediger 212-40). African-American artists and critics have contested such identifications because of the history

---

[23]. It is not argued, here, that jazz is or should be necessarily understood only as African-American music, but rather that in *Arabian Jazz* the specific power of the music being used symbolically resides in the definition of jazz as black music. In making this claim, there is no simplification of the complex, multi-layered, multi-ethnic roots and realities of jazz - Jazz, like other musical symbols used in literary texts, can function differently in different spaces. The concerns of this article are more circumscribed and specific. Here, the paper treats how Abu-Jaber uses jazz and how this relates to her novel because her literary text proposes this music as a symbol of African-America, and this is the side of the music which is highlighted here.

[24]. How non African-American authors nourish their works with the rich flavours of African-American music, culture, and literature is an issue, however, which should be raised in the long context of the appropriation of black culture, in particular for financial benefit. Though African-Americans as a group are marginalized in the United States, politically and especially economically, their role in the arts, literature, and entertainment more generally has historically occupied an important and much more central position - African-American artistic production has often been transgressive, extremely creative, and daring; it has also been extremely significant to American culture. Figures as diverse as Susan Gubar, Howard Winant, and Martin Luther King, Jr., have all noted the centrality of African-American creative production to mainstream American culture (Roediger 213). Not only are African- Americans understood as important contributors to the American cultural scene, but they often set trends and are revered through their participation in these venues.

of appropriation and commercialization of black identities and creative production.[25] The intricacies and particularities of Arab-American identities in the United States draw upon the symbolism of African-American music and must be understood in relation to appropriations of black-American music, and also in the even more complex context of American racial, cultural, and social politics. Indeed, the success of *Arabian Jazz* is, at times, credited to its ability to convey the allegedly unfamiliar "Arab" elements to an unwelcoming "American" audience through its American element: jazz. This is reinforced by critics who read this novel as the story of a family rift that pits Arab versus American; for those critics, the novel appears to analyze jazz as a typically "American" art form (Shakir 75-76). Though this can be considered a valid reading, yet locating jazz in this manner erases the importance of its African-American origins and developments, divesting it of its ability to function as a black symbol in literature. Jazz, however, acquires its weight in the text precisely as a symbol of African-America. In the novel, jazz functions as a metonymic symbol of African-America and the text should be interpreted from this perspective.

---

[25]. This directly relates to novels and poems that draw on this music, even if only as a symbol within the texts. The history of white appropriation of black art dates at least to minstrel shows and stretches on until today where it is currently manifest in the popularity of white hip hop artists and the phenomenon of "wiggers" (Roediger, Chapter 13). As David Roediger points out in the concluding chapter of his book: *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past,* some have argued that appropriations of black music by non-blacks and crossovers between races are the only way forward in creating racial equality and social justice in an American society still stratified on racial lines. Though Roediger himself is less optimistic, pointing out the ways in which such crossing over is not a new phenomenon and has never led to such a change, he does cautiously discuss the potential for crossing over to become positive. One example he cites is Deborah Wong's argument about how Asians can bridge divides that blacks and whites cannot because of their different relationships over time with African- Americans (239). This is a compelling argument in the Arab-American case because of the range of ties between these groups, including those related to music. This is particularly true in the case of Muslim-Americans; the importance of Islam to the African-American community and the large number of Muslim rappers make this an interesting prospect to explore; see Aidi ("Jihadis"), Anzaldúa ("Let Us Be Moors"), and Rose (164-66). This is again not straightforward and can be highly problematic. Most Arab-Americans are not Muslim, and the vast majority of Muslim-Americans are not Arabs. The possibilities for links and bonds, however, is not excluded for these reasons.

The use of affiliations represented by African-American musical symbols in *Arabian Jazz* works as a starting point. Evident in Abu-Jaber's novel is the direct reference to Jazz, both in its title and as a metaphor which permeates the novel. The dust jacket alerts the reader that the work is set in a "poor white community in upstate New York." Because the Ramouds do not quite fit into this poor white community that has few "ethnics," their friends, family, and neighbours understand them largely in relation to African-Americans.[26] Therefore, the work's engagement with African-America – and the unstable racial categories of Arab-Americans – are central to the structure and message of the novel. This is revealed in the way the "jazz" of the title begins as a reference to "black music," but then becomes "Arab." This theme is reinforced through passages discussing the cultural and racial indeterminacy of Jemorah, as she struggles to understand her identity. Her challenges are reflected in the jazz metaphor that envelopes the entire work. This begins with the title and is further underlined by the musical notes and drum adorning the cover; the cover also depicts a large, colourful camel. The implications of this medley are revealing:

> These symbols reinforce the supposed incongruity of the title's two simple words – one of which (Arabian) refers clearly to Arabs, the community explored in the novel, and the other (jazz) which metonymically refers to African-America. Abu Jaber's title therefore alerts the reader that this work is defining a new sort of jazz, one which is Arabian. It also implies that Arabs can somehow be understood through jazz, or more broadly, in relation to African-American culture. (Hartman 154).

As Majaj ("Arab-Americans and the Meaning of Race" 332) and Shakir (72) have suggested, jazz can be read as a metaphor for Jemorah's negotiations of identity throughout the novel. This is not merely a struggle between a mainstream American identity and an ill-defined Arab identity, as suggested by Shakir (75). Though this is one struggle in the work, the jazz metaphor is more powerful when read as a metonym for black America. In this sense, African-Americans and the question of race are, thus, necessarily involved in untangling how Jemorah fits into the United States as an American and as an Arab-American. *Arabian Jazz* subtly explores how race informs the ambiguous status this Arab-American family holds in their

[26]. Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* confronts issues which occupy the works of many Arab-American writers of the 1980s and 1990s such as identity politics and the fault lines between being Arab and American (Majaj, "Arab-American Literature" 267-70; and "Arab-American Ethnicity "320-26; Shakir 70 - 71).

upstate New York community, and this is fore-grounded not only through the title but also in a number of specific passages in which the Ramoud's racial identity is linked to African-Americans.

Because she is not identified immediately as "white" or "black," Jemorah's racial identity is explicitly questioned by other characters in the novel. For example, Jemorah's white American cousins connect her Arab heritage and brown skin to something dirty; they say that they want to help her "clean herself" of these "flaws" and enable her to become "white" (156). Portia, as noted earlier, also declares her racist logic about Jemorah's father, Matussem, labeling him as hardly "any better than Negroes" (294). Portia's sympathetic remark to Jemorah for her bad luck at having such a father is not in the least comforting: "Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that color. A damn shame. But I've noticed that in certain lights it's worse than in others" (294). Jemorah's patience with Portia tried, she jeeringly retorts: "My father's mother *was* black…. Yeah, a former slave. She married her master who had twenty six other wives. They were black, brown, and yellow, and some didn't even *have* skin" (295). This mischievous response, which infuriates Portia, finds retaliation in the latter's plea to "scrub the scum off of her" (Jemorah) and make her pure (295). In this incident, the protagonist must state an identity in relation to that of her supervisor who defines herself aggressively as white and who Jemorah later describes as "washed out" (296). As Hartman fittingly puts it: "Rather than negotiate an in-between status, Jemorah here claims a black identity. Jemorah does not try to explain the complexities of who she is as an Arab-American to her racist and ignorant boss, but rather proudly declares her heritage as 'black' " (155).

The metaphor of jazz comes into play here. As Majaj has pointed out, this scene reveals Jemorah's ethnic/cultural indeterminacy and how the novel uses the cultural cross-over and improvisation of jazz music as a metaphor for her alternative to unitary identification ("Arab-Americans and the Meaning of race" 332). If jazz music is understood as not simply a cultural cross-over, but an art form deeply embedded in racial politics and rooted in black-American culture, then it comes as no surprise that Jemorah's father, racialized by his in-laws and the town he lives in, loves jazz music. The jazz metaphor, as the title announces, intimately connects him as an Arab – and Jemorah's "Arab self" as well – to a particular America; namely African-America. Jemorah spends much of the novel coming to terms with her "Negro" or black side. She deals with this conflict through contemplating marriage to her cousin, Nassir, from Jordan, through

her loving devotion to her father, and through her resistance to the "white' norms of her relatives and supervisor.

Matussem Ramoud's identification to Jazz music, thus, comes as no surprise. Racially compartmentalized by a hegemonic culture, he seeks refuge in an art form that affiliates him to historically the most oppressed minority group in the United states; namely African-Americans. He is unable to offer help to either of his daughters as they attempt to navigate the cultural pressures forced on them. Playing the drums becomes a way for Matussem to retreat into the past, to a time when Nora was still alive; the woman who provided a semblance of conformity with the hegemonic culture for him. At one point, he describes how the drums are "on the edges, moving it along so the song didn't just stop and close on itself like a wound" (16). For Matussem, playing Jazz music is a way to keep the wound of his exclusion from mainstream white culture alive; or rather metonymically, to keep the pain of his wife's death from ever healing:

> After their mother's death, they [Jemorah and Melvina] heard him both mornings and evenings, alone or with his band, tapping in the basement, drums humming, tripping and rushing, giddy, loud-voiced. This sound had followed the girls through the years. (2)

Matussem's constant drumming and tapping enable him, and perhaps also Jemorah and Melvina, to remain in that place of cultural loss.

As the novel proceeds, we begin to understand how Matussem's struggle to live and raise his daughters is directly linked to losing the one woman who initiated him into the hegemonic culture. For Matussem, the Palestinian-Jordanian, Nora is not only the woman he falls in love with and marries; she is the key to his entrance into American life: "She taught him how to speak a new language, how to handle his new country. His new lover. Through the years of their courtship she took his hands and fed him words like bread from her lips" (188). Nora gives him the knowledge he needs and the ability to survive in this new culture. When she dies during their visit to Jordan, Matussem seems to lose that ability. His decision to move his daughters from the larger city of Syracuse to Euclid in upstate New York after Nora's death is an attempt to retreat from American culture, and through jazz music, form an alliance with an ethnic minority he feels bound to: African-Americans.

To further alienate himself from mainstream American culture after Nora's death, Matussem links his desire to retreat to Euclid to his almost forgotten memories of Palestine. He compares Euclid to "the country his parents tried to leave as they made lives in Jordan, as they let go of their children's memories and let them grow up as Jordanians" (260). Consciously or unconsciously, Abu-Jaber has made references to Palestine quite subtle. As Pauline Kaldas points out: "Those references [to Palestine] are tucked into the corners of the novel because Palestine reflects another layer of loss in the character's lives, a loss which they are unable to confront" (176).

But Jazz music eventually proves to be a healing force for Matussem. Returning from a brief visit to Jordan where he visits the graves of his infant sisters and a tombstone for Nora which his sisters erected because they "had thought she might need a second bed" (354), he develops a different theory of Jazz music that enables him to move out of the past and into a new life. He realizes that music "tapped into the heart and broke the spirit free, all the colors and the flavors of the life a person had lived. There were things hidden in the core of a person, feelings and memories so deep, that with the right music the spirits of people could be liberated, new life conceived and the dead given rest" (352-53). Instead of being held captive to the past by his music, Matussem is finally able to use it to release his grief, just as African-Americans had done the same with their Jazz music. His memories "needed the bitterness of earth to temper them, and the clarity of the present, of music, to bring out new life" (353).

Understanding jazz as a symbol of and metonym for African-America, and understanding Abu Jaber's novel through the notion of "blackness" opens the text to a range of interpretations. For example, one must consider the postulation that Arab-Americans do not merely occupy an "in-between" or indeterminate position within the United States, but rather identify with African-Americans. By defining her own Arabness as connected to blackness, Jemorah negotiates a different kind of position for herself in a racially layered town in upstate New York. This interpretation proposes new directions for the development of Arab-American identity and for solidarity between groups in the complex and multiple racial and cultural hierarchies of the United States.

Fatima, Matussem's sister, is another case of cultural indeterminacy in *Arabian Jazz* who both collides and coalesces with her Jordanian/Arabic culture. On the one hand, she is a character who seems to find relief in being

attached to her roots and in trying to preserve traditional Arab values, yet it is these same roots and values that have left her inconsolable about the fate of her baby sisters; buried alive in their infancy due to the family's inability to cater for their nourishment and upbringing. She is portrayed as an apparently simple-minded matchmaker whose primary concern is her obsessive endeavours to find suitable Arab husbands for her nieces; Jemorah and Melvina. Abu Jaber, however, has actually constructed a complex character, through whose memory of female experience of the past, is quite ambivalent in her experience of life.

Unlike Matussem's memories of home, being fondled in his mother's arms while her voice poured insults at his sisters around them, Fatima's images of home are of a more afflicting nature. Having witnessed the burial of four newborn sisters alive, at a time when the dispossessed family could not afford to feed more girls, Fatima grows haunted by tormenting memories which she believes she can escape. These memories have been transferred to America, as has the recollection of being detained without cause in an Israeli prison at the age of sixteen. She tells Jemorah and Melvina:

> When we were homeless and dying without food, what of the four starving babies I had to bury still alive …. Babies I buried with my mother watching so this rest could live, so my baby brother [Matussem] can eat, so he can move away and never know about it…. He was born so fortunate! Born a man, not to know the truth. (334)

Fatima seems to find respite by breaking the silence and telling her incredulous American nieces the story of her infant sisters' burial. She seeks closure and peace, neither of which has been offered in diaspora.

However, notwithstanding the circumstances of her past, Fatima has no conception of life outside the patriarchal social order that oppresses women. She conveys ambivalence in ironically antithetical statements such as "the speech" she often delivers to her nieces:

> It's terrible to be a woman in this world. This is first thing to know when the doctor looks at baby's thing and says "It's a girl." But I am telling you there are ways of getting around it…. First and last is that you must have husband to survive on the planet of earth. (116-17)

In all respects, she remains "true to the ways of her mother and mothers before her" (41) and continues to nourish her resisting nieces with the old tradition of female perpetuation of female oppression.

In the novel, through Fatima's unconditional attachment to the values of the homeland, Abu-Jaber critiques one aspect of ethnicity which idealizes the past in an alien culture that stands in opposition to these homegrown values. Unable to reconcile with the past nor adjust to her present, Fatima resorts to a nostalgic invocation of an idealized past of traditional ethnic values presumed to constitute selfhood. Ethnicity in her case, as a means of assertion of self and overcoming ambivalence, is highly problematic. As Salwa Cherif remarks: "Not only does it invoke a static conception of culture and an essentialist perception of one's identity, but it also leaves unquestioned the gendered assumption of the homeland's patriarchal structure" (6).

Fatima's attachment to the traditional values of Arab society does not seem to benefit the personal fulfillment of either the aunt or the young nieces concerning the formation of their composite Arab-American female selves; resulting, consequently, in a gendered ambivalence of collision and coalition. Salwa Cherif is more elaborate:

> With her memory of the past, their aunt [Fatima] serves as the instrument of a gendered return to their [Jemorah and Melvina's] return to their ethnic roots carried out in strongly ambivalent terms. She is tormented by the memory of events which not even a removal thousands of miles away from the site of the trauma succeeds in mitigating, yet she expresses a nostalgic longing for the very oppressive values from which she seeks to escape. Then, she tries to resolve her ambivalence towards the past and to achieve a reconciliation with the ghosts of her memory by imparting to her nieces an ideal picture of home, which she makes up as much to soothe her own inner state of unrest as to assist them in their attempt to come to terms with their duality. (6-7)

For Jemorah and Melvina, Fatima's memory impacts their experience of duality negatively. The novel ends with a prevailing attitude of unresolved ambivalence, leading to cultural indeterminacy displayed by the two young female protagonists' ambiguous motivation at the end of the novel. Melvina is shown at the backroom of a local bar injecting her drug addicted friend, Larry and bringing relief and destruction to his silent pleas. The peculiar act, regularly performed, by the dedicated life-saving nurse, as Melvina is known to be at the hospital where she works, is suggestive of her

ambivalence towards her own life experiences, encountered again and again with Larry's sway between life and death as "his veils would lift … like the layers of death she had seen in her life" (286). Although Melvina does not take any drugs herself, she endorses the opposite roles of healer and killer. After the injection, Larry voices her ambivalence towards the duality of her life experience when he welcomes her to the "Room of the Absolute Present Tense" (268), unrealistically removed from time and space. Unresolved ambivalence is similarly revealed at the end of the novel by Jemorah. On the one hand, she is willing to marry her cousin, Nassir and move back to Jordan because, as she laments, she is unable to "fit in" (328), and on the other hand, she unexpectedly changes her mind and decides to resume her education in the United States in an attempt to overcome the "racist hate" (362) of the hegemonic culture.

The release from the enclosure of cultural collisions with a racist hegemonic culture and coalitions with other minority cultures is made apparent in the last chapter of the novel. Matussem plays his drums as he did at the beginning, but instead of the Jazz music holding him inside his grief for his wife, it allows him to move forward: "She came to him again, dancing like the original mystery of her language, its jinni's tongue. Her image turned, bent to him, the world in her gesture, the mystery of her love, releasing him" (374). Like Matussem, Jemorah allows herself to feel the loss of her mother so it can move her forward, realizing that "the space was inside her now, she could feel it, a thing to be valued, the edges of her loss" (321). Jemorah's memories now enable her to love someone else: "In a gesture that she recognized as her mother's, she brushed the hair from his [Ricky's] eyes" (373). Melvina is now able to express emotion: "Melvie put her arms around Jem's waist and laid her face against her neck" (370); a gesture that would have been impossible for the Melvina we met at the beginning of the novel. In the end, the postulation that Arab-American literature mourns the loss of Arab culture and expresses nostalgia for that culture is reversed by *Arabian Jazz* in that it probes the loss of America. Through the cultural indeterminacy of the novel's characters, it is not the connection to Arab culture that they must strive for, but rather the connection to American culture that they must retrieve.

IV

Abu-Jaber's second published novel, *Crescent* (2003), highlights the discrepancies among the novel's American characters and conveys some distinguishing characteristics that exist within other ethnic groups (represented, for example, by the book's Latino characters) to reveal how the novel, like *Arabian Jazz*, constructs inter-ethnic and inter-cultural bridges among what is traditionally regarded as separate ethnic enclaves; hence the cultural indeterminacy. Such bridges are represented through the specific character of the protagonist Sirine on the one hand, and the Middle Eastern food she cooks on the other. It is important to note, here, that contemporary Arab-American writers such as Abu-Jaber articulate stories about individual and group identities, locating strategies by which the ethnic boundary becomes a space of communication for different minority groups; a space that eventually leads to the transformation of ethnic relations. However, the process of making the borders among various ethnic enclaves more fluid should not lead to a trusting form of multiculturalism. "The recognition of commonality," Anzaldua reminds us, occurs today "within the context of difference" ("(Un)natural Bridges" 2). Recognizing the differences among and within minority groups becomes an essential part of Abu-Jaber's delineation of the ties that unite them within *Crescent's* cultural and ethnic boundaries. It is, consequently, necessary for Abu-Jaber to expose the discrepancies at play within Arab-Americans as an ethnic group in order to form relationships with other minorities.[27]

---

[27]. The concept that Arab-American women writers seek to introduce discrepancies through their stories is what Geertz identifies in another context as the "difference between a difference and a dichotomy. The first is a comparison and it relates; the second is a severance and it isolates" (28). Arab-American women are not quite the same as Arab women or the same as American women, nor are they quite the "other;" they stand in that undetermined threshold where they constantly drift in and out. The Arab-American woman is "this inappropriate 'Other' or 'same' who moves about with at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at" (Minh-Ha 71). It is even more important to note that differences do not only exist between Arab-American women and their "other" Arab or American women, but they also exist within the single Arab-American identity. Within every "I" there is an "other" and within every "other" there is an "I."

The indeterminate relationship of Arab-Americans towards their own minority group on the one hand, and towards the hegemonic culture on the other, is best represented by Sirine, the Arab-American Chef in *Crescent*. Sirine lives the life of an independent American woman, and yet she cannot overlook the bond she feels towards her Iraqi heritage. When she meets an Arab woman called Rana, she initially notices how strange this woman looks with her black veil. Yet gradually, Sirine realizes that Rana is not strange, but only different. This relationship between the two women reflects the Arab-American women's hyphenated identity with all its multiplicity and complexity. Rana is Sirine's "other self;" she is "other than [herself]." Indeed, Rana is Sirine's "other." She is the "typical," veiled, dark-featured woman who has been forced into marriage to a dominant old, rich man. However, like Sirine, Rana is in actuality an independent woman who has managed to escape from the dominance of her husband, and currently enjoys the freedom of living on her own. In this respect, Rana is Sirine's "other" or "same" who embodies a stance of affirming "I am like you" while "persisting in my difference" (*Crescent* 419). Similarly, Sirine has traces of Rana's identity. Sirine is an independent woman, but like traditional housewives, she is confined to the kitchen. Ingredients of identity that label Rana as an Arab and Sirine as an American seem fluid and inconsistent.[28] It is impossible to categorize Sirine as purely American simply because she was born and has always lived in the United States or because she looks and acts like an American. Similarly, it is unlikely to label her an Iraqi because her father was originally from Iraq or because she has been raised by her Iraqi uncle, or again because she is a chef at a Middle Eastern Café.

Likewise, It is difficult to call Rana an Arab because she has dark features or because she is wearing the veil; given that escaping from her husband and coming to live in the United Sates on her own is anything but "Arab" within Arab or Muslim "traditions." It is, thus, possible to postulate that Rana and Sirine are both simultaneously Arab and American. Sirine and Rana are both similar and different from each other. Thus, as Minh-Ha remarks: "Differences do not exist only between outsider and insider – two

[28]. Observe Edward Said’s comment: “No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind.… Just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities” (336).

entities. They are also at work within the outsider herself or the insider herself – a single entity" (76).

Though narrating her own story, Sirine points to the in-betweeness and doubleness of Arab-Americans who, through their position between two cultures, challenge dominant frameworks that define Arabs as a monolithically oppressed group. Sirine, with her blond hair and green eyes, looks more American than Iraqi. But she feels to have inherited her father's character. She wonders if she is not in reality Iraqi because of her looks and Hanif's (her Iraqi exiled lover) insistence that she is *too* American; or whether she better belongs to the Middle East where flavours, scents, and stories seem to be pulling her.[29] Sirine's character points to a common experience of some Arab-Americans endeavouring "to leap the gulch between two worlds, each with its claim" whilst it is "impossible for us to choose one over the other" (Kahf 20). Majaj also aptly remarks:

> Although I spent years struggling to define my personal politics of location, I remained situated somewhere between Arab and American cultures – never quite rooted in either, always constrained by both. My

---

[29]. Abu Jaber has always been interested in the notion of “race” and how it is based on appearance. In an interview, elaborating on this point, Abu Jaber remarks: “Race is based on appearance. And appearance is strenuous at best. I happened to come out looking like this. My sisters look much more traditionally Arab… but I am actually the only one among my sisters to speak Arabic. Race has nothing to do with who we are and it’s not a reality. It’s a complete social construction and we cling to it … as some kind of signifier and it basically signifies nothing” (Shalal-Esa 16).

[30]. Observe Abu-Jaber's recounting of the circumstances which brought to her the idea of the novel and its location:

> I was teaching a class in Middle Eastern culture at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) as a guest lecturer, in 1995. The class was filled with students who were all either Arab or Iranian-Americans and they were all very interested in identity work, in finding out about their cultures or their parents. Almost none of them could speak Arabic or Farsi. They didn't know, they were just eager to learn. It was uplifting. I was energized, and that's when I just started writing the novel…. There really is this little Lebanese café in the heart of the section of town they called the Tarantula. I remember thinking – How interesting, it's Lebanese, but it's an Iranian part of town. I started thinking about how cafés created their own cultural environment, their own micro cultures. (17)

> sense of liminality grew as I became more aware of the rigid nature of definitions; Arab culture simultaneously claimed and excluded me, while the American identity I longed for retreated from my grasp.("Boundaries" 67)

The interaction among *Crescent's* ethnic characters discloses the tension of the plot, emphasizing the particular intricacies of ethnic identity politics in the novel. The main character, Iraqi-American Sirine, lives with her uncle and works as a chef in a Middle Eastern café fittingly located in Teheranangeles and owned by a Lebanese woman, Um Nadia, who sympathizes with the loneliness of the immigrants.[30] In the course of the novel, Sirine falls in love with the Iraqi exile Hanif El-Eyad (also referred to as Han), a professor of Linguistics in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at an unspecified nearby university. The book revolves around their fervent love affair and all the attendant negotiations of American and Arab identity and culture that their relationship stimulates, with the ethnic characters around them contributing to such negotiations. Arab students, teachers, exiles, and immigrants flock to the café, which becomes for them a hub; a symbol of a recreated home in the midst of a foreign and alienating culture. Actually, the café serves as a central locus of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural contacts between Arabs, Arab-Americans, Latinos, blacks, and white-Americans.

Representing such groups are café regulars like "Jenoob, Gharb, and Schmaal – engineering students from Egypt; Shark, a math student from Kuwait; Lon Hayden, the chair of Near Eastern Studies; Morris who owns the news-stand; Raphael-from-New-jersey; Jay, Ron and Troy from Kappa Something Something fraternity house; Odah, the Turkish butcher, and his many sons," as well as two American policemen who developed an addiction to the Bedouin soup operas and the fava bean dip (20). Such grouping not only transcends any simplistic divisions based on Arab/non-Arab binaries, but is also complicated by encompassing, with the Arab/Arab-American group for instance, members from a wide selection of Arab (and other Middle Eastern) backgrounds. In this respect, the novel comes to directly and indirectly underscore some of the differences that these backgrounds entail.

For example, although most of the Arab café customers remain in the novel's background and play hardly any active role in the plot, the careful delineation of their distinct national differences negates simplistic representations of Arab identity. Observe Fadda-Conrey's elaboration:

> The names of the Arab students from Egypt and Kuwait - Schmaal, Jenoob, Shark, and Gharb, which in Arabic mean North, South, East, and West, respectively – signify distinct geographical entities that can be interpreted as individualized characteristics challenging the reductive attributes the term Arab (and non-Arab) characters hail from diverse backgrounds, they nevertheless manage to negotiate the barriers that their differences might produce by partaking in the kitschy Arab culture provided at the café in the medley of "news from Qatar …,endless Egyptian movies, Bedouin soup operas in Arabic, and American soup operas with Arabic subtitles" (20). (195)

Moreover, in her characterization of people sharing the same national background, such as Iraqis, Abu Jaber highlights some distinguishing factors: "Even though both Hanif and Sirine's uncles are Iraqis living in the U.S., their status differs since the former was coerced to leave Iraq, fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime, while the latter emigrated as a young man to the U.S. with his brother (Sirine's father) in pursuit of adventures and new experiences" (Fadda-Conrey 195). In addition to delineating some distinguishing factors among Arab/Arab-Americans, Abu-Jaber extends her complex portrayal of *Crescent's* ethnic boundary to include important distinctions amongst Latinos. Sirine is assisted in the kitchen by two Latino characters: Victor Hernandez from Mexico, and Cristobal from El-Salvador. Although the characters of Victor and Cristobal might seem hazy and peripheral, serving mostly to diversify *Crescent's* ethnic and cultural representations, they emerge in several instances in the novel as individualized representatives of the variety of the Latino experience in the United States; representatives that, nevertheless, echo feelings of displacement which is experienced by the novel's Arab and Arab-American characters. Victor confides in Sirine: "I was born here (the United States) and all, but sometimes I wish I could just go off to someplace like Mexico" (286). Cristobal, on the other hand, is a refugee who had escaped from El-Salvador after the "*guardia*" had "firebombed his whole family" (287). Although victor is nostalgic for an abandoned homeland, yet his personal and national histories diverge from those of Cristobal's, confirming the multiplicity of Latino identity. Also, when Hanif suddenly returns to Iraq, where he is in danger of being eliminated by Saddam Hussein's men, Sirine mentally connects Cristobal to Hanif, thus blurring the cultural and ethnic distinctions between them; seeing the former as being privy to the latter's fate by virtue of their shared experience of exile and persecution: "What will happen to Han now? What will they do to him?" Sirine wonders; "it seems Cristobal somehow knows the answer to that." (305). Although Cristobal

actually lacks the knowledge about Hanif's future, yet the depiction of such connections between the two political exiles, one from El-Salvador and the other from Iraq, "changes the internal makeup of the ethnic borderland by bridging boundaries between different ethnicities residing within it" (Fadda-Conrey 196).

The character of Sirine and the Middle Eastern food which she cooks become important bridges in the novel. From her central position in the kitchen, which opens out to the rest of the café, Sirine serves as a basic connecting link, joining together the different communities and individuals of *Crescent's* ethnic framework. Some of the Arab regulars often confide to her, "tell[ing] her how painful it is to be an immigrant" (19), and she becomes a bridge between lost or abandoned cultures on the one hand (in this case the Arab world), and adopted cultures on the other (signified by America), as well as between different ethnic groups coexisting within the same limbo of displacement.

Although Sirine stimulates ties between the different Arab and non-Arab ethnic groups, she still suffers from the constricting effects formed by the persistence on the part of mainstream culture to categorize ethnic subjects into clearly outlined and transparent identities. With an Iraqi father and an American mother, she possesses a hybridity that becomes a mark of contradiction for Americans on the one hand, and Arabs and Arab-Americans on the other. Looking at herself in the mirror, she self-criticizes herself in a way reminiscent of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness," by which she assesses her identity through the racial perceptions handed to her by a mainstream white culture:

> All she can see is white. . . . She is so white. Entirely her mother. That's all anyone can see: when people ask her nationality they react with astonishment when she says she's half-Arab. I never would have thought *that,* they say, laughing. You sure don't look it. (205)

Skin colour, then, becomes a significant, but nevertheless flawed racial and ethnic marker, revealed in the underlying assumption ("You sure don't look it") that denotes "darkness" as a designation of Arab identity and "whiteness" as a mark of mainstream American identity.

Abu-Jaber further complicates the portrayal of Arab/Arab-American ethnic and cultural identity by showing how certain reductive stereotypes are not only applied by a dominant white majority, but can also be simulated

by ethnic groups themselves, who can turn a discriminatory eye on Arabs occupying the same ethnic space. Khoorosh, "the Persian owner of the Victory Market up the street . . . stood open-mouthed when he saw white-blond Sirine [for the first time], then finally blurted out, 'Well, look at what Iraq has managed to produce!'" (20). Switching from the American who "react[s] with astonishment" to the fact that she is half-Iraqi to Khoorosh, who marvels at Sirine's whiteness, Abu-Jaber reveals the limitations of both perspectives. In this way, she not only uses Sirine's character as an interethnic bridge, but also portrays a complexity through this character that is essential to a more intricate understanding of ethnic identities, particularly the Arab-American one. Consequently, Abu-Jaber renders fluid the otherwise rigidly constructed demarcation lines that generate ethnic enclaves, which separate one minority from another and turn members of the same minority group against each other.

Sirine's "inbetweenness" pushes her into a constant state of border-crossing. With her cultural, ethnic, and religious indeterminacy, Sirine becomes an incarnation of what Anzaldua denotes in her preface to *This Bridge We Call Home* as the "nepantlera," existing at the frontier, bridging the gulf between realities, perspectives, ethnic communities, and racial categorizations. Anzaldua articulates the importance of such a force, stating: "I associate nepantlera with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another" ("(Un)natural Bridges" 1). Sirine represents such trans-formational spaces and acts as a connecting bridge in the novel. Her characterization in *Crescent* engenders a form of questioning that transcends one viewpoint, thus becoming Anzaldua's "tierra entre medio," ("(Un)natural Bridges" 2) adopting multiple worlds and easing the transition between them. The novel's vociferous Arab poet tells Sirine: "Cooking and tasting is a metaphor for seeing. Your cooking reveals America to us non-Americans. And vice versa" (197). For Hanif, too, Sirine embodies "the place I want to be ..., the opposite of exile" (140). Such border-crossings are not merely unilateral, however, since Sirine herself becomes submerged by Hanif in a world that she had thought was lost: the world of her father's abandoned and romanticized Iraq, and a religion unfamiliar to her, repre-sented by Hanif's reciting the call to prayer and giving Sirine his mother's veil.

In addition to the complex portrayal of Sirine's Arab-American identity and her bridging role of "nepantlera," food is another vital medium

that connects the novel's different ethnicities while highlighting the internal distinctions that exist within and between them. Abu-Jaber has explicitly voiced the importance of food as a connecting metaphor for the characters in *Crescent*:

> Food is such a great human connector, it's so intimate. And Middle Eastern food, when it's done well, is amazing. I thought … let the food be a metaphor for their experience. And I want people to relate to it through the beauty and the passion of the senses, the sensory joy of the novel and the beauty of Arabic cooking…. And that's why food has been such an important metaphor. To me, that's one of the most immediate and powerful ways of creating the metaphor of the hearth and a gathering place, a place where the collective forms. (Shalal-Esa 21)

In fact, it is specifically through the connective medium of food that Sirine can enact her role as a bridge across the various ethnic communities. Carol Bardenstein points out the multilayered relationship that often exists between collective identities and food, stating: "At given historical moments, resulting configurations of collective affiliation or culinary practice are likely to contain multiple layers, a range of internal inconsistencies or contradictions, and overlapping, interpenetrating elements" (361). The type of communal participation associated with food production and consumption, when applied to *Crescent*, mirrors the "multiple layers . . . [and] range of internal inconsistencies or contradictions" (361) inherent in the characters' cultural and ethnic makeup, even when they belong to the same Arab/Arab-American minority group. Sirine's cooking and the act of participating in its consumption, while drawing the various characters together, simultaneously underscores their varied cultural, and ethnic identities. For example, the food prepared by Sirine, through bringing the Arab/Arab-American students and teachers closer to a home that they have willingly or unwillingly forfeited, brings into focus the variety in the locales and definitions of such homes, thus contributing to a more layered portrayal of Arab/Arab American identity.

Such a type of portrayal is best exemplified by what Sirine dubs her "Arabic Thanksgiving" (192), a key event in the novel during which a group of the cafe's regulars, in addition to Um-Nadia, her daughter Mireille, Victor, Cristobal, Hanif, Sirine, and her uncle assemble at the house of Sirine's uncle for Thanksgiving dinner. This event highlights the distinctions inherent within and between different Arab societies and the contradictions that originate from transferring these traditions into the United States. The Egyptian Gharb detects one such difference in that men and women sitting

together at the dinner table does not compare with his background, which dictates that men and women eat separately. This statement is met with reactions that mirror the various and countless cultural norms between various Arab countries. Um-Nadia, for instance, counters Gharb's statement by saying, "In Beirut, it's always boy-girl, et cetera, et cetera. Much more sophisticated," thus revealing her own biases about the "progressive" norms of her country. The Iraqis in the group explain how, in their villages, "the big parties always separated men and women, but for just regular meals the family and friends always ate together" (194).

Although Sirine's cooking creates memories and instances that transport many of the novel's Arab/Arab-American characters to their native homelands and customs, for Sirine, her Middle Eastern food transports her to the lost world of her parents, American Red Cross volunteers who had died in Africa. In other words, the food that she cooks is not so much a channel to a lost homeland as much as a physical imitation of the culture that her Iraqi father tried to retrieve by cooking the food of his native land and passing on his culinary knowledge to his American wife. In this way, Sirine's longing for and remembrance of a lost Iraq replicate those of her deceased father, in a manner that her food is an attempt to overcome a mediated, rather than a direct, loss of a homeland. Returning to Middle Eastern cooking after trying her hand at various other cuisines, including French, Italian, and Californian, Sirine "felt as if she were returning to her parents' tiny kitchen and her earliest memories" (19).

Sirine's preparation of lentils fried with rice and onions, roasted lamb, baba ghannuj, rice and pine nuts, fava bean dip, laban sauce and eggplant, however, is not adequate to enact what Shirley Geok-lin Lim describes as a "remembered past" (218). In an autobiographical piece, Lim describes the process of craving, during and after her pregnancy, specific types of traditional Nonya food from her native Malaysia. Lim comes to the realization that such cravings transcend food to encompass a yearning for the female community that in her memory was tied to motherhood (209-16). In the same way, Sirine's reconstruction of her past and the memory of her parents, remain incomplete without the participation of a community in the consumption as well as production of the notable dishes.

In addition to the café's owner Um-Nadia and her daughter Mireille, Sirine is assisted in the kitchen by other displaced ethnic minorities such as Victor and Cristobal, who altogether serve to exemplify such a community. These characters' presence in the café reinforces a sense of fluidity between

one minority group and another, with food acting as a bridge between the two ethnicities. Speaking about Sirine's cooking, Victor says: "Chef isn't an American cook…. Not like the way Americans do food—just dumping salt into the pot. All the flavors go in the same direction. Chef cooks like we do. In Mexico, we put cinnamon in with the chocolate and pepper in the sweet-cakes, so things pull apart, you know, make it bigger" (197). This metaphor of "enlarging" the taste of food can be extended to the interconnections among diverse ethnic characters. Such intermingling results in the transformation of ethnic relations, so that instead of existing as closed enclaves, minority groups can relate to each other, thus transforming and widening the ethnic framework.

While connecting different ethnicities, the preparation of food in *Crescent* also serves as an important distinguishing tool between one national and ethnic affiliation and another:

> The "pull[ing] apart" of ingredients in cooking enriches the result by bringing out the individual taste of each ingredient. In a similar manner, while widening the ethnic borderland blurs the border limits between one ethnic group and another (as well as between the majority and the different ethnic minorities) and facilitates border-crossings, the particular attributes of each group come more into focus as a result of the intermingling of what can be referred to as "ethnic ingredients." (Fada-Conrey 201)

The shifts between Middle Eastern and American cooking, such as using "butter instead of olive oil; potatoes instead of rice; beef instead of lamb" (68), become more subtle when distinguishing the various culinary degrees within the same Arab-American ethnic framework, even within the same national framework such as Lebanese or Iraqi. For instance, despite being a chef who masters the Middle Eastern recipes that she had grown up with and had learnt from her Iraqi father, Sirine is still prompted by her relationship with Hanif to "look ... up Iraqi dishes, trying to find the childhood foods that she'd heard Han speak of, the sefeehas—savory pies stuffed with meat and spinach—and round mensaf trays piled with lamb and rice and yogurt sauce with onions" (191). Such a quest on her part underscores, through food, the discrepancy in the experience and personal background of the Arab-American, and specifically, the hyphenated Iraqi, whether he/she is an exile, first or second-generation immigrant, or of mixed heritage.

Food, while determining difference, also becomes a connective bridge that transcends the limitations that this difference might create. "Food," for Sirine and Hanif, "is their private language. . . . The[ir] words flow into eating" and becomes a major tool for communication (266). Thus, the food motif in *Crescent* is knotted with the various relationships between many of the novel's characters and their complex identities. Also, the blending of culinary cultures mirrors the merging of cultures in this novel. When working with Sirine as a chef, for example, Victor brings Sirine some chili peppers, which she uses "puréed into the baba ghannuj and marinades for the kabobs" (265). Such blending of different culinary ingredients results in a new and spicy version of Sirine's Middle Eastern food. A parallel instance of cross-cultural "merging" occurs with the marriage of the Mexican Victor and the Lebanese Mireille towards the end of the novel; an event that foreshadows the reunion of Hanif and Sirine. The combination of inter-ethnic ingredients and identities ultimately sets the stage for new identities to emerge. Such hybrid results stimulate new grounds for communication among diverse minorities, and also serve to draw attention to the unique internal characteristics that prevent Arab-Americans, as well as other ethnicities like Latinos, from being fitted together into an indistinguishable whole.

Instead of setting different ethnic characters against each other by marking what keeps them apart as individuals and communities, *Crescent* resists the "us versus them binary" that might characterize some minority cultures' preconceptions of each other. The intersection of ethnic concerns becomes a positive realm from which ethnic communities can defy the binary oppositions that exist between them, and work together to break down stereotypes that transform ethnic groups into mysterious suspects. Speaking about Arabs and Arab-Americans, the poet Aziz states in *Crescent*: "They [meaning Americans] think we're all terrorists anyway," to which Victor replies, "Who's 'they'? I don't think that." Withdrawing the differences between Arab-Americans and Latinos, Aziz vividly portrays the indiscriminate prejudice against not only Arab-Americans, but most ethnic groups, when he continues, "You? . . . If you and I were out shopping at the mall do you think any of the white guys there could tell the difference between us? They'd think you were one of my terrorist buddies" (197).

Crescent, thus, raises significant queries concerning the dominant ethnic and cultural uncertainties that often engulf people of colour in the United States. This novel, moreover, creates a physical and psychological

ethnic perimeter in which various ethnic communities coexist and communicate with the "other." The basis of such acts of inter-ethnic, indeterminate bridging, however, encourages a search for cohesion which is anti-essentialist, since it is engaged in an understanding of the inherent differences within and amongst ethnic communities. Only through such strategies can the ethnic boundary transcend exclusionary limitations and become a transformative location extending beyond what Castillo describes as "the refused other" (187).

V

The increase in number of Arab-American writers must soon be taken seriously as both a permanent ethnic group and a valuable contributor to American literature as a whole. By interacting with the American landscape, Arab-American fiction is inscribing that landscape into thematic paradigms; thus countering the commonplaces of the dominant culture by conjuring Arabism as a strategic trope and a source of creative energy. Increasingly, the experience of American writers of Arab background is the product of Arab culture, American culture and a fine blend concocted when these two cultures are summoned together.

Consequently, in the course of both *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*, Diana Abu-Jaber voices profound and poignant statements concerning the racial and cultural position of Arab-Americans in the United States and their shared, positive links to other ethnic minorities. "Whiteness" is rejected as an option, and the "in-between" status of Arab-Americans is explored most positively in relation to the various minority groups. Both texts do not deny that the racialization of Arab-Americans and other minorities in the United States is significantly a different process and that the position and roles of these groups are distinct. Yet, they celebrate the ability of Arab-Americans to utilize a strategy of identity building that brings them into line with other ethnic minorities as a substitute to the failure to carve out a space within the dominant white community. Abu-Jaber articulates stories about individual and group identities, locating strategies by which the ethnic/cultural boundary becomes a space of communication for different minority groups; a space that eventually leads to the transformation of ethnic relations. These texts, thereby, help to formulate an Arab-American identity that is deeply embedded within other minority cultures; recreating an indeterminacy rooted in the collision with mainstream American culture, and the consequent coalitions across ethnic boundaries. The ultimate result is a

release from the enclosure of cultural collisions with this racist hegemonic culture and a more positive coalition with other minority cultures. Such postulations on the part of Diana Abu-Jaber are a potent contribution to the ongoing discourse on the ethnic/cultural status of Arab-Americans.

Works Cited

Abdelrazek, Amal. "Arab-American Women Writers and the Resisting, Healing, and Connecting Power of Their Storytelling." *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 5 (Spring 2005): 140-157.

Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Arabian Jazz*. New York and London. W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.

Abu-Jaber, Diana. *Crescent*. New York and London. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

Aidi, Hisham. "Jihadis in the Hood: Race, Urban Islam and the War on Terror." *Middle East Report*, Vol. 224 (2002): 36 - 43.

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. "Let Us Be Moors: Islam, Race and Connected Histories." *Middle East Report*, Vol. 229 (2003): 42-53.

------------------------. Preface. *Borderlands. La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999: 19- 20.

------------------------. and Ana Louise Keating, eds. *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. New York : Routledge, 2002.

------------------------. "(Un) natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces." Preface. *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002: 1-5.

Bardenstein, Carol. "Transmissions Interrupted: Reconfiguring Food, Memory, and Gender in the Cookbook-Memoirs of Middle Eastern Exiles." *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2002): 353- 87.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York : Routledge, 1994.

Castillo, Debra A. "Border Theory and the Canon." *Post-Colonial Literature: Expanding the Canon*. Ed. Deborah L. Madsen. London: Pluto, 1999: 180-205.

Cherif, Salwa Essayah. "Arab-American Literature: Gendered Memory in Abinader and Abu-Jaber." *MELUS*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (December 22, 2003): 1- 14.

Dabis, Cherien. "Arab and a Half." *MIZNA*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2001): n. pag.

Daoud, Mojahid. "Growing Up Arab in America." *Arab-Americans: Continuity and Change*. Ed. Baha Abu-Laban and Michel Suleiman. Massachusetts: The Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989: 173-79.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York UP, 2001.

DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996 (rpt. 1903).

Evans, Alice. "Half and Half: A Profile of Diana Abu-Jaber." *Poets and Writers Magazine*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1996): 38- 49.

Fadda-Conrey, Carol. "Arab-American Literature in the Ethnic Borderland: Cultural Intersections in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*." *MELUS*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2006): 187 - 205.

Geertz, Clifford. *After the Fact: Two Centuries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Gosh, Amitav. *In an Antique Land*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Gualtieri, Sarah. "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2001): 29-58.

------------------------. "Strange Fruit: Syrian Racialization in the Jim Crow South." Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting. Washington, DC. 24 Nov. 2002.

Haney-Lopez, Ian F. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: New York UP, 1996.

Hartman, Michelle. "'this sweet/sweet music': Jazz, Sam Cooke, and Reading Arab- American Literary Identities." *MELUS*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2006): 145-165.

Hassan, Salah D. "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State." *Middle East Report*: 224 (2002): 16-21.

Jacobson, Mathew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1998.

Johnson, David E., and Scott Michaelson. "Border Secrets: An Introduction." *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. Ed. Scott Michaelson and David E. Johnson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997: 1-39.

Kadi, Joanna. Introduction. *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*. Ed. Joanna Kadi. Boston: South End Press, 1994: xiii-xx.

Kahf, Mohja. *E-mails from Scheherazade*. "Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003.

Kaldas, Pauline. "Beyond Stereotypes: Representational Dilemmas in *Arabian Jazz*." *MELUS*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2006): 167 - 185.

Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. "Memory and the New-Born: The Maternal Imagination in Diaspora." *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldua, and AnaLouise Keating. (New York: Routledge, 2002) 208-23.

Majaj, Lisa Suhair. "Arab-American and the Meaning of Race." *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature*. Ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000: 320-37.

-----------------------. "Arab-American Ethnicity: Locations, Coalitions, and Cultural Negotiations." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future.* Ed. Michael W. Suleiman. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999: 320-36.

-----------------------. "Arab-American Literature and the Politics of Memory." *Memory and Cultural Politics*. Ed. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, and Robert E. Hogan. Boston : Northeastern University Press, 1996: 266-90.

------------------------. "Boundaries: Arab/American." *Food For Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*. Ed. Joanna Kadi. Boston: South End Press, 1994: 65-86.

------------------------. "New Directions: Arab-American Writing at Century's End." *Post-Gibran: Anthology of Arab-American Writing*. Ed. Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999: 70-79.

------------------------. "The Hyphenated Author: Emerging genre of 'Arab-American Literature' Poses Questions of Ethnicity and Art." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Ed. Michael W. Suleiman. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999: 337-339.

Massad, Joseph. "Palestinians and the Limits of Racialized Discourse." *Social Text*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1993): 94-114.

Minh-H, Trinh T. "Not You / Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." *Dangerous Liaisons*. Eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997: 70- 79.

Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldua, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table P, 1981.

Morsy, Soheir. "Beyond the Honorary 'White' Classification of Egyptians: Societal Identity in Historical Context." *Race*. Ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994: 175-98.

Naber, Nadine. "Arab-American In/Visibility." *AAUG Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1998): 1- 16.

Naff, Alixa. *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Up, 1985.

Roediger, David R. *Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002.

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994.

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

Salaita, Steven. “Sand Niggers, Small Shops, and Uncle Sam: Cultural Negotiation in the Fiction of Joseph Geha and Diana Abu-Jaber - Critical Essay.” *Criticism*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Fall 2001): 423 - 444.

-----------------------. “Split Vision: Arab-American Literary Criticism.” *Al Jadid*, Vol. 6, No. 32 (2000): 14-17.

Saliba, Therese. "Resisting Invisibility: Arab-Americans in Academia and Activism." *Arabs in America. Building a New Future*. Ed. Michael W. Suleiman. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999: 304-19.

Samhan, Helen Hatab. “Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab-American Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Ed. Michael W. Suleiman. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999: 304 - 19.

Shakir, Evelyn. “Coming of Age: Arab-American Literature.” *Ethnic Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1993-1994): 64-80.

Shalal-Esa, Andrea. “Interview with Diana Abu-Jaber.” *Al-Jadid*. Vol. 8, No. 39 (Spring 2002): 14- 23.

Shohat, Ella. “Staging the Quincentenary: The Middle East and America.” *Third Text* (Winter 1992-93): 96-99.

Wade, Corey. “Memoirs of a White Arab-American.” *Mizna*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2001): n. pag.

Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal Secrets*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

West, Stan. "An Afro-centric Look at the Arab Community." *Mizna*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2000): 20-22.