Chapter I
Introduction

Arab-American Discourses: A Trajectory

This thesis is to explore three main Arab writers who are considered the compartment of the 'Arab-American School'—Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy. In particular, it explores the ways in which, through traveling beyond their native lands and reading widely in Western literature, they were deeply influenced by the English Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge) and American Transcendentalists like Whitman and Emerson. Naimy had direct connections with the great Russian writers, Tolstoy and Turgenev. All the three selected writers aspire to the freedom to feel and to write and to travel, outwardly and inwardly.

They break out of the formal restrictions of Arab literature, which they saw as backward, hidebound and incapable of expressing real feeling. They are delighted by the intellectual freedom they find in the West and, a hundred years from the European Romantic period, do a sort of crash course through Enlightenment to Romanticism, and into the twentieth century, an age of greater realism and interrogation.

Each writer has his own particular preoccupations and primary inspirers, but there are common strands which follow from this experience of freedom. They revere Nature (for Rihani, the wildness of nature), finding an identity between their experience of Nature, human nature, and the transcendent. (This takes from intuition and experience rather than a developed theology.)
In common with some of the English Romantics, they long for justice and the freedom of greater equality between human beings in society. Gibran makes a special compassionate focus in his stories on the position of women.

They are vehemently anti-clerical and condemn the stranglehold of institutional religion on ideas and feelings and social policies, but at the same time they acknowledge indeed, live and write from the spiritual dimension of human nature and the mysteries of aesthetic and spiritual experience. Humanity is the pinnacle of creation and shares the transcendence of the divine.

The literature of the U.S. represents a multicultural, multiethnic and multiracial profile from pre-colonial days to the present. The American cultural heritage has been enriched through plurality. The different communities that arose from different cultural backgrounds have been able to assert themselves through one of the fastest ways of recognition: ethnic literature. Literature has been able to articulate, formulate, naturalize and transform these communities from immigrant into indigenous and from diverse nationalities into Americans. Through this literature, a history was constructed for these multiethnic groups; a history that gave them a sense of nationality and a make-believe notion of an umbilical nexus with the land.

The ideology behind the concept of the melting pot was a euphemism for Americanization. When it came to Americanization, the intent was focused not on preserving and celebrating ethnic heritage but rather on how American can one become i.e., assimilating the American thoughts and internalizing the American practices, etc.
The melting pot concept was put forth in a fashion that stressed the important goals and the supposedly true nature of American society: freedom, equality and democracy for all.

However, the significance of this concept dates backs to the early 18th century when Crévecoeur, an emigrant French aristocrat who turned farmer, wrote:

He is an American, who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds... Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men whose labors and posterity will one day cause great change in the world.(crévecoeur p.34)

Nevertheless, this term would not actually have taken on much significance if it were not for literature. It became popular when Israel Zangwill, a Russian Jewish immigrant to the United States, used it in his play The Melting Pot in 1908. In this play he wanted to celebrate the American dream and the assimilation of the ethnicities in America; the main character in the play David Quixano says:

America is the God’s crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming. Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty groups, with your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for there are the fires of God you’ve come to—there the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the crucible with you all God is making the American.(p.18)

As for the concept of assimilation, which was also referred to in Zangwill’s play The Melting Pot, it proposes the idea that the ethnic groups in a heterogeneous society will come together to bring about a new social and cultural experience. This process was defined by the sociologist Robert E. Park as following:
Assimilation is a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.(P.76)

The process of assimilation depended on several factors which have to be observed by the newcomers in order for them to assimilate. First they have to adapt to the immediate surrounding environment of the host culture, then they have to become familiar with the native language and interact more with indigenous people. After that, the immigrants have to understand and appreciate the new cultural values that are offered to them by the host country (Horak 124).

However, these concepts of assimilation and melting pot were far from what was taking place in the real world, i.e. these concepts hold the newcomers solely responsible for integration and becoming part of the host country’s social fabric.

In addition to that, these concepts appear to be advocating a promised Utopia for the immigrants if they play by the rules, while the truth is they were mere fictitious arbitrary creations of sociologists and politicians who failed to understand the depth of the immigrants’ problem that was not only experienced by one ethnicity but rather by the majority. For as Said foregrounds, it is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality. This notion or pretence of coexistence, especially in a society of multiethnicity and tolerance or democracy, finds itself, whether intentionally or not, harboring contrapuntal elements: assimilation and exclusion, reconciliation and resistance, integration and segregation, compromise and confrontation and so on; consequently, causing the
centripetal-centrifugal trajectories to destabilize and undermine the claims of compromise and rapprochement. The result is “a group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and its immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call “the land of the barbarians” (Said 54). A good example of these contrapuntal elements is what happened to the Japanese-Americans during world War II. When World War II erupted and America took part in fighting against Germany and Japan, many Japanese and Japanese-Americans in the United States, especially after the attack on Pearl Harbor, were racially, ethnically and culturally discriminated against. The grounds for this discrimination were based on the notion that these descendants might feel a sense of patriotism towards their mother country Japan and cause problems for the US government. Many internment camps were set up to harbor these suddenly demonized descendents as if they were never American. Over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were interned behind barbed wires. This racial and cultural discrimination is not the first of its kind in the history of the United States. One can trace its origins back to the slavery of the African-Americans since the independence of this country. Racism then was particularly against African-Americans who were enslaved. After the outbreak of the Civil War, the slavery issue was made acute by the flight of large numbers of slaves to Union lines who volunteered to fight for their freedom. Even after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the discrimination against the African-Americans went on being practiced openly up to the 1970s in the form of racism. The ruling white majority considered themselves Americans while others were
viewed as Afro-American, Latino-American, Irish-American, and Arab-American, etc. This group wanted the other ethnic minority groups to strive towards the culture of the dominant group and to let go of their distinctive heritage.

Orientalism and the melting pot ideologies share a major aspect: the practice of hegemony over the “other.” The paradigm of the “us” and “them” is implied in both. There is one center that is represented by the ruling white majority/the Occident (thoughts, culture, etc.), and there are many minorities/ethnicities/the Orient that circle and rotate around this center.

While Orientalism tries to tackle the methods of thought practiced by the Occident towards the non-Occident, the melting pot seems to enhance the dominance of the very same ethnicity that Said was criticizing. From these points I will deal with the Arab-American experience from the early stages of emigration in 1870 to the United States of America up to 1940 looking at how literature played a role in preserving, constructing or transforming the Arab-American ethnicity from heterogeneous to homogenous - that is, if they were accepted as part of this society.

The early Arab-American poets and literary figures held back from using the American language in their compositions. They were aware of their condition as a minority in the diaspora. Therefore, they intentionally used their native language in their writings. They did not use the colloquial or regional dialects in their literature. They used the classical/fusha (pure) Arabic. Since the Arab immigrants were from the various geographical regions of the Arab world, each
of which had its own distinctive dialect that differed not only in enunciation but also in parts of the vocabulary system, for those reasons, the classical Arabic, which had the same form that was agreed on by all the Arabs, was used among the immigrants in their print and literature which created a sense of belonging and identity among the Early Arab immigrants in their diaspora. The issue of language will be related with Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and how language and print play an eminent role in establishing a sense of nationality even if it is in the outer margins of the original national borders.

The history of the United States includes many accomplishments, especially when it comes to immigration. There has never been such a massive free movement of humans from one location to another, nor have such diverse groups ever been assembled or concordantly come to live together in a single place.

Since 1820 approximately 48 million of all races, from all continents and nations, with diverse religious and political beliefs have immigrated to the United States. This paved the way for the creation of two kinds of citizenships: legal and cultural. The legal citizenship is what the newcomers would be able to obtain after meeting the requirements placed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. When they earn this legal citizenship, they are privileged to hold certain rights that they would not have otherwise, such as voting, government aid, American passport, green card, etc. However, this kind of citizenship does not guarantee the assimilation and acculturation of the new citizens. Many examples
confirm the negative aspects of it, such as, the enslavements of the negro, the lynching of Chinese, the exclusion of Oriental immigrants, etc. On the other hand, one definition of cultural citizenship was “the peoples may continue to be different yet contribute to a participatory democracy. It is a claim to the right be different and to belong in the nation-state’s democratic life” (Delany 5).

Nevertheless, Delany, an authority on social and political theory, historical and political sociology, and the philosophy of the social sciences, prioritizes, it is a claim. The reality maintained by the ruling majority was that belonging to the cultural citizenship and being acquired, actually meant giving up all ancestry heritages, customs and loss of any kind of group identity in favor for the new one provided through the means of passage of time and adjustment to the norms of the new society.

Immigrants, aliens, foreign-born population, Latino, Afro, Anglo, Arab, etc… are some of the many terms coined to refer to those legal citizens on the American soil. Although the immigrants try to be good Americans and patriotic, such as what the Japanese-Americans did when they were discriminated against; they joined the army to fight in the World War II as Americans.

The circumstances of the current Arab immigrants differ from those of the earlier ones. The new Arab immigrants joined communities (relatives, friends, neighborhoods, and sometimes large communities) with a familiar environment that considerably resembled the culture of their own native land. They were acquainted in advance with the customs, manners and demeanor of the new
society through the media and other recourses that were not available or popular in the early 19th and 20th centuries. The majority of these current immigrants partially communicated in their native tongue, consumed their indigenous cuisines, interacted with their compatriots in their own ethnic enclaves, practiced their religions in their own constructed houses of worship and even married someone with comparable heritage.

By contrast, earlier Arab immigrants, from underdeveloped or occupied countries, who had the same heritage, cultural backgrounds and set of beliefs of the current immigrants, faced enormous predicaments. They were not only obliged to acquire and maintain sustenance, but were also responsible for observing, learning, and respecting many unknown habits, lifestyles, and many other conditions. For these reasons, the early Arab immigrants appeared to focus more on replicating their own home countries’ communities and trying to preserve what other qualities possible from those enforced ones upon them by the host country. That is why part of the early Arab immigrants’ literature tended to be more nostalgic, romantic and transcendentalist/mystic in its beginnings, later Arab literature in America transformed to a down-to-earth one to reflect the depressions and turmoil of the Arab immigrants. It was a way of expressing and articulating alienation and dissatisfaction with the false or fabricated identity that the Occident was determined to impose on them.

It is difficult to actually try to pinpoint the date when Arabs began emigrating to the U.S.; however, the earliest date available goes back to 1870. According to Michael W. Suleiman, an expert on
Middle Eastern issues and editor of *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, the Arab emigration went through two major phases, more specifically, one ended with World War II while the other started after it. It is essential to point out that the Arabs who emigrated before World War II did so to flee from the persecution of the Ottoman and European occupying forces that conquered and subjugated that region for more than four and a half centuries. On the other hand, those who emigrated after World War II were not only avoiding deteriorating economic and social circumstances but also dictatorships that were brought to power with the aid of certain Western democracies.

The first wave of Arab immigration in the period from the 1880s to the 1920s is typically associated with the literary production of Kahlil Gibran, whose 1923 book *The Prophet* has attracted a wide international readership. Gibran and his contemporaries in the New York Pen League, a group of Arab immigrant writers that included Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy, are considered the first Arab American literary formation. These writers had all immigrated from the Ottoman Empire’s Arab province that later came to be known as Lebanon. They also all belonged to the Christian minority communities in the Arab Middle East and can be seen as an international manifestation of the Nahda (the Arab national awakening), which gave expression in mid 19th century to Arab modernist cultural politics.

In the context of early 20th century North America, post-Nahda cultural politics in the literary works of Gibran, Rihani and Naimy tends to reiterate certain tropes of the exotic Arab orient. The work of
these writers may have provided US readers with an access to modern Arab cultural ideals in English, but it did not disrupt the cultural images of Arabs. That said, Gibran in particular and the Pen League more generally have played an important role in establishing the foundations for Arab American writing. Their writing also provides important historical points of entry into the early history of Arab immigration to the US and for this reason that moment is the ground zero for historicizing Arab American literature of migration, a point from which most studies of Arab American cultural production begin, even when seeking to move beyond it, as is evident in Post-Gibran.

The foundational aspect of the Pen League authors to contemporary Arab American writing remains significant not because of the sharing of a style and preoccupations, but because of the persistent cultural cross-lighting that has conditioned most noteworthy Arab cultural production in North America over the last hundred years. Arab American writing has always been conditioned by Arabic literature and the broader cultural trends extending from the region and also by the figuration of Arabness in the US imaginary.

Although the U.S. never employed or deployed force to colonize Arabic territories, during that time there was a cultural American influence going on, mostly in the form of Protestant missionaries that had been present since 1831. They had a long-lasting impact on the Arabs, especially on how they viewed America. According to Alixa Naff, an archivist of the Naff Arab American Collection at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC and herself the daughter of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, “Their educational success, left a legacy of far-reaching social significance
for Syria, creating a bond between its people and America that remained unframed until after America’s recognition of the state of Israel”. (Naff, 77)

However, the greater impact was through the American mission press, which with the collaboration of the American University, evolved a modern Arabic idiom and style suitable for the expression of Western ideas. The missionaries translated *Robinson Crusoe* on purpose, they are the new Robinson Crusoes coming to civilize the Fridays of the Arab world.

*Crusoe* starts from scratch. He travels, tames nature, worships God, observes Sunday, and preserves the spiritual integrity. He saves a black man from cannibals, reforms him and calls him Friday. He approaches others with Christian tolerance. *Robinson Crusoe* is a perfect example of the bourgeoisie: thirst for knowledge, belief in practical experience. Many of the Arab people might accept them due to their oppressive conditions. “They [Protestant missionaries] wanted to push people against the feudalist authorities of the Ottomans. More importantly, they wanted to encourage the spirit of individualism. The idea never to lose sight of God is also strongly there” (Abbas and Najm 15). It was no mere coincidence that missionaries started from the Lebanon area. The area of Lebanon, specifically Mount Lebanon, was governed by a Catholic Christian Ottoman government that was appointed by the sultan and approved by the West. This area in general “remained Western-oriented autonomous part of the Syrian province until it was terminated by the revolutionary Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire in 1915” (Naff 29).
In addition to this atmosphere, Lebanon had a major seaport; therefore, traders decided to settle there, which, in turn, made it the center for the rise of the Arab bourgeois class that was being encouraged by the American missionaries.

In addition to all that has been stated, the reason why these Protestant missionaries were able to achieve some kind of success was not solely dependent on the fact that they were Western, American or more economically advanced, but, also, because the Arabs were eager to catch up with growth that was going on around them in the world whether it was in the West or the Far East. One of the immigrants to the United States stated in an interview reported by the editor of The Independent that:

The teacher [in an American mission school] had a great many pictures of American cities, streets, and scenes, and I could see that life in that land is very different from hours. I heard about the telephone, telegraph and railroad, and as I already knew about ships on account of seeing them go by on the water, it began to dawn on me that there was a very great and active land outside Mt. Lebanon and that it might be possible to find something better to do than be a monk. (Hitti 55)

The monk missionaries also addressed women’s issues. Both missionaries and Arab intellectuals felt that without learned and liberated women, the future would be hopeless. Butros al-Bustani, who worked as a teacher, translator and author, with the Americans, supported the women’s liberation movement. Most intellectuals joined hands in criticizing the old-fashioned institutions and calling for global enlightenment. The irony is that while the society benefited a lot, the champions of enlightenment suffered too much (being persecuted).
Although Homi Bhabha, one of the most recognized names in the critical field known as Postcolonialism, with a distinct interest in ethnicity, culture and hybridity, would prefer to acknowledge this as what he calls “hybridity” in which the colonized people would have co-opted and transformed various elements of the colonizing culture.

One needs to keep in mind that America never colonized the Arab countries in the literal sense but rather in an influential rapprochement with the already occupied people. The Protestant missionaries addressed the issues that the Arab people longed for and tried to provoke a sense of historical and regional specificity. The historical connection was that the Americans were once themselves under occupation; therefore, they could appreciate the Arabs’ need and yearning for a sovereign country of their own in which they govern themselves. As for the regional specificity, it was established through a religious method where the Arab land is the cradle and birth place of Jesus Christ and as Christians [the Protestant missionaries] it was their duty to help the weak and the oppressed Arabs. Nevertheless, the Americans and the Arabs did not blend into each other and become one, thus weakening the idea of strong and weak cultures where the strong one overwhelms the other and replaces it. The western institutional structures that were presented for the Arabs’ adaptation could not have been the only answer for the occupied Arab people. Therefore, the notion of escaping from the Ottoman occupation, the need to lead a free life where there were no political or religious conflict and persecutions paved the way for creating the desire to emigrate to America in which these things were promised.
So, although these Protestant missionaries and educational facilities had had their influence, the remaining two points were the occupation and deteriorating conditions of the Arabs. Without these two factors, the Protestant missionaries would not have achieved noticeable influences. It might sound rather fallacious to talk about the impact of the missionaries when the Arabs themselves wanted to emigrate. Worse still, it appears to be so illogical, someone might say, to talk about American dominance over the Arabs when the Americans offered, so it seems, nothing but an outlet and a safe haven. However, the incredible contrast between what the missionaries tabulated and propagandized and the reality that confronted the immigrants explains it all. For upon arrival the emigrants went through what might be called a coup d’etat in the full sense of the word. All their expectations were betrayed. The promised utopia was nothing but an infernal dystopia. One of the factors that led to such dismay was “the tourists with their manifestations of munificent wealth, the hundreds of American travelers and tourists annually poured into the Holy Land acted as an object lesson before the eyes of the people demonstrating the riches of the United States” (Hitti 55). These tourists would show the Arab people pictures of America: the tall buildings, the paved streets, lit streets, etc, which, in turn, encouraged them to immigrate in the hope of earning a good living as these tourists but when they arrived in America they found out that this was not the case; many of them ended up working as peddlers and living in run down places.

The immigration of the Arabs here is not merely an attempt to have a better opportunity or to be included into a more advanced
nation or identity. It is an act of diaspora, breaking away, and being uprooted because many of the Arab immigrants were forced into exile by the occupation and deteriorating social and economic conditions. As Arnold Ages puts it, “their isolations from the rest of the world exacerbated the feeling of rootlessness that plagued them everywhere”. Even though, tourists and missionaries were present, they were limited to certain areas. Many of the Arabs did not get a chance to meet foreigners or encounter any other lifestyles other than that of the Ottomans in charge. One might say how could have the Arabs felt a sense of rootlessness while being in their own homes? First of all, many of the youth and middle aged men were drafted by the Ottoman military and were sent to fight for the expanding empire and then later on forced to defend it while it was collapsing. Next, most of the intellectuals were forced to move to the Ottoman capital in an attempt to deprive the Arab population of knowledge; this “dislocation marks the essential condition of the exile, a status between place and loss” (Redfield and Tomaskova 73). A third reason for the Arabs’ sense of rootlessness was because the Ottomans and then later on the European occupiers banned the use of Arabic language in public places like government offices or schools and forced their own languages instead. Ottomanization, Gallicization and Anglicization were colonial projects to eradicate and terminate Arabic in an endeavor to liquidate the essence of Arabism. The Turks practiced systematic Ottomanization and tried hard to impose their language on the parts of the Arab world they occupied in the same way the French colonizers prioritized Gallicization to make sure that the countries will be permanent colonies.
The chronic impact is still visible in places like Lebanon and Algeria. Similarly, the British deployed Anglicization for the same purposes. *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayyeb Salih, a Sudanese author, is a solid example about such colonial strategies. The hero Mustafa was selected by the British and taken to Britain where they think they will have him reformed and reshaped. The reason is only that by contrast to his schoolmates, he is good at English. Those behind him in their command of English have been left behind. These conditions were practiced for over four and a half centuries of Ottoman rule that created a sense of frustration.

This sense of frustration was further deepened by the deteriorating economic conditions. The economic landscape was impoverished agriculture and a very poor economy. With the increasing of free trade in Europe, the suffering here, in the Arab countries under Ottoman occupation, increased because there was no economic protection. Politically, the Ottomans encouraged corruption and religious or sectarian conflicts to weaken the Arab regions, especially Lebanon, because Lebanon in the 19th century witnessed the rise of the bourgeoisie. The spirit of individualism flourished. Similarly, translations of European books flourished as well as attempts by the intellectuals for salvation out of the stagnant situation (Abbas and Najm 25).

As it is mentioned earlier, most of the youth and middle-aged men were drafted into the military and those who were able to avoid it barely found jobs. This condition was juxtaposed to a totally different one in America. The steamships that brought the American Protestant
missionaries began to recruit Arab workers because it was cheap labor. In addition to that, the immigrants were attracted to the United States by its accelerating urbanization and industrialization, which required a greater workforce than was available in their country in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Labor, therefore, was recruited from abroad by agents of industry, steamship lines, and even by the less populated western states and territories. (Naff 26)

So, there were conditions on both sides, American and Arab, which would fuel the beginning of immigration. The rapidly expanding American industry needed labor and the growing urbanization needed more population, while, on the other side of the ocean, politically there was chaos and the writers and immigrants failed to find a place for themselves in the society ruled by Ottomans. They failed to make serious changes. Hence many of them decided to immigrate overloaded with frustration and disappointment. The majority of Arabs who were not able to tolerate their conditions any more, whether they were farmers, villagers, craftsmen, intellectuals, Muslims, Christians, politicians, etc, needed to escape the tyranny and hopelessness imposed by occupying forces and find jobs to support their families. Others decided to stay. A couple of reasons for those who did choose to stay were because they could not afford the costs of the trip or because they were benefiting from the corruption of the Ottomans in charge.

As emigration began, many people from different classes and backgrounds left for America. There were peasants, farmers, craftsmen, aristocrats, poets, writers, politicians, etc... all heading to
the United States. Many of these immigrants came without any intention of settling there permanently.

Arab immigrants began accepting the culture they lived in and the fact that they are being influenced and Americanized. They yielded to acculturation. The immigrants started out with an aim of just living as Arabs in America, but due to all the hard labor they had to put in and due to the similarities they generated between themselves and the American labors, there was little place for inferiority according to some of their personal beliefs. Alixa Naff points out that the Syrian immigrants thought they perceived in the behavior of Americans they encountered on the roads and the settlements, a number of similarities with themselves. Most Americans, they observed, dressed simply, labored hard, attended church and lived by Christian values, visited neighbors, and lived frugally and morally.

Since that is how they viewed themselves, the comparison generated little cause for inferiority.

Nevertheless, no matter how many similarities they tried to find, there was always something impeding them from establishing a firm national connection with the nation that has offered them citizenship i.e. America. Despite the fact that they were “classified as whites by government definitions, they were excluded from discussions of white ethnicity and were popularly perceived as nonwhites” (Majaj 320). First they were perceived as whites, then as Caucasians, after that as Asiatic. Although the Arabs in America were “scientifically identified as Caucasians, their popular perception as
nonwhite was so persuasive that courts were willing to privilege common knowledge over scientific evidence when the two were at odds” (Majaj 322).

This racial classification was far worse especially in the segregated south where the Ku Klux Klan was ascending. Arabs were often considered as colored regardless of the country of origin. Those who had earned American citizenship had difficulties in obtaining voting rights. A candidate for a local office in Birmingham in the 1920s passed out handbills that read “They have disqualified the Negro, an American citizen from voting in the white primary. The Greek and the Syrian should also be disqualified. I DON’T WANT THEIR VOTES. If I can’t be elected by white men, I don’t want the office” (Dehmer 38-39). This comes as no surprise to Said, for he thinks that one of the reasons that have contributed to this negative view of the Arabs, especially the early 20th, is “the absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam”. In other words, there was no effort by the host country to attempt to understand the various cultural, social, religious or economical histories of its newly claimed citizens. Instead they were exploited and resented and lived a low social status which heightened ethnic feeling among the majority of the Arab-Americans.

This kind of view towards the Arab immigrants created a split among the immigrants. Some of them retreated to their own communities and tried to stay in the shadows, while the others tried to imitate the American way of life and character. The Americanization
of some Arab minds produced a divide between those who began considering themselves Americanized and those who were still trying to hold on to their roots. Naff reports a conversation between an Americanized Syrian and a nationalist Syrian:

Americanized Syrian: Are you still a villager? Haven’t you become civilized? Syrian Nationalist: Do good manners allow you to insult me this way when you are pretending to be civilized?
Americanized Syrian: We alone know what it is to be civilized and we regret that you are not one of us. Don’t you understand that we are all intelligent? For when we become Americanized, we are able to earn more without working hard and we help each other by gaining greater prestige. (Naff 263-264)

These conflicts and confrontations were reflected in the Arab-American literature, in particular poetry, before World War II, because it was one of the traditions that the Arab poets and authors preserved, especially in the poetic discourse. It was the way they communicated their thoughts and sufferings to their families and friends in their native countries. This tradition is a very old one; there is “a belief in poetry that could be traced back to the lips of the pre-Islamic tribes; the poets of Phoenicia, such as Meleager of Tyre; and even back to the Canaanite authors of portions of the Song of Songs” (Orfalea and Elmusa 2). Preserving this practice was one way of sustaining their identity and customs. They even wrote it in Arabic rather than English. After that they would translate it, or have it translated into English. As it is mentioned earlier many of them had come with the intention of going back and that was one of the factors that kept some of them away from integrating with their social environment, thus resulting in their shying away from participating in American politics and settling in the shadows.
The Al-mahjar poetry, a phrase that refers to the literature of the immigrants, is a co-product of the east/Arab and the west/America. It is a hybridization of the Arab sophism and the western materialism. On the one hand, it is realist as a result of the direct confrontation, and immediate contact, with the new status in the United States. The new landscape of suffering in the diaspora consolidates that realism. On the other hand, it is romantic because of the nostalgia and the desire for any escapist paraphernalia. Gregory Orphalea and Sharif Elmus, editors of one of the few anthologies on Arab-American poetry, describe the Al-mahjar poetry as being inter-textual owing to the intense exposition to all literary genres and influences that existed in the West such as the influence, not only of Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats and Blake, but of the American Transcendentalists Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman.

In general, Al-Mahjar poetry calls for renewal and resurrection. It is against the classical, the conventional and the conservative. This is not unexpected. Most of the poets came in touch with Europe and America through the Christian missionaries sent to the Arab countries. These poets, in the new land, felt free from all the classical restrictions concerning the composition of poetry. Much imagery was borrowed from nature, and they continually contrasted the natural world with the human world. They recognized nature as a rich store of symbols that provided both the emotional and intellectual apparatus for poetry. They stressed the sanctity of nature and celebrated it, learned from it and associated with it, not necessarily to explain it but to understand it and reveal it in action and thought, and above all in poetry. This
literature distinguishes itself by prioritizing time and the economy of expression. Gibran and Naimy are the best representatives. Gibran formulated the theory of emigrant literature and Naimy articulated its canon and rubric in his book *Al-Ghirbal* (The sieve). (Al-Miwesh 15)

Poetry was also an important literary tradition. The Al-mahjar literary figures kept this tradition alive for they knew its importance in reflecting and foregrounding the various aspects and conditions of life. They attempted to perfect it so it would live up to what they were experiencing in the diaspora.

One of the early themes that can be traced in Arab-American poetry is the issue of work. Some of these poets were Khalil Gibran, Ameen Rihani, Mikhail Naimy, and Elia Abu Madi, since that was one of their major topics, it was reflected upon from various aspects. Many of the Arab immigrants began as peddlers roaming the metropolitan and rural areas. Unfortunately, this was not what they anticipated because according to those Protestant missionaries, who preached America to the Arabs, life in America meant financial stability, respect, and equal opportunities. The reality of America did not live up to the missionaries’ depicted canvas of the United States. Most of the immigrants were denied decent jobs and salaries due to the lack of training and ended up working in restaurants and other low paying jobs.

In Rihani’s poem, which was written in Arabic, “I Dreamt I was a Donkey Boy Again”.
I dreamt I was a donkey boy again.
Out on the Sun-swept roads of Baalbek, I tramp behind my burro,
trailing my mulayiah.
At noon I pass by a garden redolent of mystic scents and tarry awhile.
Under an orange tree, on the soft green grass, I stretch my limbs.
The daisies, the anemones, and the cyclamens are around me pressing:
The anemone buds hold out to me their precious rubies; the daisies
kiss me in the eyes and the lips; and the cyclamens shake their powder
in my hair.(Orfalea,72)

When reading these lines, one cannot help but notice, from the
kind of imagery and metaphors that are used, that there is a wide gap
between his hometown and the place he is living in: New York.
Although he puts forth the image of a peddler boy behind his small
donkey, the work environment is much easing and care free. This
romantic and nostalgic picture of home is contrasted with the image of
New York later on in the poem:

We do what we want in Nature’s realm, go where we please;
No one’s offended, no one ever wronged.
No sentinels hath Nature, no police.
But lo, a goblin taller than the tallest poplar, who carries me upon
his neck to the park in the far New York. (Orfalea,78)

The environmental difference in the workplaces, between
Baalbek and New York, is highly contrasted. While Baalbek is all
natural, all free, New York is all stifling with watch dogs in every
corner. The transfer from Baalbek to New York does not take place
with the help of a fairy or genie, but rather on a shoulder of a goblin.
This is merely to emphasize the horrific shift. Not only is the transfer
oppressing, it is also suffocating. Rihani later on in the poem says,
“The goblin placed his hand on my mouth, and I was dumb”. Rihani is
reflecting the stoicism of New York and how it has made him sterile
on the creative level. The watchers [the police] are everywhere forcing limitations on individual rights. He also points out the humiliation that is visited upon him. A question that comes up here is by whom? Since the comparison is between New York and Baalbek, and in Baalbek no one is degraded, that automatically means the mortification is happening in New York by Americans. The poem ends in an appeal and desire for going back home and being a donkey boy again rather than staying in New York. Rihani ends his poem by stating: “O, let me a burro-boy again; O, let me sleep among the cyclamens Of my own Land.”

Reading Rihani’s poem, one can label it as belonging to the pastoral tradition flavored with a pinch of romanticism. In fact, as a poet and author, he was both a romantic and a realist. On the one hand he firmly rejected the negative aspects of society, and was a lover of both nature and simplicity; but on the other hand he did not talk of escapist solutions but rather of aims and objectives. In an essay entitled “Over Ancient Babylon” for example, he talks about the coming of modern transport to the Arab world and how some ignorant people attempt to prevent their countries from development.

Meanwhile, the doctors of the Mohammedan law, the ulema of Islam, will scan their sacred books to see if aught therein is mentioned about the railroad and the aeroplane. And if, after straining their theological faculties, they cannot find, expressed or implied, a divine sanction of these inventions, they will forthwith curse them from the pulpit. (Rihani 100)
Bushrui describes his way of thought as “an intellectual and practical stance underpinned by a vision and an intuition that kept him in firm touch with the real needs of his people”. As a critic he expressed the utmost contempt for linguistic scholasticism and for Romanticism in the form of woolly sentimentality. He reserved his most vitriolic attacks for the Arab neo-Classicists, and was one of the first to call for socially committed poetry. A poet, he argued, should be fully involved with the lives of those around him, as in the noble Bedouin tradition established long before the advent of Islam.” (Bushrui 4)

This standpoint of Rihani reveals that the Western cultures and its advocates like Rousseau, Levi-Strauss, Artaud, Macaulay, etc. whose, as Said phrases it, “thought is filled with discriminations such as these made between what is fitting for us and what is fitting for them, the former designated as inside, in place, common, belonging, in a word above, the latter, who are designated as outside, excluded, aberrant, inferior, in a word below”, is actually based on stereotypes, and that the non-western cultures are not merely naïve, pristine, pure and innocent but rather active, alive and involved in various walks of life. An example of this occurs in 1921 when Rihani published two works which demonstrated his competence as an essayist and poet in English who can compete with any other western author or poet. One of them was The Path of Vision, a collection of essays illustrating basic differences, especially between philosophy and a practical way of life, between the East and the West and between Christianity and Islam. Its central message is a sincere appeal for each to be willing to
learn from the other, and for a harmonious relationship between the two. The book contains several references to Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, and much of it is “imbued with their transcendentalist philosophy of the unity of existence, in particular man’s oneness with nature” (Bushrui 8). Rihani asks:

What avails it to know that I am free, if I can not realize this freedom in a definite, specific existence? But can it be realized wholly by a revolt only against a hierarchy or a state? It depends upon the nature and scope of the revolt. If we are concerned in breaking the fetters that are fastened upon our bodies and souls by external agencies only, we are doomed to failure. But if we become aware of the fetters, which we, in the sub-consciousness of centuries of submission, have fastened upon the spirit within us and strive to free ourselves of them first, then we are certain to triumph. For freedom of the spirit is the cornerstone of all freedom. And this can be attained only by realizing its human limitations and recognizing its divine claim. It might be said too that freedom is to spirit what gravity is to matter. It is inherent in it and limited, yea, fettered by it. To know and recognize this truth is to rise to the highest form of freedom. (Bushrui 44)

In this paragraph, Rihani reveals his acknowledgement of the limitations of earthly existence. It also shows us “an intellect rooted in reality, and inclining to practical solutions illumined by intuitive vision, rather than to escapism or sophistry like most of Rihani’s Arab contemporary verse-writers. One is reminded of Emerson in his Journals: ‘If you cannot be free, be as free as you can.” (Bushuri 12)

Rihani’s mind, although to an extent shaped by the influences of America, France and England, was blended with something of the Arabian imagination. Rihani began to dream of the glory of his past, his Arab cultural heritage, and to find in it sustenance for his life in the present. This return to the old glories of the past was also an attempt to warn the Arabs of the dangers threatening them and the
ambitions of other nations in overtaking their lands. He urged them to
unite and together promote a humanitarian spirit in reforming and
modernizing their societies so that the Arab people would be able to
play an important role in the modern world, just like they used to in
the Golden Age of the Arabs that existed between the 7th and 13th
centuries, without sacrificing the moral and spiritual heritage which
has been their mainstay for centuries. For the materialism of America
is in marked contrast to the images of his heritage that had
experienced in his early life, as he relates in his *Introduction to Muluk
al-’Arab (Arab Kings)*, published in 1924:

As a child, I knew little about the Arabs, and what little I knew was
derived from what mothers tell their children about the Bedouin in
an attempt to frighten them into behaving properly (‘Shush, the
Bedouin is here’). Consequently, when I arrived in America I had
nothing but fear for those whose language I speak and whose blood
runs in my veins. The only other culture I knew anything about was
the French, and this only superficially, my information being
derived from the French school I attended in Lebanon which taught
me that France was the greatest nation in the world, the noblest,
richest, and most advanced; the centre of civilization, beauty and
light; a peacock among nations, strutting majestically among the
domestic fowls of the world’s barnyard. After arriving in America, I
became an admirer of the vitality of the American people; of the
freedom they enjoyed in their thought, speech and deeds, but at the
same time grew to fear their intense materialistic activity, their
acquisitiveness. (97)

The sense of estrangement and alienation that accompanied the
Arab-American immigrants was further deepened due to the impact of
the American metropolis. Most of them came from smaller cities,
towns and villages only to face huge high-rise buildings and factories
that were scattered across America. Even this internal split was
reflected in the Arab-American literature. This cultural shock is a
result of the gap and inequality among nations, specifically those that
are independent and economically blooming and those under occupation and economically deteriorating. In this case, the supremacy of the New World, America, manifests itself in the derogatory abuse of the new incoming immigrants. They were “face to face with results of modern civilization without having been through the process that produced it, and consequently, without having the traits and inhibitions that result thereof” (Hitti 82). The rigorous and strange life that they had to endure, especially those who became peddlers, could not have been anticipated nor would have they been able to prepare for such abuse. Elias L., an Arab immigrant, recalls some of his sufferings while trying to make a living “Sundown each day became a signal for anxiety. Would he eat, if at all? Where would he sleep? A peddlers eyes searched the countryside, as he trudged along, for haystacks, barns, empty schoolhouses, or any enclosure that could serve as shelter” (Naff 184). The Arab immigrants were not as lucky in the cities either. As I mentioned earlier the Arab-American poet Rihani drew a very dull image of New York only to confirm and project the tedious city life caused by the impact of what the Arab-American immigrants encountered.

The Arab-American writers did not stop there; they began to rebuild and resurrect the dying hopes of those Arabs who migrated to America. Their lives were full of agony and humiliation and poetry was one of the few ways to reach out to the Arab-American community and try to soothe their pains, anxieties and reflect a sense of community whose individuals-the Arab-Americans- are undergoing similar turmoil.
The Arab-Americans have tried to fit in and flow with the American mainstream. Nevertheless, steady and strong blows were dealt to the Arabs and Arab-Americans when the Western allies’ secret colonial and hostile plans were revealed towards the Arab countries in 1916 in the form of the Sykes-Picot treaty and later on followed by the Balfour declaration in 1917 that was agreed upon between the European victors, England and France, without any strong objection from the United States. The Arab-Americans were caught in crossfire between their ancestral identity and their new one. While one opposed what was happening, the other was supporting it, i.e. the Arab people were struggling to prevent these catastrophes while the American governments were in favor of these colonial plans. These situations would pave the way for the second wave of Arab emigration after World War II to the U.S. that would witness many tragedies, oppressions and a literary movement associated with the ups and downs of this ethnicity and accompanied with the rise of an Arab-American political awareness of the self and the other; a political attentiveness that was barely present before World War I.

Ever since the early Arab immigrants settled in the United States, they established periodical publications that served as a link between their native countries and the immigrants in their current environment. The disintegration of the hierarchal system that the Arab poet immigrants were under living i.e. the Ottoman feudal system, gave them the ability to criticize that system and its supporters in the Arab countries. I need to point out here that this hierarchal system did not collapse, but it came to end only for the Arabs who immigrated because the United States was a capitalist country and the Ottoman
feudal system had no authority in America to control the Arab immigrants. This life in a capitalist country where print was advanced allowed the literary figures to express their concerns and condemn the misery and injustice inflicted on the Arab people.

As the number of immigrants began to grow, and as they began to spread across the country, the number of Arab-American publications began to expand. Philip Hitti writes, “a census taken in the 1920s lists 102 periodicals and papers which saw the light in the U.S.A.”. As Hitti mentions, the largest number of periodicals were in New York due to the large number of Arab immigrants that settled there, which in turn, reveals the eagerness of the Arabs for news and reading.

The content of these publications varied. It ranged from social and political news from the Arabs’ native countries to news about the new communities in Al-mahjar (the land where the immigrants have settled). In addition to these social and political issues, many of the publications were dedicated to literary and cultural issues. In the Al-Funun journal (The Arts), which was published by the Arab immigrant and poet Nasib Aridah, an article titled “Catastrophe in Syria” reflected on the suffering of the Syrians as World War I erupted. It informed the Arab-Americans of the catastrophes and suffering the Arabs in Greater Syria were experiencing under the Ottoman occupation.

The main reason of the catastrophe is the war. The other factors are: first, the involvement of Turkey in a war that it was not properly prepared or militarily equipped for. Second, the drafting of all the
young men, who were fit to work, in the military and leaving behind the elderly, women and children. Therefore, there was no one left to farm the land or trade. The European products seized to flow into Syria and the allies surrounded the Syrian shores and prevented ships from entering or leaving the ports. Then there was the spread of fatal diseases and famine.

During Rihani's lifetime, the literary life of the Arab Americans gained in strength. The first Arabic language newspaper, Kawkab Amerika (Star of America), was founded in 1892; by 1919, 70,000 immigrants supported nine Arabic-language newspapers, many of them dailies, including the popular El-Hoda (Guidance) in 1898 (Hitti 120). But the most important publication of this time in terms of the literary evolution of Arab Americans was a journal, Syrian World. Here the most distinguished writers of the early 20th century published plays, poems, stories and articles. The most important of all was Gibran Khalil Gibran, who eventually turned out to be a widely popular author among American readers.

Nevertheless, some of the early Arab immigrants did try to acculturate and assimilate into a customary milieu that was mostly structured in accordance with the White American ideologies and attempted to “distance themselves from those elements of Arab culture viewed as particularly foreign and less readily assimilable” (Majaj 328). They would associate themselves with Christianity and they would use the term the ‘Holy Land’ instead of the Arab land. They did so to engage the American readers and familiarize the ‘exotic’, while at the same time seeking to distance themselves from
Islam” (Majaj 328). One of these Arab-Americans was Reverend Abraham Rihbany. In his autobiography A Far Journey, published in 1914, he emphasized his Christian identity and the duty of the Syrian Christian to export the spirituality of the Holy Land to the West, “the oriental must never cease to teach his Occidental brother, nor ever allow himself to forget his own great spiritual maxims which have guided the course of his life for so many centuries” . Not only did he make his association with Christianity precise, he also thoroughly distanced himself from Islam, constructing an image that fits the typical American stereotype of Muslims, “I was not to gaze curiously at the Mohammedans, whom I knew by their white turbans. They considered us kuffar (infidels) and enemies of the faith; therefore, they were ever ready for the slightest provocation to beat or even kill us” . He even calls the Muslims ‘Mohammedans’ because that was one of the terms used to describe Muslims in America. Such authors realized that “American continued to mean Christian, European, western and white” (Majaj 329). Some went to the extent of denouncing the need for the usage of Arabic language in America because they considered the West to be the power that gave the world its civilization; therefore, it is necessary to adopt the language of the civilized rather than those of the defeated and occupied.

On April 20, 1920, Gibran, with ten other Arab-American authors, established Al-Rabitah Al-Qalamiyah (The Pen League). The aim of this group was to create a new literary tradition that would both lift the already existing Arabic literature from its quagmire and stagnation of imitation by introducing new forms of poetry like free
verse and prose poetry, for the classical Arabic poetry depended mostly on monorhyme. They intended to transfer it from merely being contemplative, abstract, and metaphysical to a worldlier, down-to-earth approach, preoccupied with daily life and personal experiences. They wanted to take poetry into the 20th century with a new active, creative force that would strengthen Arab-American solidarity, bring recognition to the Arab-American community and Arab literary traditions through print and newspapers.

These newspapers and periodicals testify the fact that Arab immigrants never gave up their language completely, nor did they give way for the use of the American language in these publications. In fact the majority of Arab immigrants emphasized the use of Arabic, especially the standard/classical one (Al-fusha). The immigrants even emphasized the importance of teaching Arabic to their children who were born in the United States (Hitti 100-101). These kinds of practices helped create a sense of community by providing news from home, such as the brutalities of the Ottoman occupation and later on its collapse. It also provided news about their lives in this new country, such as “guiding the adjustments of new Arab immigrants in editorials” (Naff 321). This persistence on the use of the Arabic language in an English-speaking country reveals how conscientious these immigrants were, especially the authors and poets. They were mindful about the importance of language in maintaining a sense of unity and developing a consciousness of group integrity and identity. The emphasis on language is not an arbitrary one because language itself is not an arbitrary system; it is a defining one. Anderson points
out that language is what brings a community together: “written Arabic functioned … to create a community out of signs, not sounds”. Although the Arab immigrants were from different regions of the Arab world (Africa, Middle East, Arabian Peninsula), they either had the sufficient knowledge or spoke the same classical/fusha Arab language. Now that they were in America, using the Arabic language not only keeps the umbilical connection with their native homes strong, but also with each other, This ethnic consciousness was strengthened through the usage of the classical Arabic in print. They were capable of “comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands of the people in their language-field … These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the imagined community ” (Anderson 44).

These Arab-Americans were living all across America: New York, Detroit, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, etc. (Hitti 67). The possibility of all of them physically meeting in order for them to materialize and concretize their sense of belonging and converse is impossible. Yet, this sense of community was established through print and written Arabic. Anderson manifests this point when he wrote that nations are imagined political communities, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. They are imagined because most of their members will never meet each other, "yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". However, the notion of belonging to an Arab ethnicity would not have
occurred if the elites Arab-American, such as, the members of the Pen
League, had not decided which of the existing forms of the Arabic
language would be used as the languages of literacy (and therefore of
education and communication among the Arab-Americans), "Thus
English elbowed Gaelic out of Ireland, French pushed aside Breton,
and Castilian marginalized Catalan", and the classical/fusha Arabic
was established as the form instead of the other vernacular ones like
the Moroccan, Syrian, Egyptian, Sudanese, Saudi, etc. Although,
these vernacular dialects used the same Arabic alphabet in their
informal and formal spelling, the difference is in the informal written
form because then they spell the words as they pronounce them unlike
the formal form in which they follow the classical/fusha spelling of
the word that can be read and understood among Arabs from different
regions.

Now that the form of communication was agreed upon, it had to
be stabilized. For this objective, using the classical/fusha Arabic in the
journals, magazines and other publications was to maintain the
stabilization of the Arabic language. Since the Arab immigrants were
in an English-speaking country, and they were required to use the
American language in their work places and with other non-Arabs, the
Arabic language was threatened by being changed, becoming less
frequent or being annihilated. Furthermore, if language was to change
so rapidly, it would create fusion and interrupt communication among
the scattered Arab immigrants in America. A good example of this is
when the Arab-American newspapers were publishing columns for
new Arab immigrants on how to adapt and what to do in America;
this would not have been possible if the form of the Arabic language spoken by the early Arab immigrants had altered from the form of the Arab language spoken by the new arriving Arab immigrants. In addition to this, with the consistency of the classical/fusha Arabic, the Arab-American generations would not be able to access their ancestral heritage because it would be written in a completely vague language. The continuity of language was necessary for the continuity of the sense of community and belonging. So, “print gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (Anderson 44) Through the printing and circulation of these Arabic publications, a wide range of people were able to recognize themselves as belonging to one community, i.e. the Arab immigrants recognized themselves as belonging to one ethnicity.

The literature of the Arab immigrants whether it was poetry, novels, plays, or even articles mirrored the Arab ethnicity by representing a homogenous idea of this ethnicity at a certain time and in a certain place. The same thing applies to the effect of newspapers due to their mass production and circulation among the Arabs. If these papers were dealing with arbitrary topics then their circulation would have been very limited. As I mentioned earlier on, the literature and articles in these journals dealt with the news from the Arab world and the Arabs’ status in the diaspora. The topics tended to express a down-to-earth attitude in which the sufferings, conditions and situations of the immigrants in Al-mahjar were reflected for example Rihani tackles in The Book of Khalid deals with the poor conditions of the Arab immigrants which reflects the status of many of them Khalid's motto
was, "One book at a time". He would not overload himself with books any more than he would with shoes. But that the mind might not go barefoot, he always bought a new book before destroying the one in hand. Destroying? Yes; for after reading or studying a book, he warms his hands upon its flames, or makes it serve to cook a pot of lentils-with-rice. In this extraordinary and outrageous manner, barbarously capricious, he would baptize the ideal in the fire of the real. (44)

Now this Arab-American literature became an identifying tool. It referred to a culture: the Arabic culture, and preserved identity of the Arabs as an ethnic group living in America, because the “quest for self-definition is intimately bound up with culture, and culture and language are like hand and glove” (Nielson 15). Culture and language are what the Arab literary figures where using in their works to preserve identity in the diaspora. This identity is “conceived as a bond as the affinity and affiliation that associates those so identified, that extends to them a common sense or space of unified sameness. It is a tie that holds members of the collective together.” (Goldberg 12)

This drive for a unity within the Arab-American ethnicity is not merely a natural and spontaneous thing. It is necessary for the preservation of the identity in the diaspora and for the continuous association with their ancestral heritage in the Arab world, although some might claim the opposite because, it is the natural drive to survive for to choose kin over nonkin. In choosing kin, one is choosing those of the same kind. From this natural selectivity follows a commitment to homogeneity. It is in our makeup, so to speak, if it is not straightforwardly in our genes. (Goldberg 21)
It is natural to communicate in Arabic when the immigrants meet, and it is natural to exchange experiences in social gatherings. As Taylor argues, one’s identity does not come from isolation but through negotiating it, through dialogue “partly over, partly internal, with others … identity depends on dialogical relations with others” (80). Nevertheless, what the Arab immigrants were doing exceeded that. They were communicating in Arabic across America through newspapers and magazines and they were reflecting on turmoil and conditions through a unified standard classical Arabic knowing that it would overcome the various dialects that the Arab immigrants spoke.

These practices by the Arab immigrants to create this sense of belonging to an ethnicity were both voluntary and imposed simultaneously. It was imposed because the Arab-American immigrants were struggling to maintain the religions of their ancestors in a country that appeared to them materialistic and acquisitive. Although nearly the majority of the Early Arab immigrants were Christian, they were not defined as Arabs by the American government. During a census in 1924 in which the American government did not count the Arab Christians as Arabs, Philip K. Hitti had to write a plea to the American government asking for the recognition of the Christian immigrants as Arabs because of their unique and particular history and civilization. Those who were being denied their historical ancestry just because they were Christians were subjected to this identity crisis following stereotypes: all Arab are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs, no Christian can be an Arab. Even the Muslim Arab community did not enjoy the luxury of
practicing their religion openly because there were no mosques. The first mosque was not built until 1919. The facet of religion gains its importance due to its collectiveness, i.e. “the longer a group remained without its church, the more difficult it was to maintain group cohesion and used the Arabic language in their prayers and have always identified themselves, historically, a part of the Arab world, though located in the United States. The Arabs-Americans’ connotation of being a Christian is being an Arab because to them “Church affiliation was a matter of birth and tradition and not merely conviction and belief” (Hitti 104). Not only were the Arab-Americans being denied their original ethnicity but also Arabs were often considered as ‘colored’ regardless of the country of origin. Those who had earned American citizenship had difficulties in voting rights. This denial of identity, which is “partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others” (Taylor 75), forced the Arabs to attempt to try and make their ethnic identity recognized even if it were only among the Arab immigrants. In other words, it had to do with the constitution of some defensive collective identity against the practices of racist society. It had to do with the fact that the people were being blocked out and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. (Hall 52)

The racist practices of the dominant identity and culture towards the Arab-Americans created a kind of frustration in which the Arab immigrants felt threatened to lose their heritage identity and in return not becoming part of the dominant one. So the early Arab-
American intellectuals had to think of this conflict of identity “not in the wake of [its] disappearance but in the wake of [its] erosion, of [its] fading, of [its] not having the kind of purchase and comprehensive explanatory power it had before” (Hall 4). The Arab immigrants’ identity manifested power in their native countries because it had a history; it had a culture and most of all it occupied a space. These three conditions were not available for the survival and development of an Arab or an Arab-American identity in the American Diaspora because the Arab culture was completely vague for the American people. As William E. Leuchtenburg, an American historian, remarked, “from the perspective of the American historian, the most striking aspect of the relationship between Arab and American cultures is, to Americans, the Arabs are a people who lived outside of history”. This point of view is also expressed by an acclaimed literary figure, Salman Rushdie, who in his Satanic Verses says, “The Arabs, like the sand dunes of their deserts, are without roots”. Simultaneously, culture refers back to history because culture is not an arbitrary thing that is created out of a vacuum. It is based on a systematic progress that allows it to flourish or diminish through the passage of time. So if the native culture of the Arab immigrants was not recognized or appreciated by the host culture, then the history of the immigrants is also abrogated and annihilated by the host culture that puts forth its own history and ideologies as an example to be followed and appropriated by the newcomers. As for the space, in addition to the restriction they faced like voting, although they had the legal citizenship, there was the issue of negative stereotyping of Arabs, and consequently Arab immigrants/Arab-Americans. Since the
beginning of the 20th century, western authors and media have been including negative images of Arabs in their books, reports and movies. This tradition goes on today in both Europe and America. What kinds of image are projected on Arabs and their descendants? Some of the stereotypes are: all Arabs are Muslims, and all Muslims are Arabs, Arabs are camel jockeys, towel heads, sand niggers, Muslim fundamentalists, militants, terrorists, women oppressors, sheiks, lavish and wasteful spenders, dirty, unshaven, and uneducated. Arab women are stereotyped as oppressed, scantily clad belly dancers, sensuous, beautiful women in love with Western heroes who rescue them from the evil Arab men. Or they are depicted as confined to home, wearing veils, long robes, faceless, characterless, passive, and uneducated. Is there a good stereotype of Arabs? As long as they are minor in characteristics, passive, culturally Western, and subordinate to western policies then they might have a chance of being labeled as good. These negative stereotypes create an unhealthy environment for unequal recognition which “inflicts damage on those who are denied it … the projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to an extent that the image is internalized.” (Taylor 81)

The focus of the literary Arab-American literary figures on using the classical/fusha Arabic in their literatures and to print their articles came as attempt to regain identity and territory, something that they had lost since they left their native countries just like the rest of the Arab immigrants.
In this course the search for roots, one discovered not only where one came from, one began to speak the language of that which is home in the genuine sense, that other crucial moment which is the recovery of lost histories. The histories that have never been told about [themselves] that [they] could not learn in schools, that were not in any books, and that [they] had to recover. (Hall 52)

Language, as Renan says, “Invites people to unite ... It encloses one in a specific culture. The Arab-Americans valued the significance of language and its implication and that is why they used one form of Arabic to communicate, report and document. They wanted to achieve that sense of unity in the diaspora within the boundaries of their ethnic group. They sought after a haven from the oppressions of the dominant culture and its language that was forcing them to go astray from their heritage, traditions, customs and language. “True to Arab tradition, poets within the Arab American community write with passion and commitment about identity, culture and life, and represent many styles and voices” (Abi nadjir 3).

In consequence, the Arab-Americans’ quest for identity between 1870 and 1940 has demonstrated my argument and contribution to Anderson’s theory that the imagined community and identity can be strengthened, even if in the diaspora through the means of language and print and vice versa; language and print reinforce and fortify identity and the sense of belonging to an ethnicity.

Throughout this whole study, I have managed to spot light an ethnicity and its literature, a people striving for the recognition of their identity in a period of American history that appeared to have scarcely
cited them. The experience of the early Arab immigrants that span from 1871 up to 1940 was shadowed with much turmoil and agony, yet they managed to tolerate deteriorating conditions and sustain connection with one another as individuals and as a group.

The commencing of the Protestant missionaries in the 19th century to the Arab countries precipitated in the introduction of the American culture to the Arabs whose own culture had been stagnant due to the seriously negative influences of the Ottoman occupation. Therefore, the Arabs had an opportunity of learning about another culture that enjoyed freedom and progress. The constituents of the American culture portrayed by the Protestant missionaries in combination with the Arabs’ degenerating economic, social, educational and political conditions appealed to the Arabs as a scheme for immigration. The major objective of their immigration was to escape the Ottoman brutality and acquire a decent economic status that would allow them to return to their families and provide a sufficient and adequate living for them. However, the early Arab immigrants, upon arrival to America, encountered a different environment than of that advocated to them by the Protestant missionaries. The physical description of the cities and town was precise, large cities, huge building, congested metropolitans, electricity, railroads, etc, but the promise of decent well paid jobs and respect were absent from the real life they encountered. Life in America was tough and humiliating at times. The immigrants lived in poor colonies with inadequate accommodations. Financially they had barely enough to provide food and shelter, so there was no possibility
of purchasing a ticket and returning back home after realizing that image depicted by the missionaries was different from the reality experienced. As a result, they had to accept poor paying jobs. These miserable situations did not go unnoticed.

The Arab-American poets embarked on a mission of recording these miseries in their poems and at times attempted to offer some form of encouragement to the early Arab-Americans. The early Arab-American literature reflected on the various conditions of the Arab-Americans, translated their sufferings into words and published them in the Arab-American newspapers so the rest of the Arab-Americans in their diaspora would realize that many of them were experiencing the comparable hardships, and aiming at informing the Arabs back home of the Arab-Americans rigorous lives and asperities.

These publications, however, although circulating mostly in the United States, were all composed in the Arabic language. To be more precise, since there various vernacular Arab dialects, the Arabic language employed was the classical/fusha one. The intention of using such a unified form was to create a sense of community among all the Arab-American across the United States regardless of the colloquial dialects they spoke. Not only was it easier to communicate among them, especially those who descended from the various geographical locations of the Arab world, but as Anderson theory observes, language and print are necessary components for the creation of a sense of identity and belonging to a larger body and entity. In addition to this, as I have established in this study, the availability, accessibility and deployment of these two elements (language and print) among the
Arab-Americans resulted in a community that shares equal commitment to their identity and ethnicity, thus preserving the umbilical cord that connects them with their ancestry heritage, which, in turn, aids them to distinguish and recognize themselves as individuals in both the ‘intimate sphere’ and the ‘public one,’ but mostly this self recognition was achieved through splitting; “Splitting between that which one is, and which one is the other” (Hall 48) because, Arab identity formation often takes place outside the American mainstream. In these marginal locations, Arab immigrants from various national and village “homes” construct identities that flow constantly across the globe. They participate in agendas in the Middle East. Arab American concerns are noticeably absent from the larger American arts scene, whether multiethnic or mainstream, popular or elite. (Howell 62)

The Arab-Americans have tried to fit in and flow with the American mainstream nevertheless, steady and strong blos were dealt to the Arabs and Arab-Americans when the Western allies' secret colonial and hostile plans were revealed towards the Arab countries in 1916 in the form of the Sykes-Picot treaty and later on followed by the Balfour declaration in 1917 that was agreed upon between the European victors England and France without any strong objection from the United states. The Arab-Americans were caught in crossfire between their ancestral identity and their new one. While one opposed what was happening, the other was supporting it, i.e. the Arab people were struggling to prevent these catastrophes while the American governments were in favor of these colonial plans.
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