CONCLUSION
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There is an enduring representation of “Arab”- as not quite American- not quite free, not quite white, not quite male, not quite person in the civil body of the nation.

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(Suleiman, Arabs in America 257)

In our thesis we have tried to understand and examine Arab-American poetry in history. It is only recently that some anthologies or comprehensive discussions about the nature of Arab-American poetry have started to emerge. Our study therefore comprises an effort towards trying to comprehend major Arab-American poetry over the last century, or so as well as to delineate the main characteristics and features of these poems.

Arab-American poetry is over a century old and it has scaled the heights of popularity and critical appreciation. Early greats like Ameen Rihani and Khalil Gibran stand testimony to the world wide acceptance of Arab-American writings. However, in spite of smashing and persistent success, Arab-American literature is just about beginning to be included in the field of university scholarship in America. In such times, therefore, the terms and reference of the inclusion of Arab-American poets into the corridors of academic debates is very important.

Both poets and critics are trying to come to terms with contemporary literary classifications. While some poets prefer to be known primarily as Arabs, there are others who prefer to be viewed as Americans. Some prefer inclusion in the wider canon of women poets while others prefer ‘diaspora’, immigrant/mahjar or exile literature as a suitable category of classification. Some also see themselves as part of the larger body of commitment/political literature. There are those who bear the burden of representing their people all the time, whereas some others defend their individuality most fiercely. Amidst all this, poets have also begun to be known by their nationality along with their linguistic/ethnic background, i.e., Palestinian-Arab, Syrian-Arab etc. So, there is a twin tendency in Arab-American literature today,
becoming part of categories of classification that are more encompassing and inclusive, and asserting the separateness of identity. With the ‘clash of civilizations’ doctrine coming into force through the US establishment, a trend to study poets as part of the canon of ‘Islamic’ culture and literature is also growing. Many Arab-American poets are also being read as part of postcolonial literatures.

Amidst all this, our effort to study Arab-American poets as a category of classification is not to argue that gender, nationality, or generation are any less important. It is rather to suggest that apart from these threads of unity that bind the poets of Arab descent living in America to other poets, there is also a running thread of commonality and similarity that runs through their works because of their common roots in the Arab speaking world. The Arab speaking world is a distinct and identifiable area of spread. However, the identity of ‘Arabs’ as Arabic speaking people has been consciously built in opposition to more divisive identities based on religion, nationality etc. Ameen Rihani, often called the founding father of mahajir or immigrant literature, was one such tireless crusader for Arab unity. Thus, even though many contemporary Arab-American poets do not/cannot write in Arabic language, we have tried to show that Arab-American poets are a distinct category of their own.

As we have explained in our study, Arab-Americans have established themselves in the US as an ethnic group for a long period of time. Their century old history of immigration to the US, no doubt, played a crucial role in shaping their community. They have accomplished much in the professional, economic, social and political domains. Arab migration to the United States started in the 1870s. Three phases of immigration have brought thousands of Arabs to the US. This population has grown steadily adding to the “wondrous profusion of ethnic influence in the North America” (Naff, Arab Americans 10). Many reasons, economic as well as religious, forced them to leave behind their households and farmlands. Christians and Muslims both migrated in the hope of finding their fortune in the New World. Though they initially called themselves temporary settlers, later on they decided to settle down permanently requesting American citizenship. Stories of those who dared to be different and those who overcame numerous obstacles and challenges are valuable because individuals like the great poets Gibran and Rihani and thousands of brave ordinary immigrants through their hard labor, and sacrifices laid the foundation to a vibrant community.
This community that had to protest against Zionism for decades was forced to defend themselves in the wake of terrorist attacks. In the post-9/11 America, they are subject to racial discrimination, marginalization and negative stereotyping. With the ongoing violence between Palestine and Israel and more recently in Iraq, Arabs realize that they have to rise against the current wave of discrimination and marginalization to safeguard their future and their interests in the region. As prominent Palestine-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye says, “There is a real sense among Arab-American writers of a need for balance with 9/11 and the demonization of people in that part of the world. All the bad headlines are just very sad fragments of the true story. “We feel a larger need than we did twenty years ago to create positive cultural stories, forces and linkages” (Smith, Dinitia 2). Thus the role of the writer/poet becomes significant. As we have seen in all Arab-American writers discussed in the course of this study, they dwell on cultural themes or to be more specific, bicultural themes bringing justice to both sides of the hyphen.

In our study, we have tried to explore six such poets, both male and female, Muslims and Christians, who are separated in time, vary between first and second generation immigrants, come from different national roots, are divided by gender, perceive themselves as part of different literary classifications, can or cannot write in Arabic, do or do not use the Sufi tradition, have different readerships etc., yet, write poetry that ultimately reflect different ways to negotiate Arab-American identities. All of them try to deal with explicitly political themes. A politician poet in the United States (for instance, Eugene McCarthy) is considered an oddity, whereas Arab-American poets actively engage in politics and take positions. While the US has tried to portray the Arab world as its civilizational ‘other’, mainly on religious grounds, the Arab-American poets display a remarkable resistance to this paradigm. With national and ethnic conflict being promoted by imperialist powers after 9/11, the poems of Arab-American poets are very opinionated yet refuse to become ideological victims. A poet may not ostensibly reflect the Arab or ethnic culture but on closer reading of his/her poems, one may find something Arabic in his attitude to poetry. In other words, other non-Arabic subjects are intrinsically Arabic.

The question of identity is a frequently talked about theme in the genre of Arab-American poetry. Their identities are complex, hybrid and multicultural. It is not restricted by the singular ethnic identity inherited from the old country nor it is irrevocably merged into the identity of the adopted culture. Modern day poets write
about nostalgia and in particular their undying loyalty to the land left by their forefathers and also about Arabic food and music which have become emblems of Arab culture in the US. Constant references to the old country show that the emotional bond with the homeland is never shaken. Thus, on one hand we see poets insisting on preserving Arab culture which includes Arabic language and maintaining their primary relationship with the Arab world. On the other hand, we see poetry about assimilation to the new culture and their new life in the US. They are truly diasporic writers who merge two cultures and create something new.

It is hardly surprising that Arab-American writers have turned towards poetry. For them it's source of inspiration and celebration. “It is a sign of some achievement to have a poet in the family” say the co-editors of the anthology Grape Leaves (Smith 3). Poets today are varied as Arab-Americans themselves. Organizations such as RAWI, Radius of Arab-American Writers take efforts to highlight Arab-American poets as a group. Over 150 members from about 22 nations, both Muslims and Christians are increasingly making their voices heard through this particular organization.

As we have mentioned before, the new generation poets are blessed with such pioneering figures like Khalil Gibran and Ameen Rihani who contributed much to the growth of Arab-American poetry. The creation of the Pen Bond Association by the first generation Arab-American poets is seen as the most marked development in the history of Arab-American poetry. First generation writers, especially Gibran, brought Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism together and thus, unfolded a message which is universal and timeless. Memory and nostalgia were two strong features in the poetry of Mahajjar poets. The great poet/philosopher drew his inspiration from his motherland. Lebanon was very much in his mind when he wrote his magnum opus, The Prophet. However, these poet/philosophers reached out to a wider world, discussing themes such as brotherhood, justice and religious unity. These themes are repeated in the works of contemporary writers. Many similarities can be identified among the first generation writers and contemporaries as far as themes are concerned. However, writings of the first generation were marked by their spiritual and mystical tone and their ineluctable life philosophies. Contemporaries, who are mostly born, brought and educated in the US, use simpler yet passionate language.

Arab-Americans on their part have taken the initiative to uplift Arab-American poetry. It has been a much neglected genre as far as the recognition as ethnic poetry in
...America is concerned. The fruit of their labor can be seen in the form of anthologies published over the years. *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* is a groundbreaking publication edited by Gregory Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa and has been often quoted in this study. There is also *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writers by Arab-Americans and Arab-Canadian Feminists* edited by Joanna Kadi, the most recently published *Scheherazade’s Legacy: Arab-American Women on Writing* edited by Susan Muaddi Darraj and not forgetting Naomi Shihab Nye's *The Space between Our Footsteps* which is an anthology of poems and paintings by Middle East writers.

The Arabic press in the US equally contributes to the welfare of its community. They have been publishing newspapers since 1892, the year in which the first newspaper, *Kawkab Amerika* was published. Currently there are over 30 newspapers and magazines in circulation, and all these except the *Arab Times*, are distributed free. They are all published locally, exception being again the *Arab Times*, the only newspaper to be distributed all over the United States. These newspapers and magazines take upon themselves the task of encouraging literary activities among the new generation of Arab-Americans. *Mizna* is one such literary journal which publishes works of not only Arab-American writers, but writers from other cultural back grounds whose works discuss pertinent Arab-American themes. The Arabic press gives the opportunity to raise their concerns and safeguard their interests. It is important for a community such as Arab-Americans, which is often associated with negative stereotypes, to speak out against racial prejudice and marginalization.

Political activism in poetry is a recurrent theme which we have seen in almost all Arab-American poets, especially among Palestine-Americans like Fawaz Turki and H.S. Hamod. Turki, who grew up in a refugee camp in Beirut, speaks vehemently against Zionism and highlights the plight of his people in his work. From the times of Gibran and Rihani they united against different causes like famine in Syria or European colonialism. Arab-American writers have always taken an interest in political activism. Given the ongoing violence in the Middle East and pro-Zionist attitude of the US administration, most if not all, voice their anxiety. As we mentioned before, the role of the poet becomes an important factor in safeguarding the interests of the community.

Arab-American poetry reflects the family bond which is of utmost importance to the community. Looking at the number of poems written about family, including by contemporary writers, we are obliged to agree with the co-editors of *Grape Leaves*...
and Nathalie Handal, who, in their respective anthologies, explain that for Arab-Americans, family is the key to survival. Family is seen as the emblem of the self, culture, heritage and identity. Most contemporary writers like Naomi Shihab Nye, D.H. Melham, H.S. Hamod whose work we have discussed in detail in this study, have written poems about parents, grand parents, uncles, aunts etc. cherishing the spirit of close knit families. The most striking case in point is the book length eulogy of D.H. Melham devoted to her mother, Rest in Love. Poets dwell on the memory of their ancestors paying homage to those who braved all odds to lay the foundation to the thriving Arab-American community of 5-6 million today.

Arab-Americans, as we have cited several times, have been subject to racism. Arab-American women, however, face additional pressure due to the gendered nature of Arab-American society and the role they are often thrust into of maintaining an Arab identity for their community. Andrea Shalal-Elsa writes “Their ability to communicate freely about the challenges they face as Arab women is often compromised by concerns about deepening already debilitating stereotypes about Arabs in America” (1). Nonetheless, it must be noted that, many have successfully integrated into the US society liberating themselves from strict, conservative family values and patriarchal authority. They excel in their chosen careers.

Women predominate among new generation of writers. The editor of Al-Jadid magazine, based in Los Angeles states, “They were more daring and more open in challenging the status quo because of their second-class status” (Smith 5). Mohja Kahf for example who considers herself an Islamic woman feminist, tackles themes courageous for Muslim women and virtually unthinkable in the previous generations. Among contemporary Arab-American writers Naomi Shihab Nye is the most highly read and recognized of Middle East descent. Arab-American women writers have set out to question their own often fragmented identities, deriving strength in particular from feminists to chronicle decades of racism and marginalization in the US. Though much has changed in the past, efforts to analyze Arab-American women’s lives and their literary production are still in their infancy. Yet, richness of materials being produced by old and new writers gives us hope to look forward to a better future.

Research on Arab diaspora and the genre of Arab-American poetry present many challenges. Main concern of many scholars is that very little of the published legacy of the early Arab communities survives today and much of what does survive, is in Arabic. “For many years there was little interest in what many viewed as an
insular culture, despite the fact that the people of Arab descent have been contributing to US and Canadian culture since the 1870s in fields as diverse as literature, science, politics, medicine and commerce (Center for Research Libraries 2). For many scholars, the main source of information is still the newspapers which offer a valuable window to the Arab-American world of the 19th and 20th centuries. They provide copious information on political activities, interests of the community etc. Present day researchers owe much to individuals whose prescience and energy lead to the survival of newspapers and other archival material, thus enabling future scholars to carry on research on the Arab-American community.

As says Lisa Suhair Majaj:

Arab-American literature has gone through many shifts since the early decades of the twentieth century, when Khalil Gibran and other Mahjar, or émigré, writers in New York formed Ar-Rabitah, the Writer’s Guild, and began to publish poetry and prose that changed the face of Arab-American literature...but in many ways the problems that confronted the Mahajar writers continue to confront us as Arab-American writers today. (Mattawa, Akash 67)

The recurrent theme of ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ haunts the poetry of all these poets. The quest for belonging is a perpetual quest along with the theme of religious unity or the futility of religious intolerance. Post 9/11 the situation for the Arab world has worsened between the strangleholds of US aggression on the one hand and the growth of religious fundamentalism on the other. Arab-Americans have faced the brunt of hate crimes within the US. Racial and religious stereotyping is at its worse. Yet they have also not become part of the fundamentalist discourse. However, to use Edward Said’s analysis, being exiles or rootless individuals also accords Arab-American poets rare insights into the contemporary situation. While being fiercely critical of US imperialist aggression and its consequent fallout for the ordinary people of the Arab world, Arab-American poets also express the pain and injustice of religious misuse and misunderstanding.

From the first generation onwards, Arab American poets have been engaged in trying to bridge the divide between the first world and the Arab world. In spite of the services rendered by greats like Gibran and Rihani, it is evident that the task has only become more difficult by the passing day. There is poetry in midst of the brutality and pain of the real world, yet it is neither the poetry of escape nor the poetry of evasion.
The voice of sanity carried by Arab-American poets who are communicating with the American and world readership on the one hand and the Arab people on the other, is the ray of hope amidst the contemporary crisis.