Chapter V
Conclusion

I am the East, I am the corner stone of the first temple of God
And the first throne of Humanity... I am the East, I possess
philosophies and creeds So who would exchange them with me
for technology. (Ameen Rihani)

In the preceding chapters efforts have been made to trace out
the creative endeavours made by the selected authors to promote
reconciliation and the assimilation in the land of different culture. 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 the deteriorating conditions and sustain connection with
one another as individuals and also as groups.

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).

Going back to the first assumption of this study, I still feel the need to emphasize the necessity and significance of motivation for certain Arab immigrants to the US. Arab Americans, I believe, had
added their color to American culture but their color seems invisible
to most of those in the American mainstream. Usually, critics classify
Arab American literature into periods in accordance with immigration
waves of Arabs to the US. According to Tanyss Ludescher, “Arab
American literature mirrors the patterns of Arab American history”
(93) which scholars have traditionally divided into three phases based
on the three waves of Arab immigrants to the US. For the first Arab
Americans, American environment created a lifestyle form which
“accelerated assimilation because it provided ample opportunities to
learn English and mix with the local populace” (Ludescher 93).

The second wave of Arab immigrants to the US began
sometime after World War II. Demographical reports state that, unlike
the first wave, the second consisted of “educated, skilled
professionals, who were more likely to be familiar with the nationalist
ideologies that permeated the Arab world” (Ludescher 94). The major
factor that reshapes the interest of Arabs in the US is the Palestinian
case. Thereupon, it has been crucial and significant to look again and
examine their decision of immigration to a nation that does not care
about their dignity. During the political crisis of the Palestine- Israel
war Arab Americans “staunchly identified themselves as Arabs” (94).

The third major wave began in 1967 and continues to this day.
This last group is of great interest to me because it has been “imbued
with anti-colonial sentiment and Arab nationalist ideas” and therefore
has been “highly politicized.” About this group of immigrants and its
influence on mainstream Americans and their descendants, Ludescher
writes:
For the first time, Arab and American organizations were formed to defend the Arab point of view and to combat negative stereotypes of Arabs in the popular press. Newly sensitized to their ethnic identity by worldwide political events, the descendants of first and second-wave immigrants joined their newly arrived countrymen in support of Arab concerns. (94)

It is a fact that the Palestinian cause became the central “rallying cry” of many Arab Americans, regardless of background (94-95).

Taking all these historical facts into consideration, I find it challenging to argue that subsequent generations moved beyond a strong feeling of nostalgia which characterizes their fathers. Discussing literature of these generations seems more challenging, however. Critics have recognized a third phase in Arab American literature in which the major theme is “embracing Arab American ethnicity” after a long indifference to Arab American background by the preceding generation. Recently, Arab American writers have been moved by the complete absence of their literature from listings of immigrant and ethnic American literature (Majaj qtd in Ludescher 103).

Moved by sense of responsibility towards their ethnicity in the US, the new Arab American writers have chosen to re-examine their native past. This native past is not, however, glorious as their fathers tried to show or relate. Aware of the native ethnic deficiencies, these writers started writing against history or past. Certainly, every individual writer has his/her own strategy to present a re-reading of that past but they all fall into a category of “beyond nostalgia” approach. In this chapter, I again start with an assumption: Arab Americans are, like other ethnic groups in the US, changing and
developing in their understanding of their ethnicity in their new environment generation by generation. Critics have also emphasized the fact that the illiterate first Arab Americans were cut off from events in their country of origin (Ludescher 94). But a few of them, literate and well educated, have chosen a new way to assert their identity in the US by dealing with their ethnic native past differently. Arab American literature, I conceive, has reached a stage in which not only does it consider its ethnic native past but also deals with it in a way that maintains both its hybridity and adds to the identity of the writers as a minority group in the US.

Examining Arab American literature, literary critics have found that there is a period of “transformation” in terms of concerns and themes dealt with by Arab American writers. In this transformative time, Arab Americans have completely forgotten about their ethnicity and considered themselves mainstream American. This might be the reason why they produced so little literature. That period did not last for a long time, nonetheless.

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. (Edward Said From Culture and Imperialism) to be an Arab American, a true one, is to be a true American, or better – a true human being. (Gregory Orfalea from The Arab Americans: A History 34)

Despite a strong relevance, taking history of Arab Americans as a mirror of conflict in the Middle East oversimplifies the ethnic
situation. What I find important about the third wave of Arab immigrants in the US is the great “burden of internecine conflict” (Orfalea 190).

Arab Americans, after a long stay in America, have come to consider their ethnicity in a different way: they want to characterize their ethnicity and assimilation to American culture rather than their attachment to a native ethnic past. Aware of their complex origin, they tend to treat their ethnic native past distinctively.

They have realized that it is not enough or constructive to assert one's Arab identity in America. It is, however, essential and fruitful to represent in-betweenness, doubleness and the confusion that Arab Americas live by. In short, after about a hundred years of their presence in the US, Arab Americans have found it indispensable to ignore their complexities and uniqueness in such a society. They have moved steps beyond the old feeling of nostalgia to land upon a new ground of self-awareness and expression.

According to ethnic studies, Arab Americans are in the “unique position of being largely excluded from both majority and minority status as currently defined in the U.S.” (Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt 151)

This liminality makes clear the “inability of prevailing American models of racial and ethnic classifications to fully account for the diversity of the American multiculture” (Majaj, “Meanings of Race” 321).

Literature of Arab Americans has reflected such “contested racial categories.” According to Lisa Majaj, the early Arab American
writers sought to find acceptance within the racial categories of white America. In contrast, Majaj continues, “contemporary Arab-American writers increasingly seek to challenge established cultural and racial boundaries in their articulation of Arab-American identity, and to assert their identity on their own terms” (331). I might agree with this statement but most importantly we need to examine how these writers assert the identity “on their own terms.” My main argument here is that they start re-examining their ethnic past as a result of feeling the burden of native ethnic past. Therefore, they decide to deal with it differently by reconstructing this past. One major undertaking of subsequent Arab Americans is to establish themselves as an ethnic group by acknowledging American citizenship, preserving civic rights, and claiming significance and contribution to the American culture.

After the establishment of Post Colonial theory, the East is now looked at differently. The Other is, ultimately, defined against criteria made by the old definers.

Lauret argues that “contemporary ethnic fiction is often informed by theory” or is in dialogue with it. It is believed that definitions now belong to the definers, not the defined, an often quoted statement by Toni Morrison. Lauret, however, adds that “ethnic American fictions turn this proposition upside down: the defined are doing the defining, and definers of old had better take note” (9). According to Lauret, the social movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a turning point in ethnic representation in the US.
Since the social movement of the 1960s and 1970s created a new and more militant discourse of self-representation and autonomy however, ethnic writing has become less a literature of assimilation or protest than one of cultural drive towards affirmation is characterized by a search for identity which is positive and/or confrontational rather than tragic and victimized, as it had often been before.

The point is that ethnic writers have changed their attitude towards their new adapted culture during a long time of presence in the US. Taking Arab Americans particularly, first Arab American novels failed to represent ethnic complexity and some novelists failed to voice their ethnicity positively. In subsequent generations, Arab Americans have come to realize that they need to take their responsibility as ambassadors of minorities and not of the mainstream - as they did in a previous stage.

There is a shift from the cosmopolitan themes to individual themes; from the universal to the personal. That is what distinguishes the two stages I have noticed in Arab American literature. America is a land of individuals not communities, though some have tried to prove the opposite. Despite the attempts by some to claim America a land for certain groups, ethnic writers always try to contest this way of thinking. Some have asserted their right to be part of this culture by attaching themselves to the glories of their native past but some have found it useful to maintain the ethnic experience as individual and to sing the American song.

What marks a clear distinction in ethnic representation is the attitude contemporary writers have adopted in their understanding of
the ethnic experience. It is their awareness of the “dubious position” these writers have found themselves in.

**Khalid and Almustafa**

Scholars of Arab American literature mention a certain relationship between 'The Book of Khalid' and 'The Prophet'. However no comparative study has ever been made between these two major works. The purpose of this paper is to trace a series of similarities and differences between the two books written in the first quarter of the Twentieth Century. It also points out eleven similar topics, namely: suffering, friendship, the soul, truth, knowledge, democracy, falsehood, solitude, work, love and the desert. It then discusses four different perspectives in the two works: self-identity, sarcasm, real suffering and language. The paper concludes that the first prophet, Khalid, identifies himself with rational, pragmatic, and universal visionary philosophy, while the second prophet, Al-Mustapha, associates himself with mysticism, utopia and worldwide human good.

In an attempt to describe the portrait of the emigrant Rihani interprets the emigrant's expression, finding that it involves "a past rich with culture, tradition and persecution" (*Critiques in Art*, 1999:127). It is clear in this interpretation that the art critic sees himself in this portrait as if in a mirror. The contradictory legacy of rich culture and persecution is an experience that most emigrants understand and more so if they happen to be intellectuals. The outcome of such a difficult experience is revealed by Rihani in his *Critiques in Art* as an amalgamation of "light and flame extinguished
by centuries of brooding silence. And out of this silence comes [the]
Emigrant not as a "red", but as a type that is intensely human, with
possibilities untold of spiritual and intellectual, development", (Rihani

Perhaps this outcome represents the thesis of *The Book of
Khalid*, Which could be simplified under tow aspects first getting out
of the silence, and striving for the human development . The first
aspect is revealed by Khalid when he affirms: "For our country is just
beginning to speak, and I am her chosen voice. I feel that if I do not
respond, if I do not come to her, she will be dumb forever" (Rihani,
1911:128).

The second aspect is manifested in several chapters of the book.
Actually it represents the spirit of Khalid specifically when he hears" The Voice of the Dawn, the dawn of a new life, of a better, purer,
healthier, higher spiritual Kingdom" (Rihani, 1911:236). An ideal but
problematic attitude captures the reader when Khalid declares: "I am a
citizen of two worlds - a citizen of the Universe. I am equally devoted
both to the material and the spiritual" (Rihani, The Book of *Khalid*,
1911:237; *The Path of Vision*, 1921:chapters 1,3,6 and10).

**The Pioneering Role :**

Mohammad Husain Haykal wrote *Zaynab*, another pioneering
novel in Arabic, almost the same time as Rihani wrote *The Book of
Khalid*, between 1907 and 1910. Yet *The Book of Khalid* was
published two years before Haykal's novel. One could conclude from
these simple facts that if *Zaynab* is usually listed as the first novel in
Arabic, then *The Book of Khalid* is, and should be, listed as the first
published Arab novel in English. Geoffrey Nash compares the national and cultural aspect of the two works: "If Zaynab has its significance in the development of a national literature and a national longing for form, The Book of Khalid embraces the interface of America and the ethnic ghetto, and the confrontation of Middle Eastern traditionalism with a modernizing nationalist awakining." (*The Arab Writer in English*, 1998: 26).

The pioneering role of the author of *Khalid* is once more reinforced by the recent scholars of Arab-American literature. Robin Waterfield confirms that "Rihani was, in general, a pioneer in almost every field later explored by Gibran and his fellow Mahjar writers" (*Prophet, The Life and Times of Khalil Gibran*, 1998: 118-119). The pioneering role of Khalid himself is also confirmed by scholars specialized specifically in Kahlil Gibran and well-published in the United States or the United Kingdom. According to Suheil Bushrui, *The Book of Khalid* is "possibly the most complete account in English of the modern liberated Arab" (*Arab American Cultural Relations in the 20th Century*, 1990). While Nash elaborates on the other sense of the pioneering aspect, which is the concern of an Arab American author in his adopted new land, he sees that "none of the other mahjar authors had as wide an interest in their adopted country as Ameen Rihani. Confident enough of his own biculturality, he set out to make an inventory of the impact upon himself exploring the wider implications of being a pioneer Arab-American" (*The Arab Writer in English*, 1998: 27-28).
Khalid's Prophethood:

We hear Khalid's voice speaking with a tone borrowed from the Messiah and other prophets of the Old Testament: "Light, Love, and Will - with corals and pearls from their seas would I crown thee, O my City. In these streams would I baptise thy children, (The book of khalid 1911:247)

It is significant here to trace the prophetic symbols of Khalid based on his attitude and thought as described in his book. The reader notices that the image of the Prophet is vividly present in the mind of the author, who uses the term repeatedly in describing some of The Book's characters. One of them is Jerry, the owner of a book-shop who, in a chapter entitled "The Summer Afternoon of a Sham", is sketched as someone who "resembles the Prophet" (Khalid, 1911:58). The author elaborates in portraying the "prophetic solemnity of the face [of Jerry who] is as grim and sullen as the prophet" (khalid 1911:59)

Another personality is the hermit. The author opens chapter X of Book II entitled "The Vineyard in The Kaaba" by saying: ".even the hermits of the Lebanon mountains, like the prophets of America . are subject to the laws of evolution" (Khalid, 1911:202). This law of evolution is applicable to Khalid himself even when he is referred to as the new Prophet, the new Muhdi (Khalid, 1911:8) or as "Our Prophet" who "lived in a cave in the wilderness of New York for five years" (Khalid,1911:8). Khalid speaks of himself as the "chosen voice" (Khalid, 1911:128-29) of his country, and his disciple friend Shakib goes on about Khalid, confirming that "he speaks, too, of his
nation, his people, awaking, lisping, beginning to speak, waiting for him, the chosen Voice!" (Khalid, 1911:129). This voice delivers sermons of a prophetic vision and spirit. In Book III, chapter II, entitled "The Voice of the Dawn", Khalid is anxious to affirm his devotion to both the material and the spiritual kingdoms. He affirms: "when the two in me are opposed to each other, conflicting, inimical, obdurate, my attitude towards them is neither that of my friend the Hermit nor that of my European superman." (Khalid, 1911:237).

Scholars interested in Arab-American literature consider that "America is Khalid's 'Spiritual Mother', the place where he received his call to prophethood." (Nash, The Arab Writer in English, 1998:28). If the first part of this statement is debatable, the second part stands on more solid grounds. Nash sees that Rihani "had invented a fictive messiah, and produced an appropriate prophetic discourse for him" (The Arab Writer in English, 1998:29). It is true that Khalid's call for prophethood came from America but it is equally true that Khalid's prophetic vision is inspired by the spiritual values of the East and drawn from the human, social and political needs of the East.

The Relationship between Khalid and Gibran:

The seven illustrations made by Gibran for The Book of Khalid confirm the original contact between the book and the artist. These illustrations included drawings covering the work's title in Arabic, and one illustration at the beginning and one at the end of each of the three Books. It is significant how Gibran highlighted the prophetic aspect of Khalid in his art work for the Book, specially in drawings including the smiling sphinx with wings, the person carrying the torch, and the
human bodies following the leader. If these illustrations stress anything they emphasize Gibran's understanding of Khalid's prophethood. Scholars have neglected the artistic link between Gibran and Khalid and have been more interested in the intellectual relationship between the two. The author of *The Arab Writer in English* compares Gibran's taste for the "oriental and the exotic", with that of Rihani who, according to Nash, "had already exposed in his satirical depiction of the young prophet Khalid" (1998:36). He elaborates further with the following statement: "Gibran adopted for himself the prophetic role for the artist that Rihani had already toyed with in *The Book of Khalid.*" (1998:38). In other words Gibran adopted for himself Khalid's role. To support this idea, Nash highlights the social and historical context of both works by confirming that "the material and cultural conditions which helped produce the text [of *The Prophet*], .and the new social and economic possibilities opened by an age of rapid modernization .are present and specifically foregrounded in *The Book of Khalid*" (*The Arab Writer in English*, 1998:44). Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins highlighted the image of the wise man coming from the East and noted that "the idea of a sage dispensing wisdom among the people of a foreign land no doubt appealed to Gibran" (*Khalil Gibran Man and Poet, A New Biography*, 1998:99) as revealed in *The Book of Khalid*. They support this observation by stating that Rihani's book "has foreshadowed Gibran's *The Prophet* in that it conveys the teaching of the East in the language of the West, and was written by an Arab who appreciated the best of both worlds" (*Khalil Gibran Man and Poet*, 1998:99). In his attempt to trace the influences that shaped Gibran, Robin
Waterfield states clearly that after Gibran's return to the US, the one "who was to have the greatest influence on him, and engagement in his life, was Ameen Rihani. [whom] Gibran admired immensely, describing him as a great poet" (Prophet The Life and Times of Kahlil Gibran, 1998:118-19). Waterfield adds: "It is not going too far to say that for some time he [Gibran] aspired to follow in his [Rihani's] footsteps" (Prophet, 1998:119). Waterfield indicates in his notes that Rihani "was a model for Gibran in two important ways: as a pioneer of protest and, with regard to The Book of Khalid in particular, in writing about Arab experiences in English, that is, for an international audience" (Prophet, 1998:313).

When it comes to Gibran's direct reaction to The Book of Khalid we find it in two letters, one to Mary Haskell on May 16, 1911 saying "Rihani is very happy - his book Khalid is accepted by first-class publishers, and I am sure you will enjoy reading it when it comes out" (Otto, The Love Letters of Kahlil Gibran and Mary Haskell, 1970:74). It was obvious that this successful step of writing and publishing in English was a role model that Gibran took from his close friend and gave it significant thought. The other indication of Gibran's reaction to Khalid came on Monday, June 12, 1912, in a letter to Rihani himself, saying: "I would have liked to kiss you farewell before your ship takes you towards that place where the sun rises. But above all, come back with another Khalid" (Bushrui, Unpublished Gibran Letters to Ameen Rihani, 1972:10). One could conclude from Gibran's first reaction to The Book of Khalid that he realized the significance of writing and publishing in English for the western reader and eventually for an
international audience. This positive reaction from Gibran was paralleled by a similar reaction from a western reader and friend; Charlotte Teller writes to Mary Haskell on December 13, 1911, saying: "Rihani's Book of Khalid is directly and indirectly the cause of my wakefulness." (Gibran, J. and K., *Kahlil Gibran His Life and World*, 1974:228). Whether this "wakefulness" was intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or a bit of each combined, the indication of the vitality of Khalid is clear. Khalid's ability to create a special, solid and vivid relationship with his reader is unquestionable. The artistic and intellectual relationship between Gibran and Khalid, as an example, sets the proper background for a comparative study between *The Book of Khalid* and Gibran's *Prophet*. Kahlil Gibran, Ameen Rihani and Mikhail Naimy are like-minded Lebanese intellectuals who fostered a new sense of identity among their Arab readers and revitalized Arabic literature in both form and content. They belong to a generation of Arab exiles who constituted the first record of an Arab American literary voice in the early years of the 20th century. All three started as Western modernizers who borrowed a great deal from Western culture, but remained faithful to their origins. They enriched the literary field in the US with works from their native Arab East and were dedicated to an intercultural reconciliation, an East-West understanding.

Among these three awe-inspiring literary voices, Kahlil Gibran holds a unique place as the leading representative of Arab American literature. His literary achievements as well as artistic talents are appreciated all over the world and remain representatives of his
legacy. Gibran is a Romantic but visionary, a madman but wise man, a revolutionary but peacemaker. He constantly expressed his love of freedom, of nature, of humanity. His doctrine is of the brotherhood of man, and of justice and universal love. His writings stay beautiful and timeless. They are as insightful and relevant in our present time as when Gibran first drafted them. Gibran particularly moved his readers with *The Prophet*, the words of which eloquently carry deep truths of our human existence. *The Prophet*, which Gibran considered as his greatest achievement, remains widely popular; another *Bible* for millions of people around the world, and hence fulfilling Gibran’s desire to be a “poet-prophet”.

The English-speaking readers who are impressed by Gibran’s *The Prophet* might want to add his Arabic works to their list. *The Broken Wings*, *A Tear and a Smile*, and “The Procession” are enduring in terms of their beauty and lasting influence over Arabic literature.

Gibran is seen as a gift from Lebanon to America and to the world at large. This is definitely true, but Gibran also certainly owes the title of “the genius of his age” to his adopted country which helped him prosper, and particularly to the generous patronage of Mary Haskell who steered his career.

The entire study in its final analysis highlights the sincere attempts made by the Arab American discourses, and especially, the discourses produced by the selected authors, Rihani, Gibran and Naimi in pioneering reconciliation.
All the works discussed in the earlier chapters unequivocally establish the fact that the entire oeuvre has, explicitly or implicitly, been an intellectual drive, with all human and emotional touches, to bridge up the gulf between east and west; to minimize the distances and differences enlarged and exacerbated by racial and cultural discriminations.

The study also stands as a tribute to the selected writers who have paved ways, and also to the host culture, for embracing and nourishing creativity beyond geo-cultural politics. After all to make the world a haven of freedom and to make the life meaningful, colorful and relishable is the ultimate intent of literary production.

The study, it is sincerely and firmly believed, will open up fresh approaches for further studies and research.